

Stylistic Analysis of Barine Saana Ngaage's Poem "Democracy of Fenced Walls"

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze Barine Saana Ngaage's "Democracy of Fenced Walls" from the viewpoint of stylistic analysis. This analysis covers different aspects such as the syntactic or grammatical, graphological, phonological, figurative, and lexical levels. This analysis is helpful in understanding the basic concepts of the poem - that is the effects of the socioeconomic and political state of the country – Nigeria on the poor masses. The poem is simple but the theme is universal and particularly Africa because the issues of pauperism and bad governance are very common to African countries. This research also analyzes the structure and style of Barine Saana Ngaage's poetry. The poet conveys his message, themes, and views by using different stylistic devices.

Keywords: Style, stylistics, phonological level, grammatical level, graphological level, Barine Saana Ngaage.

1.1 Introduction

“Style” is a word derived from the Latin word “*stilus*” and has the connotation of “elocution.” It means “lexis” in Greek. Style is a broader term. It has several meanings in and outside of the literary text. It means a particular procedure by which something is done, a manner or a way of doing things. Broadly speaking appearance of everything is style. The way of doing something or the way of living is also style. Style is also related to a personality of a person. A style reflects the thoughts of a person’s mind. It describes the way of a person’s speaking and writing. According to Abrams and Harpham (2005):

style has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse – as *how* speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. The style specific to a particular work or writer, or else distinctive of a type of writings, has been analyzed in such terms as the rhetorical situation and aim; the characteristic *diction*, or choice of words; type of sentence structure and *syntax*; and the density and kinds of *figurative language*. (p.349)

For Leech and Short, the word “style” has a fairly uncontroversial meaning: it refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on. But they feel that to be on the safest ground, it is better to think of style as “the linguistic characteristics of a particular text” (qtd. in Alemu, 2015, p. 9). From the foregoing statements, it is noticeable that style is simply the manner or way of expression or using language. The manner in which a writer or speaker dresses his or her thoughts to the audience constitutes style. The effectiveness of any text is to an extent determined by the style the author has employed.

1.2 Stylistics

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics concerned with the study of style in texts. Before the 20th century, stylistics only dealt with literary texts. But from the 20th century it has started to deal with non-literary texts in disciplines such as law, religion, advertisement, newspaper, etc. Katie Wales writes:

the goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake but in order to show their interpretation of the text, or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic causes where there are felt to be relevant. (qtd. in Aslam et al., 2014, p. 1)

Every scholar defines stylistics from his own view. Short and Candlin (1989, p. 183) says, “stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of the literary text.” Mahmood and Jamil (2015, p. 49) are of the opinion that, “Stylistics is the study and clarification of texts in respect to their linguistic and tonal style.” Paul Simpson asserts, “stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language” (qtd. in Alemu, 2015, p. 9). From the position of Simpson, stylistics manifests through language. The implication here is simply that language is the vehicle through which writers’ and speakers’ peculiar manner of expression is shown. Stylistic analysis provides a commentary which is objective and scientific based on a concrete quantifiable data and applied in a systematic way.

1.3 Levels of Stylistics Analysis

1. **Phonetic level:** This has to do with the analysis of sounds. The study undertakes the features and necessary function of sounds as applied in the literary text.

2. **Phonological level:** This level is concerned with the study of sound system of any given language. It deals with the recognized rules of pronunciation. Phonological devices comprise rhyme elements, consonance, alliteration, assonance, etc.

3. **Graphological level:** It recognizes the writing system of a language and studies the formal rules of capitalization, spelling, structure, the systematic formation and punctuation in the sentence.

4. **Grammatical level:** It comprises both syntactic and morphological levels and discusses the internal formation or structure of sentences and their function in sequences. It identifies clauses, phrases, words, nouns, verbs, etc.

5. **The lexical level:** This level observes the mode in which distinct words and phrases incline to design in diverse linguistic contexts, on the semantic level in positions of stylistics. It studies words relative to internal expressiveness.

1.4 Theme of the Poem

Barine Saana Ngaage’s *Democracy of Fenced Walls* (2011) is a collection of fifty four poems which touch on various aspects of our society. Some of the poems in the collection are “Judgement,” “Tunes of Life,” “African Arts,” “Sirahood,” “Song of Nmaadula,” “Masses,” just to catalogue a few. All the poems touch on topical issues affecting our contemporary society. The collection discusses the themes of poverty and harsh economic realities on the masses of the country of Nigeria and other African countries plagued with the “*leprechaunish* attitude of our African leaders.” The economic deprivation as discussed in the poem is the reality staring in the faces of Nigerians who are “in the ocean of plenty” and yet are made to “eat excess melons” instead of the dividends of democracy that would nourish them. The masses of Nigeria are being deceived following each dispensation. Poverty is on the high side in Nigeria, yet the governments which promised heaven in course of their election campaign look on impotently because of rapacity and avariciousness. Nigeria is a country where political leaders stack excess money – misappropriate, embezzle and divert funds meant for the masses into foreign accounts. Thus, the poem persona presents the various ills perpetrated by our political leaders. According to the poet the politicians, “...sitting on the luxury of millions of naira/ sleeping on golden furniture allocation/...deprive labour its due/...withdrawing the hand of sunshine.” The leaders are basically after themselves and play nonchalant to the masses who voted them into

power. The word “labour” is used here to refer to the “workforce” of the country who is being paid peanuts for their labour while politicians embezzle millions of naira. Thus, amongst other themes articulated in the poem, the themes of impoverishment of the people by the political class through social, political and psychological barricades and the arrogant attitudes of our leaders resonate.

1.5 Stylistic Analysis of the Poem “Democracy of Fenced Walls”

Narrative Voice:

“Democracy of Fenced Walls” describes through the poem persona sad feelings about the political, economic and social status of Nigeria. The “I” – speaker (poem persona) expresses his feelings and displeasure at the social decay and poverty affecting the masses in a land of plenty and the hypocrisy of our political leaders who deprive the people of what is due them.

Graphological Level:

- i. *Structure:* Structurally, the poem contains 48 lines of eight stanzas of unequal length.
- ii. *Use of Capital Letters:* The capital letters are used only to begin a sentence.
- iii. *Punctuation Marks:* The poem has five question marks, a comma, a semicolon and 12 full stops. The use of full stop shows that the poet is urging the leaders to put an end to their leadership of poverty, political shenanigans and whatever deprives the masses from living a fulfilled life in the country.

Phonological level:

Phonological devices used in the poem are alliteration, consonance and assonance.

i. *Alliteration:* It is the repetition of consonant sounds. This is evident in the following lines:

“ballot...breed” (l.5)

“what... when” (l. 6)

“jungle... justice” (l. 10)

- “needs no” (l. 31)
“does... deprive... due” (l.32)
“without ...withdrawing” (l. 34)
“nor ...new” (l. 40).

ii. *Assonance*: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in a line of poetry. The assonance in the poem includes:

- / ə / in **ballot**, **paper** (l. 5)
/ ʌ / in **drum**, **jungle justice** (l. 10)
/ ɪ / in **the market** (l.19) & **it gives the retired ...its** (l. 33)
/ ai / in **applies...style** (20) & **buys...ideas**, **behind...line** (l. 20-21)

iii. *Consonant cluster*: Consonant cluster refers to a sequence of two or more consonants. Consonant clusters may occur at the beginning of a word (initial cluster), within a word (medial cluster) word end (final cluster). These three types of consonant clusters are frequently used in the poems which are as follows:

Initial position: **threaten**, **plenty**, **broken**, **class**, **praise**, **steal**, **blind**, **trust**, **privilege**, **drum**, **style**, **grain**, etc.

Medial Position: **democracy**, **happen**, **imprison**, **sustenance**, **golden**, **retrieve**, **deflate**, etc.

Final Position: **hand**, **songs**, **blind**, **jungle**, **sustainable**, **behind**, **threatens**, **walls**, **fenced**, **mend**, **trust**, etc.

iv. *Consonance*: There are examples of consonance in the poem. In line 2, the reader notes the use of consonance which is evident in the repetition of the /n/ sound: ...**not mend broken**...

v. *Repetition*: The poet makes use of repetition. The phrase “democracy of fenced walls” and the word “democracy” are repeated in lines 1, 3, 5, 9, 16, 18, 22, 25, 28, 35, 42, 44, 46. Also the word “does” is repeated 11 times. The sentence “Justice does not pinch one grain of salt” is repeated more than once. The words: salt, blind, justice, home, class, or, not etc. are also repeated more than once.

Syntactic or Grammatical Level:

There are many grammatical devices used in the poem to create poetic effects. In most of the stanzas, the words “or,” “does not” and

“nor” are repeated. Their repetitions highlight the idea that the poet’s mind is occupied by many thoughts. This poem is a mixture of present and present continuous tenses as the poet moves forwards and backwards over time. This indicates the poet’s personal or self-reflection on what is going on in the country. The grammatical structure of the poem is very simple; there is use of lexical and *-ing* verb forms. The poem makes use of simple sentences and stylistically ends them with a full stop. There is use of prepositions. The structure is free; no grammatical rules are applied. This structure presents different views of the poet about the theme of the poem, that he is writing in a flow and all ideas are flowing smoothly with each other. It also shows that the ideas are closely related to each other and cannot be separated from each other; this flow of ideas actually makes the theme of the poem very real and empathetic.

Tropes (Semantic Deviation)

i. Personification (prosopopoeia): Personification is the attribution of human qualities or human attributes to non-human objects. We see more of this in the poem, examples are:

- a. “The democracy of fenced walls” “does not mend broken ethics.”
- b. “The democracy of fenced walls” “does not see...”
- c. “Do ballot papers breed democracy?”
- d. “...poverty sells a right?”
- e. “Sustainable democracy plays drum...”
- f. “Justice does not question legitimate candidacy”
- g. “Or leads it with a gun”
- h. “Or buys it...”
- i. “Or threatens...”
- j. Democracy of self-preservation is said to be “sitting,” “sleeping” and “steal.”

ii. Rhetorical question: This figure of speech is primarily deployed in a poem to accentuate the subject matter of the poem. The effect of the rhetorical questions in the poem is conspicuous as they encourage the disclosure of the socio-economic predicament of the masses. They are:

- “Do ballot papers breed democracy?” (1.5).
- “What happen when poverty sells a right?” (1.6).
- “Can you retrieve it when rights have merged into authority?” (7-8).

“Is your democracy in chain?” (l.16).

“Or is it a joyous lamb?” (l.17).

iii. Imagery: The use of imagery in the poem comes in three ways, which are visual, tactile and audio. The visual imagery are words such as gun, salt, chain, ballot papers, drum, lamb, shed, melons, bags, book, wheel, naira, furniture, fenced walls, audio: drum, tactile: sunshine.

iv. Symbolism: This is the act of using symbols in writing while symbols are words that stand for something else other than themselves. Some words in the poem are symbolic. Such words as fenced walls, chains, and gun. “**Fenced walls**” and “**chain**” symbolize the Nigerian governments which instead of improving the living condition of the masses have kept the people in bondage and hamper their efforts to succeed in the country. They are barriers that stop the masses from succeeding. The word “**gun**” symbolizes the use of force, death and destruction. The word “quietude” stands for death and a state of impotence. The connotation is a government that connives to send to the grave instead of to make alive and weaken the zeal and creativity of the people because of lack of encouragement.

v. Irony: The poem is quite ironical. It is recognizable that democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people but, it is ironical in the sense that such a government that is meant to take care of the people is the bane of the people as they wallow in untold hardship and misery. The government has been incapacitated by the people who claim to represent the general interest of those who voted them into power.

vi. Diction: The words used by the poet are carefully chosen to convey his message and feelings. The poet makes use of simple words to convey the theme of social economic jeopardy and social dilemma. The poem would not pose any difficulty to an average reader. It is simple and understandable. Its simplicity lies in the fact that the poet’s intention among others is to expose the nature and operations of the government and its functionaries.

vii. Denotation in the poem:

Walls: a rampart of earth, stones etc. built up for defensive purposes.

Lamb: A young sheep

Gun: a firearm or cannon.

Chain: a series of interconnected rings or links usually made of metal.

Quietude: a state of being still and quiet.

Retired dancer: someone that is tired of dancing.

viii. Connotation:

Walls: barriers, barricades, hindrance etc.

Lamb: inexperience and unskillful.

Gun: force, destruction, death etc.

Chain: bondage, difficulty.

Quietude: death, impotence.

Retired dancer: a retiree from public service.

1.6 Below is an Array of the Numeration of Word Classes Used in the Poem

Noun	Pronoun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb	Conjunction	Preposition	Det./Numerals
ethics	self	is	broken	not	and	into	the
gun	them	breed	golden		nor	behind	one
naira	your	play	joyous		or	on	a million
poverty		see	retired		not	with	a
lambs		sleeping	fenced			at	the
hearts		gives	lavish			in	the
etc		eat, merged	sustainable			of	

Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of the poem “Democracy of Fenced Walls” has to some extent proved that by using a systematic analytical technique like stylistics, we can make our interpretation as clear as possible. In other words, it is some ways towards convincing that stylistics is a useful tool for anybody interpreting literary texts. The selection of words by the poet plays a very vital role in meaning construction. It supports the reader to capture the message the poet is trying to convey. In addition, the stylistic analysis of this poem has shown that there is dissimilarity between poetic and non-poetic language as a means of defining literature. Also, interpretations need not be the same for everyone. There need not be a logical reason for what the poet meant. Furthermore, it is not out of place to express that only the poet himself will know what the poem truly means; in addition, therefore, there can be hundreds of interpretations and everyone may be right. Interpretations should never be stated as facts, especially in instances where so many different views are possible.

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