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**A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF ISIDORE  
OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY***

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**Abstract**

*The paper makes a stylistic Analysis of Okpewho's The Last Duty. The framework of the analysis is based on style as a choice which is one of the six rubrics identified by Azuike (1992). In this case, an individual has the freedom to deviate from the normal way of writing to have a unique presentation. This paper exposes the stylistic idiosyncrasies embraced by Okpewho in passing his message. The writer uses individualistic narrative style. Dash and ellipsis are punctuation marks also used in special ways. Figures of speech like anaphora, litotes, and rhetorical questions among others are used to beautify the work. Varieties of sentences are also displayed in the novel.*

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## Introduction

The Work of literature is written and presented in many ways in order to bring out its creative nature. To achieve this, the writer uses his peculiar manners, choice of words and form in presenting his message. This is what is known as style. Style therefore is the peculiar way in which something is done.

Simpson (2004:2) defines style as “a method of textual interpretation in which primary of place is assigned to language”. This shows that language is the key point in stylistic because a writer employs various forms and patterns of language while presenting his message.

Azuike (1992) identifies the following rubrics to guide one in stylistic analysis. They are: “Style as a deviation from the norm, style as individual, style as content and form, style as choice, style as a product of context, style as good and beautiful writing”.

Style as choice, as one of the six rubrics forms, is the focus of this work. This means that an individual can adopt a special way of writing to make his work unique. *The Last Duty* is a typical example of a literary work with unique presentation.

It is written by Isidore Okpewho, a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Ibadan. The novel deviates from the normal form of prose work which is always written in chapters.

*The Last Duty* is divided into three parts. Instead of the usual first person or third person narrative, it rather takes individualistic narration. Here, each character gives account of himself. This high degree of deviation prompts the researcher to write a stylistic analysis of the book.

## Plot

The novel records the deeds of Toje, an evil man of the society who uses the arrival of the federal troops to hurt his rubber business rival. It has three divisions: part one, part two and part three.

Part one is titled “Breath burns more sulphate and blood calcifies into boulders for brother to hurl against brother”. It opens with an address from Major Ali. He recalls how triumphant it was when they set Igabo free from the rebels. He sees himself as one responsible for “defending this post against rebel”. He sees it as “the last duty” (p4). Toje Onovwapho boasts of his position as a popular man in the society. He uses his position to victimise and deal with his business rival, Mukoro Oshevire. He conspires against him that he is one of the rebels and this makes Mukoro Oshevire to be jailed while Toje takes his rival’s wife in adultery.

Aku, Oshevire’s wife remembers how she stood with her husband when others escape only to be under the lust of another man. She therefore argues her decision, “I am beginning to question the wisdom of that original decision to stay” (p11). She laments that she is frustrated to succumb to such an evil man. Toje gives his servant, Odibo, gifts for Aku such as foodstuffs and cloth. While in prison, Oshevire does not regret his action of saving a rebel boy but thinks of how his family copes with the condition.

Part two which is titled “Except by rooting who could pluck yam tubers from the base?” starts with the news of air raid that occurs and claims lives. Toje still blames the Sebians for such an action and tries to woo Major Ali into believing that Oshevire should further be interrogated on this.

Okumagba expresses his resentment in guarding a prostitute and Odibo for Toje’s sake. Odibo usually goes to Aku’s house to call her as Toje demands, while Odibo stays with her son. One day, Aku returns late and Odibo had to sleep in her house because of curfew.

The last part which is titled “I know of flowers unseen and they distil beautiful dawns but tares withhold possession of our mangled lawns” concludes the story. It starts with Toje’s comments on the odour of the medicine given to him by Emuakpor to cure his impotency. He wants to be cured so as to have sexual intercourse with Oshivire’s wife before he is released. Aku goes to Toje’s house one day and

returns late which makes Odibo to stay in her house again. This time, Odibo sleeps with her. Odibo reports “She threw her legs wide apart. ...I fell upon her lap and know desire” (P181). Aku regrets her deeds caused by frustration.

Toje realizes the relationship between Odibo and Aku and this leads to serious fight between the two men. They ended up matcheting themselves. Oshevire, while returning home learns from Eseognene, and Esiri that his family is not in order. He returns to meet his wife who is sleeping with another man. He sets his house ablaze and was killed by the soldiers when he refuses their bidding.

### **Narrative Style**

Individualistic narration: Instead of the usual first person or third person narrative, it uses the individualistic approach. Here, each character gives account of himself or herself. Oghemovo is a child in the book. He talks and behaves like a child and his speeches are presented in a childish manner. In all his speeches and actions, the proper nouns are written as common nouns. His sentences begin with small letters at the beginning of a sentence or paragraphs. For example, “i told my mother”, “i went to show onome, i cried” p15.

Aku states on p184 “Can I swear that I never saw it coming? Frustration had driven me to the point where I would rather live the fact than the fiction of sin”. Toje says, “Every town must have a few people whose names lend respect to the community. They should be the town’s foremost citizens, men of some distinction.” p4. Oshevire complains on page 32, “I still don’t know what I am doing here. But I don’t care”. Also, Major Ali argues, “A man must do what he has to do. It may hurt a few people, but right and expediency must always be the determining factors in his decisions” (p15).

Although the narration is a unified one, the act of narration is shared by bringing the characters together as they expose or reveal their conditions and behaviours to us.

### **Sentence Structure Analysis**

**Periodic Sentences:** The periodic sentence which is also referred to as the ‘climatic sentence’ sustains the main idea in a sentence until the end by presenting dependent ideas first. This sentence type according to Ebest (2000) lends emphasis to main points and creates suspense.

Leech and Short (1985) in their discussion of this subject matter say that “it is an anticipatory constituent” which must therefore be held in the memory until the major constituents are interpreted.

Similarly, the periodic sentence creates suspense as earlier mentioned and retains readership.

TEXT 1: Just yesterday, late in the evening, a number of rebel planes had visited this town on the bombing mission. (p3).

TEXT 2: But I must confess I feel great joy this moment, as all over the town the entire population raise their fists in solidarity, jumping and shouting and showing in every way how much they welcome our presence and our efforts. (p3)

TEXT 3: When I took over command of this post as Brigade Major about two years ago, I was quite aware of the tremendous task ahead of me. (p3-4)

In text one (1) above, the direct message is sustained to the end of the sentence which creates suspense in the mind of readers. This sentence type is typical in films and prose materials. Below is the analysis of the sentences:

TEXT 1

Just <sup>A</sup> yesterday, late in the evening, a number of rebel planes had <sup>B</sup> visited this town on a bombing mission. <sup>C</sup>

The sentence structure in the text above is ASVOC which is deviant to the conventional SVOCA. The sentence in a traditional manner would have looked thus:

<sup>S</sup> A number of rebel planes had visited this town on a bombing mission <sup>V</sup> <sup>O</sup> just yesterday, late in the evening. <sup>C</sup>

In the sentence above, the direct message starts the sentence. This depletes suspends and therefore creates boredom and directness which is not good for prose works.

TEXT 3:

<sup>A</sup> When I took over command of this post as <sup>C</sup> Brigade Major  
<sup>A</sup> about two years ago, I was <sup>V</sup> quite aware of the <sup>O</sup> tremendous task ahead of me.

The structure of the above sentence reads ACASVO. Here, the structure is scattered and the direct message comes at the end of the

sentence retaining the structure: SVO. The sentence would conventionally be SVOCA and would read thus:

I was quite aware of the tremendous task ahead of me as Brigade Major  
when I took over command of this post about two years ago.

**Loose Sentence:** The loose sentence is one in which trailing constituents predominate over anticipatory constituents. A loose sentence structure presents issues as they were by making it simple and understandable.

Leech and Short (1985) describe the loose sentence to consist of “trailing constituents” where ideas are presented in a linear chain.

TEXT 1: They should be the towns’ foremost citizens, men of some distinction (p.4).

TEXT 2: It was about ten or eleven in the morning (p42).

TEXT 3: I feel a little relieved to see that the worst fears are over (p.93).

The loose sentence presents the direct message first while the additional information comes after. It is a literary style which aims at natural simplicity and directness, instead of rhetorical effects.

In text one (1) above, the aspects of the sentence can be analysed as follows:

**Direct Message**

**Additional Information**

They should be the town’s foremost citizens    men of some distinction.

TEXT 2:

**Direct Message**

It was about ten or eleven

**Additional Information**

in the morning.

TEXT 3:

**Direct Message**

I feel a little relieved

**Additional Information**

to see that the worst tears are over.

The texts above which are typical of the normal everyday conversations present the real message at the beginning of the speech before adding any additional information(s)

**Simple Sentence:** A simple sentence is one that consists of a subject and a predicate, with or without a complement. Many examples abound in the text.

Text 1: //He /stops talking// (p.7). (SV)

S V

Text2: //I/Just/couldn't do/it// (p199). (S A V O)

S A V

Text 3: //I/have always known/it// (p118) (S V O)

S

V

O

**Compound Sentences:** The compound sentence contains two main ideas, joined by co-ordinating conjunction. Below are examples from the text:

Text 1: [The soldiers try to beat them back] but [it is hard for us to check their overwhelming gesture of approval and goodwill] (p3).

Text 2: [He wears a benevolent face,] and [I am sure that he is by nature a good man] (p38).

Text 3: [He came to the foot of the bed,] and [stopped] (p162).

**Complex Sentence:** The complex sentence consists of one main independent clause and one or more dependent clause(s). Isidore Okpewho uses a lot of complex sentences in the novel.

Text 1: Just yesterday, late in the evening, a number of rebel planes had visited this town on a bombing mission (p3).

Text 2: They have their God to thank, most of them that they ran away with the rebel troops at the approach of the federal forces (p53).

Text 3: But for the villagers here, unaccustomed as they are to such harsh surprises, a thundering air raid proves a bit too much to absorb (p93).

**Compound-Complex Sentence:** This is the type of sentence that contains two main ideas or independent clauses with one or more dependent ones.

Text 1: It is hard for a man, I am aware with all his uniform and his marital gear, to be able to inspire confidence in a people used to a more peaceful life than that which prevails at the moment (p42).

Text 2: Then slowly, slowly, I began to step, at tiptoe, towards the woman, skirting the walls meanwhile, so that my sneaking figure did not catch any stray beams of light from the lamp (p180).

Text 3: Scarcely had the planes departed – untouched by all the anti-aircraft fire that we had released at them in an exchange that had lasted about twenty minutes when all over the town could be heard the takum-takum reports from rebels guns engaging our soldiers from the eastern sector of the town (p200).

### **Figurative Language Analysis**

Figures of speech are expressions commonly used by writers to evoke images in the minds of readers. Figures of speech can add the following to your writing: “Style and creativity, beauty and colour, simplicity and freshness, vigour and precision, originality and familiarity” (Ukwuegbu et al 2002:132).

A lot of figures of speech are used in the book. They include:

1. Personification: In personification, objects or abstract ideas are given human attributes.
  - The war is still on and every moment is pregnant with danger (p.3).
  - Yet, the mere sound of gunfire signals some kind of danger (p.16).
  - Ever since the war came to this town (p.28).
  - ... he throws a greeting smile at us ...(p.38).
  - I can almost feel his heart knocking so eager ... (p.38).
  
2. Anaphora: This is a device that makes use of conscious repetition of sentence patterns.
  - Long enough for this war to take its full course (p.32).
  - Long enough for full normalcy to return ... (p.32).
  - Long enough for me to be able to use his wife ... (p.32).
  - Labour was needed to weed and sweep the Otata's compound (p.182).
  - Labour was needed to keep the town's market clean (p182).
  - Labour was needed to reconstruct and rehabilitate ... (p.182/183).

The use of anaphora did not only lay emphasis but also gives the book a musical effect as a sound device.

3. Synecdoche: In synecdoche, a part of a person or thing is made to stand for a whole or the whole is made to stand for a part.
  - A town is worth nothing if it has no names on whom its credit hangs (p.5).
  - Great names are rare and must not be wasted (p.5).

- ... the town welcomed the federal troops ...(p.19).

This device is specifically used to stress the condition of the people and their community.

4. Rhetorical question: A rhetorical question is a question asked which does not require an answer because its answer is already suggested in the question.

- Where can I run? What can I do? (p.11).
- How shall it be told, how reported, that I cannot lie with a woman? (p.23).
- Who else is there to be called to account when any crisis comes in this house? (p.24).
- For what kind of answer could I have given to my God if I had turned down the boy's desperate plea for help? (p.33).

A lot of rhetorical questions are deliberately used by the author to bring out rhetorical effects.

5. Litotes: This is the use of deliberate understatement by using the negative in order to express the opposite.

- ... who has contributed in no small way to all ... (p.25).
- I am not a small boy you understand? (p.45).
- It took us no less than two days (p.46).
- ... Made up in no small way for all the testimony (p.208).
- It is with no small joy therefore that my brooding mind... (p.209).

The use of this double negativity device helps to stress the opposite of the expressions.

6. Simile: This is used to compare two things, persons, objects or situations because of certain qualities common to them, although they may be different in other areas. Simile is derived

from the word “similar” which shows similarities between the persons or objects being compared. It uses “as” or “like” in making its comparison.

- ... a dry, mirthless crackle, like a squawk in a graveyard at midnight (p.22).
- She stands at the floor for a while to preen herself, like a duck ... (p.132).
- ... smelling like a buzzard’s crotch (p.173).
- ... to my room like a dog fresh-loosed from the halter ... (p.181).

The use of simile in the novel is recognised. It helps in making the illustrations clearer and understandable.

7. Hyperbole: A hyperbole consists of an exaggeration which cannot be taken literally.

- ...before the very eyes of the gazing world ... (p.23).
- The whole town and even the wretched chief prostrating before me (p.26).
- ... what the whole town knew Oshevire did ... (p.31).
- ... devote my whole life to a cause... (p.151).

The above examples are used to show the high number of people involved. The device is used have to achieve a humorous effect.

8. Metaphor: This is a device which compares two things, persons, objects or situations without the use of “as” or “like”. That is why it is called a contracted simile.

- Tearing a man away from his family and wafting him so far away into detention (p.33).
- For me she was the measure of justice (p.59).
- This is heaven (p.204).

- This must be heaven (p.204).

The author uses metaphor to give a direct comparison of situations, objects etc. Here, the reader feels the way the characters feel.

9. Onomatopoeia: This is the use of words whose sounds suggest their meaning.

- You waited for a while! He bawls (p.7).
- ... fumbling with the shirt ... (p.10).
- Mothers clutched their babies (p.22).
- ... wincing in torment (p.40).

A lot of onomatopoeia is used in the book. As a sound device, it brings out the tragic effect of the events.

10. Idiomatic Expression: This is an expression whose meaning cannot be interpreted literally like proverb; it expresses truth in a striking manner.

He took his last look at the world ... (p22).

It was time we gave the whole affair a talking over (p24).

... I have no stomach for your bullying (p165).

... and his face loosens ... (p227).

... people were ploughing his furrow (p233).

These expressions bring out the beauty of the work.

## **Diction**

Diction has to do with the ability of the writer to choose appropriate words, terms and expression in a given context. The writer uses the following words in the novel. The writer carefully selects words to buttress the tragic effects in the novel. The words before show the condition of war, the effects of war, the activities involved in war,

places that relate to war and to crown it, personalities that are involved in war.

Language of military: military duty (p.4), commander of the xv Brigade of the federal army (p.4), civil defence instructions (p.13), armed soldiers (p.14), war machine (p.19), federal chief of staff (p.20), public military execution (p.20), officers (p.21), military escort (p.47), reinforcing the defences (p.93),captains (p.219),

Language of war: the enemy (p.16), dispute (p.16), blood-soaked sheets (p.17), crisis (p.20), state of emergency (p.21), confrontation (p.22), tension (p.22), graveyard (p.22), firing squad (p.22), hazard (p.23), traitors (p.31), situation under control (p.100), tragedy (p.131),

Language of effects of war: was in prison (p.14), firing squad (p.22), distressed (p.40), under the pain (p.40), persons injured (p.94), loneliness (p.95), death of her son (p.99), insecurity and fear (p.111), destruction (p.115), into adultery (p.134), atrocities (p.145), enemy (p.145).

Language of court: into detention (p.11), execution (p.20), course of justice (p.31), crimes (p.31), vindicate (p.33), detained on a charge (p.34), lawyer (p.38), an admission of guilt (p.38), into protective custody (p.51) court (p.119), council (p.119), proceedings in detail (p.123).

### **Punctuation Marks**

One of the punctuation marks used is dash (—). It runs throughout the novel.

Everybody knows that —or should. (p5).

“Her son was there, and if —”(p6).

I can go on in this state of affairs — myself and my child (p11).

... I am having to pay a price for the assistance that he is rendering —and what a price” (p12).

I am too big for that sort of thing — I, Chief Toje Onovwapko ... (p25).

...the entire population —man woman and child (p32).

Yes--no--yes, sir! (p77).

The author deviates from the normal use of dash as seen in the above examples. Dash is used for the purposes like to create suspense, connections, lay emphasis, list, and to conclude.

Another punctuation mark used in a special way is ellipsis (...). It is also used in different areas to achieve different purposes.

“Well, she...she —” (p6).

Still.... (p29).

The silence continues... (p156).

Well one day ... one day ... (p202).

I mean... I..., ... she hisses (p204).

Just like dash, ellipsis is used by the author to lay emphasis, to get the reader's attention, to create balance, and to make the story interesting.

### **Conclusion**

Literature aims at creativity using words and styles as its special tools. It is not in doubt that language is not separated from literature, which means that they are two sides of a coin. Language is important to human beings. They use it not only for communication but to present messages in a special and peculiar way. Literature could be used to teach students how to use language in different dimensions. This is because literature does not only provide a means of learning the language but serves as an important demonstration of the language in use.

In *The Last Duty*, the reader is not only confronted by the contents of the message but the style in which the message is being presented.

The use of individualist approach exposes the characters to the readers. Each narrator advances the story's plot, and the author has no real input in character formation. This makes it impossible for one to accuse the author of favouring any character or achieving a personal theme. Also, the author chooses his diction carefully to depict the themes of war, jealousy and personal honour.

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