

PATTERNS OF DEVIATION IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S POETRY

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Abstract

Poetry is generally marked by deviation. But the question that has bothered scholars is whether there is a difference in this deviation in Modern African/ Nigerian poetry in English as opposed to patterns of deviation in Euro-modernists poetry. A critical stylistic study of the poetry of Niyi Osundare from Nigeria reveals that he has made an exemplary effort to domesticate modern Nigerian poetry in English by adopting a pattern of deviation that is unique and has created an "Alter-Native tradition" in order to achieve its overall goal. Deviation is a linguistic manipulation used by the poet to deviate from norms and conventions of language thereby creating aesthetics and artistic values in literary works especially in poetry for purposeful and meaningful communication. A linguistic usage considered to depart from normal expectations of users of the language. The emergence of Niyi Osundare along with a new poetic tradition is perhaps the height of the concept of deviation in Modern African/Nigerian Poetry from the loins of the Eurocentric poetry. The study adopts the literary stylistic approach of Leech and the Russian Formalists to examine selected poems from Osundare's ten collection of poems. In terms of execution, the study relies on extensive library research involving extensive review of the scholarship on Osundare. The result of our findings is reported in the segments that focus on a practical analysis of individual poems.

Introduction

The language of literature is seen as a different register, marked by deviations from ordinary daily discourse. Literary language has been chosen and manipulated by its user with greater care and complexity than the average language –user either can or wishes to exercise. One task of literary stylistics is to determine how far and in what respects a poet's language shows deviant features. This requires close attention to how a writer uses generally accepted features to special effect, since literature shows far more diversity of individual usage than do other styles. If this distinctive use is recognized, it may be possible to discuss intelligently a writer's individual style. There are prominent critical differences in defining style and stylistics. The two concepts are virtually synonymous. However, the main difference between them is in the usage of terms. Style is an ambiguous term which applies to every sphere of human activity.

Nigerian poetry has come a long way. It has laid down a noble trend of responding to the cross - currents of socio - political and economic experiences of the people as against the individualistic euro - modernist trend that has attracted a great deal of criticism from concerned literary critics. It is on the emergence of this poetic tradition and style that this research is based. As a result, a decisive turn in the tune, attitude, concerns and craft of the poetry began to emerge in the pool of what will eventually constitute the national literature. The pre-colonial poetry provides a useful context for understanding the currents of personal and social feeling which have gone into shaping the Nigerian identity. It is therefore not surprising that to a very large extent, this generation of poets has become the reference point for those looking in poetry for an enduring sense of literary and social values.

African literature is message-oriented. Osundare is a poet who is quite sensitive to language, who is prepared to exploit even the seemingly insignificant of forms to achieve stylistic significance. Stylistics is “the phonology, in the analysis of the texts” (5). This is why it is quite expedient that the linguistic dimension to Osundare’s creativity be closely examined for proper interpretation of messages and evaluation of his artistic style. This study does a holistic stylistic criticism of selected poems in order to project the artistic aesthetics in Niyi Osundare’s poetry. The language of literature especially that of poetry is seen as a different register, marked by deviations from ordinary daily discourse. Deviation is an important aspect of literary style. The chief goal of deviation is to communicate meaning coherently by means of foregrounding. As style can be defined as a deviation from a norm, the question arises whether it could be defined positively, in terms of a norm rather than in terms of deviations. The epoch of the "Alternative Poetry Tradition" witnessed a radical departure from the Euromodernist poetry to the period of the new generation poets who demystified poetry to make it speak the "public language.

Apart from the three levels of grammatical deviation, syntactic, semantic, and phonology which have remained the major focus in stylistic criticism, there are other patterns of deviation which can be equally identified in Osundare’s poetry. These are in the perspective of graphology, capitalization, italicization, parallelism.

Parallel Pattern

Osundare makes use of parallel structures copiously in *Waiting Laughter*, *Days*, *Midlife*, *Tender Moments* and *The Eye of the Earth*. This is because; he uses them as devices to reinforce and re-emphasizes his ideas with their syntactic structures. In fact, parallelism forms the greater part of the aesthetics in Osundare’s poetry. A few examples will suffice.

Waiting
 for the heifer which hides its horns
 in the womb of the lamb
Waiting
 for the nail which springs an ivory wonder
 in the aprons of the finger
Waiting
 for the tome which split its spine
 in the spotted arena of reading eyes.
Waiting
 for the deer which loves its hide

and hunters who cuddle their flaying guns
Waiting
for the razor's stubbled glide
across the firmament of the beard
Waiting
for fists which find their aim
and idioms which split their atoms
in 'plodding shadows (WL, 10).

In this poem, Osundare presents some of the various forms of waiting that are evident in nature. First, the writer foregrounds the concept of waiting by making the word "waiting" to stand alone in separate lines at the beginning of every stanza of the poem. With this, Osundare emphasizes the fact that waiting is a common phenomenon in life, and that it stands out in every aspect of life. In other words, nothing can be achieved in life without waiting, psychologically, emotionally, mentally and physically. Osundare seems to be saying here that waiting precedes everything in life. Hence, before the heifer's horns protrude from the womb of the calf, there must be a period or process of waiting; before the nail can spring an ivory wonder in the aprons of the finger, there must be a waiting process; before a tome (a big book) develops into such a large volume of reading materials, there is a process of waiting; before the hunter can have access to the hide of the deer, there is a waiting process; before the razor can achieve a clean shave, there is a process of waiting; and before the literary fists can piece idioms together to form beautiful literary pieces, there must be a process of waiting. Osundare is only emphasizing here the fact that every good and beautiful thing is achieved after a process of waiting. In other words, waiting as far as Osundare is concerned waiting, becomes a recurrent phenomenon in the game of life. For example, in "Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed", Osundare shows a great concern for an environment that is experiencing drought. In an incantatory tone, he in a glance traversed the universe to showcase the effects of drought on both living and non-living things. He also acknowledges the fact that the sky is the carrier of the much needed rain:

The sky carries a boil of anguish
Let it burst

Our earth has never lingered so dry
in the season of falling showers
clouds journey over trees and over hills
miserly with their liquid treasure

The sky carries a boil of anguish
Let it burst... (27).

Osundare has expressly given a synopsis of the geographical idea of how rain is formed in the sky. This expression is made in a way that captures the idea of how water particles are formed and fall back as rain. The beauty of language is here effectively used.

The sky carries a boil of anguish
Let it burst (27).

If it bursts, it will not only be for the good of the earth, but will also bring succour to the sky, the carrier of the anguish. Consequent upon the devastating effects of the drought, man is not only affected physically, the environment is equally affected. Thus Osundare uses a parallel form in expressing the consequences of drought on human and non-human entities:

dust in eating halls
dust in busy bedrooms
dust in scheming boardrooms
dust in retrenching factories
dust in power brothels (28).

The effects of the drought on human and other living things give rise to the agitation and prayer for rain to fall:

Let it rain today
 that parched throats may sing
Let it rain
 that earth may heal her silence
Let it rain today
 That corn leaves may clothe the hits
Let it rain
 that roots may swell the womb of lying plains
Let it rain today
 that stomachs may shun the rumble of thunder
Let it rain
 that children may bath and bawl and bawl (28).

Here, in one straight parallel expression are enumerated the consequences of drought on human beings. For examples; “parched throats”, the earth is dead without rain. 'Earth' here represents the totality of creation and the falling of rain brings life and the earth's silence is healed. Osundare portrays the picture of one in agony who depends on the necessary drugs to get well again. The springs back to life again as "the bare brown hills" are clothed by vegetation, and the “womb” of the earth is “impregnated” by the growing roots, there will be no rumbling in the stomach due to hunger while humans not only drink to live but bath to refresh. There is no procreation if there is no life. There is the recurrence of the effects of drought in *Waiting Laughters*. Apart from the phenomenal waiting as part of life's processes, Osundare, here, paints the picture of a continuous process of life's expectations from the natural perspectives.

Graphic Pattern

One way by which poetic form differs from prose form is in the graphic structures of the former. That is, poetry exploits space to form its own graphological distinctiveness, like the use of line, stanza etc. According to Leech and Short “graphological variation is a relatively minor and superficial part of style concerning such matters as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization and paragraphing” (105). Osundare in *Waiting Laughters*, *Songs of the Season*, *Songs of the Marketplace* and *Days* though adopts the verse-free form; enriches his works with stylistic variations of aesthetic patterning and line lengths, which give his poetry in the texts,

their uniqueness. We shall look at a good number of texts in the collections whose poetic forms are exploited either to aid the ideational contents in them or for other stylistic significance.

Graphic patterning in Osundare's poetry, as a device, is clearly demonstrated in *Waiting Laughters* where a letter of the alphabet is used as a line: The above is also devoid of the complete sense of reading in a linear form. Only a word exists in a vertical arrangement which allows a reading from the top to the bottom. Some of the words are truncated in a deliberate attempt to restrict them to the two vertical lines.

Long
er
than
the
y
a
w
n
of
the
moon
in
a
sky... (84).

The poem is the longest in the collection *Waiting Laughters*, and the most deviant. It ignores almost all poetic patterns, as far as poetic composition is concerned. Normally, a poem is expected to have two levels: the graphic and the phonic. But in this poem, there is a complete merger of the phonic and the graphic media. In other words, the text can only be read with great difficulty, visually, it cannot be read aloud or verbalized, let alone being sung, so its phonic realization is lost. Many factors are obviously responsible for this. First, some verse lines merely have a letter in each of them, as in the spread of the lettered word “yawn” over four verse lines as:

“y
a
w
n”

Now if each of the letters is uttered as an independent line, no communication is made. This is not only a deviation from poetic standard but also the ordinary language structure which poetry is expected to deviation from in the first instance. The first two lines have two recognizable morphemes of the truncated word-longer: “long-“, “er”, while the maximal line of the poem contains just a lexical word. All these make the poem much more elongated than usual. This makes reading extremely difficult. For effective reading therefore, certain words must be brought together and some others separated following the lexical standard of English language.

But the elongation which, of course, engenders difficulty of reading, is graphologically justified as it foregrounds the long period the waiting “harvest” will take. Osundare uses the graphic elongation to admonish the oppressed and the ordinary people that the period of waiting for the political change will not come too soon but might be very long and boring. This long

waiting which will eventually result in boredom is expressed in the idea of 'yawn' as an associative word. The word is stylistically foregrounded for the purpose of striking emphasis. Osundare further reinforces this idea of long wait with the use of the metaphor of the farmer's much awaited rainfall for the drying tendrils in the dry season – note the repeated word 'waiting' and 'dropping' for this emphasis. Again, 'waiting' is syllabically 'fractured' to further show the slow pace of movement of time as against the people's hope and expectations.

Wait
ing
And the hours limp a-
long
with
band-
ages
of fractured moments. (29).

There is an extensive comparison drawn between the period waiting and the realization of the people's desires. They keep on:

Waiting
la felon yoked to a tryst with the noose
a groom for the magic of the bridal night
a husband pacing the scented corridors of the labour
ward
a home-sick traveler on the platform of tardy trains
a big-bellied billionaire for the aroma of Rhine-rouge
champagne... (29).

Yet in all of these, the "bandaged".

Time
ambles
in
diverse
paces
with
diverse
persons (30).

Another kind of graphic deviation for stylistic effect, can be observed in the poem "a tongue in the crypt" which not only plays on the title of Soyinka's collection of prison poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1967) but also ridicules infringement of the rights of the people to freedom of expression under military rule. The idea is expressed in the form of an advert:

Patriots
Thinkers
Countrymen

Behold your tongue
Sealed up in this iron cage
For public safety
And the national interest

For permission to use,
Apply to:
The Minister of Whispering Affairs
Dept of Patriotic Silence
53 Graveyard Avenue
Dumberia (SS. 127).

The poet has in this text exploited the use of incarceration of opposition by the military junta. This is satiric. The first three lines of the poem sound like the observation of certain protocol before the reading of a prepared speech. However, nobody is addressed in particular, but the “Patriots”, “Thinkers” and “Countrymen” are those who do the biddings of the power that be. The “iron cage” is an allusion to imprisonment for security purposes in which those who are opposed to anti-social policies are usually kept. The graphological crafts with which Osundare expresses this concept makes it unique. Of course, failure to adhere to keep a sealed lips of government policies may result to incarceration or an outright extermination as it has always being in military regime or even in a democratic dictatorship. It evokes the imagery of military scenario and oppressive dictatorship where oppositions are crushed or incarcerated In *Waiting Laughters* there are:

The
Rails

Criss and cross

in a crisis of sleep
ing
steel... (32).

This same conceptual expression also occurs in *Songs of a Marketplace* entitled “the Nigeria Railway” where lexical truncation is expressly used graphically:

dark sna
ky str
uctures

tor tuous
milli
pede on
legs
of iron
crawl ing
wear ily
fromswamp to savannah (30).

As shaped poems the text achieves graphic patterns that are representatives of the crossing of a rail line at its junction. Osundare uses this to paint the graphic picture of the moribund Nigeria railway system in a comatose. The only reminder of its existence is the rusted line criss-crossing the swampy and the savannah landscape of the country. It has remained in a rickety condition, almost in a state of despair, as he gives a pictorial but yet a graphic description of a locomotive system that is near total collapse:

“...tor tuous
milli
pede on
legs
of iron
crawl ing
wear ily...” (30)

The use of words such as ‘millipede’, ‘crawling’, and ‘wearily’ gives a vivid visual image of the old models of locomotive engines compare to the much modern models which use electricity with faster speed. The ‘millipedic’ movement could also be viewed from the socio-political and economic development of the nation, which still crawls as against the fast developing economies of the developed world. ‘Millipede’, ‘crawl’ and ‘wearily’ in the structure, further reinforce the state of neglect and ineptitude in the Nigerian railway system. While the lexical truncation in the word ‘sleeping’ in the third line suggests the dysfunction of the railway system.

Italicization

Loan words and expressions are foregrounded in italics in most of Osundare's texts, especially in Yoruba words and expressions e.g. *Iyáwó kòbó kan ábó* (SS, 56) and the entire Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's lyrics in the poem entitled “for Fela Anikulapo- Kuti”:

*No agreement today
No agreement tomorrow
Make ma broda hungry
Make I no talilll?
I no go gree!
No agreement today
No agreement tomorrow... (SS, 94).*

Like quotation marks, italicization is often adopted to mark off direct speech as it is the case with Fela's lyrics. Similar use of italics is also observed in *Village Voices* as *gangan*, *gbedu*, *Bata*, *egiri*, *ibembe* (6), and *omodindinrin* (46).

Osundare captures more of Yoruba words in his use of italics as a style. In Canto I of *Waiting Laughters*, we see more of such loan words, especially in Yoruba, being deployed.

Waiting...

And when the humble axe finally heeds its
noble task,
the head descends, lumpen dust in its royal

mouth

Òrògòdodo Òrògòdo
Òrògòdodo Òrògòdo
Òbá bá ti bēyi
O mō d Òrògòdodo oooo (22).

This is an Ikere mythology expressing the worthlessness of a king once he has been banished. Elongation of sound is observed in the last unit which is the lengthening of vowels. It functions as a feature of speech as well as an indication of emphasis.

Capitalization

Capitalization is a common graphological feature in most of Osundare's poems. In *Songs of the Season*, some expressions are foregrounded for emphasis. This feature is prominent in satiric poems such as; "For Fela Anikulapo-Kuti":

...Sing on, then
bird of our battled dawn
someday our FOLLOW FOLLOW...
when a loamy black has routed
the YELLOW FEVER of our slaying souls:
we shall then stop SHUFFERING AND SHMILING, (96)

Note the use of the sound /f/ - "sh" as against the sibilant sound /s/ which further places great emphasis on the two words "suffering" and "smiling". This poem captures the philosophy of the great musician, Fela, in the hands of the military for using his music as a weapon to fight against tyranny, social injustice, and some other social vices that kept the people "in prison house when dragons wrestle TRUTH".

Capitalization as a form of deviation stands out among other elements in the poem. This is a type of foregrounding which M.A.K. Halliday refers to as "prominence". It is used in "health for all by the year 2000" for the purposes of prominence and emphasis. This is also a satire on government health policies in every successive administration in Nigeria. This has become more or less a kind of political jingle which has remained a mirage, due to the fact that those factors militating against the realization of a robust health policy are still not yet addressed. These are poor sanitation, hunger, high cost of drugs and poor facilities in the hospitals:

Though rubbish builds skyscrapers in our streets
And malaria struts the lanes like a conquering demon
HEALTH FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000
Though kwashiorkor decimals our brood,
Our children so obese with needless hunger
HEALTH FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000
Though medicine merchants murder with unnatural prices
And DEATH sells at a thousand for ten kobo
HEALTH FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000
Though hospitals are horse-spittle
And theatre door open into crowded morgues
HEALTH FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000. (SS, 134-134),

Foregrounding “HEALTH FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000” in capital letters and as a repetition continues to agitate the mind of an average citizen as to whether health is not now an exclusive preserve of the rich who can afford it or an illusion for the helpless poor. Another instance of the use of capitalization for emphasis is seen in “this I believe” where “MAN” is foregrounded and used at the beginning of the second line of the first four stanzas to indicate its significance and to draw attention to it:

...that
MAN is the centre of this world...
that
MAN has the power to tame the tempests
that
MAN lives to work and works to live
that
MAN's mind is infinite as... (147)

The poem captures the position of man in the cosmos and portrays man as having a great and powerful psyche that can transform the world. This sounds more philosophical as Adejare (1992) says that, ‘the use of capital letters other than in their conventional places is a feature of philosophical texts’ (65). Thus, most of Osundare's poetry are philosophical to some degree based on his use of graphological features.

Conclusions

The main concern, as stated in the foregoing, is to show that studying Osundare's poetry from a stylistic point of view would enable one to understand and appreciate the aesthetics of his poetry from the various stylistic perspectives to fully grasp his ideological stance. The study explores Osundare's poetry with the view of determining the patterns of deviation in his works. In sum, therefore the significance of the study lies in the fact that it explores the poetry of Osundare within the context of the patterns of deviation observed in his poetry. Apart from the discovery of the various patterns of deviation, there is also the observation that the beauty and the uniqueness of Osundare's works lie in his use of language that is familiar in everyday communication.

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