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REVERIE, AN ESCAPE ROUTE: A LINGUISTIC EXAMINATION OF DENNIS BRUTUS' LETTERS TO MARTHA 2,4,5 AND 6

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Abstract

In recent times, in the studies of literary works, it is no longer adequate to use such expressions as "the language of the poem or the novel is lucid, or gives joy to the reader, or language is simple or inaccessible." A step further should be taken to state what has made it so and how it has become what it is. This method of describing the language used in any literary work is a new approach which strengthens the relative bond between the theme and the language employed to bring the theme of the work to focus. The writer of any work has a choice of possible alternatives of words and expressions to use. The question behind our search is why has the writer chosen these words or expression and not the others available to him? This actually draws the reader into the mainstream of the writer's message and eventually this rewards the writer's efforts. This is what the linguistic stylist does with literary works. In Dennis Brutus' 'Letters to Martha 2, 4, 5 and 6' he uses his choice of graph representation, his grammatical arrangements and words that semantically represent what exactly he means. This paper attempts to examine how successful Brutus uses language to achieve his purpose of making his readers be a part of shared experience.

Introduction

The Southern Rhodesia's writer Dennis Brutus, has been recorded as one of such writers that experienced life in the prison for his protest against apartheid in the countries of the southern part of Africa. Born in Salisbury in 1924, he spent his children in the township of Doweille in Port Elizabeth in South Africa. He is of mixed descent and so a 'coloured' by South African definition. His parental background is such that told the story of hardship. Although his parents were both teachers; his father was continuously fighting against poverty and this perhaps led to his father abandoning his (father's) family. Although he did not attend

school regularly in his childhood days, he participated greatly in his family poetry recitation which sharpened his intellect. His favourite poems were Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott' and 'The Round Table' and Wordsworth's narrative poems.

He was an activist, a leader in the struggle against racism in South African sport and involved in anti apartheid campaigns. His was a story of arrest and re-arrest until he was finally sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment with hard labour on Robben Island. His first volume of poetry *Sirens, Knuckles, Boots* was awarded the 1962 Mbari Prize for poetry but he rejected the money prize for poetry on the ground that the competition was racially discriminatory.

His experiences as a prisoner were originally written as letters to his sister-in-law Martha (for it was a crime for Brutus to write poetry) which was published in 1969 under the title *Letters to Martha and other poems from a South African Prison*. *Library Journal*, Aug. (1969) quoted in *A New Readers' Guide to African Literature* notes that:

They express his fear, loneliness and deprivations (especially the act of music) and they are peopled by figures from his nightmares - brutal prison wardens, fellow prisoners former friends and so on ... (P 366).

When he was freed from prison in 1965 but was banned from writing, from being published and even from being quoted, he took a Rhodesian passport and left for England on one-way exile permit. Other of his works include *Poems from Algiers, A Simple Lust* which was published in 1972 and works in addition selections from his previous points to the agony of exile.

Thumboo (1978) indicates the new pressures on Brutus:

Confrontations with apartheid in situ cease with exile. One set of pressure diminishes, another develops. Exile is never easy... The moment of personal freedom is paradoxically also a moment of personal loss (P. 366).

A collection of poems called *Strains* was published in 1975. His other awards include Freedom Writer's Award (1975), the K.D. Kaunda Award for Humanism (1979). In summary, Romanus Egudu (1976) quoted in *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature*, on his stature and achievement as a poet and prominent exile says:

In his intellectual protest without malice, in his mental agony over the apartheid situation in South Africa, in his concerns for the sufferings of the others, and in his hope which has defied all despairs – all of which he has portrayed through images and diction that are imbued with freshness and vision – Brutus proved himself a capable poet fully committed to his social responsibility (p 367).

It is worth examining Dennis Brutus' use of imagery and diction that are imbued with freshness and vision and perhaps to re-examine his linguistic arrangements which serve as his vehicle of delivering his message. By this I mean that this paper focuses on the three levels of linguistic representation as used by Dennis Brutus in these poems under consideration. From all indications Brutus has physically been associated with rough times and hardship of childhood days brought about by the society where he grew up. That is to say oppressive life in South Africa, hostility meted to his people, assault, violation, rape etc abound. His personal exposure to fear, loneliness, denials and deprivation are such that the underlying tone of his poems is protestation. A study of his poems 'Letters to Martha 2, 4, 5 and 6' will validate the claims of this writing.

Level of Graphology

- (i) Use of small letters to start lines of stanzas.

To start with, the very first thing that strikes any reader about Dennis Brutus' poems is the formal structure and layout which he has adopted. His presentation is initially a matter of compliance with the conventional layout at the beginning of each line of a stanza. But as soon as he is jerked to consciousness of feeling of protest, he shows marks of deviance and quickly changes to using small letters at the beginning of many lines.

Moreover, one cannot pin him down to a regular number of lines per stanza. What is observed is irregular number of lines per stanza for some, e.g in Letters to Martha 2 stanzas 1 and 2, where there are four lines in each of the stanzas, to changing to more lines e.g in Letter to Martha 5 stanza 2 with nine lines and to others that have just three lines and outrageously to one line stanza in Letter to Martha 6 stanza 4 - 'So great the pressures to enforce Sodomy. This is a summative one line, heavily laden with information.

- (ii) Paucity of regular punctuation marks: conventionally other punctuation marks like commas, fullstops e.t.c are expected in the poems but what is observed is the application of a few semi-colons, colons and dashes, the use of which indicates loose connection of information that has gone before to the on-coming one (for semi colon) and colon to introduce more information. Brutus aptly used these marks because all the pieces of information given out as horrible experiences in the prison are many and continuous, one being connected sequentially to the other. The colons are used to divulge more information of what happens in the prison, while the dash does the work of rephrasing and giving further explanation or example of what the poet means.

The 'Letters to Martha' 2, 4, 5 and 6 are organically related even though they were

not written at the same period. Letter 2 discusses how otherwise useful materials are converted to weapons and objects of gruesome acts, whose use is capable of generating fear, mental torture pain that could kill, when savagely used on human persons thus:

/and when the knives suddenly flash/
/produced perhaps from some disciplined anus/
(lines 9 to 10). This state of affair leads to the next letter which is **Letter to Martha 4**, which deals with intuitive escapist behaviour which enters human mind at an instance of impending danger, especially the weak. Linking letter 4 to the next which in letter 5, the poet discloses the horror of deprivation, fear, callous acts meted to prisoners, inhuman act that pervade the four walls of the prison yard and their effects on human beings encaged therein. The unnatural wicked acts on the prisoners produce in them the urge to unnatural acts which they feel would abet the ugly situations they have around them. All they are left with are hallucination, a feeling of communicating and finding companionship with 'ghosts' of themselves. In other words this letter states that some weak minded prisoners are engulfed by frustration and consequently meet their demise in this kind of circumstance while others may survive as a result of strong will power and amenable disposition to life's circumstances.

In 'Letter to Martha 6', the poet stresses individuality of personality and how people apply themselves to situations confronting them. Singling out two prison inmates, the poet sees their reaction contrasting with what the generality of prison inmates resort to. Whether theirs are better or not, remains the judgment of the individual reader.

Phonological level: These poems are fraught with dearth of aesthetic phonological arrangement, because of the pathetic situation involved and the treatment of dominant issue which is life in the prison yard. Already known, a prison is not a place for enjoyment and relaxation; rather it's known as a place carved out for purging people of their bad behaviours

through punishment. Consequently the speed of the poem need to be highlighted. The inadequacy of punctuation marks produces a breath-hanging reading with fast-reading speed in order to do away quickly with horrible experiences undergone by prison inmates. One can afford to repeat pleasant structure emanating from pleasant topics which can give enjoyment and beauty of sound arrangement, but these poems relay suffering, hostility, bestiality, excessive pains and death. Therefore there is little room for aesthetics. However, the axiom that in every dark cloud, there is a silver lining, can be applied here. Their little flash of sham joy which can be so short-lived, can accommodate the phonological chiming of the labio-dental fricative /f/ in 'fainting fits, finally fled' lines 12-13. This produces beauty of sound and rhythm for purposes of brief enjoyment in the midst of suffering. Other chimed sounds are the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ in 'be bribed' and the glottal sound /h/ in 'hedged his'. All these produce aesthetic value in the poem.

Grammatical level: At this level the sentence order is not thwarted. By this is meant that in **Letters to Martha 2, 4, 5, and 6**, many sentences are yoked together with the use of co-ordinator *and* which occurs six times joining NPs to NPs and one sentence to another culminating in various types of sentences namely simple, compound, complex, compound complex. The conventional order of SVOCA is maintained in many sentences. One striking phenomenon that runs through the four poems is the nesting of sentences with *but*, or *that* etc. The distribution is Letter to Martha 2 has 6 *ands*, Letter 4 has 3 *ands*, 2 *buts* and 1 *or*; Letter 5 has 2 *ands* letter 6 has 6 *ands*, 1 *but*. These show that many clauses are nested together showing relativeness of thought.

Using Letter to Martha 2 as an example let us identify the clauses and their structure.

S V A
Cl 1 (One learns quite soon)
S

Cl 2 (that nails and screws and other
sizeable bits of metal)
V A
(must be handed) in

S V
Cl 3 (and seeing them shaped and
sharpened] one) (is

C S V
Cl 4 chilled, appalled to see) [how
vicious) (it) (can be) -
S
(this simple, useful bit of steel).

A - S - A V
Cl 5 (and when (these knives)
suddenly) (flash) -

V A
Cl 6 (produced) (perhaps from some
disciplined anus)-
S V A C
(one) (grasps) (at once) (the steel
bright horror)

A C
Cl 7 (in the morning air) (and how
soft and vulnerable)
V S
(is) (naked flesh)

There is a total of seven clauses but with the presence of even semi: colons, colons, dashes and grammatical words, there is visibly one string of sentence.

Many patterns emerge as a result of the attempt made by Brutus to represent the pattern of life in the prison yard. The function of *and* in binding sentences also occurs in binding all the inmates and reducing and levelling everybody therein to one appalling status; whether one is a political prisoner, all are subjected to the same

shabby and brutal treatment, such as forcing 'shaped and sharpened nails or screws' into peoples anus and forcing them out again as a disciplinary measure-a horrendous action. The following patterns can be identified:

Pattern 1

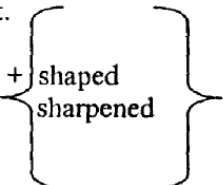
One learns quite soon that + nails
Screws must be handed in
other sizeable bits of metal

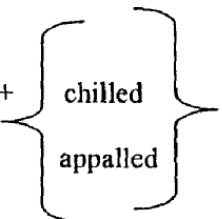
The NPs *nails*, *screws* and *metal* are in paradigmatic relationship with each other and shares the plural morpheme 's', except that the NP *metal* is not a countable noun and so has a zero plural morpheme. The other two words *nails* and *screws* share the voiceless sibilant /s/ as the end morpheme thereby showing agreement and harmony of sounds. The first two NPs are one syllabic words and fall within the rhythmic pattern that gives beauty of rhythm. Although the 3rd NP which in *metal* is a 2 syllabic word, their sharing the same paradigm neutralises the difference and forces it into the same rhythm. Further, the NPs are syntactically related to the noun clause 'one learns quite soon that' and they share semantically the general feature /+ weapon/ and there is this contrast in the expression 'how vicious it can be - this simple, useful bit of steel' line 7-8 of Letter 2. The pronoun *it* has an aberrant use because the referent has surfaced after the use of the pronoun. It is uncommon to use pronouns in such a way. This represents the state of some prisoners in our prisons where they are put into prison while awaiting trial (AT) some people would have spent upwards of five to six years without having a formal trial of their cases in the law court.

The ironical status of the nails and screws which are said to be useful and simple but viciously used, needs to be highlighted. The adjectives used for the nails and screws are three

namely simple, useful, vicious. The first two adjective *simple* and *useful* are in antonymous relationship with *vicious*. The nails and screws carry two opposite units of meaning /+ advantage/ and /+ deadly/ but intratextually they are bestowed with the same value, which neutralizes their semantic opposition. In relation to prison, it explains that possibly innocent people are imprisoned along with guilty persons and all are lumped into one group – criminals. Here there is no difference between the guilty and the innocent.

Pattern II

and seeing them + 

Pattern III one is +  to see

The action 'shaped and sharpened' produce the desired negative effect of fear, terror as to what function they are to be put. The initial phoneme of palato alveolar fricative /ʃ/ in /ʃeɪpt/ and /ʃa: p nd/ makes onomatopoeic sound in the action of shaping and sharpening as a frictional sound occurs between two bits of metals coming into contact with each other. Again the same sound is used to warn a person in a hush manner to beware of an impending danger especially the type they are used to in the prison. Equally the two words share the past tense morpheme '-ed' which in phonemically represented as /pt/ and /p nd/ respectively. Both, semantically, share the general feature /+violence/. Finally both VPs are syntactically related to the phrase 'and seeing them'. The three levels converge here and reinforce each other.

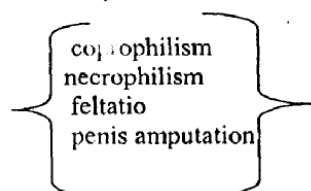
The same applies to the participle chilled and appalled' which are syntactically related to the verb to be 'is' and are paradigmatically related and also share the semantic feature /+ fear/. Phonetically, both are monosyllabic words and the participle morpheme 'ed' which the two words share is realized as /d/ and produces the rhyme sound which gives pleasure and joy. These three levels namely phonological, grammatical and semantic converge and reinforce each other.

Some words are collectively contrasting e.g. the knives are produced from 'some disciplined anus'. The adjective disciplined should, in the normal English code select an object with the semantic feature /+ animate/. But "disciplined" here selects an object 'anus' with the semantic feature /+ human part/. A disciplined object is one which is reformable. Anus being an involuntary part of a human being cannot isolatedly be disciplined. Therefore there is a collational disorder just as it is for someone to be imprisoned because he condemns inhumanity to man by fellow human beings. However in spite of its linguistic absurdity, the poet achieves the purpose of distancing the reader from the horror of imagining shaped and sharpened steel forced into a human being through the anus and brought out again. The poet goes on to yoke together words which produce a mixed image as the poet states that

'One grasps at once the steel-bright horror in the morning air' (lines 11-12) of Letter 2. Bright-steel is very dazzling to the eye and should normally produce a beautiful and attractive image but instead of this, the image produced is horror and unmistakably noticed because the naked flesh which is 'soft and vulnerable' line 13 will be the receiver of the horror.

In 'Letters to Martha 4 like the others, one regular and common phenomenon of present tense cuts across the 4 letters e.g. 'the religious sense asserts' (line 3); is a currency' (line 7) 'can purchase' (line 8); other are 'shafts'

The pattern that has emerged is
labyrinth...+



The four NPs are syntactically related to the labyrinth of self' and they share the general semantic feature /+unnaturalness /+ animalism/. These are culture bound words and are not in common use except in certain cultural setting. Because the prisoners are in unnatural setting which Brutus refers to as 'gibbering society' their sexual pressures that have not been given vent to, now force their ways through the actions associated with the four earlier mentioned NPs. Brutus' selection of the words depicting unnatural sexuality is worth taking note of. Brutus has used derivational suffixes to capture the reality of the situation in the use of '-ism'; and '-tion'. Fellatio' a Latinate word has also been employed to describe the action as it is. 'Penis-amputation' is a hyphenated word employed to explain the exactitude of the action. This is another form of debased action which can result in suicide. This raises a question whether this action is done out of sexual pleasure or for personal annihilation? These actions lead to 'self-damnation and suicide' (line 9) which become a companionable ghost' (line 10). To show the degree of instability of the mind, the person who reacts in these unnatural manners, the poet says, sees his apparition or 'wraith' which Brutus refers to as 'doppelganger' follows shortly ones death. To prove death as a sure occurrence, Brutus says such a person sees as 'familiar, familiar doppelganger' (line 12) 'which cannot be shaken off'. The repetition of the word 'familiar' underscores the certainty of occurrence and unmistakability of its recognition.

'Letter to Martha 6', shows an 'enormously different reaction' (line 3) where there is 'tense thought' caused by danger and fear and pain' (lines 4-5).

The pattern that emerges is

was +



The three NPs are structurally related to the verb to be 'was' and are complement of the same verb to be 'was'. They also share the same paradigm and share the general semantic feature /+discomfort/. This represents the kind of treatment meted to prisoners. The supposed of correction and direction to positive change of attitude which imprisonment should give, is replaced by brutality, hostility and excessive fear experienced, by the prisoners. The use of co-ordinator 'and' which binds the three NPs grammatically is used by the poet to show the unity of 'danger' fear and pain' which culminates in 'drama' (line 6) which a dash has been used to introduce. One of the two men in letter 6, devised a way of grappling with his situation thus:

One simply gave up smoking knowing he could be bribed and hedged his mind with romantic fantasies of beautiful marriageable daughters (lines 7-10).

Behind these fantasies were danger and fear and pain' yet he was able to manage himself. That points to what poets in prison suffer, like Wole Soyinka, who when he was in prison refused to give in to frustration and self annihilation. Rather, he wrote his experiences as poems, on cigarette packs, and smuggled them out. Brutus is personified in this prisoner who took to 'romantic fantasies as reverie and make belief life to swim safely across the ocean of prison life.

Unfortunately the other of the two men 'sought escape' in 'fainting fits and asthmas and finally fled into insanity' (lines 11-13).

Conclusion

Dennis Brutus has let us into the world within the four walls of the prison. It is obvious that many categories of people are thrown into prison purportedly for one or other forms of misconduct but once in the prison, all prisoners regardless of one's status are visited with the same brutal treatment to which people react differently. Summarily, some in their weakness, pray for God's intervention while some find vent in engaging in sodomy and all other sorts of sexual abnormality which lead them eventually to suicide while others delve into fantasies and create a world of make belief while still, others end up in derangement. Since any person can, perchance, find him or herself in the prison mistakenly or deservedly, Brutus warns us by exposing several alternative avenues, for our personal choices, for dealing with life in the prison.

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We Shall not Let Him Die! - A Linguistic Appraisal of Okigbo's 'Heavensgate'

by

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An Introduction

This paper responds to a call from an anthology of poetic tributes to Okigbo, entitled Don't Let Him Die, edited by Chinua Achebe and Dubem Okafor. Actually, from the data available, not much work has been done in the volume of his poetry especially in his language use.

Okigbo, we know, was one of those few Nigerian powerful poets and a metaphysical one too, who shone like a star briefly and was put off, by his death during the Nigeria – Biafra war. During his short life, he was the pivot of an interplay of activities and experiences of life, which he harnessed to build up a volume of poems namely, 'Heavensgate', 'Limits', 'Distances', 'Paths of Thunder'. Okigbo, like Soyinka, is not an easy poet. This is attested to in A New Readers' Guide to African Literature:

His images are often personal and his symbolism complex, calling forth all the influences that have worked on him p. 448.

These influences make his images eclectic because he does not limit his sources for his choice of images or words, because he believes that poetry has a wider world. His sources, claims Funso Aiyejuna 1997:586, has no limit, time, region or race. Okigbo has this to say:

I think that I've been influenced by various literatures and cultures, right from Classical times to the present day, in English, Latin, Greek and a little French, and a little Spanish ('Death of Christopher Okigbo' in A New Readers' Guide To African Literature, p. 449.

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In addition to what he said, he was influenced by and his work affected by his childhood, in his little town Ojoto, where he interacted fully with his peers, fetched water, bathed, and even swam in the Idoto stream. Furthermore, his Christian upbringing accounts for the images drawn from the Bible. All of these sum up to result in the difficulty of his poems.

Okpewho 1985 shares the same observation with other critics as he asserts.

But what makes Okigbo's poem particularly difficult is that it reflects the complex mixture of cultural influences which the poet has undergone.Okigbo reminds us of the Anglo-American poet T.S. Eliot... Okigbo's poem here, like Eliot's, is composed of multiple symbols which are logically associated with one another.... p. 239

In his quest for self identity, Okigbo sees himself turn around to look at himself from the inside. He speaks in his interview with Marjory:

....And when I talk of looking inward to myself, I mean turning inward to examine myself (underlining mine). This of course takes account of ancestors.... because I do not exist apart from my ancestors.

(Marjory White Law, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo in A New Readers' Guide to African Literature. p.448.)

Poetry has given Okigbo a base for practising his traditional religion **which** he lamentably abandoned. This time, he becomes an idol **workshipper** of the river goddess, as his maternal grandfather, who **has been the priest** of the shrine, and who is reincarnated in Okigbo. This **vehement** turn-around of Okigbo's, exposes his disgust for the **Christian religion**, particularly the Catholic Church which had nurtured him. It is no wonder that Romanus Egudu comes up with his extreme view of Okigbo as an anti-ecclesiastical, anti-clerical

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poet. It is a pathetic situation of one trying to serve two masters. The Bible makes it clear that it is not possible. Such a person must hate the one and like the other. To show his new found love in the goddess Idoto, Okigbo had to castigate the Catholic Church in order to project the traditional worship that he had evidently abandoned, hence his being 'a prodigal'.

Heavensgate

"Heavensgate" has five sections, each of which expresses a deeply felt experience by the poet. In the main title of the section "Heavensgate", the poet presents himself at the 'gate' through which he can, if allowed, to enter the place of his desired worship. Entrance through the gate spells out his admission into the arena of actions. For this poet, the first step is "The Passage", which is the first poem in this section, followed by "Initiations", the other poem of this section. The third is "Water maid", followed by the fourth poem "Lustra", and finally the fifth poem, "Newcomer". Although these poems were written at different periods of the same year 1961, there is a flow of thought and organic connection and link binding the five of them, with one flowing into the other.

Thematically, the poet in 'The Passage' presents himself as a prodigal to the water spirit of his roots, his revered muse and goddess, after many years of non-recognition of her. Yet he had been a passive adherent of hers in his early years in the village of Ojoto.

In his quest for knowledge and being, in consonance with the religious path carved for him by his parents, he imbibed Christianity, without anyone seeking his consent, and without any feeling of abandonment of the goddess by him. This Christian religion which had been a gateway to education and subsequent civilization and modernity, nurtured Okigbo, who after many years of acquiring western education, felt a hollowness which could only be filled by his return to the river goddess. He is at the passage stripped of all alien and foreign influences, /naked I stand/, begging to be re-admitted into her fold of worshippers.

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The second poem, "Initiations", discloses how he had been initiated into the foreign religion and he vents his disgust on the 'culprit' whom he believes is the epitome of both the religion and education that result from it. He derides this religion by categorizing its hierarchy using geometric figures.

The third poem, "Watermaid", is couched in the poet's mystical experiences of the appearance of the watermaid. Although her visit is brief and dazzling, it puts him into an ecstasy. This flash point is also an indication that his prayer has been partially accepted by the water spirit.

The fourth poem, "Lustra", brings to limelight the essence of the ceremonial and final purification, which he draws from his solitary visit to the hills. 'Hills' in religious worship connote sources of spiritual strength. Whereas Soyinka climbed the Idanre hills, Jesus, the Judeo-Christian leader, went to the mountain (the Sermon on the Mount), and finally concluded his mission on the Mount Calvary. Although Okigbo tries desperately to sever himself from the Christian religion, in favour of the traditional, it is difficult for him to achieve. That is why he, in the next but last poem, is involuntarily jerked into the time for worship – 'the Angelus', and he makes the sign which reminds him of the death of Jesus on the cross.

In the fifth and last poem "Newcomer", the struggle for his disengagement continues and he sees the whole phenomenon as 'a mask over his face, and believes that using vulgar, rude and offensive words regarding the activities of that 'abhorred' religion would do the magic,/ protect me from them fucking angels/lines 11 - 12! However, the tension is assuaged by the birth of his daughter to whom he dedicates this section – "For Georgette". Her birth at this point in time, is the synthesis of the inner struggle between the foreign and traditional religions. This birth of her daughter is a mark of victory. He now/stands above the noontide/above bridge head /

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(lines 6 and 7).

A close examination of the linguistic arrangement in these poems, namely graphological, the phonological, the grammatical and the semantic, reveals that although no definite structural and stanzaic pattern can be discerned in terms of a uniform line stanza, there are obvious strikers in the use of capital letters for the first one or two words of the lines which begin each of the poems. These are thereafter, followed by normal small letters. Let us examine the following:

From The Passage

- i. BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto p.3
- ii. DARK WATERS of the beginning p.4
- iii. SILENT FACES at crossroad p.5

From "Initiations"

- i. SCAR OF the crucifix p.6
- ii. AND THIS from Jadum p.8
- iii. AND THIS from Upandru p.9

From "Watermaid"

- i. EYE OPEN on the sea p.10
- ii. BRIGHT p.11
- iii. AND I WHO am here abandoned p.12
- iv. THE STARS have departed p.13

From "Lustra"

- i. SO WOULD I to the hills p.14
- ii. THE FLOWER weeps unbruised p.15
- iii. THUNDERING drums and cannons p.16

From "Newcomer"

- i. TIME for worship p.17
- ii. IN THE CHILL breath of the day's waking p.18
- iii. I AM standing above the noontide p.19

These undeniable cases of graphological foregrounding are pointers to the reader. The poet is split between two religions, the foreign and the traditional. He prodigally makes a u- turn to embrace the

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traditional worship of his abandoned waterspirit. Thus, the consistent capitalization of words as shown earlier, drops a message of highlighting and projecting the worship of Idoto, in preference to the now jettisoned Christianity which is represented by small letters. There are profuse uses of the ellipsis (...) and dashes at the end of many lines which indicate that information has been hoarded by the poet. By the nature and content of the poem, the poet is flooded with information that he has decided to withhold.

Below are some examples:

- "The Passage" - /give ear and hearken ... line 12
 /festivity.... in black/ line 34
 /its loveliest.... fragment/line 44
"Initiations" - /the rhombus – brothers and deacons line 30
 /self seekers – all who are good, line 32

Whereas the dashes are used by the poet to elucidate some thoughts, the markers in print contribute to a better understanding of the poem, and further task the reader's imagination to have a feel of the poet's predicament.

In addition to the graphological signals, the poet uses italics for the whole of what could be termed a quasi stanza in "Lustra", where he sees himself as a 'Messiah' of the traditional religious worship of Idoto. Because he thinks his messiahship is the functional type, different from that of the Christian religion, he uses the italics contemptuously to show unfulfilled prophecy:

Messiah will come again
After the argument in heaven
Messiah will come again ... lines 19-21 of Lustra.

Another use of italics is in "Newcomer" where it is meant to denote the non-participant persona whose birth coincides with the crucial moment of his mental squabble that aids him in arriving at a successful spiritual journey. He therefore dedicates that section of his poem to his daughter – *For Georgette*, p. 18.

—◆—

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At the phonological level, one would not expect any melodic rendition, given the thematic nature of these poems. Nevertheless, to ease the tension in the poet who is in the throes of a spiritual expedition, there appear bits of expressions which may not be intentionally arranged to give melody, but are rather seen as an oasis in a desert area.

Furthermore, he shows his total disgust for the Christian religion by his use of italics – thus

/Anna of the panel oblongs /
/protect me /
/from them fucking angels: /
/protect me /
/my sand-house and bones / lines 10 – 14 of 'Newcomer'

In "The Passage", where the poet dramatizes his penitence by his position, i.e. both his nakedness and bare foot, he is / leaning on an oil bean /, / lost in your legend /.

— □ □ □ — —
/Leaning on an oil bean
— □ □ — □

Lost in your legend (lines 5-6)

Not only is there rhythm here, there is also beauty, harmony and melody. There is the chiming of the lateral sound /l/, in leaning, oil, lost, legend.

At the syntactic level, the sentence arrangements distort the usual sentence order of syntax, which is S V O C A. Although this thwarting of the syntactic order of sentences is the prerogative of poets, he has lavishly employed this license in protesting against the Christian religion. From "The Passage" through to the last poem "Newcomer" we find:

Adv complement



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/Before/you, mother Idoto/
/naked I stand/
adj subject verb

Subject

Verb adj adv
Ordinarily the sentence order should be I/ stand/ naked/
before/
complement
you mother Idoto

/Under your power wait I/
/on bare foot/ (The passage line 7-8)
/out of the depths my cry/
/give ear and hearken/ (The passage line 11-12)

In many such lines are thrown up bits of noun and prepositional phrases without verbs to anchor them e.g.

/SILENT FACES at crossroads/
/festivity in black.../
/faces of black like long black/
/behind the bell tower/
/into the hot garden/ the passage lines 29–32

The reader is given the onerous task of fixing the poet's communication point because of the telegraphic nature of his syntax. This emphasizes his protest that he does not see anything worthwhile in the Christian religion, even though he had been 'dragged' into it by his parents, without his consent.

Some statements are paradoxically made e.g.

At confluence of planes, the angle;
Man loses man, loses vision; (underlining mine)
.... Life without sin, without life (underlining mine) lines 14
and 15 of Initiations.

The poet, in his eclectic tendency, uses the biblical paradox of 'he

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who loses his life (for Jesus) will find it and he who finds his life will lose it'.

He employs parallel structures, which are meant for emphasis e.g.:

Count the sand by waveland abandoned
Count her blessing, my white queen
"Watermaid" (lines 34 and 35)

Both NPs "sand and blessing" are syntactically related to the verb – "count" and are also paradigmatically related. Both NPs are semantically related under the general feature /+ free gift/, unquantifiable bestowed.

All of these go to reinforce the view that the worship of Idoto is supreme. Apart from parallel structures, the poet uses repetition of sentences, emphasis, as well as endows it with musical artistry e.g.:

The STARS have departed,
The stars have departed
("Watermaid" lines 42 and 45)

Here, the poet emphasises the unexpected and flash departure of his idol – the watermaid, such that he is left mesmerized, as he asks/and I – where am I? (Line. 46). He yearns to catch her as he pleads with an unseen tracker:

Stretch, stretch, O antennae
to clutch at this hour
('Watermaid', lines 47 and 48)

To establish his new mission as a poet as well as a prophet, he resorts to dialogue in a linguistic combat between him and 'a village explainer', Upandru, whose name, perhaps, is a corruption of the Christian name Andrew. Upandru's admonition states:

AND THIS from Upandru
Screen your bedchamber thoughts
with sun-glasses,
who could jump your eye
your mind window,

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And I said,
The prophet, only the poet.
And he said: Logistics.
(Which is what poetry is)...
And he said to the ram: Disarm.
And I said
Except by rooting,
who could pluck yam tubers from their base?
(‘Initiations’, lines 65 – 77)

This is a warning from the adherents of the Catholic religion that people should be careful and beware of people that could sway their thoughts from the truth. But the poet retorts: “The Prophet, only the poet.” He counteracts the command given to the ram, to disarm, and he asks a rhetorical question – ‘who could pluck yam tubers from their base?’ With this, he makes a claim that any religion which is not entrenched in the base of its worshippers cannot be effective. In this, we find a comparison between the Christian religious worship and that of Idoto, the water spirit.

In ‘Watermaid’, the poet is so taken in by the exquisiteness of the water spirit, which makes him qualify her as
salt-white surf on the stones and me
maid of the salt – emptiness
sophisticreamy.

The word ‘sophisticreamy’ is a coined word, used to describe the beauty of the watermiad. Her beauty is further described as
with the armpit-dazzle of lioness,
wearing white light about her;
and waves escort her,

**He addresses her as ‘my lioness’
crowned with moonlight,
so brief with mirror and me.**



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(watermaid lines 17-26)

At the lexico-semantic level, words are astoundingly used to convey some strange phenomena. Some words originate from Christian religion against which he protests, while others originate from his nostalgia for the traditional worship of Mother Idoto.

In the passage, the poet stands before the “watery presence” of Idoto. This expression bastardises the use of statues before which the Catholics pray. This is in order, as a way of projecting a village stream which for him is a more potent image of worship. The expressions ‘hearken’, ‘heavensgate’, ‘dark waters of the beginning’, are all from the biblical myth of creation. His assessment of the Christian religion is that it is only glamorous with ‘rays’, and ‘violet’, which ‘foreshadow the fire that is dreamed of land/rainbow on far side, arched like a boa bent to kill/foreshadows the rain that is dreamed of/ (lines 13 – 17). The relationship of the statements could be put thus:

{ Rays ... }	foreshadow	the fire	that is dreamed of
{ rainbow ... }	foreshadow	the rain	that is dreamed of

(Lines 14-17)

The NPs, ‘rays and rainbow’ are syntactically related to the VP “foreshadow”, and also are related structurally to the 2nd NPs, the fire and the rain. All of them share the general semantic feature /+ natural/, +atmospheric / and by extension, /+ destruction /, as accounted for in the creation myth when the world would be destroyed by fire and flood. The poet thinks that Christianity is like a rainbow with beautiful colours but beyond it, it is / arched like a boa bent to kill/.

He goes on to describe himself as ‘a wagtail to tell the tangled-wood-tale and a sunbird to mourn a mother on a spray’ (lines 20 – 23). He mourns his departure from the mother Idoto while the “tangled-wood-tale” is the totality of his experiences in the jettisoned tian

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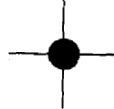
Christian religion.

In "Initiations", he makes use of the symbol, the crucifix, which was used in initiating him into the foreign religion and he describes it as a 'scar over the breast', 'by red-hot blade'. This is because the crucifix represents the cross, with the red-hot blade showing its spiritual implication.

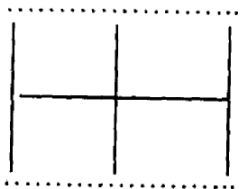
He uses geometric figures to describe the effect of the sign of the cross:

At confluence of planes, the angle:
man loses man, loses vision
(lines 14 and 15)

Diagrammatically, the confluence of planes is where the angles meet



The confluence of planes and the angles of the straight lines are at the position of the heart, which produces faith; and faith itself controls man's reasoning which results in 'man loses man, loses vision'. He closes up the outer parts of the straight lines, which give a square thus:



The square encloses such categories of people in
Christian religion which the poet tags
'morons, fanatics

and priests and popes, organizing secretaries and party managers'. The poet further creates another geometric figure – the rhombus, in which he groups the brothers and the deacons, the liberal politicians and the self-seekers about whom he says, 'all who are good doing nothing'.

The last of the geometric figures is the one he terms the quadrangle, which houses 'the rest – me and you'. Okigbo has disgustingly shown his distaste for this foreign religion by classifying the hierarchy of the Catholic Church into geometric figures, thereby showing his

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preference for his traditional worship of Idoto.

In "Lustra", the poet longs for purification, by visiting the hills. This is necessitated by the brevity of the watermaid's appearance, which signals a non-acceptance of his repentance, leading to his seeking to purify himself further. Going to the hills or mountains is synonymous with a solitary and spiritual encounter with one's creator.

The poem "Newcomer" introduces the time for worship. Through a reflex, the poet recognizes and obeys the call for the "Angelus" and makes a sign which reminds him of 'calvary and of age of innocence'. Here the poet replaces a woman of unparalleled holiness and dignity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, with his own mother Anna, and asks the latter to protect him, in place of 'pray for us:

Anna of the panel oblongs,

Protect me

From them fucking angels;

Protect me

my sandhouse and bones

('Newcomer', lines 10 – 14)

The phrase 'fucking angels', is a horrible collocation of words, and it is an unprecedented high level of vulgarity and ribaldry to refer to pure spirits with such an expression. His juxtaposition of the worship of the water spirit Idoto (signified by the thundering drums) and the Angelus produces a synthesis which for him is "Georgette" (a synthetic fine silk material). This spiritual and mystical operation of his, coincides with the news of the birth of his only daughter, in the cold weather of May's morning. He dedicates this section of his poems to the baby – For Georgette. This fusion of the physical and the spiritual brings success to the poet and he expresses it thus:

I am standing above noontide

Above the bridgehead

Listening to the laughter of waters

that do not know why...

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....Listening to incense –

Lines 23 – 26 of 'Newcomer'

The lexical items 'noontide' and 'bridgehead' above which he stands signify success. There is also a collocational disorder in 'standing above noontide' and 'listening to the laughter of waters'. The VP 'standing', ought to take an object with the feature/+ solid/whereas it takes the object 'noontide' with a feature/+liquid/. Moreover, the NP laughter equally ought to take a complement word with the feature/+ human/, whereas it takes 'water', a word with the feature /- animate/. All these aberrations underscore the poet's theme of dilemma.

In summary, Okigbo's poems pose a linguistic challenge to readers, but only the dogged will eventually untie the knot and enjoy fully the beautiful linguistic arrangements displayed therein. This paper will produce a multiplier reader effect, because many more people will now shake off the phobia associated with the esoteric and eclectic nature of Okigbo's poems.

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