

A Linguistic (Stylistic) Reading of Ideological Discourse in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, *The Contract* and *Heroes*

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes, through the prism of linguistic (stylistic) analysis, a reading of the ideological discourse in Festus Iyayi's novels- *Violence*, *The Contract*, and *Heroes*, with the broad aim of establishing the nexus between literature and ideology, through the instrumentation of language, for societal transformation. The paper explores the symbiotic relationship between language and literature and how the former is used in the study and understanding of the latter. Attempt is made to identify the patterns of use of language with reference to the purpose of commenting on quality, the exegesis and interpretative meanings of the text. The scaffold upon which our analysis is anchored is the Marxist literary criticism based on socialist and dialectical theories. It is the contention of the Marxist theorists that literary works are a reflection of the social institutions from which they originate. Terry Eagleton has affirmed that Marxist criticism "is not merely sociology of literature" but paying attention to its forms, style and meaning with a view to grasping those forms, style and meaning "as the products of a particular history. In all, four major literary tools-narrative technique, lexical choice, dialogue and authorial comments are deployed as indices for our analytical framework, using the Critical Discourse Analysis. What is apparent is that no success can be achieved in the reading and understanding of a literacy text without a manifest use of language.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary scholarship of literature involves an array of theories –Marxism, socialism, hermeneutics, structuralism, psycho-analysis, feminism, post –colonialism and semiotics, Eyeh (2011:145). Right from the classical period the cognitive value of literature and other genres of art has been a subject of intense scholarship. Aristotle, for instance, believes that imagination literature involves mimesis, imitation or representation. Similarly, Plato in *The Republic* gives an elaborately reasoned treatise on the general principles of organizing the Republic and the process of accomplishing it.

The radical sociological perspective or the Marxian approach is also germane to this study. This perceives literature "as a weapon for fighting oppressive ideologies such as capitalism, fascism and other totalitarian hegemonic structures", Ogunjimi (1987: 3). It is the contention of Marx that history is a record of struggles which are caused by unequal distribution of rewards in societies. All societies, he claims, are stratified because one group tries to protect its economic interest at the expense of the other groups. These classes are in conflict with one another because the "owners" (bourgeoisie) have, and want to keep a monopoly of power over the "no-owners" (the proletariat). The attempt of the bourgeoisie at perpetuating this system

is through alienation and violence. This unjust system is perpetrated through the family, the school system, religion and even the machineries of government, Oyedokun (1991:4).

The concept of revolutionary commitment in literature seeks to conceptualize the society in terms of its class structures with a view to transforming the existing social values and ethics. This is in line with the submission of Mitchell (1958:259) that the yardstick for measuring popular novel is for the novelist to portray the alienation of the oppressed. Similarly, Bretch (1958:245) opines that literature should project the plight of the working masses. To writers of socialist realism, the situation of alienation is never accepted as a given destiny. In fact, they seek to negate the mystification process employed by the ruling class. Wood (1955:245) sees the Marxist aesthetics as a connection between art/literature and the material base. This material base is defined in terms of the totality of relations of production, the class basis of literature and the progressive nature of proletarian literature. It is also defined in terms of the dialectical relationship between content and form with the former determining the latter, and lastly, the recognition of realism as the most appropriate form of artistic representation, Mitchell (1958: 245). This study, therefore, focuses both on the content and the form.

LITERATURE, COMMITMENT AND REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY

The concept of literature and social criticisms is suggestive of the radical commitment of the artist towards ideological orientation of his society. In class societies the artist has a broader responsibility. His task exceeds that of the Aristotelian mimesis. A matter of- fact proposition is obtained from Lukin (1980:104)

The social function of art is many layered. Any truly important work of a art serves as a means of cognizing life, expresses the artist's attitude to the world, his class sympathies and antipathies and his attitude to man and society is a means for forming the personality and its world outlook and morals; awakens the creative ability in the reader, viewer or listener and develops and perfects aesthetic taste.

It is also his contention that art (in its broadest sense) is a form of social consciousness and artistic figurative representation of reality with the creation of specific aesthetic taste or values. Ideological speaking, art has a multi-dimensional function of expressing the ideology, the political, economic, and ethical views of various classes. In this perspective, art concentrates on the direction of "public sentiments" and is likened to "a sensitive mirror" which reflects social psychology and its development, Savostanny (1980:104). The use of the term "ideology" in relation to literature was for long typical of the Marxist Criticism, especially as related to the Althusseria's first and second theories of ideology. This exerted "powerful impact" on literary criticism and theory. In the words of Ogunjinmi (2009), African writers are also in the vanguard for better society through the instrumentality of literature:

Attempts have been made by African artists to evolve a revolutionary ideology that will negate the evils of colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, imperialism and capitalism. Vacillations and apathy typify the search for such an ideology for development

Iyayi's novels seem to be a response to the clarion call by Angus Calder in a letter to Pio Zirimu- an assessment of the relevance of ideological discourse, as cited in Ogunjinmi (2009):

Economics as an ideology, not a science, and development form an integral part of ideology of exploitation and alienation. This ideology, unchecked, will destroy the world much like it has already destroyed the comfort of most of its inhabitants. The artist, if he merely wishes to survive physically into middle age, cannot exempt himself from political action. He must commit himself to the destruction of a system which destroys humanity...

The Marxist Literary Criticism adopted for this study is "a loose" term describing literary criticism based on socialist and dialectical theories. Marxist Criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate. Even Marxists perceive literature as a social institution and that it has a special ideological fracture based on the background ideological of the author. The thought

behind Marxist Criticism is that works of literature are mere products of history that can be analyzed by looking at the social and material conditions in which they were constructed.

According to Terry Eagleton-an English literacy critic and cultural theorist, Marxist criticism is not merely "a sociology of literature" concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literacy work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meaning.

But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as "the product of a particular history". It is through the theories of class struggle, politics and economics that Marxist literary criticism emerged. An important first step in the sociology of literature was taken by Georg Lukacs's *The Theory of the Novel*, first published in German in 1916. The novel form, according to Lukacs, is organized around the problematic hero in pursuit of problematic values within problematic world. Lukacs's second distinctive contribution to the sociology of literature was *The Historical Novel* written in German but first published in Russian in 1937, which appeared in English translation in 1962. Here, emphasis is on the social implications of studying literature. The major thrust of the Marxist school is further highlighted by Farrell (2003):

Literature is one of the arts which re-create the consciousness and the conscience of a period. It tells us what has happened to man, what could have happened to him, what man has imagined might happen to him. It presents to us the environments, the pattern of destiny, the joys and sorrows, the tribulations, the dreams, the fantasies, the aspirations, the cruelties, the shames, the dreams of men and women. Life is full of mysteries and one of the major mysteries of life is man himself. Literature probes into that mystery. Just as science makes the forces of nature human in the sense that it permits the construction of instruments which can control these forces, so does literature aid in making man human to himself.

Iyayi and His Ideological Commitment

Iyayi is, without any doubt, a leading proponent of the socialist realist tradition of the African novel. His novels- *Violence*, *The Contract* and *Heroes* have demonstrated his total commitment to the radical transformation of the society "caught in the unholy rapacious embrace of the neo- imperialist and neo-colonial social order", Obafemi (1987:12). The three novels belong categorically to the socialist realism art. Being a Marxist writer, his works have a cognitive, mirroral reflection of the social structure. This has caught the attention of Olaniyan (1986:305) who asserts that Iyayi belongs to the new brigand of writers "who lay bare the structures on which the ill social arrangement is based and emphasize its historical character".

Iyayi is eminently qualified to write an authoritative, ideologically -premiered account on social contradictions, owing to his own personal experience in the alienating process. He declares:

My own escape from that kind of life has not blinded me but has provided me with the opportunity of exposing

those appalling conditions in which my roots are still trapped (blurb, *Violence*).

This is emphasizing the truism in the nexus or symbiotic relationship existing between literature and human experience. Ngugi (1972: XV) puts this succinctly:

Literature does not grow or develop in vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even areas of concern by social, political, economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored especially in Africa where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

To this end therefore, any analysis of Iyayi's works will always reveal that the personal experience of the writer (Iyayi) in the world he tries to cognize has added some potency, plausibility and flavor of excellence to his literary works. What is more, his death, in an auto accident, in the course of union (Academic Staff Union of Universities) activities portrays him as an icon loyal to, and championing the cause of, the common man.

Conceptual Framework

Okpe (1999:21), in an attempt to underscore the symbiotic relationship between language and literature has likened the two to a bride and a groom and opines that "to separate language from literature is to deny a bride groom his bride after signing the marriage register". Notwithstanding the focus of this paper on ideological discourse, we shall, of necessity, dwell also on the structural appraisal of the novels. This is predicated on the fact that any discussion on the deployment of language (as a literary technique) cannot concentrate only on the content/message. In fact, Okpe (1999:23), asserts that it is the contention of the structuralist that "art form ought to be given priority over content since content is just the subject of the literary piece. And, as a matter of fact, one can rightly argue that what distinguish a literary work from other humanities like History, Anthropology or Sociology are those "techniques, of which language plays a prominent part".

Pyles and Algeo (1970:73) strengthen the argument further:

Literature... is language that pleases, but pleases in a special way. The pleasure that literature gives comes not from the message, content or meaning, but also from the way it is expressed; it is not the message that makes literature, but the play of language that gives it from.

Language, therefore is the "primary building material without which the complete building (the message) cannot be put in place".

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The beam of the searchlight of this paper is on the linguistic/stylistic reading of the ideological discourse permeating the novels of Iyayi:

Violence (1979), *The Contract* (1982) and *Heroes* (1986). The research methodology adopted is a synthesis

of Critical Discourse Analysis and a Cognitive Stylistic Approach. Specifically, the ideological discourse is analyzed through the following literary devices:

- i) Narrative technique
- ii) Choice of lexis
- iii) Dialogue (among characters) and monologue(of characters)
- iv) Authorial comments/descriptions.

Choice of a Model

Cognitive Stylistics combines the kind of explicit, rigorous and detailed linguistic analysis of literary texts that is typical of the stylistics tradition with a systematic and thematically informed consideration of the cognitive structure and processes that underlie the production and reception of language. According to Semino and Culpeper (2002), "it provides more systematic and explicit account of the relationship between texts on the one hand and responses and interpretations on the other".

Critical discourse analysis

This is concerned with the relationship between language ideology and power, Fairclough (1992). This approach is heavily influenced by Halliday's Systemic Linguistic Analysis. According to Mc Cathy (1991) genres in Critical Discourse Analysis are seen as social action occurring within particular social and historical contexts. Age, class, gender, and ethnic bias are important in Critical Discourse Analysis along with the social practice they reflect. The concept of Discourse Analysis sees language as performing some vital functions relevant to the general understanding of a linguistic structure, Ogunsiji and Olanrewaju (2010).

IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN IYAYI'S NOVELS

Narrative Techniques

In *Violence*, Iyayi fiercely portrays Nigeria's extremes of poverty and wealth. He sensitizes the readership to the vicious feature of the capitalist society where little or no opportunity is open to the greater majority of the people. The novel "centers round the daily struggles of an impoverished couple who are cynically manipulated by a wealthy businessman, Queen "(blurb). The protagonist, Idemudia, is a labourer, despite his fair educational background, (p.71). The author is witty in his narrative technique: he presents a vivid account of laborers' condition at Iyaro and first east circular, the situations at the police station and public hospitals:

The doctor put on his glasses again but his mind went back to the dark tunnel of the numberless sick, their abject poverty and from that to the helplessness of their position. He couldn't understand why the government concentrated on building hotels instead of hospitals. He simply couldn't understand (p.55).

The use of the words "dark tunnel" is suggestive of hopelessness, despair and gloom.

In another narration the author presents the rich as callous and unfeeling.

The queen is said to be immensely pleased with the horse strength in Idemudia which she hopes will be made use of to enrich herself. "Surely, she thought it should be possible to make use of that man often..." (p.25). This explains why she opts to pay the four men who have offloaded a trailer of cement "later" (p.36). The author goes further in narrating the callousness of the rich as demonstrated by Obofun: when he visits Adisa at home he returns driving his car while the servant who accompanies him continues on foot after the car; (p.66). He writes further:

In front of the houses along the street, people sat and watched the weather. Men and women, all jobless. The children were thin and had sores on their legs from which they frequently drove flies. Most of the people who walked along the streets were barefooted and as the cars passed...they splashed the red muddy water on the people but drove on, carelessly, securely inside, (p.69).

In *The Contract*, the author explores further the social-realist position earlier discussed in *Violence*. The novel openly and directly documents, analyses and criticizes the social decadence, degeneration and the loss of values in the contemporary Nigerian society. *The Contract* exposes the exerting influence of corruption, power, money and women in the society. Ogie Obala, the protagonist in the novel tries to resist corruption with all his might but, unfortunately, the system proves to be more powerful than he is and he eventually succumbs and becomes a victim.

The author conscientises the minds of the readership on who really poses danger to the society:

But who in the end is more dangerous. she wants to know whether the corrupt government officials and business men who steal millions of naira of the people's money or those who advocate that there should be no stealing are the L'Enfant terrible? (p.156).

The author's narration of how millions of naira is stolen by government official is very illustrating:

...The value of the contract to be awarded at the Ogbe city council is one hundred million naira the previous day. But, on the following day, it has risen by five hundred percent (p.93).

Also, when Olowu wins the contract to expand the right wing of the city hospital, we see the hastily constructed building with substandard blocks (p.127). There is collaboration between him and those in government to take two feet off both edges of the road. The same road is to be re tarred in exactly three months at an extra cost of two million naira (p.129)

In *Heroes*, the author takes a critical, didactic survey of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). It is a historical construction shaped by the author's artistic intellect and class consciousness. The novelist maintains an overtly different view of and radically distinct approach to the circumstance of the civil war contrary to the view points of other writers on the war. Iyayi in *Heroes* presents a critical, revolutionary appraisal of the war, its causes (both remote and immediate) and effects. The novel denounces the heroic claims of

most senior officers and generals on both sides (armies)—the Federal and Biafra armies. In *Heroes*, the protagonist, Osime Iyere who is a political correspondence with the city's *Daily News* dissociates himself from the "loosely defined bourgeoisie identity". He identifies with the rank and file soldiers in the two armies. The author narrates that propaganda and outright falsehood are the major tools used by the ruling class to subjugate the masses.

"If the Biafrans lost a city and it was clear that was the truth, the newspaper had to report the opposite" (p.2). The author submits that the entire war is an investment in blood and destruction by those at the helm of affairs with the expectation of a profit (p.64). He also notes that senior officers have the habit of deserting war fronts at the peril of the rank and file soldiers. These rank and file soldiers are left to suffer. In the end however, the officers are promoted while the ordinary soldiers, the rank and file are demoted for "desertion" "or "wounding" themselves to avoid war fronts," (p.110).

Lexical Choice

It has been argued, earlier in this paper, that language is seminal to the study and understanding of literary works. Iyayi's lexical choice is highly combative suggestive of his radical, Marxist orientation. The words deployed by the novelist are also racy: he is earnestly desirous of change from the *status quo ante*. His assertion "*my own escape from that kind of life ...*" (blurb, *Violence*) presupposes earlier captivity. Indeed, the readership will readily agree that poverty is captivity! The remaining part of the sentence "*those appalling conditions in which my roots are still trapped*" further attests to this. We also note the use of *market*:

"The Ogbe hospital is an even bigger *market* of patients than the university hospital (P.56), a euphemistic reference to the large number of the sick. Further to these, a subtle reference is made to the social stratification in the class society. Idemudia is angry at Queen who beckons at him when her car skids off the flooding street into the gutter, "*when they are in trouble they remember us ...*" (P.17). The use of the pronouns "*they*" (subjective) and "*us*" (objective) clearly indicates the rich and the poor, respectively— a clear attestation to the issue of class stratification being discussed in the works. In addition, the author alludes to the "burden carried by the poor" by making copious reference to the biblical account of the Calvary. Idemudia listens to the hymns: *They were hymns about bloody Calvary, about the heaviness of the cross, about the strength of the flesh* (p.1).

In *The Contract*, Iyayi yields the stage to the infinite appropriators "so that we can see them in their "grotesque garishness". The name "*wayo*" hotel symbolizes fraud, deceit and manipulation. The language of lamentation, decrying the high level poverty, diseases, ignorance and government's insensitivity is captured in the speech of the taxi driver to Ogie Obala:

You ought to go to the burial grounds and all you see are the bodies of babies, killed by kwashiorkor or by the dysentery. The women are hungry, the men are hungry and we all live in dirt. But what does the government do except reserve special roads for itself (p.8).

The novelist makes subtle reference to the pervasiveness of corrupt practices in government circles when he declares that "Ajole shares the stolen part of the money with others in office (p.117). The stolen money is looted from the supply of substandard telecommunication equipment. When Ogie feels dejected about the filth and vomit he sees on the street, the author writes: "...he had deplored them without fully understanding that these were merely the outward manifestation of an inward decay and shamelessness in the people (p.66). The use of filth and vomit in *The Contract* depicts decadence and corruption in the society, as copiously evident in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

In *Heroes*, Iyayi's disavowal of the credit given to the generals and most senior officers in the prosecution of the civil war is evident through his choice of words, the war is described by him as "corrupt and murderous conflict" (p.8) and that the people are "tricked into war" because "any consultation that takes places is always in the form of manipulation, of propaganda" (p.63). His conclusion that the entire war is "an investment in blood and destruction by those at the helm of affairs with the expectation of a profit" leaves no one in doubt as to his class sympathy and empathy

Dialogue

Dialogue is such a defining ingredient that characterizes the success or otherwise of any literary work. Iyayi manipulatively engages his characters in such dialogue to reinforce his thematic pre occupation. In *Violence*, the laborers discuss the helplessness of their situation. Osaro tells his colleagues: It's so unfair...one man has enough to eat; in fact so much that he throws some away. Yet here we are, hungry, with nothing to eat (p.20). Idemudia also tells his colleagues: "we have to fight for everything we want" (p.258).

In *The Contract*, the dialogue between Ogie Obala and the taxi driver (p.8) sheds so much light on the plight of the masses. Also, the author, speaking through Mallam Mallam, highlights, the evils of secret societies: "But I understand that they are very powerful. They even pervert the course of justice; make it possible or difficult for government to given (p.207). This is further corroborated in the monologue of Chief Ekaette, the businessman:

The only ethic in business is to climb upon the shoulders of the other man. There should be no mercy; no consideration for the feeling of the other man, business is the big graveyard of all our decency It drives a man into strange associations, even secret cults... (p.73).

Furthermore, the societal attitudes to women are vividly shown in the dialogue between Rose and Ogie Obala. Rose maintains that men use women arbitrarily. She cites the example of women being led to the "slaughter house" before securing a job that may not even exist (pp.24-25).

Also, in *Heroes* the novelist drives home his thematic preoccupation through Osime Iyere's dialogue and monologue. For example, the protagonist notes that if the Biafrans lost a city and it was clear that was the truth, the newspapers had to report the opposite, (p.2). He later concludes that "the entire war is an investment in blood and destruction by those of the helm of affairs with the expectation of a profit "(p.64).

Finally, Osime Iyere in his conversation with Sergeant Keshi Keshi, highlights the "correct nature and general principle a war should be based", (pp.110-111).

...talk about the war in Zimbabwe, or in Vietnam! Talk about the Russian Civil war, talk about the resistance of the Binis against the whites, talk about Jaja of Opo-bo and you have wars with ideas behind them, wars with romance, war worth fighting in, worth dying in ... (p.111)

Authorial comments

The single greatest index of Iyayi's ideological preoccupation is manifested in his (authorial) comments in all the (three) novels. In fact, Olaniyan (1986:25) has posited that Iyayi's ideological obsession towers over and above his art. In *Violence*, he comments on religiosity among the poor.

....she hoped that Idemudia would be better. She hoped that some miracle would happen to change the course of events. *Perhaps* God would intervene. Was he not there to protect the poor and the needy?

Yes, *perhaps* He would intervene (pp.139-140) (Italics mine).

We are to note that the use of the adverbial "*perhaps*" connotes probability, "chance" and not "certainty". This implies that a people's condition will not change by happenstance unless they themselves take concrete steps to change their own conditions. The authorial comments firmly establish the high level corruption in public place:

...inside the freedom hotel a group of customers talked about the prices ... They thought and talked about money, how to steal to make money, cheat to make money, make money to make money. They talked and concluded that the best way to make money is to steal from the government ... Yes! Steal, cheat, dupe, and even murder in the name of the government, (p.281).

In *The Contract*, the novelist comments on the corrupt practices of the ruling class. The value of the contract to construct Ogbé city council is raised five hundred-percept on the following day (p.93). Two feet are taken off both edges of the road and the (same) road is to be re-constructed in "exactly three months" (p.129). He further comments on the fear of the ruling class on the coming "revolution"

...he didn't want to hear the explanation for it, he didn't want to know that it was a natural sequence of development, that every country ...had to pass through social revolutions... (p.69).

In *Heroes*, the author's attitude toward the military and its style of governance is aptly illustrated:

...the black man took over all the colonial man's vices and when he added his own, society became blacker than darkness, selfish, greedy, dirty, like vomits. People want power. Power and property, houses, positions at the top. And there are only two ways of achieving these things – the barrel of a gun or money or both. Have a gun and you can seize power from the elected representatives or the people, (p.4)

He explains the cause (s) of disunity among the poor: look for territories they can plunder, loot and scavenge, feed them

with meaningless slogans to trick them into war”, (pp.132-133). And finally, his comments on the *dramatis personae* in the war aptly conceptualise his view point:

He had come to see the war as the result of the struggle for power between individuals, as the result of the very contradictions in the ruler ship of the country. He understood then why as many as a hundred soldiers guarded the governor’s house and as few as ten guarded a whole airport... The same greed, the same hunger for power, the same disregard for the rest of the country ... (pp.90)

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it becomes intuitively evident that any appreciable effort at the study and understanding of literary works should take into cognizance the pre eminent position of language. In this paper, we have highlighted the ideological discourse in Festus Iyayi’s novels, using linguistic/stylistic analysis approach. The major tools for our analysis covered (i) narrative technique, (ii) dialogue, (iii) lexical choice, and (iv) authorial comments.

The issue of ideological discourse is a “recurring decimal” in all the novels. Consequently, the classification of the three novels as literary works would not have been possible without the manifest consideration of language and other literary devices. The narrative techniques – first person point of view, second person point of view and omniscient point of view were adequately deployed to establish the author’s thematic preoccupation. Further to this, the author has succeeded in choosing appropriate lexical items to drive home his points. The words have been very combative, radical and poignant, to say the least. More often than not the author hauls “verbal missiles” at the corrupt officials who, through their corrupt practices, keep the nation permanently under developed. And, apart from aforementioned, the authorial comments, aside dialogue and monologue among the characters, are also a convenient but direct avenue for the novelist to further “launch” his ideology. In conclusion, the novelist has succeeded in “passing across his message”. In all the novels, clearly formulated solutions are proffered; cases of crises, conscientisation, unity and collective struggle are prominently discussed. What critics regard as the setback of such literacy efforts is the limitation of the foreign language used as a medium of communication in much African literature. However the message of the messenger is clear- create a new social order in the contemporary society and let those who get the message be the torch bearers in the collective struggle to create a better, egalitarian society.

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