



Graphology: An Expressive Poetic Style of Deviation in Niyi Osundare's Poetry

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Graphological analysis of poetry has found its way into the poetic away from the tradition that governs the analysis of poetry. As a psychological representation of the writer's state of being, it projects and illuminates the hidden meaning of an expression through the visual concept. Niyi Osundare as one of the foremost "Alter Native Poetic Tradition" poets has copiously introduced graphic mode of writing into his literary works to reflect his immediate environment, history, social and cultural traditions. The use of more than one literary device at a time is typical of Osundare as exhibited in some of his works with graphologically deviant structures. Linguistic elements in a good work of art interrelate as patterns of a system and such patterns should be describable at various linguistic levels. The patterns thus created should make significant inputs in terms of beauty and meaning in the literary work.

INTRODUCTION

Modern literary study does not presume to dictate to poets, rather it examines styles that are already formed. Style is the dictate of the writer himself – the expression of his personality. It may also refer to all or some of the language habits of the poet – his linguistic idiosyncracies – just as we talk of Osundare's style, Achebe's style, Soyinka's style and so on. Enkvist describes it as "an individual's deviation from norms for the situations in which he is encoding..." (25). Literature uses language as an artistic medium, not simply for communication but in "various ways in which man's actual experience, historical, social, moral and religious, has been represented in literary form in all the various phases of HIS culture" (69). (emphasis is mine).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leech shares same view with Spencer. He notes that when style is discussed, focus is always on "the language of a particular writer, a particular period, a particular genre, even a particular poem" (i). The idiosyncrasy of the writer is underlined in this definition. This implies that the character of a writer is marked by his use of language. This same view explains Murry's idea of style as "a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts...peculiar to the author" (65).

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). The poet also uses iconic devices to effect the presentation of certain idea(s) in his poetry. These are in a category of poems classified as "shaped poetry" and concrete poetry" in poetic terms. According to Ofuani, "shaped poetry" is the effort on the part of a poet to match graphic form with the conceptual context of the text" (Humanities, 85).

One way by which poetic form differs from prose form is in its

graphic structures. That is, poetry exploits space to form its own graphological distinctiveness, like the use of line, stanza etc. These are determined by the conventional use of syntax but become more expressive when the writer makes a graphological choice thus making use of an unconventional approach in his expression such as a deliberate misspelling. In addition, Bamikunle continues, while the new poets are accessible because "their language is less contriving nevertheless their diction" especially that of he most widely acclaimed revolutionary of them, Niyi Osundare, "has remained metaphoric and highly allusive" otherwise their poems would not be poems.

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.

Biodun Jeyifo "Introduction to Songs of the Marketplace" reveals the dialectical vision as the nucleus of Osundare's poetry. He locates Osundare's position within the new poetic tradition. He describes him as "the most distinctive voice among our new poets" because in his poetry one encounters "both poetry of revolution and a revolution in poetry" Jeyifo further argues that Osundare's poetry "demonstrates the unique values of mature revolutionary poetry, for the social implication of his work is never obscured by mystifying artistic technique". He hails Osundare for "his distinctive voice", which he says, announces by the sheer quality of its originality, the weaning of African poetry "from the womb of colonial society".

In expressing his ideological view on the prevalent economic and political situation in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, Osundare deploys the graphic poetic forms to make greater emphasis and impact on what he is talking about. Osundare does this by giving both spatial one-word-line and indentational prominence to a word by

making it occupy a class of its own in a text. More often, the lines are enjambed in two regular modes. There is also the projection of word in a stanza, or by giving line-initial capital to the first word in the second line. Such examples can be found in *Waiting Laughters*:

Waiting
for the heifer which hides it horns
in the womb of the calf
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 fists which find their aim
and idioms which split their atoms
in 'ploding shadows. (10)

This poem expresses different and diverse situations of 'waiting', there is a simple structure of the same stanzaic parallelism, with each stanza containing just a unit of thought. The last line which has the status of a stanza assumes the essence of the waiting in which everything has come to the climax. The word "ploding" is incomplete as perhaps, the first syllable has been replaced with an apostrophe to make it have an onomatopoeic effect of an explosion which suggests violent eruption, in line with the overall theme of violent change in the entire collection.

The use of breath-space pauses, common in oral performances, is employed in *Songs of the Marketplace*; *Moonsongs* and *Waiting Laughters*. According to Alu (2008:14), this device takes care of punctuations in written English by the use of spacing in print as in 'Nightfall' 'Back to the future' and 'Phase XIII' poems. The structures of these breathing spaces usually result in some structural changes in the form of graphological deviations. For example in *Waiting Laughters*, the poet gives spatial and indentational prominence to certain word by way of giving over all attention to an expression:

Waiting
The anxious fumes of the visa awe-ffice
thick with queries, thick with fear
and stamps which bite trembling papers
with purple fangs, and seals pompous
like a mad phallus
Narrow, the walls
high, imperiously white;
the hangings stoke wondering dreams
with their tourist havens
the future is one wavering complexion
of the visaman's edict. (11)

Graphologically, apart from giving 'waiting' the spatial and indentational prominence, the last stanza is further indented from the rest in order to give sharp focus to the action of the visaman.

Waiting....

The visaman, rightly, suited,
his hair correct, his parting severe,
takes two furtive looks at the crowded hall
then shuts the window with a cold
imperial hiss; (11)

The change of the type of pre-eminence giving to 'waiting' is quite copious in *Waiting Laughters*. It has an overall significance on the essence of the poems in the collection.

| | |
|-------|---------------|
| Some | say |
| You | moon |
| Are | the |
| Ash | es |
| Of | the |
| Sun | bath |
| Ing | lunpid |
| Night | in |
| The | grey |
| Ing | of |
| Your | silence. (23) |

More radical use of this device is clearly demonstrated in *Waiting Laughters* where a letter of the alphabet is used as a line:

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 resulted 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 te 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...

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 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.

While “concrete poetry” is simply defined as a form of poem which exists, “only in written form; there is no corresponding, spoken text at all” (Levenston, 467). It essentially involves lexical truncating and cramping, thereby deviating radically from the expected poetic form. In *Waiting Laughters* we have:

The Criss and cross Rails

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 achieve 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” 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. Osundare acknowledges this as a fact in an interview with Oguanah (2009), that “the appearance of the poem is a means of meaning” and that “the physical appearance of the poem shows that Nigeria has no railway system”. This poem has both lexical and semantic implications. The words are scattered are jumbled. In his words, “the arrangement of the poem slows down your reading speed. You count the words - all depicting the waiting process”.

One can also observe the use of graphology in “Our Earth Will Not Die”. The last poem in *The Eye of the Earth*. Osundare adopts the graphic craft as a way of expressing a conceptual idea:

Lynched
the lakes
Slaughtered
the seas
Mauled
the mountains
But our earth will not die

Here
there
everywhere
a lake is killed by the arsenic urine
from the bladder of profit factories... (50)

There is the scrambling, jumbling and slanting of the words to depict the harm that has been visited on the natural environment. Although it is a summary of the evils of profit - driven capitalism as a material character to the destruction of the earth, this he has done in a graphic form in order to enhance the meaning of the poem.

This same graphic style is used to expressed the concept of silence in “Serpent of silence”, in *The Word is an Egg*. Silence is described in the slanting sliding movement of a serpent. Ironically however, the serpent is to be killed not with a stick but with a pen;

A serpent of silence
wriggles across my path
I aim my pen
at its head
My pen breaks
into a forest of singing trees
A fountain
of sprightly idioms. (41)

A pen is not the right weapon with which to kill a serpent. But it is a long silence and so after the silence comes verbal expressions and this is through the tip of the pen which “breaks/ into a forest of singing trees”

and “a fountain/ of sprightly idioms”. The “songs” and the “idioms”, flow from the pen after a long silence. The period of silence is over and nature becomes the first to express the joy of a broken silence “forest of singing trees”.

In “Daughter of the word”, Osundare uses both graphic crafts and repetitive pattern to express his idea of nature’s role in the existence of the universe through the invocation of words, especially those elements which he describes in feminine terms as “daughter”

I invoke
Grief
Daughter of the Tear
Tear
Daughter of the River
River
Daughter of the Cloud
Cloud
Daughter of the Sea
Sea
Daughter of the Moon
Moon
Daughter of the Word. (29)

There is the use of climax to indicate a rising order of importance in the idea expressed. Each of these elements has its role and position in the affairs of nature and one comes before the other. Finally, the “word”, is the last and powerful of all. There is an allusion to creation in which words were uttered and the universe came into existence. Osundare sees the word as the beginning of creation and not the biblical expression.

In the Beginning was not the Word
In the Word was the Beginning. (12)

The use of more than one literary device at a time is typical of Osundare as exhibited in the following graphologically deviant structures. This type of literary device is used for emphasis to enhance meaning:

I proscribe the snail
I proscribe the shell
I proscribe the frog
I proscribe the tadpole
I proscribe the sun
I proscribe the moon
I proscribe the tale
I proscribe the TRUTH
I proscribe History! (WL, 50)

This is typical of dictatorial expression of the military regime where everyone and everything including natural elements such as “the sun”, “the moon”, and if possible “HISTORY” are proscribed in order to eliminate opposition and criticism.

Another kind of graphic deviation for stylistic effect can be observed in this poem in *Waiting laughs*:

...The eyes I see are waiting for rallying visions
The fists for a bolt of implacable thunder
For time it may take
Time it may take
The stammerer will one day call his
Fa-fa-fa-ther-ther’s na-na-na-me! (74)

In the last stanza, Osundare tries to capture the mannerism of a stammerer's natural utterance. In doing so, he uses the graphic form to show the actual phonic realization of the stammerer's natural idiosyncrasy. In this way, the poem deviates from the expected poetic form by the lexical truncation through hyphenation of the unusually spaced words together in the line to achieve the natural difficulty and jerky efforts of a stammerer to utter words. While the word "will" is deliberately misspelt "wil", a deviation depicting a revolt by the stammerer.

Contextually, Osundare uses the metaphor of the stammerer as a sort of warning to corrupt leaders that not too long there shall be a revolt from the very people they thought are not relevant in the scheme of things.

Relevant graphological features that we shall further consider relate mostly to punctuation marks and these include; capitalization, italicization, and repetition. The utilization of these features in the texts under consideration has some semantic and stylistic implications as shall be revealed in the following analysis. In fact, the deployment of certain graphological resources of language is a common feature in African literary works. For example, Okunoye and Odebunmi (2003:293) have also observed that Achebe makes special of some print marks like italicization and capitalization among others, in *A Man of The People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* to achieve some stylistic effects.

CAPITALIZATION

Capitalization is a common graphological feature in most of Osundare's poems. In *Songs of the Season*, some expressions are foregrounded for prominence and emphasis. These features prominently 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 / / - "sh" as against the sibilant sound /s/ which further places great emphasis on the two words "suffering" and "smiling". This poem captures the experiences 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 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 nor 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 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.

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 talililll?
I no go gree!
No agreement today
No agreement tomorrow... (SS, 94)

Like quotation marks, italicization is adopted at times 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 adopted.

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.

Waiting...

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

Òrògòdodo Òrògòdo

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

Apart from the use of italics, Osmidare also employs asterisks to mark off the loan words, acronyms and non – English words as footnotes. In *Songs of the Marketplace*, loan words such as; tanwiji* (9), molue*, danfo*, dagbere* (11), agbero* (12), ekam* (18), Isoye* (80) but NEPA* (16) and OED* (18), are not italicized but asterisked. The use of italics and quotation marks to indicate direct speech provides stylistic variation.

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