

**THE CRITICAL STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MALE CHARACTERIZATION IN
THE REBELLION OF THE BUMPY-CHESTED BY STELLA DIA OYEDEPO**

Ebenezer Deji OGUNRINDE, Ph.D

*Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts, Federal University Oye Ekiti
ebenezer.ogunrinde@fuoye.edu.ng*

Abdulakeem Yinka USMAN

*Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts, Federal University Oye Ekiti
usmankeem@gmail.com*

&

Damola Ebenezer AGBOMOLA

*Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts, Federal University Oye Ekiti
dagbomola@gmail.com*

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Abstract

The feminist movement has been a contending issue recently as there have been calls for gender equality in all facets of life owing to the injustice meted out to them; hence, it is in this regard that this research seeks to carry out a stylistic analysis of the Revolt on the Bumpy Chested by Stella Oyedepo. This stylistic research underpins how the author exemplifies the idea of feminism in the text in contrast with the reaction of men alike. It focuses on the tools that aid how she maximally underscores her characters to spiral the feministic ideology. This research critically considers how women are empowered for roles meant for men and how this transition is enveloped in the text.

Keywords: Feminism, Male Characterization, Stella Dia Oyedepo

Introduction

Language is a tool used for communication in different contexts or genres, different contexts demand distinct manner of expression, that is, poet's language use is outright

different from playwrights. This work examines Nigerian playwright style of language use. Writers control the use of language to suit the intended message. Poems are major data for stylistic analysis and a considerable amount of researchers have worked on it. Stylistic examination of poems triggered researchers to analyse other literary works, like novels and drama texts. Dramatic texts are usually regarded as literary texts that are composed for performance. Drama text includes dialogue between characters; characters take turns among one another.

Characterization is developed through events and dialogue in the play. A writer introduces characters with noticeable emergence. The writer goes further to involve the character's opinion and ideas during conversations with other characters. The final part shows how others in the story respond to the character's personality. Playwright uses their characters as a vehicle to convey their thoughts and values, such as poets do with personas, and novelists do with narrators. Characters are what a reader infers from the text that describes, depicts and suggests the thoughts, utterances, feelings or actions of the characters. Therefore, the way writers organize information will determine the type of impression one might form of a character. Eventually, this leads to more attention being paid to the text (Van Peer 1988, p.9).

Characters that push beyond the limits of traditional gender roles have increasingly become attractive archetypes to Nigerian female playwrights (Rowland Chukwuemeka, 2019). In recent times, Nigerian female playwrights have appeared to project a more suiting image for the role of women in society. The need for the modification of playwriting is supported to "haul the image of the woman to the centre stage by creating strong and credible female characters worthy of discourse, not as prostitutes, mistresses, naggers or over-dependent, subservient wives and battered mothers, but as co-travellers, worthy companions to men, respected mothers and wives who are stakeholders in their moulding of nations" (cf Alkali 2012, p. 18). This movement revolves around strengthening the female gender insofar that female would be seen above the socially mandated roles.

Also, the feminist movement aims at achieving equality with men in all ramifications. The playwrights tend to articulate the flaws of men in order to deviate from the norms of the society. Female characters, hence, exhibit personalities other than their assigned gender roles as a form of resistance to oppression. Male characters appear to display their feebleness and infirmity, forcibly taking up child-bearing duty, and dressing up effeminate.

The male characters are projected and represented through the other gender in order to stylistically deviate from the culturally expected role of men. Since deviations is an

element of foregrounding, the violation of linguistic norms switches the power of gender (critical stylistic) as seen in Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested*. Oyedepo and a few other female playwrights/writers such as Lola Shoneyin, Buchi Emecheta, etc. share similar feministic doctrine where male characters are presented as repulsive and unwise. This research would employ Lesley Jefferies's Critical Stylistic Theory to unravel and present the image of the male characters within the drama text.

Critical Stylistics and Character Foregrounding

Critical stylistics (Hereafter CS) is a critical theory (power relations) developed by Lesley Jefferies in 2007. CS provides the missing links between stylistics (textual choices) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (namely ideology) (Coffey, 2013: 30). CS is a stylistic method of linguistic analysis that draws interest in how language conveys social meanings. Jefferies is concerned with the examination of (a) the hegemonic discourses on the female body in society and (b) whether feminist ideologies have successfully been incorporated into these hegemonic discourses.

One of the major influences for the development of CS is Simpson (1993); what is of real importance in a text is the way things are "made to look" and "the angle of telling" as the projection of positions and perspectives, as the way of communicating attitudes and assumption" rather than "the elusive question of the "truth" of what a text says (p. 2). It is essential that the researcher use language resources to infer subtle information about characters in a text.

CS is interested in text analysis by identifying and exposing power relations by working on the textual level (p. 380). It offers a developed theory and introduces some set of analytical tools that would help uncover the ideologies implied by the foregrounded linguistic choices of the playwrights. In addition, critical stylistic is a designed methodology to analyse completely the systematic presentation of ideology through foregrounding linguistic choice in texts. Each text is based on a particular ideology, so the tool to investigate the ideology is CS.

Critical stylistic tools answer significant questions, some of which include what the text is 'doing?' and what ideologies are being presented through the text? Jefferies (2014, pp. 413-417) identifies ten textual-conceptual functions that may have been employed in projecting and analysing the particular world-view and ideology in any text:

1. Naming and describing
2. Representing actions/events/states
3. Equating and contrasting

4. Exemplifying and enumerating
5. Prioritising
6. Implying and assuming
7. Negating
8. Hypothesising
9. Presenting others' speech and thoughts
10. Representing time, space and society.

Among the 10 critical stylistic tools, we will be using 4 of the tools to analyse the ideology of the drama text. Naming and describing, Representing actions/events/states, hypothesising and prioritising are the four tools we would be using for the analysis coupled with the character foregrounding used to project an ideology. These two items would be used simultaneously.

Foregrounding is a theory which addresses the nature of literary interpretation of literary texts. The term 'foreground' denotes the elements that are used to achieve salience by standing out in relief against a background. In Formalist literary theory, it is argued that foregrounded elements achieve salience through deviation from a linguistic norm (Mukaëovsky, 1970). Foregrounding involves deliberate prominence of a linguistic feature that might appear to be deviation i.e. what usually happens or repetition.

The theory of character foregrounding is built on Jonathan Culpeper's extensive work on character and characterisation in drama. Bimbola (2016) posits that the normal processes of interpretation which applies to texts, whether literary or not, foregrounding invites an act of imaginative interpretation by the reader (cited by Leech 1985 in Culpeper 1996, p. 346- 347). In a text, any form of deviation (foregrounding) is seen as style and the readers get accustomed to the style using imaginations in order to be able to interpret the text. Characters would be investigated by the physical appearance, a character's opinion about him/herself, his/her action and performance.

Critical stylistics and character foregrounding is used to analyse the male characters in the play *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested* by Stella Oyedepo. Since critical stylistic tools analyse the ideology in the text and how the playwrights has presented them; the feministic doctrine of the text is the major concern of the characters.

Thematic Preoccupation

The text focuses on the need for female emancipation on the one hand and male emasculation on the other hand. Captain Sharp is typified as the Biblical Moses who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the land of slavery. She represents the Messiah who is

out to liberate women from male domination and subjugation. The playwright uses her as a weapon of liberation, hence, the women wants their roles switched. They clamour for the domestication of male roles especially in the home hence, they want men to feed the children, tidy the home, cook for the family and cater entirely for the household while they frolic away in parties and indulge in all shades of frivolities.

Analysis of Data

Naming and Describing

The writer uses certain words to typify women and men. Naming and describing is a tool writers use to reveal the intended concept. The readers, through the naming and describing, grasp and interpret the concept accordingly. Naming and describing is the construction of noun phrases which consist of head noun, sometimes accompanied by pre or post-modifiers, which construct the referent (Jefferies 2010: 17).

The word "weak" is used by Imokwa but no sooner had she used it than Sharp chastises her and encourages that the word be scrapped from their dictionary. *The English Oxford* defines the word "weak" as lacking in force or ability, feeble. Sharp motivates them with several words; she adds that women should halt from using the word "weak" so the society would not tag them as "the weaker" gender.

SHARP: And now, you want to make piddling excuses turning lofty plans into a play, staged by a buffoon, full of foolery and ridicule. I have vowed to myself, if it is my breast that will be an impediment in the course of this struggle, I shall not think twice before slashing them off. No sacrifice is too much. No sacrifice is too little. Learn to suppress those things for which the rival sex has stamped you "the weaker". Through Sharp, the feministic ideology sets in. The playwright tries to reimage women to be associated with stronger words as opposed to the popular or societal ascribed labels. She later uses the word "the skitters" to refer to women to show she prefers to be labelled "skitters" than "the weaker". This is captured in the dialogue below:

SHARP: Now, this movement is all out to deliver the skitters from the slavery of ages. I say womanhood is nothing but euphemism for slavery.

On the other hand, the word "lord" is used by Sarah to address her husband. "Lord", according to the *English Dictionary* means one who has mastery over the servants of a household, one possessing similar mastery over others. Here, Oye is regarded by Sarah as one who is the master of the house. This is also exemplified in the way Sarah in the Bible respected her husband, Abraham. Hence, it is recorded that she addresses him as "My Lord". The lordship of the man over the woman spirals the tenets of the typical traditional

society where the man is accorded the respect of a “Lord” over his home. Stella uses the Bumpy-chested Movement (hereafter BCM) to counter every supporter of patriarchy. Immediately after Sarah’s respect for her husband, the representatives of BCM (Falilat, Ashake and Tara) visited their household. Sarah went to get her husband “a cold drink” when Oye invited them in. The BCM representatives were invited in by her husband, although he had a very rough conversation with them. They got to know that Sarah made the food and these were their reactions:

ASHAKE: Sarah, you’re a traitor, a disgrace to your sex, a betrayal of BCM.....

Tara: Shame! After the pledge

Sarah was tagged “traitor and betrayal” by her co-conspirators because she was being subservient to her husband. Stella uses this to confirm that women should not be submissive to the gender living deceptive lifestyle as Oye deceives his visitors to keep his ego intact. Oye values the richness of his soup and he wraps his ego around a decoration meat that he places in the soup so any visitor who comes in would be deceived by the sight of the bone.

Stella foregrounded the male characters in this play; virtually all of them are characterized with filthy roles. At the B.C.M meeting, Rebecca (popularly known as Iya Alakara) that’s portrayed to be an illiterate and married a stack illiterate man raised the fact that her husband claims to possess extra bones in his body. Captain Sharp, Sabina, Tara and Segi reply her that women have what it takes to render the men “amenable and submissive” to their will.

Rebecca: Caftain (Captain), it ish (is) true that a mon (man) posheshis (possesses) more bones than a womon (woman)? You shee (see) my husband claimsh (claims) that he hash (has) nayin (nine) and I sheven (seven).

Sharp: it’s all hoax. Any claims of extra bones by men is nothing but fraud.

Ayi: Why don’t women capitalize on the extra tissue they have in chest region?

Sabina: If they want to play game of fraud like men

Tara: You’re right. If we are to rely on our large hemispheric eminence, then we could win a war by merely exposing our bumpy chest.

Segi: Even those bumps, even if they’re carrying machine guns and we are fighting with ordinary fists, the result of the battle is a foregone conclusion. Naked bumps are enough to render them as docile as a sheep, and as powerless as earthworm.

Here, Captain Sharp and others claimed that it is all shades of fallacy that a man possesses more bone than a woman and also, women possess Bumpy-chest which is enough to win battle against men. This reiterates the fact that men would not win a battle against women even when they are armed; women are naturally powerful, resilient and fearless.

Representing Time, Space and Society

These tools represent the Halliday's transitivity theory, which is normally understood as the grammatical feature (choice of a verb) that takes direct object. Halliday divides the system of transitivity or process types into six processes, namely: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. The representation of process has the power to define the way reader's will perceive and interpret actions, events and states (Jefferies 2014, p. 413).

According to Simpson (1993), transitivity is part of the ideational function. This function refers to the way that meaning is exemplified in the clause. It displays the way that language users encode their mental picture of reality and the way they exemplify their experience of the world around them. Stella tries to underscore a predominant patriarchal society taken by surprise by the emerging matriarchs, hence, the patriarchs tries to negotiate and retain their dominance.

The text is situated in a society where there is male dominance as women are assigned domestic roles such as breastfeeding of the baby, cooking for both the husband and the in-laws as and when due, showing maximum respect to both the husband and the in-laws. However, as the events unfold, one can deduce that the women are tired of these roles, hence, they fight for their freedom aggressively and with fisticuffs as women like Falilat resort to kicking their husbands in the scrotum. This is found in excerpt:

Jolomi: (Rises up and moves to the sitting room) I'll make you take some bile, by giving you a good thrashing which you will always remember

Falilat: Me Fali! (Pounce on Jolomi suddenly with incredible agility sending him sprawling on the floor. She descend on him, raining down pallets of slaps and punches especially at the lower region. Jolomi let's out yells and struggles rather desperately. As quick as lightening, Falilat jumps up snatches her handbag from the settee and hurries out of the room. Jolomi remains in recumbent position, groaning, intermittently, shortly Saka knocks the door with almost tearing force).

Stella switches the power of men to women in order to achieve the desired message. Women "pounced on" (Material process) men during a break-out fight, accompanied with several slaps and punches. Women also carry out tasks hitherto performed by men such as

palm wine tapping, as Rebecca has done, taxi-driving, as Salwa has done. Akin was dressed in female attire with baby wrapped on his back, reverse is the case.

Hypothesising

This tool gives the writer avenue to present their point of view which could be deviation from the convention. Stella Oyedepo presents an emerging matriarchal society against the predominant patriarchal society in Africa most especially Nigeria. At the genesis of the text, Sharp is seen giving orders to the women as they hold a BCM meeting. She directs them on how to usurp their husband's authority and headship at home. One of the members, Falilat is seen telling Rade another member how she has directed her husband to get two feeding bottles glued to his chest to "breast feed" the children.

Rade: But Captain

Captain Sharp: But what, why don't you instruct your husband to give the baby artificial. I suppose we spoke at length of this the other times we met. Your husband should bottle-feed the baby when you're not.

Rade: He wouldn't try to do such a thing

Falilat: Your husband won't hear of it... I, Falilat take no nonsense from my husband. Do you know what I told him? I asked to go and buy two feeding bottles... Tie them together with two strings leaving some spaces between the two bottles you see his chest measurements will determine the width of the gap.

In another instance, Ashake is seen throwing tantrums to her in-laws (Clem & James). She refuses to prepare them a meal or offer them water as she has locked her fridge and the kitchen. Falilat is also seen wrestling with her husband Jolomi as she overpowers him and gives him a kick in the scrotum. However, Sandra seems to do the opposite of what BCM stands for and its ideologies. She behaves courtly to her husband as she recognizes his authority as the head of the house.

While Sharp and her adherents are tools that typify the emerging matriarchal characters, Sarah represents the typical African women who cater for her home. What the playwright intends doing is to meander the interstice between reality and mirage. Oye and Jolomi try to subtly protest the emerging emancipation of the matriarchs by holding a dialogue with the "head" of BCM, but hit a deadlock.

Stella tries to hypothesize by creating a contrast between the real and the unreal. The unreal is women fighting for total emasculation of patriarchs and flagging off the ideals of women emancipation. She attempts to fight male dominance from the fringes but in

reality, it is a ship that cannot leave the shore. Africa unlike the Western World places premium on tradition and culture as it recognises the male as the head of the home and side-lines the woman to the role of the help meet, vis-a-vis, an assistant, hence, female switching roles with their men cannot be totally adopted.

Prioritising

Stella Oyedepo seems to prioritize female emancipation above every other event in the text. All events, actions are centered on how women can be liberated from the shackles of male subjugation as they go as far as creating a union called BCM (BUMPY CHESTED MOVEMENT). However, at some point, the men go as far as having a dialogue with the commander of BCM, Sharp to seek solution to the ravaging madness but to no avail.

Captain Sharp, in the text, symbolises a “leader” who is capable of doing her duty. Stella uses this to project the message that women are capable of occupying the “leading position”. Other instances, women show strength, pride and find pleasure in seeing men doing the domestic chores. Rebecca (Iya Alakara) could not speak good English but she wasn’t condemned for it, rather the condemnation her husband received was not even because he couldn’t speak but Falilat believes he wouldn’t know if Rebecca was speaking well or not.

Rebecca: B-shi-e-Mu (BCM)

Forward nefa (never), backward efa (ever)

Sharp: Iya Alakara, that’s not how to say it... It is Forward ever backward never.....

Rebecca: backward efa forward nefa (some burst into raucous laughter)

Sharp: I don’t know how else to teach Iya Alakara

Falilat: Captain, it doesn’t matter if she can’t say it properly, after all her husband is an illiterate. So even if she says it wrongly, the man wouldn’t know he would be awed all the same that his wife could chant such a mystifying slogan.

The man was ridiculed even without making mistakes or speaking; this is so because the priority is placed on emancipation of the female characters in the text.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the gender issues shown in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested*. These gender situations basically include the perception of the male dominance which a movement is constructed to counter. The analysis of the text is done using Lesley Jeffries’

Critical Stylistics alongside male foregrounding theory. Only four of the ten tools were used in the course of analysis;

- a. Naming and describing,
- b. Representing time, space and society;
- c. Hypothesising
- d. Prioritising

The bitter situation geared Stella Dia Oyedepo to pen down a project that would restructure, encourage, and motivate the female gender to liberate themselves from the associated duties that reduce women to property or mere helper. This study points out the writer's view on the roles of women in society.

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