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## A Stylistic Appraisal of Ayi Kwei Armah's the Beautiful Ones are not yet Born

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# A Stylistic Appraisal of Ayi Kwei Armah's the Beautiful Ones are not yet Born

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Vajime (1996) asserts "that the genre of the short story cannot be defined absolutely [...] its most important features are that it is prose, narrative and fictive" (36). Literature is governed by norms, and as a writer conveys his messages to the reader, he applies such norms skillfully (stylistics). In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah presupposes fictively shared knowledge between him and his readers, and proceeds in the narration 1. It is the author's communicative goals and illocutionary strategies that enable the reader relate the work with states-of-affairs in the world.

It should be noted that in employing the tools of stylistics in textual-property investigation, the linguist and the literary critic do not have same goals and approaches; while the linguist is concerned with how a piece of literature (for example, the literature of Law) exemplifies the language-system, and treats literature as "texts", the literary critic is concerned with underlying significance and artistic vision of a writer, and so treats his work as "messages". However, stylistic criticism combines some aspects of both "texts" and "messages" and treats literature as discourse. Unlike grammar or syntax that is limited to a discrete sentence, stylistics incorporates chains of sentences.

The various approaches to the study of style explain factors which inform the use of idiosyncratic, regional, pragmatic or occupational choices of words (as in the diction of Legal Advocacy discourse). This study examines in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, grammatical components and issues of meaning and

this is the case in any stylistic investigation of both linguistic and literary properties of texts of various kinds.

## II. STYLISTICS, STYLE AND RHETORIC

Stylistics is simply the study of style. In stylistics, texts of various disciplines can be seen as "language in action". Defining stylistics therefore presupposes a clear understanding of the term "style", which refers to the way language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. Style relates the critic's concern of aesthetic properties with the linguist's concern of linguistic description. As a vehicle of communication, style consists of five parts: the encoding of the message, the transmission, its realization as a signal, its reception and its decoding.

There are three significant views to the study of stylistics: dualism, monism and pluralism. Dualism distinguishes between the "manner" of a text and its "matter"; this distinction is between "textual expression" and "textual content". Dualists therefore restrict style to those choices which concern "manner" or "form" rather than "matter" or "content". Scholars of the Monist School contend that expressions cannot be separated from their content. Pluralists view language from a functional perspective, arguing that the functions performed by language are numerous and speakers' choice of words are germane to the dynamics of social functions which language performs; this implies that speakers' linguistic choices depend on their communicative goals in various contexts and situations 2. "Style" derives from Latin "stylus" which means "a pointed object". It later meant "a pointed object used for writing". Today, style is known as "a manner of writing". Fakuade (1998:13) cites "that in medieval period, style underwent the same theoretical classification as rhetoric". During the period, style was classified into three strata:

- a. The low (plain) style;
- b. The middle (mean) style;
- c. The elevated (grand) style.

Each of the above levels was linguistically and extra-linguistically unique and motivated. "Persuasion", the business of rhetoric was also the concern of style besides writing.

There is a traditional perspective that style and a writer's personality are inseparable; the Latin terms "Stilus Verum Arquit" (The style proclaims the man)

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corroborates this view. Obviously, a person's style of speaking or writing is immersed in a diachronic context which invariably, he shares with other speakers or writers who embrace same social dialectics with him. This position makes the individualistic view of style a problematic position. Banjo (1982) defines stylistics as "the exhaustive study of the role of language in literary works". In stylistics, we find a meeting point between literary and non-literary study of texts. Stylistics is a registration of a writer's artistic prowess in the communication of themes, and this is achieved through the manipulation of the linguistic repertoire at the disposal of the writer. Selecting or ordering language, as well as deviating from the norm is essentially the concern of style. Distinction exists between stylistic, grammatical and non-stylistic choice. Enkvist (1964) asserts that appropriateness depends on context 3.

Leech and Short (1981) posit that style can be applied to both spoken and written, both literary and non-literary varieties of language, but by tradition, it is particularly associated with written literary texts. Abraham (1981) opines that the characteristic of a work may be analyzed in terms of certain parameters: its diction, or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language; and its rhetorical aims and devices. Leech (1966) distinguishes two scales of institutional delicacy: the register scale and the dialect scale. The register scale handles various registers or roles of linguistic activity within society, distinguishing, for example, a spoken language from a written language, the language of advertising from the language of science, the language of respect from the language of condescension. The second distinguishes the linguistic habits of various sections of society differentiated by age, social class, sex and geographical area. The two scales have a meeting point in terms of their ability to produce complete stylistic-analyst approach to textual analysis.

Vocabulary modification is the most obvious and accessible aspect of style. Halliday et al (1964) proposes Field, Mode and Tenor as highly general concepts for describing how the context of situation determines the kinds of meaning that are expressed. Field is the total event in which the text is functioning together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer. It incorporates the subject matter. Mode is the function of the text in the event including therefore both the channel taken by the language spoken or written, extempore or prepared and its genre or rhetoric, "phatic communion" and so on. Tenor refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved. Field, Mode and Tenor collectively define the context of situation of a text.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Halliday's (1971) conceptual tools for the analysis of discourse, facilitates the textual analysis of selected samples from the novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. He opines that substitutions, conjunctions, repetitions, ellipses and other linguistic properties make texts cohere. The rhetorical functions of such linguistic devices are obvious as will be seen in the subsequent sections of this study. According to Halliday (1978), text refers to any passage, written or spoken irrespective of the length that constitutes a linguistic entity. See Fakuade (1998:24) who cites that "texture", "tie" and "cohesion" characterize texts.

### IV. PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF CORPORA

We consider the stylistic features in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as evident in our twelve corpora below:

#### *Corpus 1:*

You see, we can share,' he said, as he came up to the man. But only the unending rattle of the bus answered and absorbed his words. The man in the back seat just sat and his eyes just stared, even when the conductor brought his cigarette to within about a foot of his face.... Then a savage indignation filled the conductor. For in the soft vibrating light inside the bus, he saw running down from the left corner of the watcher's mouth, a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the oil-like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left hand, underneath... the watcher was no watcher after all, only a sleeper (p.5).

#### *Corpus 2:*

I know people who won more than five hundred cedis last year. They still haven't got their money.' 'Have they been to the police?' 'To help them get their money?' 'You're joking,' said the messenger with some bitterness. 'It costs you more money if you go to the police that are all.' 'What will you do? the man asked. 'I hope some official at the lottery place will take some of my hundred cedis as bribe and allow me to have the rest.' The messenger's smile was dead. 'You will be corrupting a public officer.' The man smiled. 'This is Ghana,' the messenger said ... (pp.18-19).

### V. POINT OF VIEW

"Point of view" refers to the manner narratives are told. It makes clear the place of the narrator in the story. The trio "person" "mask" and "narrator" form a novelist's narrative media as he attempts to enact realism into his story <sup>4</sup>.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is told with the third person omniscient

narration; this narrative device presupposes the use of personal pronouns (he, she, they as well as proper nouns which name the characters as certain comments are made about them). The use of third person pronouns necessitates alienating the writer from the story. However, the omniscient narration device in the novel affords the writer the opportunity to register his supremacy over the characters as he is all-knowing, observes and reports their actions from the rare.

We note that the narrator experienced the situation, and has appreciable knowledge of it. This all-knowing capacity is exhibited in the way this narrator remarks on each character and it is of stylistic relevance; it facilitates proper characterization of the macro-structure<sup>5</sup>. The third person omniscient narration also affords the writer the opportunity to enact his overriding message.

Fowler (1981) opines that "Linguistic structure is not arbitrary, but is determined by the functions it performs". Difficult as it is, a novelist has to take a position, even when he uses the third person omniscient narration that is encumbered with the principle of detachment<sup>6</sup>. Through omniscient point of view, Armah unfolds his awareness and attitude towards the cankerworm, "corruption", which has become institutionalized in his society, and he sustains the registration of this awareness.

It is worthy of stylistic attention that in the above text, the writer alludes hinging on the shared knowledge he has with his characters and his extra-text audience (readers) on the spate of bribery and corruption in the society as evident in the activities of the police. He paints the picture of a police force ridden with lack of uprightness and insensitivity to integrity. From the rare, he makes us know that the citizens whose lives and property the police are supposed to protect do not repose any confidence in such degenerated police force. We note the narrator's stylistic strategy of using intra-text audience (characters) to expose and lampoon the societal vice in which people serve personal interests rather than their nation. The ironical question, ("Have they been to the police?"), in Corpus 2 is a stylistic communicative (illocutionary) strategy that probes the addressee to say what the omniscient narrator already knows about the disposition of the police.

Interpreting the text presupposes locating the link which the words therein have with the structure of the text. The fact that the story is narrated via the third person/omniscient narration does not make it illogical to use first person pronouns; the narrator uses these pronouns to make reference to the exact words of The Messenger. The narrator uses Informative speech act as a constative (See Austin 1962) to state that corruption pervades the society. Also, the utterance, "Have they been to the police?" is an indirect speech act (question) used satirically<sup>7</sup>.

Abrams (1981:62) evolves the "showing" and "telling" methods of characterization in narratives. We note that the stylistic potency of the telling method over the showing or dramatic method is that the former affords a writer the opportunity to enact his evaluative remarks on the actions and utterances of the characters as the story unfolds whereas the latter only leaves the reader making inferences or deductions from what the characters say and do<sup>8</sup>. In exploring the advantages which the telling method affords the writer, the omniscient point of view enables the writer to capture a wide range of characterization possibilities as he clings to his didactic and thematic concerns.

*Corpus 3:*

"checking the coins against the tickets, he began to count the morning's take. It was mostly what he expected at [...] was certainly easier, but at the same time not as satisfactory as in the swollen days after pay day" (p.1).

## VI. REMINISCENCE

The term "reminiscence" refers to the use of recall as a narrative strategy as it applies to the experiences of the characters. In the novel, we are aware of what has been the past experience of people in Ghana shortly and late after salaries have been paid. The experiences being narrated may be that of a particular character or a society. However, the use of reminiscence connects the reader with the plot and characterization. Through reminiscence we are informed on page 95 about the unfortunate experience of Zacharias Lagos who for a period of time enjoyed the "booty" of his job before he was caught.

*Corpus 4:*

Zacharias Lagos, living so long here that he had forgotten he was ever a Nigerian. Working for a Sawmill and getting, in the days of pounds and shillings, ten pounds twelve a month...when he was caught people called him a good, generous man, and cursed the jealous man who had informed on him.

## VII. TEMPORAL ABRIDGEMENT

The time gap between occurrences in some narrations are not indicated, and this is essentially part of verbal artistry. The writer of a novel uses temporal abridgement to curb inflated suspense and engage the reader's deductive reasoning (inferencing)<sup>9</sup>. For example, we do not read about the various experiences or developments that revolve around Zacharias Lagos' disposition at his work place, before we are suddenly told that he was eventually caught. In abridging time and ignoring durational happenings, the writer leaves the readers pondering on possible developments.

*Corpus 5:*

There would always be only one way for the young to reach the glean... eating the fruits of fraud (p.95).

## VIII. METAPHOR

Through the use of figures of speech, literature takes language to a higher dimension, using it to seduce and enchant. Scholarship acknowledges that the goals of the literary artist include teaching the readers and appealing to their sense of linguistic admiration. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, we see the writer's aesthetic matrix in the use of the following figures of speech:

We note that in narrations, metaphors are ideologies-built images 10. Abrams (1975) opines that in a metaphor a word, which in standard (literal) usage denotes one kind of thing, [...] instead of comparison". In the text below the tenor of the metaphor is "fruit" while the vehicle is "fraud":

It is obvious that images are instruments of metaphorical expressions, and they are tied to writers' authorial statements. In playing with the reader's sense of hearing (phonological features) through the choice of the words "fruits" and "fraud", Armah is theme-driven; "fruits of fraud" is thematically appropriate as stylistic unusual collocates because the central message of the novel is "that corruption pervades the society". Another metaphorical device in the novel is thus:

*Corpus 6:*

Outside, the sight of the street itself raised thoughts of the reproach of loved ones, coming in silent sounds that ate into the mind in wiry spirals and stayed there circling in tightening rings, never letting go (p.35).

The extract above shows the linguistic prowess of the author who relies on metaphor in capturing the intense concern which the character has for his poverty-stricken nuclear family members. Literal language may not be able to convey the atmosphere which the use of "silent sounds that [...] wiry spirals and stayed... in tightening rings [...]" conveys in the text <sup>11</sup>.

*Corpus 7:*

... coming in silent sounds that ate into the mind in wiry spirals and stayed there... (p.35)

## IX. PERSONIFICATION

The use of the expressions "silent sounds that ate" and "[...] and stayed" is a transfer of inanimate attributes (personification) to the abstract noun, "sounds".

Rhetorical elements in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* perform dual functions: they convey speakers' illocutionary goals and create linguistic flavour 12. The following rhetorical devices abound in the narration:

*Corpus 8:*

These were the men who had finally, and so early, so surprisingly early, seen enough of something in their own lives and in the lives around them to convince

them of the final, futility of efforts to break the mean monthly cycle of debt and borrowing, borrowing and debt (pp. 21 & 22).

## X. REPETITION

Although repetition is capable of phonological effects in literary works, it concretizes and draw readers' attention to writers' message; repetition is for emphasis. The elements which exemplify repetition in the above extract are the alternated ("debt and borrowing", "borrowing and debt"). The writer uses this device to capture the "repeated" experiences (cycle) and practices of the people of Ghana during Passion Week.

*Corpus 9:*

"Have they been to the police?' 'To help them get their money?" (p.18)

## XI. RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

We note that rhetorical questions are used in the narration as a result of the linguistic presuppositions which the characters have with one another, or as a result of writer-reader shared linguistic presuppositions. Rhetorical questions in the novel are theme-laden and are indirect speech acts. The decoder of Corpus 9 understands it as an indirect speech act<sup>13</sup>.

*Corpus 10:*

So the conductor had not lowered his eyes. Instead he had kept them fastened to the hungry eyes of the giver of the cedi, and fed them with admiration. He had softened his own gaze the better to receive the masculine sharpness of the giver's stare (p.2).

## REFERENCES RÉFÉRENCES REFERENCIAS

References are words whose meanings can only be discussed by referring to other words in the text, e.g. person pronouns. As references, the person pronouns "his" and "he" in Corpus 10 refer to "the conductor".

*Corpus 11:*

Have you ever seen a bigman without girls? Even the old ones,' the seller laughs, 'even the old men' (p.37).

a) *Substitution*

Stylistic features are crucial in effective communication <sup>15</sup>. There is clausal substitution on Corpus 11 as the encoder has omitted "even the old ones have girl friends" without communication breakdown.

*Corpus 12:*

He had opened his mouth slightly so that the smile that had a gape in it would say to the boastful giver, 'Yes man. You are a big man.' And he had fingered the coins in his bag, and in the end placed in the giver's hand a confusing assortment of coins whose



value was far short of what he should have given. The happy man has just dropped the coins into his shirt pocket. He had not even looked at them (p.3).

#### b) *Conjunction*

Halliday et al (1971) evolves four categories of conjunctions <sup>16</sup>:

and in all this time he met no one (additive).  
Yet he was hardly aware of being tired (adversative).  
So by night the valley was far below (causal).  
Then, so dusk fell, he sat down to rest (temporal) – (Halliday, p. 239).

Different kinds of conjunctions are on Corpus 12:

- so that the smile that had a gape [...] (causal)
- And he had fingered the coins [...] (additive)

#### *Corpus 13:*

"In this office the clerks go home at four-thirty." "Oh, I know," the teeth said. "I know, but I thought he would stay after work" (28).

#### c) *Lexical Cohesion (Usual Collocates)*

We find the piling up of usual collocates: "office" "work" and "clerk" as in Corpus 13.

#### *Corpus 14:*

Money Sweet Pass All  
Who Born Fool  
Socialism Chop Make I Chop  
Country Broke...  
You Broke Not So?...  
Pray For Detention  
Jailman Chop Free (P.105-106)

#### d) *Pidgin Elements*

Pidgin English elements are partly used to give the work lighter tone or comic effect, but they are elements that subtly put the reader on sober reflection; they are used to lampoon social vices and make allusions <sup>17</sup>.

#### *Corpus 15:*

[...] the conductor walks away down the road. In a few moments the waiters can hear the sound of his urine hitting the clean-your-city can. He must be aiming high. Everyone relaxes visibly. The poor are rich in patience. The driver in his turn jumps down and follows the conductor to the heap. His sound his much more feeble (p.39).

#### e) *Digression*

A narrative technique, digression aligns conversational turns with the mainstream of the narration. Armah uses digression to draw the readers' attention to his authorial positions. Through the omniscient narrative device, digression is used to concretize and reinstate the thrust of the narration <sup>18</sup>.

By successfully hitting the clean-your-city-can, the conductor represents the Ghanaians whose inordinate ambition informs corruption and lack of

uprightness in that society. This conductor's disregard for the law, informed by his awareness that the formulators of the law, "that the city should be cleaned", are themselves polluters (though corruption) of the city, makes him urinate on the clean-your-city-can. In the narration, digression is linguistically and thematically rooted. The writer seems to capture binary representations of people in the society: the rich and the poor; the corrupt and the upright; the smart and the honest <sup>19</sup>. Armah subtly engages the readers into making inferences from the fact that the sound of the driver's urine is feeble unlike that of the conductor.

It is therefore of stylistic significance that at different points of the narration, even at unexpected points, the narrator is able to draw the readers' attention to his thematic concerns. Stylistic instruments are used in the novel as a theme-sustenance strategy 20:

## XII. CONCLUSION

Fiction presupposes authorial use of diverse narrative techniques, and this process is message-driven as every literary writer communicates central and subthemes through the agency of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements. Thus, Armah succeeds in conveying his thematic pre-occupations in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

The various stylistic methods the writer uses in the novel: point of view, reminiscence, temporal abridgement, textual cohesive devices, digression, figurative language, among others, interacts with his ideological underpinning on the issue of corruption in society. We note that fiction writers do not just ignore writer-reader shared knowledge even when they make use of the omniscient narration point of view. They align with their audience but stick to their message; achieving these two ends is essentially stylistic prowess. Our effort in this study accentuates the fact that in literary works, meaning transcends the signification for which formal linguistics is known; meaning is taken to be a function of the relationship which this signification and the value these elements take on as elements in a pattern created in the context.

#### *Notes*

1. Allan (1986) contends that literary writers succeed in their work when the readers are able to locate the writers' world -spoken -of. This position captures Bach and Harnish (1979) who opine that in a linguistic community (of course Ghana, the setting of Armah's novel counts as a linguistic community) effective communication is achieved when speakers and hearers have mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs). We also note that writers of literary works communicate with what Bch and Harnish label CP (Communicative Presumption).
2. Leech's view of style as the dress of thought (Cf. Leech 1981:3) makes it clear that the concern of persuasive speech is the relationship between

"what" is said and "how" it is said; however, the informants of these two ends are "contextual variables" which are dynamic.

3. The characters in a narrative, like the omniscient narrator, hinge on context for normative (linguistic) appropriateness. For more insights on context phenomena, see Austin (1962). According to him, the total speech acts in the total speech situation, is the only actual phenomenon worthy of the analyst's investigation.
4. Fiction is preoccupied with the dialectics of social reality. This is crucial as literature does not exist in a vacuum; it is a product of the writer's existential experiences. Such experiences are not poles apart from those of the reader. Hence, the stylistic elements in African fiction aid the writer's attempt to enact the African reality on stage or paper.
5. The macro-structure is the entire novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The omniscient narrator would have known the entire verbal and non-verbal roles of the major and minor characters before he could categorize them as being greedy, corrupt, power-drunk, and so on.
6. Indirect speech acts are primary illocutionary acts.
7. Searle (1969) classifies indirect speech acts into primary and secondary illocutionary acts. In asking, "Have they been to the police, both primary and secondary illocutionary acts are performed, of which the primary act is an illocutionary force of condemning.
8. In this way the analyst can see beyond the writer's spectrum; critiques on various literary works have been illuminating to their authors.
9. See Ahmed in Fakuade (1998:36-37).
10. Levinson (1983) opines that metaphors have deleted predicates of similarities; we note that this amplifies their potentials to capture narrator's thematic concerns in prose narratives, and in other genres of literature.
11. See Fakuade (1998:85).
12. However, the former is more crucial to communication via speaking or writing.
13. Fakuade (1998:17) posits "that language use (style) is governed by a wide range of contextual factors, including social and physical circumstances, identities, attitudes, abilities and beliefs of participants and relations holding or supposed to be holding between participants".
14. Linguistic presuppositions are semantic (lexeme-dependent) while extra-linguistic presuppositions are pragmatic (social context-driven); Adegbiya (1999) is illuminating in this regard.
15. It is understood therefore, why scholars opine "that style and content are inseparable".
16. See Osisanwo (2003).
17. In fiction, allusions are made to individuals and societal practices, and in doing this, writers and

textual characters rely on the belief that such stylistic choices are understood; the choices have potentials to pick events that relate to them from the world. In Searle (Ibid.), this is word-to-world direction of fit as in assertives.

18. We see how the conductor's action was taken up and related to the sub-themes of the novel through the digressive technique indexed by the expressions "He must be aiming high" and "The poor are rich in patience" which seem to disconnect from the topic of discourse.
19. The conductor is in the category of those who are smart, corrupt and dishonest.
20. There is progression in narration when the plot and message are located and held unto by the readers. Irrespective of the narrative strategy employed by the novelist, the beginning and end of the story should not be bereaved of his thematic preoccupation (s).

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