

## ECHOES OF TRAUMA: FOREGROUNDING OF VIOLENCE IN EZENWA-OHAETO'S *THE VOICE OF THE NIGHT MASQUERADE* AND FIDELIS OKORO'S *WHEN THE BLEEDING HEART BREAKS*.

F.O. Orabueze. PhD, Ifeyinwa Ogbazi. PhD and P.A. Ezema. PhD  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

### Abstract

The poets, like other creative artists, have striven to depict both the ineffable and traumatic experiences in human history. Since the Second World War, particularly, man has subjected other human beings to untold hardship and violence through criminal activities that have the catastrophic dimensions of natural disasters like earthquake, landslide and tsunami. However, the poets have not shied away from their onerous responsibility as the voice that must alert the human race to the immanent retaliatory violence or bloody revolutions, which the victims of unmitigated violence can unleash on the whole society. The poets are able to send their messages to their readers through the use of literary language. This research, therefore, uses some selected poems from Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* and Fidelis Okoro's *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks* to examine the cause-and-effect sequence of violence that exists in both private and public spheres in the two literary texts. It particularly deals with the language use of the duo – the linguistic foregrounding and the foregrounding of imagery of violence – as they engage in a fierce battle with words and meanings to compellingly draw the attention of the reader to the criminality of a world that pushes the weak to rebellion. In order to achieve this goal, other forms of language in literature, like figures of speech and deviant structures in the two texts, must be appropriated as the poets struggle with elusive and unstable language to pin-point and concretize the social reality of a violent world inhabited by fragmented people.

### Introduction

Works of literature, whether written or oral, is a mode of expression through which man has recorded the beauty and the beast in human life. And as a mode of expression, it comprises three different genres and each has identifiable characteristics which set it apart from the others. It is believed that the novel suggests through invented stories or series of stories, drama by an invented action or series of actions, and poetry by invented pictures or images; however, each of them are inter-relational as they can appropriate each other's materials. R. N. Egudu distinguishes poetry from the other two genres because it is the only one that "communicates by means of imagery, rhythm and sound" (2007:9). And to the Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A poem is the image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (1973:748). The poet who expresses the image of life and immortalizes as eternal truth is described not as an ordinary mortal, but as "the master of the art of *double-talk*, he or she speaks in riddles and in a jigsaw puzzle" (Maduakor, 2001:3). It is his

duty to name the "unnameable and unknowable" (ibid) as he considers the "vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed..." (Shelley 749).

And one may ask what are the vices of the age, the unnameable that the poet has the duty to expose? It is the poet, like other creative writers, who immortalizes with vivid images the experiences of man, particularly his painful and traumatic experiences, as he trudges on the crooked road of life. For instance, in a world where violence has taken on the centre stage, the poets are not cowered to express their vision of an apocalyptic world-order, where the strong unleash violence on the weak, as seen in:

The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born (Yeats 1700).

Again, Nicholas Amechi Akwanya's poem, "Nigerian Civil war," expresses his message of the unhealable, psychological and traumatic experiences of survivors of any war as they watch the victims die. As he depicts the horror:

The liquid staring eyes  
surprised me again twenty four years  
after they were extinguished,  
but stared on  
through slanted dead lashes (*Pilgrim Foot* 33).

There is no doubt that the two poets –Yeats and Akwanya – here used literary language, which makes literature, "not a pseudo-religion or psychology or sociology, but a particular organization of language" (Eagleton, 2009:2-3), to concretize and evoke haunting images of carnage, death, disorder and violence. And that is why Geoffrey Leech has called literature the creative use of language. As he further puts it, it is "in the context of general linguistic descriptions can be equated the use of unorthodox or deviant forms of a language" (1966:136). Leech's view is also in line with that of another literary critic, Henry G. Widdowson, who states that literary language is a curious amalgam of opposites which marks literary writing and "... is indicative of the nature of literature as discourse" (1975:31).

All these opinions of creative writers and critics point to one fact: the distinctiveness of literature from other branches of knowledge that depends on language for their survival. However, writers like Roger Fowler believe that there is nothing special about literary language. In his opinion, "It is unlikely that any formal feature, or set of features, can be found, the presence or absence of which will unequivocally identify literature" (1966:10).

Despite the contrary opinion of Roger Fowler, there is no doubt that the uniqueness of literature lies in its language use, and that what thrusts literariness on a

literary work is its unique language, which is over and above the prosaic or ordinary language use in everyday activities. It is only with the special language which a writer uses in his literary text can he imprint indelible memories that will influence his readers. This influence is recognized by Plato, the first known critic of literary works, when in his philosophical treaties, he excludes poets from his ideal republic, where philosophers will rule. He unequivocally states that their exclusion is as a result of their misrepresentation of Greek gods and heroes. He warns that Greek children should not be allowed to watch such plays with such misrepresentation, because when a "poet uses such language about the gods" (*Republic* 68), the messages which the writer gives corrupt the Greek children as they are "fixed and indelible" (62) in the minds of the youths.

Aristotle, a student of Plato, disagrees with his teacher on the uselessness of poets in an ideal republic and the corruptive influences of their creative works. Among other things, he introduces the concept of poetic justice to forestall what Plato conceives as bad or evil influences of creative works. Also, as the first literary theorist, he lays down the rules for the creation of a literary work. Among the essential parts of a literary work is its diction or language. He argues that a creative art should make use of diction which is "distinguished" and "non-prosaic". And in order for a writer to achieve the desired effect in his text, he should make use of special language. According to him, a creative artist ought to "use strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms, and everything that deviates from the ordinary modes of speech" (*Poetics* 253). He puts the effects of such use of diction thus:

A certain admixture, accordingly, of unfamiliar terms is necessary. These, the strange words, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalents... will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will serve the requisite clearness. What helps most, however, to render the diction at once clear and non-prosaic is the use of lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words (254).

Though Aristotle does not use specifically the word, "foregrounding", in the distinguished diction of a creative art, it is undoubtedly included in it. According to Paul Simpson, foregrounding is a "relative prominence in discourse, often involving deviance from a linguistic norm" (2008:51). As far back as the 1920s, the Russian Formalists like Roman Jakobson, Victor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov, emphasize the formal features of a literary work, divorcing them from their communicative value. They believe that a literary work is like a material fact whose functioning can be examined like the components or parts of a machine. They further argue that literary language is quite different from that of an ordinary language. In a literary text, the author deviates from the norms of the language, appropriates all the devices in his power, and manipulates language in such a way that will make what is familiar to seem strange and unfamiliar. And this is what Victor Shklovsky calls defamiliarization, which is the "artful aspect of a work that makes the reader alive

and alert; it causes the reader to intensify the attention paid to the text, to look again at an image in an effort to take in the unexpected" (Dobie, 2013:3-4).

Foregrounding, which includes parallelism and deviance, is inclusive in Aristotle's distinguished diction and Victor Shklovsky's defamiliarization. In Rishi Kumar Nagar's view, foregrounding in literature has several purposes:

First of all it is used to indicate the (psycholinguistic) process by which – during the reading act – something may be given special prominence. Second, it may refer to specific devices (as produced by the author) located in the text itself. It is also employed to indicate the specific poetic effect on the reader. Furthermore, it may be used as an analytic category in order to evaluate literary texts, or to situate them historically, or to explain their importance and cultural significance. Finally, it is also included in order to differentiate literature from other varieties of language use, such as everyday conversation or scientific reports (*Foregrounding* 2013).

It should be noted that the concept of foregrounding does not have exclusive application to literary texts; it is also used in the domain of visual arts and spectators' responses. And even when it is employed in literary texts, there exists some problems. One, there is the issue of the relationship between foregrounding and the evaluation of texts. In other words, does the presence of foregrounding devices in a text affect the reader's sense of value of the text? Two, there is the vagueness in the terms like 'estrangement', 'deautomatization', 'foregrounding' and 'defamiliarization'. Are these terms "synonymous, or do they correspond to slightly different psychological process" (Nagar 2013)? Despite the shortcomings of foregrounding, this study intends to use two literary texts – *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* and *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks* – in a functional and condensed way to give the reader the aesthetic experience of violence, trauma, destruction and death as a result of the criminality of the leaders, using the methodology of library research and the web. However, there is the need to review briefly a few relevant and related literature in the area.

In Samuel Egwu's sociological study on the protracted and endemic ethno-religious and political conflicts, which the Western writers have continually called "Revival of Old Hatreds", and which have been the sources of bloodletting in post-independence and post-cold war Africa, he identifies internal conflicts, which arise as a result of different ethnic groups engaging in deadly confrontations. In his argument, "it is more productive to problematize the question of organization of state power and prevailing governance regimes in the explanation of conflicts in Africa" (2008:408).

Besides, in Ezenwa-Ohaeto's critical essay, "Slices of Life: The Metaphor of Poverty in the Short Stories of Yusuf Idris", he suggests that Idris adeptly appropriates the techniques of good story-telling, which includes, "the sudden revelation of character, the vision of a world through another's eyes, the glimpse of truth, the capture of a moment in time" (Crane quoted in Ezenwa-Ohaeto 86).

Ezenwa-Ohaeto further argues that Idris aptly describes the lower classes of society by evoking their lurid world through images that portray life beneath the glitter of the cities. According to him, Idris is able to transform the single incident he describes in each short story through the elegant presentation of his material, and apt choice of words that he projects a “better society through the analysis of poverty as a metaphor” (94).

Moreover, in Isidore Nnadi’s research which centers on Chukwuemeka Ike’s chronicling of some aspects of Igbo tradition, particularly the trauma the society inflicts on children born out of wedlock, he argues that the novelist is able to send his message across to the reader through a masterful use of several linguistic devices, especially syntagmatic foregrounding. He concludes that “semantic interpretations of selected lexical items used vis-à-vis their society-imposed meanings reveal the underlying ethical muddle plaguing Igboland” (2013:84).

Besides, Anthony Eyang theorizes on the concept of deviance, which is an attribute of the language of literature. He suggests that his research is a “humble reconciliatory attempt to marry the deviationist and non-deviationist approaches to literary language” (2005:163). Nevertheless, he argues that literary language stretches the possibilities of language use and by so doing forcefully draws attention to itself in a way that ordinary language cannot.

## Analysis

### Foregrounding of Violence in the Two Texts

There is an intricately woven cause-and-effect sequence of violence and trauma, death and destruction, in the creative works. And in order to send out their visions of violence and retaliatory violence as a result of criminality, Ezenwa-Ohaeto in *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* and Fidelis Okoro in *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks* stretch the resources of language in order to force the reader to perceive the imminent violence in the land. In Ezenwa-Ohaeto’s “The chant goes on”, he presents the masquerade, which in most pre-colonial African society, constitutes the highest administrative and judicial systems. In this poem, the masquerade symbolizes the poet, who assailed by the criminality and abominations that he sees in the land, must sanitize it and “name the nameless” (61). The lyrical persona, the masquerade, is forced out of its dwelling place, the ant-hole, because of the violence that has besieged the land. The poet foregrounds the reason for the emergence of the night masquerade, Akatapa, with parallelism. Goring describes parallelism as a “rhetorical device by which two ideas are brought together through the use of identical or similar rhythmical, syntactic or verbal constructions. Grammatical or METRICAL equivalence in a few lines allows for an intense focus on the elements that are compared or contrasted, as well as creating memorable passages of writing” (2010:403). Akatapa is on the prowl to cleanse the land as he emerges from his extra-terrestrial abode because:

Dirges fill this night

In these dirges, the terror,  
the fear, the horror, the hope  
mingle, separate, mingle, separate (60).

There is the use of linguistic parallelism in: terror In these dirges, the + fear  
horror hope

These four NPS, "terror", "fear", "horror" and "hope" are syntagmatically related to the determiner, "the", but they are in paradigmatic relationship with one another. The first three lexical items, "terror", "fear", "horror" are semantically related, because they all share the semantic features /+violence/, /+trauma/, and /+destruction/. However, "hope" is antonymously related to them, for outside the context of the poem, it has the semantic features /+virtue/, /+peace/, /+life/. Intratextually, the poet has forced "hope" to co-occur in the same context with the others. Therefore, the semantic opposition between them has been neutralized that "hope" within the context has also acquired the semantic feature /+violence/ like the others, because of the company it keeps. Therefore, the poet uses the resources of linguistic foregrounding, semantic compounding and neutralization of semantic opposition to foreground the violence which forces the night masquerade to sanitize the land with elocutionary effect. The violence in the land is further re-emphasized subsequently by, "Blood has flowed, flow-e-d / Skulls broken with despair" (60).

It is only the night masquerade that has the capability and capacity to carry out this onerous task: sanitize the land, punish the criminals that pollute the land and restore order, justice and peace. Akatapa must do his work, because he has seen the sorrow, the suffering, the pain and the hopelessness of the people, where in a fertile and fruitful land, a few reduce the majority to abject poverty. As the persona puts it:

But must dirges fill the land  
Where the land is so green  
Where the soil drips wealth  
And vegetables ever in bloom?

Like the Romantic poet, William Blake, in his "Holy Thursday" in his *Songs of Experience*, Ezenwa-Ohaeto uses rhetorical questions that are a pattern repetition that begin with wh-questions to foreground the violence on the populace as a result of starvation. The parallel structures that underscore poverty are seen in:

Where the land is so green  
Where the soil drips with wealth  
And where vegetable ever in bloom (60)?

Not only that the three lines are introduced by the same lexical item, "where", but also the lexical items "land", "soil" and "vegetable" are paradigmatically related and share also a synonymous relationship with the semantic feature /+nature/. This is also the case with "green", "wealth", "bloom", which share the semantic features /+fertility/ and /+abundance/. Therefore:

Where the land is so green  
Where the soil drips with wealth  
And (where) vegetable ever in bloom

underscores fruitfulness. But in the context of the poem, where there is so much violence and so much corruption, the poet questions the reason for the deprivation and poverty in a fruitful land that forces the coming of the masquerade.

Again the masquerade that can execute such an onerous task is not an ordinary one. Because the task ahead is not a simple one, "Only fortified masquerades" (58) and "the masquerade merges with wind" that can execute it. The omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent nature of Akatapa is further linguistically foregrounded in:

The masquerade sees all  
the thoughts hiding in the mind  
the inchoate thoughts forming  
thoughts that drought the land (60-61).

There is the pattern repetition in the lines above, which are introduced by the determiner, "the". There is also the use of parallel structures in: all the thoughts hiding in the mind

The masquerade sees + the inchoate thoughts forming thoughts that drought the land

There is also the repetition of "thoughts" that gives rhythmic cadence to the poem and re-emphasizes the poet's vision of a land that is filled with violence and polluted by criminality.

Besides, this omnipresent nature of the masquerade is further fore-grounded in the imagery of the indirect comparison of the masquerade with the "wind" in "Like wind I touch everywhere/As I walk, I sense every thought" (6). It is only a masquerade of such celestial dimension that is capable of the ritual cleansing of the land of its criminals, the violence and abominations they subject it and its people as he "name the nameless" and is fearless of the consequences of his cleansing the land.

In Fidelis Okoro's "On My Dying Bed", the lyrical persona is a representative of every human being, and the good and evil deeds they have done in the course of life. He reflects on the things he would like to remember before he dies, and the ones he would not like to recollect. The poet presents his abyss of no return through a linguistic parallelism in:

As I sail towards the sunset,  
The sullen horizon beckoning,  
As I move towards the anticlimax  
That will topple all mortals  
As I swim towards the final coast,  
The ebbing sea behind me

As I surmount the commas and colons

To the final full stop that awaits all men (19).

All these lines above are linguistically foregrounded as they are all introduced by the adverb, 'as', and the personal pronoun, "I", which force the reader to notice the poet's message and also enhances the musical sonority of the poem. In order to underscore the movement towards death, there is the four verb phrases that are paradigmatically related, and each in syntagmatic relationship with "I" in "sail", "move", "swim" and "surmount", which share the same semantic feature /+motion/ and can be graphically represented thus:

As I + sail  
move  
swim  
surmount

Also the reader can see the poet's grappling with words, in this case, his use of four Nps, "sunset", "anticlimax", "coast" and "full stop", which he uses to foreground the finality of death, because intra-textually, they share the same paradigmatic relationship and semantic feature /+finality/. The death of the persona that forces him to recollect his activities while he is alive and well is a given; it is only a matter of time before he breathes his last.

The persona enumerates the good deeds which he has done, which he wishes to remember as his last thoughts, as he lies on his dying bed. He remembers the virtuous life he has lived through linguistic foregrounding:

May I remember

|                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| the smile on faces      | which I caused        |
| the laughter of friends | whom I loved          |
| the chuckle of birds    | which I enjoyed       |
| the smell of the dishes | that I ate            |
| the peace of my house   | which I cherished     |
| the echoes of truth     | which I spoke(20-21). |

The whole lines of poetry are introduced by the clause, "May I remember" and the noun phrases that make up the independent clauses are syntagmatically related to the verb phrase "may remember", and the pronoun, "I", which is the subject of the independent clause as seen in:

the smile on faces  
the laughter of friends  
May I remember+ the chuckle of birds  
the smell of dishes  
the peace of my house  
the echoes of truth



In the paradigmatic relationship that exists within these six Nps, “faces”, “friends”, “birds”, “dishes”, “house” and “truth”, while the first five items share the synonymous relationship with the semantic feature /+good life/, “truth”, extra-textually, has the semantic feature /+virtue/. But for the fact that it has been made to co-occur with the others, it has acquired the semantic feature /+good life/ like others. And this is thrust on it because of the company it keeps, for words like human beings, select the company they keep. The effect of this linguistic foregrounding is that the dying persona does not live a virtuous life, but spends his whole life on good life without thinking about improving the lives of others around him. Instead, his life is spent on activities that subject the weaker members of society to violence and hardship. The vision of the poet is further reinforced in the parallel structures in “smile”, “laughter”, “chuckle”, “smell”, “peace” and “echoes”. The same relationship of linguistic foregrounding can be seen in the six subordinate clauses:

which I caused  
 whom I loved  
 which I enjoyed  
 that I ate  
 which I cherished  
 which I spoke

As if the linguistic foregrounding used above is not enough to bring the good life which the dying persona lives that is full of vices, he further forces the reader to take note of the vice-filled life that devastates and spreads trauma on the weak and the poor. Indeed, the persona does wish on his dying bed:

May I not remember  
 the thunder of my voice  
 my saber-toothed words  
 the cry of my servants  
 the hunger of my slaves  
 the billions in the bank  
 the trillions in the store  
 the land in dispute  
 the many cases at law  
 my political opponents  
 the bullets in the ballot  
 the other company executive  
 and his widowed wife  
 the annual general cheating  
 and the profit after tax  
 the children my wife doesn't know  
 the wife my children do not know  
 the lecture in London

the book in progress (18-19)

In the above stanza of the poem, the poet uses eighteen Nps to present the vices of the dying man that bring hardship, violence, trauma and destruction to weaker members of his society. Though the eighteen Nps are in syntagmatic relationship with the verb phrase, its negative adverb and pronoun, "May I not remember", they all share the semantic feature /+oppression/, /+exploitation/ and /+violence/. However, some are more closely synonymously and semantically related than the others. These could be seen in the pairs below:

May I not remember:

1. the thunder of my voice  
the saber-toothed words
2. the cry of my servants  
the hunger of my slaves
3. the billions in the bank  
the trillions in the store
4. the land in dispute  
the many cases at law
5. my political opponents  
the bullets in the ballot
6. the other company executive  
and his widowed wife
7. the annual general cheating  
and the profit after tax
8. the children my wife doesn't know  
the wife my children do not know
9. the lecture in London  
the book in progress

The poet here wrestles with words and meaning in order to bring to the forefront of the reader's mind the many activities of the symbolic dying man that bring violence and trauma to other human beings through the foregrounding of these parallel structures.

As if the use of parallelism or pattern repetition, which is a feature of linguistic foregrounding, is not enough, the poet appropriates the repertoire of deviance as seen in the breach of selectional restriction rule. As Nicholas Amechi Akwanya explains it:

Rule violation is a problem encountered at the interface between competence and performance, an inaugural distinction in generative grammar. Competence describes the rules of sentence formation, performance, the individual appropriation of the language for communication. Transformational grammar attempts to describe competence, and this comprises the rules of sentence

formation or generation set up as an abstract system. But it is in... semantics that the rules are tested (2007:97).

In order to emphasize the peak of his wicked, violent and traumatic activities on the weak and the innocent, the persona particularizes the individual, who is a victim of his wickedness. As he states:

May I not remember that young maid  
whose hopes I capsized in the ocean of my caprices  
whose tear ducts I ruptured with the blades  
of my treacherous tongue (19).

The persona particularly remembers this young girl he has ruined her life among the many for he qualifies her with a demonstrative adjective, "that". In the use of the parallel structures: who hopes I capsized in the ocean of my caprices

whose tear ducts I ruptured with the blade of my treacherous tongue

In the poet's quest to represent the violence, the trauma and the destruction which the dying persona has wreaked on this particular young maid, he breaches the rules of selectional restriction. In the normal language code, "hopes", which is a virtue and intangible cannot be "capsized" in the ocean, because it is not a ship or a tangible object, so also "tear ducts" cannot be "ruptured" with the blades of the tongue. In the world of this poem, which is inundated with violence and trauma, these words are made to collocate or appear in the company of others to show the enormity of the violence and trauma the dying persona has subjected the young and innocent maid, who is unaware of the "ocean of my caprices" and the "blade of my treacherous tongue".

In Ezenwa-Ohaeto's "On the street at night", the poet presents a graphic depiction of the consequences of the destruction of the youths by the leaders, who deny them meaningful existence. He presents the reader with rock-solid images of destitute who have graduated from the universities but are unemployed and they are "Lost in the labyrinth of Lagos/Seeking dreams on Abuja streets" (27). They dream of a better life, but this is made impossible by leaders, who use them in crooked ways during political elections. In order to underscore the violence and bloodshed the wastage of the youths would cause, the poet begins the poem with an apocalyptic vision:

Histories hoisted everywhere,  
I have seen the eyes on the street  
Glow with the drug of despair (27)

There is the breach of selectional restriction rule in the subject, "Histories", collocating with the verb, "hoisted". "Histories" has the semantic feature /-tangibility/, but the poet has consciously made it to collocate with a verb, "hoisted", that has the semantic feature /+tangibility/. The effect of this deliberate deviation from the normal language code is to foreground the history of violence, which has bedeviled the country since independence. The histories of violence which the poet presents as if they are flags and lessons can be read from them include the histories of

several military coups and counter-coups, the pogrom of the Igbo in the northern part of Nigeria, the genocidal Nigerian Civil War, and at present the scourge of Boko Haram in the north, and armed robbery and kidnapping in the southern part of Nigeria.

There is also the metonymic representation of the estranged and angry unemployed graduates with the "eyes" in the foreboding repetition:

I have seen the eyes on the streets

Glow with the drugs of despair (28)

The refrain confers musical elocution to the poem and ushers the reader into the violent world of the youths, where they commit all sorts of vices, including prostitution, drug addiction, alcoholism, and political thuggery. Because of the nature of life they live and the frustration, they are presented as:

wandering round life circuses

hungry, hurrying and lonely

wondering, wandering, whimpering,

they breakdown at guarded gates

intoxicated with wines of worry (28).

There is the use of four different verbs with progressive aspects: "hurrying", "wondering", "wandering", and "whimpering" to foreground the desperate situation of the unemployed youths. In fact, the four verbs put together give the imagery of people who are insane as a result of their pitiable condition and life-style. This is further reinforced by the metaphor of, "Each tattered mind trails/the flotsam of its hope debris" (27). There is the foregrounding of the imagery of madness in the breach of selectional restriction rule of "mind" being qualified by the past participle, "tattered". This shows that the youths are no longer in a good mental state.

These youths who have been subjected to violence, used and abused, have "brains bleached morals" (27), which "Neither Mohammed nor Jesus/reaches into their starving-a-religion" (27) unleashes retaliatory violence on a society that has denied them meaningful existence and has driven them to insanity. The society denies them the "dregs of average joys"; they plan the death and destruction they would unleash on the people because "they wrote obscenities with blood/ they savor horror in their minds" (28). And after being used by politicians as thugs, their violent thoughts materialize into violent actions as they unleash mayhem on the people because:

they now jump onto the streets

Carrying the rage of the age

their eyes glowing with drugs of despair (28).

There is also the phonological foregrounding of the diphthong sound /ei/ in "rage" and "age", which is repeated several times to give rhythmic cadence to the poem and to underscore the message of retaliatory violence from unemployed and estranged youths.

In Fidelis Okoro's "The Clock Weeps", the poet presents the personal catastrophe of the persona's unrequited love by Katty and links it with that of a societal catastrophe as a result of waste of time in the solution of problems that will later escalate into violence. In a lyrical monologue, the persona in the first stanza foregrounds the lamentation as a result of denials in:

Kind Katty,  
There is a clock weeping in the big blue bag  
Across the cold corner of the room  
Weeping like my love  
There is a voice of lament in that bag  
Wailing like my soul (64).

There is the pattern repetition in this first stanza, which foregrounds the sorrow and grief of the persona. There is also the breach of selectional restriction rule in the collocation of the noun, "clock", which has the semantic feature /-human/, and the verb, "weeping", which is of /+human/. The effect of this deviation from the norm of the language code is to thrust human attributes on the clock. This personification of the clock, which confers human attributes to it, foregrounds the violence or trauma which time has suffered as a result of violence and neglect. This is also reinforced in the indirect comparison of the clock's weeping with that of the persona as a result of his unrequited love for Katty. The voice of lament in the bag is also compared to that of the persona's soul's wailing. The message of grief or lamentation is also emphasized by the musical beauty in the use of the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ in such words as "big blue bag" the voiceless plosive /k/ in "cold corner".

It is in the second stanza of the poem that the reason for lamentation and grief in the first stanza is explained. The impatience in the voice of lament is seen in these rhetorical questions:

"Is it not time, is not time?"  
Cries the voice of lament  
Is it not time to climb the snow-capped mountains  
and pluck the calm-coloured rose at the peak  
rose glimmering with joy,  
rose with petals of blue  
rose waiting for you and me (64)?

There is no doubt that the clock that is weeping, and the voice of lament in the bag, have been denied the good things of life like the persona, who suffers the mortal wound inflicted on him by Katty's unrequited love. He foregrounds these good things of life with pattern repetition in:

and pluck the calm-coloured rose at the peak  
rose glimmering with joy,  
rose with petals of blue

rose waiting for you and I (64)?

In an ironic twist, he uses graphological foregrounding, which is seen in the shortness of the last three lines of the stanza above to underscore the impossibility of such a rosy life in his union with Katty.

In the third stanza of the poem, he continuously foregrounds the imagery of fertilization as he implores Katty, "To let drop your golden dust/And pollinate the good seed in me? / For I shall remain a lone star ranging across/a monocular universe/Till my stigma by your anthers fructify" (64). Katty ignores his plea for a holy wedlock, "for a knot tied by divine hands" (64). He warns her of the impending danger and violence thus:

It is time, my Rose

It is time

For I saw Time yesterday crouching at your door

I saw him wink at the box with anger in its brow

I saw him, Katty,

I saw him (64).

In this stanza, not only that the poet uses repetition of "It is time", and "I saw him" to emphasize his message and give musical cadence to the poem. There is also the graphological foregrounding in the capitalization of "Time" as if it is a proper name that denotes identity. There is also a deviance in "Time yesterday crouching at your door" and he "winks at the box with anger in its brow". The effect of the breach of selectional restriction rule or the deviance is to give human attributes to time as "crouching" and in readiness for a fight and winking in anger as a human being, who has been provoked to anger. The effect of this foregrounding is to underscore the impending retaliatory violence, which Time and the persona have been provoked to, as a result of the denials of meaningful existence.

"In each night one fled", Ezenwa-Ohaeto focuses on the reign of terror, the brutal killing of critics of jack-boot leaders. Meanwhile, the survivors of the bloodbath flee into exile in Britain and the United States of America. The first stanza of the poem forcefully puts forth the inevitability of the death of critics of murderous rulers:

The desert crawled closer;

The voice that sang at dusk

Never wakes with us (34).

There is the foregrounding of the imagery of aridity in the use of "desert" and the breach of selectional restriction rule in the co-occurrence of "desert", which has the semantic feature /-animate/ with a verb with the feature /+animate/. Also the poet metonymically represents the critics of bad leadership with the "voice". And in all the stanzas of the poem, the critics are aptly represented as "voices", thereby, creating a pattern repetition and bringing to the focus of the reader that the critics would never be silenced, despite being killed and being sent into exile. The poet, therefore, foregrounds the imagery of a revolution or rebellion that will uproot draconian and

evil leaders. It is because the voices of the critics are not silenced that at the last stanza of the poem, there is the echo of a revolution because:

The voices gathered  
Chants across the surging sea  
A volume of sound reach the desert  
the ogre startled grunts grumbles (34).

Again, Ezenwa-Ohaeto artfully and symbolically represents the terrible leaders as "ogre". In the second stanza, he paints a terrible image of leaders who slaughter and unleash violence on the critics in the metaphor of, "Each dawn the ogre fed / A stream of blood flowed" (34). By the use of this metaphor of the "ogre" that feeds on the blood of his people, he foregrounds the imagery of violence, bloodletting, trauma, cannibalism, death and destruction, which cruel leaders subject the citizens, particularly their critics. The imagery of cannibalism of the leaders is reinforced in the fourth stanza of the poem, because of their insatiable appetite to destroy, some have fled into exile where they join others that are already in exile, "the ogre grew more fretful/our births it awaited each dawn" (34). It is obvious that the metaphor of "our births" is foregrounded in order for the reader to appreciate that the cruel leaders do not only kill the old people, but also the young ones or new-born babies are also murdered. This shows the desperate situation in such a state, which is reinforced by the repetition of the, "The desert of distress crawled closer".

The poet also examines the terrible state of the critics of the bad leaders, who survive the killing machines and are forced into exile overseas. The persona says thus:

The voices now still sing  
Trembling in each tea house  
Hugging each painful pavement  
Hiding in the heart of the Hyde Park  
Wilting in the winter of Madison,  
the voices crossed the seas  
the ranks of rebels swelled  
Each night one fled (34).

The poet here uses parallel structures to foreground the painful condition of the exiles. In the normal language code, one of the verbs is enough to describe the state of the exiles. But in order to bring to the reader's notice their painful experience while in exile, he uses four of them – "Trembling", "Hugging", "Hiding" and "Wilting" – all capitalized to emphasize that their lives in exile is not a rosy one. These four verbs evoke the images of discomfort. Also the four Nps, "house", "pavement", "Hyde Park" and "Madison" are in syntagmatic relationship with the four Vps but are in paradigmatic relationship with one another. They share the synonymous relationship of being dwelling places and foreground that these exiles can be seen everywhere or their ubiquitousness. They therefore underscore the endlessness of the number of the

exiles, who flee the state run by murderous leaders. This foregrounding is later reinforced by the graphological foregrounding in the succeeding three lines:

the voices around the seas  
the ranks of rebels swelled  
Each night one fled

The shortness of these three lines foregrounds the fact that as many critics flee into exile and join others who are already in exile to swell their number, the effect is that the number of critics at home shortens. As the number of critics in exile swells, their "voices gathered with strength" (34) and they would chant across the seas, the volume would reach the desert and startle the bad leaders that slaughter their people and force others into exile.

Finally, in Fidelis Okoro's "My Heart Skipped a Beat", the poet stresses the violence, cannibalism and predatory relationship that exist in human society. In order to replicate the themes of oppression and violence, he employs the allegory of the symbiotic relationship that exists between predatory animals and their preys. He stylistically ushers the reader into the violent, fearful and tension-filled world of the animals, which he expresses in paradoxes and ironies thus:

My heart did not skip a beat  
when the hyena huddled the hare  
and gave it utmost care;  
when the serpent kissed the hen  
and helped it into the pen;  
when the falcon cuddled the sparrow  
and led it away from the arrow (71).

The poet uses pattern repetition in the three subordinate clauses, which are in paradigmatic relationship with one another:

when the hyena huddled the hare  
when the serpent kissed the hen  
when the falcon cuddled the sparrow

There is also a semantic cohesion between the three carnivorous animals, "hyena" "serpent" and "falcon", which share the semantic feature /+predatory/. Likewise, the same semantic affinity can be seen in "hare", "hen" and "sparrow", which share the feature /+prey/. The verbs "huddled", "kissed" and "cuddled" share the semantic feature /+affection/, /+love/. In the world of the poem, the poet is urging the reader to take notice of the paradoxical relationship that exists between the preys and their predators. Through irony, the poet foregrounds the imagery of violence, cannibalism and trauma that naturally exists in human society, where the strong would take advantage of the weak. However, the violence in human relationship is not restricted to the strong and the weak. Strong-willed and violent people can also clash and spread violence and destruction on one another as symbolized by the two kites in the first stanza of the poem in:

when two kites clashed in mid sky at midday



and tumbled out of the safe heavens  
to the quagmire of the earth (71).

In the same vein, the resources of phonological parallelism contributes exceedingly to the musical cadence of the poem and re-emphasizes the theme of violence in the third stanza of the poem, where there is the alliteration of /h/ in “hyena”, “huddled” and “hare”. The musical sonority of the end rhyme is seen in “hare” and “care”, “hen” and “pen” and “sparrow” and “arrow”.

Besides, the three words, “sky”, “heaven” and “earth” are in paradigmatic relationship with one another and share a syntagmatic relationship with the main verb and its negative adverb, “did not skip”. They are all synonymously related because they share the general semantic feature /+abode/. However, there is a closer semantic affinity between “sky” and “heavens”, because they share the same semantic feature /+celestial/, while the “earth”, on closer reading of the poem, is somehow antonymously related to them, because it has the semantic feature /+terrestrial/. However, there is the neutralization of semantic opposition between them, and going by the paradoxes and the ironies with which the poem operates, the clashing of two kites in “mid sky” forces the two to tumble out of the peaceful and beautiful “safe heavens” into the dangerous and violent “quagmire of the earth”.

Fidelis Okoro, therefore, by showing the violent relationship that exists between two carnivorous animals, “kites”, and between the predators, “hyena”, “serpent” and “falcon”, and their preys, “hare”, “hen” and “sparrow”, foregrounds the violence, the cannibalism, the death and destruction in human society which the animals metaphorically and symbolically represent.

## Conclusion

It is submitted that the message of any creative artist or his vision of life can be unfurled through his or her artful and masterful use of literary language. Poetry, particularly, is heavily dependent on the poet’s ingenious weaving of language that evokes images with lasting impressions on the reader. In other words, language is to a creative text – novel, play, poetry – what a heart is to the human body or an engine is to a vehicle or pillars to a bridge. It is obvious that the message of the poets in selected poems of Ezenwa-Ohaeto in *The Voice of the Night Masqueade* and Fidelis Okoro’s *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks* are inseparably bound to the language use. None of them can be removed without the falling apart of the other, for it is in literary language that “the unions, divisions, the love affairs, stars, cells, atoms and men are reproduced” (Paz quoted in DiYanni 2002:2133). It is further submitted that it is principally through linguistic foregrounding and foregrounding of imagery that the two poets force into the forecourt of their reader’s mind their visions of a violent world inhabited by traumatized and fragmented people.

## WORKS CITED

- Akwanya, Nicholas A. *Pilgrim Foot*. Enugu: New Generation Books, 2005. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Semantics and Discourse: Theories of Meaning and Textual Analysis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Enugu: Acena Publishers, 2007. Print.
- Aristotle. *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1984. Print.
- Dobie, Ann B. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. New York: Wadsworth, 2012. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009. Print.
- Egudu, R.N. *The Study of Poetry*. Ibadan: University Press, PLC., 2007. Print.
- Egwu, Samuel G. "Beyond 'Removal of Old Hatreds': The State and Conflict in Africa". *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*. Ed. Shedrach Gaya Best. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2009. 444-456. Print.
- Eyang, Anthony. "Literary Language as a Deviance: A Stylistic Appraisal" *Currents in African Literature and the English Language* 3.1 (2005): 158-164. Print.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd., 2003. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Slices of Life: The Metaphor of Poverty in the Short Stories of Yusuf Idris". *Minstrels Never Die: Selected Writings of Ezenwa-Ohaeto*. Vol 1. Ed. Ngozi Ezenwa-Ohaeto. Awka: SCOA Heritage Nig. Ltd., 2011. 85-95. Print.
- Fowler, Roger. "Language Theory and the Study of Literature". *Essays on Style and Language: Linguistic and Critical Approaches to Literary Style*. Ed. Roger Fowler. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966. 1-28. Print.
- Fulton, Gordon. *Styles of Meaning and Meanings of Style in Richardson's Clarissa*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press. 1999. Print.
- Goring, Paul, et al. *Studying Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London. Bloomsburg Publishing, 2010. Print.
- Leech, Geoffrey. "Linguistics and the Figures of Rhetorics". *Essays on Style and Language: Linguistic and Critical approaches to Literary Style*. Ed. Roger Fowler. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1996. 135-156. Print.
- Maduakor, Obi. *Introduction to Poetry*. Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Co., 2001. Print.
- Nagar, Rishi Kumar. *Foregrounding*. 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2013. Web.
- Nnadi, Isidore C. "Foregrounding in *Conspiracy of Silence*". *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies* 4.1 (2013): 67-85. Print.
- Okoro, Fidelis U. *When the Bleeding Heart Breaks*. Enugu: EL' DEMARK Publishers, 2006. Print.
- DiYanni, Robert. *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002. Print.
- Plato. *Republic*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997. Print.

- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry". *The Oxford Anthology of English Language*. Vol. II. Eds. Frank Kermode, et al. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. 746-762. Print.
- Simpson, Paul. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Widdowson, Henry G. *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. Oxford: Longman, 1977. Print.
- Yankson, Kofi. *An Introduction to Literary Stylistics*. Obosi. Pacific Publishers Ltd., 2009. Print.