TEXTUAL PATTERNS AND SIGNIFICANCE
IN JOEUSHIE'S POETRY: A SEMIOSTYLISTIC STUDY

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Abstract:

Ushie's poetry has been much studied for its message on topical issues like social injustice, political malfeasance, the environment, among others, and perhaps much more for its use of language. Yet several aspects of the use of language in Ushie's poetry are yet to receive attention, and a major one among these is what this study has attempted to demonstrate. Against the background of Daiches' (1948) exposition on creative writing as an art, and the creative writer as an artist in words, this study analyses a few of Joe Ushie's poems with the tool of semiostylistics, and shows how Ushie communicates his messages through patterns created with language units in the text of his poems. This study concludes that this is a technique Ushie has consciously wrought, being himself a stylistic critic of the works of great literary artists, and thus very conversant with the workings of creative writing as verbal art with a semiotic dimension, as every good work of art in general.

Keywords: creative writing, poetry, semiostylistics, textual patterns, significance

1. Introduction

In spite of its young age, being largely grouped in the third generation of Nigerian poetry (Mowarin (2009), Ushie (2005), and Egya (2011) for instance), Ushie's poetry has received considerable critical attention. A good part of this attention has been focused on themes which include principally the socio-political, the socio-economic and the environmental malaise experienced mainly in his native Nigeria and in Africa at large. Such malaise specifically manifests in the systemic corruption and abuse perpetuated by the political and economic power-holders, resulting in the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. For instance, studying Ushie's fifth published collection of poems, *A Reign of Locusts* (2004), Garba (2006) concludes that:

> "*Like in his previous collections, Joe Ushie has demonstrated that a concern for the degradation of the environment is closely linked with the assumption that poets, like all other creative artists, are*

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physically, culturally, and metaphorically rooted in specific geographies, and they strive towards the well-being of those physical and cultural geographies. In this remarkable collection, Ushie has shown that when it comes to what Charles Bodunde (2002, p. 195) calls "the appropriation of the physical environment" as both subject and object, Ushie is a master in portraying the decay in the people's lives."

For Tsaaior (2012), *Eclipse in Rwanda* (1998), which he adjudges "*Ushie's one of great collections of poems*" (sic):

"…belongs to the African tradition in verse which focuses on the role of history and consciousness, the raging issue of war and conflict and the self-humiliation and self-annihilation that has (sic) enveloped postcolonial Africa."

Concluding his study on the collection, Tsaaior (2012) submits that:

"The volume peaks significantly at two points: it combines thematic appropriateness and a searing vision in the navigation of the murky waters which Africa in her post-colonial condition, is fatally plunged into. It intensively interrogates the "Civan principle" which is irredeemably dedicated to war and conflict in Africa and advocates the alternative paradigm of harmonious and peaceful co-existence for African progress and development."

Alongside the focus on the socio-political, socio-economic and environmental themes in Ushie's poetry, there has also been a considerable study on the language and the stylistic techniques of this poetry. Aboh (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, and 2014), as well as Godwin Ushie and Idaevbor Bello (2014) to mention but these ones, have carried out very revealing studies on this aspect of Joe Ushie's poetry. For instance, using the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context, Aboh (2009a) has shown through semantic mapping of Ushie's poems, that "*the relations words hold in the context of the poems are deliberately explored by the poet to reveal the injustice, meanness and wickedness with which the powerful impede the means of livelihood of the masses so as to impoverish them*". It is an analysis that has revealed how the poet associates himself with the pain and misery of the people and has thus stated his populist ideology through the use of lexical items in his poems.

Using the tool of critical linguistics, defined by Fowler (1981:24) as "*the critical analysis of the social practices that are managed through the use of language*", Aboh (2009b) has shown that Ushie's poems "*which are experimental in terms of linguistic exploration of stylistic and discourse features which draw emphatically from his immediate society*", display linguistic inventiveness, coinages (and semantic extensions in the main), to awaken the readers' interest, and prompt their interpretive mind on issues that touch on their individual and collective livelihood and destiny.

Aboh, an ardent student of Ushie's poetry, has analysed this poetry using various other linguistic and discursive elements, devices, and strategies such as lexical borrowing (Aboh, 2010), modality (Aboh, 2012), pronominal features (Aboh, 2013a), and euphemisms (Aboh,

2013b), to demonstrate essentially how Ushie uses such language elements and devices in his poetic creations, particularly in relation to his themes.

If several aspects of the use of language in Ushie's poetry have been studied, including those we have mentioned above, a number of others are yet to be examined. One of these is the use of language units to build patterns in the text of his poems, which patterns turn out to be signs that convey messages to the reader, turning Ushie's poems into pieces that fuse language and theme in an art of signification at the linguistic and the semiotic levels. As the rider in the title of this paper points out, we shall be studying the above technique in Ushie's poetry with the tool of semiostylistics which, simply put, combines the tool of semiotics, simply defined as the science of signs and signification, with the tool of stylistics, also simply defined as the systematic study of language use.

To pursue its task, a first section of the remainder of this paper shall examine the nature of the text of creative writing, which of course includes poetry, as a craft in signification with textual patterns, among other things. The next section shall explain our choice of the tool of semiostylistics for this study, given the conceptualisation of the creative literary text as presented in the previous sentence, and the considerable use of textual patterns in Ushie's works. The third section shall dwell on the study of significant patterns in selected poems of Joe Ushie. A final section of this paper shall draw the pertinent conclusions from the data yielded by the preceding sections.

2. The Nature of Literary Art

David Daiches' *A Study of Literature for Readers and Critics* (1948) has been quite useful down the years in showing the text of imaginative or creative literature as an art, and we shall draw extensively from the book's exposition on this subject for the benefit of the present study.

Chapter four of the above-mentioned book is titled "Art and Craft", and begins with following observation:

"Whatever else can be said about art, it can be safety asserted that it is a form of communication. We may say if we like that every artist is endeavouring to communicate a private vision to his pubic. The literary artist makes his communication through the medium of words, the painter through colour and form, the musician through musical sound, and other artists through other media of communication." (Daiches, 1948:71).

Continuing his exposé on the nature of art in general, and on literary art in particular, Daiches submits that:

"Art is the making public (or potentially public) of something that was private. Of course, it shares this function with many activities which are not art – with the ordinary use of language in daily life for example. The uniqueness of art lies in the uniqueness of the kind of things to be communicated which in turn requires uniqueness of expression." (Daiches, 1948:71)

This is where our interest lies in this study. Seeing that the artist can communicate the same messages as the journalist and the essayist for instance (all of them can talk or write about corruption or political malfeasance or whatever other theme), what is the uniqueness of artistic expression? And seeing that artists in diverse media can communicate messages on a common theme, as a sculptor on my university campus and the poet Joe Ushie have both communicated messages on terrorism, what then is the uniqueness of artistic expression in sculpture and in the literary art of poetry respectively? Again, Daiches offers us the clue:

"The artist's medium will vary. The musician arranges musical sounds in relation to each other in such a way that the pattern of the whole is significant. Significant of what?..... All we can say is that the significance depends on and is produced by the pattern, the arrangement, the relation of the notes to each other." (Daiches, 1948:72).

Having examined patterns as created by the musician and the painter, Daiches explains further that patterns in works of art create significance by the way they suggest, comment on, illuminate, or interpret the patterns we have experienced in real life. Concluding on the musician and the painter as they communicate message through patterns in their respective art, Daiches submits:

"However that may be, it will be seen that both the musician and the painter create significance by patterns – create it not for themselves but for those others who have learned how to listen or to look at their work. That is to say, they create by communicating, or making communicable, a pattern, a set of relations, which adds up to a totality of significance. That significance is not expressible in any other way, except indirectly by analogy." (Daiches, 1948 :73)

Turning then to the creative writer, whose medium is language, Daiches first of all explains a point for the importance of which we shall cite the author's words *in extenso*:

"Language, unlike musical sound, has a meaning apart from its relation to other parts of a pattern constructed out of the same medium. Pattern to the writer, then, must be something more subtle, in a sense, than it is to the composer (who is concerned only with the relation of the parts to the whole, knowing that the individual notes have no meaning at all in isolation), or to the painter (who, though he may have to consider the relation of the form and colour in his work to form and colour outside it, is not bothered by having each blob of paint contain a specific meaning in itself). Words have more or less precise meanings, and as a rule the same words used in a unique order by the poet or novelist, are consistently being bandied about in different contexts elsewhere. And in each context, they will have approximately the same individual meaning. If the artist in words is bound by the pre-existing meaning of these words, how can he hope to achieve anything than express himself clearly? How can the novelist do anything more significant than the mere journalist could accomplish?" (Daiches, 1948:74)

Our common knowledge and experience of the workings of the creative literary text reveals that significance in this type of text occurs on at least three levels: i) the level of what

Daiches calls here the "*individual meaning*" or again the "*pre-existing meaning*" of words, which is the denotative meaning; ii) the level of the connotative meaning which is to say, the meaning that the collective memory of a society or a community attaches to a word; and iii) the level of the meaning that can be adduced from the pattern that a word forms in the text. The last two of these levels of significance are the more important ones in the artistic value of a work of creative literature. In our view, literary criticism has considerably demonstrated significance in woks of creative literature at the level of connotative meaning. This of course, is one of the reasons this study is focusing on significance at the level of textual patterns, using the poems of Ushie, which, as we shall later endeavour to show, consistently create significance through the patterned use of various types of language units.

We can now go back to benefit from Daiches' exposé on the way significance is wrought from the patterned use of language in a creative literary work. If we may paraphrase Daiches, the good creative writer will use language in such a way that at every point in the work, the meaning of each unit is sharpened and particularised by its position in the context, by its relation to meanings that precede it and follow it, so that as the work proceeds, the message line, as laid down by the purely semantic meaning of the words, becomes not a single strand, but a rich pattern of significance in which the rise and fall of sentences, the length of paragraphs, the verbs and images used, all contribute new enrichment to what is being said. Daiches concludes in a way we cannot help but cite extensively his very words:

> "*The intellectual meaning of words thus becomes one element in a complex pattern, for such meaning is continually expanded by overtones and reverberations deriving from the choice and arrangement of words, sentences, paragraphs….[all of which become] not a pattern of ideas, but a pattern of suggestive words, of a moving picture vitalized at each point by the most effective kind of expression. Words have more than merely intellectual meanings: they have other qualities which if properly employed, can actually be made to comment on their meaning as well as on the meaning of other words in the same general context. This is done more intensively and subtly in poetry that in prose, but it is done in some degree in good prose fiction.*" (Daiches, 1948:75)

One may reasonably say at this point that Daiches' little old "manual" for readers and critics of literature has helped us to see considerably well the mode of the creation and of the functioning of pattern as an artistic device in works of creative literature. We may now conclude with Daiches that: "*literary art, like all art, communicates significance through patterns and that the relation of what the words mean to where they are and where everything else is produces the pattern*" (Daiches, 1948:77).

It is however pertinent to add at this point that if Daiches appears to have favoured the word as the language unit with which patterns are created in the text, even as he has mentioned other units like sentences and paragraphs, our common knowledge of and experience with creative literary works have shown, as we shall also see in Ushie's poems, that language units ranging from sounds and letters, individually and in combination, through syllables and words and phrases, to sentences and larger units, all go into patterns that produce significance of various kinds.

3. The Semiostylistic Tool and Literary Art

It is the very nature of the creative literary text as an object that communicates through patterns that has called for the tool of semiostylistics for its adequate analysis and appreciation as a work of art. It is evident that *semiostylistics* is derived from *semiotics* and *stylistics*.

3.1. Semiotics and the Work of Literary Art

One definition of semiotics that we find useful for our present discussion is the one by Roman Jakobson, one of the very prominent authorities on the subject after it was separately founded in Europe and in America by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce respectively. For Jakobson,

> *"The science of signs, termed semiotics, deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs whatever, and with the character of their utilization within messages, as well as with the specifics of the various sign systems, and of the diverse messages using those different kinds of signs."* (Jakobson, 1971:698, cited by Hawkes, 2003:102)

"Sign", the very object of the science of semiotics, has received a considerable number of definitions, covering a wide spectrum in kinds, from the very simple to the very complex. For example, Swardhani (2013) has given a very simple definition of *sign* as a term in semiotics as *"anything that stands for something else"*. However, Peirce's definition would serve our present discussion better. For Peirce,

> *"A sign … [in the form of a representamen] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen."* (Peirce, 1931:58, cited in Chandler, 2007:29)

We might say then that the patterns created by the creative writer as a signifying unit or element in his work, is a *representamen*: it is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It stands to the reader of the work of creative literature (a poem, short story, novel or play) for something in respect (the context) of creative literature, and in the reader's capacity as someone who is familiar with the workings of the creative literary text. We here recall Daiches' observation earlier cited in this discussion that artists (the musician, painter, creative writer, etc.) *"create significance by patterns – create it not for themselves, but for those others who have learned how to listen to or to look at [or to read] their work"* as pieces of those specific forms of art. What a pattern, as the *representamen*, evokes or conjures up in the mind of the reader, is what Peirce calls the *interpretant*. This is the reader's interpretation of the pattern as a sign, the significance the reader gives to the pattern as a *representamen*.

The patterns in the text of a work of literary art are worked out by the creative imagination of the writer in reference to the events, experiences, objects and subject-matters in life, the society

and the physical environment, which constitute Peirce's *object*, and which have created some sort of ideas in the writer, which is Peirce's "ground of the *representamen*", i.e. the ground or inspiration for the creation of the *representamen*. The reader too, must in some way, be conscious of this *object*, appreciate the "sort of idea" it has inspired for the creation of the pattern (the *representamen*), in order to arrive at the *interpretant* to the *representamen* (the pattern). This is then the basis for the theory of creative literature as a game between the writer and the reader. It must be pointed out that Peirce's *object* – the events, experiences, objects and subject-matters in life, in the society, and in the physical environment are all in the culture which the writer and his reader must necessarily share together for the latter to appreciate and interpret the work of the former. And indeed, the literature of the science of semiotics has copiously shown that the process of *semiosis*, and semiotics, the science that studies this process, are cultural enterprises, just like literature.

3.2. Stylistics and the Work of Literary Art

The fact that creative literature or literary art is created with the medium of language logically brings in stylistics as a tool for its study, given the fact also that stylistics is "*une étude de l'expresion linguistique*" (a study of linguistic expression) (Guiraud, 1979:8), or clearer still, a study of language use. The appellation "*stylistics*" has been given to studies of many different kinds. (Thorne, 1970:185). To get a clear view of stylistics that is helpful for the present discussion, a view that does not get us back into the "*bramble*" (Osundare, 2003), we must go back to Crystal and Davy (1969:10), according to whom:

> "*The aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying, from the general mass of linguistic features … as used on every conceivable occasion, those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context; to explain, where possible, why such features have been used, as opposed to other alternatives; and to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their functions in the social context.*"

This conceptualisation of stylistics enables us to identify features of language use peculiar to specific social contexts or situations like conversation, religion, newspaper reporting, legal document, as shown in Crystal and Davy's book. These social contexts or situations also include, to cite other examples, minutes of meetings, advertisement, reports of scientific experiments, users' manuals, creative literature, to cite but a few. This kind of stylistics has ended up describing the "styles" of these social contexts or situations of language use, thereby affording the very practical definition of "style" as the language features that characterize the language use in specific situations. This is then the basis for such expressions as religious style, conversational style, scientific style, literary style, journalistic style, etc. This has given respectability to the claim that "*stylistics is the study of style*", as we find for example in Turner (1973:8), a statement which was once thought to be banal. Stylistics as we have employed in this study, then, is the systematic study of style, defined as the features that characterize language use in specific social contexts or situations. It must be clarified that these situations of language use, seen as producers or users of specific language features for particular effects, are of macro and micro types, ranging from whole professional and social communities, classes and

institutions, large and small, to individuals, producing perceptible types or forms of discourse. It must also be clarified here as Crystal and Davy (1969:10-11) have done, that:

> *"By 'features' here, we mean any bit of speech or writing which a person can single out from the general flow of language and discuss – a particular sound, word, part of a word, sequence of words, or way of uttering a word. A feature, when it is restricted in its occurrence to a limited number of [or to particular social] contexts, we shall call it a stylistically significant or stylistically distinctive feature."*

An important point to note here, that borders on the technique of stylistic study or the study of style, is that the characterizing feature(s) of the style under study must be such that "*a person can single out from the general flow of language*". In this regard, Riffaterre, an influential theorist and teacher of literary stylistics had said that "*il n'y a de style que dans ce qui est perçu*" [there is no style except in what can be perceived] (Riffaterre, 1961:334), given the fact, according to him, that "*l'objet de la stylistique n'est que de constater*" [the business of stylistics is only to point out] (Riffaterre, 1964:81, cited by Hardy, 1969:94). Fortunately, the science of linguistics has come to offer very useful tools, according to its diverse descriptive models, for the description of stylistic features of the diverse forms of situational language use or styles. One handy example is Thorne's (1970) "Generative Grammar and Stylistic Analysis" and Iwamoto's "Stylistic and Linguistic Analysis of a Literary Text Using Systemic Functional Grammar" (www.human.kanagawa-u.ca.jp/gakkai/publ/pdf/no162/17209.pdf), or nearer home, Muhammed-Badar's PhD Thesis titled "A Systemic Text Linguistic Study of Selected Nigerian Novels" (www.kubanni.abu.edu.ng/jspui/handle/123456789/1328).

For some people, stylistics has become a branch of the science of linguistics. (see Turner (1973:7) and Fowler (1966:17) for instance). Stylistics therefore enables us to identify and describe the characteristic features of styles or language use in specific situations. One of the situations of language use we have seen is creative literature, which is essentially the creative or artistic use of language. For some people, creative literature is the privileged field or domain of stylistic practice, and for others it is the only. Turner (1973:7) for instance, says that "*stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language, often, but not exclusively, with special attention to the most conscious and complex uses of language in literature*". Ufot (2006:1) says that stylistics is "*linguistic enquiry into literature*". One reason for this is that style, the object of study of stylistics, has for centuries been a major concept and concern in literary studies. Guiraud (1963:11) sees "*style*" as "*l'emploi des moyens d'expression linguistique dont dispose l'écrivain*" (the (creative) writer's use of the resources of linguistic expression at his disposal). The object of the present study, the poetry of Joe Ushie, is of course a body of creative literature. We have employed stylistics in the study of this work to the extent that it enables us to identify and describe the linguistic features with which Ushie constructs the patterns that convey the messages in his poems. As we had observed in the introductory section of this paper, the analytical tool of stylistics had been considerably used in the study of Ushie's works. We are here employing stylistics together with semiotics in what Vaquez-Ayora (1979) before many others, has named semiostylistics.

3.3. Semiostylistics and the Work of Literary Art

We have brought semiostylistics to the study of the work of literary art because, as it should be very clear by now, the latter is a work that conveys its message(s), at least in part, through "signs" created as patterns in its texts, which device invites the techniques of semiotics, the science of signs and signification, to help in the interpretation of the message(s) communicated by or through the signs. The fact that these signs are created in the text of the literary art with units of language, invites the use of stylistics, the discipline that studies language use in particular contexts and situations, to help with its techniques of the identification and description of linguistic units as they are used in the flow of language. What then happens is that stylistics helps to marshal out the configuration of the linguistic units as they come into the creation of the textual signs by the writer, while semiotics helps to bring out the messages in, or meanings of, the textual signs. It then becomes clear why Vasquez-Ayora sees semiostylistics as "*stylistics plus interpretation*". It becomes clear why semiostylistics, and no more merely stylistics nor merely semiotics, is bringing out more satisfactory studies of works of great literary art, and we think here of Molinié and Viala (1993), Stolz (1998), and Soudani (2014), to mention but these. Semiostylistics thus clearly recommends itself to the study of Ushie's poetry.

4. The semiosylistics of Ushie's Poetry: Ushie's Significant Patterns

The meaning of the word "pattern" that is relevant to this study is that of "*a regular occurrence of a specific element in space or time*". Such regular occurrence of specific language elements or units at the different levels of linguistic organisation – sound, letter and letter arrangement, word and word structure, word sequence or syntax, phrase, whole sentence, etc. – is found in abundance in Ushie's poetry. This is of course not strange as the regular occurrence of specific units of language is a characteristic feature in works of literary art. Indeed, it accounts for much in poetry, and even in good prose literature. It does so too in Ushie's poetry.

The patterned use of sounds largely produces rhyme and rhythm, which in turn create the musicality in poetry. Ushie creates harmony in his poems through the patterned use of sounds, and he does this abundantly. Let us consider a few instances of this.

> This **v**irile wizard of **v**irology, / tell us the **v**erdict of your /
> life-long **v**endetta with that / unnamed **v**irus of your world.

> If that awaited flood doe**s** come / to **s**ettle this un**s**ettling du**s**t, /
> If our **s**un **sh**all **sh**ine again / Rock**s** like you **sh**all gli**s**ten /
> defying a**x**e / defying time / **West**, not a **waste**.
> (From "To tamuno west" in *Popular Stand …*, pp. 13-14)

> If, for fear of self-exhaustion,
> **faggots** shrink from burning the
> **maggots** with **mad guts**, some day
> the **faggots** will decay and become cheap
> fodder for the **maggots**.
> *(From "Evening tales" in Lambs at the Shrine, p. 14)*

First October
Their **day** of **boom**
Our **day** of **doom**
Their **day** of **birth**
Our **day** of **death**.
(From "First October" in *HILL SONGS*, p. 16)

"Bestiality! It's in**human**!"
Familiar stones from our sling
At every **human** wrong.

My **sword** of **words** unsheathed, I ask:
…………………………………………
When have dog's teeth of **sword**
Left dead one of its kind?

When have the **tiger's** claw**s**
Sunk a clan of **tigers**?

When has the lion gathered into barns
While its kind starve?
………………………………
When have the **gods** of the beasts
Butchered the faithful of other **gods**?
When next in a **hewman** rage,
Fling at the **f**iend this s**ling** of **words**:
"**Hewmanity**! It's unbestial! It's **human**!"
(From "Homo sappers" in *A Reign of Locusts*, pp. 26-27)

For ease of observation, the language elements with which the poet has worked out patterns to create effect in the respective poems are written in bold characters in the above extracts. The harmony created with this patterned use of sounds even make some of these lines easily memorisable, as are the lines of very harmonious songs. It is particularly the case with lines like the second extract above taken from "Evening tales" in *Lambs at the Shrine*, and which even sound epigrammatic. But from the semiotic perspective, this linguistic craftwork does even more.

In the first extract above for example, Ushie may not have gone to the extent of Rimbaud, the prince of the nineteenth century French symbolist poetry, who, in some synaesthesia, saw some correspondence between vowel and consonant sounds on the one hand, and colours on the other, and between these and certain moods and emotions. (cf. the poems "Alchimie du verbe" and "Voyelles" by Arthur Rimbaud). But the alliterative repetition of the voiced labio-dental fricative consonant sound [v] certainly conveys a feeling of strength or virility in the voice of the persona in the poem as he articulates the imperative "tell us the verdict of your / life-long

vendetta …": the voiced consonants are clearly more forceful in their articulation than the voiceless ones. This feeling is all the more amplified in the context of the words "virile", "verdict", and "vendetta" all of which have a ring or aura of power or force by their semantic value. We see at work here, Daiches' very insightful observation on how units of language work to produce meaning in a work of literary art: they are carefully chosen and placed in the text of the work in a manner that where they are and where everything else is, suggests and continually sharpens the meaning or message (Daiches, 1948:77).

The echo in the vocalic sequence "faggots … maggots … mad guts … faggots …maggots" in "Evening Tales" serve to foreground or amplify the picture being painted of "faggots" that fear to burn (or prey at) "maggots", only to decay and become themselves prey for the maggots. This is a case where the sound pattern helps to amplify the meaning created by the pattern built from the semantic value of the words. Likewise, in the poem "First October" in *Hill Songs* (p. 16), the dichotomy between the affluence (the boom) of the privileged and the deprivation and misery (the doom) of the underprivileged, worked out with the antonymic pattern of the words "their" and "our", "boom" and "doom", and "birth" and "death" in the following lines,

their day of boom
our day of doom
their day of birth
our day of death

is amplified by the patterning of the same sounds in the above-cited words both on the horizontal and the vertical axes. The rhyme and rhythm thus created make the lines easily memorisable just as the contrasting semantic values of the words make the image thus created very vivid. In the poem with the suggestive title of "Homo sappers", the neologism "hewman", is coined from the verb "hew" and the noun "man" to convey the idea of the destruction of human lives. But the coinages "hewman" and "hewmanity" and the words "human" and "humanity" play with the sounds sequence [hju:]. This serves to attract attention to them, thus foregrounding and amplifying the poet's message that while we humans are quick to describe every little wrong done to one another as bestiality, even dogs, tigers and lions in all their bestiality do not do to one another anything near the "hewmanity" we humans carry out on one another in our "hewman rage".

Crystal and Davy (1969:15-20, 83-91) had shown that just as language elements at the phonetic and phonological level are used for stylistic effect, they are also used at what they (Crystal and Davy) call the graphetic and graphological level, i.e. at the level of graphic symbols marked on a surface, and known as letters in the case of English and other similar languages. Ushie abundantly uses patterning at the graphological level to convey or amplify meaning in the text of his poems. The first time we see this practice in Ushie's poetics is in the poem "Song of the bedbug" in his first collection *Popular Stand and other poems*. Here, the meaning of the verb "violate" as "to do violence to" is foregrounded as Ushie does violence to the usual way of writing and writes the word "Violated" as shown below:

Vi   ted
    Ola

In the poem "Metamorphosis" in Ushie's second collection *Lambs at the Shrine* (pp. 21 – 22), we read the following lines at the end of the poem:

…………………………………

    the decrowned clown
        drowning,
          sinking
    steadily down

The visual effect of this vertical arrangement of the words re-enforce the ideas of drowning and of sinking. This is similar to what we read in the first lines of "Balloon" in Ushie's fourth collection, *Hill Songs* (p. 72 – 73), where the arrangement of the letters evokes the picture of an object dropping down:

Tang!
The news d
        r
        o
        p
        p
        e
        d
Like a metallic tear of rain
In the heart of the dry season
I am one cousin less!"

This technique is also found in one of the four poems contributed by Ushie to a collection he edited under the title *Tsunami Blues and other poems*, in which we read the following lines in the poem "Our (de)vices":

Our one neck
    h
    a
    .
    .
    .
    ngs
    from
    two
    nooses

.

.

.

In "Fall of the iroko", in *Lambs at the Shrine* (pp. 50 – 53), we read the following lines:

O death, you have trimmed us low,
low like this earth into which the low
and the high are l
           o
           w
           e
           r
           e
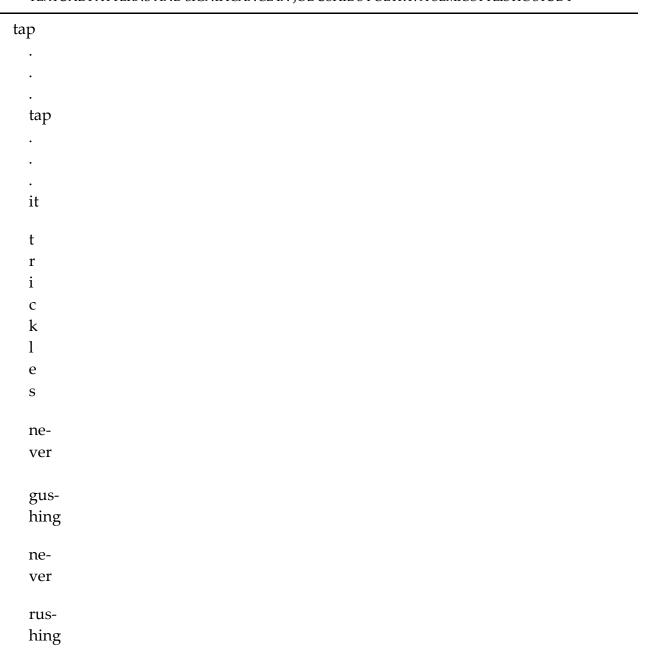   d
           .
           .
           .

In the above extract, Ushie patterns the letters in the word "lowered" in a way that visually captures the act of lowering. Also, the image of the act of lowering is no doubt reinforced by the recurrence of the word "low". It should be pointed out that Ushie seems to be in love with this technique each time he has to use the action verb "to lower": the words "lowered" and "lowering" in the poem "From hill to valley" in *Hill Songs* (pp. 33 – 35), and the word "lowered" in the poem "Amauche Amangbo" in *A Reign of Locusts* (pp. 83 – 84) are written in this same manner, and with the same effect.

The most exciting uses of this technique of graphological re-patterning of words in the text of Ushie's poems to create or amplify the message of these poems are found in the poem "Onion kernel" in *Lambs at the Shrine* (p. 46) and in the poem "Hillside rill" in *Hill Songs* (pp. 57 – 58). "Onion kernel" is set as follows:

                  End-
      lessly   we   peel   this
       onion   for   its   golden
     kernel   which
      glitters   like
       eldorado   in the
        vacuous   centre
         of the onion.

Here we see the attempt to shape the text of the poem to evoke both the shape and the "vacuous centre" of the onion. In the case of "Hillside rill", there is an attempt to evoke, through a re-ordering of the graphology, the trickling of water in the rill:

tap

.

.

.

tap

.

.

.

it

t
r
i
c
k
l
e
s

ne-
ver

gus-
hing

ne-
ver

rus-
hing

One may perhaps cite these three other cases, all in *Hill Songs*, before leaving off with graphological re-patterning. In "Mother's back" (p. 52), the following lines end the piece:

Her bent back
like Atlas'
     is
     the
     pi-
     ll
     ar
     of
     the
   e a r t h

Here one can see the attempt to build a pillar with letters in the text of the poem. In "Balloon (for Peter Akinsheye Ayade)", (p. 72 – 73), w read the following:

Akinsheye, son of my Aunt,
Dawn to dusk
You pedalled
            d   the Abeb hill
            e
             s
             c
              e   g
              n   n
              d   i
               i   d
               n   n
                g   e
                a   c
                 n   s
                  d a

In each of the cases seen above, the poet uses elements of language, in this case the letter, to create patterns that function as signs to create or amplify meaning and help in building and conveying the totality of the message of the poem as a work of art.

It is pertinent at this point to remark that this particular feature of Ushie's poetry by which the poet builds significant graphological patterns in the text of his poems, calls to mind a poetic tradition or genre that has been referred to as "**pattern poetry**; also called **figure poem**, **shaped verse** or **carmen figuratum**. These refer to verse in which the typography or lines are arranged in an unusual configuration, usually to convey or extend the emotional content of the word". https://www.britannica.com/art/pattern-poetry). The above-cited examples of Ushie's lines clearly show that this is what Ushie does. The authors of the above definition of pattern poetry, the Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, have told us that pattern poetry, which is of ancient (probably Eastern) origin, and is found in the Greek *Anthology*, which includes work composed between the 7th century BC and the early 11th century AD, has other notable later practitioners in the 16th-century English Metaphysical poet, George Herbert (with the wing-shaped "Easter Wings"), in the 19th-century French Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, who employed different type sizes in his "Un coup de dès n'abolira jamais le hasard" (1897), in the early 20th-century French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, with his very famous *Calligrammes …*(1918), one of which poems had the shape of the Eifel Tower in Paris, and in the American poet, Edward Cummings. (https://www.britannica.com/art/patern-poetry). It is very probable that Ushie, a gifted poet by all standards, but also a serious student of poetry and of the analytical tool of stylistics, may not be unaware of the works and styles of these distant confreres of his, and may have admired and cultivated them to his very great advantage. Whatever the case, one thing is clear: Ushie's use of this technique tends to put his poetry in a class of its own in the mass of modern Nigerian poetry.

To our knowledge, though very limited, only one poem on page 36 of Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* (1990), presents something close to pattern poetry which Ushie has had the merit of employing on a considerable scale. This untitled poem begins with the following lines:

The
Criss and cross
Rails

in a crisis of sleep
ing

steel!

We find the first two lines of the poem graphically attempting to produce the criss-cross.

The technique of pattern poetry seems to have gone beyond a technique of signification in Ushie's poetry to become indeed a defining feature of his poetry in the mass of present-day Nigerian poetry in English.

Ushie constructs significant patterns in the text of his poems in one other major way that must be mentioned here. In this case, pattern is worked out on the basis of antonymic relationship between words. We had earlier touched on this feature in this study as we examined significant patterns worked out with sounds, using the poem "First October" (*Hill Songs*, p. 16) as an instance. "Popular stand", the poem that lends its title to the collection *Popular Stand and other Poems*, presents another of the very many cases of such patterns in Ushie's poetry. Since the poem is a short piece, it is reproduced below with the relevant words highlighted in bold type for the point to be better appreciated.

This suffocating popular stand
Breeds oven-hot creeds:
If we harness those **faint voices** into a **shout**
If we join those **faint fists** into a **punch**
If we collect these **tear trickles** into a **pool**

Our cry the gods will echo
Our echoes will shake that hill
Our might will crush that clown
Our bid will daze the leopard
Our flood will cleanse the land

Our fate lies **here**, in our faith
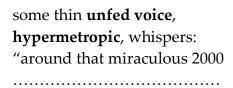**Here** at this oven-hot popular stand, not

THERE.

The society in which we live, together with the poet of course, is in two camps – that of the privileged and that of the under-privileged. The latter camp is much more populous, and recalling the stadium scenario, constitutes the poet's "popular stand". Lacking in any of the facilities that make life comfortable, and being over-crowded, this stand is "oven-hot". Hunger and other forms of deprivation can only produce "faint voices", "faint fists" and "trickles of tears". However, galvanised by the "oven-hot creeds" produced by the deprivation that has put the masses in the "oven-hot popular stand", these "faint voices", can produce "a cry", "a shout" which the gods will echo to give it enough force to shake the privileged self-interests that have entrenched themselves like a "hill". The "faint fists" can produce "a punch" that will have enough force ("might") to "crush" those whose undeserved privileges have turned into "clowns", and to "daze the leopards" preying on the masses. The "flood" from the common "pool" of the trickle of tears from the masses will "cleanse the land". But this message which is easily conveyed to and grasped by the reader through the first order or everyday meanings of the words pointed out here, is symbolically underscored and more significantly amplified by the pattern produced by the strategic placement of the antonymic words and expressions in the text: "faint voices" vs "shout", "faint fists" vs "punch", "trickles" vs "pool", "pool" vs "flood", and very glaringly "here/Here" vs "There". The opposition is vivid and palpable. This is how words, placed in a pattern in the text of the literary art, are made, as Daiches observed, to comment on one another, continuously expanding the significance or meaningfulness of the work of literary art.

Instances of building significant patterns with antonymic words and expressions abound in Ushie's poetry, but only a few more examples will be cited here. In the poem "By the year 2000" in *Popular Stand …* (pp. 9 – 11), the words we have highlighted in bold type in the following lines in the middle of the poem,
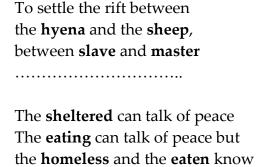
some **over-fed voice**,
blessed with **myopia**, forecasts:
…………………………………
By the year 2000
…………………………………

form a significant pattern with the words we have equally highlighted in bold type in the following lines towards the end of that poem:

some thin **unfed voice**,
hypermetropic, whispers:
"around that miraculous 2000
…………………………………

In the context of the poem, a dichotomous pattern built with the antonymic relationship between these words clearly sets and reinforces before us the image of our opulent political leaders with their exaggerated promises and developmental policy statements vis-à-vis the

judicious warnings of the deprived intimidated citizens who can only "whisper" such warnings or risk the wrath of these political leaders.

In "Peace talk" (*Eclipse in Rwanda*, p. 25), this type of pattern is built with the words we have highlighted in bold type in the following lines:

> To settle the rift between
> the **hyena** and the **sheep**,
> between **slave** and **master**
> …………………………..
>
> The **sheltered** can talk of peace
> The **eating** can talk of peace but
> the **homeless** and the **eaten** know
> of no peace
> …………………………………

The words "hyena" and "sheep" may not really be antonyms; nonetheless, they and the other highlighted words give the same image and thereby the same message that the poet wants to give about the parties involved in the peace talk: hyena / sheep, master / slave, sheltered / homeless, eating / eaten.

A number of times in his poetry collections, Ushie has employed this technique of using contrasting words and expressions to build whole contrasting pictures which such poems turn out to be, with the resultant contrasting pictures conveying specific messages that would take an essay of several pages to develop. Such is the case with the poem "Lady X" in *Eclipse in Rwanda* (pp. 34 – 35), which paints the contrasting picture of a working or career woman's day as she leaves home in the morning full of vigour and radiantly made-up, and as she returns in the evening exhausted and dishevelled. The contrast evoked by the words "morning" and "evening" are developed in the picture painted in each of the two sections of the poem which have these words as their respective titles.

5. Conclusion

This study has attempted to highlight Ushie's use of patterns built in the text of his poems to convey or enhance the conveyance of his messages. Such patterns have been highlighted at the phonetic/phonology, graphetic/graphological, and the semantic levels of linguistic units. The above types of significant patterns are not all that can be found in Joe Ushie's poetry. For instance, patterns formed by words and expressions that recur as *motifs* or *leitmotivs* in a number of poems in a given collection, and in poems from one collection to another, in Ushie's poetry, deserve and indeed call for a study. What the present study hopes to have achieved, is to have summoned evidence to show, through a semiostylistic analysis of a few poems that can be carried in a journal article, that the conscious use of language units (sounds, letters, words) to build in the text of his poems patterns that compel the interpretive sense of the reader, and thus enhance the conveyance of the poet's message, is a technique that has given a peculiar stamp to Ushie's

poetry, and has placed him in a class of his own as Nigeria's pioneer par excellence in **pattern poetry** or **shaped verse**. In world poetry however, this has in turn put Ushie in the class of the George Herberts, the Stéphane Mallarmés and the Guillaume Apollinaires of Europe, and of the Cummings of America. Above all, this technique of Ushie's poetry has underscored the veracity of David Daiches' very apt observation that "*the artist must include the craftman, for unless he is complete master of his craft, he cannot see his vision in terms of his medium*" (Daiches, 1948: 87). Ushie, as an artist working in the medium of language, is a "*complete master of his craft, able to give expression to his vision, his message, by using his medium in a particular and peculiar way – creating patterns in the text of his poems that express his message(s).*"

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