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Music Semiotics in Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare's Poetry: a Piercean Interpretation

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Abstract

A critical semiotic exploration of patterns of semiosis in Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide's poetry would reveal the representation of music as a core ingredient of signification; one that underlies the aesthetic and ideological foundations of their works. Specifically, the paper appraises the engagement of music as an instrument of art in selected poems of Osundare and Ojaide, with focus on how semiotic connotations constitute a complex framework of significations and project diverse implications of creativity, thoughts and ideas.

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Essentially, the paper, in line with the Peircean triadic principles, analyses the semiotisation of music in the poets' works and reveals how music semiosis functions as a signature device of the poets' art; and how through it they philosophise and engage meaning. The analysis also points out how musical elements, features, attributes, influences, and even connotations activate poetic profundity in the works. From the perspective of general semiosis - representation and ideation- music tends to act as a preeminent device for cultivating message and essence. In other words, music, in addition to being a core component of semiosis, significantly enunciates distinction in style.

Keywords: Music; Peirce; Semiotics; Tanure Ojaide; Niyi Osundare

1. Introduction

This paper investigates how, as a semiotic system, music functions within the signification frameworks of the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide to create ornate and distinctly imaginative communicative construct. The idea is to examine an aspect of the metaphor of creativity that is based on how these poets engage elements of music to establish distinction in their poetic art. In other words, the task here is to critically ascertain the significant processes in which the discourse and artistic deployment of music constitutes a strategic instrument of semiosis and creativity; how it structurally and communicatively confers on the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare profound imaginative and expressive qualities. The primary interest of the paper is to establish the ways in which music - as

artefacts and metaphor – constitutes an expedient meaning-making and signification device as well as a means of espousing the aesthetic nuances of the poetic art of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare.

Music - its diverse signification, distinct representations and creative appropriations - captures an overriding aspect of human intellectual and philosophical pontificating, positioning it at the nexus of imagination and art. The representations of music in human consciousness, thought and creativity have taken multiple dimensions and realisations, which have assigned music distinct meanings, codifications and implications resulting in varied interpretations, applications and contexts. In a lot of ways, it has represented a source of joy and happiness, and soothed human weaknesses and failings especially in times of intense sorrow, tragedy and pain. As art and artefact, music has always been attributed with giving intensity to human feelings of grandeur and profundity.

From the artistic perspective and as a means of encoding meaning and aesthetic essence, music has lent wings to expressivity and yielded varied articulation of form. Literarily music has been used as metaphor for actualising the beauty of thought, giving impetus to imagination as well as reinforcing message and meaning. Through the centrality of depiction and emphasis, elements of musicality have been integral symbols providing core dynamic of form - phonic, lexical, semiotic and

discursive - of expressive and aesthetic distinction, and occasioned inestimable realisations of artistry and poesy.

2. Music Semiosis

The notion of music semiosis entails the consideration of music as a device of signification within the broad spectrum of interpretations of semiological systems. It also involves the recognition and acknowledgement of the idea of music as possessing the capacity to function as a medium of representation and framework for the engaging of methods of signification. Music semiosis in this sense is categorised as a significant aspect of general semiotics given its tendency to generate or elicit different forms of signification and as a complex meaning-making potentialities and capabilities. It institutes mechanisms for the interpretation of signs and signification systems as they pertain to the meaning-making possibilities of music, musical elements and features as evident in the verbal and linguistic features, the lyrical and phonic forms, rhythm and instrumentation devices, and symbolic media. Within its broad range of semiotic possibilities and enormously virility in meaning-making possibilities, music semiosis provides both a conceptual and interpretative framework for conceptualising music itself and music as a discourse metaphor.

Music semiosis designates the engagement of music, its forms, elements and implicatures as mechanisms of discourse signification and expressivity. It is the notion of music as form of codifying and conveying the shades of thoughts, feelings as well as expounding ideas and poetic splendour; a set of ideational conventions that signifies and articulates phenomena and arty tincture. In the works of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide, musical concepts, messages, items and pieces serve as influential ingredients of exposition, expression and interpretation; as mechanisms and devices for giving vent to inspiration in poetry. Thus, the semiotisation of music in the poetic works of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide is achieved through diverse representations and generate multiple entailments. In some instances the representations are conveyed in the form of physical and concrete entities, abstractions, organic symbolisms, ideational modes and notions - metaphorical, phonic, orthographic, and graphetic- woven into the discourse structure of their poetry. Sometimes, the nature and dimensions of music semiosis form intrinsic features of the internal fabric and architecture of the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare. Aspects of music semiosis in this sense include musical instruments and infrastructure which may entail the representations of music through drumming – in the form of sounds and material elements, in their denotations and implications; which are acknowledged as points and sources of

reference of musicality as well as being facets of attributes. Thus, at one point, music semiosis is constructed in the form of songs, sounds, instrumentation, dancing, etc. and implies distinct significations of meaning embedded in the various forms, elements and representations of music and its creative import.

3. Literary Semiosis

Literary semiosis in the sense in which it is used here denotes the imaginative techniques and expressive patterns, processes and mechanisms of articulating ideas, generating meaning and encoding message deployed in literary works. In relation to the poetic art of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare, through coordinated, allusive and suggestive linguistic and communication apparatuses, conventions and complex modes of symbolisms as signification models for expressing artistic imagination. It involves the systematic application and utilisation of the principles available in the process of encoding the imaginative force of literary creations and the untangling of its semiotic foundations and underlying semantic forms and entailments. In a way, literary semiosis entails framing and instituting the interpretative framework and platforms for disambiguating the patterns of integrating musical features and attributes into the representational mechanisms of the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare. So, in this paper, the idea of

literary semiosis is the artistic untangling and engaging of musical representations into the system of imagination and semiosis, and how this is operationalized in the poetic art of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare

4. Peircean Semiotics

Charles Sanders Peirce, an outstanding American Pragmatist Philosopher and architect of modern semiotics, enunciates the triadic notion of the sign which has come to be regarded as one of the most engaging and surviving philosophical postulations on the sign and principle of semiotics. He projects the sign as

... anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby immediately determined by the former. (Smith, 2000: 4)

In this paper, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics serves as the interpretative framework. Its underlying principle is based essentially on the conceptual principle of duality - a two-way classification of the sign, namely: sign-action ("*semiosis*") and sign-object ("*representamen*"). Thus, we conceptualise semiosis as the action of the sign - the sign in action or in process-that is, the sign as a means of signifying or signifying mechanism;

while *representamen* describes an “object serving to represent something to the mind” – the sign as an instrument of representation or a representing device (Deledalle, 2000: 37). This in essence implies that the Peircean notion of *semiosis* and *representamen*, either as action or object, generates the triadic analytical framework of the sign, the triadonomy – the iconic, indexical or symbolic interpretation of the sign - as platforms of signification and representation. By implication, this account of meaning designates ways and methods of communicating, signalling, and referring.

Smith further observes that the Peircean semiotic provides a universal clarification of the sign phenomenon; one that describes the entire triadic paradigm in terms of the constituents of signification. In an existing form, *representamen* is brought to a given situation while the interpretant is a sign that in its elaborate form is directly acquainted with the object (Smith, 2000: 4). It is a construct consisting of three inter-related parts: a sign, an object, and an interpretant: the sign - word, utterance, colour image, etc. - constitutes the signifier (that which signifies); the object - the item or thing to which the object is associated or attached refers to that which is signified; and, the interpretant - the understanding of the sign/object relation - is the interpretation that the sign generates or the meaning that is given to the sign. Thus, the Peircean notion of the sign is categorised in terms of “whether their sign-vehicles

function in virtue of qualities, existential facts, or conventions and laws ...” and similarly according to how their object functioned in signification. If the process of signification projects the sign as reflecting qualitative features of the object, the sign in this sense is an *icon*; and, if the sign utilises some existential or physical connection between it and its object, such as a sign known as an *index*; and finally, if successful signification of the object requires that the sign utilise some convention, habit, or social rule or law that connects it with its object, then the sign is a *symbol*. The process is conceptualised as a three-level structure of meaning and representation. This framework is structured on the conceptual principle of “...signification, representation, reference and meaning; ... the medium for inquiry and the process of scientific discovery, and even as one possible means for 'proving' ...” (*Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, www.plato.stanford.edu).

Our concern in this paper is principally concerned with exploring the deployment of music as agencies of semiosis in the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide; taking into consideration the ways in which musical features are deployed to serve, construct and expound a system of meaning within the form of the poems and how these are made evident at the expressive, material and metaphorical levels of signification.

5. Music and Poetic Semiotisation

Music features represent dominant instruments of semiosis in the aesthetic and communicative structure of Osundare and

Ojaide's art. The poets artfully deploy through various forms, features and patterns of engaging the music semiosis as art, the poets have developed distinct significations and representations, and ultimately set up elaborated schemes of rhetorical excellence with grandiose stylistic implications. On the basis of this, the two poets have evolved a form of poetics with such stylistic traditions that have institutes diverse patterns and structures of semiotisation of music. With this system of semiosis generally permeating Osundare and Ojaide's poetics, there seems to emerge clear-cut communicative aesthetic and idiosyncratic ideational and expressive significations. Taking into consideration the manner of its engagement and the representations of its various elements, the semiosis of music is used by the poets to project profound stylistic and aesthetic essence. In semiotic terms music explicates not just unique artistic significations on the expressive texture and ideological essence of the poets' works, the applications of the music semiosis convey multiple implications and depictions at the phonic, artistic, structural and ontological spheres too. These semiotic attributes are well-realised in Ojaide's *The Endless Song* which expounds its ideational and formal pursuits and interests through the semiotic platform of songs and music-like constructions and renditions. "The Wanderers Song", for instance, applies this technique as its primary semiotic mechanism.

Now the drum strikes a birdsong,
now I sing under the tamarind, looking out.
These days aspirations crash on the wide road,
but as I gaze through transparent days and nights
I see a walking pace caravan

(The Endless Song, p. 32)

The manner of organisation of the various signification forms of the music as a means of semiosis in the poetry of Osundare and Ojaide conjure wide-ranging entailments and implications and create potent artistic effects of the works. In the excerpt above, for example, the semiotisation of music is expounded through such agents as “the drum” which is encoded and represented as a personified entity that activates (“strikes”); an encoding metaphorical process constructed around the concepts of song (“birdsong”) and singing (“now I sing under a tamarind”); and further processed in the counter projections of contrasting images and motions from the intensely racy dynamism of the drum striking a birdsong to aspirations crashing on the wide road and twisted to the slow, tempered rhythm of “a walking pace caravan”. In terms of time, the representation progresses from the immediate present signified as “Now” and moves on to a loose notion of contemporary time (“These days”) and finally to a hazy, unspecified time - “transparent days and nights”.

These varied and divergent projections of music semiosis exemplify an aspect of the complex semiotising structure and framework of the poetry of Ojaide.

6. Indexical Semiosis of Music

Music involves employing musical elements and agents as pungent creative devices for configuring indexical significations in many of Osundare's poems. The poem, "I Wake Up This Morning" demonstrates an aspect of the indexical acuity of the semiosis of music through the use of such imagery as "harping breeze", "feet drumming the road", and "rousing body" are suggestive of a chequered journey employs pervasive musical representations and symbolisms to evoke an atmosphere of musicality.

I wake up this morning
with a song in my throat
a youthful breeze harps the leaves
rising feet drum the road
to meet the upland sun
my sole treads the dew
rousing my body
to the virgin cool of earth

(Village Voices, p. 1)

The refrain and chant-like poetic rendition pattern used here signifies one of the dimensions of the indexical semiosis of music in the art of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide's poetry. The instrumentality of this is illustrated in the application of musical elements to evoke splendour and create an atmosphere of conviviality. The interaction and feeling of participation it engenders invokes the mood of folk musical renditions. The following excerpt from "XXIII" conveys the artistic and expressive magnitude of the device.

The moon, this night, is a rugged master
Tere gungun maja gungun tere

With withering smiles and snarls of crimson
echoes
Tere gungun maja gungun tere

His forehead is a universe of scorpions
Tere gungun maja gungun tere

He struts the clouds with a retinue of whips
Tere gungun maja gungun tere

His path a winding saga of bristling stones
Tere gungun maja gungun tere
(*Moon songs*, p. 44)

Tanure Ojaide's "The Northern Star" through the idiom of refrains and chant rendition recreates the sonorous tone and blissful tenor of a eulogy thus serving as indexical imitations of the poems projected theme and mood as the following lines dramatically demonstrates.

Not for Maitatsine zealots

-- who cannot capture headlines with
blood?

Not for the legendary crossroads

--who stops over to Yola or Jos
nowadays?

Not for the pyramids that stretched the eye's
reach

--who is not a victim of the slump?

Not for the once shinning spear-wielding emir

--who cares for titles that need to be in the
archives?

(The Fate of Vultures, p. 46)

7. Iconic Semiosis of Music

The iconic configuration of music equally serves as a pragmatic device for the enunciation of ideas, thoughts and messages. That is, music as an iconic device comprises several images derived from music or that are musically inclined which function as

signifying avenues for encoding meaning and espousing them. For instance, in Osundare's "A Dialogue of Drums", musical imagery serves as a dominant evocative and artistic device.

Hear this, and listen well:
I hail from a line of drummers
And understand perfectly
The language of the leather:
Bata which speaks with two elegant mouths
Omele which carries a high-pitched face
...
And **Gangan** which wasped its waist
From the embrace of prodding arms.
(Village Voice, p.6)

The musical objects used in the poem that also make reference to themselves on one hand, and also serve as icons that signal other semiotic propositions and implications. That is, musical surrogates and related instruments act as mechanisms for communicating the expressive and aesthetic suppositions.

The semiotic configuration of the works of Osundare and Ojaide also rests on the creative modification and casting of poetry into musical structures and framework. This implies the adaptation and reconfiguration of musical attributes and trends into poetic renditions and patterns. Thus, through the creative

applications of musical features, the theme, mood and tempo of the poems are established and regulated. This feature is clearly expressed in Osundare's "Harvest call" as the following excerpt illustrates:

Harvest call
(To be chanted to lively **bata** music)

This is Iyanfoworogi
Where, garnished in green
Pounded yam rested its feted arms
On the back of stooping stakes.

...

(Music lowers in tempo, becoming solemn)

Where are they?
Where are they gone:
Aroso, geregede, otiili, pakala
Which beckoned lustily to the reaping basket
(*The Eye of the Earth*, p. 18 –20)

In the example above, the poem commences with a chant and lively drumming which sets the tempo of the poem on a high crescendo at its commencement, but progressively tempers

down in intensity as the poem gets to its end. The ascending and descending crescendo of the poem harmonises with the hilarious mood with which the poem commences and its subsequent transformation towards a note of solemnity at the end.

This device is not too elaborate in Ojaide's poetry, though there is a sprinkling evidence of its application in few of his poems where the method of rendition is quite subtle. For example, the poem "When the Plague Struck" reveals some features of Ojaide's realisation of the signification pattern in his works as the excerpt below shows.

There are always spices
For a good palate.
And so they sang upland:
Shoot down the sparrow
Which dims your light,
Shoot down the sparrow
With steel arrows
To save tomorrow
From a sun-eclipse

(The Fate of Vultures, p. 82)

As a systematic and pragmatic creative signification, the iconic representation of music functions as a medium for projecting graphic simulation and imitative reconstruction artistic

imagination and inclinations. Particularly, this is evident in the use of images and symbols deriving from the iconic recreation of the atmosphere of musicality as a lucid reflective construct serve as an avenue for explicating ingenious poetic semiosis and creativity. For instance the second stanza of Ojaide's "What Poets' Do Our Leaders Read?" engages musical symbolism and imagery as its major signification construct for expounding its meanings, suppositions and implicatures. The following excerpt of the stanza illustrates the point.

Do not mince my heart-sprung words
do not mint lores of salvation
from the blood smacked and
bone-decked thrones,
do not drown the howls of patients
with samba of guests

(The Fate of Vultures, p. 6)

The items, "heart-strung words", "mint lores", and "samba of guests", for instance, convey ideas, feelings, impressions and notions of musical renditions and forms upon which the sonorous and mellifluous ambience of the poem is embodied.

Later on in the fourth stanza of the poem, the efficacy of the music symbolism and its artistic essence are profusely evoked. The following extract illustrates:

When they hear a rib-relaxing sigh,
a grief-dispelling chant,
they kick the air, demon-possessed
and need blood to still their spasms
You can hear infallible words
from foaming mouths...

(The Fate of Vultures, p. 6)

Through the use of musical images, like “grief-dispelling chants”, the poem graphically communicates the hypocrisy and the aberration of military dictatorship which is characteristic of African leadership as steeped in deceit and sycophancy. The artistic and communicative essence of the iconic projection of music as a potency instrument of semiosis in these examples is dramatized in the progressive intensity of its representation. For instance, the musical imagery which commences with “heart-sprung words” progresses to “lores of salvation”, further transforms into “howls” and gets subsequently submerged in the sounds of “samba”.

8. Symbolic Semiosis of Music

The idea of music as device for constructing symbolisms is one of the peculiar significant semiotic attributes that delineate Osundare and Ojaide’s poetic art and communicative pattern. It is the symbolic reconstruction of the music form that generally

constitutes as a key performative and artistic force that ignites and keeps the poets' creative impulse and expressive dynamism charged up. The effusive potentials and motley signification amplitude of music as a symbolic and expressive construct projects and sustains the writers' literary imagination and poetic artistry, thus providing the platform for the explication of idealistic creative form and cast. The symbolic projection of music in their poetry is largely signified through images and metaphors that reconstruct the poets' creative instincts and serve as an avenue for substantiating them into poetic ideas. In semiotic terms the significance of this form of music symbolism resides mainly in the cultural derivation and implications of meaning and connotations the poems express. And the pragmatic elicitation of signals in such poems powers their semiotic projection including their cultural signification, which are conceptualised particularly within the discourse framework of L2 English.

The music symbolism sharpens the expressive and aesthetic capabilities of the poets and enlivens their evocative powers and creative rendition of their works. Moreover, the communicative scope of the English Language is invested with the drama, warmth and lustre of musical performance, thus assigning it more candour and texture. The following example dramatizes this point.

The river has a song
The river has a song
Deep-timbered tenor of whispering forest,
The traffic suckles its roots,
Its udder springs a lake of honeyed wine.
Bring the keg, bring the gourd
Bring healthy throats so smooth
With the traffic of flowing songs
The pigeon is white, so the wine,
And so this clay from the quarry
Of supple memories
The wine is white
And black, black runs the earth
At the palm's tenacious root
The river has a song

(Midlife, p. 18)

Through the medium of musical imagery and symbols, this poem recreates the serenity and gracefulness of the river and relates it to tempo and of grandeur of cool and calm musical rendition. Furthermore, musical symbols are used to personify the river and the rock in the poem as the lines below illustrate.

Master of the flame
Murmuring tunnels which wash dawn's face

with a bowl of clouds.
The sky is your depth,
Every boulder bears a womb
of a scarlet flowers.

(Midlife, p. 18)

The personification of these elements expressed through the symbolic projection of music and song like rendition serve as a device used in attributing mythical qualities to the objects.

9. Conclusion

The paper has examined some of the ways in which music and elements of musicality have functioned and served as devices of semiosis and how the manner of their engagement assign a measure of distinctiveness to the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide. The analysis explored how, based on ingenious deployment of complex semiotic constructs and mechanisms, the poets enact and institute a system of representation that integrates the bilingual and bicultural signification patterns. In this study, the works of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide have been analysed as representative works whose signification patterns are paradigmatic of L2 English poetry and underscore the aesthetic foundation of many non-native English literary writings. The semiotic order of their poetry has been examined based on the Peircean triadic principles of signification, which

looks at the sign as an icon, index and symbol. This analysis identifies three dominant semiotic frames that underpin the creative aesthetics of the poetry of Ojaide and Osundare - blood, music and nature.

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