
Language and Style in Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Marsh Boy and Other Poems*

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Abstract

*This work is a stylistic study of Ogbowei in Marsh Boy and Other Poems which is a collection of poems that vent a liberation ideology. Stylistics studies the style of language used by individual speakers and writers. It is a linguistic tool for the analysis and interpretation of meaning and manner of language use. There are two primary dimensions of stylistics namely linguistic stylistics and literary stylistics. Whereas the former focuses on the form of language, the later focuses on literary or rhetorical devices used by writers to achieve aesthetic purposes. A third relatively new dimension of stylistics is discourse stylistics which analyses language use and describes textual organisation. The aim of this study is to identify and analyse Ogbowei's linguistic and literary style. The data is the collection of poems entitled Marsh boy and other poems. The study reveals the author's productive use of various syntactic configurations such as parataxis, hypotaxis, foregrounding and parallelism as well as aesthetic devices such as imagery and symbolism conveyed in metaphors, similes, personification. The diction in **marsh boy** largely reflects the theme and locale of the poems which converge on the exploitation of the oil and gas resources of the marshlands of the Niger Delta peoples, the neglect of the peoples of the region, and the attendant rise of protest in form of youth militancy.*

Keywords: Language, stylistics, poetry, marsh boy, youth militancy, Ogbowei.

1.0 Introduction

Literature or creative writing emanating from the Niger Delta reflects the environmental, economic and socio-political issues of this geographical region of Nigeria. Situated in a predominantly swampy terrain, physical infrastructural development is confronted with difficult environmental challenges. But the region is blessed with large deposits of oil and gas and is host to numerous transnational oil companies. In spite of the large volume of petroleum revenue in oil and gas derived from the region by Transnational Oil Companies and the Nigerian Federal Government, the area remains largely undeveloped as there is a glaring absence of federal developmental projects. There is palpable poverty: the general dialectics of the Niger Delta (as could be deduced from Tamuno (2011) are economic exploitation, political exclusion or marginalisation, environmental pollution and degradation through uncontrolled oil spills and gas flares.

This state of affairs which Ayoola (2008:140) also reaffirms as “ecological degradation, injustice, insecurity ... and marginalization” has been the motivation for series of protests from the inhabitants of the region in form of political agitations and ethnic nationalism, environmental activism and youth militancy. Ayoola (ibid) further identifies some of the agitations captured in some important documents as “the Ogoni Bill of Rights of 26 August, 1990, Resolution of the First Urhobo Economic Summit of 28 November, 1998,

the Kaiama Declaration of 31 December, 1998, the Oron Bill of Rights of 25 June, 1999, the Warri Accord of 27 June, 1999, the Ikwerre Rescue Charter of 4 September, 1999, ...” The sore points of these agitation were the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and seven other Ogonis (popularly dubbed the Ogoni eight) for their environmental activism, and the militant revolt of the ‘Egbesu boys’ of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and later Avengers whose activities crippled oil and gas operations and diminished the revenue accruing to the Federal Government. The issues highlighted above constitute the theme of many literary works emanating from the Niger Delta and they literally define what has fossilized as Niger Delta literature.

Ogbowei’s *Marsh Boy and Other Poems* (henceforth, *Marsh Boy*) is an addition to many such other literary works but it has not received substantial scholarly reviews particularly stylistic analysis of the language of the writer intended at providing an interpretation of the content or meaning of the text. This is hinged on Leech and Short’s (2007:28) view that stylistics studies the relation between linguistic form and literary function or the relation between language and artistic function. The focus of this paper therefore is to attempt to interpret the text through a stylistic review. There is no doubt that stylistics, as a branch of linguistics, analyses and interprets language by looking at the kinds of linguistic structures and literary devices used by writers

Ebinyo Ogbowei who is a Bayelsa-born Nigerian is the author of several other volumes of poetry which include *Let the Honey Run and other poems* (shortlist, LNG Nigeria Prize for literature, 2005), *The Town Criers Song, the heedless ballot box* (Joint winner ANA Bayelsa Isaac Boro price, and *the dying river* (shortlisted in the LNG Nigeria prize for literature, 2009).

2.0. Synopsis of the Text

This collection of poems has two sections, ‘marsh boy’ and ‘other play’. This essay concentrates on the first portion, /marsh boy’ which aptly provides insight into the themes of socio-economic, socio-political and environmental issues concerning the Niger Delta. In the context of the literary creation, and which admittedly reflects the reality, the poet persona who is the self-acclaimed ‘marsh boy’ expresses the torment of tyranny, dictatorship, exploitation, insecurity, abject poverty, disappointment and anger of the peoples of the region.

The poems focus on the destructive activities of International Oil Companies (IOCs) and the consequent dehumanizing impoverishment of the environment and peoples of the Niger Delta. This has motivated radical resistance from defiant groups of militant youths. The author demonstrates that the environment of the Niger Delta has been badly polluted and degraded as a result of oil and gas exploration and exploitation. The flora and fauna of the forest and the rivers, creeks and ponds have been largely destroyed. The destruction of the environment directly corresponds to destruction of the sources of livelihood of the indigenous peoples. As a result, youth restiveness has taken over in protest. The poetic personae, the **marsh boy** and others like him are the defiant fighters in the poems.

3.1. Theories of Stylistics

As a point of departure, we have to work with the general definition of style as given by Leech and Short (2007:26) which is “the way in which language is used in a given context, by a person, for a given purpose” This definition is often referenced to Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole* where *langue* is the linguistic code while *parole* is the individual’s use of language. In the era of Chomskyan generative linguistics, *langue* was equated to competence, and *parole* with performance which is the style of the individual speaker or

writer. Therefore, style may be labeled as the linguistic habits of a writer/speaker, with reference to Buffon's (1753) famous statement that "the style is the man himself". Stylistics as the modern day version of rhetoric is now a popular field of linguistic study and follows directly from style. It is, according to Simpson (2004), a sub-field of applied linguistics concerned with the study of style especially in literary works but Leech and Short (2007:28) define style simply as the (linguistic) study of style.

Stylistics as a branch of linguistic study has two broad strands of language use to analyse. The first strand is concerned with the way writers use language to express meaning and emotions while the second strand is concerned with the aesthetic embroidery of the literary work. These two concerns literally divide into linguistic and literary stylistics. Linguistic stylistics refers to the description and explanation of the formal or structural features of language found in a literary text. This is the use of structural linguistics as espoused by Halliday (1961). It involves the study of the linguistic forms that perform the transitive or ideational metafunctions of language which convey the content or ideas of the writer. The aesthetic strand of stylistic study is concerned with what aspects of language use create the most aesthetic impression on the reader or listener. This approach is the realm of literary stylistics.

However, both approaches to stylistics have a common goal which is to provide an interpretation of a text. Simpson (2004:17) is handy with the view that 'stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language'. This is also the view of Leech and Short (2007:28) that stylistics is more directly concerned with interpretation. According to them, stylistics is studied because "we want to explain something, and in general, literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function". Understanding the linguistic patterns and levels, all of which constitute linguistic structure, in Simpson's view is an index of the function of the text and provides interpretation and understanding of the text as well.

Indeed, stylistics aims to account for how texts project meaning, how readers construct meaning and why readers respond to texts in the way that they do. It explores how readers interact with the language of the text in order to explain how they (readers) are able to understand, and are affected by texts in the process of reading them. Katie Wales (2001:437) also subscribes to the statement that "the goal of ... stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes'. These views are echoed in Andrew Nyongesa's (2017) essay article entitled "Stylistics, the Capstone of Literary Interpretation..." Stylistic analysis is done at linguistic level involving phonology, graphology, lexis, morphology, syntax, and artistic level involving literary devices. All of these could reflect in a writer's linguistic idiosyncrasies and this underlies Buffon's famous statement that 'style is the man himself.'

3.2. Theories of Style

The analysis in this work is hinged on style as choice, style as iteration and style as difference. Every piece of literary work tends to be embedded intransitively in the sense of communicating an idea in addition to the aesthetic motive and the stimulation of human emotions. The communication of all of these intentions is usually subject to the linguistic and literary choices the writer makes. The choices, in the opinion of Osundare (2003:14), are both pre-verbal and verbal. Pre-verbal choice is psychological and thought-oriented which eventually translates to phonological articulation or morphological realization. Style as

choice is reinforced by Milic (1971), who attributes writers' lexical and syntactic selections as unconscious stylistic choices for aesthetic purpose.

In essence, stylistic choice may be motivated consciously or unconsciously. Either way, however, according to Simpson (2007:37), it exerts profound impact on the way texts are structured and interpreted. Essentially, therefore, style could emerge from choice of linguistic structures as well as choice of diction and register. This underscores the reference to style as register by some scholars such as Osundare (2003). Style as choice falls in tandem with the dualists' notion of the dichotomy between form and content, that is, what to say and how to say it. Nevertheless, it is not also possible to discountenance the idea of monism which holds firm the unity of form and content because the monists believe that the literary product emerges from the inner thought of the mind.

Style is also viewed as difference, and this may be determined by contextual and sociological variation or deliberate deviation from the norm. Language variation helps to distinguish one person or group of people from others. This is person-oriented stylistic variation. On the other hand, style as deviation entails breaking away from the canons of linguistic rules. This is most pronounced in poetry. Poetic language is generally a deviation from the ordinary language. Deviation could be grammatical, lexical and even semantic. Poets, especially, resort to deviation to achieve certain artistic aims and effects. Indeed, is a general view that poetry utilizes an elevated style of language and explores and experiments with deviant usages to communicate new areas of experiences. Style is also regarded by some scholars as "**Iteration**". The notion of style as iteration represents the conscious exercise of repeating linguistic structures and elements especially for emphasis.

4.0. Data Analysis: Linguistic Stylistic Devices

It was noted that style could arise from the deliberate choices a writer makes; it could also arise as a result of deviation from the norm, variation from the norm or as conscious iteration. It was also noted that stylistic analysis could be linguistic and/or literary. In this section, a comprehensive review of both the linguistic and literary stylistic devices in Ogbowei's *marsh boy* is carried out.

4.1. Graphology

Graphology examines the visual aspects of a written text. It is, according to Luke Eyoh (2005:43), the stylistic mode that describes the shape of printed marks, punctuation and paragraphing and assesses their contribution to the aesthetic appeal and readability of the literary text. The first graphological feature is an outright deviation from the rules of punctuation; the entire text of *marsh boy* is printed in small letters. This also includes the title "marsh boy & other poems", and the authors name, "g'ebinyo ogbowei" on the cover page. This graphological device runs from the very first poem to the end of the collection. Secondly, the author disregards punctuation marks in the poems. There is no fulstop to identify sentences, no comas to separate clauses, no colons and semi-colons, etc. A few sample lines taken from stanza 2 of *marsh boy* (p26) reveal this device.

hear the hyena howl
the battle for land
is the battle for life
the place of suffering
is the place of learning (p26)

The author's purposeful disregard for punctuations is a deviation from the norm and seems to

serve two purposes. First, it seems to create speedy reading of the text as each line runs on to the next. Secondly, the avoidance of capital letters throughout the poems tends to symbolize the mental demolition of barricades of social status and a deliberate technique to depict or create the equality of everything and everybody in the society. It is a kind of protest against the inequalities and injustices in the Nigerian society, especially the people of the Niger Delta. This graphological deviation can be reasonably interpreted as an advocacy for equity and justice in the society. On the dimension of graphology, ogbowei's style is reminiscent of the American poet, cumming (Cumming) whose poetic style, according to Simpson (2004:69), is a 'conspicuous spelling and orthography resulting from the removal of standard punctuation devices such as commas, full stops and capital letters', and this includes his name.

4.2. Syntactic Structures

The sentence is the largest unit of grammar which performs ideational function (Bloor and Bloor 1995; Osisanwo 1999). The sentence is a group of words which contains a subject and a predicate, and it expresses a complete thought or idea. Sentences are classified into different types using the parameters of structure and function. The other units are the clause, the group or phrase and the word. In Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which is adopted in this study, paratactic and hypotactic constructions are manifestations of the ideational metafunction of language. Writers, and indeed, every language user, have liberty in the choice of linguistic structures which could be paratactic and hypotactic clause-complexes and group complexes, according to Halliday (2002:217), and which may adopt a variety of functional mood such as indicative, interrogative and imperative. No writer uses only one type of sentence. There is always a combination of different types of sentences. However, it is the predominance of choices and the consistent iteration of certain types of mood patterns that creates stylistic effect in a literary text, and it is so in ogbowei's *marsh boy*.

4.2.1. Paratactic Constructions

Paratactic constructions are clause complexes in coordination where there are two alpha clauses which are linguistically equal in status. This means both clauses are main or independent clauses. Paratactic sentences are common in *Marsh boy*. The opening sentence of the first stanza which is a paratactic interdependence signals not only the stylistic direction of the author but also introduces the theme of the poems. He writes:

locked in the prison of poverty
denied the right to rise
out of holes in sighing swamps (p21)

Here are two covertly coordinated adverbial clauses which modify a yet-to-be mentioned pronominal subject nominal group. By placing this clausal adverbial before the subject, the author draws attention to the information about the existential circumstances expressed in the sentence. Ogbowei continues in this trend in stanza three of *marsh boy III* (p22) but this time with overt linkers.

we'd be decked in royal robes
but you dress us in shrouds
we desire liberty equality not bread
but death a liberator
the grave a leveller
you feed us the poisoned fruits of freedom

There are two overt coordinators (but) which conjoin independent or alpha clause and help to create paratactic constructions as highlighted. There is a third conjunction which is not morphologically spelt out: that is 'and' which would have formed a constituent with 'the grave a leveller'. In the view of the writer, the people of the Niger Delta ought to be treated with honour because the oil wealth which is the mainstay of the nation's economy is produced there. Ironically, instead of a royal accolades, they are fed with the 'the poisoned fruits of freedom' and 'rewarded' with death through military repression arising from youth agitations. The opposite participants in the sentences are 'we' - the people of the Niger (lines 1 and 3) Delta and 'you' -the Nigerian government and IOCs (lines 2 and 6).

4.2.2. Hypotactic Constructions

Hypotactic constructions are complex sentences which usually contains an alpha clause and a beta clause. Hypotactic construction is a grammatical and rhetorical term for an arrangement of phrases or clauses in a dependent or subordinate relationship (that is, phrases or clauses ordered one under another). In hypotactic constructions, subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns serve to connect the dependent elements to a main clause. For example, stanza IV of *marsh boy* illustrates this.

angry waves wash away turkey cocks
commanders wrestling for control of oil
clinging to privileges **that** deny our humanity
establish the objective merits of war (p23)

The first line above is a declarative sentence without a full stop in conformity with the style of Ogbowei, but has a subject, predicate and a complement (SPC). The second to the fourth lines together form one hypotactic clause complex in which the matrix clause is "commanders ...establish the objective merits of war". There is an embedded beta clause which is placed inside the matrix clause and all of it serves as an adjectival modifier to the subject nominal group which is "commanders". The embedded clause is a paratactic clause complex in itself except that it lacks an overt coordinator 'and'. It could have been "commanders (**who are**) wrestling for control of oil (**and are**) clinging to privileges that deny our humanity". In these lines, the author paints yet another gory picture of the peripheral existence of a people who do not have control of the oil wealth in their land, who are denied basic privileges and are subjected to inhuman living conditions. The poet therefore justifies violent agitation against exploitation and deprivation. Hypotactic constructions reflect the complexity of the writers thought and his/her desire to communicate much information in a unit of thought such as a sentence. Ogbowei uses more hypotactic constructions in *Marsh boy* VI (p25).

Stanza 2:

how can they live in peace
whose seductive symphony
calls out of ravaged rivers
the avenging demons of destitution

Stanza3:

discovering ourselves in ademocracy
that lays waste our liberal lowlands
we are lost in a gun-toting kleptocracy

And then the author continues with more parallel sentences by repeating the phrase “I sing of”. This manner of rendering a poem makes it not only lyrical but also concentrates information in a verse. In these lines, the author laments the pervasive poverty of the marsh boy who is representative of the restive youth of the Niger Delta who are denied opportunities to realize their potentials and enjoy the wealth of the area. Parallelism, as I have noted earlier, is a dominant stylistic device employed by Ogbowei in *Marsh boy*. For instance, in *Marsh boy II*, the deprived youth comes out in a defiant mood in a string of parallel constructions. He declares:

i am the marsh boy
 quick and handy with a gun
i am the marsh tiger
 stalking beneficent tyrants
 swept south by cruel storms
 to secure staked swamps
 stolen in the mean months of ‘66 (21)

The deprived youth no longer hides his identity as a militant fighting for a cause. He is revolting against tyrannical oppressors (from the North) who are perceived to have been stealing the wealth of the Southern swamps. The theft of the wealth began in the middle of 1966 in the words of the poet, when the first military coup took place in Nigeria. The author continues the defiance of the militant marsh boy in further parallel structures in page 22. So he writes:

i am the **dagger**
 driven into the mind of the mugger
i am the **assegai**
 driven into the soul of the stalker
i am the **bomb**
 exploding the peace of the pillager
i am the marsh boy
 quick and handy with a gun

The parallel hypotactic clause complexes convey a series of warlike imagery in form of metaphors. The revolting *marsh boy* is not just carrying a dagger as a weapon, he is not just carrying an assegai or a bomb but he is literally all of these weapons himself searing the mind of the exploiter (like the word of God being a double-edged sword) whom he calls the mugger, the stalker and the pillager. In this sense, marsh boy stands as the conscience of the nation but because the nation has refused to respect his conscience, he has taken up arms in violent demand for equity and justice. In another poem in the collection entitled “welcome to our smouldering swamps” (page 28), the *griot* continues to sing in parallelisms where he paints a frightening ghoulish picture of the Niger Delta as ‘smouldering swamps’, ‘swamps of death’ and ‘boiling cauldron’ and the people ‘vanishing...’ as a result of oil spills and gas flairs.

welcome to the smouldering swamps
welcome to the swamps of death
our boiling cauldron of loony leaders and dreamers ...
what are schools and clinics to the vanishing ones
what are water pumps and power mowers
what are cruisers and suvs to the swamp dweller (p28)

refers to as the swamps is now a death trap where people die slowly as a result of what experts call acid rain from gas flares and from oil pollution arising from oil spillages in the swamps. This is why Ogbowei uses deathly words such as “swamps of death” and “boiling cauldron”. This situation is caused by “loony leaders and dreamers” and “... beneficent tyrants” (p23)

... who see in our desolation their prosperity
... who see in our destruction their security” (p23).

These lines show that the desolation of the people of the oil-bearing areas creates wealth and prosperity for the people in control of the political and economic power to their exclusion. Similarly, the destruction of the environment tends to be the economic and political security of the oppressors. Therefore, in protest to this ghoulish, exploitative and oppressive situation, the militant youths become restive and declare boldly and defiantly that:

i am the marsh boy
 quick and handy with the gun
i am the marsh tiger
 stalking beneficent tyrants (p23)

Gun is an instrument for revolt and war which the marsh boy says he has. Furthermore, he describes himself as tiger which is a fearless and ferocious animal. The marsh boy seems to be saying that he is prepared to challenge the economic exploiters and political oppressors (beneficent tyrants) with his guns fearlessly like a tiger. The author uses the metaphor of a tiger to refer to himself.

5.0. Imagery and symbolism in *marsh boy*

Stylistics has two dimension; the linguistic form and literary devices. Ayeomoni (2003:177) affirms that “there are two aspects to literature: the verbal and the artistic”. According to him, linguistic stylistics’ major purpose is to relate language use in literary texts to its artistic function. So far, this work has concentrated on the linguistic structures used stylistically by the author. In this section, attention is given to literary style which involves imagery and symbolism. The poem *Marsh boy* creates mental pictures of the Niger Delta situation and the transformation of the marsh boy to militancy. Figures of speech or figurative language is a deliberate deviation from the normal way of speaking as to communicate new and unusual ideas to the readers. Poetic imagery is created through metaphor, similes and personification. Ogbowei uses ample poetic devices in his poems

Metaphor which is an indirect comparison of two things of different nature usually identifies hidden similarities between two ideas and provides clarity. In this collection, Ogbowei uses the metaphor of prison to symbolize the wretched existential circumstances of the Niger Delta peoples as in:

locked in the **prison of poverty**
you feed us the poisoned fruits of freedom
the grave a leveller
now locked doors are blown open

(stanza 1, 2, 3, 5,)

The geographical Niger Delta is conceived as a huge ‘prison of poverty’. It is not only a prison but a prison of poverty. The metaphoric imagery is the ascription of the semantic properties of prison which is a concrete noun and a place of punishment by confinement to

poverty which is an abstract condition of existence. Prison denies its occupant certain fundamental human rights such as freedom of movement, the human dignity self-esteem. It is ironical that the people are subjected to poverty in spite of the oil wealth extracted which has been the political and economic mainstay from their land by “loony leaders” and “beneficent tyrants” of Nigeria who deny them the freedom to control their resources. Insurgency by militant youth arose out of these dire conditions. The poetic personae ‘marsh boy’ who himself is a symbol of resistance heroically announces the determination of the youth to revolt against status quo. The ‘marsh boy’ dramatically enters the stage with gallantry and announces to the world ‘his’ preparedness to revolt against the subsisting tyrannical system by comparing himself with the ferocious beast, the tiger in a metaphoric sense. Hear him:

i am the marsh tiger
stalking beneficent tyrants (p23)

He further calls himself a ‘dagger’, an ‘assegai’ and a ‘bomb’. All of these are deadly combat weapons and *metaphorising* himself to the weapons, ‘marsh boy’ accentuates his resoluteness to the resistance stance. The tiger is a fearless, fearsome and ferocious animal. By this proclamation, the marsh boy seems emphasize his preparedness to defy and challenge the economic exploiters and political oppressors (beneficent tyrants) with his weapons available to him fearlessly like a tiger. Indeed, ‘marsh boy is both a symbol of the Niger Delta as well as a symbol of protest and resistance.

There is also the symbolism of ‘smouldering swamps’ ‘boiling cauldron’. These are dreary mental pictures of the Niger Delta which could be likened to being engulfed in a huge ball of fire as a result of the ubiquitous fire roaring from the numerous oil and gas drilling locations and platforms. This imagery reflects the area as being too dangerous and unsafe for human living and also for the flora and fauna. Fire is destructive because it consumes and devastates the entire environment. He heightens the dreary picture with the symbolism of a ‘boiling cauldron’ to the extent that the entire Niger Delta is a boiling pot which, in my view is a reference to the fierce conflict between the militant protesters and governments armed forces. The dangers posed by the activities of oil companies have turned the Niger Delta to ‘swamps of death’. The excerpt below contains these images.

welcome to our smouldering swamps
welcome to the swamps of death
our boiling cauldron of loony leaders and dreamers (p28)

Furthermore, Ogbowei employ a series of martial imagery in describing the protestant youths whose collective symbol is the *marsh boy* who declares himself variously as dagger, an assegai and a bomb. All these are martial instruments used to kill. These images drive home the intensity of the anger of the people who are the victims of oil and gas exploitation and the preparedness to fight for justice. Hear what the *marsh boy* says:

i am the **dagger**
driven into the mind of the mugger
i am the **assegai**
driven into the soul of the stalker
i am the **bomb**

6.0. Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of the poems in *marsh boy*, it is evident that Ogbowei is engaged in poetry of social commitment and resistance like many postmodernist poets of Nigeria who, according to Sule Egya (2005:66) have had to deal with disillusionment in every aspect of the Nigerian state, especially social, economic and political issues. According to Azuah (2005), poetry or literature of social commitment ‘makes comments on the issues confronting a particular society’. This involves the ills and short-comings of the society most often due to failure or misrule of the government of the day. These social issues may be corruption, injustice, ethnicity, nepotism, among others. Ogbowei’s *marsh boy* is replete with statements about oppressive, repression, exploitation and injustice to the people of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian State.

Ogbowei’s poetry in *marsh boy* does not only make comments on socio-political issues confronting the Niger Delta but also extends its tentacles to resistance. It is, indeed, poetry of resistance. Generally, poetry of resistance is symbolic of oppressed peoples agitating for freedom. Resistance forms a major theme in Kenyan literature represented by Ngugi wa Thiongo (e.g. *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*) and the writings of Apartheid South Africa’s Denis Brutus (see *Simple Lust and Stubborn Hope*). Significantly, there is a vibrant replication of literature of resistance in the Niger Delta where a body of literature, now branded Niger Delta literature has emerged. Scholars such Taunre Ojaide, G.G. Darah, Ogaga Okuyade and Ben Binebai have theorized on this genre. Binebai (2012:31) alluded to Niger Delta literature while talking about drama stating that “Niger Delta drama can be understood as a drama written about the region by a playwright who is either an indigene or a non-indigene of the region”. Ojaide (2015:55) goes ahead to postulate that the body of literary works from the region is called Niger Delta literature because they “reflect the worldview, sensibility, identity and experiences of the people as well as the society and landscape that form the Niger Delta”. In a similar vein, Okuyade (2017:13) also characterizes Niger Delta literature as:

a new kind of poetic expression within the tradition of Nigerian literature or a paradigmatic extension of contemporary Nigerian protest poetry which is not only ethno-regional in temper and tone by primordial attachment to place or geography, but also equally committed to human and environmental rights.... This poetry is informed and influenced by the historical experience of internal colonization”

Writers such as Tanure Ojaide, Ken Saro Wiwa, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Ebi Yeibo, Helon Habila, and Sophia Obi among many others have made significant contributions to this genre.

7.0. Conclusion

Linguistic stylistic devices demonstrate the manner in which the various resources of language and communication cohere in the text. However, it needs be pointed out that the linguistic properties do not operate in a vacuum, literature exists in a particular culture and language is spoken in a particular context. In this study, the work demonstrated the intricate relationship between the linguistic code and the language properties which observe and point out the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the author in *marsh boy*. The analysis revealed that Ogbowei has dexterity in manipulating the resources of language to communicate his

thoughts using a myriad of complex strategies such as graphological violations, clausal manipulations lexico-semantic choices as well as imagery and symbolism. Although there is over-boiling anger that nearly marred the aesthetic pleasure of the poems, the poet, Ogbowei has demonstrated that he is a master of (poetic) language.

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Appendix

marsh boy

I

locked in the prison of poverty
denied the right to rise
out of holes in sighing swamps
i sing of creeks with crushed dreams
i sing of ponds with decaying hope
i sing of rivers the cargo ships and
supertankers sail on
i sing of swamps sold to swindlers and
rustlers
i sing of swamps demanding dignity
and opportunity
spurned passed over
i cast aside paddle and net
humble hungry hunter
pushed out of the dining hall
by buccaneering brothers
like locusts have overspread the land
i sing of ambushed agreements
that bring us to son my and srebrenica

II

i am the marsh boy
quick and handy with a gun
i am the marsh tiger
stalking beneficent tyrants
swept south by cruel storms
to secure staked swamps
stolen in the mean months of '66

infernals crowns a curse to our coasts
would sear on our consciousness
the delta is a death parlour
a place of grief
where we're gathered to hear
the ghouls decide how you deserve to die

tasting the buttery vapour of life in a vodka
i see beyond the caterpillar
chewing leaves buds and flowers
i see the pollinator fluttering in the almond garden

sweeping through eventful graveyards
i see the elusive army of the despoiled
protesting peasants mourning menchu
mourning a bishop bludgeoned outside his garage
denouncing disappearances battered babies
suckling mothers murdered for body organs

suicides without sufficient safeguards
orantes and margarita tied in bed
are charged with a rabid dog
like a raging bear has cracked gerardi's skull

sweeping through eventful graveyards
i see scorched seaside settlements
i see the elusive army of the debased
take the burning brand to the pernicious precinct
a wailing bullet burying a complicit consul
petulant policemen set ablaze a benevolent embassy

i see the sick state crumble like a kicked-in sand castle
a presidential palace strewn across a screaming street
starving criminals scavenging for supplies
dance around the dead and dying
rush into promising stores and warehouses
haul home stereo systems sacks of sugar and flour

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VI

how can they live in peace
asks asida sorrowing for her son
dragged into the night
necklaced a mother's joy

how can they live in peace
whose seductive symphony
calls out of ravaged rivers
the avenging demons of destitution

discovering ourselves in a democracy
that lays waste our liberal lowlands
we're lost in a gun-toting kleptocracy

discovering the plasticity of greed
seeing through the bizarre rituals of corruption
we dynamite granite hearts
that see us protesting only as brainless people do

now hear traumatized territories
answer with their quaking and rattling
see sullen rivers carry their cargoes of death
to the sea's exhibit room
where wailing widows wait for sons and spouses
whose footprints the sour sea has washed away

now locked doors are blown open
see palm-greasing patriots
flirting through breached bunkers
to the hall where history is made

now locked doors are blown open
see scheming cowards and cunning criminals
celebrate the valour of partisans
their watchful practised steps
bringing them to thrones others have died for

25

hear the mimicking bullfinch warn
the monkey who'd be king in heaven
is buried beneath a mountain of greed

hear the hyena howl
the battle for land
is the battle for life
the place of suffering
is a place of learning

25 february 2009