

Texture in Okigbo's poetry: An exploration of cohesion

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Abstract

Even among system texts, poetic language is unique. On the surface, the words appear disparate, resulting in the perceived difficulty associated with its study/analysis. Okigbo's works have been criticised for their esotericism. Insights from the linguistic approach of cohesion, however, reveal that Okigbo's poetic language is neither disparate nor deny access to the poetic text. Indeed, the words cohere, quite uniquely, sustaining ancient kinships and entering into new relationships, helping them to achieve texture. A(re)reading of Okigbo in light of this approach addresses the perceived opacity associated with his works and raises fresh questions on the traditional criticism of Okigbo, particularly the motif of the prodigal son. This study, therefore, explores the interpretive affordances of the notion of cohesion in selected poems by Okigbo. The overarching aim is to re-examine Okigbo's works with the lens of cohesion, underpinned by the cohesion theory of Halliday and Hasan (1976/2013) in order to offer new insights into the interpretation and criticism of his poetry.

Keywords: poetic criticism/pedagogy, texture, cohesion, Okigbo, Nigerian poetry

Introduction

The Aristotelian literary tradition identifies literature as the only art form whose mode of being is language alone, and it is by means of this mode that it differentiates itself from the other art forms with which it shares the relationship of representation. Within the mode of representation by virtue of language are also the broad genres of literature, namely poetry (lyric), drama, and prose (narrative). For Frye (2000), each of these forms is governed by a certain peculiar rhythm: continuity, decorum and association respectively. The rhythm of continuity reflects the narratorial format; the rhythm of decorum connects with the dialogue format of the dramatic genre; while the rhythm of association resonates with the nature of the language production called poetry. In its essential nature as texture par excellence, poetry is an interweave of lexical patterns, usually achieving its wholeness in a shorter compass. This nature of poetry suggests that the poetic genre is closely related to cohesive patterning.

Frye(2000,p. 271) has also observed that "the lyric is the genre in which the poet, like the ironic writer, turns his back on

his audience. It is also the genre which most clearly shows the hypothetical core of literature, narrative and meaning in their literal aspects as word-order and word-pattern." But to speak of the poet as turning his back against his audience is to credit him with the exclusive custody of its meaning and being, a matter which will certainly fall short of empirical enquiry. This is because the language of literature consistently shows that it might not be the poet who turns their back on their audience but the poem that recoils to itself, drawing attention to itself and demanding that it be read on its own terms, as against conventional everyday language. In fact, Ricoeur (1981/2016) has noted that when discourse is fixed by writing, the speech feature of reference is intercepted, just as the dialogic interaction between the interlocutors is interrupted by texts which replace it with a different parallel between the reader and the text. This assertion is particularly true of poetry. In epitomising the core of the hypothetical nature of literature, the poetic form brings the everyday language into such relations to ensure that the content references are only to the lexical correlates, and thus endophoric. For readers, critics and teachers of poetry to

successfully interpret works of poetry, a consideration of the movements of correlation is necessary. This is the task undertaken in this study.

Okigbo scholarship has engaged with the debate over the inaccessibility of his poems. The oft-cited Aiyejina (1987), for example, describes the poetry of first-generation Nigerian poets as marked by "obscurantism and private esotericism" (p. 24). It is noteworthy that Okigbo is widely regarded as not only the representative poet of this generation (Ushie, 2005; Izevbaye, 2011; Diala, 2017) but "the most difficult of them" (Olaoluwa, 2008, p. 464). More specifically, Chinweizu et al. (1983) directly criticise Okigbo for writing in an obscurantist and esoteric style. These critics posit that such a style of writing alienates the audience. Okigbo himself appears to have complicated the scenario even further by saying that "Personally, I don't think that I have ever set out to communicate a meaning" (qtd in Diala, 2017). But the duty of the critic is to interact with the text, and never to look up to the writer for decoding the meaning. Our engagement with the texts, therefore, indicates that the poems are not meaningless and that the question of obscurantism can be addressed by

approaching the poems from the point of cohesion, especially from a pedagogical standpoint. This engagement is in recognition of the current thinking in poetic scholarship that poems should be "present[ed]...in a more audience-reader friendly mode" (Ifeanyi, 2020, p. 54). Another motivation for this study stems from the one-dimensional interpretation of the two Okigbo poems chosen for analysis in terms of prodigality and repentance. We aim to demonstrate that a more formalist linguistic approach to the poems might open them up to other interpretive possibilities. By this, we also aim to show another method of teaching poetry to less advanced students.

Whilst there might be diverse factors responsible for the perceived difficulty in poetry, we tend to agree with Castiglione (2013, p. 115) that "difficulty [in poetry] is regarded as a combination of semantic opacity and hypothesised processing effort at [the] syntagmatic level." Thus, we argue that for Okigbo's poetry—and by extension other poetic forms—there might not be any such semantic opacity if the works are approached with the analytical tools that cohesion theory offers. Our position here echoes Stine's (1980) assertion that "Anyone who wants to study the meaning of a literary text

must consider the semantic unity of the text as a whole in addition to the meaning of the words and sentences in it" (p. 13). Although he was writing in relation to translation, we consider his postulation that "translators must be aware at all times of the cohesive elements that create unity in texts" (Stine, 1980, p.13) relevant to our argument in relation to the interpretation of poetry. We thus demonstrate that directing attention to the inner structure of poetic texts by looking at the cohesive ties can potentially resolve any seeming semantic opacity.

Text, texture and cohesion

For the purposes of this study, our understanding of text is not as spoken, in opposition to written (Coulthard, 1985), nor as a 'communicative event' (Tanskanen, 2006, p.5), but as the interweave of lexical and structural units, the convergence of language items, capable of being synonymous with discourse, in many respects. It is, according to Ricoeur (1981/2016, p. 107), "any discourse fixed by writing," and it is both anterior and subsequent to speech, not adding anything new to speech, except as speech fixed by writing; if anything, it conserves the speech. The text is a coherent whole, capable of being

considered as a single utterance, notwithstanding the length (Halliday and Hasan, 1976/2013). As a convergence of language items, the text receives the quality of texture, which refers to the power of its cohesive force for which it is so called (Bowen & Thomas, 2020). In fact, "text implies texture, that is, complexity of composition" (Ricoeur, 1981/2016, p.xlvii). Thus, we read in Halliday and Hasan that "the concept of texture is entirely appropriate to express the property of 'being a text'. A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its [textual] environment" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976/2013, p. 2). One way by which texts achieve this quality of texture or unity is by the use of cohesive devices.

Cohesion refers to how text components connect together in (chains of) networks to yield texture. It is the semantic relations within the text. Although a few scholars (e.g., Chafe, 1972) have attempted to theorise linguistic cohesion in the early seventies, Halliday and Hasan's (1976/2013) *Cohesion in English* is often regarded as canonical and seminal in this area for its simplicity,

comprehensiveness and depth. Their theory identified five ways in which cohesion occurs in English texts, namely reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical. However, reference cohesion and lexical cohesion are prioritised in the poetry pedagogy presented in this paper. This is because we find the two as holding the key to unlocking the interconnections between the seemingly disparate lexical items interlinked into poems, as will be explained below.

Reference is conceptualised as the relations between an element of the text and another element by reference to which the reference item is interpreted in the given instance (Halliday and Hasan 1976/2013). The lexical item could point forward in the text to its presupposed (cataphoric relations) or backwards to the part of the text gone before it (anaphoric relations). In whatever direction the pointing goes, a cohesive tie, and sometimes chain, is formed between the reference item cataphorically or anaphorically.

The interpretation of a reference item takes place in two ways: either by identifying it with another element in the text (mainly anaphorically or sometimes

cataphorically) or by way of comparison. In the identifying process, according to Halliday and Hasan, the reference items function as deictics. That is, they play the identifying function of the nominal group. The presupposed necessarily does not need to share a sameness of identity with the cohesive item. It is just that the reference item needs to be dependent on the presupposed, in some way, for its interpretation, hence the relationship of co-interpretation. Indeed, reference relations, though expressed by grammatical means, is actually a semantic relation between the meaning of particular instances rather than between words.

In discourse, there are two channels of information: the situation and the text. While the situation is semantic and often exophoric (referring to something outside the text), the text is formal and lexicogrammatical. This is why, in principle, reference items (for instance, personal pronouns) are exophoric (Halliday & Hasan, 1976/2013), for the meaning of 'I' is the speaker, while 'you' is the addressee. It is by this association that the text connects to the situation and creates the projected reality. But they can be, and indeed usually are, made endophoric (referring to something within

the text) by anaphoric reference. In fact, exophoric references might not be ordinarily cohesive in the sense that they are not within the text; however, their echoes can, especially where there is shared knowledge between the reader and the text/author, potentially draw their referents into the textual meaning by means of which cohesion is built and texture is established.

On the other hand, lexical cohesion is a vocabulary-based cohesion and occurs in three ways: general nouns, reiteration, and collocation. The general nouns include mainly the common nouns whose operation in texts come close to that of referential items, while reiteration pertains to the repetition of lexical items, which creates a bond between/among them. Collocation, it seems, is the commonest type of lexical cohesion in poetry. Collocational relation is the kind of cohesive relation that occurs between words that usually co-occur in discourse. It refers properly to the infinitely expanding potential of lexical items to enter into certain lexico-semantic relations with the other lexical items, with which they co-occur in the text by means of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, complementary items, or ordered series.

In sum, the point, therefore, is that just any words could come into certain kinds of pairs by virtue of their membership of the same text. Sometimes, the collocational relationship is not paradigmatic but built simply by the proximity of lexical items in the same text. Such collocation is a creation of the text as discourse. Hence for Halliday and Hasan, "EVERY lexical item MAY enter into a cohesive relation, but by itself it carries no indication whether it is functioning cohesively or not. That can be established only by reference to the text" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976/2013, p. 288). Furthermore, they argue that:

Without our being aware of it, each occurrence of a lexical item carries with it its own textual history, a particular collocational environment that has been built up in the course of the creation of the text and that will provide the context within which the item will be incarnated on this particular occasion. This environment determines the 'instantial meaning', or text meaning of the item, a meaning which is unique to each specific instance. (p. 289)

Indeed, it is collocation, among other cohesive devices, that mostly connects to one of the core properties of language as a habit of thought, namely: the building of linkages among items that might appear disparate.

Method

A number of theorists have argued that literary criticism has a lot of benefits when approached with linguistic theories (e.g., Ricoeur, 1981/2016; Maynard, 1982; Ugwuanyi et al., 2020). In light of this, this study relies on the principles of Halliday and Hasan's (1976/2013) theory of linguistic cohesion to show how the criticism and teaching of literature can be approached. In this theory, the unit of analysis is the sentence. However, we acknowledge that the division into the Hallidayan 'unit of analysis' has some drawbacks. For instance, the poetic text does not submit itself to the limits of the traditional sentence boundaries as the theory conceives it. As a way of adapting the theory's unit of analysis to suit the purposes of our study, we chose to use a model of 'unit of analysis', which is predicated on what we call *sense units*. This enabled us to overcome the challenge of traditional, sentence-based analysis in a poem of the nature of Okigbo's. The sense units are neither

grammatical structures nor are they marked by any punctuation marks; they are simply units of sense in the poem.

A sense-unit analysis of poem is not entirely novel. The categorisation of the rhyming couplets of the Neo-Classical and Romantic eras was considered by many as sense units (e.g., McKie, 1996; Sweetser, 2006; Creaser, 2012).

Furthermore, each part of both the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms are, in a sense, considered sense units. A term used to account for the relationship that holds between the rhymed lines and their meanings is 'semantic rhymes' (McKie, 1996, p.341). Although these divisions have been discussed as sense units, they are essentially based on rhythmic patterning. Our division—and analysis—is different in two important ways. One, the partitioning is not premised on *sounds* but on *sense* or *meaning*. In other words, what is important is a group that holds a *thought*. Two, the unit, containing a distinguishable thought, or meaning or sense, need not be a line or sentence – it is a lexical unit (a word, a phrase, or a longer string of words) considered as a *meaningful* utterance capable of communicating a quasi-independent thought.

Our division here corresponds to what Fabb (2012, p. 111) calls 'rhetorical groups':

Rhetorical groups are not identical with any other grouping: they have no consistent form, they are not always involved in parallelism, and they need not be separated by punctuation. Rhetorical groups both do and do not relate to the line... they are contained within lines, but they also form patterns irrespective of line boundaries, which develop over the text as a whole, e.g., patterns of increasing length, thus making formal variation possible. Any type of formal

variation can produce an interpretive consequence.

The "interpretive consequence" or value of this kind of 'parsing' of a poem into sense units offers us the space to focus on the interrelations that hold between the lexical items constituting the entire piece rather than on sentence boundaries. Thus, it will replace for us the traditional *line* references in poetic analysis. In this study, sense units from "The Passage" are marked "PS", while those from "Watermaid" are marked "WS", such that PS2, for instance, will mean sense unit 2 in "The Passage", while "WS7" stands for sense unit 7 in "Watermaid". The two tables below contain the refereced sense units in the two poems.

(PS1) BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto,	(PS2) naked I stand;	(PS3) before your watery presence,
(PS4) a prodigal	(PS5) leaning on an oilbean,	(PS6) lost in your legend.
(PS7) Under your power wait I on barefoot,	(PS8) watchman for the Watchword at <i>Heavensgate</i> ;	(PS9) out of the depths my cry:
(PS10) give ear and hearken ...	(PS11) DARK WATERS of the beginning.	(PS12) Rays, violet and short, piercing the gloom,
(PS13) foreshadow the fire that is dreamed of.	(PS14) Rainbow on far side, arched like boar bent to kill,	(PS15) foreshadows the rain that is dreamed of.
(PS16) Me to the orangery	(PS17) solitude invites,	(PS18) a wagtail, to tell,
(PS19) the tangled- wood-tale;	(PS20) a sunbird, to mourn	(PS21) a mother on a spray.
(PS22) Rain and sun in single combat;	(PS24) in silence at the passage,	(PS26) SILENT FACES at crossroads:
(PS27) festivity in black...	(PS28) Faces of black like long black column of ants,	(PS31) where all roads meet:
(PS32) festivity in black...	(PS33) O Anna at the knobs of panel oblong,	(PS34) hear us at the crossroads at the great hinges
(PS35) where the players of loft pipe organs rehearse old lovely fragments, alone –	(PS37) bleach of the light of years held in leather:	(PS38) For we are listening in cornfields
(PS40) listening to the wind leaning over its loveliest fragment ...		

Table 1: Referenced sense units in “The Passage”

(WS17) BRIGHT	(WS18) with the armpit- dazzle of a lioness,	(WS19) she answers,
(WS20) wearing white light about her;	(WS21) and the waves escort her	(WS22) my lioness,
(WS23) crowned with moonlight.	(WS24) So brief her presence-	(WS25) match-flare in wind's breath-
(WS26) so brief with mirrors around me.	(WS27) Downward...	(WS28) the waves distil her;
(WS29) gold crop	(WS31) Watermaid of the salt- emptiness,	

Table 2: Referenced sense units in “Watermaid”

The selected poems were taken from Okigbo's (1962) collection, *Heavensgate*, which has been described as containing his most difficult works - a reason for choosing them. The two poems also share commonalities in themes (e.g., ritual sequence) and characterisation (e.g., mother figure) (Nazombe, 1988) as well as stylistically (Okere, 1977), hence their choice.

In the analysis, we present the cohesive chains that exist among the items in the sense units and subsequently discuss their implications as sources of access to meaning while highlighting their pedagogical benefits.

Analysis and discussion

The preponderance of personal pronominals and possessives in “The Passage” indicates that it is a vocative text. That is, it is a direct address to someone who listens, and

the subject of the address involves the persona, primarily, but also others to whom s/he might be a part. First is the second person singular pronoun ‘you’ in PS1 referring to ‘mother Idoto’, and to which the possessive ‘your’ in PS3, PS6, and PS7 look up to in an anaphoric relationship for their resolution. Connected to these are also the other forms of pronominals and possessives referring to the persona as the one who speaks, in connection to whom we are to attempt an understanding of the one who is spoken to. These other pronominals and possessives include ‘I’ in PS2 and PS7, ‘my’ in PS9, ‘me’ in PS16, ‘us’ in PS34, and ‘we’ in PS38, forming a wide-ranging cohesive chain, with only one occurrence of the possessive ‘your’ (PS7) being a case of *immediate* (I) occurrence while the rest are *remote* (R), with the range of intervening sense units ranging from one to sixteen. One possible implication of this spread is

that the vocative form, which these pronominals and possessives mark, binds the text up as a single utterance.

Furthermore, the reiteration of 'mother' in PS21, with intervening 19 *remote* sense units (R19), the collocation of 'naked' in PS2 with 'barefoot' in PS7, and the collocation of 'stand' in PS2 with 'wait' in PS7 serve to reinforce a focus. The 'mother' in PS21 is to look up in a relationship of anaphora to that in PS1 as its presupposed (Halliday & Hasan, 1976/2013), and ultimately to 'mother Idoto' for its final resolution. The 'barefoot' in PS7 is an emphasis on the 'naked' of PS2. It is the presupposed with which the supposed repentant mood of the persona is marked. The 'wait' in PS7 ties up with 'stand' in PS2 as indicators of the persona's need, hope and search for help.

This hope is picked up in "Watermaid," where the second stanza begins with a positive, expectant, and even euphoric mood, resulting from the goddess appearing (as if) in response to an invocation. In this way, 'she answers' (WS19 links anaphorically to 'wait I' (PS7), 'my cry' (PS9) and 'Give ear and hearken' (PS10) of "The Passage". Okigbo's *Heavensgate*, where both poems appear, is often considered a ritual sequence in which the quest is around a female figure (Mother Idoto, Mermaid, Lioness) who fulfils both

artistic and spiritual functions (Nazombe, 1988). Thus, the poem is also part of a larger text in the ritual journey of purification as well as an artistic quest for the Muse. In its own internal logic as a unique, independent discourse, 'she answers' (WS19) seeks reference cataphorically by relating with the possessive 'my' whose appropriation of 'lioness' (WS18) implicates the one who calls as an admirer. But it also builds the tempo towards catastrophe/loss in 'around me' (WS26), bringing the subject (implied in the 'my' and 'me') into a lamentation for the 'gold crop' (WS29) that '[sinks] ungathered'. 'Gold', by its association with grandeur, amplifies the regality of the mermaid, connecting 'escort' (WS21) and 'crowned' (WS23) with royalty and 'BRIGHT' (WS17), 'white light' (WS20), 'moonlights' (S23) and 'mirrors' (WS26) with radiance. The import is seen in the depth of loss, signalled by 'Downward' (WS27), the abrupt disappearing of the watermaid, which earlier is foreshadowed by 'match-flare' (WS25). 'Match-flare' would ordinarily form an alliance with 'white light', 'moonlights', etc. However, its semantic bonding with 'wind's breath' (WS25) and 'so brief' (WS24) is in collocational relations of antonymy with the movement involving the glowing maid and her entourage, bringing tension between 'the waves [that] escort her'

(WS21) and 'the waves [that] distil her' (WS28).

As Okigbo's *Heavensgate* is also understood as a ritual sequence or movement in which each poem/text becomes part of a larger text in the ritual journey of purification and contributes to its logic and conflict within such a ritual space, "Watermaid" advances the 'sense' in "The Passage", which is a further indication of their connectedness (Okere, 1977). The poem takes the form of a non-verbal response (even if unsuccessfully) to the vocative utterance of the latter. Thus the 'she answers' (WS19) connects anaphorically to the pleas of the prodigal in "The Passage", the one who stands naked before Mother Idoto and who cries, in prayer, to be heard. But 'she answers' equally calls forth the 'my' (PS9) whose claim/appropriation of the 'lioness' (WS22) implicates an "I" (the prodigal) who is answered. Because this response from 'my lioness' is unfulfilling, the sense of loss becomes personal and even tragic. The transition from 'a lioness' to 'my lioness' calls forth the collocational relationship between the lone-word 'BRIGHT' (W17) and 'mirrors around me' (W26), building associations of radiance which animate the poem: 'the ample-dazzle' (W18), the 'light about her' (W20), 'moonlights' (W23) 'mirrors' (W26), 'gold' (W29), which all combine to heighten the initial hope as well as the loss at the end.

In "The Passage", the persona's perception of himself as one who is struck by the conviction of his apostasy and who with a sense of repentance needs to confess and seek forgiveness and re-absorption is what leads him to describe himself as a 'prodigal' (PS4) and 'watchman' (PS8). He, as the "I", is the prodigal who has now returned but is still at "heavensgate", as a watchman, in search of the watchword. And while 'watchman' coheres on the one hand with the nominalised 'prodigal', the two being the speaker's description of her/himself, it also coheres with 'knobs' (PS33), which must look up to it in anaphora for its interpretation. Thus, the cohesive chain of 'prodigal', 'I', 'watchman', and 'me' further interlinks with the tie between 'knobs' and 'watchman' and between the oilbean and the one who leans on it waiting to be accepted. Both 'heavensgate' and 'oilbean' connect to similar experiences even if they evoke symbols relating to different religious traditions: Western vs African. At heavensgate, where the persona is watching for the watchword, a deep cry is raised. Hence the chain is further elongated by the short cohesive chain involving 'cry' in PS9, 'give ear and hearken' in PS10, and 'hear' in PS34. These three senses are related as belonging to the superordinate *prayer* being made to 'Anna' who superintends over the knobs of the oblong panel, or, as in the reading of the oilbean, to Mother Idoto, the custodian of the

ancient ways the prodigal has lost and thus seeks. With this, the picture of the persona as one who is at a fix is amplified.

One also observes that in this journey of returning to the first love, the persona is on a lone journey. This explains the cohesive tie between 'lost' (PS6), 'solitude' (PS17), and 'alone' (PS35). The distribution of these three senses (at the opening, middle and the end) indicates that the thread runs across the text and the combined force which reinforces the cry action already seen with the persona, tying the words to all the lexical items captured to share the superordinate *prayer*. By contrast, "Watermaid" promises community only to dash all hopes in the end. The urgency evoked in her coming, seen in such lexical items as 'lioness' (WS18), 'light' (WS20) and 'waves' (WS21), all of which are associated with swiftness, is undermined midway. This obstruction is never encountered as an event in the poem but rather appears as a narration: 'So brief her presence' (W24). Thus, the persona is left lonely and alone, with memories of an encounter that deepens his longing, his loss, and his lamentation. The withdrawal of the watermaid, therefore, ambiguates 'she answers', casting questions on the intention of the watermaid's hasty appearance and on the relationship between the presumed lover and the one

who proclaims a bond by declaring her 'my lioness' (WS22).

But there is, in "The Passage", an image of a lack of clarity that casts strong shadows on the whole narrative of the returning of a repentant prodigal son. This is first signalled by 'your watery presence' in PS3, which reverberates through the entire text and suffices to be the presupposed to which a long chain of collocationally cohesive items look up to for their resolution. To 'your watery presence' is connected anaphorically 'dark waters [of the beginning]' (PS11), 'gloom' (PS12), 'dreamed' (PS13 and PS15), 'tangled-wood-tale' (PS19), '[at] crossroads' (PS26 and PS34), '[in] black' (PS27), '[of] black ... black [column]' (PS28), 'all roads meet' (PS31), '[in] black' (PS32), and 'the great hinges' (PS34). Usually, the popular reading of 'watery presence' connects to Idoto as being a water goddess (Nwakanma, 2010; Aito, 2014). But by cohering with the other lexical items as listed above, that interpretation seems blighted. In any case, "water presence" will certainly make better sense in the direction of such interpretation than 'watery presence'. For it is clear that the presence which is watery is unhinged, slippery, fluid and thus doubtful; it is a diluted presence, without any indication, in the present instance, that it is water that has diluted it. It is in this respect that it ties to the other lexical

items listed and affirms the sense of confusion pointed to by the persona in the poem as pervasive. This is captured by such lexical items as 'crossroads', 'gloom', 'where all roads meet' and 'the great hinges'. The hinges are great indeed, for it is the juncture where all roads meet and open to the persona, obviously with each one having something to recommend it. But the narrative produced and told at such juncture must understandably be tangled, insofar as the indecision of crossroads could arise from different paths holding different appeals.

This is further observable in the cohesive pair of 'lovely' (PS35) and 'loveliest' (PS40), where 'lovely' modifies fragments played with the old loft pipe organs while 'loveliest' modifies fragments produced by the wind players. And even though the latter is loveliest while the former is only lovely, both are only fragments; none is whole. The implication of these is a need to reexamine the prodigal narrative, for it appears, by the combined implication of these words building a tie, that the persona's path is beclouded, and s/he is no longer sure of that to which s/he sends their appeal, Idoto's presence having become watery. Nwosu (2007, p. 77), however, sees 'Watery presence' as a combination of "a physical state and a supernatural essence into a referentialization of both water and spirit",

a form of duality which "Watermaid" returns to: first, as a lover/goddess (watermaid) and, second, as a spiritual/creative energy, powerful yet ungraspable, a figure distilled by the waves and disappearing into 'salt-emptiness' (WS31). The sense of 'salt-emptiness' is indicative of these two properties: the solidity of the physical form (salt) and the absence of such a form (distilled by the waves, WS28). Thus, 'salt-emptiness' ties up again with 'match-flare in wind's breath' (WS25) as it is both a reality in the physical form (the lioness/maid escorted in royalty) and quick-fading existent like the 'match-flare'.

It is instructive that it is at the point where all roads meet, where festivity is in black, that the persona raises a cry to Anna, who is at the knobs of the panel oblong (PS33). It has already been seen how this cry looks back to its first occurrence in PS9 and PS10 for its resolution. Furthermore, this set of lexical items portraying a sense of gloom and indecision collocate by means of antonymy to another set joined in a chain of cohesion and indicating light. This chain includes 'rays' (PS12), 'foreshadow' (PS13), 'fire' (PS13), 'foreshadows' (PS15), 'sun' (PS22), and 'light' (PS37). These, as a set in their cohesive chain, constitute a ray of hope, as the rays, short and violet, pierce the gloom (PS12), with the attendant foreshadow of that which has hitherto

remained in the dream world, namely *fire* and *rain*. But here again we return to the pervading binary, cutting across the physical and into the dream world. The contents of the foreshadowed dreams are fire and rain, two seemingly opposing forces. The first dream is of fire which is seen in classical mythology, particularly of the Greeks as a source of life and creation. But the second dream is about rain, the extinguisher of fire, its very enemy. It is also possible to interpret rain, as water, as a force associated with creation/regeneration, since 'watery presence' may also indicate a search for becoming, as explained above.

The climax of this situation is the indication in PS22 that the rain has engaged the sun, which shares a relationship of co-hyponymy with fire in combat. As a matter of fact, 'combat' as a lexical item collocates instantially with 'piercing' (PS12) as co-hyponyms of the hypernym 'violence'. But it also appears we are dealing with a persona whose consciousness is both expansive and troubled, resisting reconciliation. Both the 'fire that is dreamed of' (PS13) and 'the rain that is dreamed of' (PS15) speak about a future of hope insofar as they are 'dreamed of' and therefore do not look (completely) opposite to each other. It is a conflict that invites artistic contemplation, calling the wagtail into solitary meditation.

In "Watermaid", we have seen a parallel to this paradox in 'waves', the one that escorts and the one that distils. It appears that water and fire are forming an alliance outside what is conventionally known as opposites. This might be why 'watery presence' may not be easily dislodged if conceived, even if remotely, as a source of regeneration. In a sense, a certain sense of referential connection can be established among the chain: 'dark waters... beginning' (PS11), 'the rain' (PS15) that holds the future as a dream and the 'watery presence' (PS3) that is (almost) expiatory. For example, the 'dark waters of the beginning', which is the only member of the chain that appears negative, can be seen as exophorically echoing the dark depth/waters in the Book of Genesis, which was without form and void and being hovered over by the creative Spirit. In other words, it may be seen as the creative bowel where all things emanate, which connects, both exophorically and anaphorically, to the short and violet rays of the classical fire associated with creation/knowledge.

As previously explained, one property of texture is that it engenders the interlacing of lexical items, which is only possible in discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976/2013), particularly of the type under discussion here. For instance, 'gloom' and 'black' which, as we have seen above, collocate with the series 'watery presence', 'dark',

etc. also enter into another chain of cohesive ties with the set that includes 'solitude' (PS17), 'mourn' (PS20), 'silent [faces]' (PS26), 'festivity in black' (PS27) and 'black [column]' (PS28), while 'solitude' enters another chain of ties with the set 'wagtail' (PS18), 'sunbird' (PS20), 'mourn' (PS20), 'silence' (PS24), 'silent' (PS26) and 'alone' (PS35), all echoing the tragic tendencies in the work. It is also seen that 'rain' (PS15), which coheres with 'rainbow' (PS14), also joins 'waters' (PS11) and 'spray' (PS21) in another cohesive chain. The 'spray' can be interpreted as standing in the same relation with 'rays' as both are vital to the final onslaught that is expected (the fire/water that is dreamed of) as a result of action on 'the gloom' 'dark [waters]'. This might also be an indication that water and fire may not be totally opposed, at least to the end to which the persona expects of them, an interpretation that challenges the duality which has been observed earlier.

One implication of the interlacing seen here is that the language before us is that which captures thought taking place, that which builds connections among textual items. It is indeed with the study of cohesion in texts that we can affirm the observation of Halliday and Hasan (1976/2013, p. 388) that "discourse does not wander at random from one topic to another but runs on reasonably systematic lines with a certain consistency of topic

and predictability of development". By tracing the links connecting the lexical items (lexical cohesion) and establishing referential relationships that hold among them (reference cohesion), a more nuanced understanding of the poems appears to be emerging. As will be explained below, this approach, when properly implemented, has some benefits in the way poetry is learned and taught.

Conclusion

As has been observed earlier, the poetic text is discourse par excellence, when discourse involves the lexical item immersing itself in the social mass of language, where it submits whatever meaning it brings into the text to the function to which it is assigned by the entire discourse. In the literary text, a lexical item brings to play all its history and the memory of its journey in the forest of language use (Halliday & Hasan, 1976/2013), with the potential of raising echoes that reverberate through the entire text. It is in poetry, particularly, that words in general attempt to defy common-sense grammar and affirm their belongingness as both products and resources of uninhibited thought. This feature of the poetic text is what makes it an object of texture and useful for modelling cohesion in discourse, especially in literature.

Our approach has opened up the texts under consideration for comprehension, raising a fresh query over the taken-for-granted narrative of the prodigal son, to which traditional reading of the poem has made the poem synonymous. We find that the cohesive ties and the accompanying interlacing of lexical units present the persona rather as one faced with a dilemma akin to the boundary situation of the tragic hero. Indeed, his appeal to Anna, who Nwakamma (2010) regards as a mother figure, is the same as the 'watery presence' before whom the persona stands naked (PS1-3). Clearly, the persona is still at crossroad listening to both 'lovely fragments' of 'loft pipe organs' and 'wind players' in the 'cornfield' and crying for help. It cannot be said that the persona has made an absolute commitment of allegiance or repentance, which is a reading that has characterised the prodigal-son narrative. Hence what we see in the end is that the persona is undecided

and *un*-helped, for the presence to which he appeals 'at great hinges' is *watery*.

It has been demonstrated (e.g., Ugwuanyi et al., 2020) that the employment of linguistic principles such as cohesion, with a focus on lexical and reference cohesion, can help the teacher of poetry to disambiguate a poem and parse it beyond the limiting boundaries of lines. This pedagogical approach can be useful for teaching difficult poems because it focuses on words and the meaningful relationships that exist among them. However, it must be acknowledged that a potential drawback of the model is that it leaves out other areas (e.g., sounds, structure) of poetry analyses, especially when a more advanced or technical analysis is intended. Nevertheless, this approach offers the teacher one out of many possible approaches to the teaching of poetry and reinforces the argument that linguistic theories are useful tools in teaching literature.

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