

## A Stylistic Reading of Rome Aboh's "Hour Of Truth"

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### **Abstract**

*Language system offers varied choices to a language user for the expression of their thoughts and intents. However, these choices can be manipulated in distinctive ways to achieve particular purposes. Such motivated and distinctive uses of language are regarded as rhetorical arts that not only foreground language but also underscore the concept of style. The task, in this paper, is to examine style in Rome Aboh's "hour of truth," as an example of new Nigerian poetry. The analysis, conducted at the backdrop of foregrounding theory and systemic functional grammar, reveals that at every level, language is foregrounded to infer a pathetic quasi-antonymous relationship between nature's beauty and humans' acts of terror in the 21st century. Consequently, elements of language are tactically foregrounded to juxtapose the beauty, bliss, and unity in nature with the terrors of humans' inhuman activities in order to lament the loss of bliss in the 21st century world. Beyond affirming Aboh as an artful master who knows how to bend or break language for the apt conveyance of his intent, his style validates him as a 21st century Nigerian poet.*

**Keywords:** Stylistics, stylistic analysis, foregrounding, 21st Century Nigerian Poet, Rome Aboh, "hour of truth"

### **Introduction**

Poetry has always been a means of expressing the feelings of the artist and, importantly, the means of representing society's feelings about issues and conditions of life. In the latter assignment lies the burden of the writer/artist as the voice, sight and hearing of the masses. It is a mimetic assignment/burden which necessitates the writer to 'right' his/her world by choosing to write, choosing the subject, and choosing the vision (cf. Osundare "Writer" 6). New Nigerian poets, otherwise referred to as 21st Century poets, can no less be regarded to be guided by this mimetic preoccupation. Osundare reveals that this new generation of poets are 'a voice that is public, confident, and inspiring, the voice of a different category of African writers who, confident of the place of art as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle, have been confronting social issues with rare single-mindedness' (26). For Mowarin, the new poets are lamentation poets who 'lament the betrayal of political leaders and the dilapidated state of the Nigerian nation' (qtd. in Aboh 2). In Gloria Emezue's perspective, a dominant voice of threnody prevails in the poetry of the new poets:

These poets lament the betrayal of the people's genuine aspirations for a better life, poverty, unemployment and the dilapidated state of

the nation's economy. Their anger over the vicious cycle of brutality that diminishes the [nation] is unmistakable. It is this form of threnody ushered by these young men that has come to be known as the new generation of poetry. (qtd. in Orhero 4).

To substantiate Emezue's position, Orhero cites Garuba who expatiates on the idea of threnody in new Nigerian poetry thus:

Though collectivized by a threnodic thrust, the new poetic voices are diverse, disparate, deliberately individualized, a deviation from the gregariousness, the fraternal spirit, and the theoretical meeting point, of the poets of the Alter-Native tradition. The poets recognize the miscarriage of good governance and its attendant woes as the greatest crisis in Nigeria, consider it their duty to confront the crisis, and take different thematic and stylistic routes to do so. They write as insiders implicated in the intense persecution and the struggle for self-liberation, their tones leaning towards pessimism.

Orhero, whose study focuses on the works of Ochia Ofeimun and Rome Aboh as new Nigerian poets, concludes that behind the lamentation in new Nigerian poetry are the defining factors of politics and history.

### **Style, stylistics, and stylistic analysis**

Simply defined, stylistics is the study of style. More technically however, stylistics, being a sub-discipline of linguistics, is the linguistic study of (literary) texts (Leech 1) that is concerned with the systematic analysis of style in language and how this can vary according to such factors as genre, context, historical period and author (Jeffries and McIntyre 1). As a sub-discipline of linguistics therefore, stylistics uses models of language and analytical techniques/methodologies from linguistics to facilitate the study of style in its widest sense (Jeffries and McIntyre 1). Norgaard, Montoro, and Busse explain that stylistics studies style by investigating all levels of language from graphology to phonology and on to discourse such that linguistic description anticipates and facilitates the interpretation and the evaluation of the text:

Stylisticians use linguistic models, theories and frameworks as their analytical tools in order to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does, and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning. The analysis typically focuses qualitatively or quantitatively on the phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic or discursual features of texts, on the cognitive aspects involved in the processing of those features by the reader as well as on various combinations of these (1).

Before the development of stylistics, the study of style was the preserve of literary criticism (Finch 189). However, with the development and rise of linguistics, stylistics evolved in the twentieth century as an attempt to provide a more systematic and linguistic foundation for the study of literary effects (Finch 189). What stylistics does differently from literary criticism, therefore, is to show how a text works by

describing the formal features of the text in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text (Wales 400). Leech and Short reveal that stylistics is not as much an exercise in describing what use is made of language as it is an exercise for explaining either the explicit or the implicit relationship between language and artistic functions (Wales 11). They further aver that the motivating questions in stylistic analyses are not so much *what* as *why* and *how* (Wales 11; original emphasis). Style, unlike stylistics, is not easy to define since the term is a fluid, elusive and relational term. To define the concept, different perspectives merge, diverge and clash and subsequently produce different theories of style such as choice, difference, situation, variation, norm, deviation, iteration, period/time, genre, and as the man himself, amongst others.

Although stylistics began flourishing in Britain and the United States in the 1960s, it can be traced to classical rhetoric and poetics. Specifically, stylistics can be said to be deeply rooted in ELOCUTIO, the third of the five canons of rhetoric, which has to do with stylisation: the effective selection of appropriate style in particular contexts. At the stage of elocutio, consideration is given to KAIROS (locative time) rather than KRONOS (linear time), such that the style of the text fits the audience, the occasion, and the subject matter. Related to this perspective is the definition of style as particular language choices, in particular situations, for particular purposes. A major step in stylisation entails the kairotic consideration of whether the style of the text should be low (plain/attic), middle or high (florid/asiatic), in order to fit the discourse content, the situation and the make-up of the audience. Whilst the low style reflects the everyday language used in conversing and instructing, the high style is a high cerebral effort that ornaments language for the purpose of presenting lofty ideas to the effect of moving, delighting, and rousing the emotions of listeners. With the high style often entailing the use of style figures, it provides for the definition of style as the motivated and distinctive use of language to effectively make statements or rouse emotions. Basically, the florid style is the foundation for the concept of foregrounding.

Furthermore, style has its etymology in Latin *stilus*, an ancient instrument of writing. The word has undergone semantic development over time and has thus moved from being an instrument for writing to literally mean ‘a writer’s characteristic way of shaping letters,’ to metonymically and figuratively mean ‘a writer’s characteristic mode of expression in terms of effectiveness, clarity, beauty and the like’ (Verdonk 196). This recalls the definition of style as the distinctive mode or manner of expression in speech or in writing. Style, as a manner of expression, has often led to debates of whether it is matter or manner; message or medium; content or container; and what or how that takes priority in style. Whilst some scholars maintain the inseparability of matter and manner (monism); others maintain the separation of the two (dualism); and some others maintain a functional approach to style (pluralism). For Osundare, however, the question of differentiating manner from matter is not as significant as recognising that ‘language is not just a medium of literary expression,

but an enabling factor, indeed the main pillar of the literary edifice, a vital affective tool which aids the status of literature as a transitive enterprise' and that literature, in its own turn, 'enriches language ideationally, lexically, and structurally; extends its expressive and cognitive frontiers, and creates new possibilities where there was none before' ("Cautious Paths" 11). With these divisive standpoints about style, this study adopts Leech and Short's multilevel approach to style:

- (i) Style is a way in which language is *used*: i.e., it belongs to *parole* rather than *langue*.
- (ii) Style consists in *choices* made from the repertoire of the language.
- (iii) A style is defined in terms of *domain* of language use (e.g., what choices are made by a particular author, in a particular genre, or in a particular text).
- (iv) Literary stylistics is typically concerned with *explaining the relation between* style and literary or aesthetic function.
- (v) Style is relatively *transparent* or *opaque*: transparency implies paraphrasability; opacity implies that a text cannot be adequately paraphrased, and that interpretation of the text depends greatly on the creative imagination of the reader.
- (vi) Stylistic choice is limited to those aspects of linguistic choice which concern *alternative ways of rendering the same subject matter*. (31, original emphasis)

### **Foregrounding**

Foregrounding is a veritable tool for the study of style. Leech describes foregrounding as the meeting point of formal and functional points of view where formality entails a deviation, or a departure, from what is expected in the linguistic code or the social code and functionality involves a special effect or significance conveyed by that departure (3).

The concept of foregrounding builds on Mukařovský's concept of actualisation, as well as the Shklovsky's earlier term – 'making strange' (defamiliarization). Douthwaite explains that defamiliarization is borne out of the need to combat how our world routinizes and thrives on habituation which dulls the senses and the critical faculties. He explicates further that defamiliarization uses the linguistic technique of foregrounding to impede normal processing by showing the world in an unusual, unexpected, or abnormal manner (qtd. in Leech 4).

Leech sees foregrounding as a motivated deviation from linguistic or other socially accepted norms which are basic to the principle of aesthetic communication (30). For Simpson, foregrounding is a form of textual patterning which is motivated specifically for literary-aesthetic purposes and which is capable of working at any level of language (50). Being a motivated use of language, foregrounding has a 'value in the game' (Leech and Short 40) in that it projects the intended and overall meaning of the text in an unusual or unique way.

Leech points out that foregrounding, in addition to the normal processes of interpretation, invites an act of *imaginative interpretation* from the reader. He thus submits that a reader needs to pay attention to the text to discover any form of abnormality or irregularity in order to work out the text and make sense of it. To do this, the reader must consciously use his/her imagination to investigate the essence of the abnormality. Leech concludes by saying that it is in these imaginative acts of attributing meaning, or 'making sense', that the special communicative values of a text lies (61). Leech, hinging on the argument that the *communicative values* of foregrounding are not random, identifies four major categories or effects of the foregrounded elements of a text:

- *contrast*: such as those found in paradox, antithesis, and antonyms
- *similarity*: such as in metaphor, simile and synonyms
- *parallelism*: such as in repetition of linguistic items of syntactic structures
- *mimesis*: imitation or enactment of the meaning of a text through its form as can be indicated in onomatopoeia and sound symbolism. (61-62)

Thus, Leech concludes that these interpretative values are not present in the text itself, but are a part of a reader's 'poetic competence' to look for such values. They are the basis for *local* acts of interpretation, and local interpretations in their turn contribute to the interpretation of the whole [text] (62).

Basically, foregrounding is accomplished through either deviation from the norm or over-application of the norm. As a deviation from the norm, foregrounding builds on abnormal/unexpected irregularity, whilst foregrounding, as an over-application of the norm, is a product of abnormal/unexpected regularity such as repetition and parallelism. For Wales, however, repetition and parallelism are forms of deviation since they violate the rules of usage through over-frequency (167).

### Analysis

The selected poem for analysis is Rome Aboh's "hour of truth" from his collection *torrents of terror*. The poem is first replicated before proceeding to the analysis.

#### **hour of truth**

*Never again will our story go*

*without a proper telling*

Niyi Osundare, *The Word Is an Egg*

You can write	1
if you so choose	2
about chirpy birds romancin' the silvery sky;	3
about blossomin' roses sendin' forth perfumes	4
from virgin nectars;	5
about mornin' dew weavin' hands	6
with bloomin' frangipanis;	7

about fabulous fireflies dartin’	8
through wet evenin’ grasses;	9
about rambunctious moths flutterin’	10
to the lustre of your laughter;	11
your enticin’ laughter caressin’	12
her honey drippin’ lips;	13
about blazin’ rainbow	14
on her cloudy cheeks;	15
about sloshin’ waterfall	16
at Agbokim.	17
All I care is to	18
write not in beaded words;	19
but in words encrusted with bitter memories,	20
memories of hunger-swollen-belly kids trudgin’	21
mine-ridden streets of Khartoum, Kabul	22
Timbuktu, Damascus, Maiduguri.	23
I will write of American drones in Karachi and Somalia.	24
I will write of frenzied shootings in American schools.	25
I will write of joblessness and corruption.	26
I will write of designed kidnappin’.	27
I will write of neglected ashibiti*	28
recordin’ many more deaths.	29
I will write of workers’ taxes	30
oilin’ barren political ambitions.	31
I am writing of a forest <i>Sambisaing</i>	32
our girls; O our dear girls!	33

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\* Ashibiti – Bette-Bendi word for hospital

“hour of truth” can best be described as a poem of rage and lamentation. The poet is uncomfortable with the different mishaps, unrest, corruption and terrors in different parts of the world, especially in Nigeria, his home country. The poem thus bemoans failing and failed national systems not only in Nigeria, but also in other parts of the world. The persona is, therefore, not so much bothered about appreciating nature, as he is with revealing and lamenting various disastrous events taking place in different parts of the world. The ugliness of the atrocities in different nation-states contrasts with and suppresses the beauty of nature. As the title of the poem indicates, talking about humans’ various atrocious activities in various parts of the world is telling the truth. With this understanding, the analysis investigates how language is deliberately foregrounded across different levels of language to encode the concerns of the poet.

### a. Graphological level

The poem has 3 stanzas, 33 lines and 165 words: stanza 1 has 69 words across 17 lines; stanza 2 has 30 words across 6 lines and stanza 3 has 65 words across 10 lines. Whilst stanza 1 romanticises with the beauty of nature, stanzas 2 and 3 paint the ugly picture of human atrocities that deemphasise, contrast with, and suppress the beauty of nature outlined in stanza 1.

Particular graphological foregrounding can be found with the title of the poem which is presented in small letters against the norm of writing titles. In line 28, an asterisk against the ‘ashibiti’ is used to identify the word as a loanword and to signify that its meaning is provided at the end of the poem. There is a preponderance of apostrophe because all words, except two, which contain an ‘ing’ morpheme, have the letter ‘g’ deliberately omitted. The deliberate elision of the letter aids musicality, especially whilst describing nature. One of the two words whose ‘g’ is retained is *Sambisaing*. Since the word *Sambisaing* breaks the poet’s deviated norm of eliding the ‘g’ letter in the ‘ing’ morpheme, the word exemplifies internal deviation. Very importantly, writing the word in italics foregrounds it to encode a significant meaning at the lexico-semantic level.

### b. Phonological level

In stanza 1, repetitive sound patterns manifest as alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia and enhance musicality to project the concentration on the beauty of nature, as a characteristic of romantic poetry.

- a. Alliteration - /s/ in the silvery sky (line 3)  
/f/ in fabulous fireflies (line 8)  
/l/ in lustre of your laughter (line 11)  
/t/ in tlustre of your tlaughter (line 11)
- b. Assonance -/ɜ:/ in chirpy birds (line 3)  
/eɪ/ in blazing rainbow (line 14)  
/ə/ in lustre of your laughter (line 11)
- c. Consonance - /p/ in dripping lips (line 13)
- d. Onomatopoeia – sloshin’ waterfall (line 16) n
- e. Others - there is the prominence of phonemes /f l m n t ə/ between lines 7 and 11 and this leads to some level of musicality which complements other sound patterns in the poem:

with **bloomin’ frangipanis**;  
about**fabulous fireflies dartin’**  
through **wet evenin’ grasses**;  
about **rambunctious moths flutterin’**  
to **thelustre of yourlaughter**;

In contrast to the musical sound patterns in the first stanza, the persona, who is disinterested in romanticising with nature, employs phonological patterns that demand great production (pronunciation) efforts from the reader in stanza 2. This, thus, foregrounds the serious task of the poet in the subsequent stanzas of the poem.

Consequently, the prominence of obstruents which demand higher production efforts in stanza 2 contrasts with the beauty of nature which is projected in stanza 1. Whereas, the phonology of stanza 1 flows mellifluously, the phonology of stanza 2 is demanding and indicates the harsh, trying and demanding conditions of humans' inhumanity as the bolded phonemes in stanza 2 suggest:

All I care is to	ɔ:l aɪ keə ɪzteʊ
Write not in beaded words;	raɪt nɒt ɪn bi:dɪd wɜ:dz
but in words encrusted with bitter memories,	<b>b</b> ʌt ɪn wɜ:dz ɪnkrʌstɪd wɪðbɪtə
meməɪz	
memories of hunger-swollen-belly kids trudging	meməɪz əv hʌŋgəs wɒlənbəlɪ
	<b>kɪdz</b> trʌdʒɪn
mine-ridden streets of Khartoum, Kabul	mɑɪnrɪdn stri:ts əv kɑ:tu:m
<b>k</b> ɑ:bl	
Timbuktu, Damascus, Maiduguri	<b>tɪmb</b> ʌktu <b>d</b> əməskəs
mer <b>d</b> uguri	

With different resources such as alliteration, assonance, and sound symbolism, the poet foregrounds the phonology of stanza 1 to encode the beauty of nature. However, with the preponderance of obstruents and the near absence of the 'ing' morpheme in stanza 2, the foregrounded phonology of stanza 2 lacks both lustre and musicality and thus projects the harsh conditions of living in a 21st century world.

### Morphological level

#### *Inflection*

There is the regular occurrence of the present participle inflection morpheme 'ing' in the poem. However, the words containing 'ing' morphemes are made prominent through the deliberate elision of the 'g' letter in: romancin' (line 3), blossom in' and sendin' (line 4), mornin' and weavin' (line 6), bloomin' (line 7), dartin' (line 8), evenin' (line 9), flutterin' (line 10), enticin' and caressin' (line 12), drippin' (line 13), blazin' (line 14), sloshin' (line 16), trudgingin' (line 21), kidnappin' (line 27), recordin' (line 29), and oilin' (line 31).

However, line 32 demonstrates an internal deviation because the poet's established tradition of eliding the last letter of the morpheme is suspended in 'writing' and 'Sambisaing' (line 32). This suspension helps to foreground the words, especially 'Sambisaing' with its deviant employment of the present continuous inflectional morpheme. Normally, 'ing' morpheme is affixed to a verb. However, in 'Sambisaing', it is here affixed to a noun, "Sambisa". With the foregrounded use of the 'ing' morpheme in 'writing' and 'Sambisaing', the poet underscores the kidnap of the Nigerian Chibok and Dapchi schoolgirls and conveys the intense emotional pain and psychological torture that the kidnap of the girls, amongst other disasters enumerated, has on the poet/persona.



### *Compounding*

Two innovative compound words occur in the poem and both point to the agonies bred by failed human systems:

- hunger-swollen-belly (adjective, line 21)
- mine-ridden (adjective, line 22)

### **Lexico-semantic level**

The lexico-semantic level concerns the specific choices of vocabulary items that language users select to express and encode their ideas and experiences such that they mean exactly what they intend them to mean. In the poem, the lexico-semantic level reveals the specific choices of nature terms, unusual and innovative collocations, loanwords, and place names. Each of these lexico-semantic choices is discussed below.

### *Nature terms*

Semantic field organises the vocabulary of a language into their domains of reference (Wales, 159). In this poem, the poet employs lexical sets of items of nature within the semantic field of nature.

Because the objective of the poet is to protest inhuman happenings in the world, he juxtaposes the beauty of nature with the ugliness of humans' actions. As a result, the poet selects set of nature lexical terms and intensifies the beauty and unity they exude with apt adjectives thus: chirpy birds and silvery sky (line 3); blossomin' roses (line 4); virgin nectars (line 5); mornin' dewes (line 6); bloomin' frangipanis (line 7); fabulous fireflies (line 8); wet evenin' grasses (line 9); rambunctious moths (line 10); lustre of your laughter (line 11); enticin' laughter (line 12); honey drippin' lips (line 13); blazin' rainbow (line 14); cloudy cheeks (line 15); and sloshin' waterfall (line 17).

### *Collocations*

Wales submits that collocation is the habitual or expected co-occurrence of words as a characteristic feature of lexical behaviour in language which attests to its predictability and idiomaticity (68). This, however, does not imply that there cannot be innovative turns in language, especially literary language, such that the non-habitual and the unusual are exploited for poetic effects (69). Thus, collocation can refer to lexical incongruity which juxtaposes different levels of style for emotive emphasis and purposes (cf. 69).

In the poem, unusual collocations 'paint' the pictures of the different atrocities around the world as well as the damaging effects of the events:

- i. bitter memories (line 20)
- ii. hunger-swollen-belly kids (line 21)
- iii. mine-ridden streets (line 22)
- iv. American drones (line 24)
- v. frenzied shootings (line 25)

- vi. designed kidnappin' (line 27)
- vii. neglected ashibiti (line 28)
- viii. barren political ambitions (line 31)
- ix. a forest *Sambisaing* our girls (lines 32-3)

#### *Loanword*

'Ashibiti', the Bette-Bendi word for hospital, is used not because there is no English equivalence, but probably to emphasise that the persona is speaking from the viewpoint of the victims of neglected hospitals.

#### *Place names*

The poet employs place names for intertextual purposes. Wales defines intertextuality as utterances/texts in relation to other utterances/texts (235). In simple terms, intertextuality compels the hearer/reader to connect with some other text/talk. In this connection, the reference to places in the poem serves intertextual semantic purposes since the places are points of brutalities around the world.

The place names referred to in the poem are Khartoum, Kabul, Timbuktu, Damascus, Maiduguri, Karachi, Somalia, American schools, and Sambisa. Each of these names recalls different atrocities that have been or are being experienced in those places and different parts of the world. The reference to Maiduguri, for example, calls up the memory of the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents in Northern Nigeria, that is, in Sambisa (forest) which is a horrendous hideout and stronghold of Boko Haram insurgents (Olaniyan). The most pathetic of the stories revolving round the Sambisa forest is its being the location where the Chibok schoolgirls, who were kidnapped sometime in 2014, were taken to and subjected to different forms of inhuman treatments (Bodunrin; Nigeria Chibok). This understanding of Sambisa forest explains the poet's use of the verb 'Sambisaing' as a semantically loaded term that encodes many ideas, including the traumatic acts and the malevolence of the insurgents in the Nigerian nation.

#### **Syntactic level**

The syntax of 'hour of truth' is creatively foregrounded to align with the preoccupation of the poet. Stanza 1 contains one complex sentence whose dependent clause is enclosed within the structure of the independent clause. Thus, stanza 1 has the structure  $\alpha\text{--}\langle\langle\beta\rangle\rangle\text{--}\alpha$ . The  $\langle\langle\beta\rangle\rangle$  clause – "If you so choose" – is an enclosed clause, thus a parenthetical clause which is inserted to break the linearity of the  $\alpha$  (alpha)-clause.

Whilst the  $\alpha$  (alpha)-clause has the simple structure SFPA, the adjunct complicates the clause since it comprises seven paratactic prepositional phrases (PP) (see table below). Halliday and Matthiessen explain that "group and phrase ... serve to develop single elements within a clause (or, if these complexes are embedded, a single element within a group or phrase), serving the same function as a simple group or phrase would" (558).

You	Can	Write	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. about chirpy birds romancin’ the silvery sky;</li> <li>2. about blossomin’ roses sendin’ forth perfumes/from virgin nectars;</li> <li>3. about mornin’ dew weavin’ hands/with bloomin’ frangipanis;</li> <li>4. about fabulous fireflies dartin’/through wet evenin’ grasses;</li> <li>5. about rambunctious moths flutterin’/to the lustre of your laughter; your enticin’ laughter caressin’/her honey drippin’ lips;</li> <li>6. about blazin’ rainbow/on her cloudy cheeks;</li> <li>7. about sloshin’ waterfall/at Agbokim.</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>

A further complication can be seen in the fifth PP where the logico-semantic taxis of elaboration expands “your laughter” through apposition thus:

your laughter = your enticing laughter caressin’ her honey drippin’ lips

This way, the fifth PP also exemplifies a nominal group complex through the nexus of two NG’s – your laughter ^ your enticing laughter caressin’ her honey drippin’ lips – embedded within an element of an NG.

Halliday and Matthiessen note that the function of group complexes is to textually present a single message; interpersonally project a single proposition or proposal; and experientially emphasise a single figure (558). In essence, in spite of the adjunct being a group complex, the seemingly multivariate ideas point to just one message which is the unified beauty of nature.

Stanza 2 is made up of a clause which has the structure S F < P > F A where the Predicator (*to write*) breaks the sequence of the Finite (*is not*) thus:

[[All care]]	I	is	<to write>	Not	in beaded words but in words encrusted with bitter memories, memories of hunger-swollen-belly kid trudgin’ mine-ridden streets of Khartoum, Kabul/Timbuktu, Damascus, Maiduguri
<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>&lt; P &gt;</b>	<b>F (contd.)</b>	<b>A</b>	

Notwithstanding the seeming simple structure of the clause constituting stanza 2, the clause is a complicated one because the subject of the sentence is a clause. Also, the adjunct of the clause is a group complex which is formed through the nexus of two prepositional phrases that are joined by the conjunction ‘but’, thereby underscoring elaboration parataxis:

PP1: *in beaded* ^ PP2: *but in words encrusted with bitter memories,  
words memories of hunger-swollen-belly kid trudgin’  
mine-ridden streets of Khartoum, Kabul/Timbuktu,  
Damascus, Maiduguri*

PP1 has the structure: PP (p ^ NG (Classifier: *beaded* ^ Head: *words*)) and is thus less complex. However, the same thing cannot be said about PP2. Unlike PP1, post-modification via down-ranked groups and clauses as well as the employment of group complex complicates PP2:

In words [[encrusted with bitter memories, =memories of hunger-swollen-belly kid  
[[trudgin’ mine-ridden streets of Khartoum, Kabul/Timbuktu, Damascus,  
Maiduguri]] ] ] |

it is important to note that stanza 2 is significant to the development of the poem because it bridges stanza 1, the “beaded words” which reveals the unintended writing goal of the poet, and stanza 3, the “words encrusted in bitter memories” which constitute the intended preoccupation of the poet. The complexity of PP2 can thus be understood as a reflection of the complexity of the emotions surrounding the words encrusted in bitter memories which stanza 3 is concerned with.

Stanza 3 contains seven simple sentences and contrasts with stanza 1 which equally contains seven PPs. Thus, the seriousness of the matters in stanza 3 contrasts with the somewhat sensual concerns of stanza 1. Since stanza 3 actually encodes the core preoccupation of the poet, simple sentences are employed therein to reflect the build-up of the different global disastrous events that burden the heart of the poet.

I	will	write	of American drones in Karachi and Somalia.
I	will	write	of frenzied shootings in American schools.
I	will	write	of joblessness and corruption.
I	will	write	of designed kidnappin'.
I	will	write	of neglected ashibiti*/recordin' many more deaths.
I	will	write	of workers' taxes/oilin' barren political ambitions
I	Am	writing	of a forest <i>Sambisaing</i> our girls; O our dear girls!
<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>NG</b>	<b>VG</b>		<b>PP</b>

Whilst the first 6 sentences in the stanza employ future aspect, the last sentence employs the present continuous tense. This exception is foregrounded since it breaks the tradition the poet set in the first six sentences. The foregrounded seventh sentence aesthetically communicates the “ongoingness” of the action of writing about the girls and identifies the matter of the girls as the most painful and urgent of the atrocious issues to be discussed. The use of an exclamatory NG in the last sentence conveys the poet's intense pain whilst thinking about the girls' condition. Halliday and Matthiessen submit that exclamations are usually verbal gestures of the speaker which call for empathy on the part of the addressee (196). Invariably, the exclamation climaxes the recount of the persona's bitter memories.

Where the poet realises the seven nature items in stanza 1 as a group complex, he realises the seven items of humans' terrors as full sentences. This, aesthetically, signifies the seven human terrors as the primal purpose of the poet. Where group complexes serve to develop a single message, upgrading the ideas in the group complex to a clause rank will create distinct messages, propositions (proposals) and figures (Halliday & Matthiessen, 558). Invariably, the seven sentences in stanza 3 project seven different messages and reiterate the commitment of the poet to uncover humans' atrocious activities.

### Conclusion

The preoccupation of this study is to investigate style in Aboh's “hour of truth” through the instrumentality of foregrounding. The analysis shows that Aboh, as a 21st Nigerian poet, employs foregrounding to picture and lament the agonies of living under pitiable conditions in the 21st century. With his mimetic concern set in pace with the quotation from Osundare – Never again will our story go/without a proper telling – Aboh clearly indicates that the 21st century writer is a “righter” who

chooses to write with a threnodic voice to agonise the pains of the masses who live in a 21st century world that is fast losing its bliss.

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