

Critical Semiotic Analysis of David Diop’s Poem: “THE VULTURES”

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Abstract- *Language is a veritable tool in communication. It is a structured system of communication, used by human beings to convey messages, either through verbal or non-verbal medium. However, effective communication is achieved eclectically, by means of linear words, signs, symbols, gestures and imagery. Oftentimes, speakers use proverbs, songs, poems and slangs to enhance effective communication, to a desirable end. This study therefore, sets to examine the efficacy of the use of signs and symbols in poems to pass across information or messages. “The vultures” one of the poems of David Diop, is sourced from the internet, and used as the data for this study. Methodology that is adopted for the analysis is Critical Semiotic Analysis, propounded by Caldas – Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2003). The main purpose of this study is specifically to examine the use of semiotic modes, such as, imagery, signs and symbols, and linear words in achieving good communication. The findings, however, reveal that the use of semiotic modes: representational and discursive signs, through symbols and linear words respectively, help to a large extent, in conveying in the mind of the readers or audience vivid meanings of the message. The study also reveals the fact that unbridled callousness of the foreigners brought colossal damage to the socio – economic life of the Africans. The critical semiotic analysis has therefore illuminated the effects of inhumane attitudes of the Colonial Masters and the overall trauma and cultural degradation they have foisted on the psyches of the Africans, generally.*

Indexed Terms- *Language, Communication, Semiotics, modes, Poem.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of language is not only a cause for joy, among human beings, but also a cause for the sustainability of peace, and expressions of intents in the global sphere. As language is used to achieve different things, so also, it is diverse in nature, and with all forms, striving to achieve communication. Language, as defined by Clerk, et al (1994), is seen as the principal medium that humans use to communicate with each other or one another, and it is also seen as a bond that links people together, and binds them to their culture. Communication is achieved through the effective use of language, which is either through verbal or non-verbal. However, it is expedient to note that even in verbal use of language; elements of semiotics are encapsulated, as signs, imagery and symbols, and they are often utilized to convey vivid meanings in the mind of the readers or audience. In light of the above, this study goes beyond the literal use of language. It sets focus on the use of metaphors, imagery and symbols, with a view to finding how communication is effectively arrived at, without any bias or much criticism from the public or the Government. Signs, in whatever forms, are phenomena of life, and in relation to Semiotics. Semiotics, according to Olaosun (2016), is the study of life’s phenomena instantiated in diverse sign forms and categories. Parts of the sign phenomena are things that we do (including our embodiments) which carry meanings or send messages and things that we encounter as we interact with both the natural and the artificial worlds. Eco (1976) clearly indicates that Semiotics is principally about signs and symbols that are shown, not only physically, but are also perceived in our actions or in actions, and even in nature, with a view to transmitting messages or information. The poet, David Diop, carefully and methodically presented his message about the degradation and dehumanization of the Africans by the foreigners, and

all in the name of colonialism. The language used is subtle in nature, though full of semiotic modes and affordances, such as, vulture, blood stained monument, forgiveness books, womb of the Earth, desolate villages and mines, just to mention, but a few. Language is here perfectly used to bring to lime light the extreme wickedness perpetrated in order to subjugate Africans and openly rape Africa of her God given patrimonies. Diop highlighted how the foreigners had come with the supposed civilization, but ended up subjugating and dehumanizing Africans for their own selfish gains. Symbolically, Vulture is typically known to be an evil bird that preys on dead bodies and carcasses, and the use of Vultures clearly typifies foreigners as evil. They are all out to devour the glory and the resources of Africa. What a calculated tragedy! In light of the above, the beauty of language, as used by Diop, clearly paints the true picture of how colonialism has destroyed Africa, and has also stagnated her development. Africa is plundered, raped and colonized to service and nurture the Western World. This is a clear manifestation of man's inhumanity to man.

Review of Related Literature

In his work, Purwaningsih (2023) defines poetry as a language skill that belongs to old and modern literature. Poetry is an expression in words that forms an imaginary expression when reading it. It is noteworthy that expressions in poetry are often through symbols, images, signs and literary devices. Purwaningsih (2023) uses semiotic analysis to do justice to the poem, "I want" in order to arrive at the critical meaning or message of the poem. In David Diop "vultures" , a critical semiotic analysis will be adopted to arrive at the plausible meanings intended by the poet.

Be that as it may, a critical semiotic analysis of a poem examines how signs and symbols within the text, including words, imagery and structure, create meanings, drawing on semiotic theory to interpret the poem's message and cultural context. In Arning (2023), Peirce states that both poetry and semiotics are about meaning making. He says further that poetry is about the intensely private, the vicissitudes of emotion expressed subjectively, whereas semiotics seeks to account for public meanings.

Diop, in Vultures, expressed the ineffable message in verse, and perhaps his tangled emotion and things that could scarcely be expressed in prose. His words, signs and symbols were well crafted to create a vivid illustration and also arrive at intended meaning.

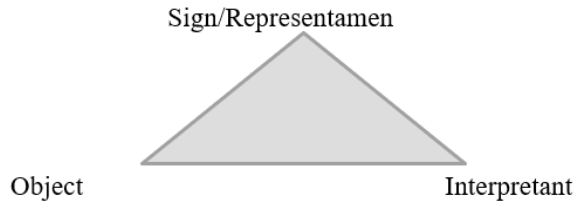
The beauty of the poem cannot be an illusion, as it can effectively match the beauty explored in "The Love Song of J. Alferd Pruffrock" by T.S. Eliot, "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and Christopher Okigbo's "Path of Thunder " just to mention a view.

Simply put, "Vultures", as painted by David Diop, is replete with semiotic resources that help in driving home the full intent of the poet. Van Leeuwen (2005) lends credence to a simple fact that semiotic resources, not limited to words or signs, but also include symbols images and emotions (tone) contribute largely to intending meaning. In line with semiotics, meaning of a word or a symbol can be interpreted denotatively or connotatively, depending on what the writer aims at, as we can see in the analysis of the poem "Vultures".

II. METHODOLOGY

In this work, researchers observed the meaning of both the representational modes (symbols) and the discursive modes (linguistics forms) and how they express meanings that are in tunes to David Diop in his poem titled: The Vultures, And in doing just that, they used descriptive and qualitative research . Burns and Groove (2010) define descriptive research as research that is designed to provide picture of a thing, an object and a situation, as exactly as it should be with adequate illustration. In line with the above, researchers would illustrate the used symbols (representational modes) and the literacy signs (discursive modes) in the poem "The Vulture". The qualitative and descriptive research, as used by the researchers, would enhance better understanding of the semiotic modes used in the poem.

In arriving at better understanding and clearer description, a critical semiotics analysis, as outlined in Peirce's triangle, as stated below would be explored .



The data that researchers used for critical semiotic analysis were drawn from words that have symbolic meanings, either appearing as representational modes or discursive modes in the poem. Steps taken in analyzing the data were in three ways. That is, reading the poem thoroughly, identifying and classifying the representational and discursive modes, and subjecting the data to the critical semiotic analysis.

Findings and Discussion:

The Vultures

In those days

When civilization kicked us in the face

When holy water slapped our cringing brows

The Vultures built in the shadow of their talons

The bloodstained monument of tutelage.

In those days

There was painful laughter on the metallic hell of the roads

And the monotonous rhythm of paternoster

Drowned the howling on the plantations.

Of the bitter memories of extorted kisses

Of promises broken at the point of a gun

Of foreigners who did not seem human

Who knew all the books but did not know love

But we whose hands fertilize the womb of the earth

In spite of your songs of pride

In spite of the desolate villages of torn Africa

Hope was preserved in us as in a fortress

And from the mines of Swaziland to the factories of Europe

Spring will be reborn under our bright steps.

Discussion 1

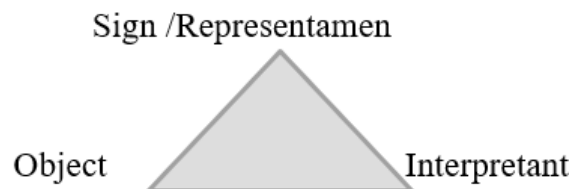
The poem clearly exposes the atrocities often committed by man against man. It exposes the evil perpetrated by the colonial masters against the colonized Africans. It paints the irony and the innuendo of civilization in the hands of those that are supposedly civilized. It talks about the brutal force, with which innocent Africans were degraded, oppressed, traumatized and subjugated. The

desperation to loot and vandalize Africa by the colonialists forms the kernel of the message, as presented in the poem. The above, notwithstanding, the poet praises the dogged and diehard attitudes of the Africans, in facing dehumanization and excruciation pains, suffered in the hands of the colonialists. He also praises the resoluteness and high hope on the part of the Africans, who believe that sooner than later, Africa would gain total freedom. The poem is a classical invective against the foreign adventurers, colonialists.

DISCUSSION 2

Classification of semiotic modes:

- i. Representational (symbolic) semiotic modes are :
Holy water , vultures , bloodstained monument, gun , foreigners, metallic hell of the road , womb of the earth, mines of Swaziland , factories of Europe, plantation, books, spring e. t. c.
- ii. Discursive (words/signs) semiotic modes are:
Civilization kicked us in the face, slapped, in those days, monotonous rhythm of the paternosters, drowned the howling, extorted kisses, promises broken, songs of pride, hope, bright steps, e. t. c.
- iii. Critical semiotics analysis, using Peirce’s triadic semiotic models:



Sign	Object	Interpretant
Birds	Vulture	Vulture is a bird that represents evil omens. It is a predator, and mostly feeds on carcasses. The colonialists are painted as people who profit from the suffering of the Africans. The colonialists are regarded as interlopers and

		inhumane people. Rather than helping Africans, they traumatized the citizens, raped their land and pauperized Africa.
Literacy	Book	Book is a source of enlightenment. It is an eye opener. It is a compact compendium for civilization. However, “books”, as used in poem suggest civilization, but foreigners in actual fact are crude, oppressive and evil. Instead of advancing civilization, they suppress it, and display the height of Man’s inhumanity to man. They represent crudeness and savagery.
Wickedness	Blood stained monument	This is a clear evidence of the use of brutal force to suppress the harmless and innocent Africans. All their supposed good things are stained with the blood of those they have directly or indirectly

		traumatized and killed. Though the foreigners claim to live in a protected building, or environment, the monument is stained with the blood of the innocent. The poet is pained to the bone marrow because of the senseless crudity on the part of the foreigners.
Instrument	Gun	Gun is an Instrument or weapons of war. It is not used for anything other than to harm and kill. The foreigners, as indicated by Diop, use gun to intimidate or terminate the lives of Africans. It simply means that any African that dares the foreigner, is automatically silenced, intimidated or killed. It means the environment is not healthy enough to accommodate agitation
Emblem	Holy Water	Holy water is supposed to be a sign of good omen, but it is symbolically

		used to deceive African. It is used for deceit. They claim to be holy and pious, but their mind is full of evil. They are selfish, and think about their own benefit alone. Baptizing people with holy water in the name of God, but also bringing the same people down if they agitate for their rights.
Open Land	Plantation	Plantation is supposed to be a place where serious or mechanized farming takes place with the sole aim of getting bountiful harvest. However, the plantation is not only where farming take place, but also a dungeon where the rebels are tortured and isolated. It is a place of torment. The worst part of it is that when a section of those in agony are crying, the foreigners will force another section to be reciting, The

		Lord's Prayer, with the soul aim that the recitation will drown the noises or crying of agony. What cruelty!
Repository	Womb of the earth	Africans were purely agrarian, who cultivated the land for their means of existence, before the foreigner came. The womb of the earth is the fertile land used for cultivation of crops. Africans love one another, unlike the foreigners, usurpers that came disguising as friends but are real enemies of Africans.

Stark reality of exploitation	Mines of Swaziland factories of Europe	Mines of Swaziland and factories of Europe are contrasted in nature. Mines of Swaziland represent crudity, while factories of Europe represent civilization. However, It is the laborious efforts of Africans that run the factories in Europe. Gold and several other mineral deposits
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		are excavated and transported to Europe. The foreigner raped and grossly exploited Africa to sustain their factories in Europe. This is also the height of Man's inhumanity to man.
Brutal force	Civilization kicked us in the face	This is a clear embarrassment from those who seem to be civilized. They trample upon Africans with impunity. They are far from being what they claim they are. They are brute savage. Their lives are shrouded in deceit and hatred against Africans.
Deceit	Monotonous rhythm of the paternosters drowned the howling	Worry by their conscience, the foreigners always ask Africans to recite The Lord's Prayer, in order to cover the agony and crying of the innocent ones being exploited on the plantation. They claim to be good and holy to the passers-by, when indeed

		they are wicked and are demonic. They turn the owner of the land to destitute and scavengers.
Relief	Songs of Pride, Spring bright steps	In spite of the agony and untold hardship that Africans are made to undergo, Africans still strongly believe that the Sun shall shine again. All hope is not lost, as they believe that time and season happen to all situations. Africans are full of hope that sooner than later the Continent will gain total freedom. They believe in the saying, "When there is life, there is hope."

III. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

It is crystal clear that poetry is a literary piece that often reflects the thoughts and feelings of a poet. Poetry, in this analysis, is seen as a veritable tool in communication. As little or short a poem is, it can generate several meanings with which the poet can sensitize, clarify, expose, condemn or appreciate things or situation.

"The Vultures" written by David Diop, is replete with meanings, as can be inferred from the used semiotic modes and affordances. The use of symbols and imagery, coupled with the linear words, makes the readers align with the mood or feelings of the poet. The poem is a complete condemnation of the attitude of the foreigners, who claim to be civilized but are

worse than slave masters. The ultimate aim of bringing religion to Africa is not really for evangelism and the spread of the gospel. Rather their target is to exploit Africa, openly rape Africa and subjugate Africans to perpetual servitude. They pries to be harbinger of love, but in reality, they are demon. Their presence is to rob Peter to pay Paul. The poet did not fail to praise the bravery of Africans, who are confident that somehow and someday, Africa will be emancipated from the shackles of the tyrants.

Simply put, the poem revolves round exploitation, stark hatred, deceit and the height of Man's inhumanity to man.

It is advisable, however, for coming researchers to use critical discourse analysis or text linguistics to analyze the poem, with a view to getting further understanding of the poem.

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