

1  
2 | **Objectifying Intuitive Response in Stylistic Analysis: A Study of Maya**  
3 **Angelou's 'Still I Rise.'**  
4  
5  
6

7 **Abstract**

8 *Intuitive response is an antagonistic phenomenon in the stylistic analysis of a literary work. This*  
9 *is given the fact that stylistics relies on tangible linguistic evidence to unfold the writer's*  
10 *meaning or the communicative purposes of an author. ~~this is the concept of objectivity.~~ This*  
11 *paper however, examined objectivity in Maya Angelou's 'Still I Rise'. The study employed the*  
12 *different linguistic levels of stylistic analysis as a framework. They are: Syntax, Semantics, Lexis,*  
13 *Graphology and phonology levels of analysis. It is believed that, this work will serve as a*  
14 *(division of labour) explain further between a stylistic analyst and a literary critic.*  
15

16 **Keywords:** Objectivity, Intuitive Response, Stylistics  
17

18 **1.0 Introduction**

19 Stylistics is a branch of linguistics and linguistics is the scientific study of language and  
20 language is a central phenomenon in the studies of stylistics. By this, stylistics is unarguably an  
21 | offshoot of linguistics. Stylistics according to (Ogunsiji and Farinde, 2010 page?) relies on  
22 evidence and proofs to validate its proposition. This is the task of a stylistician. It is an  
23 observable reality, that critics often mistake stylistic analysis for literary criticism. While  
24 stylistics tries to give proof and evidence of their propositions, literary criticism suggests a closer  
25 look at a literary piece and it allows for the critic's personal views, feelings and attitude. This is  
26 the concept of "intuitive response", which can also be described as "a personal assumption of the  
27 | critic towards a literary work", are you quoting? Indicate the source and it is against the "norms"  
28 of stylistics. On this note therefore, this paper draws a clear distinction between stylistic analysis  
29 and literary criticism and empowers the stylistic analyst with the "linguistic levels of analysis" as  
30 imperative tools for an in-depth and sound stylistic analysis of a literary work. This is achieved  
31 with a review of Maya Angelou's 'Still I Rise', as a case study.

32

## 33 **2.0 Conceptual Framework**

34 In recent times, the stylistics has continually enjoyed an overwhelming intellectual and  
35 scholarly attention by scholars of linguistics. Several attempts have been made to explain this  
36 branch of linguistics called, stylistics. To many, stylistics is perceived as a branch of linguistics  
37 that deals with the study of varieties of language, its properties, principles behind choice,  
38 dialogue, accent, length and register (Bradford, 1979 and Downes, 1998), while others insist that  
39 it attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular [style] choices used by  
40 individuals and social groups in their use of language. This is according to (Turner, 1973, Birch,  
41 1995 and Fowler, 1998).

42 “Objectivity” and “intuitive response” are two parallel tools and concepts in stylistics.  
43 While the former is often associated with linguistic stylistics, the latter aligns with literary  
44 criticism. In a bit to create a clear distinction between these two concepts, (Ogunsiji and Farinde,  
45 2010) opines that, stylistics is objective and involves the recognition of the levels of linguistic  
46 description or analysis of a “text”. These linguistic levels however prevent the reader’s intuitive  
47 response or personal feelings. By this, the critic is unable to dive into hasty conclusions to a  
48 particular literary ‘text’ analysis. Objectivity however, provides the critic with invaluable  
49 insights gained from linguistics and offers discipline in the process of stylistic analysis of any  
50 literary ‘text’.

51 According to (Jacobson 1960) cited in (Ogunsiji and Farinde, 2010), Stylistic criticism  
52 seeks to bring the methods of linguistics into literary criticism, it also aims at being more precise  
53 and systematic than conventional in criticism. However, this implies that, for there to be a  
54 significant stylistic analysis, greater emphasis must be made on language components – ‘the  
55 linguistic levels’. In contrast to this, any literary analysis based on institutive response is likely to

56 avoid a purely technical approach to the study of such ‘text’ and will be much concerned about  
57 matters of aesthetic value and content as conventional criticism.

58 The practice of stylistics is targeted at achieving certain goals, some of which include:  
59 studying the peculiarities that characterize the discourse of a writer, speaker, period, people or  
60 genre and to create sensitivity to the different linguistic manipulations and choices in a given  
61 “text”. Primarily, the objective of stylistics is to help determine the linguistic background and  
62 orientation embedded in literary work and induce the writer of speaker’s illocution. This can  
63 only be achieved through objectivity and little or no intuitive response. An objective stylistician,  
64 therefore, is saddled with the task of pointing out those linguistic choices which a writer or  
65 speaker has made as well as the effects of the choices. Given a piece of literature, a poem for  
66 example, a linguistic stylistic analyst who is objective in his analysis will be interested in  
67 describing the form and function of language in the poem, paying attention to certain curiosities  
68 that may be accounted for in ‘linguistic terms’. On the whole, stylistics requires a reliance on  
69 stylistic evidence for proper and significant analysis. It is dependent on linguistic description of  
70 textual details. In such linguistic description, (Verdonk, 2006) identifies the following linguistic  
71 features: Graphological, syntactic, semantics, lexical, and phonological features.

72 *Graphological features* involve the use of language in print. It allows the stylistician,  
73 opportunity to reasonably explore and give descriptions of the physical appearance of a literary  
74 ‘text’. Here, such features as the use of punctuation marks to create stylistic effects are  
75 significant. However, a major feature here is foregrounding. In this instance, certain words are  
76 foregrounded or brought to the fore to give them prominence through the use of italics, capital  
77 letters, underlining, and so on.

78 | *Syntactic features* involved is the identification of the effects created by the various  
79 'sentence types and structures' in a text. Such aspects as ellipses, parataxis, hypotaxis, right and  
80 left-branching sentences, etc are considered significant. For instance, dislocation in syntax is  
81 occasionally used to demonstrate the dislocation in human thoughts (stream of consciousness)  
82 and this is highly manifested in James Joyce's novels.

83 *Semantic Features* focus on the level of meaning – the meaning one attaches to what is  
84 read or heard. Sentences have the following meanings: interpersonal, ideational and textual.  
85 Interpersonal meaning deals with interpersonal function of language which is to express attitude,  
86 comment and evaluation. Ideational meaning allows one to form concepts and ideas based on the  
87 orderliness and experience that relate to the text read or heard, while the textual meaning has to  
88 do with events as they occur in terms of language use – references can only be made to those  
89 events through textual recourse.

90 *Lexical Features* involves the choice of words (diction). The stylistic use of words here  
91 may produce denotative, connotative, *collocative*, affective, thematic, or stylistic meanings based  
92 on the speaker's or writer's intention. Certain characteristic use of words may help us to identify  
93 the context of a text, its genre, its communicative purposes, its author, and so on.

94 *Phonological Features* are the level of sounds. These features involve sound  
95 combinations. Because language is basically spoken, this level of stylistic analysis seems to be  
96 the richest and most important.

97  
98 | **3.0 — About the Poem, Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise***

99 Maya Angelou's famous poem, 'Still I Rise' is part of a 1978 collection similarly titled:  
100 *And Still I Rise*. The poem is a reaction to the struggles experienced by African American  
101 women in the long history of oppression and discrimination in America.

102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111  
112  
113  
114  
115  
116  
117  
118  
119  
120  
121  
122  
123  
124  
125  
126  
127  
128  
129  
130  
131  
132  
133  
134  
135  
136  
137  
138  
139  
140  
141  
142  
143  
144  
145  
146  
147

3.1 The Poem:

*Still I Rise*

4 You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

8 Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

12 Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

16 Did you want to see my broken  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

20 Does my haughtiness offend you  
Don't you take it awful hard.  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Digging' in my own backyard.

24 You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

28 Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise?  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my things?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and far.

Formatted: Indent: Left: 1", First line: 0.5"

148 I rise  
149 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
150 I rise  
151 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
152 I am the dream and the hope of the slave  
153 I rise  
154 I rise  
155 I rise  
156

#### 157 4.0 Analysis and Discussion

158  
159 *Graphological features:*

160 The poem is divided into eight stanzas. Each of the first to seventh stanzas contains four  
161 lines. The eighth stanza, however, comprises 15 lines. There is predominant use of the question  
162 mark in the poem as this could be seen in lines 5, 6, 13, 14, 17, 25 and 28. This is, perhaps,  
163 related to the background of the poem, which has to do with the Black American slaves' constant  
164 but purposive quest for identity and freedom from the white masters' oppression and tyranny.  
165 Also in the poem, both commas and full stops are employed, virtually in equal proportions.  
166 These beautify the lines with courage and hope, reveals the teary and sorrowful nature of the  
167 poetic persona, thereby. There is a conscious use of "apostrophe" in the poem as a graphological  
168 tool to indicate the colloquial nature of the language-use in the poem; [for example: e.g.:](#)

169 I'll - (lines 4, 12 and 24)  
170 'Cause - (lines 7 and 19)  
171 Don't - (line 18)  
172 I've - (lines 7, 19 and 27)  
173 That's - (line 31)  
174 I'm - (line, 33)

175  
176  
177 By implication, the use of "apostrophe", probably, shows the care-free attitude of the  
178 poetic persona to her uncaring audience (the white masters). The poem is symbolic as its form  
179 represents its title. The successive repetition of "I rise" in three lines in the final stanza of the  
180 poem cuts the image of a rising phalanx. Thus, the form of the poem is quite suggestive of a

181 group of people rising against the tide of oppression and tyranny – and that is, the Black  
182 American slaves. The structure of the stanza typical of lamentation – the poem began with an  
183 equal stanza of four not until towards the end of the poem, eight. This suggests an outpouring of  
184 one’s cares.

185  
186 ***Phonological features:***

187 There are, a great number of phonological features in the poem which promotes a degree  
188 of musicality in it. Rhyme, as a prosodic element in a poem, is utilized in a good measure in the  
189 poem. This is noticeable in *lines 2 and 4, 6 and 8, 10 and 12, 14 and 16, 18 and 20, 22 and 24,*  
190 *26 and 28, 33 and 34, 35 and 37, and 39 and 40.* The musicality which the use of rhyme evokes  
191 in the poem appears to have made it attract attention to the condescending message which the  
192 poetic persona is trying to get across to her audience. The use of repetition in “I rise”, which,  
193 though, begins the poem as “I’ll rise” is another noticeable phonological feature which assists in  
194 placing emphasis on the resolution of the defiant poetic persona not to allow anything deter her  
195 from achieving freedom.

196  
197 ***Syntactic Features***

198 The sentence types that are commonly used in the poem are the imperative and the  
199 interrogative. The use of these sentence types harmonizes with the tone and the mood of the  
200 poetic persona. While the pseudo imperative sentences such as the following:

201

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Complement</b>	
You	may write	me	down in history	(line 1)
You	may shoot	me	with your words	(line 21)
You	may cut	me	with your eyes	(line 22)
You	may kill	me	with your hatefulness	(line 23)

--	--	--	--	--

202  
203 Show the dare devil poetic persona's attitude of calling her listener's bluff, the interrogative  
204 sentences, such as the following:

205 Does my sassiness upset you? (line 5)  
206 Why are you beset with gloom? (line 6)  
207 Did you want to see me broken? (line 13)  
208 Does my haughtiness offend you? (line 25)  
209 Does my sexiness upset you? (line 25)

210  
211 have the illocutionary force of probing the reasons for the oppressor's oppressive tendencies  
212 which are to the detriment of the poetic persona. Again, in the poem, both simple and complex  
213 sentences are used in a considerable proportion. There is cohesion in the structural patterns of the  
214 poem through the use of the conjunctions, 'but' and 'like' as we have in the following lines:

215 But still, like dust, I'll rise (line 4)  
216 Just like hopes springing high, (line 11)  
217 But still, like air, I'll rise, (line 24).  
218

219 Bondage, on the other hand, manifests through the use of subordinators like 'cause' (because)  
220 and 'that' as shown in the following lines:

222 Why are you beset with gloom?  
223 "Cause I walk like I've got oil wells (lines 7-8)  
224 Don't you take it awful hard.  
225 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines (lines 18-19)  
226 Does it come as a surprise?  
227 That I dance like I've got diamonds (lines 26-27).  
228

229 The use of these devices, especially, bondage (which shows dependency) probably depicts the  
230 servitude in which the Black American slaves were to their white masters, while slavery lasted in  
231 America. Most of the simple sentences utilized in the poem are inverted as follows for stylistic  
232 effect:

233 ...like dust, I'll rise (line 4) Still I'll rise (line 12) ...  
234 ...like air I'll rise (lines 24)

235 Out of the huts of history's shame  
236 I rise (lines 31 - 32) 126  
237 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
238 I rise (lines 37-38)  
239

240 Inverting structures in a text manifests one of the concepts of style known as deviation from the  
241 norm, and it is a form of foregrounding inversion in this poem may have to do with the  
242 audacious poetic-persona doing the unusual by confronting her oppressor-listener. Besides, and  
243 very importantly, the fronting of the adjuncts in the above-cited structures is a means by which  
244 emphasis is achieved.

245  
246 ***Lexico-Semantic Features***

247 Although, a cursory look at the poem would suggest that the reader might not have  
248 difficulty in understanding the message in it, it is noteworthy that the poem employs some words  
249 and expressions that demand a careful analysis for their meanings to be properly decoded. This is  
250 because such words are not usual collocations – a situation which creates some stylistic effects.  
251 Such unusual collocations include the 'words' in 'You may shoot me with your words, 'cut' and  
252 'eyes' in 'You may cut me with your eyes', 'kill' and 'hatefulness' in 'You may kill me with  
253 your hatefulnes' and 'black' and 'ocean' in 'I am black ocean. They bring about strikingly  
254 metaphoric meanings that draw the reader closer to the import of the poet's message. It is not  
255 unlikely that the poet does this to show the inequality between the white masters and the black  
256 American slaves.

257 Apart from metaphor, simile is also employed by the poet to some stylistic advantages.  
258 The simile in each of '...like dust', '... like air...' and '...like I've got diamonds' creates an  
259 imagery which helps in enhancing the reader's understanding of the message in the poem.

260  
261 **5.0 Conclusions**

262 In carrying out a stylistic analysis of a literary work, one must pay attention to its content,  
263 form and language. Objectivity posits that, such observations and analyses should always be  
264 backed with tangible linguistic evidence away from intuitive response. Again, a thorough and  
265 effective reading with sensitivity to linguistics choices is essential to a productive stylistic  
266 analysis of any literary work. On the whole, Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" deploys rich poetic  
267 devices to a number of purposes such as explaining, illustrating, revealing and clarifying.  
268 However, the analysis provided in this paper as believed, has provided a division of labour  
269 between a stylistic analyst and a literary critic.

270

#### 271 **References**

272

273 Bradford, R. (1997). *Stylistics*. London and New York: Routledge.

274

275 Birch, D. (1995). *Context and Language: A Functional Linguistic Theory of Register*. London:  
276 New York Pinter.

277

278 Fowler, R. (1981). *Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism*. New  
279 York: Routledge.

280

281 Ogunsiji, Y. and Farinde, R. O. (2010). *Analytical Linguistics*. Ogun: Olabisi Onabanjo  
282 University Press.

283

284 Turner, G. (1973). *Stylistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguins Books.

285

286 Verdonk, P. (2006). *Stylistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.