

PSYCHO-SCHEMATIC TENSIONS AND RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN ABUBAKAR ADAM IBRAHIM'S *SEASON OF CRIMSON BLOSSOMS* AND *THE WHISPERING TREES*

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jolls.v15i3.3>

Abstract

This study examines psycho-schematic tensions and rhetorical strategies in Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees*. The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach based on Hassan's (2023) Psychoanalytical Schemata theory, which integrates psychoanalytic structures with schematic features to explain the relationship between mental processes and linguistic expression. The study's data consist of purposively selected textual excerpts from *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees* featuring three rhetorical categories: litotes, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions. The analysis focuses explicitly on how these rhetorical forms function as psycho-schematic expressive strategies through the interaction of psychoanalytic features, namely the id, ego, superego, and defence mechanisms, with schematic features such as experience, goal, and age. The findings reveal that litotes, hyperbole and rhetorical questions function not merely as stylistic ornaments but as linguistic manifestations of psycho-schematic tussle. Litotes mediates psychological tensions associated with repression, denial, and emotional restraint; hyperbole intensifies experiences of fear, hostility, grief, and suspicion; while rhetorical questions externalise tensions involving guilt, doubt, moral conflicts, and unresolved psychological impulses. At the same time, these rhetorical forms organise individual experiences according to schematic features, making primary psychological processes observable in discourse. The study concludes that rhetorical expressions derive from the interaction of psychological and cognitive processes and that their linguistic manifestation provides insight into the mental structures involved in meaning construction. The study contributes to stylistic scholarship by demonstrating how psychoanalytic and schematic features converge within expressive forms to produce literary meaning.

Keywords: Psychoanalytical Schemata; defence mechanisms; stylistics; psycho-schematic tussles; rhetorical expressions; linguistic manifestation.

Introduction

Language is central to constructing meaning in literary texts. Through particular lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical choices, writers represent emotions, social realities, and psychological conflicts. Stylistics examines how language operates in literary texts and how particular linguistic choices shape meaning, characterisation, and readers' responses to events and situations within a narrative. Interpreting literary texts therefore involves more than identifying themes and literary devices. Characters often experience conflicts arising from desire, memory, fear, guilt, ambition, social expectations, and moral obligations. Such conflicts are not always stated directly; they may

emerge through imagery, symbolism, figurative language, narrative patterns, and other forms of linguistic representation. These expressive forms provide access to how discourse represents consciousness, experience, and motivation. Recent work in stylistics has consequently continued to examine the relationship between linguistic form and the representation of mind, particularly through cognitive approaches to characterisation and mind style (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2022; Lugea, 2022; Sirinarang & Wijitsopon, 2021).

Questions about the representation of the human mind have also long informed literary criticism. Psychoanalytic literary criticism draws heavily on Freud's theorisation of unconscious

processes, psychic conflict, and the structural model of the id, ego, and superego (Freud, 1961). From this perspective, human behaviour may involve competing impulses, moral constraints, and processes of psychological regulation. In literary texts, such processes are not treated as clinically measurable states but as interpretive categories through which representations of character consciousness, motivation, and behaviour may be examined. Contemporary discussions of psychoanalytic literary criticism likewise stress the importance of distinguishing literary interpretation from clinical psychological analysis (Sandbæk, 2022).

Another perspective relevant to literary meaning is schema theory. Bartlett (1932) proposed that individuals organise and interpret experience through structures shaped by previous encounters, while Rumelhart (1980) further explained the role of schemata in information processing and interpretation. In contemporary cognitive stylistics, schema-based approaches continue to offer a way to examine how linguistic choices activate knowledge structures and shape the representation and interpretation of experience. For example, Sirinarang and Wijitsopon (2021) combine Schema Theory and Text World Theory to examine how linguistic features construct a narrator's mind style, showing how textual patterns interact with cognitive structures in interpreting literary experience. Recent work on mind style similarly demonstrates the continuing relevance of cognitive approaches to the linguistic representation of consciousness and distinctive perspectives in narrative fiction (Lugea, 2022; van Emde Boas, 2022). Psychoanalytic and schematic approaches arise from different intellectual traditions, but they can be brought into analytical relation because both provide ways of interpreting how mental processes are represented in language. In the present study, psychoanalytic features such as the id, ego, superego, and defence mechanisms are considered alongside schematic features such as experience, goal, and age. The former provides categories for interpreting represented psychological pressures and forms of regulation, while the latter account for the experiential and cognitive conditions within which those pressures

are represented. Their interaction may therefore be observed when a represented impulse, constraint, or conflict encounters an experience-based, goal-oriented, or age-related organisation of a situation and becomes linguistically expressed through a particular rhetorical form. This study describes such interactions as psycho-schematic tussles. This approach aligns with the broader movement in stylistics toward examining how linguistic form represents aspects of mind, experience, and cognition (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2022; Sirinarang & Wijitsopon, 2021).

Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's fiction presents numerous representations of these tensions. His works engage with desire, memory, identity, morality, trauma, family relationships, and social responsibility. *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees* are particularly notable for depicting characters confronted by competing personal, social, emotional, and moral demands. Existing scholarship on the two novels has examined issues including sexuality, gender, religion, trauma, memory, identity, and social relations (Adeleke, 2023; Edwin, 2016; Giwa & Jesse, 2019; Madumere, 2022; Nenadović, 2023). These studies have contributed substantially to understanding the thematic and psychological dimensions of Ibrahim's fiction, while recent stylistic scholarship more broadly has demonstrated the value of examining how linguistic choices represent mental states and perspectives (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2022; Lugea, 2022). However, relatively little attention has been given to how rhetorical forms linguistically encode the interaction between psychological processes and cognitive schemata in these two novels. The specific relationship between psychoanalytic features, schematic features, and rhetorical expression therefore remains insufficiently examined. This study addresses this problem by examining psycho-schematic tussles as stylistic strategies in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees*. It draws on Hassan's (2023) Psychoanalytical Schemata framework to investigate how psychoanalytic and schematic features interact within selected rhetorical expressions and how these interactions are realised linguistically. The study consequently contributes

to the stylistic study of Ibrahim's fiction by bringing psychological representation, cognitive organisation, and rhetorical form into a single analytical account.

Literature Review

Stylistics examines the relationship between linguistic choice and literary meaning. Contemporary developments in the field have increasingly linked stylistic analysis to cognition, particularly how linguistic patterns contribute to the representation and interpretation of mental experience. Giovanelli and Harrison (2022) identify the continuing expansion of stylistics toward questions of cognition and literary interpretation, while recent cognitive stylistic research shows how textual features relate to mental representation, perspective, and mind-style. Sirinarang and Wijitsopon (2021), for example, combine Text World Theory and Schema Theory to examine the narrator's mind-style in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Their study shows how linguistic features relate to background knowledge and schematic organisation in constructing a distinctive perspective. Similarly, van Emde Boas (2022) relates cognitive stylistics, mind-style, and schema theory in the analysis of characterisation.

Schema Theory provides an important basis for understanding the relationship between language and cognition. Bartlett (1932) conceptualises schemata as organised forms of knowledge derived from previous experience, while Rumelhart (1980) develops their role in comprehension and in organising new information. In literary analysis, the theory helps explain how experience and existing knowledge shape interpretations of situations, events, and characters. Recent cognitive stylistic studies confirm the continuing usefulness of this approach, particularly in analyses of mind-style and represented consciousness (Sirinarang & Wijitsopon, 2021; van Emde Boas, 2022). However, cognitive approaches differ in their analytical emphasis. Some primarily investigate readers' cognitive processing, whereas others focus on the representation of cognition or consciousness in literary characters. The present study belongs to the latter orientation, with

particular attention to how schematic organisation interacts with represented psychological tension in character discourse.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism offers a complementary perspective by providing concepts for interpreting representations of desire, repression, conflict, anxiety and defence. Freud's distinction among the id, ego and superego remains influential in literary interpretation, but the application of psychoanalytic concepts to literary characters requires methodological caution. Sandbæk (2022) emphasises the distinction between literary and clinical contexts and identifies reductionism as an important concern in psychoanalytic literary criticism. This implies that psychoanalytic categories should not be treated as clinical diagnoses or objectively measurable properties of fictional characters. They are better understood as interpretive categories through which textual representations of motivation, conflict, behaviour and discourse can be examined.

The relationship between cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches is therefore complementary rather than identical. Cognitive stylistics provides concepts for examining experience, knowledge structures and the organisation of meaning, whereas psychoanalytic criticism provides concepts for interpreting represented psychological impulses, constraints and conflicts. Their analytical intersection becomes particularly relevant when a literary expression simultaneously reflects a character's psychological tension and the experiential, goal-oriented or age-related organisation through which the situation is understood. The Psychoanalytical Schemata framework proposed by Hassan (2023) provides the theoretical basis for examining this intersection in the present study. Rather than treating psychoanalytic and schematic features as two independent sets of labels, the framework permits their interaction to be considered in relation to linguistic expression.

Rhetorical expression provides a particularly suitable situation for investigating such interaction because rhetorical forms derive much of their meaning from context. Litotes, hyperbole and rhetorical questions may

communicate meanings that extend beyond their literal or grammatical structures. Their interpretation consequently requires attention to the relationship among rhetorical form, narrative context, represented psychological condition and the speaker's understanding of the situation. This position is consistent with the broader orientation of stylistics, which treats linguistic form as evidence for the construction of literary meaning rather than as ornamental description. Akinrinlola and Sonde (2024), for instance, prove how stylistic choices contribute to the representation of ideological and social meanings in Femi Osofisan's *The Engagement*. The present study extends this concern to the representation of psychological and schematic processes within specific rhetorical forms.

African literary stylistics further establishes the relevance of examining linguistic choices in relation to culturally situated experience. Scholarship on African literary style has shown the importance of attending to the relationship between narrative form, language, ideology and cultural context. Recent scholarship on style and narrative practice reflects this continuing interest in African literary stylistics, including the work collected in *Style in African Literature: Essays on Literary Stylistics and Narrative Styles* (Makokha et al., 2021). Within this broader field, Akinrinlola and Sonde (2024) show how stylistic choices contribute to social and ideological representation. These studies support a text-centred approach that treats linguistic form as a key resource for representing individual and collective experience.

Research on Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's fiction has addressed several psychological, social and ideological dimensions. Studies of *Season of Crimson Blossoms* have examined sexuality, trauma, memory, gender and social resistance (Adeleke, 2023; Giwa & Jesse, 2019; Madumere, 2022; Nenadović, 2023). Adeleke (2023) examines sexuality through a psychoanalytic perspective, with attention to desire, repression and emotional conflict. Giwa and Jesse (2019) focus on trauma, reminiscence and memory, while Madumere (2022) examines traumatic memory and the sexual exploitation of women. Nenadović

(2023) considers defiant love in relation to social and cultural expectations. Collectively, these studies establish the importance of psychological experience and social pressures in interpretations of *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. Their principal concerns, however, are thematic, psychological or ideological rather than the stylistic realisation of such processes through particular rhetorical forms. Scholarship on *The Whispering Trees* is comparatively limited. Edwin (2016) examines Islam, gender and literary aesthetics in the novel alongside Mohammed Naseehu Ali's *The Prophet of Zongo Street*, emphasising the relationship between religious values, cultural identity and gender. The existing studies therefore provide useful accounts of important thematic and ideological dimensions of Ibrahim's fiction, but they offer limited attention to the linguistic representation of psychological and cognitive processes in *The Whispering Trees*. Hassan (2023) offers an important theoretical starting point by bringing psychoanalytic and schematic features into analytical relation. What remains insufficiently developed, however, is the application of this relationship to specific rhetorical expressions in the two novels.

The literature consequently reveals both convergence and separation among the relevant strands of scholarship. Cognitive stylistics establishes that linguistic choices can provide evidence of cognitive organisation and represented mental experience. Psychoanalytic criticism provides concepts for interpreting representations of psychological conflict, desire, repression and defence. African literary stylistics establishes the importance of examining linguistic choices within their social and cultural contexts. Yet these approaches have largely followed separate analytical lines. Cognitive studies tend to focus on cognition, schematic organisation, mind-style or interpretation, whereas psychoanalytic studies tend to emphasise psychological motivation and thematic representation. Studies of Ibrahim's fiction have similarly concentrated on sexuality, trauma, memory, religion, gender and social relations rather than on the interaction of psychological and schematic processes within identifiable rhetorical structures. A related

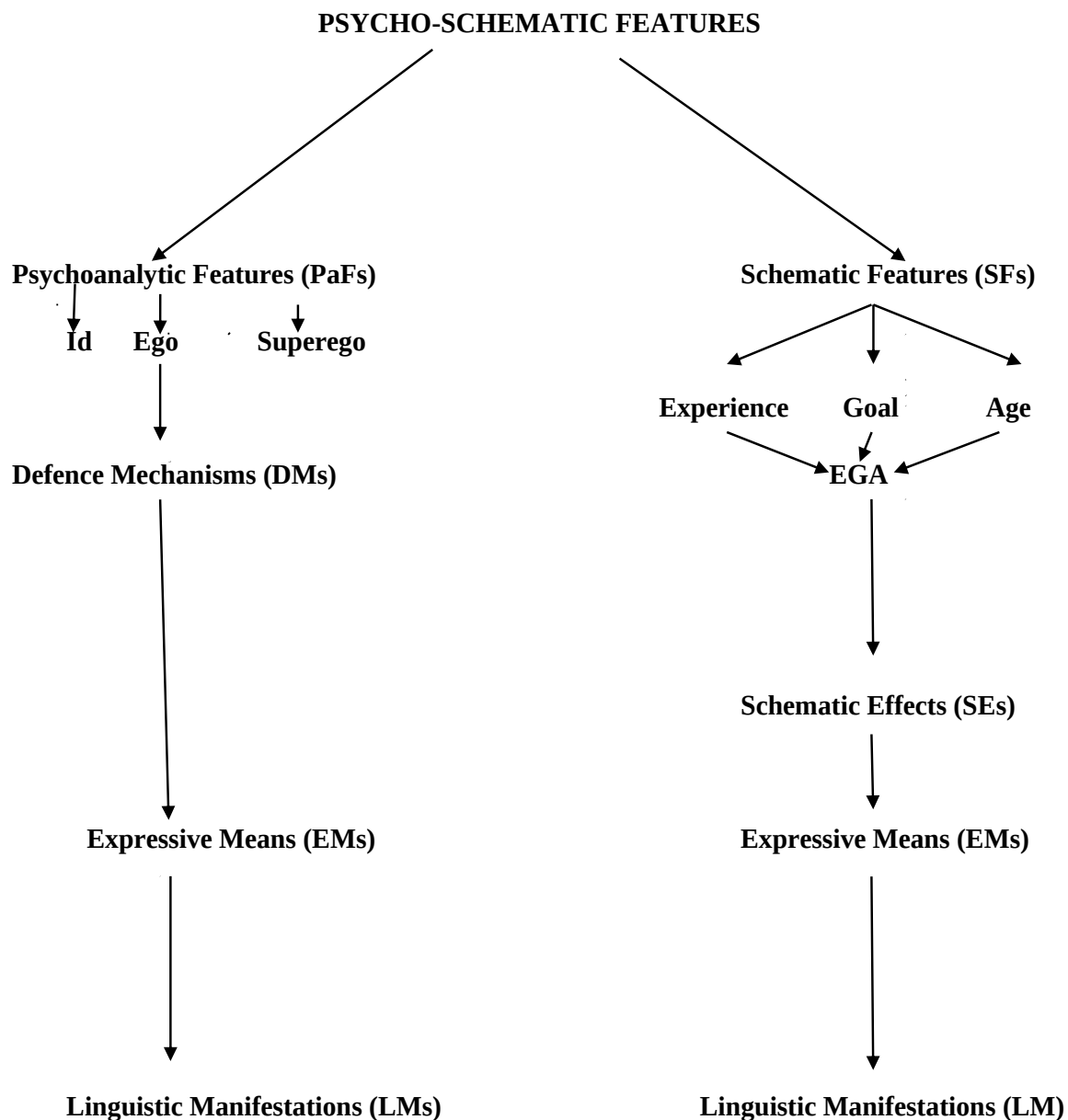
methodological concern is the tendency to assign psychological or cognitive categories without sufficiently establishing their textual basis. Psychoanalytic concepts can become speculative when imposed on characters without adequate contextual evidence, just as schematic categories can become overly general when experience, goals, or age are assumed rather than demonstrated. The present study addresses this concern by treating psychoanalytic and schematic features as interpretive categories whose relevance must be established from the textual and narrative context of each selected expression. The analysis therefore begins with rhetorical form and proceeds to its contextual, psychological, and schematic significance, rather than imposing theoretical categories on preselected quotations.

The specific research gap lies in the limited attention given to how represented psychological processes and schematic organisation interact within particular rhetorical forms in Ibrahim's fiction. Existing scholarship has established the psychological, cognitive, stylistic, and thematic significance of the author's works, but it has not adequately explained how psychological impulses, constraints, conflicts, or defence processes interact with experience, goals, and age, and become observable through specific linguistic choices. This study addresses this gap by examining litotes, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees* as

psycho-schematic stylistic strategies. It uses Hassan's (2023) Psychoanalytical Schemata as its theoretical basis and employs the concept of psycho-schematic tussles to describe instances in which represented psychological processes come into tension or interaction with schematic organisation and are realised through a particular linguistic or rhetorical form. The study therefore seeks to show, through close textual analysis, how psychological and schematic dimensions converge in rhetorical expression to contribute to literary meaning.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Hassan's (2023) Psychoanalytical Schemata framework. Hassan develops the framework by relating psychoanalytic concepts to schema-based concepts. Its intellectual basis therefore lies in two established traditions. Psychoanalysis provides categories for interpreting represented impulses, restraints, conflicts, and defensive responses, while schema theory provides categories for considering how experience, goals, and age-related organisation of experience shape perception, interpretation, and response. Here, the framework serves as an interpretive model for literary discourse, not a method for measuring the actual mental states of fictional characters. The psycho-schematic diagram below visually represents the framework.



The diagram represents the framework as an analytical network rather than a rigid hierarchy. **Psychoanalytic Features (PaFs)** and **Schematic Features (SFs)** constitute the two principal dimensions of analysis. PaFs include the id, ego, superego and, where textually warranted, defence mechanisms (DMs), while SFs are represented through Experience, Goal and Age (EGA). The interaction between these dimensions is examined through **Stylistic/Expressive Elements (SEs)** and **Expressive Means (EMs)**, including the

rhetorical forms selected for analysis. These interactions become observable in particular **Linguistic Manifestations (LMs)**. The model therefore traces an analytical movement from represented psychological and schematic conditions to their interaction and eventual linguistic realisation. It does not imply that one category invariably causes another, nor that every textual instance must contain all categories. The psychoanalytic domain comprises the id, ego, superego, and defence mechanisms. In Freudian

terms, the id is associated with instinctive or desire-driven impulses; the superego with internalised moral and social constraints; and the ego with mediation between competing demands and the conditions of reality (Freud, 1961). Within this framework, defence mechanisms are ways in which represented psychological conflict may be managed or displaced. In this study, these concepts are applied only where the textual context provides a reasonable basis for interpreting a character's response in such terms. They are therefore analytical labels for patterns represented in the narrative rather than claims about clinically demonstrable psychological states.

The schematic domain comprises experience, goal, and age, represented in Hassan's framework by EGA. Experience refers to accumulated knowledge and lived encounters that may shape how a situation is interpreted. Goal refers to an orientation or communicative purpose relevant to the character's response. Age is considered where the narrative provides explicit or sufficiently clear information that developmental position is relevant to interpretation. These variables are not assumed to operate in every excerpt. Their relevance must be established from the textual and narrative context. Within the schematic dimension of the present study, age is treated as a contextual feature that may bear on the experience and knowledge structures available to a character when interpreting a situation. It does not constitute a schema in itself; rather, it provides contextual information for understanding the experience-based schemata through which situations may be interpreted.

The relationship between the two domains is central to the framework. Psychoanalytic and schematic features do not constitute two independent lists of labels. A represented psychological impulse or constraint may be activated or modified by a character's prior experience, current goal, or age-related position. Conversely, a character's organisation of an experience may be represented as affected by fear, desire, moral restraint, grief, denial, or another psychological process. The interaction can consequently be represented as a sequence: a textual situation provides contextual evidence; the

rhetorical form represents a particular response; the response may be interpreted through a relevant psychological dimension; the character's experience, goal, or age may shape the organisation of that response; and the resulting interaction is realised through an observable linguistic form.

Within this study, this interaction is termed a psycho-schematic tussle. The term is an analytical formulation developed from Hassan's (2023) framework rather than a claim to a separate theoretical system. A psycho-schematic tussle is identified when textual evidence supports a tension between a represented psychological impulse, constraint, defence, or conflict and an experience-based, goal-oriented, or age-related organisation of experience, and when the tension is realised through a particular rhetorical or linguistic form. The term's analytical value lies in directing attention to the interaction between the two domains rather than attributing a rhetorical expression to psychology alone or cognition alone. The framework is particularly appropriate to the present study because litotes, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions are forms whose effects are strongly dependent on context, stance, intensity, inference, and communicative purpose. Identifying the rhetorical form alone cannot adequately explain their interpretation. The Psychoanalytical Schemata framework allows the study to examine how a rhetorical choice may represent a psychological pressure while also reflecting the character's organisation of experience and communicative orientation. The point of analysis is therefore not to prove an unseen mental state but to explain how the novels linguistically represent tensions between psychological processes and cognitive organisation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven interpretive approach based on Hassan's (2023) Psychoanalytical Schemata framework. Data consist of purposively selected textual excerpts from *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees* that contain rhetorical expressive structures. The analysis identifies these structures within their narrative contexts and

examines them through psychoanalytic concepts such as the id, ego, superego, and defence mechanisms, as well as schematic elements such as experience, goal, and age. Expressive forms are treated as points where psychological and cognitive processes converge, while linguistic manifestations are analysed as their surface realisations. The interpretation follows the psychoschematic framework systematically to ensure consistency, theoretical alignment, and analytical rigour.

Analysis of Expressive Strategies in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees*

This section presents expressive strategies as ways through which inner mental pressure and organised thought are linguistically expressed. These strategies are not ornamental features of style but functional means of expression, guided by the psychological states and cognitive orientations of the characters and the reader.

Litotes as Psycho-Schematic Strategy

Litotes is a rhetorical strategy of understatement in which a proposition is expressed through negation, often producing an effect that is stronger than the literal wording suggests. In Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, this strategy provides a restrained linguistic form for representing Binta's apprehension towards an experience that is both unfamiliar and socially imposed. The expression, *The prospect of being intimate with any man, particularly one she hardly knew, was far from comforting* (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 52), is litotic in its use of "far from comforting" to understate a much stronger emotional response. Rather than describing the prospect directly as frightening or distressing, the narrator presents it through a moderated negative formulation. The understatement consequently leaves the intensity of Binta's response to be inferred from the situation in which the expression occurs.

Binta is sixteen or seventeen and has been betrothed to Zubairu. Her parents engage Dijen Tsamiya, an older woman, to introduce her to the expectations and practices of marital life, including marital intimacy. For Binta, however, the prospect is not an ordinary aspect of an anticipated marriage. It confronts her with an unfamiliar and emotionally disturbing experience.

The expression "far from comforting" therefore becomes significant because its restrained form corresponds with the difficulty of openly articulating resistance within the social environment in which Binta is situated. Her emotional response is strong, but its linguistic expression remains controlled.

This is where the psychoanalytic and schematic dimensions converge. Psychologically, the utterance represents a tension between Binta's immediate apprehension and the expectations surrounding her impending marriage. The response reflects the pressure between an instinctive desire to resist an unwanted experience and the moral and social constraints that make such resistance hard to express openly. In psychoschematic terms, this psychological tension is shaped by Binta's age and limited experience of marital intimacy. Her situation requires her to respond to an adult social institution before she has acquired the experience needed to make it familiar or emotionally acceptable. The linguistic understatement thus reflects not only what she feels but also the conditions under which she can express it. Her goal is equally relevant to the construction of the utterance. Rather than openly rejecting her parents' expectations or the institution of marriage, she communicates her discomfort in a moderated form. The choice of "far from comforting" lets the emotional force of her response remain present without becoming an explicit act of confrontation. The psychoschematic tussle emerges in this meeting of emotional resistance, limited experience, age, and socially constrained communicative purpose. Litotes gives that tension a linguistic form: the stronger the feeling that remains unstated, the more significant the understatement becomes. A similar use of litotic expression occurs in *The Whispering Trees*:

I don't know who you are or what you want from me. Whatever your mission is, you will never succeed (Ibrahim, 2012, p. 12). Ohikwo makes this statement in response to Ozioma, a seventeen-year-old girl who claims to be his dead mother. The situation places him before an experience that contradicts his established understanding of death. Ozioma's claim becomes particularly disturbing

because she addresses him as “Ndagi”, the name by which his dead mother used to call him. The encounter therefore creates a tension between what Ohikwo recognises emotionally and what he understands rationally to be possible.

The litotic force of the expression lies in its repeated negation. “I don’t know who you are” and “I don’t know what you want from me” appear to deny knowledge, but their effect is more forceful than simple ignorance. They constitute a refusal to recognise the identity and intentions presented before him. The final assertion, “you will never succeed,” intensifies this refusal by establishing a firm boundary between himself and the mysterious figure. Through these negative formulations, Ohikwo distances himself from a situation that threatens his established understanding of his mother’s death.

The psychological tension represented in the passage is closely connected with this act of distancing. Ozioma’s appearance evokes an emotionally charged association with Ohikwo’s dead mother, while his response resists accepting the implications of that association. His denial can therefore be read as a defensive response to an experience that he finds difficult to accommodate. The psychoanalytic dimension is particularly evident in the opposition between emotional recognition and rational resistance. The memory and emotional familiarity associated with “Ndagi” pull the character towards recognition, while his understanding of his mother as dead resists such recognition. The ego can be viewed as mediating between these competing pressures through a verbal act of denial.

The schematic dimension deepens this conflict. Ohikwo’s existing experience provides the cognitive basis through which he interprets the encounter: his mother is dead, and the appearance of a seventeen-year-old girl claiming to be her therefore contradicts his established understanding of reality. At the same time, his immediate goal is to reject the claim and protect the boundaries of what he understands to be possible. His experience and goal consequently shape the form through which the psychological tension is expressed. Rather than engaging directly with the possibility presented by Ozioma, he employs negation to

distance himself from it.

The psycho-schematic tussle therefore occurs between an emotionally disturbing experience that evokes recognition and a cognitive organisation that resists accepting its implications. Litotes becomes the linguistic medium through which this conflict is expressed. The negative formulations allow Ohikwo to maintain verbal distance from the extraordinary claim while simultaneously revealing the intensity of the situation. What appears on the surface as a series of denials consequently carries a deeper tension between recognition and rejection, memory and present experience, and emotional response and cognitive resistance.

Hyperbole as Psycho-Schematic Expressive Means

Hyperbole is a rhetorical strategy involving deliberate exaggeration for emphasis, intensification, or expressive effect. In the present study, its psycho-schematic significance lies in how exaggeration may provide a linguistic form through which experience, communicative goals, and other relevant schematic conditions shape represented emotional responses. Rather than treating hyperbole as merely ornamental, the analysis considers how its exaggerative force helps represent psychological tension and organise experience in context. The first example occurs in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*:

The sin of some people is enough to provoke Allah’s wrath, and He will smite the earth overnight (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 275). The expression “He will smite the earth overnight” is hyperbolic because it presents divine punishment in an extreme and disproportionate form. Kandiya is not simply describing the consequences of conduct that she considers morally objectionable; she intensifies those consequences by imagining the destruction of the earth within a single night. The exaggeration consequently gives exceptional force to her moral judgement.

The narrative context is important to this interpretation. Kandiya knows about Binta and Reza’s relationship and regards it as morally unacceptable. Her condemnation is expressed through religious language, particularly the invocation of Allah’s wrath. The hyperbolic image

of the earth being smitten therefore provides an indirect but forceful way to express her disapproval. The utterance can be interpreted psychoanalytically as representing hostility and moral anxiety that are displaced into the language of divine punishment. Rather than directing an overt personal attack at Binta, Kandiya frames the perceived transgression as deserving punishment from a higher moral authority. The utterance can thus be read through the interaction between a represented psychological response and Kandiya's organisation of the situation through her existing moral and religious experience. Her knowledge of Binta and Reza's relationship provides the experiential basis for her judgement, while her communicative goal is to condemn the conduct and establish the seriousness with which she regards it. The religious framing allows the personal judgement to acquire a broader moral significance. In this sense, the hyperbole does not simply express hostility; it transforms that hostility into an exaggerated representation of divine consequence.

The psycho-schematic tussle emerges from the relationship between Kandiya's negative emotional response and the moral and religious schema through which she interprets the relationship. Her response is not presented as a purely personal reaction. It is organised through a system of values that enables her to construe the conduct as deserving extraordinary punishment. The hyperbolic expression consequently magnifies the perceived offence and gives linguistic force to her judgement. Although the passage suggests an attempt to position the conduct as morally threatening, the available evidence does not by itself establish that Kandiya successfully mobilises the women around her or deliberately manipulates their collective judgement. It is more defensible to say that the religious hyperbole creates a discourse of moral condemnation that can influence how the conduct is perceived.

A comparable use of hyperbole appears in *The Whispering Trees*:
But it took me a quarter of an eternity to recognise the smell of antiseptic in the air (Ibrahim, 2012, p. 44). The phrase "a quarter of an eternity" is unmistakably hyperbolic because eternity cannot

be understood as a literal, measurable unit of time. The expression therefore does not provide chronological information about how long it took Salim to recognise the smell. Instead, it conveys the extraordinary length of the interval as it is subjectively experienced. The rhetorical exaggeration makes the perceived duration more significant than its literal measurement. The narrative context connects the expression with Salim's experience following severe physical trauma and the loss of his mother. His return to consciousness places him in a state in which ordinary perceptions of time and circumstance have been disrupted. The hyperbole thus gives linguistic form to the magnitude of that experience. Rather than stating that the interval seemed unusually long, the expression "a quarter of an eternity" expands the duration beyond any ordinary temporal scale and thereby communicates the intensity of Salim's experience. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the utterance can be read as representing shock, grief, and disorientation associated with the circumstances surrounding Salim's recovery. These states are not treated as clinical diagnoses but as aspects of experience represented in the narrative. Within the psycho-schematic model, experience is particularly significant because Salim's physical trauma, altered state of consciousness, and bereavement provide the experiential background against which the temporal exaggeration becomes meaningful. His immediate communicative goal is to render the unusual quality of the experience intelligible to the reader. Hyperbole therefore becomes a means of translating subjective temporal experience into a form language can communicate.

The psycho-schematic tussle here differs from that in Kandiya's utterance. Kandiya's hyperbole magnifies a perceived moral threat, whereas Salim's exaggeration magnifies the subjective experience of duration. In Salim's case, the tension lies between an experience that ordinary chronological description struggles to represent and the need to communicate its intensity. The hyperbolic expression resolves this representational difficulty by substituting subjective magnitude for literal temporal

measurement. “A quarter of an eternity” therefore represents psychological time rather than chronological time, allowing an otherwise difficult experience to be represented linguistically.

Rhetorical Questions as Psycho-Schematic Expressive Means

Rhetorical questions often give characters a way to express what they cannot state readily as a direct assertion. Although they retain the grammatical form of interrogation, they may communicate doubt, protest, criticism, disbelief, or emotional resistance rather than seek information. In Ibrahim’s *Season of Crimson Blossoms* and *The Whispering Trees*, such questions occur at moments when characters confront circumstances that unsettle their expectations or place them in conflict with others. The first example occurs in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*:

How could you run into the wall, Hajiya? (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 11). Hadiza directs this question to her mother, Hajiya Binta, but the question does not appear to seek a literal explanation of how someone might physically run into a wall. Its rhetorical force arises from the circumstances surrounding the utterance. Hadiza notices the inconsistency between her mother’s account and the physical evidence, namely the crushed eyeglasses. The question therefore functions as an indirect challenge to the explanation she has been given. Instead of directly accusing her mother of concealing what happened, Hadiza frames her suspicion as a question. The rhetorical form is significant because it allows suspicion to be communicated without being converted into an explicit accusation. The question “How could you run into the wall?” implies that Hadiza finds the explanation difficult to accept. Her response can therefore be interpreted as expressing suspicion and unease. Within the psychoanalytic dimension, the utterance suggests a tension between her perception that something is wrong and the restraint required by her relationship with her mother. The ego may be understood as mediating this tension through indirect confrontation, while the family hierarchy and moral restraint represented by the superego help explain why the challenge is expressed through questioning rather

than an unequivocal accusation.

The schematic dimension becomes visible through Hadiza’s experience and communicative goal. Her observation of the physical evidence provides the immediate experiential basis for questioning her mother’s account, while her apparent goal is to understand what actually happened. Her interpretation of the situation is therefore organised around the discrepancy between the explanation offered and what she observes. Age is relevant to the broader representation of Hadiza as an adult daughter, but the passage does not require age to be treated as an independent explanatory category. The rhetorical question thus becomes the linguistic point where suspicion, experience, and communicative purpose converge. It lets Hadiza probe the inconsistency while maintaining the social relationship in which the exchange occurs. A related form of rhetorical resistance occurs in: *Since when has Allah become a policeman, Hajiya?* (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 16). The question is rhetorical because Hadiza is not genuinely asking when Allah became a policeman. The expression challenges her mother’s decision to rely on divine judgement rather than report the incident to the police. The comparison between Allah and a policeman is deliberately incongruous and gives the question an ironic outlook. Hadiza uses the interrogative structure to question whether her mother’s response adequately addresses a practical problem. The question therefore represents more than disagreement. It reveals Hadiza’s frustration with an explanation that, from her perspective, fails to address the immediate situation. Psychoanalytically, the utterance may represent frustration and resistance, while the religious and familial context limits how directly that resistance can be expressed. The interaction between these pressures is reflected in the rhetorical form. Rather than openly rejecting her mother’s religious position, Hadiza couches her disagreement in an ironic question. The question lets her express resistance while staying within the conversational and familial relationship.

The schematic dimension is particularly evident in Hadiza’s understanding of the practical circumstances. Her experience leads her to expect

an appropriate practical response, while her goal of accountability or resolution conflicts with her mother's reliance on divine judgement. The rhetorical question consequently becomes a cognitive and evaluative response to this difference in orientation. It does not request information; it presents a judgement through interrogative form. The psycho-schematic tussle lies in the interaction between Hadiza's represented frustration and the experiential and goal-oriented organisation through which she interprets her mother's response. The rhetorical question gives that tension a socially manageable linguistic form. A different emotional configuration appears in Salim's utterance: *Where was God when all this happened, eh?* (Ibrahim, 2012, p. 51). The question's rhetorical status derives from its context. Salim is not simply requesting information about God's location. The question follows a series of profound losses, including the loss of his eyesight, the death of his mother, and the disruption of his aspiration to become a medical doctor. In this context, "Where was God?" functions as an expression of grief, anger, and protest. The interrogative form gives his emotional response the appearance of a question, but its communicative force lies in the demand for an explanation that the utterance itself does not expect to receive.

The psychoanalytic dimension of the expression can therefore be understood through the tension between suffering and the need to make sense of it. The utterance may be read as displacing grief and anger into a confrontation with divine absence. Rather than directing his emotional response towards a particular individual, Salim addresses God, thereby giving his distress a symbolic object. The expression is thus consistent with a psychological struggle involving loss, anger, and the search for meaning, without requiring the assumption of a clinically identifiable unconscious process. The schematic dimension is closely connected with Salim's experience and disrupted goals. His previous understanding of his life included particular expectations concerning his education, career, family, and future. The losses he experiences disrupt those expectations and make his earlier

organisation of experience difficult to sustain. The rhetorical question gives linguistic form to that disruption. His immediate goal is not to obtain a factual answer about God's whereabouts but to express the perceived absence of divine intervention in circumstances that have radically altered his life. The question therefore functions as a means of psychological regulation rather than as a literal request for information. The interaction between psychological distress and disrupted experience constitutes the psycho-schematic tussle in this instance. Salim's grief and anger encounter an experience that challenges his previous expectations about life and divine protection. The rhetorical question externalises this conflict in a concise, emotionally charged form. Its vigour comes from the fact that the question cannot easily be answered in the moment.

Stylistically, what matters is not the information requested but the emotional and cognitive tension conveyed through the interrogative form. A final example is found in Ohikwo's response: *How can the dead speak?* (Ibrahim, 2012, p. 65). The expression is structurally interrogative, but in context it functions as disbelief rather than a genuine request for information. Ohikwo encounters a seventeen-year-old girl who claims to be his dead mother. The extraordinary nature of the encounter conflicts with his established understanding that his mother died many years earlier. His question therefore reflects the difficulty of reconciling what he encounters with what he already knows.

The psychological dimension of the utterance lies in its representation of shock and disbelief. Ohikwo faces an experience that challenges his ordinary expectations, and the rhetorical question gives immediate linguistic expression to that disruption. The question "How can the dead speak?" does not seek a technical explanation of speech after death. Instead, it foregrounds the event's impossibility from the perspective of Ohikwo's existing understanding. The schematic dimension is particularly evident here. Ohikwo's previous experience and knowledge provide the schema through which the new encounter is interpreted. His knowledge that his mother is dead makes the appearance of a

young woman claiming to be her extraordinarily difficult to accommodate. The conflict is therefore not simply between belief and disbelief; it involves a confrontation between an established organisation of experience and a new event that appears to contradict it. The rhetorical question becomes the linguistic manifestation of that confrontation. Within the psycho-schematic model, the psycho-schematic tussle lies in the interaction between Ohikwo's representation of emotional shock and the cognitive structure through which he understands death and identity. The question captures the pressure this contradiction produces. It is therefore unnecessary to assign every psychoanalytic category to the utterance. The textual evidence more directly supports an interpretation grounded in disbelief, experience, and cognitive disruption. The rhetorical question makes this disruption linguistically visible.

The psycho-schematic significance of these questions therefore depends on their contextual specificity. In Hadiza's case, suspicion interacts with her immediate circumstances and her goal of challenging an explanation. In Salim's case, grief and anger interact with experiences that have disrupted his expectations for his future and his understanding of divine protection. In Ohikwo's case, shock interacts with an established understanding of death that cannot readily accommodate the encounter before him. In each instance, the rhetorical question provides the expressive form through which the interaction

becomes observable in discourse.

Conclusion

The study shows that litotes, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions serve as psycho-schematic stylistic tools in Ibrahim's novels, representing psychological tension and emotional responses rather than just rhetorical devices. Litotes moderates' expressions of apprehension; hyperbole heightens moral and emotional perceptions; rhetorical questions convey suspicion, protest, grief, and disbelief. These functions vary with context and narrative goals. The findings reveal that psychoanalytic and schematic features interact; psychological responses like conflict and resistance relate to schematic elements like experience and goal. This interaction forms the psycho-schematic tussle, an extension of Hassan's (2023) framework that captures how psychological processes are expressed through language. The study concludes that rhetorical expressions are vital for linking psychological representation, schematic organisation, and literary meaning, transforming emotional tensions into communicable forms in the novels.

AI/Software Disclosure Statement

Grammarly was used for language editing and proofreading purposes. The software generated no content, interpretation, analysis, or conclusions. The author remains solely responsible for the manuscript's content.

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