

**A Multimodal Analysis of the Cover Page of the Poetry Anthology:  
Book of Blood by Chimankpa A. G. Ogbueri  
By**

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**Abstract**

*A cover page announces the title of a book, subtitle and publisher of the book. Book Covers are commonly the most decorative display pages on books, and are often used as the only location rally suitable for expression of design and graphics, since the rest of the book is devoted to transmitting the thoughts of the author. Cover pages have often been the canvas on which author and book designers have painted a picture of what is to come in the body of the work. This study explores from a multimodal perspective the extent to which book cover designs are meaning-making on their own and how they interact with other modes of meaning in a complex process of semiosis using the front cover page of the poetry anthology entitled "Book of Blood" by Chimankpa A. G. Ogbueri. The study is intended to draw the attention of readers of literature texts to the cover page before reading the text as contextual meanings are often times summarized in the cover pages. This is emphasized attractively through the multimodal stylistics theoretical framework which the study used as its model. It descriptively unveils the different patterns of meaning expressed through shape, image,*

*colour, grapheme, and language style markers embedded on the cover page.*

**Key Words: Book Cover, Style and Stylistics, Multimodal, Semiotics and Foregrounding.**

### **Introduction**

A book cover is any protective covering used to bind together the pages of a book. Beyond the familiar differences between hard-covers and paperbacks, there are further alternatives and additions, such as dust jacket, ring binding, and older forms such as the nineteenth century “paperboards” and the traditional types of hand bill.

As the competition in the book market increases with time, the importance of a book cover page also increases with the hundreds and thousands of books launched every day in the market, only attractively designed book covers makes a book easier to sell. A book cover is basically the face of a book. As the human face reflect the inner feelings similarly, a book cover can also reflect what is inside that book. Book cover plays the role of introducing the book to the potential readers. A book cover front page especially draws the potential reader’s attention towards the book and communicate with the reader on an emotional level. It is uniquely designed and distinguished from other books. The difference makes easy identification just like the faces of humans.

A book cover is designed professionally and gives an idea of the category of the book whether horror or love story. It communicate the message about the book and tell the reader about the tone of the book whether fiction, non-fiction or biography.

The front cover is the first of the physical parts of a book. It has one purpose: to sell the book by intriguing the right reader. The essential elements of a front cover include title and author name. Optional elements include the subtitle if any and photos, background images or graphics.

The visual element of a book cover creates anticipation, a mood or expectation. It is the first thing a reader sees and will remember later. The visual element creates a feeling in the mind of the reader and give the reader a sense of what reading the book will look like. The cover page contains the mind of the book. It provides a visual summary of the content of a book for potential readers. A book cover contains both visual and verbal elements. The verbal elements has to do with the typographical information, while the visual elements are drawings, photographic images and illustrations which are called image information. Genette (1997) classifies all of these elements under the concept of paratext.

The first impression of a book in readers' minds is usually linked to the illustration of its cover. A certain message can be conveyed to the readers by carefully choosing the setting, lighting, clothing, and depiction of characters as seen in the cover design. Matthew (2007 p.20) highlight that "a test of the importance of the jacket to the marketing of books" is evident on how "the repackaging of books impacts on the kinds of reader they reach and the way in which they are valued. A research which was conducted for the "orange prize" for fiction in the United Kingdom shows that "if knowledge of the author or book is excluded, the cover is the most important factor in whether readers would like to start reading a book" (Matthew 2007, p.23).

The book cover allows the reader to identify the book at a glance. Book covers often times display graphitic designs and images that serve as instructional material to what it sets to teach in the actual content.

### **Literature Review**

Research on book cover designs in relation to semiotics has been minimally attended to. A related research work was carried out by Korepanowa (2013) who examined four different autobiographical book cover designs in terms of intermodality to find out the link between the text and the photo image on the book covers in her dissertation. Korepanowa assessed both the book covers as well as the textual materials based on the theory of performative.

She argues that the self-representation of the bodily in the autographical textbooks reinforces in the readers minds and the unconditional autobiographical truth since the photographic image of the author on the cover alongside the autobiographical text creates the illusion of trustworthiness.

Salmani and Ejhetesadi (2015, employed the semiotic approach to the translation of book covers in translated novels. They applied Kress and Leeuwen's (2005) model of semiotic analysis on the cover design of Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* (2004) and its three person's translations.

Bailey (2017) carried out a semiotic analysis on the character, Nancy drew a twelve book covers in nine. Nancy drew series published from 1930 to 2016. He applied the theory of representation introduced by Goffman (1979) to "explore the symbolism present in the covers and identify signs" (p.21). Bailey use semiotic theory to break down the signs into both the signifiers and the signified in order to better understand the intended meaning. He also used Goffman's theory to categorize messages derived from the message into dichotomy of masculinity/femininity and dominance/submission. Bailey concluded that the representation of Nancy Drew had transformed through time from an independent and strong female character into a more dependent and weaker one.

### **Style and Stylistics**

The term "style" emanated from the Latin word "stylus" used to refer to a pen used by the Romans for writings on wax and tablets. In the course of time, it developed several meanings, each one applied to a specific study of language elements and their use in speech.

Samson (1996) defined style as the particular way in which an individual communicate his thoughts which distinguishes him from others.

Style from Chapman's opinion is the manner in which the form is executed or the content is expressed. Style is thus described as the manner in which

a writer addresses a matter. A writer's style reveals his personality. A writer's style is known by his choice of words, patterns, graphical devices and major thematic preoccupation.

Stylistics is a branch of Applied Linguistics devoted to the study of style. It may be defined as the systematic, methodical or scientific study of style. Stylistics as a scientific study of style means that it relates to Linguistics which is the science that investigates or describes Languages and how it works.

Stylistics can also be defined as the analysis and description of the features of styles in literary texts. Stylistics is the study and interpretation of texts. As a discipline, stylistics links literature criticism to Linguistics. It does not function on its own but it's applied to an understanding of literature, journalism and linguistics. Sources of study in stylistics may range from canonical works of writing to popular texts and from advertising copy to news, non-fiction and popular culture as well as political and religious discourse. This is seen in the recent works of critical stylistics, multimodal stylistics and mediated stylistics.

### **Multimodal Stylistics**

Multimodal Stylistics is a new direction in the field which aims to develop analytical framework that will allow systematic analysis of literature and other types of a text which in addition to wording employ semiotic modes such as typography, visual images, colour, for further meaning making .

Generally speaking, multimodal texts are those which integrate more than one semiotic mode in their communicative functions Kress and Leeuwen (1996, 183). Thus, multimodality refers to approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use such as images, gestures, gaze, posture and so on and the relationship between them. (Jewitt, 2009, 14).Multidomodality therefore "steps away from the notion that language always plays the central role in interaction, without

denying that it often “does” and the term mode refers to semiotic resources for making meaning that are employed such as image, writing, gestures, gaze, speech, and posture. Jewitt (2009,1).

Multinational stylistics therefore aims to use literacy stylistics with multimodal theory to analyze texts. It implies paying attention to the choice of typeface, (graphology), colour, layout, and the role of the stylistics which is to demonstrate how the different semiotic resources interact to produce meaning.

### **Thesis Statement**

Books don't just speak with words they also speak with the way they are designed. The front cover of a book is the physical part of a book that showcase the title, authors name, subtitle (if any) and other elements essential for poetry, plays and proses such as photos, background images elements of a book cover, imagery is arguably the most essential for poetry, plays and proses. Imagery communicates what the book is about while bringing the events out of a mere book to reality. It creates anticipation, mood, and expectation.

The fonts on the front cover page also communicate more than the words they spell out. A more flowing font suggests romance, a whimsical font suggests humor and a strong font creates a sense of drama or adventure. The title in consonance with the pictures communicates what the book is about virtually and what reading the book will be like. Ideally subtitle compliments the title and add additional description. The front cover often times serves as instructional materials to the intended knowledge of the author for the readers.

Underlyingly, every book cover is designed to sell the book. This is widely achievable if the book is well designed to attract attention through the caption (title) and imageries. How do authors lure customers into buying their books and get the attention of the students to listen to the message of the book from the beginning to the end? Why do readers skip the cover page to get straight to the text? Why is the cover page neglected?

What are the aesthetic qualities of the front cover page of the anthology-*Book of Blood*? What is the effect of the front shape on the front cover of the book? How is space presented on the cover page? What relationship does it have with the context of the book? What colours are identifiable on the front cover and what meaning do they evoke? What are the graphological effects of the graphemes on the front cover page?

These are the basic questions this study attempts to answer through a multimodal stylistics analysis of the foregrounded shape (image), colour, space and graphological effect of the front cover page of the anthology under study.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to unveil the relationship between the front cover of a book and the content of the book through multimodal stylistics analysis of "*Book of Blood*", an anthology of poetry Authored by Chimankpa A.G. Ogbueri.

### **The objectives are to:**

1. Explain the effect of the foregrounded shape on the front cover page of the book.
2. Identify space as presented on the cover page and explain its relationship with the content of the book.
3. Discuss the meaning of the colours on the front cover page.
4. Give a graphological analysis of the graphemes on the cover page.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the multimodal stylistic theoretical framework of Halliday which is based on relating images, typography, colours and space to the meaning of the context of the a text, and Van Leeuwen (2006, 139) that "much of the work that used to be done by language is now realized, not through linguistic resources, but through layout, colour and typography".

## **Methodology**

This study used the qualitative data collection method. It simply provides information useful to the understanding of texts using a purposively chosen text as its sample. This study does not involve the use of any statistical or mathematical operations. E-books from online, books from the library were used for the literature review.

## **Data Analysis**

The front cover page of a poetry anthology entitled "*Book of Blood*" author by Chimankpa A.G. Ogbueri was used to analyze the extent to which book cover designs are meaning-making on their own and how they interact with other modes of meaning in a text in a complex process semiosis.

## **Shape (Image)**

Shape (image) is contextual in meaning. For the purpose of this study, shape or image is a visual representation of an information. It can be described in terms of drawings or pictures in the negative or colour forms. The words shape and image are used interchangeably because of their synonymous meaning from their etymologies. They both imply "shape form", "created being", artifact that depicts visual perception.

Shape or image is a representation of anything in the mind, a picture drawn by the fancy; a conception; an idea, an illustration, a figure, a symbolic representation.

In the foreground of the front cover page of the "*Book of Blood*" is a human shaped head with a neck, resting on a bloody thorny earth surrounded by lake or river as its shoulder. Inside the head are feminine figures in various activities. This depicts that the head is recollecting or remembering incidents, concepts and humans represented as feminine. The prominent figure that seems to be coming out of the head is the figure of a woman holding a lifeless or weak looking woman whom she is preventing from falling to the Thorny earth. The blood flowing from these figures are

dripping down the earth and flowing into the lake surrounding the thorny earth. This lake with mangrove looking thorns, have the look of the Niger Delta environs. It's therefore a memory of the persona towards the Blood Shed and situation of the Niger Delta. The land is represented as feminine, weak and helpless. The image draws a pathetic sight and appeals for remedy. The connection of the earth to the neck of the head as its shoulder is an indication that the persona has a connection with the land as a "Son of the Soil" (an indigene of Niger Delta) with all the memories connected to the land.

### **Space**

The title at the top most part of the book suggests the height of the preservation of these memories in an indestructible place or archive where humanity cannot destroy. The subtitle "for my lovers" in bracket further explains how secured the memories have been kept for the purpose of history or scholarship. "Poetry" and the author's name Chimankpa A.G. Ogbueri written on the lake or river is foregrounding the author and his career overseas. It is an indication that the memories that triggered the production of the poems developed when the author is in overseas.

### **Colour**

The dominant colours on the front cover page are red, blue, grey black and white. Colour is the appearance of any object as it reflects on light. The title of the book written in red evokes the strong feeling of loss created in the mind of the persona. The colour red is an intense colour that is packed with emotion ranging from passionate, intense love to anger and violence. It is a highly visible colour on the cover that is able to focus attention quickly and get people to make quick decisions. "Blood Red" evokes loss of temper, agitation, anger and overbearing, demanding and oppression.

Blue represents both the sky and the sea, and is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, imagination, expansiveness, inspiration, and sensitivity. Blue also represents meanings of depth trust loyalty, sincerity, wisdom,

confidence, stability, faith and intelligence. On the cover, it evokes wisdom and memories of the mind. It evokes self-expression. Blue is angst suppressants. Blue is used to symbolize pretty and sincerity in heraldry. Blue communicates significance, importance and confidence without creating somber or sinister feelings. Blue is often associated with intelligence, stability, unity and conservation. This is used to show the people and the land before the shedding of the blood posited on the cover. The blood flows down to contaminate or mix with the blue.

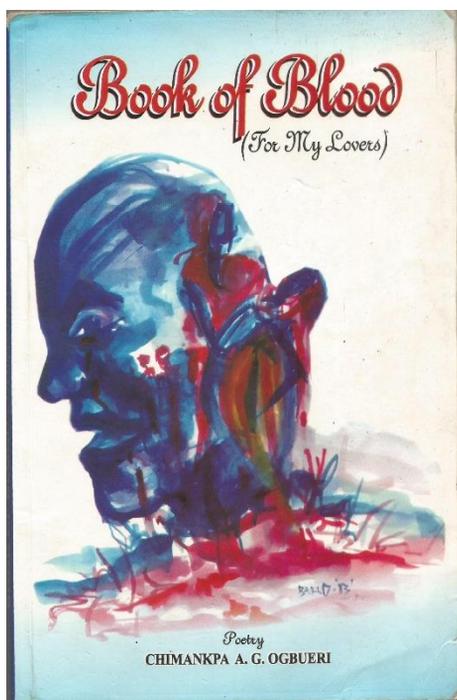
Grey is another colour identifiable on the head image of the cover. Grey colour affects the mind and body by causing unsettling feelings. On the cover it evokes femininity, While dark greys are masculine in nature.

Black on the graphemes is associated with power, strength. Black is required for all other colour to have depth and variation of hue. It means that the information in the poetry is powerful and required by the poet's lovers as he has said. It evokes strong emotion. The colour black affects the mind and body by helping to create an inconspicuous feeling, boosting confidence, increasing the sense of potential and possibility. Black colour on the graphemes (for my lovers) and on "poetry" is positively represented. The white background is an inherently posture colour associated with purity, virginity innocence, light, goodness, cleanliness, protection, softness, sterility. It depicts the previous state of the Niger Delta before the shedding of blood. On the front cover, it evokes clarity. The colour white affects the mind and body by aiding in mental clarity.

### **Graphemes and Graphology**

In Linguistics, a grapheme is the smallest unit of a writing system of any given language. Graphemes comprise alphabetic letters, typographic ligatures, chinese characters, numerical, punctuation marks, and other individual symbols. A grapheme can also be construed as a graphical sign that independently represents a position of linguistics materials. Altman, (2008). Graphology measures the structure and movement of the written form. It examines the reasons behind actions, providing information in a

very quick space of time. Graphology is derived from the Greek word for writing and study. Graphology analysis of a text, is concerned with the description of physical appearance of the graphemes of the text and help to convey paralinguistic and extra-linguistic messages on the front cover page of the anthology, the title is written in initial capital and in a bold *monotivecosiva* font written in red signifying blood. The initial capital font size evokes the meaning of the former big and prestigious economical, political and social lives of the Niger Deltas. While the lowering of the preceding cases signifies the crippled state of the once pretentious economic, political and social life of the people. The “*Book of Blood*” is expressed in the colour of the font and the metaphor of the bloody figures and the land. The author’s name and his work appear on the bottom of the cover page and on the lake tracing the author and the sources of his information as coming from the riverine. In all, the images, colours and the graphemes contributed to the expansion of the meaning of the text.



## **Findings and Conclusion**

### **Findings**

The cover depicts that the content will be pathetic and thus arouse pity for solution scavenging in order to curb the situation of the environment posited in the context of the text. The images, colours, graphemes all contributed to the meaning-making of the text.

### **Recommendations**

A cover page invites a reader to make a tonal connection, it covers the tone of a book and the first impression that a book create on its potential readers. A good cover page communicates that the pages within are worth the buyer's time and attention. Authors should pay for a good design for their book covers and make good sales.

Readers should not neglect pictures, images, and other icons on a book cover as they help to make a clearer meaning of the context of a book.

### **Conclusion**

A good literature text is designed from the cover to catch the attention of readers anywhere. The inside of a book is most times judged by the outside. It echoes the depth of its context. It creates imageries that are emotive and attacks the psychological domain of the reader positively by negatively depending on the images portrayed. "*Book of Blood*" can be classified as one of those good poetry in the market as seen on the cover page, which conveys the tone of the book.

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