

A critical discourse analysis of Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone conversation'

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Abstract

The study investigates the Critical Discourse Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Telephone Conversation to expatiate on the hidden meaning and the poet's intention of writing the poem. The study employs Searle's (1975) Speech Acts Theory and stylistic techniques and methods. The data for the study is Wole Soyinka's Telephone Conversation. The analysis of the data is carried out under the aspects of graphological, syntactical, semantically, and phonological patterns. The study observes that the analysis is necessary to understand the basic concept of the poem in terms of the impact of racial discrimination in the micro-structure of society. The study finds out that assertive, directive, and commissive acts were the predominant acts employed by the poet, while expressive and declarative acts were sparingly used. Also, stylistic tools like phonological, grammatical, lexical, and graphological features were employed to aid the flow of the message and the organizational structures of the poem. Also, the study finds out that, there are significant systematic linguistic differences in the way Africans and American communicates and disseminates information. The study concludes that the language we encounter daily influences our perceptions, attitudes, and reactions to the circumstance of an event.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Graphological, Syntactical, Expressive,

Introduction

Language serves as a medium for exchanging ideas, feelings, thoughts and a tool for achieving social interaction among members of a social group. Through language, important social information is conveyed in a socially acceptable and organized manner. Language is a vehicle of thought which shapes the most characteristic of the human faculty. It is a system of vocal symbols by which members of a society or social group interact and co-operate. Language, therefore, is a means by which people relate, interact, and express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through written signs and symbols. The language chosen by the speaker enhances the quality and effectiveness and easy decoding of the message by the audience or hearer. It is important to note that the choice



and meaning of that language is valued when it is studied in the context in which it has been used. (T. Oladejo 2016)¹

Discourse analysis as defined by (Yule 1996)² is the "language beyond the sentence and so the analysis of discourse is typically concerned with the study of language in texts and conversation". He shows that language users make sense of what they read in texts and understand what speakers mean despite what they say. Users of language can also recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse, and successfully take part in that complex activity called conversation. (Trappes-Lomax 2006)³ sees discourse as the study of language viewed communicatively and /or of communication viewed linguistically. Discourse is socially constructive as well as socially conditioned; it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people.

Objectives of the study

This study aims at investigating the discourse and stylistic features of Wole Soyinka's Telephone Conversation. The objectives are:

- (i) to reveal how Wole Soyinka constructs his messages;
- (ii) to identify the speech acts and stylistic features in Wole Soyinka's poem;
- (iii) to reveal how these features will portray the intrinsic meanings in the poem;

Research questions

The following are the research questions:

- a. How does Wole Soyinka construct his messages?
- b. What are the speech acts and stylistic features in Wole Soyinka's poem?
- c. How do these features portray the intrinsic meanings in the poem?

Literature review

A Critical discourse (cda)

Discourse Analysis (DA) is concerned with meaning in use, that is, the meaning which is produced by speakers/writers and understood by listeners in everyday life. The concern of DA is not only spoken form but it includes written form as well. (Trappes-Lomax 2006)⁴ sees discourse as the study of language viewed communicatively and /or of communication viewed linguistically. He notes the following definitions of discourse. Discourse analysis is:

¹ Oladejo, T.O. "An Overview of Stylistics in English Language." *Oyo Journal of Languages and Literature*, 2016: 377-397.

² Yule, G. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

³ Trappes-Lomax, H. "Language in Language Teacher Education: A Discourse Perspective." Edited by Ferguson, G. Trappes-Lomax. *Language in Language Teacher Education* (John Benjamins), 2006: 1-21.

⁴ Ibid.

1. The linguistic, cognitive, and social processes whereby meanings are expressed and intentions interpreted in human interaction.
2. The historically and culturally embedded sets of conventions that constitute and regulate such processes.
3. A particular event in which such processes are instantiated.
4. The product of such an event especially in the form of visible text, whether originally spoken and subsequently transcribed or originally written (Trappes-Lomax 2006).⁵

DA is a framework with which the analyst approaches a text and explicates what it says and how it has been said, in addition to what has been understood and how it has been understood. Invariably, DA examines text at the surface level i.e. at the sentential level. Similarly, DA is a study of how humans use language to communicate and how addressers construct linguistic messages for addressees; how addressees work on linguistic messages to interpret them. Discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between language and the contexts of its use. DA claims that its analysis goes beyond the word level to the sentential level.

There are three major sets of features that DA studies. These are 1. Extra-linguistic features include time, place, typography, format, medium of presentation, and the background and history of a text. 2. Para-linguistic features which include punctuations, intonation, pause, speech acts, genre, and discourse types (narrative, exposition, description), and 3. Linguistic features are word order, embedding, nominalization, and levels of language. (McGregor 2010)⁶ argues that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to see our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social and political condition. Hence critical discourse analysis studies real and often extended, instances of social interaction which take particularly in linguistic form. Critical discourse analysis deals with the long-term analysis of fundamental causes and consequences of issues. Therefore, it requires an account of detailed relationships between text, talk, society, and culture.

CDA develops discourse socially in such a way that it involves social conditions of production (e.g., text) as well as social conditions of interpretation. It is the linguistic form of social interaction that is either embedded in the social context of a situation or that it interprets the social system that constitutes the culture of institutions or society as a whole. It is a product of its environment and it functions in that environment through the process of interaction and semantic choice. Critical discourse analysis tries to determine the relationship between the actual text and the processes involved in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thus, this provides skills in critically analyzing written text, that is, the way we write and what we say. (McGregor 2010) ⁷argues that given the power of the written and spoken word, critical discourse analysis is necessary for describing, interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing social life reflected in the text.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ McGregor, S.L.T. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University, 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

From the foregoing, the theories employed in this study are speech acts analysis and stylistic methods/techniques. The theories were chosen to ensure that Wole Soyinka's poem is analyzed to reveal intrinsic and hidden meanings that are embedded in the poem.

About the poet: Wole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole "Wole" Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright and poet; he was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature being the first person in Africa to be endowed with such a prize. (<https://www.poemhunter.com/wole-soyinka/biography> n.d.).⁸ Soyinka was born into a Yoruba family in Abeokuta. After completing his study in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London where he wrote plays that were produced in both countries, in theatres, and on the radio. He also took an active role in Nigeria's political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. In 1965, he seized the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio and broadcast a demand for the cancellation of the Western Nigeria Regional Elections. In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, he was arrested by the Federal Government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for two years. Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, becoming the first African laureate.

Theoretical framework

In this study, we have decided to make use of general stylistic methods and techniques with the incorporation of Searle's Speech Act Theory as our framework. These theories were adopted because Stylistics offers us the opportunity to be aware of the structural pattern of language permeating a poem to be able to identify the prominent or foregrounded stylistic features of the text and helps us to reveal the internal patterning of the poem. From the foregoing, our focus will be on the structural patterns (syntactic, graphological, morphological, lexical, etc.) that were demonstrated in the data.

Concept of stylistics

Stylistics is a branch that defines different styles. It refers to the study of the appropriate use of words or language in a sentence or writing. Style depends on linguistic levels and as a result of these levels, every text and writing is different from the other, hence every genre is different. According to (Leech 2008),⁹ stylistics is the (linguistic) study of style that is rarely undertaken for its own sake. It is an exercise in describing what use is made of language. They also said that the major aim of studying stylistics is to explore the meanings and understand the linguistic features of the text. Stylistics is regarded as a field of study where the methods of selecting and implementing linguistic, extra-linguistic, or artistic expressive means and devices in the process of

⁸ <https://www.poemhunter.com/wole-soyinka/biography>. (accessed 06 23, 2021).

⁹ Leech, Geoffrey. *Language in Literature, Style and Foregrounding*. London: Longman, 2008.

communication are studied. (Bradford 1997),¹⁰ opines that stylistics is a critical approach that uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts. This implies that stylistics is developed as a means of interpreting literary texts with the use of linguistic methods but it has become clear that such model can be applied to the analysis of any type of text: to non-literary registers as well as the literary. Stylistics can tell us how to name the constituent parts of a literary text and enable us to document their operations by so doing; it must draw upon the terminology and methodology of disciplines which focus upon language in the real world.(T. Oladejo 2016).¹¹

Levels of stylistic analysis

The levels of stylistic analysis are discussed briefly:

1. Phonetic level: It is the level of sound analysis in which we study the characteristics and function of sounds in a literary piece of work. Phonological level: this level is concerned with the study of the sound system of any given language. It deals with the recognized rules of pronunciation. Phonological devices comprise rhyme elements, consonance, alliteration, and assonance, etc.

2. Graphological level: it recognizes the writing system of a language and studies the formal rules of capitalization, spelling, structure, systematic formation, and punctuation in the sentence. Grammatical level: It comprises both syntactic and morphological levels and discusses the internal formation or structure of the sentence and its function in sequences. It identifies the clauses, phrases, words, nouns, verbs, etc.

3.The lexical level: This level observes the mode in which distinct words and phrases incline to design in a diverse linguistic context, on the semantic level in positions of stylistics. It studies words relative to internal expressiveness.

4.Morphological levels include Affixes: It is a process of forming new words by putting morphemes before some words. It is further divided into prefixes or suffixes. These are two popular types of morphological operations. Prefixes generally alter the meanings of the words and suffixes change their part of speech. Coinages: It is the process of forming new words from the existing ones.

5.Lexico-syntactic levels include Anastrophe: anastrophe is the inversion of the natural or usual word order. The use of anastrophe secures emphasis and focuses the readers' attention. Parenthesis: it entails the insertion of some verbal unit (extra information, an afterthought, or a comment) in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow of the sentence. Ellipsis: Ellipsis entails the deliberate omission of a word or words, which are readily implied by the content: It is used to create brevity reemphasize, or ambiguity. Asyndeton: This is the deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses. Asyndeton produces a hurried rhythm in the sentence. Anaphora: The use of

¹⁰ Bradford, Richard. *Stylistics*. London: Routledge, 1997.

¹¹ Oladejo, T.O. "A Speech Acts Analysis of Dr. D.K. Olukoya's Selected Sermons." *Language and Literary Studies in Society: A Festschrift for Prof. Eno Grace Nta* (University of Lagos Press), 2021: 297-308.

words that refer to or replace another word used earlier in the sentence. Epizeuxis: Repetition of a word or phrase without any breaks at all.

The speech act theory

In addition, more important to this research is the Speech Act Theory of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* which was a collection of his lectures published posthumously in 1962. The Speech Act Theory developed from (Austin 1962)¹² work: 'How to do things with words' forms the basis of this present study. This idea was further developed by (Searle 1969)¹³ who became one of the major proponents of the theory. According to Austin, a speaker utters a sentence to perform some acts which he calls speech acts. Speech is premised on the fact that people perform various actions through the use of words and when utterances are made, a particular act is performed; this is called Speech Act. Speech Acts according to (Austin 1962)¹⁴ fall into three classes, which are: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

A locutionary act is an act of saying something; that is, the act of producing an utterance. This is referred to as uttering a sentence with a certain sense and reference or linguistic meaning. For example: 'Don't eat that piece of candy'; 'I am hungry'; 'Come here.' Illocutionary acts are the core of any theory of speech acts. The illocutionary act is an act of performing some action in saying something such as giving information, warning, issuing a threat, request, etc. This is realized, according to (Austin 1962)¹⁵ as the successful realization of the speaker's intention, which for (Searle 1969)¹⁶ is a product of the listener's interpretation. For example: 'Kindly lend me some money!'; 'We congratulate you on your appointment'; 'what is your name?' etc.

The perlocutionary act is the effect or influence on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the listener/hearer. Perlocutionary acts refer to the effect of the utterance of the speaker on the hearer i.e., what the speaker can achieve by saying something such as convincing, persuading, inspiring, consoling, etc. it brings about an effect upon the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors of the addressee. Hence, (Searle 1969)¹⁷ categorizes the illocutionary acts into five classes:

- (1) Assertives: According to him, "the point or purpose of the members of the Assertive class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g., stating, claiming, reporting, announcing, etc.
- (2) Directives: these are statements that compel or make another person's action fit the propositional element. It is usually used to give order thereby causing the hearer to take a particular action of advising, admonishing, asking,

¹² Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

¹³ Searle J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, instructing, ordering, permitting, requesting, requiring, suggesting, urging, warning, etc.

(3) Commissives: Commit speakers to some future actions, e.g., promising, offering, swearing, etc. to do something, congratulating, greeting, thanking, accepting, etc.

(4) Expressives: This is the expression of the speaker's psychological state, e.g., thanking, apologizing, congratulating, etc.

(5) Declarative: These statements are used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty, resigning, dismissing, accepting, declaring war, etc.

Empirical studies

There have been several works on the use of stylistic methods and speech act theory as a theoretical framework. For instance, (Mahmood 2015)¹⁸ 'Stylistics Analysis of Holly Thursday I By William Blake'. He employed stylistics analysis to explain the different features such as the lexico-syntactic patterns and choices, semantically, grammatically, graphological and phonological patterns. He concluded that the analysis helps understand the basic concept of the poem that is irony and it defines the beauty and charm of the church traditions but with irony.

Babatunde (2007) adopts Adebija's (1982) unified theory of speech acts and Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech acts and Mutual Contextual Beliefs. He found out that the evangelical religious speaker has an intention that he wants the audience to recognize and respond to. Also, his analysis has revealed that there is a directive force underlying religious speeches which serves as a binding wire to join all the individual speech acts together as recognized by Adebija (1982: 125).¹⁹

Also, (Cheema 2012)²⁰ studied Stylistic Analysis of Wordsworth's Poem: "Early Spring". Stylistic techniques and methods are used for the stylistic analysis of Wordsworth's poem Early Spring. The analysis is made under the aspects of graphological, syntactical, semantically, and phonological patterns. This analysis helps understand the basic concept of the poem that is the contrast between the harmony of nature and disharmony of the mankind. They found out that the poem describes the beauty and charm of nature and the poet describes the contrast between the real natural world and the materialistic world of man

In Suhair Safwat(2015)²¹ 'Speech Acts in Political Speeches', the study investigates the role of language in the communication and interpretation of intentions by examining selected political speeches of John Kerry in Presidential

¹⁸ Mahmood, Jamil. "Analysis of Holly Thursday I By William Blake." *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 2015: 46-52.

¹⁹ Adebija, E. F. (1982). "A Speech Act Analysis of Consumer Advertisements". USA: Indiana University. Ph.D Dissertation

²⁰ Cheema, Bilal and. "Stylistics Analysis of Wordsworth's Poem 'Early Spring'." *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2012): 35-50.

²¹ Suhair Safwat(2015). 'Speech Acts in Political Speeches'. *Journal of Modern Education Review*. Academic Star Publishing Company:USA Volume 5, No. 7, pp. 699-706

Campaign in 2004 and George Bush- Inaugural address in 2001 since they have the same purposes as pieces of discourse with specific goals. In view of this, it is obvious that nothing thus far exists on the critical discourse analysis of Wole Soyinka's Telephone Conversation using speech acts and stylistics methods as theoretical framework hence the importance of this paper.

Research methodology

The data for this study was Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation' which was downloaded from the internet (Soyinka 1934).²² The analysis was done in two parts - quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis is done using a table to determine the frequency of occurrence of illocutionary acts in the poem, while the qualitative analysis employs stylistic methods to interpret the foregrounded and inherent meanings found in the poem.

Data analysis

1. *Stylistic features*
2.
 - Graphological Devices- Capitalisation

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Examples: 'HOW DARK?' | Line 10 |
| ' ARE YOU LIGHT? OR VERY DARK?' | Line 11 |
| ' ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' | Line 18 |
| ' WHAT IS THAT?' | Line 25 |
| ' DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS' | Line 26 |
| 'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' | Line 27 |

With the use of capitalization, the poet emphasizes mainly the skin color of an African man which always poses a problem to him especially in a white man's land. It also helps us to understand the segregation and frustration of an African man in England.

- Repetition

There is the use of repetition in the poem. 'Dark' and 'light' are repeated about 4 and 2 times each; all are written in capital letters. They are used as emphasis to produce a specific effect on the reader.

Lexico-semantic features

The lexico-semantic features which occur in the poem are:

- The use of hyponymy emphasizes that there is no mortal body that is of only one complexion but each person is made up of different colors.

Hypernymn-'colour'- Hyponyms- 'black', 'gold', 'red', 'sepia', etc.

²² Soyinka, Wole. *htt://www.k-state.edu/english/westmark/spring00/SOYINKA.html*. 1934. (accessed 06 29, 2021).

Hypernym-body-hyponyms-hand feet, ear, etc.

- Hyperbole- 'Palm of my hand'... is a peroxide blonde...' (line 30). This is an exaggerated statement by the poet to state that he also has a trace of light complexion in him.
- Anaphora- 'Button B. Button A. Stench' (line 11) 'Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered' (line 13). This is to create awareness in the reader of the effect of the landlady's comment on the poet.
- Simile- 'You mean like plain or milk chocolate?' (line 19). The sentence is a simile, comparing a man's complexion to a 'plain or milk chocolate' 'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS' 'like a brunette.'
- Onomatopoeia - 'Omnibus squelching tar.' The sentence is onomatopoeia because it is describing the sound of the tires of the buses on a tarred street. This is used to depict the landlady's ill-mannered and to echo the sense of the event that happened in the previous lines.

Phonological devices

Alliteration- repetition of consonant sounds 'Lip-stick coated, Long gold-rolled'- repetition of consonant sound 'L'

'Red booth. Red pillar-box repetition of consonant sound /r/
Red double-tiered''

"...clinical, crushing in its light" repetition of consonant sound /k/

Each phrase in line 29 is made up of four monosyllabic words- 'The rest of me. Palm of my hands, soles of my feet.'

Syntactic features

There is the use of Anastrophe- This is the inversion of word order. Examples are: 'caught I was foully' (line 9) 'considerate she was, varying the emphasis' (line 17)

'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS'-There is an omission of pronominal 'I' which is deliberately omitted by the landlady to save her 'face'

2. Speech acts analysis of Wole Soyinka's 'telephone conversation'

The analysis of the data found is based on the speech act type suggested by John Searle. They are representatives, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressives.

1. Representatives (Asserting, Stating, Concluding, Boasting, Describing, and Suggesting)

Based on the data analyzed, ten utterances were belonging to this type of speech act. They are as follows:

The price seemed reasonable, location
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.

Considerate she was, varying the emphasis--
 Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
 Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
 Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
 Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
 The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
 My bottom raven black--One moment, madam!"—sensing
 Are a peroxide blond. Friction caused--

These utterances above belonged to representatives' type because all of them deal with the truth of an expressed proposition. Most of those utterances were in form of stating.

2. Commisives: It commits a speaker to some future action. This study found that only two sentences were belonging to this type. These are:

Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
 Off-premises. Nothing remained

3. Directives: Directives type relates to the effort of the speaker that the hearer will do certain actions after hearing the utterance. It was found that twelve utterances in the poem are directives type. These are:

But self-confession. "Madam," I warned,
 "I hate a wasted journey--I am African."
 "HOW DARK?" . . . I had not misheard . . . "ARE YOU LIGHT
 OR VERY DARK?" Button B, Button A. Stench
 "ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came.
 "You mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
 Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding
 "DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like brunette."
 "THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?" "Not altogether.
 Foolishly, madam--by sitting down, has turned
 About my ears--"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather
 See for yourself?"

4. Expressives: Expressives speech acts deal with expressing some sort of psychological states like greeting, thanking, apologizing, complaining, and congratulating. This study found eleven utterances belonging to this speech acts type.

Silence. Silenced transmission of
 Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
 Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
 Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was foully.
 Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered
 Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
 By ill-mannered silence, surrender
 Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
 I chose. "West African sepia"--and as afterthought,
 "Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
 Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap

In the speech act analysis of Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation', the data shows that directive acts accounts for the highest percentage 34.3% of the illocutionary acts performed in the poem, followed by expressive acts, 31.4%; assertive, 28.6% while the declarative act has 0% respectively. According to the data analyzed, there were no utterances that belonged to declaratives type of speech acts. The calculation of percentage is based on the total number of each illocutionary act over the total summation of all the speech acts in the text. Hence, we have:

| Frequency | | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Assertives | 10 | 28.6% |
| Commissives | 2 | 5.7% |
| Directives | 12 | 34.3% |
| Declaratives | 0 | 0.00% |
| Expressives | 11 | 31.4% |
| Total: | 35 | 100 |

Table 1: Summary of Illocutionary Acts in Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation

Conclusion

In our day-to-day living, the language we encounter influences our perceptions, attitudes, and reactions to the circumstance of an event. With regards to the study of Critical Discourse Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Telephone Conversations, the study finds out that, there are significant systematic linguistic differences in the way Africans and American communicates and disseminates information in such a way that they manipulate the listeners to interpret information in certain ways. The two characters in the poem do not just convey information but they infused their ideologies through the choices of powerful emotive words

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APPENDIX

Wole Soyinka
(b.1934)

"Telephone Conversation"

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off-premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. "Madam," I warned,
"I hate a wasted journey--I am African."
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was foully.
"HOW DARK?" . . . I had not misheard . . . "ARE YOU LIGHT

OR VERY DARK?" Button B, Button A.* Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis--
"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came.
"You mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. "West African sepia"--and as afterthought,
"Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding
"DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like brunette."
"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?" "Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blond. Friction caused--
Foolishly, madam--by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black--One moment, madam!"—sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears--"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather
See for yourself?"