

A Stylistic Approach of William Shakespeare’s “SONNET 138”

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the sonnet 138 written by William Shakespeare from a stylistic point of view. The division of Shakespeare’s sonnets is shown. A short introduction to both style and stylistics in literature are written. For further facilitation, a short introduction to Shakespeare, the sonnet 138 and its themes are given. The stylistic analysis of the sonnet is shown from four sides. Graphological, grammatical, phonological and lexical analyses are shown. This paper will help to understand the structure and style of Shakespeare’s sonnet number 138. Moreover, the themes and ideals of Shakespeare will also be understood.

Keywords: Sonnet, style, stylistic, graphological analysis, lexical analysis, grammatical analysis, phonological analysis, Shakespeare

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is well known worldwide for his 154 sonnets. The critics believe that, among them, the first 1-126 is about the Fair Youth or the Earl of Southampton while the rest of the sonnets are written about the dark lady. Sonnet 138, among all the other sonnets in the sequence, is one of the most well-known sonnets. In this particular sonnet, the poet continues in his quest of self-criticism but mixes it with a unique love for the dark lady. He is self-conscious about growing old.

He uses the uncomplicated sexual love for the dark lady to reassure himself that he is still worthy of being somebody’s object of interest. The sonnet is in the usual iambic pentameter scheme, typical of a Shakespearean sonnet. The lines of the sonnet follow the usual da-DUM, da-DUM rhyme. The Volta or the turn of events appear late into the couplet of the sonnet.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Atkins [1] in his book “*Shakespeare’s Sonnets: With Three Hundred Years of Commentary*” says that, even though the book in which the sonnet was published, “The Passionate Pilgrim Collection” says it is written by W. Shakespeare, some critics have debated to doubt its authenticity. Some believe it may contain works of other authors. Some have even argued that the names of other authors have been taken out when Jaggard initially published the book in 1599. Atkins also believes that in the sonnet, the dark lady lies to the speaker about her truthfulness but the spokesman does not lie to her, only to himself so that she could think of him as an untutored youth. In line 9, Atkin believes unjust to mean dishonest or unfaithful. He says that “in line 12 lie with means that the speaker lies with his mistress later than to her and identifies it as an elaborate pun.”

Booth [2] writes about swear what is used in line 2 of the sonnet and hints a slight disbelief. In line 2 of the poem the “swear” portrays a slight cynicism in the speaker’s tone. The speaker clearly acknowledges the lies of his lover but at the same time also accepts them. Booth further believes that line 7 shows the mutuality in the speaker and his lady’s relationship, where the speaker states that they are both liars. One lies about his age and the other pretends to believe him. They have a mutual deception and believe everything they tell each other. Finally, Booth believes that the last line of the poem portrays the speaker’s “cynicism, bitterness and despair”.

Moore [3] writes that, the later sonnets in the sonnet sequence of Shakespeare are just as dark as the dark lady. She believes that writing about the foul and deceitful nature of the dark lady makes the speaker expose his own dark features as well. The sonnets therefore shadow his own disappointment and anger. About sonnet 138, she regards the relationship of the speaker with his lover to be based on mutual dishonesty. According to her, the line 2 of the sonnet portrays the internal conflict of the speaker where he knows his lover lies but chooses to ignore it. Moore says that the contradictory effect of line 5 and 7 displays the “schizophrenia” of both the poem and the lovers. She identifies the “O” at the beginning of line 11

as sarcasm. The ending couplet suggests an interesting concept that is the deception of one and the love making what becomes one to lie is to lie with.

Fineman [4] opines that the beauty of the dark lady was not conventional to the time of Shakespeare. All the ladies described in Petrarchan sonnets have rosy cheeks and golden locks whereas the dark lady had pale skin and dark hair. He further believes that the sonnets about the dark lady have a “lusty misogyny” to them which makes them unique in the series to that of the Earl of Southampton. Throughout the sonnets related to the dark lady, especially sonnet 138 displays an erotic side to the speaker’s and his mistress’s relationship. Such example is seen in the last two lines. Fineman believes Shakespeare challenges Christianity and also the art of poetry itself.

Research problem

Several researchers studied numerous poems written by William Shakespeare but the stylistic analysis of Shakespeare's sonnet 138 has not been done before. This paper will analyze the sonnet 138 stylistically and will investigate the individuality of stylistics.

Objectives

This study focuses on the stylistic analysis of sonnet 138. For facilitation, a brief description on style, stylistics and the author himself, William Shakespeare has given with schemes and troops. The objective of this paper is to explore sonnet 138 at different levels like graphological level, grammatical level, lexical level and phonological level and to evaluate how language devices has been integrated in the poem

Research questions

How to investigate the sonnet at different levels like graphological level, grammatical level, lexical level and phonological level? And how to evaluate the language devices that has been integrated in the poem?

Scope of the study

This study will be stylistic. Through the use of different levels of analysis like graphological, grammatical, lexical and phonological and levels the analysis will be done.

Justification

Shakespeare's sonnet 138 has a universal theme that can be applicable to any time. It is a famous and stunning poem which is affluent in meaning. Author's writing style and diction have made the researcher to embark on this study. This work will be of huge advantage to the readers who are interested in the field of style and stylistics and obviously the learners of English language and literature.

STYLE

Style in literature can be considered as the way, the method or the distinctive pattern through which a writer composes his writing. There is a coherent relation between style and content. While some pieces of writings demand a methodical terse style, as seen in Francis Bacon’s writings; others demand a base style which is necessary for satires and comedies. Romantics associate style with the thoughts and mentality of the authors or poets, the age in which the writing is written and the environment in which it is written. Some, on the other hand, consider it to be mechanical. A good style stamps a writer’s personality. Such style, however, needs to be a product of the author alone. Indeed, many writers derive their motivation from other writers and their writing. The writings of such writers can be a source of inspiration for many. Nevertheless, a writer needs to adapt his subjunctive style through extensive writing and reading.

STYLISTICS

Stylistics is a vast and debatable topic. Some consider stylistics to be divided into three divisions. 1) A poem 2) A novel and 3) A play. This classification, however, is not widely accepted. Stylistics may be considered as the tool through which readers can identify the structure or genre of the written text. Stylistics is caught in between two punitive imperatives. Firstly, it has a relationship between the method in which I use the language and also its context. Secondly, it is used structurally to create a mirror image of the real world. In previous times, stylistics was related only to texts but after the 20th century, literary pieces are also linked to it. At present, stylistic analysis of a wide variety of writings is done such as journals, newspapers, poems, prose, drama etc.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITER OF SONNET 138, “WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE”

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is one of the greatest British poets and playwright .He was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in England. There are rumors regarding his education but many consider him to be a student of Grammar school. When he was only 18 he married Anne Hathaway and had a daughter and twins, Judith and Hamnet. A few years later he travelled to England and became an actor and playwright in the acting company, Lord Chamberlain’s Men. By the age of thirty-four, he became one of the most successful playwrights in England and created masterpieces such as, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and Julius Caesar. He wrote thirty-eight known plays, 154 highly praise-worthy sonnets and three or four longer poems. In his late forties Shakespeare retired and returned to Stratford where he died three years later in 1616 [5].

Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets are still widely celebrated to this day. He is one of the most translated and quoted writers of all time. Many consider

him to be the national poet of England or the ‘Bard of Avon’.

INTRODUCTION TO SONNET 138

Sonnet 138 is a part of the Shakespearean sonnet sequence. Sonnets (1-127) are considered to be directed towards ‘The Earl of Southampton’ whereas sonnets (128-152) are said to be directed towards ‘The Dark Lady’. According to the sequence, sonnet 138 speaks of the dark lady and how she lies to the poet, Shakespeare in agreement to the fact that the poet is still a young person.

In this sonnet, the poet is insecure about his age. He is aware of the fact that his lover lies and tells him that he is still young. When in reality, the poet agrees with this lie so that the lover thinks of him as an ‘untutored youth’ or a naïve and young person. The poet credits his lover’s ‘false speaking tongue’. This is an indication of the profound love that the poet has for his mistress. Furthermore, the poet speaks of ‘simple truth’ which is his age, being ‘suppressed’ on both the part of the poet and his lover. After this, he asks a rhetorical question of why they lie and don’t come clean about their dishonesty. He later answers this question saying that ‘age in love love’s not to have years told’, which means that love does not place old age in a very respectable place. This is a paradoxical attitude of the poet because in sonnet 116 he talks about how love is not at the mercy of time and does not change with age. Finally, in the couplet, the poet says that both him and his lover lie with each other and are flattered by their lies.

THEME OF SONNET 138

The salient theme of sonnet 138 comes across as ‘insecurity’ as the poet feels insecure about his old age. Nevertheless, there are other themes that build up the sonnet. Firstly, the theme of love is seen as the poet addresses his mistress as ‘my love’. Secondly, the poet

speaks about age. He mentions young age in metaphors such as untutored youth and unlearned in the world’s false subtleties. Lastly, beauty and time are also themes in this sonnet. The line twelve is a reflection of fading good looks with the passage of time.

SONNET 138: TEXT OF THE POEM

“When my love swears that she is made of truth,

 And in our faults by lies we flattered be.”
 (Cited after Duncan-Jones 138)

FRAMEWORK

This work is a stylistic analysis of sonnet number 138. The sonnet is analyzed on various levels of stylistics. Qualitative and descriptive method is used in this work. Shakespeare has written 154 sonnets and the data for analysis is the sonnet of Shakespeare. But the sonnet which is selected for analysis in this research paper is sonnet number 138.

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SONNET 138

The sonnet can be analyzed on different levels such as-

GRAPHOLOGICAL LEVEL

1. There are 14 lines in this poem.
2. First 12 lines are divided into 3 quatrains with 4 lines each and then last 2 lines are couplet.
3. There are 118 words in the poem.
4. Punctuation marks are used in the poem. For example: comma, apostrophe, hyphen, colon, full-stop and question mark.
5. There is usual capitalization.
6. There is no use of underline, italic or bold letters.
7. There is no use of syncope or Apocope.

LEXICAL LEVEL

NOUN	PRONOUN	ADVERB	ADJECTIVE
Love, truth, youth, world, credit, tongue, habit, trust, age, years, faults, sides, days, lies.	My, she, I, her, me, we, that, our.	Vainly, simply, when, thus, not, wherefore.	Untutored, false subtleties, best, false-speaking, simple, seeming, unlearned, past, unjust, old, some, the, both.
VERB AND AUX. VERB			PREPOSITION
Swears, made, do, believe, know, lies, might, think, thinking, thinks, knows, credit, suppressed, told, lie, flattered, is, are, says, am, have, be.			Of, in, on, to, with, by.
			CONJUNCTION
			Though, although, but.

GRAMMATICAL LEVEL

Question Mark

In the sonnet, Shakespeare uses question mark to ask a rhetorical question in lines 9 and 10.

Comma and semi-colon

Commas and semi-colon are used in the poem to enhance the pauses and to make the poem easily understandable to the readers.

Full stop

Full Stops are used in lines 4, 8, 12 and 14. The full stops after every four lines express the poet’s break in thoughts and serve as a pause.

Colon

Colon is used in line 7 of the sonnet. The solon in line 7 intensifies the Volta and serves as a paradox to the poet’s thoughts and expressions.

Paragraph

Paragraphs are used in lines 13 and 14 to signify the importance of the volta and the couplet that concludes the sonnet.

Compounding

Compounding is used in the poem, e.g. in word 'false-speaking'

Anastrophe

Anastrophe's are used in the poem, such as-

- "I do believe her, though I know she lies,
- That she might think me some untutored youth,
- Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
- Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
- Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue
- On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed
- And in our faults by lies we flattered be."

(cited after Duncan-Jones 138)

Affixation

Affixation is used in the poem. Such as, in words- Untutored, unlearned, vainly, thinking, although, simply, suppressed, unjust, seeming, therefore, flattered.

PHONOLOGICAL LEVEL

Rhyme Scheme

The rhyme scheme of sonnet 138 is: ABABCDCDEFEGG.

Meter

The sonnet is written in the iambic pentameter rhyme scheme. In this particular rhyme scheme, each line consists of 10 syllables of which 5 are unstressed syllables while 5 are stressed syllables. These pairs of iambs are called 'iambic feet'. It is a metrical unit in which an unstressed syllable follows a stressed syllable. For example,

"When **my** love **swears** that **she** is **made** of **truth**
I do believe her **though** **I** know she **lies**,
 That **she** might **think** me **some** untutor'd **youth**
Unlearned in the **world's** false **subtleties**.
 Thus **vainly** **thinking** that she **thinks** me **young**,
Although she **knows** my **days** are **past** the **best**,
Simply I **credit** her false **speaking** **tongue**:
 On **both** sides **thus** is **simple** **truth** suppress'd.
 But **wherefore** **says** she **not** she is **unjust**?
 And **wherefore** **say** not **I** that **I** am **old**?
 O, **love's** best **habit** is in **seeming** **trust**,
 And **age** in **love** loves **not** to **have** years **told**:
Therefore, I **lie** with **her** and **she** with **me**
 And **in** our **faults** by **lies** we **flatter'd** **be**." (cited after Duncan-Jones 138)

Alliteration

Alliteration is used in the sonnet which is the repetition of consonant sounds in a sentence. E.g.-

Sides simple suppressed
Says she she
Love loves
Faults flattered
Simply speaking.

Assonance

Assonance is used in the repetition of vowel sounds in the sonnet. For instance-

Love of
Do ough
She e
In ubtleties
Vainly iinking
Although know
Simply speaking
Sides simple
Says she
I i
Is in
Love oves
Her e
We e

Consonance

Consonance is used in the repetition of final consonant sounds. For example,

Truth youth
Young tongue
Best suppressed
Unjust trust

Rhyming words

Several rhyming words are used in the sonnet- Truth youth, Lies subtleties, Young tongue, Best suppressed, unjust trust, Old told, Me be.

SCHEMES AND TROOPS

Schemes and troops are two classes of rhetorical figure. The contrast between the expression and the content in a poem is because of this rhetorical device. Unfortunately, the line between these two are rhetoric, which is similar to most rhetoric's, are very vaguely drawn.

Schemes: Schemes roughly comprise of figures such as, alliteration, anaphora and chiasmus and has been described as abnormal arrangements lending themselves to the harmonious presentation of ideas.

Troops: Troops are more radical and more powerful in their effect and has been identified as devices involving in the alteration of the normal meaning of an expression.

Ploce

Ploce is a scheme and it expresses the intermittent repetition of words. Such as, "But wherefore says she not she is unjust." (Cited after Duncan-Jones 138)

The word she is the ploce.

Antithesis

Antithesis is a scheme where contrasting expressions are used in case of words, phrases or sentences for the sake of emphasis. For example, On line 8 of the poem the poet essentially calls out his lover for being a flatterer and a liar. Then again, in the last line of the sonnet, the poet says that, he is aware of the lies that are devised to him by his lover and he is flattered in the lies and does not mind being lied to. The poet himself contradicts the hypothesis by being okay with being lied to.

Rhetorical Question

Rhetorical Question is a trope in which leading a question is asked to which an answer is not required. E.g. line 9 and 10.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech and a trope when two things are directly compared to each other. For example, In line 3, the poet compares himself to an “untutored youth”. In line 5, the poet compares his lover’s lies as “false speaking tongue”.

Personification

Personification is a figure of speech and a trope in which human qualities are given to inanimate beings. For example, In line 11, “love” is personified.

Pun

Pun is a trope and a play in word which suggests two or more meanings to the same word to give it a humorous effect or a rhetorical effect. For example, In line 12, “age in love” is meant to state both the age of the lovers and the number of years that they have been together.

Imagery

Imagery is the artistic use of words in which the writer or the poet creates an artistic view of the writing in the reader’s mind. In sonnet 138, the following imagery is used-
Therefore I lie with her and she with me, And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

This couplet gives the image of a toxic relationship in the minds of the readers where telling lies to each other is acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The article shows the stylistic analysis of the sonnet 138 at various levels of stylistics. Schemes and tropes which are used in this sonnet are also shown in this paper. It is a poem of psychological study of the speaker’s mistress. It reveals many of her hypocrisies but the speaker has no illusions about his mistress. It reflects their unreliable affiliation and creates the speaker’s vacillation and emotional state of trepidation.

He accepts all and he too betrays her. He is soothed by thinking that he is no more fooled by her faithlessness to him.

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