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# **A Stylistic Analysis of William Shakespeare’s Poem “Winter”**

**Chisom Paula Ogamba<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Faculty of Education and Humanities, School of Postgraduate Studies, Babcock University, Nigeria.*

### **Author’s contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Linguistic studies have taken such rapid strides in recent years that the range is baffling to the innocent and amazingly delightful to the linguistics-oriented. Applied linguistics is concerned with many fields and subjects on planet earth and possibly beyond that. A piece of literature largely depends on thought and style. This poem is categorized as a Pastoral poem, “winter” being the feature that makes the poem a pastoral poem. Shakespeare who is popularly known for his love sonnets deviated and delved into pastoral poetry describing the harshness of winter and the activities carried out by the people during winter. The entire poem can be analysed using the theory of pragmatics to see if it follows the four Gricean maxims. The Gricean maxims were posited by Paul Grice as cooperative principles that help in explaining the links utterances have in a speech community. This analysis justifies the claim that stylistics is a linguistic study in that the features of language description and a linguistic theory have been used to analyse a literary work in order to further explore the poet’s style of writing and his intended meaning. The style adopted by the poet which is the use of rhyme, capitalization of the first letter of the first word in the beginning of a new sentence, nature theme, etc. is the style that was most popular during that time period.

**Keywords:** *William Shakespear; Gricean maxims; linguistic study; Paul Grice.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic studies have taken such rapid strides in recent years that the range is baffling to the innocent and amazingly delightful to the linguistics-oriented. Applied linguistics is concerned with many fields and subjects on planet earth and possibly beyond that [1]. A piece of literature largely depends on thought and style. The concept of style in literature is the product of abstraction in the sense that style is based on a special and unique use of language, it is just one quality contained in any piece of writing [2]. The style of a novel, a play, an essay, or a poem is only one part of its totality. The study of style has been in use in German, French, and English since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [3], M.A.K. Halliday introduced the term 'Linguistic stylistics' [4,5,6]. The main concern of descriptive linguistics is the systematic study of that part of human behavior called language. William Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) suggested that poetry should deal with the experience of those living close to nature, especially in the country. It could be "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society." Long before the poet of nature came on scene, Shakespeare brought the language close to those who dwelt in the country (Essay by Bille, University, Bachelor's, B, August 2007). Keeping in mind all these concepts, we can attempt a stylistic analysis of the poem [7].

## 2. TEXT OF THE POEM: "WINTER"

'When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows the nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail  
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,  
The nightly sings the staring owl  
Tuwhoo!  
Tuwhit, tuwhoo! A merry note!  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot,

When all around the wind doth blow,  
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,  
And birds sit brooding in the snow,  
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl  
Then nightly sings the staring owl  
Tuwhoo!  
Tuwhit! Tuwhoo! A merry note!  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot'.

## 3. SYNOPSIS

This poem is a pastoral poem written in two stanzas to be precise and each stanza is made up of 9 (nine) lines each. It is called a pastoral poem because it is a poem about the harsh reality of winter, 'Winter' being the feature that makes the poem a pastoral poem [8]. Shakespeare who is popularly known for his love sonnets deviated and delved into pastoral poetry describing the harshness of winter and the activities carried out by the people during winter. The poet persona will be depicted with the use of the personal pronoun "he" because of its implementation in line "9" that suggests that a woman is making warm food for him. This is justified due to the societal norm that a woman makes the food for the man. The main theme of this poem is the harsh, tough and extremely cold winter. It is a descriptive poem for conditions that the participants of the poem go through during winter in that time.

- Paraphrasing: Lines 1-9;

"Due to the cold weather, ice hangs by the wall, the shepherd Dick is sitting outside suffering from the cold and he is trying to warm his hand by blowing on it. Another man called Tom is carrying the pieces of wood he worked extremely hard to chop to the store. Even the milk becomes frozen due to the freezing weather. Blood is also frozen and the roads have become unsuitable to ply. And although the night owl's hooting is scary and loud, it is a happy note as dirty Joan is stirring the pot preparing warm food to warm him up".

Lines 10-18;

The wind is blowing heavily all around, and the coughing of people due to the cold overshadows the preacher's preaching. The birds are sadly sitting in the snow not singing. Marian's nose is red and raw and the crabs although roasted are frozen due to the cold, the nightly owl's hooting is heard and dirty Joan is still stirring the pot preparing a warm meal.

### 3.1 Graphological Analysis

This has to do with the way the orthography of a language is represented. This is concerned with a consideration of language in the areas of capitalization, punctuation and spacing in order to explore the intention of the poet [9].

The first visible device in the stylistic analysis of this poem is the capitalization that runs through the 18 lines of this poem. This is a reflection of the versification that was salient to poetry in the earliest forms. The style in vogue then was to begin every new line with a capital letter from "When icicles hang by the wall ... to... While greasy Joan doth keel the pot". This versification runs through the entire poem and the placement of the punctuation mark (,) shows continuation of the previous line and keeps up the tempo of the poem. The use of the punctuation mark (!) shows sound or exclamation, it even shows loudness of the owl. And the use or omission of the punctuation mark (.) shows both end and continuation respectively [10].

### 3.2 Phonological Analysis

This entails the study of the way speech sounds are used by the poet to achieve his/her intentions. In this poem, the repetition of the alveolar lateral approximant (L) at the end of lines 1 through 6 is used to achieve rhyme thus making the rhyme pattern of those lines; (a,a,a,a,a,a) we have l, l, l, l, l, l, u, t,...the rendition becomes musical.

### 3.3 Lexical Collocation

This refers to the arrangements of the words in a poem and how each word contributes or delimits the other. In this poem, the lexical items used collocate and contribute to the meaning of the head word 'winter'. Lexical collocation is usually adopted by a poet to bring about a lot of things but in this poem, it reveals the features of winter and what people go through during winter. The words that collocate in the poem are; (icicles, frozen, wind, and snow).

### 3.4 Semantic Analysis

This has to do with analyzing figures of speech and its intended meaning. The figures of speech inherent in this poem are; imagery and onomatopoeia.

### 3.5 Imagery

'When icicles hang by the wall'  
'And milk comes home frozen in pail'  
'And birds sit brooding in the snow'  
'And Marian's nose looks red and raw'  
'While greasy Joan doth keel the pot'  
Visual image;

'When blood is nipped, and ways be foul'  
'And Dick the shepherd blows his nail'  
Auditory imagery (sense of feeling);  
'When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl'

### 3.6 Onomatopoeia

The formation of a word from a sound associated with what it is named. It is the imitation of a sound [11].

'Tuwhoo!'  
'Tuwhit, tuwhoo!'  
'Hiss'

These figures of speech were infused in the poem to serve a dual purpose. For imagery, to create a picture in the mind of the reader and for onomatopoeia to describe the sound of the owl and how loud it was.

Since a stylistic study is said to be eclectic, other features of the poem will be analysed.

**Participants;** the participants in the poem are; the poet persona, the weather, and the people of the town who are suffering from the harshness of the weather.

**Sentence repetition;** lines 6 through 9 was repeated as lines 15 through 18

'Then nightly sings the staring owl  
Tuwhoo!  
Tuwhit! Tuwhoo! A merry note!  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot'. X2.

The intention of the poet is to show that although the winter is harsh and the weather is not suitable, the owl still sings loudly at night and the poet persona is compensated with Joan preparing him a warm meal to fight the cold. Greasy Joan also implies that Joan has just come back from a hard day's job. This repetition is used by the poet to show that life goes on uninterrupted even by the harsh weather.

### 3.7 Lexical Ambiguity

This has to do with the use of words that are ambiguous in nature. Ambiguous refer to two or more meanings; words that have two or more implied meanings.

'And birds sit brooding in the snow,'

The word 'brooding' in this line is ambiguous. The use of this ambiguous word by the poet is because poets are expected to use elevated form of language or the language of poetry when writing poems so that it may have more than one semantic value to set it apart from the language of prose.

The entire poem can be analysed using the theory of pragmatics to see if it follows the four Gricean maxims. The Gricean maxims were posited by Paul Grice as cooperative principles that help in explaining the links utterances have in a speech community [12]. They are;

- Maxim of quantity: This has to do with the amount of data provided. The poem has 18 lines and it follows this maxim because it has provided a suitable amount of data. It is not too long or too short and it passes its message.
- Maxim of quality: This maxim simply refers to the quality of the text, (The truth condition). The poem is true because these conditions mentioned in the poem are general to everybody during winter; the harsh cold, the uninterrupted life because people are used to it, the sickness (cough) and the need of a warm meal or to keep warm. And the fact that it is an original poem by a renowned poet William Shakespeare. This is a quality poem.
- Maxim of manner: This simply means mode of delivery. The mode of delivery is the written form. The poem has rhyme and when reading out, it has musical properties. The tone of the poem is neither an angry tone, or a sad tone, one cannot even say a happy tone however, the tone of the poem is neutral and the only indication of happiness in the poem is in lines 6 through 10 and lines 15 through 18 when the poet persona talks about the owl crying loudly at night which is an irony, and Joan preparing a warm meal for him. The poet persona adopts a neutral tone to describe winter. The mood of the poem is vague.
- Maxim of relevance: The poem is relevant in that it is a literary work and is useful to language, linguistic and literature students. It is also relevant to those who do not know what winter is like. This poem provides visual imagery by making use of words that create pictures in the

mind of the decoder or reader what winter is like or feels like. Example: (Lines 1-9) and subsequently throughout the poem.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

All these features inherent in this poem were brought together by the poet, used in the writing of the poem, and in the end brought about a perfectly structured poem with its message of winter passed across without difficulty. The style adopted by the poet which is the use of rhyme, capitalization of the first letter of the first word in the beginning of a new sentence, nature theme, etc. is the style that was most popular during that time period.

This analysis justifies the claim that stylistic is a linguistic study in that the features of language description and a linguistic theory has been used to analyse a literary work in order to further explore the poet's style of writing and his intended meaning [13].

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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