

A STYLISTIC READING OF SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR*

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Abstract

Throughout history, man has continued to search for meaning in life, trying to comprehend both his world and himself better. Consequently, the human mind has consistently expressed itself in various forms in order to articulate nature more correctly. This stylistic study of Julius Caesar investigates the text from the framework of the reader-response theory and how, besides the text's 'constraints' and reader's 'inadequacies' of the second language user, a fuller interpretation of the text is achievable through a study of its graph logical, syntactic, phonological, and pragmatic features.

Keywords: Stylistics, Artistic, Phonological, Graphological, Superstition, Metaphorical, Intrigue, Conspiracy.

Introduction

With regard to literature, stylistics has been a major focal point among contemporary intellectuals of literary criticism. Diaches describes criticism as a philosophical enquiry into the nature and value of imaginative literature (289). To Crystal, stylistics is the study of situationally distinctive use of language and of choices made by individuals and social groups in their usage in all linguistic domains, such as the study of the manner and significance of language use in literary text in order that it could be of great benefit (232). On his part, Fish states that the meaning of an utterance is not some final corrected result but the reader's experience (301). In as much as there are bound to be several interpretations since no one reading can be judged 'right reading' it is especially important that we gain some 'universal' appeal for the proper interpretation of the text. On the basis of linguistic evidence before the informed reader, he is directed towards understanding the literary text as artistic whole as he moves from a very involved (subjective) evaluation to a fuller critical (objective) interpretation of the text, within the limits of the text 'constraints' and the reader's 'inadequacies'. They maintain also that it is through language that the human person is defined.

Theoretical Consideration

As it pertains to language, literary stylistics, in agreement with linguists, uphold the primacy of language to men and that, in whatever form, it should be recognized and appreciated as a complex instrument of human thought. They maintain also that it is through language that the human person is defined. A stylistic reading in our sense, is a way in which a work is interpreted or understood... The reader-response stylistics stemmed from the stand of modern 'subjective' criticism otherwise known in the German school of criticism as reception aesthetics. This development in literary criticism is a radical departure from the Romantic conception of the author as being totally responsible for whatever meaning that one, as a reader, may encounter on the pages of a text. Thus, the reader-response stylistics examines the reader's response to a text as a response to a horizon of expectations (Ogunsiji, 2013:21). On his part Jonathan Culler (1981:25) describes it as 'literary competence'. The text reader nexus as a process of stylistic analysis has often been dubbed 'affective stylistics', concentrating on reading as an experiential process

(Esizimotor, 1984). So for a work of literature to fully achieve its meaning such that the work takes on some structure of meaning as a response of the reader to the text, the reader must creatively participate in eliciting from the linguistic parts the artistic whole of the text. Although our modern critical word 'style' is derived from Latin, the Greeks (using other terms) had well-developed theories about it. Their schools of rhetoric's and their treatises on aesthetics laid the groundwork for all subsequent discussions of the subject.

The two major concepts of style go back to Plato and Aristotle (and beyond them). Critics of the Platonic school regard style as a quality inherent in all expressions. Thus, one school speaks of a work as having style or as having no style; the other school speaks of a superior or inferior, strong or weak, good or bad style (Shipley, 1972). From the foregoing, it becomes evident that in stylistics, the major preoccupation is in finding out how words become literature just as Roman Jakobson (1987) pointedly states that the core issue involved in this regard is in finding out, "what makes a verbal message a work of art" (85). In describing the activity of reading a text, Abrams (1980:150) says that: "...a literary work is converted into an activity on the stage of the reader's mind, and what in standard critical analysis had been features of the work itself-including narrator, plot, characters, style and structure are described as an evolving temporal process, consisting primarily of expectations and the violations, deferments and satisfactions of expectations, inflow of a reader's experience... The meanings of a text are the 'production' or 'creation' of the individual reader.

In Nigeria, our contact with Shakespeare is not as native speakers but as second language users and the problem of the 'constraints' of text and the 'inadequacies' of the reader becomes very glaring. Good readings and analysis of a text must really be a critical evaluation of the text. A 'movement' towards greater contextualization in stylistic analysis... could be through a series of concentric circles representing the gradual widening of the contextual orbit (Crystal, 1999:323). For this sort of study, that is very involving and yet attempts to remain economical, the said 'widening contextual orbit' involves the dialogic interaction between the author, the author's context of production of the text, the reader and the reader's context of perception, for the work to achieve fully its meaning potentials as an interpreted whole.

Julius Caesar will now be viewed in the light of greater contextualization as a phenomenological reading process of moving from one item to another, from one idea to another just as it is experienced in a natural reading situation.

Contextualization of the Text

Julius Caesar was first printed in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death. It was written in 1598-9. Dramatists of Shakespeare's time would often base their plays on well-known stories or on actual history and Shakespeare based his *Julius Caesar* on the stories of Caesar, Brutus and Anthony in a collection of lives of famous Greeks and Romans (written by Plutarch in the first century A.D) which he had read in English translation. Reibetanz (1977:4) rightly noted that many of the qualities that set *Julius Caesar* apart from other plays of its day are that the dramatic traditions and conventions available to Shakespeare at the time he wrote *Julius Caesar* were so rich and varied as to institute an extremely resonant and complex vocabulary; one that Shakespeare fully utilized to shape his audience's responses to create the unique world of the play.

The play is about a regicide (the murder of a serving monarch and its regrettable aftermaths). Secondly, there is a supernatural dimension which conspires against Caesar, Rome and the level of human evil. This unique drama is chronicled on various plots. It is the epic story of jealousy, intrigue, death and revenge of Caesar. Cassius, Brutus, with other Roman nobles fear that Caesar wants to be king. They wish Italy to remain a Republic. At a great ceremony, Caesar is three times offered the crown by his friend and supporter, Mark Antony. He refuses it, although unwillingly. Cassius succeeds in convincing Brutus, Caesar's friend. They decide that Caesar must die and they align with the other conspirators. Caesar is mowed down on the Ides of March (15th March) as was foretold by a soothsayer. Mark Antony's speech incites the mob and they rose against the conspirators. Three men, Antony, Octavius Caesar (nephew of Julius Caesar) and Aemilius Lepidus (the triumvirate) become the rulers of Rome and go on a vengeance mission against the conspirators. In the battle at Philippi, Antony and Octavius are victorious while Brutus and Cassius die. So the spirit of Caesar is avenged. The drama, *Julius Caesar* treats such universal issues as good versus evil, the evils of pride, betrayal of trust and the law of Karma (Hulme, 1959).

Graphological Analysis

There is no doubt that the play is well-constructed, but it is only when we look closely that we begin to notice how well. No words are wasted; everything we are told is for a purpose (1959). In the opening scene, we laugh at the cobbler's jokes and we hear about Caesar's triumph. But we are shown also that it is easy to misunderstand the ordinary people of Rome: Marullus cannot at first understand the cobbler; he describes them as 'blocks, stones and worse than senseless things'.

You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things,
Oh you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome... (Act 1 Sc.1.34).

They are treated with no respect at all. It is observed that it is easy to change the mood of the people. It also foreshadows the fact that Caesar is not loved by all and that he will be cut down eventually. In Act One Scene 2, Shakespeare brings all of his major characters on stage. By the end of this scene we have come to know them as individuals with distinct traits, beliefs and ways of speaking. Even characters with little to say in this scene- Antony and Casca for example are distinct persons in a way that the minor characters, Flavius and Marullus are not.

Safier (1985) posits that the playwright's basic method for building several characterizations economically is this: when a character speaks, he or she will often give information about three people. These three people are the character being discussed, the character being addressed and the character speaking.

To illustrate; look at one of Caesar's early speeches:

Forget not, in your speed, Antonius,
To touch Calpurnia, for our elders say
The barren, touched in this holy chase
Shake off their sterile curse.

He is saying, don't forget to touch my wife in case the magic works. This scene also gives us much information that Caesar has no son to take over from him, he shows no affection for his wife and his wishes are obeyed. Moreover, Caesar gives us what may be a clue about his ambitions. According to Safier, one of the differences between a king and a dictator is that a king passes on his title to his offspring. If Caesar wants to be a king, he will also want to have an heir (64). All these, Shakespeare shows in the first few lines. Next we learn of the friendship between Cassius and Brutus (This in the end destroys both of them). From the character presentation, one can easily make out class system and the events revolve around the nobles of the upper class. The seed of hatred and discord was immediately observed right from the start with Marullus and Flavius (Act 1 scene 1), then Brutus' and Cassius' conspiracy; then other conspirators'. The plan for Caesar's murder is fairly quickly made with Brutus insisting that Antony's life be spared. Brutus is given most of the speeches in this scene; his love for Portia is shown so that we may sympathize with him even more. We are also able to compare this marital relationship with that of Caesar and Calpurnia.

Dramatic Structure:

Suspense and Action

Film director, Alfred Hitchcock has said that the difference between surprise and suspense is that surprise makes you wonder how it will happen. You know that Julius Caesar will be dead before the play is over... but how will it happen? As regards the action of the play, clearly, there will be some violence before it is over. Violence is action and also other things that keep the play moving (93). The play is also segmented into Acts and scenes.

Act I Scene i. A street in Rome ii. A public place iii. A street	Act II Sc i. Rome ii. Brutus' Orchard iii. Caesar's House iv. A street near capitol in front of Brutus' house	ACT II Scene i. A street in front of capitol ii. The forum	ACT IV Scene i. A house in Rome ii. camp near Sadis. In front of Brutus' tent iii. Brutus tent.	ACT V Scene i. The Plains of Philippi ii. The field of Battle. iii. 4 Another part of the field.
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Traditionally, the play is segmented into five acts and eighteen scenes of action. Abrams postulates that the Elizabethan dramatists introduced this division after the tradition of Roman playwrights (12) .

Imagery

One of Shakespeare’s greatest talents is his ability to take a simple, familiar image and give it many shades of meaning and feeling. For example, let’s take a look at the way the image of *blood* is used in Act Two, Scene 1:

In line 136, *blood* means ‘the *honour* of a Roman.’

In line 162, *bloody* means ‘senselessly brutal.’

In line 168, *blood* means red ‘fluid in the body.’

In line 171, *bleed* means ‘die’.

It is pertinent to note that one image that blood pulls together is the contradictory concepts of life and death, honor and brutality. All these reflect the moral problem of the assassination. Shakespeare also uses images of sleep, sickness and fire.

Superstition and the Supernatural

There is also the effective use of superstition, omens and unusual happenings in the play that sets the conflict/tragedy in the play in motion. See table for some instances.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caesar’s words to his wife and to Mark Antony on the feast of Lupercalia. • Calpurnia’s dream- of seeing Caesar’s statue which like a foundation with an hundred spouts did run pure blood... • the soothsayer’s warning to Caesar about the Ides of March, • horrid sights seen by the night watchmen... • a lioness that whelped in the streets... • graves that yawned, and yielded up the dead... • fierce fiery warriors that fought upon the clouds in ranks and squadrons ...which drizzled blood upon the capitol... • the noise of battle hurtled in the air horses did neigh and dying men did groan... • ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets... 	<p>Act II Sc. II. 15 16 17 18 19 20 21</p>
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In accounting for the changes; Caesar comments thus,

Caesar When these prodigies
 Do so conjointly meet, let not men
 Say “these are their reasons, they are natural”.
 For I believe they are portentous things
 Into the climate that they point upon.

Shakespeare, the master dramatist, expertly employs the use of extra ordinary and horrible signs to show that something horrible is to happen to the country.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Shakespeare’s language differs in a number of ways from the English we speak today. Variations in the linguistic text is determined by the aesthetic and contextual factors that provide the descriptive framework by which the reader responds to the meaning as explored or perceived from the text (Oyeleye, 2004) .Shakespeare widely employs early modern English poetic diction in the creation of his work. In his choice of lexical items, he draws from a wide range of registers as well as archaic forms, which in his days had

already gone out of currency. These words have different meanings from that which we now have. They are not used in everyday modern English or graphology but are often shortened in Shakespeare's writing to fit into the metrical pattern of lines as in;

Ay — "yes"	e'er — "ever"
ere — "before"	hence — "from this place"
ne'er — "never"	prithee — "please" sooth — "truth"
thither — "to that place"	thou — "you"

Most of the speeches are in what is called 'blank verse', which implies that the rhythm depends upon five stressed syllables in each line, the lines being without rhyme.

/ / / / / /
Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie (v.v78)

This kind of verse is very suitable for a play as the pattern can be changed slightly from line to line to fit in with the natural rhythms of speech. The position of the stressed syllables may vary and the stress may fall highly on an unaccented syllables.

/ / / / /
This was the noblest Roman of them all
/ / / / /
All the conspirators save only he
/ / / / /
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar (v.v.68)

Sometimes at the end of a scene, the lines rhyme in a couplet (two lines together).

*After this let Caesar seat him sure
For we will shake him or worse days endure (i.ii.314),*

But more often, because of the speed of this play, the scenes end in a half-line, carrying us quickly to the next part of the story (e.g. Act iv, scene I, Act iii, scene i, Act v, scene iv). The effect of the blank verse is to make the lines more easily remembered, as for instance,

'Yond Cassius hath a lean and hungry look...'
'Cowards die many times before their deaths...'
'I, that denied the gold, will give my heart...'

In this line from *Julius Caesar*, an unstressed syllable is regularly followed by a stressed syllable. The unstressed syllable is marked {-} and the stressed { / }:

- / - / - / - / -
Why man, he doth beside the narrow world ...

Prose is used by the low class and more comic characters. In the first scene the tribunes, Marullus and Flavius who are serious and responsible officers, speak mainly in verse while the carpenter and the cobbler speak in prose. Casca's bitter description of how Caesar is offered the crown is given in prose but at other times, he speaks in verse. After the death of Caesar, Brutus speaks to the people in prose; when Cinna, the poet, is attacked by the crowd the speeches are in prose.

Imagery: an important part of language of poetry is imagery which brings an idea of some picture (image) or perhaps sounds, a movement, a touch or even a scent, to add to the feeling or agreement that is being spoken of. So for example, Metellus thinks that they should ask Cicero to join in their plot against Caesar:

...His silver hairs
And buy men's voices to commend our deeds (i.144).

We know that hairs cannot actually buy voices, but silver makes us see *the shining 'hairs' of old Cicero* as if they were shining silver coins and we understand very quickly the value to the conspirators of this wise old man. If he joins them, men will think their action wise and worthy of praise.

In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare often uses similes

Cassius says of Caesar -

He a doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus (1.ii.135)

Brutus says of the threats of Cassius;

They pass by me as the idle wind

Which I respect not (iv.iii.68)

Personification is also used extensively in the text; Brutus thinks of young ambition climbing the ladder of lowliness (ii.i.22) *Caesar* speaks of Danger and himself as twin lions (II.ii.47); Antony describes how pity shall be choked when civil war is upon Italy (iii.i.278).

Shakespeare makes his words memorable in other ways than by imagery. For example, a character may surprise us by a very short speech as when Brutus tells Cassius;

No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead (iv.iii.145).

In the first scene, one of the tribunes, Marullus asks the people, why they are glad that Caesar defeated Pompey's sons, that they are 'blocks' and 'stones' but after the death of Caesar, Antony tells them, with equal truth,

You are not wood; you are not stones, but men (iii.ii.140).

The lexical contrast is a consequence of a social mishap. This establishes the irony in the play. Furthermore, the complexity of thought is reflected in the author's use of free morphemes that combine into dithe-matic compounds in such lexical items as, live-long, tongue-tied, putting-by, rag-tag, pre-formed, high-sighted, tell-tale, noblest-minded, climber-upward, true-fixed, honey-heavy, well-erupted, new-fired, grey-beards and so on.

At the point of articulation, the primary stress on the first element and secondary stress on the second element often identify compounds. This is an effective means of foregrounding this semantic component of the word structure. A heavy use of a wide range of punctuations and contractions is stylistically foregrounding in the text as in where, e'er, ne'er, shm'st, 'tween, this graphological feature is an attempt to approximate morphological realization in these items. For us as second language users, some lexical items, perhaps throughout the entire text may appear to be almost inaccessible. The meaning of the word 'thither' would translate as "to that place", the same problem we would encounter with 'prithee' which means 'please'.

The universality of the play is engrained in such themes as betrayal, pride, jealousy and ambition. To drive home the point, Shakespeare makes use of situationally specific vocabulary relating to government, friendship, conspiracy, intrigue and warfare. These are masterfully woven into the text. Esizimotor aptly posits that perhaps Shakespeare's most effective use of lexical items is in his use of the pronouns: thine/yours, thou/you (subject), thee/you (object) which he used to create the dialectal variations in the speech of the characters. Also, to some degree these forms respectively found prominence in distinguishing poetic speech from prosaic speech (204).

Pragmatic Analysis

At this level of analysis, our purpose is to reach deeper and examine the norms and functions of communication in *Julius Caesar* using J.L. Austin's (1962) speech act theory and Grice (1975) maxims of conversation to reach a fuller interpretation of the meaning in the work. In consonance with Bernstein's theory of social class and language use, Shakespeare reflects the class structure of his society and the varied linguistic differences in the mode of expression or the use of the linguistic resources. (see Trudgi ii,

1974:34-56). The discussion between Cassius and Brutus reflects a relationship between people of the same class.

Cassius
Brutus, I Cassius do observe you now of late
I have not from your eyes that gentleness
And show of love as I was wont to have
You bear too stubborn and too strange a hand
Over your friend that loves you.

Brutus
Be not deceived if I have veiled my look
I turn the trouble of my countenance
Merely upon myself. Vexed I am of late
With passion of some difference (*Act I, sc. II 33-40*).

Here Cassius tries to woo Brutus into the group of conspirators. He starts by working on his psyche, with accusations and flattery. This contrasts with the dialogue between Caesar and the soothsayer. Here no respect is shown at all. Rather Artemidorus, the soothsayer is spoken to with disdain.

Set him before me, let me see his face.

Cassius
Fellow, come from the throng, look upon Caesar.
Caesar
What sayst thou to me now? Speak once again?

This is effective as it makes use of reiteration and echo of the same sound hence creating an isochronous rhythm as we read along. Depending so much on the echo effect of sound for emphasis, the author establishes the theme of the play .is hence not only established, one scene takes place in Brutus' orchard another in capitol while the other scenes are in public places like street, camp, tent in the battle field at Philippi. The trend is a clear picture of restiveness in a kingdom just celebrating its victory now torn into pieces by the assassinations of Julius Caesar by envious conspirators. The degeneration culminates finally at the battle field.

A summary of the tragedy would read thus; from the state of peace and tranquility to that of intrigue, conspiracy and assassination to that of confusion of battle and deaths.

As one scene flashes into another with the intermittent entry and exit, we feel the fast pace, the mood, the rising action, the climax and the eventual tragic resolution of the conflict. This breaking of time and continuity in the play coupled with the verbal actions from the dialogue spell out the play distinctly.

Syntactic Analysis

At the syntactic level, the conversations are presented mostly in simple and compound sentences. For instance

Cassius
Who's there?

Casca
A Roman.

Cassius
Casca , by your voice.

Casca
Your ear is good. Cassius, what night is this?

Cassius

A very pleasing night to honest men.

Casca

Who ever knew the heavens menace so?

Cassius

Those that have known the earth so full of faults .
For my part,I have waiked about the streets,
Submitting me unto the perilous nights;
And thus unbraced , as you see,
Have bared my bosom to the thunder stone; ...(Act 1,sc111,43-50).

Phonological Analysis

Shakespeare expertly portrays his mastery of the use of phonological devices in English. The dramatic immediacy of the play is highlighted by the sound effect of the switch from poetry to prose and prose to poetry. Effectively, the playwright weaves in doses of parallel structures, rhetorical questions and the same sound patterns are made to follow from one unit to the other.

Antony

O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.
(Act111, sc1,151

In the same scene Antony instructs a servant to run to Octovius .

Antony

Back with speed! And tell him what had chanced;
Here is a mourning Rome, a dangerous Rome,
No Rome of safety for Octovius yet...(Act 111,sc1,292).

This is effective as it makes use of reiteration and echo of the same sound hence creating an isochronous rhythm as we read along .Depending so much on the echo effect of sound for emphasis, the author establishes the theme of the play.

Nigerians and Shakespeare

Agreeably, Shakespeare never visited Nigeria and of course he would never have embarked on such an adventure. From Bamham's assertions, we know that Shakespeare has been performed with an all Nigerian cast since its earliest days in Nigeria. These days Shakespeare and other African and non-African dramas still feature prominently in the school literary menu (68).

If one should review this play in the context of the Nigerian society, the reaction of the Nigerian reader may not be too different from that of the Briton as to the archaisms that abound in it which have resulted from language change in time. Second, the Nigerian would necessarily make the interpretation of the text from African perspective. Esizimotor, posits that for the informed Nigerian reader, a proper and adequate interpretation of the text must stem from a proper understanding of the linguistic resources of Shakespeare's day and incorporating same into either the African performance of the play on its reading (33). One visibly and audibly notices that in this play, there is intermingling of statecraft, politics, intrigue, conspiracy murder and finally revenge. The issue of betrayal and conspiracy is a common occurrence in contemporary Nigerian politics; with the various coup d'etats that resulted in the death of many leaders and even a civil war.

In many tragedies, the flaw is lack of insight i.e. the inability to see the circumstances as they really are. Frequently, this ill-luck or blind fate brings about the downfall of the protagonist. Generally, the suffering that the protagonist goes through is the price that must be paid and the means by which

enlightenment comes. *Julius Caesar* may be tagged a revenge play as Antony, Octavius and Lepidius embarked on a revenge mission that ensured the conspirators paid very dearly.

In summary, we may conclude that the playwright, Shakespeare has presented his idea with a combination of elevated, complex and simple languages; with discursive elements that create heuristic tasks on the part of the reader to comprehend. Thus, the intermittent use of simple language especially by lesser characters has a thematic motivation as well as relevance, especially for dousing the high tension and characterization.

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