AN ANALYSIS OF ANALOGY AND REITERATION IN SOYINKA'S DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

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Abstract

The study aimed at carrying out a stylistic analysis of Death and the King's Horseman by Wole Soyinka. In carrying out this study, we have examined the use of Analog and Reiteration in the text. Instances of the use of this stylistic devices found in the text have been isolated for interpretation and in the end we found that the author employed these devices to assist our understanding and interpretation of the play. Introduction Stylistics and more especially linguistic stylistics can simply be defined as the linguistic study of style. It can also be described as the art of using linguistic rules and regulation to interpret a literary work. Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. The question at this juncture is why do we study style? Style is studied because we want to explain something. When a linguist or a stylistician studies the style employed in a literary work, he has the burden of explaining the relation between language and artistic function of such work. It is only when this is done that the linguist can be adjudged to have effectively discharged this burden. So, in studying the style of a literary artist, the linguist has to relate his concern of linguistic description with the critic's concern of aesthetic appreciation.

Theoretical Framework

This study falls within the domain of descriptive stylistics which analyses linguistic phenomena. The text has been examined and found out that in most parts of the play, the dialogue is poetic i.e. poem-like the stylistics and literary devices found useful for analyses and description are Analog and Reiteration. The Systemic Grammar Model of Subject-Predicator-Complement-Adjunt (SPCA) is employed to analyse the syntactic constituents of instances structural Analog isolated in the text.

Analog

Short (1996) describes Analog as a stylistic device where some features are held constant (usually structural features) while others (usually lexical items e.g. words, idioms) are varied. More often than not, Analog is identified in terms of the parts that are varied in the analog structures. This is what Short (1996) refers to as the 'Analog rule'. When readers encounter analog structures, they are inclined to draw out meaning connections between the analog structures especially when the analog patterns are antithetical to each other. Of course there can be Analog even when the analog parts or structures are similar in meaning. Analog manifests itself in form of verbal Analog, syntactic, phonological Analog, as well as free verbal Reiteration.

Verbal Analog

Verbal Analog occurs when we have exact verbal Reiteration in the same syntactic position. The position may be the beginning, the middle or the end of a clause, or sentence.

Syntactic Analog

Syntactic/structural Analog is that in which the constituents of each of the analog patterns are different but the structures are the same.

Free verbal Reiteration

This is a form of Analog which occurs when lexical items or syntactic structures e.g. phrases or clauses are repeated either immediately or intermittently in a corpus or text.

Phonological Analog

Phonological Analog manifests itself by the occurrence of the same sound in similar positions in different words.

Reiteration

As earlier noted, authors make use of certain devices to aid the readers understanding and interpretation of their works. One of such device found employed in the text under study is Reiteration. Reiteration is a kind of foregrounded feature. Foregrounded feature(s) is/are the part(s) of the text, which the author consciously or unconsciously signals as crucial to our understanding of what he has written. When certain words, statements or utterances are repeated in a text such that they stand out and we can infer some meaning from the repeated items, we can safely conclude that foregrounding has been effected.

The Synopsis of the Play

The story centers on Yoruba race. Among the Yorubas, when the king (Alaafin) dies, tradition demands that a chief called Elesin Oba, that is, the King's Horseman must also die by committing suicide. To the Yorubas, it is only when the Elesin Oba dies in this way that he saves the race from being endangered.

The position of Elesin Oba is an exalted and honourable one and as a right, the Elesin Oba is obliged whatever he requests for. In this story, the Alaafin is already dead and as usual it is expected that Elesin Oba le the King's Horseman performs his duty of committing suicide to accompany the late King in his journey to the world of the dead so as to save the race.

At the beginning of the story, we encounter the praise singer and lyaloja urging Elesin Oba to perform his duty to the race. As the Elesin Oba prepares to do his duty, he spots a young beautiful lady who is already betrothed to the son of lyaloja (the leader of women) and demands to have sexual affair with her before his own passage to the other world. Despite the young lady's betrothal to lyaloja's son, lyaloja obliges Elesin Oba of his request.

After satisfying his lust for the flesh, Elesin's feet becomes leaden and he now lacks the strength to chant the words with which he can invoke his ancestral spirit to take his life. It is at this point that the District Officer, Mr. Pilkings, the representative of the colonial power, emerges and effects the arrest of Elesin Oba so as to stop him from committing suicide

Olunde, the first son of Elesin Oba who, despite acquiring western education, is not alienated from his culture as he commits suicide to protect the honour of his lineage and save his race, a duty his father seems to have abdicated.

The death of Olunde and the tauntings of lyaloja as well as the fall from a position of honour to a dishonourable position become unbearable for Elesin Oba as he too eventually kills himself.

A good examination of the text shows that Analog and Reiteration are employed to aid our interpretation and meaning of the text. We shall isolate some instances of these devices for analysis and interpretation.

Consider the following examples of Analog

PRAISE SINGER:

S P A C

There/is/only/one home to the life of a river mussel;

S P A C

There/is/only/one home to the life of a tortoise,

S P A C

There/is/only/one shell to the soul of a man;

S P A C

There/is/only/one world to the spirit of our race.

If that world leaves its course and smashes on the

S P C

to boulders of the great void/whose world/will give/us shelter

p.11

Examination of the structural pattern of the first four sentences reveals the following structure = SPAC, SPAC, SPAC, SPAC. They are analog syntactic structures. The headwords of the complements of the analog patterns are arranged in ascending order i.e. order of rank or importance. The headword of the first pattern 'a river mussel' occupies the lowest position. 'Tortoise', the headword of the complement of the second analog pattern though is higher than 'river.- mussel' in importance, occupies a lower position compared to 'man' "Race', which is the headword of the complement of the fourth sentence occupies the highest position on the ladder. In other words, 'race' is the most crucial in that order in creation.

By means of the use of this device, the praise singer impresses it on Elesin Oba that the 'race' occupies a most important position and nothing should be done to harm it The Elesin Oba must therefore know that his suicide is inevitable and he must therefore perform his duty to the race to save it. Anything short of committing suicide will be calamitous to a whole race, and this is not desirable.

Analog is employed to reveal the preparedness of Elesin to commit suicide. This can be seen in the following example. WOMEN: Nothing will hold you back?

ELESIN: Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?

I go to keep my friend and my master company

...The world is not a constant honey pot.

S P C

Where I found little/I/made do/with little

S P C

Where there was plenty /I/gorged/myself

p 14

The last two lines here are instances of Analog. The structural pattern for these lines is Beta clause + Alpha clause. The structure of the Alpha clauses is SPC, SPC The meaning that can be inferred from this is that, Elesin does not regret his imminent passage to the other world. He is content with what the world has offered him thus far.

The playwright employed also the use of Reiteration to develop the play. As Elesin Oba tells the women that he has forgiven them, they are relieved of the fear of being held responsible should Elesin fail to perform his duty to the race. The women in their joy rendered the utterance below thrice.

WOMEN: For a while we truly feared our hands had wrenched the world adrift in emptiness.

p. 17

This statement repeated thrice in p. 17 is foregrounded. The women were, for some moment, enveloped in the fear that they have by their act of omission or commission wronged Elesin Oba such that he would refuse to die. They are afraid of being held responsible for inviting any calamity on their race.

The text contains relevant instances of Analog which aid our understanding and interpretation of the play. This is exemplified in the following:

S P A C

PRAISE SINGER: The river/is/never/so high that the eyes of a fish are covered.

S P A C

The night/is/not/so dark that the albino fails to find his way.

S P C

A child returning homewards/craves/no leading by the hand

p. 43

The structural pattern identified here are SPAC, SPAC and SPC Though the contents of each of the patterns are not the same, they express the same meaning. In other words, the relationship set up in this type of pattern is that of similarity. The praise-singer impresses it upon Elesin Oba that as the custodian of this culture, performing this duty must be easy. To the praise singer, nothing whatsoever can therefore hinder his passage to the other world.

Similar to the examples given above is another instance of Analog below:

S P C

IYALOJA: It/is/ the death of war that kills the valiant

S P C

Death of water/ is/ how the swimmer goes

conj.

S P C S

It/is/ the death of market that kills the trader/and/death

P C

of indecision/takes/ the idle away. p. 43

The structural pattern of the analog feature is SPC, SPC, SPC, SPC. Here too, there is no absolute duplication in their contents. They are intended to convey the same meaning which, in this case, is the reiteration of the fact that Elesin Oba has to die. In other words, Elesin Oba has chosen this path to exit the world.

Following the arrest of Elesin by Mr. Pilkings, Elesin is stopped from committing suicide. The consequence of the action of Mr. Pilkings is captured by means of the use of Analog as seen below.

S P A A

Elesin: The night/is/not/at peace ghostly one.

S P A A

The world/is/not/at peace

S P C A

You/have shattered/ the peace of the world/ forever.

S P C A

There/ is/no sleep/ in the world tonight.

The structural pattern is SPAA, SPAA, SPCA, SPCA. The pattern of the first two patterns are analog syntactic structures i.e. SPAA while the last two are also analog syntactic structures. They are SPCA All the patterns have been used to express the same meaning which in this case is the catastrophic consequences of stopping Elesin from committing suicide.

The failure of Elesin to perform his duty compels his son Olunde to kill himself to preserve the honour of his lineage and to save his race. Iyaloja was vexed and disappointed by Elesin's failure to die and so she has to taunt him for betraying the race for failing to perform his own duty towards the race. The stylistic device used to this effect is Analog. This is seen in:

Iyaloja:

...We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left- over. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter returning home in

triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck, you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes. "We said yours was the body of wine whose burden shakes the tapper like a sudden gust on his perch. You said, No, I am content to lick the dregs from each calabash when the drinkers are done. 'We said, the dew on earth's surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice, I shall fight them for the left-over of the world.

p. 68

From the foregoing, we can see that there are pairs of statements labeled (a, b, c) etc whose association is indicative of the use of Analog. The second statement of each pair contrasts with the first i.e. antithetical to the first statement. This stylistic device is used here to indicate the level of abyss into which Elesin has sunk. He has abandoned an honourable position for a dishonourable one. He has fallen from grace to grass. It is no wonder that his son's death, coupled with the taunting of lyaloja, compels him to take his own life.

Conclusion

This study has shown that linguistics stylistic approach to text analysis is an effective means to literary text analysis and interpretation. From the analysis done above, it is clear that Wole Soyinka employs Analog especially and Reiteration to aid our understanding and interpretation of the play. The study has disproved the claim in some quarters that literary text interpretation cannot be done by means of considering its stylistic devices.

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