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## Stylistics analysis of sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

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### Abstract

William Shakespeare wrote a total of 154 sonnets known for their remarkable depth and beauty. Among these great literary pieces, Sonnet 18 is one of the most popular. Almost every lover of literature knows the opening line “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” But there is more to Sonnet 18 than just its beautiful poem as shown by this analysis.

The style is distinctly Shakespearean where images come alive through the power of The Bard’s verses. The language with its repetitions and rhyme add to the depth, texture and range to the words. The imagery conjured becomes vivid and appealing to the senses.

The analysis shows the use of archaic words which gives the sonnet a sense of antiquity and timelessness. The use of these words was done so eloquently and to perfection in form. It’s no wonder that Sonnet 18 has remained popular since the middle ages until today.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, lexico-syntax, morphology

### 1. Introduction

Maya Angelou with conviction said that “Poetry is a starch in your backbone so you can stand, so you can compose your life”. In poetry, thoughts and feelings are expressed through words and the sensuous material is sound. If communicating is to be accurate and clear, then materials should be beautiful and must be uttered with rhythm and form, this defines definition of poetry. Poetic experience is meditative bliss more profound than the emotional discernment and more colorful than the intellectual experience. Poetry, Gupta (2010) [3] asserts does not endeavor to educate morals and facts but to serve aesthetic rupture and ecstasy of tasting God.

William Shakespeare is well known all over the world and of all time as the writer of poetry in the form of sonnets. Each sonnet had 12 lines with 10 syllable every line, with 3 quatrains, and couplet. Every quatrain has abab rhyme scheme and foot and meter of iambic pentameter. He has written 154 sonnets and divided into two groups: Sonnet 1-126 is for a beloved “young man” and Sonnet 127-152 for the “dark lady”. The theme of Shakespeare sonnets are devastation of time, confirmation of eternity and devotion in poetry.

Sonnet 18 is the exploration of immortality of beauty and love through poetry. The eternity of beauty and love is expressed by Shakespeare with various poetic devices that guide readers to engage in a brilliant and never ending aesthetic euphoria.

### 2. Style

Style is the distinctive feature of an individual, the uniqueness, voice and trademark in piece of literary work. The manner ideas, thoughts and feelings are uttered, acted, expressed and demonstrated, “narrowly interpreted as those figures that ornament discourse; broadly, as representing a manifestation of the person speaking or writing. All figures of speech fall within the domain of style.” It is the way a person write about something in simplest details and at the same time express the complexity of their thoughts through use of words-the phonology graphology, syntax, lexicon. These elements put together to establish mood, tone, imagery and meaning in the text and used by the writer to manifest style in describing events, ideas, and objects. Style is the distinguishing factor that placed a poet in a prestigious spot in the field of literature. Leech and Short (1981, 9) [7] define style as ‘it refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on’.

Shakespearean sonnet is style specifically attributed to William Shakespeare, who as Leech and Short (1981, 11) [7], explain, because there exist “traditionally, an intimate connection has been seen between style and an author’s personality. His style of sonnet is “with its three quatrains and final couplet, allow a fairly free association of images to develop lyrically toward a conclusions.” (Strand and Boland, p 57) [12]. The literary works of Shakespeare “The Bard” are considered around the world as the gold standard for poetry and prose and written with mystifying and complex language patterns. Understanding Shakespeare needs a deep and thorough knowledge of the semantics and syntax of English language. No poet was as famous or as prolific as William Shakespeare

**3. Stylistics analysis**

Writers write to express and share ideas and thoughts but more importantly they aim to expound the ways words designate meaning, the manner readers create meanings and the reasons readers respond to meanings. Stylistics analysis is interpretation and elucidation of literary style by giving objective and scientific commentary using quantifiable information and approaches in the systematic way. According to Salma, *et al*, (2014) [11] the analysis employs specialized words, phrases and concepts taken from the science of linguistics.

**4. Features of stylistic analysis**

**4.1 Lexico-syntax features:** This is a combination of lexis, the words and their meanings used in writing for varied purposes and syntax, the construction of sentences, the ways words to arranged to form phrases and sentences to express ideas. Tallerman (1998) [15] explained, lexico-syntactic patterns are specially achieved by inversion, omission, repetition of clauses and sentences, archaic word and figurative language such as metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, etc. When applied in poetry, the arrangement of

the words emphasize the meaning by being authentic and natural.

**4.2 Graphological features:** Involves the study orthography, size and shape of words, layout of texts and punctuations. This features is an important aspect in the understanding the messages of poems like sonnets because it guide readers to pay close attention to visual images as it reinforces the verbal meaning of poems. Simpson (1997) [13] stresses that graphology exert psycholinguistic influence on the process of reading and these visual features are as necessary and significant as the words. When employed in poetry, these non verbal aspects of texts will sustain the force that will give a distinctive meaning by the manner they are visually located.

**4.3 Phonological features:** Collins and Mees (2013) [2] state these features are the manner patterns and functions of speech sounds of a given language. This feature involves the examination of the creative use of the language in poetry and the ways the sounds enriches the understanding and appreciation of poetry. When used in poetry, Wales (2011, p. 318) [18] affirms, it is “expression or realization of language in its spoken form”.

**5. Analysis**

Stylistics is the study of the devices and terms writers use to create powerful and beautiful literary art and pay attention to the unique usage of language and subtle ways the objectives e and effects are presented in a literary piece. (Verdonk, 2002) [17]. Shakespeare used various technique in creating art to convey endless love and beauty. Sonnet 18 is an literary art that describes the beauty and love of a beloved and expresses the passage or the demise of human life in time. Shakespeare speaks of immortality as possible through a timeless work of art like sonnets.

**Table 1:** Composition of Sonnets 18

Line #	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	Rhyme Scheme
	unstressed	stressed											
1	Shall	I	com	pare	thee	To	a	sum	mer’s	day?	ay	a	a
2	Thou	art	more	love	ly	and	more	tem	per	ate:	ate	b	b
3	Rough	winds	do	shake	the	dar	ling	buds	of	May,	ay	a	a
4	And	sum	mer’s	lease	hath	all	too	short	a	date;	ate	b	b
5	Some	times	too	hot	the	eye	of	heav	en	shines,	ines	c	c
6	And	of	ten	is	his	gold	com	plex	ion	dimm’d	imm’d	d	d
7	And	eve	ry	fair	from	fair	some	time	dec	lines,	ines	c	c
8	By	chance	or	na	ture’s	chan	ging	course	un	trimm’d	imm’d	d	d
9	But	thy	e	ter	nal	sum	mer’s	shall	not	fade,	ade	e	e
10	Nor	lose	po	sse	ssion	of	that	fair	thou	o’wst;	ow’s	f	f
11	Nor	shall	death	brag	thou	wan	der’s	in	his	shade	ade	e	e
12	When	in	e	ter	nal	lines	to	time	thou	grow’s	ow’s	f	f
13	So	long	as	men	can	breath	or	eyes	can	see,	ee	g	g
14	So	long	lives	this,	and	this	gives	life	to	thee.	ee	g	g

Table 1 graphically shows the meter, foot and rhyme of Sonnet 18, it is composed of three four-line stanza and a final couplet. The poetic meter and foot is iambic pentameter. Each line is composed of ten (10) syllables in five (5) pairs of unstressed and stressed foot. Meter and rhyme are significant 2 characteristic features of sonnets (Jaconson, 1996), both represent patterns of repetition and similarity as means that creates melody to sonnets. Meter is the alternating stressed and unstressed syllabic pattern of the

lines of sonnets that serve as linguistic sound. Port (2003) [9] rise and fall pattern of a meter of lines establish the rhythmical and/or melodious sound. The rhyme renders a pleasing effects and delightful experience that can potentially encourage recall for ease in memorization and guide in comprehension of words (Lea *et al.*, 2008) [6]. Meter and rhyme are significant 2 characteristic features of sonnets (Jaconson, 1996), both represent patterns of repetition and similarity as means that creates melody to

sonnets. Meter is the alternating stressed and unstressed syllabic pattern of the lines of sonnets that serve as linguistic sound. Port (2003)<sup>[9]</sup> rise and fall pattern of a meter of lines establish the rhythmical and/or melodious sound. Notably, 90 out of 114 or 79 % of words in Sonnet 18 are one (1) syllable words. Impressively, the couplet, all words are one (1) syllable too. Cullen (2009) stated that short words are appealing and enlightening because they are easy to absorb. “Short words are bright like sparks that glow in the night, prompt like the dawn that greets the day, sharp like the blade of a knife, hot like salt tears that scald the

cheek, quick like moths that flit from flame to flame, and terse like the dart and sting of a bee.” (Lederer, 30) Sonnet 18 is composed of three four-line stanza and a final couplet. The poetic meter and foot is iambic pentameter. Each line is composed of ten (10) syllables in five (5) pairs of unstressed and stressed foot and the rhyme scheme that is used in Shakespeare’s sonnets is abab cdcd efef gg. This form is also known as Shakespearean sonnet. Below is the table that visually shows the meter, foot and rhyme. Notably, 90 out of 114 or 79 % of words in Sonnet 18 are one (1) syllable words and the couplet, all words are one (1) syllable too.

**Table 2:** Parts of Speech Used

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Pronoun</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Adverb</b>	<b>Conjunction</b>	<b>Preposition</b>
summer’s	i	shall	a	more	and	to
day	thee	compare	lovely	more	and	of
winds	thou	art	temperate	too	and	and
buds	his	do	rough	sometimes	or	of
may	thy	shake	the	too	but	from
summer’s	thou	lease	darling	often	nor	by
date	his	hath	all	every	of	
eye heaven	thou	shines	short	sometime	nor	
complexion	this	is	a	not	in	
chance	this	dimm’d	hot		when	
nature’s	thee	declines	the		in	
course		untrimm’d	gold		to	
summer		shall	fair		so	
possession		fade	fair		so	
fair		lose	changing		as	
death		ow’st	eternal		or	
shade		shall	that		and	
lines		brag	eternal		to	
time		wander’st	long			
men		grow’st	long			
eye		can				
life		breath				
this		can				
		see				
		lives				
		gives				

Table 2 shows parts of words used by Shakespeare in Sonnet 18. Effective choice of words can result to vivid, deep and memorable expression of ideas and efficient way to convey information. The most used words are verbs the part of speech the indicate motion, action and state of being. Well chosen action verbs instill in the reader mind and heart mental and visible action that greatly enhance the message the sonnet is trying to convey. Some verbs indicate state of

being and express existence. Shakespeare used adjectives in order to be specific, create an impact, and develop an image in the reader’s mind. Pronouns, conjunctions and prepositions are used according to their grammatical functions. Grammar is crucial in any writing or communication because it enhance accuracy and an indication of carefulness and effort of writers.

**Table 3:** Periods of Words

<b>Archaic</b>	<b>Modern</b>
thee	you
thou	you
art	are
hath	has
thou	you
ow’st	owe
wander’st	wander
grow’st	grow
thee	you

Table 3 presents the archaic words in the sonnet, these are frequently used during the middle ages and Shakespeare’s literary work are full of them. The use of archaic words maintains rhyme and meter, add formality and give a sense of antiquity to the sonnet. Archaic words function as

worldly perceptions of events as they are related ancient expression that denotes remoteness and indicative of time-honored tradition. They evoke the tone of historical authenticity and realistic background of the past.

**Table 4:** Kinds of Sentences

First line/Interrogative	Last line/Declarative
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	So long lives this, and this gives live to thee.

Table 4 show the first and last line of the sonnet, interrogative and declarative respectively. The first line is

**Table 5:** Sentence Order

Inversion	Proper order
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd	The eye of heaven sometime shines too hot And his gold complexion is often dimmed

Table 5 presents sentence order. Two lines have inversions specifically, hyperbaton, the separation of groups of words that should belong together. The style of departing from the natural order of words to express ideas is acceptable when meanings do not solely depend on syntax or orderly arrangement of words. The deliberate the improper order words in a sentence or in a line by putting key words at the beginning or at the end can result to effective emphasis of messages (Sygue, 2010) [14].

**Table 5:** Sentence Order

Inflection		Derivation	
inflected	original	derived	original
summer's	summer	lovely	love
nature's	nature	temperate	temper
winds	wind	changing	change
shines	shine	possession	possess
declines	decline		
lines	line		
dimm'd	dim		
untrimm'd	trim		

Table 6 presents morphological process. Shakespeare's morphological inventiveness allowed him to use and play with words to express consummate and distinct thoughts and feeling in his poetry.

Inflection or derivations, these are the words in Sonnet 18 that have affixes. An affix is a part of word that can be

rhetorical question, may not have answers or the answers are obvious but asked to make point. And importantly, a rhetorical question a compelling force in poetry is employed as an impressive persuasive device. The last time is declarative sentence, so called because it declares a statement the gives the reader information about thoughts and feelings.

connected to a base or root word to form a new word, it may or may not change that meaning of the original word. Inflection and derivations are two (2) categories of affixes. Inflection is modifying mechanism of a word to add or indicate different grammatical information. This category does not alter the part of speech of the word or change meaning of the base word only to mark distinction such as tense, voice, gender, number person, case and mood. The words summer and nature are inflected from nouns to specifically possessive noun as indicated by apostrophe (') s, wind, shine, decline, line from singular to plural they still retail their type of part of speech and meaning but inflected to become plural, dim and trim from present tense to past tense still a verb and the same meaning in the present tense and for the latest indicating antonym.

Derivation is adding affixes that change the type of speech and hence the meaning of the base word. Derivation is more complex since an affix can change the category of a word, the mea The word lovely is an adjective and derived from the word love, a noun, from naming a thing to describing a thing, Temperate an adjective is derived from noun temper. Changing is a participle from the word change and *ing* is attached. A participle is defined by Webster's as "a word having the characteristics of both verb and adjective; especially an English verbal form that has the function of an adjective and at the same time shows such verbal features as tense and voice and capacity to take an object." The possession is noun derived from possess, a verb.

**Table 7:** Punctuations Used

Punctuation Mark	Punctuation Name	Number of times	Line Number
?	question mark	1	1
,	comma	6	3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13
:	colon	2	2, 12
;	semi-colon	4	4, 6, 8, 10
.	period	1	14
,	caesura	1	14
'	apostrophe	8	1, 4, 6, 8, 8, 10, 11, 12

Table 7 shows the punctuations used in Sonnet 18. Every single line ends with a punctuation indicating each line is a complete thought. The first punctuation is a question mark indicating asking for question and the last is period indicating a statement. Comma is used as end punctuation in 6 lines in order to create drama, emphasize feelings and add meaning by allowing readers to pause to think about the message or ideas perpetuated by the poet. (Quackenbush & Quackenbush, 2019) [10]. Colon is used to end two (2) lines to draw attention to a series of ideas and to introduce additional information that are suggested in the preceding line.

Most of used punctuation is apostrophe. 8 times, five of which is used as contraction and 5 as possession. Contractions are shortened form of words which one or more letters have been omitted, mostly verbs. Apostrophe are placed exactly on the position of the omitted letters such as *dimm'd*, *untrimm'd*, *ow'st*, *wander'st*, *grow'st* to consistently maintain the established foot and meter, trochaic pentamerer. (Quackenbush and Quackenbush 2019) [10]. Apostrophe was used in each of the following words in the sonnet *summer's*, *summer's*, *nature's* to suggest possession in order to assign human characteristics to inanimate objects.

**Table 8:** Rhyme Scheme

day	ay	a
temperate	ate	b
may	ay	a
date	ate	b
lines	ines	c
dimmed	imm'd	d
lines	ines	c
untrimmed's	imm'd	d
shade	ade	e
ow'st	ow'st	g
fade	ade	e
grow'st	ow'st	g
see	ee	g
thee	ee	g

Table 8 show that rhyme scheme that is used in Shakespeare's sonnets is abab cdcd efef gg. This form is also known as Shakespearean sonnet. Fabb (1997) defines rhyme as 2 words that have the same sound from the last vowel to the end of a word. The purpose of rhyme is to create symmetry, a recurrence linguistic pattern to point out the perception of harmony and beauty to readers. The rhyme renders a pleasing effects and delightful experience that can potentially encourage recall for ease in memorization and guide in comprehension of words (Lea *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[6]</sup>.

**Table 9:** Repetition

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd; And every fair from fair sometime declines.
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; Not shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Table 9 shows 3 pairs of lines that utilizes repetition, a literary device that re-uses a word or phrases to create special effect by emphasizing significant point. Repetition suggests importance by directing attention key words or key phrases. In the sonnet, is done using anaphora, the use of the same word at the beginning of the successive lines purposely for intensity utterances and for aesthetic value. Further, Jeffries (2010) <sup>[5]</sup> stated that repetition is a way to achieve cohesion in expressing ideas in writing.

## 6. Conclusions

Without a doubt, Sonnet 18 has become one of the favorite poems by Shakespeare because compared to his other sonnets, the message is easy to understand and analyze. Reading this well-crafted poetry out loud would make one recognize its elegance as proven by these lines "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." Sonnet 18 truly has one of the dramatic powerful languages in poetry.

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