

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

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### A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF KWESI BREW'S 'THE DRY SEASON'

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#### **Abstract**

*Stylistics as the name suggests is a scientific study of style in written texts, especially such texts which are marked in particular as literature, that is, literary art. Style in such texts include all the properties that go to make the text distinct, that is, the properties whereby the text breaches the canons of syntax and grammar and sense-making already established in the language. It is common in literature to encounter language behaving in quite unfamiliar or 'aberrant' ways, as stylistics calls it sometimes. It is these liberties taken with language that stylistics generally tracks by a strategy of reading which follows every slightest turn of phrase very closely and attentively in order to try and understand the whys and wherefores of such curiosities. In this article we have applied such a reading to Kwesi Brew's poem, 'Dry Season', in an attempt to show how a particular aspect of stylistics called linguistic stylistics actually works.*

**Keywords:** Stylistics, Aberration, Linguistic, Graphology, Phonology, Semantics

#### **Introduction**

The kind of study we are here concerned with is commonly pursued at three often interweaving levels namely, graphology, phonology, and the level of semantics. The level of graphology takes into account any lingual 'aberrations' relating to syntax, punctuation, and the general structure of the object of study, in the present context a poem by the title of 'The Dry Season;' at the level of phonology the study looks at sound patterns generally and such other devices as alliteration, parallelism, rhyme and rhythm, that all together may go to render a poem either 'speedy' or 'jerky,' 'soft' or 'loud;' at the level of semantics, the question of sense-making in the poem is raised, especially as regards unconventional liberties taken with language whereby the known patterns of sense-making are breached, and new patterns emerge, sometimes, even in spite of the very language that makes to constitute this sense. Of course, the underlying understanding in this study is that language is a code, a set of rules for generating 'well-formed' sentences, in the axiom of the generative transformational grammarians, so that a breach of this definite code results in 'ill-formed' sentences. A follow-up to this is, perhaps inevitably, that language being rather so indefinite in literature, the literary artist shows himself forth as notorious in the regard of defying the definite codes in pursuit of what has been called 'stylistic effect' by his particular 'style.' This becomes even more so in poetry, since as 'a form, poetry is compact and concise, and choosing the right words to convey ideas is a challenge' (Kirsznner & Mandell, 819). It is these 'stylistic effects' and 'styles' which often amount to 'aberrations,' at least from the point of view of the definite language code, that stylistics sets out to trace and possibly account for, with an arm of it called literary and the other linguistic stylistics.

#### **Selection Restriction**

Linguistic stylistics is really what we are here concerned with, and will be applying at the

three levels already mentioned, though not necessarily in the order of enumeration. 'The year is withering' is how the poem of our specific attention begins, and it is apparently a conventional sentence at the level of syntax, but the predicative 'is withering' problematizes it at the level of semantics. This has happened because of the violation of what is called selectional restriction rule which consists in the choosiness of words as to what words to go with, or say nouns, what particular verbal forms to co-occur with. For the verbal form 'is withering' implicates the subject 'The year' as being, in the least, tangible, non-abstract, which is, of course, the only condition of possibility of it being withered, of it 'withering.' But much more than that, 'is withering' also implicates 'The year' as possessing life, succulent, fluid-filled life, so that in 'withering' this fluid-life is sapped from the 'year' and it becomes shriveled up. This sense is not lacking through the remainder of the first stanza:

...the wind  
Blows down the leaves;  
Men stand under eaves  
And overhear the secrets  
Of the cold dry wind,  
Of the half-bare trees.

For there is a sense in which the features /+animate/, /+tangible/, /+fluidy/ which have been communicated to the intangible, immaterial year in the first line of the poem reappears in these follow-up lines, whereby the year is seen to share these vouchsafed properties with the 'leaves,' whose very nature make them possessors of the selfsame properties.

### **Transference of Properties**

But 'the leaves' are being blown down and the 'trees' are rendered 'half-bare,' and these arguably ensuing from the 'withering' in line 1. In fact, it is arguable that what is happening is transference of properties from the leaves, the trees, to the year, or is it from the 'withering' year to the leaves, the trees, so that they are losing, now, their vitality. And we recall too that 'the wind' blowing down the leaves and trees is 'the cold dry wind' (line 5), still sustaining the sense of the shriveling up of the year, of the leaves and the trees. The paradigmatic association found existing between 'cold' and 'dry' by virtue of their sharing the same grammatical slot in 'cold dry wind' somewhat intensifies this 'withering' process, so that the objects seen to be losing their fluid-life are seen in the manner of, first, shedding their sap by the freezing activity of the coldness of the wind, which then sets the stage for the shriveling activity of the dryness.

But if this 'wind' is capable of the said freezing shriveling activity, is it not because we are looking at a movement not unlike the one witnessed in 'The year is withering,' where animate properties have been transferred to an otherwise lifeless object? Is it not precisely because this 'wind' is possessive of an unsuspected secret vitality, dark and sinister—for is it not its 'cold dry' nature that has initiated all the deadness, all this dryness that pervade 'The Dry Season'? Are we not looking precisely at a similar transference of properties from an animate object, 'Men,' to the inanimate 'wind,' so that henceforth it is the 'Men' who are rendered inert,

passive, and non-vital, while the 'wind' now speaks 'secrets' having been animated by the new acquired vitality, including the particularly speech-capacities of 'Men,' 'secrets' to which they now do the listening, they 'overhear'? What we find, therefore, is that the wind has been communicated such features as /+animate/, /+human/, for the second feature is the only condition of the possibility of its verbalizing: 'secrets' to which the

Men stand under eaves

And overhear.

Yet these properties are also shared by the 'half-bare trees,' for in the economy of the poem, these 'secrets' are too 'Of the half-bare trees' (line 6).

By the second stanza of the poem 'dryness' itself has gained the tangible materiality we have been seeing in some of the non-tangible objects of stanza 1. For 'The grasses are tall and tinted' (line 7) with 'Straw-gold hues of dryness' (line 8), and the alliterative /t/ sound in 'tall and tinted' punctuates the sense of the colouring process of the grasses, as by the tick-tick movement of a brush on an artist's canvass. But the paint for this 'tint[ing]' of the grasses in 'Straw-gold hues' is 'dryness,' whereby the features /+liquid/, /+miscible/, ordinarily associated with colour-paint, is passed on to it. The stylistic relevance of this transference is, of course, obvious, for it is only under this condition that 'dryness' can be, that is, is applied, as 'Straw-gold hues' and the 'grasses... tinted' thereby. The sense of 'dryness' having gained liquid materiality appears to have lingered further down the second stanza: 'And the contradicting a wryness,/ Of the dusty roads a-scatter/ With pools of colourful leaves'(lines 9-11). After the 'tinting' of the grasses in line 7 in the variegated 'hues' of dryness, the variegatedness of the colour-mixing and tinting has, apparently, resulted in 'the contradicting a wryness' of the dust-ridden roads which become the ultimate repository of the 'colourful leaves.' And these leaves are deposited as 'pools,' revamping the sense of the feature /+liquid/ it already has acquired.

### **Animated Atmosphere**

But 'the contradicting a wryness,/ Of the dusty roads a-scatter' not only 'With pools of colourful leaves;' they 'a-scatter' also 'With ghosts of the dreaming year'(line 12). This line, almost forcibly, takes us back to the first stanza, for there is where we encounter year for the first time, and in an uncommon relation to 'withering;' and if here now we encounter it as 'dreaming,' it can only be an extension of the already initiated pattern by which 'year' is perceived as possessing the feature /+animate/, and additionally now /+human/, a feature of course already perceptible in stanza 1, if we make enough room for the transference of properties among the leaves, trees, the year, and Men alike. And in the first stanza too is where we glimpse the activity that accounts, can account, for the scattering of, and the consequent littering with 'leaves' of the 'dusty roads,' that accounts too for the roads being a-scatter 'with ghosts of the dreaming year,' since it is in the first stanza that we find 'the wind/ Blow[ing] down leaves' (lines 1-2). What remains to be accounted for is the logic of the 'ghosts of the dreaming year' being scattered in the manner of the 'colourful leaves.' Which again takes us to our argument that there is a lingering communication of features and properties between the items 'leaves,' 'trees' and so on in the first stanza. For if here we are

looking at 'The year... withering,' is it not precisely because it has come to partake of the nature of the leaves, because 'The year is withering' like the leaves, or more radically, that 'The year is withering' a leaf?

The 'ghosts of the dreaming year' may also have been implicated in the 'secrets' which the 'Men stand under eaves' to overhear in stanza 1. For if these secrets are 'Of the cold dry wind' and the same 'wind' we have demonstrated is the force behind the roads being 'a-scatter/ With pools of colourful leaves/ With ghosts of the dreaming year,' does it not appear then how the *otherness* of these 'ghosts' is implicated and related to the 'secrets'?

The irruptive impulsiveness of the hyperactivity that dominates the third and final stanza of the poem is not totally unconnected to this *otherness* raised regarding the 'ghosts of the dreaming year,' 'the secrets/ Of the cold dry wind,' for once this hyperactivity is initiated, there is no stopping it, no interfering with it resultants:

And soon, soon the fires,  
The fires will begin to burn,  
The hawk will flutter and turn  
On its wings and swoop for the mouse,  
The dogs will run for the hare,  
The hare for its little life.

We are looking at something not unlike the setting of a lone dying capsule of ember amid a bunch of highly combustible matter. The ember is vitalized and the blazing result can only be stopped by the flames wholly consuming every last tiny piece of the combustible matter. And in the figures of the 'leaves' which have known the 'withering' activity of the shriveling dying year, known the dark, sinister operation of 'the cold dry wind,' known the 'tinting' shading of the 'Straw-gold hues of dryness,' and ultimately are scattered pool-like upon the 'a wryness/ Of the dusty roads,' there is not lacking such volatile combustible matter that may readily be chanced upon by the subtle ghost-like 'secrets' of 'the wind,' so that this wind, that all along is seen to be only in the activity of destruction, of drying up and sapping of fluid-life, is not unlikely to initiate, not altogether incapable of initiating, in this final movement, 'the fires,... to burn' up and consummate the annihilation process, even as the lone dying ember of our analogy. The sense of the irreversibility of this process, once set in motion, is heightened by the patterns of repetition found in this last stanza, as in:

...the fires,  
The fires will begin to burn,...  
The dogs will run for the hare,  
The hare for its little life.

This is at the level of graphology, a level already seen to be operational even from the poem's very first stanza. In fact, the whole structure of the poem is such that the 'withering' process inaugurated in the foremost line is really only consummated in the last, evidenced by the consistent patterns of repetition throughout the poem. In stanza 1 'Men stand under eaves'

overhearing the secrets 'Of the cold dry wind,/ Of the half-bare trees;' in stanza 2 the a wryness of the dusty roads 'a-scatter/ With pools of the colourful leaves,/ With ghosts of the dreaming year;' and in stanza 3, the repetitions have gained in amplitude by the introduction of more frequent parallelism, and at the level of phonology, alliterations as /s/ in 'And soon, soon,' /f/ in 'the fires,/ The fires,' /b/ in 'begin to burn,' /t/ in 'flutter and turn,' /w/ in 'wings and swoop,' and so on. Of course at the level of phonology still, the rhymes in 'leaves' and 'eaves'(stanza 1), 'dryness' and 'a wryness'(2), 'burn' and 'turn'(3) are taken in .

### **Conclusion**

These, together with all the other elements considered, work, as in a synergy, to endow the poem with its steady sustained rhythm from the inaugural 'withering' process in the poem to the mad restive ramifications of 'The Dry Season,' for as Akwanya has written, in a literary work what goes before and what comes later must be grasped together at an 'integrational level' (*Verbal Structures*).

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