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A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE BEATLES' 'LET IT BE'

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Abstract
This study is a stylistic analysis of the Beatles' song lyrics 'Let It Be'. The aim is to explore the various stylistic devices used in the lyrics at different linguistic levels, and to see how all these stylistic features interact to make the lyrics mean what they mean. The study covers different aspects of style such as rhyme patterns at the level of sounding, and tense selection and transitivity structure at the level of wording and grammar. The analysis shows that the lyrics make use of a variety of stylistic techniques to communicate the main theme of the songs which is centered around the notion of hope; that of leaving worries behind and moving on in life, hence the name 'Let It Be'.
Key words: stylistics; song lyrics; music; The Beatles; Let It Be.

INTRODUCTION

'The general meaning of style is 'manner or mode' but the literary meaning of style refers how a writer's thoughts take the shape of words'(Batool, 2008).Style has had various meanings throughout the history in and outside the literary text. Stylistics is the branch of linguistics which has to do with the study of style in literary texts; that is,'a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language'(Simpson, 2004: 2).Putting it in Leech and Short's words, stylistics is 'the study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions' (2007: 13).Widdowson defines stylistics as 'the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation' (1975: 3).

'The reason why language is so important to stylisticians is because the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text' (Simpson, 2004: 2).

There is usually a confusion about the realm of stylistics and according to Simpson 'confusion about the compass of stylistics is a result of confusion about the compass of language' (Simpson, 2004: 3).

Generally speaking, literature is considered the preferred object of study in stylistics. However, this traditional connection between stylistics and literature does not mean that creativity and innovation in language use is exclusive to literary writing. As Simpson states, 'many forms of discourse (advertising, journalism, popular music – even casual conversation) often display a high degree of stylistic dexterity, such that it would be wrong to view dexterity in language use as exclusive to canonical literature' (2004: 3). Accordingly, it can be said that,

song lyrics, along with other more conventional forms of literature such as short stories, poetry, and novels, can make good objects of study in stylistic analyses, since they usually employ many of the same stylistic devices used elsewhere in other forms of literature.

Stylistics has developed in several ways, and what has come to be known as modern stylistics today, is largely built on two interrelated movements in linguistics, that of Russian Formalism and Prague School Structuralism (Simpson, 2004: 50), with the work of key figures such as Mukarovsky and Jakobson making powerful contributions to literary theory (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 127).

The present study is a stylistic analysis of the lyrics of Beatles's hit 'Let It Be'. The aim is to explore the different stylistic devices used in the lyrics at different linguistic levels, in order to see how all these stylistic features interact to make the lyrics come to mean what they mean.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is mainly based on the Hallidayan Systemic-Functional Linguistics theory in which the language function is considered to be the main role of language. David Crystal defines function as 'the relationship between a linguistic form and other parts of the linguistic pattern or system in which it is used' (Crystal, 2002: 191), and 'the terms functional analysis and functional linguistics have been used to characterize theories which treat the notion of function as central' (ibid.). So,in spite of its emphasis on the function of language, the functional linguistics accounts for the syntactic structure of language.

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'Stratification' or the layered structure of language is an important notion in functional linguistics which is built on the general idea that 'a language is a complex semiotic system, having various levels, or strata' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 24). According to Halliday, 'language is organized into four strata – semantics, lexicogrammar, phonology, and phonetics', and 'these four strata are grouped into two stratal planes, the content plane and the expression plane.' (ibid.: 26).

As mentioned, the notion of function is central in Functional Linguistics, and in this theory of language the elements of language at different linguistic levels are studied in terms of the functions they serve in each of the levels. The lyrics in this study are analyzed according to the stratification notion of functional approach.

THE BEATLES IN A NUTSHELL

The Beatles were a British rock band formed in Liverpool in 1960. The band consisted of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. The group grew out of a shared interest in American rock and roll. The members of the Beatles are always referred to as John, Paul, George and Ringo. This reflects the order in which they joined the group, as well as what many consider the order of importance or influence in the band. The line-up wasn't complete until 1962 when Ringo joined the group.

The success of the Beatles was powered by two lead songwriters, Paul McCartney and John Lennon (Siversten et al., 2008). Lennon and McCartney's family background shaped their later song writing. McCartney often wrote about everyday situation and his style was often considered as optimistic, wistful and harmonious. Lennon's style was considered more melancholic and less optimist. His song had a more global perspective.

Beatles had a dramatic social and cultural impact all around the world. Their arrival in America made an impact on the nation's culture which endured through generation.

THE LYRICS

The lyrics of the song titled 'Let It Be' will be analysed in this study. This song belongs to the twelfth and the final studio album by the Beatles released on 8th May 1970, almost a month after the group's break-up. The name of this album was also called 'Let It Be'. 'Let It Be' was a number one album in many countries, including both the US and the UK. The album was conceived as a get back, a return to the Beatles' earlier, less complicated approach to music. It was recorded and projected for release before their album Abbey Road (1969). For this reason, some critics and fans considered 'Let It Be' as the group's penultimate album.

For the ease of analysis and to facilitate subsequent references to the verses, the full lyrics are given here, labeled by small letters.

(1) **'Let It Be'**
[Verse 1]
(a) When I find myself in times of trouble
(b) Mother Mary comes to me
(c) Speaking words of wisdom
(d) Let it be
(e) And in my hour of darkness
(f) She is standing right in front of me
(g) Speaking words of wisdom
(h) Let it be
[Chorus]
(a) Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be
(b) Whisper words of wisdom, let it be
[Verse 2]
(a) When all the broken-hearted people
(b) Living in the world agree
(c) There will be an answer
(d) Let it be
(e) For though they may be parted
(f) There is still a chance that they will see
(g) There will be an answer
(h) Let it be
[Chorus]
(a) Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be
(b) There will be an answer,, let it be
[Verse 3]
(a) And when the night is cloudy
(b) There is still a light that shines on me
(c) Shine until tomorrow
(d) Let it be
(e) I wake up to the sound of music
(f) Mother Mary comes to me
(g) There will be no sorrow
(h) Let it be
[Chorus]

(The Beatles, 1970: Apple Records, UK)

The general theme of the song is around the idea of keeping hope alive. But does it speak of the Virgin Mary? Although McCartney typically answers the question by assuring his fans that they can interpret the song however they would like, he admitted he knew Christians would think of the Mother Mary.

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However, he is always careful to say that the literal genesis of the song was a particular event. During the final days of the Beatles, their business was not in a good state because of a bitter managerial dispute, and the four guys who had been close friends for years were coming unglued. One night, Paul's deceased mother Mary,appeared to him in a dream and comforted him, telling him to let go and everything will be alright.

During the 1960s, John Lennon had told a reporter that the Beatles were probably more popular than Jesus was. This comment sparked record burnings and death threats. Lennon should not have said it, but the lesson had been learned by Paul and he was understandably wary of making any reference to religion.

DATA ANALYSIS: STYLISTIC DEVICES

SOUND PATTERNS

Although the lyrics of this song are primarily conceptually driven, we can still find sound patterns in the form of rhyming, alliteration and assonance in different places in the lyrics.

Beginning with the rhyme patterns, the lyrics display full rhyming at the end of lines b, d, f and h. In other words we can notice full (exact) rhyming between every other line of the verses beginning with the second line of each verse. Examples of internal rhyming both within and between lines, can be identified easily too; as exemplified below with the first verse of the song.

(2) Rhyming patterns
[Verse 1]
(a) When I find myself in times of trouble
(b) Mother Mary comes to **me**
(c) Speaking words of wisdom
(d) Let it **be**
(e) And in my hour of darkness
(f) **She** is standing right in front of **me**
(g) Speaking words of wisdom
(h) Let it **be**

As can be seen above, the extract shows cases of internal rhyming (*she, me*) at the end of line f, and also exact rhyming (*me, be*) at the end of lines.

Another sound imagery which we can find in this song is alliteration. As Simpson asserts alliteration is "a type of rhyme scheme which is based on similarities between consonants" (2004: 16). We can easily locate examples of alliteration with different consonants in the following lines of the song:

(3) Patterns of alliteration
/n, t/   **Wh**e**n** I fi**nd** myself i**n t**imes of **t**rouble (1a)
/m/   **M**other **M**ary co**m**es to **m**e (1b)
/w, z/ **W**hisper **w**ords of **w**i**s**dom (Chorus b)
/s/ There is **s**till a chan**c**e that they will **s**ee(3b)

Talking about sound imageries we shouldn't hesitate to mention assonance which refers to repeated vowel sounds in words placed near each other. Some examples of this poetic device used in the lyrics of the song under study are given below:

(4) Patterns of assonance

/aɪ/   When **I** f**i**nd m**y**self in t**i**mes of trouble (1a)

/ɪ, aɪ/   There **i**s st**i**ll a l**i**ght that sh**i**nes on me   (3b)

/eɪ/   For though th**ey** m**ay** be parted (2e)

PATTERNS OF TRANSITIVITY AND TENSE SELECTION

Transitivity is aparticular grammatical facility which is used to capture experience in language. According to Simpson transitivity normally picks out three key components of processes which includes the process itself, the participants associated with the process and the circumstances associated with the process. As we can see transitivity structures in a language express representational meaning: 'what the clause is about, which is typically some process, with associated participants and circumstances' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 361). Putting it in Hassan's words, the transitivity structure of a clause is concerned with 'who does what to whom/what, where, when, how, and why'(1989: 36).

Following the transitivity model developed by Halliday, six types of processes are identified: Material, Mental, Behavioral, Verbal, Relational and Existential; although the divisions between them tend to be more provisional than absolute (Simpson, 2004).

In the following table, all the processes (verb groups) in the lyrics are identified, and classified according to the tense and the respective line in which they appear.

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Table 1

Selection of tenses and processes in 'Let It Be'

Verse & Line	Past	Present	Future	Non-finite	Process
1a		find			Mental
1b		comes			Material
1c				speaking	Verbal
1d		let			Mental
1d		be			Existential
1f		is standing			Material
2b				living	Material
2b		agree			Mental
2c			will be		Existential
2d		let			Mental
2d		be			Existential
2e		may be parted			Material
2f		is			Existential
2f			will see		Mental
2g			will be		Existential
2h		let			Mental
2h		be			Existential
3a		is			Relational
3b		is			Existential
3b		shines			Material
3c		shine			Material
3d		let			Mental
3d		be			Existential
3e		wake up			Behavioural
3f		comes			Behavioural
3g			will be		Existential
3h		let			Mental
3h		be			Existential

As can be seen, out of a total of 28 processes in all the three verses of the lyrics,10 are existential processes, that is, processes showing that something exists. In this sense existential processes are very close to relational processes.

Existential processes can lead us to material processes. As Simpson asserts, both existential and material processes

'…can often accommodate a question like 'what happened?', the response to which results in two possible configurations. Thus, both 'X assaulted Y' and 'There was an assault' would offer a choice of responses to this hypothetical question. However, what happens in the existential version is that no role other than Existent is specified, and that role, moreover, is filled by a nominalised element which is created by converting a verbal process into a noun' (2004: 25).

After existential processes with the most instances comes the mental processes with 8 examples.

Considering the tense selection of the clauses displayed in the above table we can see that the present tense is the most frequent used one. Out of 28 verbs, 21of them are in simple present tense form. Something interesting about the above table is the lack of past tense in the lyrics.

The significant presence of simple present tense can be attributed to the functions of this tense. One of the functions of this tense is to indicate the presence of a routine and from this point of view simple present tense can be closely related to the future tense, that is, simple present can be used to predict future. Referring back to the theme of the song and considering the frequent use of simple present tense we can claim that the song writer wants to show that the story happens to him regularly and it can happen to him in future. If we take it for granted that the mother Mary in this song refers to the Virgin Mary, we can consider the theme of the song as a universal one.

POINT OF VIEW
Point of view is an important stylistic dimension in any type of narrative text. Point of view can be defined as the perspective through which a story is told. In the lyrics under discussion, the story is told in

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the first person and from the viewpoint of a participating character-narrator (Paul), rather than a third person omniscient narrator.

Returning back to the theme of the story, we can assert that the participating character-narrator can be any Christian if we believe that the mother Mary in the lyrics refers back to the Virgin Mary not Paul's own mother.

LEXICAL CHOICES IN MEANING

As already mentioned, the main theme of the song is keeping one's hope inside and leaving problems behind, and this general theme is emphasized by the use of special vocabulary and phrases in the lyrics. For example, we encounter phrases such as 'speaking words of wisdom', 'there is still a chance', 'there will be an answer', 'a light that shines on me', and above all the very title phrase 'let it be' which is repeated several times throughout the song. In this case, the choice of vocabulary is ornately in line with the main idea of the lyrics that is meant to be conveyed.

As for the phrase 'a light that shines on me' mentioned above, there is a metaphoric connection here between the concepts of 'hope' and 'light'; the word 'light' here serving as the source domain to convey the more abstract notion of hope.

CONCLUSION

All in all, 'Let It Be' is a song that, inspired by a dream experienced by McCartney, makes a good statement about one's reaction to 'times of trouble' and that of moving on in life in spite of such troubles.

The lyrics make use of a variety of stylistic devices that jointly function to carry the message of the song.

Among the main tropes are the different cases of rhyme patterns and other patterns of sound (such as alliteration and assonance) at the level of phonology, and the selection of tense and transitivity structure at the level of grammar, and the choice of appropriate vocabulary the level of meaning; and all these stylistic features interact to communicate the main theme of the song.

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