



## A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL *SHAME*

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### Abstract

*Salman Rushdie's Shamewas published in 1983. Shame is a revolutionary postmodern novel that blends politics, history and myth through a highly experimental narrative style. This research paper examines a stylistic analysis of Shame, focusing on graphological, lexical, syntactic, and narrative features that contribute to meaning-making in the text. Drawing on stylistic frameworks proposed by Leech and Short, Simpson, and Toolan, the study explores how Salman Rushdie's linguistic choices foreground themes of shame, power, violence, and identity in a postcolonial Pakistani context. The analysis demonstrates that Rushdie's distinctive style, marked by excess, irony, metafiction, and hybridity, is central to the novel's ideological and aesthetic impact.*

### Keywords

*Stylistics, Postmodernism, Language and Power, Graphological, Lexical, Syntactic, Narrative and Metafictional, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

Stylistics is concerned with the systematic study of language in literary texts and how linguistic choices shape interpretation. By integrating linguistic description with literary analysis, stylistics provides objective tools for examining how texts produce meaning. Salman Rushdie's fiction, known for its linguistic enthusiasm and narrative complexity, is particularly suitable for stylistic investigation. The novel *Shame* was published in 1983. *Shame* is a political allegory set in a fictionalised Pakistan. The novel explores themes of dictatorship, violence, repression, and emotional excess through grotesque characterisation and nonlinear narration. Rather than offering a realist historical account, Rushdie constructs a stylised narrative world where language itself becomes a site of ideological struggle. This research paper aims to examine how stylistic features in *Shame* reinforce its thematic concerns and postmodern sensibility.

#### **Review of Literature:**

Critical responses to *Shame* have primarily focused on its political allegory and postcolonial context. Bhabha (1994) emphasises Rushdie's use of hybridity and ambivalence, while Brennan views the novel as a critique of nationalism and authoritarian power. Hutcheon (1988) situates *Shame* within historiographic metafiction, highlighting its self-reflexive rewriting of history.

Systematic stylistic studies of *Shame* remain limited. While critics frequently note Rushdie's "excessive" style, fewer analyses examine the linguistic mechanisms through which this excess produces meaning. This research paper addresses that gap through close stylistic analysis supported by textual evidence.

#### **Methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative stylistic approach, drawing on:

- Leech and Short's prose stylistics
- Narrative stylistics (voice, point of view, and metafiction)



- Discourse stylistics (language and ideology)
- The analysis is organised under four linguistic levels:
- ✓ Graphological features
  - ✓ Lexical choices
  - ✓ Syntactic structures
  - ✓ Narrative and metafictional strategies

### **Graphological Analysis:**

Graphological features in *Shame*, including paragraph length, punctuation, typographical emphasis, and visual layout, are central to meaning construction. Salman Rushdie employs these features as semantic and ideological markers, reflecting themes of repression, violence, and political instability, thereby actively shaping the reader's interpretive experience and reinforcing the novel's postmodern sensibility.

### **Long and Dense Paragraphing:**

Rushdie frequently constructs extended, multi-clausal paragraphs with minimal breaks. These visually dense blocks mirror psychological congestion and emotional overflow, emphasising the inescapability of shame and social repression. These examples are Narrative Density and Emotional Pressure “No matter how determinedly one flees a country, one is obliged to take along some hand-luggage; and can it be doubted that Omar Khayyam... continued to be affected by that remarkable ban throughout his later years...” (Rushdie, 54) The paragraph's visual congestion mirrors Omar Khayyam's inability to escape the burdens of shame, reinforcing the idea that emotional and psychological inheritance cannot be neatly compartmentalised. The extended sentence structure also creates a sense of accumulation, where meaning builds gradually, reflecting the persistent weight of social and personal repression.

### **Punctuation and Syntax:**

Salman Rushdie's strategic use of commas, semicolons, and hyphenated clauses delays closure, allowing meaning to accumulate rather than resolve. This syntax-as-graphology mirrors the novel's themes of uncertainty and emotional buildup.

### **Example: Excessive Clause-Chaining:**

“Humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them. Afterwards, surveying the wreckage of their rage, they look bewildered, uncomprehending, young.” (Rushdie, 149) The punctuation and clause chaining prolong the sentence rhythmically, reflecting the delayed but inevitable eruption of suppressed shame as violence. The graphological structure of the sentence visually enacts the build-up and release of tension, aligning form with thematic content.

### **Fragmentation and Ellipses:**

Ellipses visually enact hesitation, moral ambiguity, and unspeakable emotion, reflecting the fragmented psychological states of characters.

### **Example: Elliptical Suspensions**

“... Tear your hair ... birthright ... woman's pride ...” (Rushdie, 177)

The broken visual structure mirrors Bilquis Hyder's internalised brutality and the oppressive weight of patriarchy. Ellipses extend the reading experience, creating tension and indicating what is morally or emotionally unspeakable.

### **Visual Continuity and Breathlessness:**



Rushdie frequently allows scenes of violence or obsession to continue across pages with minimal white space, creating a breathless, immersive reading experience.

**Example:** Continuous Narrative Flow

“Sufiya Zinobia was over-salivating; great jets of spittle flew out through her lips... the plague of shame... spread rapidly through that tragic being...” (Rushdie, 178)

The dense typography and continuous flow visually reflect Sufiya’s bodily and emotional overload. Form and content converge, so that graphological density mirrors thematic intensity, emphasising the embodiment of shame and emotional excess.

Rushdie’s graphological strategies in *Shame* transform the page into a visual landscape of ideological tension. Dense paragraphing, punctuation, italics, ellipses, and continuous narrative flow collectively enact the novel’s central conflicts—between shame and shamelessness, repression and eruption, silence and speech. In this way, graphology serves as a tool for meaning-making, demonstrating that the visual arrangement of text is inseparable from the novel’s semantic, emotional, and ideological content.

**Lexical Analysis:**

Salman Rushdie’s lexical choices in *Shame* are dominated by semantic fields of shame, secrecy, deception, and violence, which together shape both individual psychology and social dynamics. Shame is repeatedly foregrounded as a destructive emotional and social force:

“Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn... Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence” (Rushdie, 147).

In this example, the abstract nouns *shame*, *shamelessness*, and *violence* constitute a lexical field that links emotional states to societal consequences. The repetition of *shame* and *shamelessness* intensifies the moral and psychological ambiguity of characters’ actions, portraying it as both constraining and generative.

“The dumb-waiter contained, then, many terrible secrets. “...unkept secrets always manage to escape, under a door, through a keyhole or an open window...” (Rushdie, 28)

Here, the noun *secrets* carries narrative weight. Modifiers such as *terrible* and the phrase *always manage to escape* animate secrecy, portraying it as a force that actively shapes the social environment and destabilises trust.

**Deception** is normalised and presented as a performative aspect of social identity:

Finally, **violence** is closely linked to shame and mistrust, forming a semantic chain:

“Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence” (Rushdie, 147).

The abstract noun *violence* (an Abstract noun expressing aggression/social pathology) is framed as an inevitable consequence of emotional repression, demonstrating how lexical selection can encode both moral and physical consequences within the narrative.

Together, these lexical fields reveal a carefully structured network in which emotions, secrets, deception, and violence are not merely descriptive but actively shape the novel’s social and moral landscape. Rushdie’s lexical strategies, therefore, reflect the thematic concerns of power, repression, and moral ambiguity, emphasising the interplay between language, psychology, and society.



### Syntactic Analysis:

Rushdie's syntactic choices in *Shame* shape not only the rhythm of the prose but also the narrative's ideology and emotional texture. Through his deployment of complex sentence structures, clause chaining, inversion, and syntactic foregrounding, Rushdie constructs a style that mirrors the psychological disorientation, socio-political instability, and moral ambiguity at the novel's heart. The syntax does not simply convey information; it creates meaning by enacting tension, uncertainty, and fragmentation in both form and content.

### Clause-Complexity and Narrative Multiplicity:

Rushdie frequently uses compound and complex sentences that interweave multiple clauses, enabling simultaneous presentation of events, commentary, and reflection. These syntactically rich constructions reflect the plurality of voices and perspectives that populate the novel, as well as the intersecting personal and political histories the text explores.

### Example: Capsule of Personal and Political Context:

"I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale... But the women seemed to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories, and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in a manner of sinuous complexities..." (Rushdie, 222) Here, a series of embedded clauses and modifiers (e.g., "before I began," "that what I had on my hands was..." "obliging me to...") contribute to the syntactic density of the sentence. The layering of meanings — personal reflection, narrative strategy, gendered critique — mirrors the thematic complexity and intersectionality Rushdie foregrounds.

### Sentence Length and Thematic Immersion:

Rushdie's syntax often features extended, multi-clausal sentences that carry the reader through dense thematic terrain without full closure. This syntactic pattern aligns with the novel's concern with historical opacity and social chaos, where meaning accumulates rather than resolves.

### Example: Clause Chain with Enumerative Syntax

"...and the election shawls, one for the day of suffrage that began his reign, one for the day of his downfall, shawls swarming with figures, each one a breathtakingly lifelike portrait of a member of the Front, figures breaking seals, stuffing ballot-boxes, smashing heads..." (Rushdie, 245) This sentence's enumerative structure (a series of participial phrases like "*figures breaking seals, stuffing ballot-boxes...*") creates a syntactic momentum that mirrors the narrative's political escalation and collective unrest. Instead of pausing for clarity, the syntax pushes forward, embodying a sense of historical overwhelm.

### Parenthetical and Interruptive Syntax:

The narrator's frequent use of parenthetical asides, interruptions, and interjected clauses foregrounds the performative and self-reflexive nature of the narrative voice. These syntactic intrusions underscore Rushdie's postmodern blending of fiction, history, and commentary.

### Example 3: Authorial Aside within Clausal Structure:

"...the three sisters, I should state without further delay, bore the family name Shakil..." (Rushdie, 20)

The insertion "*I should state without further delay*" interrupts the main clause, drawing attention to the act of narration itself. Such parenthetical syntax destabilises the conventional narrator-story relationship and highlights the text's self-aware narrative stance.



### Repetition and Parallel Structures:

Salman Rushdie's strategic use of repetition and syntactic parallelism strengthens thematic emphasis while modulating rhythm and emphasis across sentences.

### Example: Repetition in Conceptual Pairs:

"Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn... Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence" (Rushdie, 147). The repetition of key abstract nouns (*shame*, *shamelessness*) and the parallel presentation ("*shamelessness*, *shame*") create a syntactic echo that accentuates the dialectical tension between opposing states. This structure reinforces the novel's thematic focus on binary oppositions and their collapse.

### Syntactic Dislocation and Figurative Complexity:

Rushdie also uses syntactic dislocation — placing phrases out of expected order — to disrupt linear logic and create semantic foregrounding. This tactic invites the reader to attend to conceptual nuances embedded in the unusual ordering of elements.

### Example: Inversion and Emphasis:

While a direct citation of a specific inverted syntax from *Shame* is challenging without the full text, critics note Rushdie's tendency toward "grammatically complex, sometimes non-linear sentence constructions" that contribute to postmodern defamiliarisation and narrative fragmentation.

Rushdie's syntactic strategies in *Shame*, including complex clause structures, clause chaining, parenthetical interruptions, repetition, and syntactic foregrounding, function as more than stylistic features. They construct meaning by aligning form with thematic concerns such as historical complexity, psychological ambivalence, narrative self-awareness, and sociopolitical turbulence. Through syntax, Rushdie orchestrates not just what is said, but how it is said, transforming sentence structure into a vehicle for ideological and emotional resonance.

### Conclusion:

This study concludes that *Shame* is a stylistically rich and ideologically complex novel in which language plays a central role in meaning-making. Through graphological experimentation, lexical intensity, syntactic variation, and metafictional strategies, Rushdie constructs a narrative that critiques power, violence, and repression. A stylistic approach thus provides deeper insight into *Shame* as a major work of postmodern and postcolonial fiction, reaffirming the inseparability of form and ideology in Rushdie's writing.

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