Stylistic Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the style of Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". A lot of work has been done on this poem in the domain of literary criticism but very little or almost no comprehensive research has been conducted yet, to find out the stylistic features. So, the present study focuses on the use of stylistic devices. Each level has been studied deeply and comprehensively, by looking at the choice of language at phonetic, phonological, graphic, semantic and grammatical levels. It has been concluded that Frost used a number of stylistic devices including cacophony, alliteration, assonance, tone modulation, denotation, connotation, metaphor, personification, symbolism, and imagery to highlight the idea of dismay and death. The repetition of certain words and choice of mental process verbs like *think*, *see*, *know*, and *watch* leave a significant effect on the mind of readers. It has also been found that, Frost tried to show the responsibilities and duties of human on this earth, which everyone has to perform. Furthermore, he portrayed the short life span of human to perform all these duties, which finally result in state of depression and anxiety. So, the present study is significant as it will help the reader to understand the author's point of view stylistically on linguistic basis rather in the domain of literary criticism.

Keywords: stylistic analysis, conflict, literary criticism, phonological, graphitic

1. Introduction

According to Leech (1969) style leads to the structure, patterns and arrangement of words to form sentences in spoken or written form. A number of studies have been conducted to explore the true intentions of the writer and exact theme of literary text under the domain of literary criticism (Widdowson, 1975). According to Leech and Short (1981), style is the usage of vocabulary in a particular situation for a specific aim. They further said that style is a dress of thoughts and a medium for transportation of thoughts and messages to the readers or listeners. But style varies from person to person and context to context of the same person (Whales, 1983). Furthermore, she explains that it is the explanation of the same picture with the same theme but in different unique ways. So, it is important to study style to comprehend the writing of any author. The present study deals with the writing style of Robert Frost in the poem "Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening".

Frost holds a distinctive position in handling the stylistic devices as Abdul Bari and Summara (2014) stylistically analyzed one of the Frost's poem "The Onset" and concluded that Frost is very unique in using stylistic devices like imagery, simile, metaphor, hyperbole and sound devices (alliteration, consonants rhyme scheme) to show the theme of virtue and evil, dismay and hope and life and death in his poems. Beside all of these, a comprehensive work needs to be done on a broad level to highlight the writer's message hidden in the text. The present study analyzes Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening" on five stylistic levels to unfold the true theme behind this poem. Another study has been conducted by Samia, Bushra and Arooj (2014) to illustrate the style of Frost in his poem "Bereft" regarding the different syntactic levels and analyzed that Robert Frost used different syntactic devices (nouns, adjective, pronouns, rhyming scheme, anaphora, anti-thesis, imagery… etc.) to explore the theme of passed youth loneliness, conflict of mind, hope, and unique treatment of

nature. Here this study is important as it will compare and contrast the reality of literary criticism and stylistics on scientific terms.

2. Review of Literature

Stylistics is the study of texts rather than the study of authors which emerged as a sub-discipline in late 20th century (Freeman, 1971). It explores the reader's attention while studying literary texts. Robert Frost is very rich in using stylistic devices. According to Kaplan (2007) Frost has been observed very frequent in using coordinating conjunctions in writing poems. Most of Frost's poems represent his subjective point of view. Sumera, Bari and Khurram (2014) analyzed Robert Frost Poem "The Road Not Taken" stylistically and illustrated Frost's use of stylistic devices at phonetic phonological, graphic, grammatical and lexico-syntactic level. Furthermore, they analyzed that Frost has used stylistic components to create deeper meanings and to clarify the reader's intentions by using figurative language. Abdul Bari (2014) pointed out that Frost's choice of words and phrases is very simple with the clever use of metaphors, anti-thesis, symbolism, similes and ironical words to create a deeper impression and strong effect on readers. This creates a complex connection between intended and ordinary meaning. This ambiguity and mystery in literary criticism can be understandable in stylistic analysis (Bari & Summara, 2014). So, the present study is an attempt to find out the stylistic connection between denotative and connotative meaning of Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening" at five levels of stylistics including phonetic level, phonological level, graphic level, grammatical level and lexical/semantic level.

2.1 Biography of Robert Frost

Robert Frost is known as a major American Poet. He was from San Francisco with mother Isabelle Moodie and father William Prescott Frost. Frost was eleven, when his father died of tuberculosis. Frost was interested in writing poetry at Lawrence High School. Later, he remained in Harvard University, where he couldn't get his college degree. He married Elinor Miriam White in 1895. She died in 1938. Frost was unique in writing American Letters. He was also known as a modern poet; Frost works highlight landscape and traditional life of New England and he is also known as a regional poet.

2.2 Research Questions

1) What are the stylistic features of Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening"?

2) How do those stylistic features contribute to construct the theme of the poem?

3. Methodology

The Researcher has analyzed each word individually and in collocations on the basis of phonetic, phonological, graphitic, lecxico-syntactic and grammatical level. Each level has further sub levels to explore the deep meaning of lexis.

3.1 Phonetic and Phonological Level

3.1.1 Euphonic

Frost used euphonic sounds in the poem to create a pleasing effect on the reader's mind and used to maintain rhyming scheme with the help of euphonic sounds in words like *snow*, *know* and *though*.

3.1.2 Cacophony

It is the usage of harsh sounds, which represent certain meanings to explain the author's point of view but in the present poem these words like *queer*, *near* and *hear* with 'r' sound do not add any significant meanings.

3.1.3 Assonance

It is a reiteration of the vowel sound in a verse of poetry. It is used to create a harmonious and pleasant effect. In the 1st stanza the 'o' sound in *woods* and *know*, in *house* and *though* and in *wood* and *snow*; in the 2nd stanza sound 'o' in *woods* and *frozen lake* and in the 4th stanza in *woods* and *lovely* and in *go* and *before*. Similarly, the repetition of 'u' sound in *house* and *though* of the 1st stanza; in *without* and *though* of the 2nd stanza. As repetition of 'a' sound in *farmhouse* and *near* and in the 2nd stanza of *darkest* and *year*. Like in *harness* and *shake* and in *easy* and *flake* of the 3rd stanza. And repetition of 'e' sound in *village* and *house*, *see* and *here* of the 1st stanza while in *little*, *evening* and *year* of the 2nd stanza. Furthermore, in *gives*, *bells* and *shake* of the 3rd stanza and in *lovely*, *deep*, *before* and *sleep* of the 4th stanza. These vowel sounds have been used in a sequence to produce a rhythmic effect in the mind of reader.

3.1.4 Consonance

It is the repetition of consonant sounds within a sentence or phrase. The repetition of 'g' in *villa**g**e* and *thou**g**h* and repetition of 'n' sound in *betwee**n*** and *froze**n*** lake. Moreover, the iteration of 'y' in *eas**y*** and *down**y*** in the last line of the 3rd stanza. Consonance creates a melodious affect to the poem and Frost tried to create a lyrical feeling in the poem by using this stylistic device.

3.1.5 Alliteration

The repetition of the consonant sounds at the beginning of words in the same line of poetry is called alliteration. As the repetition of 'w' in ***w**hose* and ***w**oods* in 1st line of 1st stanza and reiteration of 'h' sound in ***h**e* and ***h**arness* of in 1st line of 3rd stanza. Furthermore, 's' sound in ***s**ounds* and ***s**weep* and 'd' sound in ***d**ark* and ***d**eep* of 1st line in 4th stanza. Frost has used the tool of alliteration to converge the reader's attention on the specific situations of snowy woods and on anxiety of his horse.

3.1.6 Rhyming Scheme

With the extensive use of alliteration and cacophonic sounds the poem shows a unique rhyming scheme *aababbcbccdcdddd* with 16 lines each word having 2 syllables.

3.1.7 Tone modulation

Tone modulation is also there in the poem as writer starts the poem with a question as:

Whose woods these are I think I know

With rise and fall of tone it looks that poet is in state of confusion so the poem follows some kind of stress pattern and loudness. In this way tone modulation has been used to capture the attention of reader to focus on the imagery.

3.3 Graphitic Level

Graphitic analysis highlights the certain elements about the writing style of poem as the poem is handwritten, direction of writing is conventional and sheet of paper has been used as surface type with pencil and ink.

3.4 Lexical Cohesion/Semantic Coherence (on Deep Semantic Level)

Stylistic analysis highlights the Frost's use of polysemy (Natural layer) choosing the words '*woods*', '*sleep*', '*snow*', '*frozen lake*', and '*deep*' which are field non-specific words (Galperin, 1977). Frost has also used Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, which shows his brevity and correctness, when he says in last two lines of 4th stanza:

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep

Here poet explores the idea of heavy duties and responsibilities in this world to fulfil before traveling to his final destination. Then, Frost uses the tool of anaphora (repetition of same words at the start of sentences) and epiphora (repetition of words at the end of sentences) in the last 2 lines of the 4th stanza:

Taking onomasiological perceptive under consideration, Frost shows the clever use of certain antonyms in poems like *lovely-dark* and *woods-frozen lake* to highlight the theme of death. Under the onomasiological perceptive the poem shows the use of hyponymy with words *snow*, *dark*, and *sleep* having the same contextual meaning of death.

3.5 Denotation in Poem

Woods: an area of land covered with a thick growth of trees

Village: a group of houses and other buildings that is smaller than a town, usually in the countryside

Snow: atmospheric water vapor frozen into ice crystals and falling in light white flakes or lying on the ground as a white layer

Little horse: poor horse

Frozen lake: turned into or covered with ice

Darkest: with little or no light

Evening: the period of time at the end of the day, usually from about 6 p.m. to bedtime

Downy flake: covered with soft fine hair or feathers

Deep: extending far down from the top or surface

3.5.1 Connotation in the Poem

Woods: symbol of nature

Village: society and civilization

Snow: death

Little horse: poor soul

Frozen lake: death

Darkest: worse point

Evening: ending of life

Sleep: death

3.5.2 Metaphor

Frost depicts his point of view with the shrewd use of figurative language as he says: *between the woods and frozen lake*. Metaphorically, poet explains the idea of *birth to death* to highlight the importance of his presence in those woods.

3.5.3 Personification

In the, 1st line of 2nd stanza the poet says:

My little horse must think it queer

As thinking is a human quality and frost personified it to horse. This is to depict the idea of strangeness and weirdness.

3.5.4 Symbolism

Frost has used many symbols to explore the intended theme of the poem as follows.

Snow and frozen lake: death and dismay

Dark: complexity and despair

Sleep: death

3.5.5 Imagery

Frost has used many images to transport the idea of dismay, and death with *snow*, *sleep*, *frozen lake* and *woods.*

3.5.6 Grammatical Level

Frost has used 1st person pronoun *1* and *my* many times in the poem, which shows the personal involvement of Frost's own life experiences. He also uses 3rd person pronoun *he* and *his* to highlight the ultimate power of God.

Furthermore, Frost has used 16 nouns; *woods*, *house*, *village*, *harness*, *snow*, *horse*, *farmhouse*, *evening*, *year*, *bell*, *mistake*, *wind*, *flake*, *promise and sleep*. Frost uses these nouns tactfully to display the different images and symbols.

Moreover, Frost has used twelve verbs; t*hink*, *know*, *see*, *watch*, *fill up*, *stop*, *gives*, *shake*, *ask*, *go*, *keep*, and *sweep*. Some verbs like *think* and *know* are mental cognitive as these show inner experience; *see* and *watch* are behavioral process verbs as they show the outer manifestation of the inner workings; *stop*, *gives*, *shake*, *fill up*, *go*, *keep* and *sweep* are material process verbs as they belong to doing and happening process and at the end he has used *ask* which is a verbal process verb to show human consciousness, enacted in form of language (Halliday, 1967).

Frost used *little*, *queer*, *near*, *downy*, *lonely*, *dark*, and *deep* as adjectives to create a strong effect on readers to emphasize on intended themes in the poem.

3.6 Type Token Ratio

The present poem consists of 108-word token and 74-word types where '*the*' a referential article, which is repeated 7 times to refer the reader's attention to certain thoughts. '*And*' is used 5 times in the poem, showing that the mind of writer is full of thoughts, which he wants to explore. 1st person pronoun '*I*' is repeated 5 times, which gives a subjective touch to the poem.

3.7 Analysis of Poem

"Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening" is a lyrical poem with 16 lines, each word with 2 syllables. The poem

has four stanzas with same rhyming scheme in first three stanzas and changed in last one as Leach (1969) says that same rhyming scheme throughout the poem makes it boring and worse. The poem is easy to comprehend, with easy vocabulary in conscious way with the clever use of brevity, which creates a sense of amusement. Frost maintains a gap between simple, poetic and common language as common language does not serve those functions of effectiveness. Leach (1969) writes that poetic language varies from common language in its rules. The poet opens the poem with question, which suddenly catches the attention of reader. The poet looks in state of confusion at the start of the poem. He looks in need of some answers and then started explaining the concept of dismay, un-satisfaction, weirdness, despair, using different stylistic devices like cacophony, alliteration, assonance, and other figures of speech. Frost gives a universal theme to his poem that life and death is continuous process, where human has got very short time to perform his/her part in this world.

4. Conclusion

The Stylistic analysis of the current poem, explores that poem is designed very tactfully, where narrator stops on his way in woods to watch snow falling. Frost has used a combination of different stylistic devices to make this poem a lyrical one. Semantically, Frost used 108-word tokens and 74-word types. The difference in type token ratio shows that certain words are repeated many times like "*the*" for 7 times to make certain ideas and objects significant in the poem. "*And*" has been used for 5 times to express the abundance of thoughts in writer's mind. The atmosphere of poem seems very terrible, even horse is impatient to go from that sight and shakes his harness bell. The whole of environment depicted in the poem, creates a sense of dismay, despair and finally death. The poet has used 4 mental verbs *think*, *see*, *know*, and *watch* and abstract material process verbs that something is going on in narrator's mind. After the comprehensive analysis of the poem, we may conclude that it is dismay, despair, depression and anxiety that even horse is thinking it queer but human has his promises to keep, which one has to fulfil even after all of this depression and anxiety.

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