

Stylistics Analysis on Poem “Trees” Joyce Kilmer

By: Jomel B. Manuel
Department of Arts and Humanities
College of Arts and Sciences
Cagayan State University,
Carig Campus, Tugugarao City

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze Joyce Kilmer’s poem entitled “Trees” for the perspective of stylistic analysis. The analysis is made under the aspects of phonological, morphological, graphological, and lexico-syntactic levels. This research is helpful in understanding the basic concepts, literal and hidden meanings of the poem.

Index Terms. graphological level, lexico-syntactic level, morphological level, phonological level, stylistics

1. Introduction

Style is the basic feature of any literary piece of writing. This gives uniqueness to every writer. Through one’s style, s/he can convey more the message to the readers. This shows that what makes one understandable and effective in expressing the message he/she wanted to convey would depend on how he/she dresses up his/her thoughts.

Furthermore, Leech (1969) said that personality of the writer is connected with his particular style. It reveals that how a person effectively and beautifully depicts his ideas and thoughts. It describes the way of person's speaking and writing. It is derived from the Latin word "elocutio" which means "style" and means "lexis" in Greek.

Style is an aspect of language that deals with choices of diction, phrases, sentences and linguistic materials that are consistent and harmonious with the subject matter (Lawal, 1997). Style is involved in both, spoken and written, literary and nonliterary types of language. However, it is particularly associated with written form of the literary texts.

Different scholars have come up with different views or definitions about stylistics. According to Freeman (1971), stylistics is a sub-discipline which started in the second half of the 20th century. Leech and Short (1981), on the other, defined stylistics as the linguistic study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language. According to Widdowson (1975), stylistics is the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation which differs stylistics from the literary criticism and considers linguistics as its linking techniques.

According to Simpson (2004), stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to *language*. He mentioned further that the reason why language is so important to stylistics is because the various forms, patterns, and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text. Undoubtedly, to do stylistics is to explore language and to explore language creativity in language use.

In Stylistic Analysis, we make use of linguistic description to investigate how spoken or written language communicates meaning in a variety of contexts (Coxon,1993). Meanwhile, Simpson (2004) stated three basic principles in stylistic analysis. It should be rigorous, retrievable, and replicable. *Rigorous* means that it should be based on an explicit framework of analysis. Stylistic analysis is not the end-product of a disorganized sequence of *ad hoc* and impressionistic comments, but instead underpinned by structured models of language and discourse that explain how we process and understand various patterns of language. *Retrievable* means that the analysis is organized through explicit terms and criteria, the meanings of which are agreed upon by other students of stylistics. Although precise definitions for some aspects of language have proved difficult to pin down exactly, there is a consensus of agreement about what most terms in stylistics mean. *Replicable* means that the methods should be

sufficiently transparent as to allow other stylisticians to verify them, either by testing them on the same text or by applying them beyond that text.

II. Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Stylistic analysis could be conducted by means of the levels of analysis. The levels of stylistic analysis are identified as follows:

1. Phonological Level. This deals with the study of sound patterns of a given language, rules of pronunciations, the rhyming scheme and utterance of the words in the sentence. Phonological devices are rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance, and assonance.

2. Graphological Level. This deals with the formalized rules of writing. Leech (1969) claims that graphology exceeds orthography which refers to the whole writing system; punctuation, paragraphing and spacing. In short, it deals with the systematic formation, structure and punctuation in the sentence.

3. Morphological Level. This deals with the construction of the words by adding prefixes and suffixes to the root words. The main aim of this level is to study and analyze the words, internal structure of sentence and their formation. To find out foregrounding and the deviation, clauses, phrases, words, nouns and verbs are to be distinguished.

4. Lexico-Syntax Level. It is the combination of two different words "Lexis" and "syntax". Lexis means the vocabulary which is used in a language or in any writing for any purpose. On the other, syntax means 'sentence construction': how words group together to make phrases and sentences. According to Tallerman(1998). Lexico-syntactic choices are obtained through devices such as piling of usual collocates, unusual collocates, archaic, words, particular parts of speech, and figures of speech.

Thus, close analysis of lexis, syntax, morphological, phonological, and graphological features of a text helps us uncover and appreciate the layers, patterns, and levels that constitute stylistic description.

III. Analysis of the Poem

On Phonological Level

Couplet

*I think I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree*

The poem uses a literary device called **couplet**. A couplet is two lines of poetry. Kilmer uses six different couplets. Most of the couplets are usually connected with rhyming end words.

Rhyme

*A tree whose hungry mouth is **prest**
Against the earth's sweet flowing **breast***

Rhyme is likewise of word sounds. **Prest** and **breast** have like sounds therefore are rhyming words.

Rhyme scheme

The rhyme scheme of the poem is **aa, bb, cc, dd, ee, aa**. This happens because the final words of the first couplet have same sounds (see, tree), second couplet (prest, breast), third couplet (day, pray), fourth couplet (wear, hair), fifth couplet (lain, rain), while the last couplet has the same sound with the first couplet (me, tree).

Alliteration

*A nest of robins in **her hair**; (Line 8)*

*And **lifts** and **leafy** arms to pray. (Line 6)*

The words **her** and **hair** in Line 8 begin with letter **h**, while the words **lifts** and **leafy** in Line 6 begin with letter **l**. The poet uses alliteration to produce beautiful effect on the reader.

Assonance

*Against the **earth's** sweet flowing **breast**. (Line 4)*

The poet uses poetry device **assonance**. This is the repetition of a vowel sound within a line in poetry. In the poem, the words *against*, *earth's*, *breast* in Line 4 have similar vowel sound **e**. This provides tone and musical color.

Consonance

*Against the **earth's** sweet flowing **breast**. (Line 4)*

*A tree that may in **summer wear** (Line 7)*

The words *against*, *sweet*, and *breast* in Line 4 end with **t** sound. Further in Line 7, the words *summer* and *wear* have the final sound of **r**.

Repetition

*A poem lovely as a **tree**
A **tree** whose hungry mouth is prest
A **tree** that looks at God all day
A **tree** that may in summer wear
But only God can make a **tree**.*

The word **tree** is repeated five times (5x). This emphasizes how the poet appreciates and praises trees.

Rhythm

I think I that I I shall ne I ver see I

x / I x / I x / I x / I

The line shows a clear pattern of iambic feet; since each line has four feet, this rhythm is called iambic tetrameter. The iambic means the unstressed syllable is followed by the stressed one. Unstressed is represented by [x] and stressed is represented by [/]. Iambic [x/].

On Graphological Level

Period/Full-stop(.)

A poem as lovely as a tree. (Line 2)
Who intimately lives with rain. (Line 10)
But only God can make a tree. (12)

In the poem, period or full-stop is used thrice as can be seen in Line 2, 10, and 12. Period or full-stop is used to end a complete thought not necessarily the end of a stanza; it is also used to end the whole poem.

Semi-colon(;)

Against the earth's sweet flowing breast; (Line 4)
And lifts her leafy arms to pray; (Line 6)
A nest of robins in her hair; (Line 8)
Upon whose bosom snow has lain; (Line 9)

It is evident that in the poem, the semi-colon is used 4 times as can be seen in Line 4, 6, 8, and 9. It was used by the poet for a longer pause than a comma but not as long as of the period or full-stop.

Comma (,)

A tree that looks at God all day, (Line 5)
Poems are made by fools like me, (Line 11)

In the poem, the comma is used twice as can be seen in Lines 5 and 11. The poet employs comma for short pause and to separate sentential elements in the poem.

On Morphological Level

Affixation (suffix)

A poem as lovely as a tree. (Line 2)
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest (Line 3)
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast; (Line 4)
A tree that looks at God all day, (Line 5)
And lifts her leafy arms to pray; (Line 6)
A nest of robins in her hair; (Line 8)
Who intimately lives with rain. (Line 10)
Poems are made by fools like me, (Line 11)

It is seen that the poet uses only suffixes. As gleaned above, derivational suffixes such *words lovely, hungry, flowing, leafy, intimately* and inflectional morphemes which include *earth's, looks, lifts, arms, robins, lives, poems, fools* are used in the poem.

This reveals that the poet uses only morpheme/s added to the end of a word to create another word; that is, deflates or change the tense or number of a word, that is; inflectional.

On Lexical-Syntax Level

Personification

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest (Line 3)
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast; (Line 4)
A tree that looks at God all day. (Line 5)
And lifts her leafy arms to pray. (Line 6)
A tree that may in Summer wear (Line 7)
A nest of robins in her hair; (Line 8)

The poet articulates his thoughts through the use of *personification*. Personification is a figure of speech in which human attributes are conferred upon things that are not human. In the poem, the words *hungry mouth* (Line 3), *breast* (Line 4), *looks* (Line 5), *arms* (Line 6), *wear* (Line 7), *hair* (Line 8) are used in which human attributes.

In the poem, Kilmer personifies a tree in different ways. This shows that its extensive use of this figure of speech displays that the tree is alive. Clearly, it shows how people should praise God.

Simile

A poem lovely as a tree (Line 2)

Poems are made by fools like me, (Line 11)

The poet uses the literary device *simile*. Simile is a comparison between two unlike objects using the words *like* or *as*. In the poem, Kilmer uses the word *as* in Line 2, while the word *like* is also used in Line 11.

In the poem, simile is the great device used to give the reader something to compare an object to which gives the object a greater effect.

IV. CONCLUSION

The poet uses simple words and phrases to make it understandable and to clarify his intentions. By using different literary devices such as simile and personification, the poet makes the poem more effective to convey his message and to show the beauty of God's creation. Thus, "TREE" is a poem which shows the poet's religious faith and world's nature beauty. Stylistics, by this analysis, has shown that there is a distinction between poetic and non-poetic language as a means of defining literature, language manipulated in ways that signal it as different from ordinary language.

APPENDIX

TREES

by Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem as lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This piece of work is seemingly nothing without the inspiration extracted from his literature classes. Further, he would like to acknowledge the language professors in the Department of Arts and Humanities for the brilliant inputs just to finish this analysis.

REFERENCES

- [1] Coxon, Rosemary. (1993). A Level English. London: BPP Ltd
- [2] Freeman, D.C. (ed.) (1971). Linguistics and Literary Style. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- [3] Lawal, R.A. (1997). Pragmatics in Stylistics: A Speech Act Analysis of Soyinka's 5. Telephone Conversation, R.A. Lawal (ed.) Stylistics in Theory and Practice. Ilorin: Paragon Books.

- [4] Leech, G. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Longman.
- [5] Leech, G. and Short, M.H.(1981). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman.
- [6] Simpson, Paul.(2004). *Stylistics*. New York, London: Routledge
- [7] Tallerman, M. (1998). *Language in Literature-An Introduction to Stylistics*, U.K & London: Hodder Education.
- [8] Widdowson, H.G. (1975). *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*.London: Longman Group Ltd.
- [9] <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=123271>
- [10]<https://www.reference.com/art-literature/meaning-poem-trees-joyce-kilmer-38bf2ae04525dd4#>

AUTHOR



DR. JOMEL B. MANUEL is an Associate Professor II at Cagayan State University and the current Department Chair of Arts and Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences-Carig Campus.

Dr. Manuel finished his Bachelor of Secondary Education- English in 2001 and Master of Science in Teaching- English in 2003 from Saint Paul University Philippines, Tuguegarao City. He also obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in Language Education at Cagayan State University in 2012.

He teaches Grammar and Composition 1 and 2, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Methods of Language Research, English Discourse, Masterpieces of World Literature, Survey of English-American Literature, and Language research. He is a Graduate School professor handling Language Testing and Second Language Acquisition. He is also invited as a part-time Graduate School professor at University of Cagayan Valley, Tuguegarao City.

He is also one of the accreditors of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP).

He already published International Researches which include: Second Language Classroom Interaction: A Transactional, Proposed Module in Grammar and Composition, and Turn-taking Practices in Literature Classes (co-researcher).