

## STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S POEM "A POISON TREE"

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### **Abstract**

Style varies from text to text depending on various factors like the form, meanings, grammar and structure. Stylistic analysis examines various aspects of the style of a text. This article aims to analyze William Blake's poem "A Poison Tree" from a stylistic point of view. The analysis is made under the aspects of graphological, syntactical, semantic and phonological patterns. This analysis is helpful in understanding the basic concept of poem that is human beings, along with the ability to reason and question, possess the capacity to hate, and yet also to forgive. Furthermore it highlights the difference between ordinary languages used in daily life compared to the literary language that is used in poetic text. This depicts the variation in style and the impact of this variation on the reader.

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**Keywords:** Stylistic analysis, style, William Blake, poem

### **Introduction**

The word stylistics is derived from style. Stylistics is a branch which defines different styles. It refers to the study of appropriate use of words or language in a sentence or writing. Widdowson (1975, p 3) defines stylistics as —the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. He added by saying that stylistics is the link between literary criticism and linguistics. And has (as yet at least) no independent branch of its own. He also says that stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological construction suggests: the style- is relating it to the former or shape and the - istics to the method of writing.

Style has different meanings for different people. Carter (1989, p 14) believes that style is generally depends on linguistic levels. Due to these levels every text and writing is different from the other, hence every genre is different. Haynes (1989, p.3) is of the view that the study of style is the study of distinctions: looking at what was said against what might have been said.

Style is also called as variety. Style refers as the manner of expression which is different in various contexts. Style, being a versatile field, is defined depending on one's field of study.

### **Stylistics**

According to Leech and Short (1981, p.13) —Stylistics is the (linguistic) study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language. They also said that the major aim of studying the stylistics is to explore the meanings and understand the linguistic features of the text. Short and Candlin (1989, p.183) said that —stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of the literary texts. It thus embodies one essential part of the general course - philosophy; that of combining language and literary study. Widdowson (1975, p.3) defines stylistics: —the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. He said that which differs stylistics from the literary criticism and linguistics is its linking technique. He also suggests that stylistics is in between linguistics and literary criticism and its function is to link between two. So, generally, it deals with both the literary and linguistic factors. Carter (1988, p.161) also thinks as Widdowson thinks. He also said that stylistics is a bridge (link) discipline between linguistics and literature. Stylistics is the study of the devices in languages such as rhetorical terms and syntactical devices that are taken to produce expressive or literary style. Stylistics is, therefore, a study which conjoins both literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other as its morphological structure suggests: the *'style'* is relating to literary criticism and the *'istics'* is to linguistics. Widdowson (1975, p.3) said that stylistics expresses means whereas language and literature as a subjects

### **Style**

The concept of style has variety of meanings in and outside the literary text. It is commonly an issue that we use the term *'style'* without knowing its meaning. According to Leech (1969) —style is the way in which something is spoken, written or performed. It refers to use of words, sentence structures and speaking style. Broadly, style is related to the personality of the person. Style reflects the thoughts of person's mind. 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. Elocutio refers to the oral and written style of the language. Leech and Short (1981, p. 10) is of the view that the word —style has an uncontroversial meaning. It is a way in which language is being used in a given context for a given purpose. Birch (1989, p. 10) believes that both language and style cannot move beyond a limit on the supremacy of words. He strongly believes that these words contain specific meanings which differs it from the ordinary

language. Leech and Short (1981, p.11) also said that it is the selection of the words from a grand linguistic vocabulary. Style is involved in both, spoken and written, literary and nonliterary types of language but it is particularly associated with written form of the literary texts. Leech and Short (1981, p.15) further elaborates that style is the —dress of thoughts. It is the way of the writer to convey the message to the readers. It is upon the writer that how he makes his text understandable that the meanings are conveyed. Style or stylistic variations may also be analyzed in linguistic terms for example sentence types, phonological devices, lexical varieties, morphological varieties, rhetorical terms, semantic terms, and even semiotic terms and utterance.

### **Levels of stylistic analysis**

The levels of stylistics analysis are identified as:

#### **Graphology**

Leech (1969, p.39) claims that graphology exceeds orthography. —It refers to the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing. According to Crystal and Davy (1969, p.18) —Graphology is the analogous study of a languages writing system or orthography as seen in the various kinds of handwriting or topography. These are the formalized rules of writing. Alabi (2007, p.170) added that "a graphological discussion of style among other features entails the foregrounding of quotation marks, ellipses periods, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, the full stop, the colon, the comma, the semicolon, the question mark, the dash, lower case letters, gothic and bold prints, capitalization, small print, spacing, italics etc". In other words, it deals with the systematic formation, structure and punctuation in the sentence.

#### **Phonology**

Lodge (2009, p.8) is of the view that —phonology is the study of linguistic systems, specifically the way in which sound represents, differences of meaning in a language. Ofuya (2007, p.14) believes that —phonology describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized in English into a system. Phonology basically deals with the sound patterns, the rhyming scheme and utterance of the word in the sentence.

#### **Phonological**

Devices are: rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance.

## **Morphology**

Mark and Kirsten (2005, p.1) said that —Morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed. Morphological level deals with the construction of the word by adding prefixes and suffixes to the root words.

## **Lexico-Syntax**

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. Syntax means ‘Sentence construction’: how words group together to make phrases and sentences. So, it is used in the construction of the sentence as stylistics is used in literary style.

Lexico-Syntactic patterns may be obtained through various means which include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition. According to Tallerman(1998, p.1), "Lexico-Syntactic choices are obtained through devices such as piling of usual collocates, unusual collocates, archaic words, particular parts of speech, metaphor, simile, oxymoron etc".

## **Elements in stylistic analysis**

The elements of the levels of analysis are discussed briefly:

### **Graphological Devices**

#### **Punctuation**

Punctuation are the marks used in writing that divide sentences and phrases. It is the system of using the punctuation marks. These marks include full stop, comma, colon,semicolon, question mark, exclamation mark, apostrophe, hyphen, ellipsis, quotation marks, parentheses, brackets, etc.

#### **Paragraphing**

Paragraph means a separate part which contains information, usually of several lines or sentences. The first sentence of a paragraph starts on a new line.

### **Phonological devices**

#### **Rhyme elements**

It consist patterns of rhymes, the stressed pattern and the rhyming scheme which are followed in the poetry.

### **Alliteration**

It is the use of same letters or sounds at the beginning of words that are close together. It was used systematically in Old English poetry but in Modern English poetry is generally used for a particular effect.

### **Consonance**

It is a half rhyme in which final consonants are repeated but with different preceding vowels.

### **Assonance**

It is the effect created when two syllables in words that are closed together have the same vowel sound but different consonants or the same consonants but different vowels.

### **Onomatopoeia**

It is the effect produced when the words used contain the similar sounds to the noises they describe: "murmuring of innumerable bees".

### **Morphological devices**

#### **Affixes**

It is a process of forming new words by putting morphemes before some words. It further divides into prefixes or suffixes. These are two popular types of morphological operations. Prefixes generally alter the meanings of the words and suffixes changes its part of speech.

#### **Coinages**

It is the process of forming new words from the existing ones.

### **Lexico-syntactic devices**

#### **Anastrophe**

Anastrophe is the inversion of the natural or usual word order'. The use of anastrophe secures emphasis and focuses the readers' attention.

#### **Parenthesis**

It entails the insertion of some verbal unit (extra information, and after thought or a comment) in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow of the sentence'.

#### **Ellipsis**

Ellipsis entails the deliberate omission of a word or words, which are readily implied by the content: It is used to create brevity reemphasis or ambiguity'.

### **Asyndeton**

This is the deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses. Asyndeton produces a hurried rhythm in the sentence.

### **Anaphora**

The use of words that refers to or replaces another word used earlier in the sentence

### **Epizeuxis**

Repetition of a word or phrase without any breaks at all.

### **A poison tree**

#### **Introduction to the Poem**

In "A Poison Tree", William Blake critically discusses the two opposing forces, uncovering the inherent weakness in humans and the effects of these innate flaws. Through the use of extended metaphors and vivid imagery Blake symbolically portrays this fundamental flaw through the poem. The central theme in the poem is hatred and anger, dominating much of the author's thoughts. Blake expresses this through the introduction of a clever parallelism the treatment of anger between a friend and a foe.

Through this, Blake emphasizes the nature of anger – while expressing and letting go of wrath ends it, suppression nurtures it. Blake startles the reader with the clarity of the poem, and with metaphors that can apply to many instances of life. A Poison Tree is an allegory. The tree here represents repressed wrath; the water represents fear; the apple is symbolic of the fruit of the deceit which results from repression. This deceit gives rise to the speaker's action in laying a death-trap for his enemy. The deeper meaning of the poem is that aggressive feelings, if suppressed, almost certainly destroy personal relationships.

#### **Biography of the Poet**

William Blake was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of both the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. His prophetic poetry has been said to form "what is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language". His visual artistry has led one contemporary art critic to proclaim him "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced". Although he lived in London his entire life except for three years spent in Felpham he produced a diverse and symbolically rich corpus, which embraced the imagination as "the body of God", or "Human existence itself".

## **Methodology**

This chapter will provide a stylistic analysis of the poem 'Early Spring' of Wordsworth. The lexico-syntactic patterns and choices, phonological, graphological and morphological levels of analysis are going to form the basis of the analysis.

## **Text of the poem**

### **A poison Tree**

*William Blake*

I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,  
Night and morning with my tears:  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had veil'd the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

## **Stylistics analysis**

### **Graphological Level**

#### **i. Foregrounding:**

Title of the poem is written in bold letters and name of the poet in italic.

#### **ii. Paragraphing:**

This poem is consisting on *04* quatrains (stanzas). There is double spacing among all paragraphs.

#### **iii. Punctuation:**

**a. Full stops:** *07 times*

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.

**b. Commas: 05 times**

The poet employs comma for very short pause and to separate sentential elements in the poems.

**c. Colons: 02times** The mark ( : ) used to introduce a list, a summary, an explanation, etc. or before reporting what somebody has said.

**d. Semi colons: 03 times**

It has been used by the poet for a longer pause than that of a comma but not as long as that of the full-stop.

**iv. Contracted forms:**

The poet employed the above contracted forms to create an illusion of speech. In this poem poet has used contracted form in line number 14 and 16.

**Phonological Level**

**v. Alliteration:**

This is generally taken to be the repetition of the initial consonant in two or more adjacent words.

- 1. I was angry with my friend;
- 3. I was angry with my foe:
- 6. Night and morning with my tears:
- 7. And I sunned it with smiles,
- 8. And with soft deceitful wiles.
- 10. Till it bore an apple bright.

**vi. Consonance:**

It is a half rhyme in which final consonants are repeated but with different preceding vowels.

- I was angry with my friend;
- I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
- I was angry with my foe:
- I told it not, my wrath did grow.
- And I waterd it in fears,
- Night and morning with my tears:
- And I sunned it with smiles,
- And with soft deceitful wiles.
- And it grew both day and night.
- Till it bore an apple bright.
- And my foe beheld it shine,
- And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had dveil' d the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

vii. **Assonance:**

The poet has been dole to use the repetition of rounds of word in linking related words to reinforce meaning. They provide tone and musical colour and they aid memorability.

2. I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
4. I told it not, my wrath did grow.
5. And I watered it in fears,
6. Night and morning with my tears:
7. And I sunned it with smiles,
8. And with soft deceitful wiles.
10. Till it bore an apple bright.
11. And my foe beheld it shine,
12. And he knew that it was mine.

**Morphological level**

No affixation and coinage have found in the poem.

**Lexical Level**

No such elements of lexical analysis have found in the poem which includes anastrophe, parenthesis, ellipsis, asyndeton, anaphora and epizeuxis etc.

**Rhyme scheme & meter**

All the verses of the poem have the same syllable pattern, so that their meter is same and it has tetra meter. All the stanzas of the poem are also rhymed.

I was angry with my friend;	<b>A</b>
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.	<b>A</b>
I was angry with my foe:	<b>B</b>
I told it not, my wrath did grow.	<b>B</b>

And I watered it in fears,	<b>A</b>
Night and morning with my tears:	<b>A</b>
And I sunned it with smiles,	<b>B</b>
And with soft deceitful wiles.	<b>B</b>

And it grew both day and night.	<b>A</b>
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Till it bore an apple bright.                   **A**  
And my foe beheld it shine,                   **B**  
And he knew that it was mine.               **B**

And into my garden stole,                   **A**  
When the night had veil'd the pole;       **A**  
In the morning glad I see;                   **B**  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.     **B**

### **Conclusion**

The choice of words by the writer or the poet plays a very important in meaning making. It helps the reader or the hearer to understand the intention and the message the poet is trying to pass across. 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.

### **Pedagogical implications**

The ultimate aim of this work is to explore ways in which language use has been integrated in the poem. It is also aimed at analyzing some of the specific characteristics that give the poem its identity. This refers to the recurrent features of stylistics employed by the writer. In other words, this work will be concerned with striking and marked use of words in the poem in order to enhance effective transfer of message. The effects and functions of the stylistic elements as regards the poem will be looked at in the analysis.

### **Scope of the study**

This work shall be exclusively stylistic, and analysis will be conducted through the use of the following levels of analysis: lexicosyntactic patterns and choices, phonology, graphology and morphology. Analysis will be conducted using the stylistic elements in each of the above mentioned levels of analysis, such that it could provide a guide and be relevant to future researchers in a related field.

### **Limitations of the study**

The time is too short to deal properly with the analysis of the poem. The material is not as much as it should be.

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