William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming"
A Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of this present paper is to analyze William Butler Yeats' Poem 'The second coming' from the stylistic analysis perspective. The stylistic analysis envisaged here views the poem as a linguistic construct in terms of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic aspects. The study shows that a stylistic analysis is helpful and important to an analysis of verbal configuration of a text. In addition to that, it aims at evolving a composite outlook to the nature of literary work.

Keywords: Style, Stylistics, Stylistic Levels, W.B.Yeats.

تحليل قصيدة العودة الثانية لويليام بتلر يتيس: دراسة أسلوبية

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث الى تحليل قصيدة الشاعر ويليام بتلر يتيس "العودة الثانية" من وجهة نظر التحليل الأسلوبي. ان التحليل الأسلوبي المتوخى هنا يرى القصيدة بوصفها بناء اللغوي من حيث الجانب الصوتي، الجانب المعجمي، الجانب النحوي والجوانب الدلالية. وتشير الدراسة إلى أن التحليل الأسلوبي مفيد ومهم لتحليل التكوين اللفظي للنص. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يهدف إلى تطور النظرة التركيبية لطبيعة العمل الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأسلوب، الأسلوبية، الجوانب الأسلوبية، وليام بتلر يتس.

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1. Introduction:

Poetry is a medium of communication, which uses words, just as painting uses colors and sculpture uses marble and stone. The main idea of poetry is to express and convey, hence all poetry serves the same purpose. According to Khader (2004) poetry like all language forms, is an event in communication.

Since language is the medium through which all literature finds its manifestation, it is necessary to have a language-based perspective for the study of literature. This means that stylistics is the discipline that studies language based approach that can explicate literary texts as well.

1.1 Style and Stylistics:

Style is a term considered to be as one of the most confusing terms of linguistic and literary studies. As a term, style has been accepted here as a theoretical construct of linguistics; more precisely of stylistics. Describing it as a ''dress of thoughts'', Leech and Short (2007) elaborate that style is the way the writer conveys the message to the readers and how he makes his text understandable that the meanings are conveyed. What is proposed here is that style should be accepted as a term that stands for a category not based on common sense or physical properties of elements, but on the abstract relations meant to rationalize and explain certain facts related to the function of language.

Accordingly, style is simultaneously a theoretical and a functional construct. It is in this functional perspective like what Riffaterre had tried to define as "choice":

> ***Style is understood as an emphasis (expressive, affective or aesthetic) added to the information conveyed by the linguistic structures, without alteration of meaning. That is to say that language expresses and that style stresses...***
> (Riffaterre 1959:155)

Stylistics is generally defined as the linguistic study of style, which is "rarely undertaken for its sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language" (Leech and Short 2007:13). For Leech and Short, the study of style is linked with the desire to explain something.

In addition, stylistics has been defined as a sub-discipline of linguistics that is concerned with the systematic analysis of style in language and how this can vary according to such factors as, for example, genre, context, historical period and author (Crystal and Davy 1969:9 and Leech 2008:54).

Finally, stylistics as a scientific discipline with a linguistic orientation posits style as its logical construct and adopts a scientific methodology of investigation.

In the light of the above discussion, the stylistic analysis envisaged here views the poem as a linguistic construct in terms of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic aspects. The study shows that a stylistic analysis is helpful and important to the analysis of a literary text. In addition, it aims at evolving a composite outlook to the nature of literary work.

2. The Interpretation of "The Second Coming":

By*: W. B. Yeats*

> ***Turning and turning in the widening gyre***
> ***The falcon cannot hear the falconer;***
> ***Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;***
> ***Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,***
> ***The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere***
> ***The ceremony of innocence is drowned;***
> ***The best lack all conviction, while the worst***
> ***Are full of passionate intensity.***
> ***Surely, some revelation is at hand;***

Surely, the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.

The darkness drops again but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

"The Second Coming" is a poem composed by the Irish poet William Butler. Yeats in 1919, first printed in The Dial in November 1920, and afterwards included in his 1921 collection of verses Michael Robartes and the Dancer. The poem uses Christian imagery regarding the Apocalypse and second coming allegorically to describe the atmosphere of post-war Europe (Alabi, 2007, p.35). The poem is considered a major work of Modernist poetry and has been reprinted in several collections, including The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. It is superbly controlled powerful poetic comment not only on the first world war and the decline of traditional standards but also on the 20th century man and the new inventions of horror. At the same time,' The Second Coming ' is an illustration of Yeats' philosophy of history (Lahore, 1985:p.175). Finally, in writing this poem, Yeats was able to choose words, which to an appreciable extent were the right ones to reveal, grieve emotions that was its purpose.

3. Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Any literary text can be analyzed according to the following stylistic levels:

3.1 The phonological level

Phonology is the study that identify ways in which the phonetic elements of a language are grouped together and exploited by the speaker of language to effect communication. Phonology in stylistic usually deals with analyzing sound patterns in a text, the systematic use of sounds to form words and utterances in language. The phonological patterns not only draw the reader's attention but also enhance communicative perception by linking similar sounding phonological constituents into a constitute at the next higher level as that of alliteration, assonance and rhyme etc. These phonological patterns created by the repetition of same or similar sounds by some kind of phonological derivations become the tools of foregrounding such as in metre, rhyme, onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and consonance.

3.1.1 Metre:

It is a linguistic phenomenon based on the principle of "isochrony" or the principle of recurrence equal to or analogous to musical pulse or heartbeat or a kind of equaltimedness. In poetry, these equivalences are rooted within and across lines. The largest unit of metre is the line. Within a line, the minimum unit of articulation is the syllable, and the principle of equivalences operating at the level of syllables generates <u>rhythm</u>. In any poetic line, the number of syllables can be counted and their organization into metrical units can be observed.

3.1.2 Rhyme:

In traditional poetry, rhyme has been one of its constitutive factors. It results when the vowel and the succeeding sounds are identical. According to Wales (2001), rhyme is a kind of phonetic echo found in

verse: more precisely, a phonemic matching. In this regard, Short (2007) states that rhyme is usually reserved to refer to the final syllables at different lines of poetry when the vowel and syllable-final consonants – if there any – of the words in question. Thus, five can rhyme with live and alive.

Slightly looser connections that this (e.g. five/ fife) are usually half rhymes, and if the rhymes occur in positions other than at the end on a line; they are usually called internal rhyme.

Rhyme, like alliteration, attracts the reader's attention to something of importance in a poem.

3.1.3 Onomatopoeia:

This is the most obvious of all sounds effects. It is a term used for a word that sounds like its referents e.g. the words splash, bang, boom etc. The most examples are words which are the names given to actual sounds. For example, some bells ring, tinkle, clang; a cat mews, a lion roars and cars screech. There can also be a splash of water and a booming of a gun.

Onomatopoeia is not only iconic but also utilizes phonetic properties of language to set up resemblances so that sound is made to "express" or "enact" the meaning.

3.1.4 Alliteration:

It is a device used either for enhancing the musicality of the lines or drawing attention of the reader to the words of the text or both.

Alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant of stressed syllable while the other units can vary.

3.1.5 Assonance:

It serves the iconic function of enhancing the music of the lines or drawing the attention of the reader to the lines of the text, or both.

4. The lexical level:

The level of the lexicon comprises an important aspect of stylistic analysis. Here, the one studies the relation of the lexicon to the things or the concepts they designate. Although this is a complex problem, it may suffice here to agree with Ullman (1962) that the words and the things the word designate are in no way exactly equivalent.

The words can be at times more general in comparison with the precise physical nature of the objects, and at times more particular than the objects, for they may imply the attitude or emotional make-up of the speaker etc. In this way, either words may indicate a multiplicity of different things, or a multiplicity of words may point to the same thing.

The level of the lexicon here includes morphology as well, for it is basic for word formation. The important style feature at this level comprise repetition of the same lexical item, repetition of synonyms, repetition of the same word but with different grammatical function, neologisms, word-blends, words from dialects, and/or words from dead languages (archaism) etc.

4.1 Repetition of the same lexical item:

Such repetitions generally function to depict a state of great emotional excitement or stress and emphasis. Consider the following examples:

My daughter! O my ducat! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats. (W. Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*, II, VIII, 15-16).

In the above examples, the words daughter, ducats and Christian are repeated within the same utterance.

4.2 Repetition of synonyms:

The repetition of synonyms generally functions not only to lay emphasis but also to enlarge the semantic domain of reference. Consider the following:

But wherefore let we then our faithful friends, associates and copartners of our loss.
Lye thus astonish on the oblivion pool. (J. Milton: Paradise Lost II, 264-66)

In the above example, the synonyms used are <u>friends</u>, <u>associate</u> and <u>copartners</u>.

Their use signifies that the followers of Satan in Hell are a united lot that they are bound together not only by the close bonds of friendship but also by the bonds of co-operation and common suffering.

4.3 Repetition of the same word but with a different grammatical function:

Such repetition function to attract attention to the message. Consider, for instance, the following lines:

I am looped in the loops of her hair. (W.B. Yeats: Brown Penny, 8).

And mark in every face I meet Marks of weakness, marks of woe. (W. Blake: London, 3-4).

In the above examples, the words <u>looped</u> and <u>mark</u> respectively are used as verbs and then the words <u>loops</u> and <u>marks</u> are used as nouns.

5. The syntactic level:

Broadly speaking, syntax is not only the study of the interrelationships between the elements comprising sentence structure, but also of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequences. In any other literary text, one may study the arrangement of elements comprising a literary sentence. In the current study scheme, syntax is one of the linguistic organization like that of phonology, lexicon etc. at this level, like any other level of language description, significant statements of meaning can be made based on the observation of the choices that a writer has made. In stylistics, analysis of the syntactic features of a text should include the description of the group, the clause and the sentence. In addition to that, various kinds of syntactic structures can be seen to concertize signs differently. Some of the major types of syntactic structures are based on parallel or deviant.

6. The semantic level:

Semantics as a branch of linguistics studies the meaning in any language. In literary style, language exhibits meaningfulness in an interaction of semantics with the levels of phonology, lexicon, syntax etc. however, semantics contributes substantially towards stylization. Any discussion of the semantics features of literary style implies a discussion of the nature of semantics in literary texts.

Leech (1974: 10-27) has mentioned seven types of meanings. He considered the logical or conceptual meanings as a class by itself, while he lumped the remaining six-viz, connotative, stylistic, affective, reflected, collocative and thematic meanings into the second class. Accordingly, Leech has made an important distinction between two types of meanings: (i) conceptual meaning, which is referential and denotative and is tired down to the grammatical structure of a sentence, and (ii) the broadly 'stylistic' or 'connotative' meaning, which depending on the referential meaning, giving additional information in an act of utterance. While the first can be considered the direct or linguistic meaning, the second is the stylistic meaning, which is covert and implicit and is dependent on the literary contexts of usage.

The role of stylistics, in terms of semantics, is to explore sense relations, which means how meaning is created in literary discourse. Here, it is the figurative language, which is the mechanism for creating implied meaning in literature.

All figurative language is an instance of 'semantic deviation'. This, however, does not entail that all semantic deviation is figurative, for then it would be impossible to distinguish between sense and nonsense.

Figurative language operates at the level of form (as was the case with phonological or lexical or syntactic configurations) and at the level of meaning as well.

The semantic deviations viewed would be as in metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, simile, paradox and hyperbole.

In the light of the above given discussion, the present study attempts to stylistically study

Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" that is one of the best-known poems of W.B.Yeats. In writing this poem, Yeats was able to choose his words, which, to an appreciable extent, were the right ones to reveal or represent the emotion that was its purpose. Yeats's style reflects his sentiments in the poem. In order to analyze his poem stylistically, it is necessary to analyze it according to the following stylistic levels i.e. phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic.

7. Stylistic analysis levels of the poem:

7.1 The Phonological Level:

'The Second Coming' is written in Blank verse, free verse, which means that it has a consistent meter but a free rhyme scheme with 22 lines divided into two stanzas. The blank verse is to convey the didactic nature of the speaker as if he is adopting a religious voice to warn people to go back to their moral values and religious traditions. There is no end rhyme and no regular phonological rhythm.

The poem is in a rough iambic pentameter, but the meter is so loose, and the exceptions so frequent, that it actually seems closer to free verse with frequent heavy stresses (Waters, 2001).

In addition, for focus, there are other phonological elements such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia.

Alliteration: the essence of this device lies in the repetition of similar sounds, in particular consonant sounds (falcon, falconer, fall; while, worst, sight, strong, stong, sleep, sands; rough, round; blood, tide; darkness, drop; be, born).

Assonance: a partial or half rhyme much used in poetic language as an aspect of sound patterning (hand, sand; world, worst; shape, gaze, again; sleep, reel, beast; out, about, now; sight, thighs)

Onomatopoeia: the use of words whose sounds imitates the sound of thing being named. A notable use of onomatopoeia in the poem occurs in the following: ('Vexed' in line 20; 'slouches' in line 22).

7.2 The Lexical Level:

Yeats' word choice in the text reflects the disorder and the chaotic world in the 20th century. Every word in this poem is specifically chosen to elicit the feeling of eminent doom and gloom in the reader. The phrase 'The Second Coming' repeated twice in the poem. In addition, the verb 'turning' and then the noun 'desert' are repeated twice. The concrete nouns are falcon, 'falconer', 'lion', 'sun', 'body, 'head', 'man', 'birds', 'cradle', 'beast', 'sand', 'image' and 'thighs'. The abstract nouns consist of: 'gyre', 'anarchy', 'innocence', 'conviction', 'intensity', 'revelation', 'desert', 'shadows', 'darkness', 'sleep', nightmare', 'centuries', 'center', 'ceremony', 'world', 'sight' and 'gaze'.

There are some adjectives 'the best', 'the worst', 'full of', 'vast', 'pitiless', 'indignant', 'rough' and 'passionate'. There are two adverbs that used in the poem: 'surely' and 'hardly'.

In the use of verbs, the existential verb has been used ten times. The action verbs are 'turning', 'hear', 'hold', 'drowned', 'troubles', 'is moving', 'drops', 'born', 'fall', 'loosed' and 'come'. The stative verbs in the poem are 'verbs to be', 'know', 'vexed' and 'lack'.

Yeats used words such as 'blood-dimmed', 'anarchy', 'lack', 'worst', 'indignant', 'vexed' and 'nightmare' which reflect the negative thoughts of the state of the world.

7.3 The Syntactic Level:

At the level of syntax, the analysis of the poem reveals some significant features. The use of gerund in 'turning', 'ing' gives an open period, no limit for the corruption and the destruction. It is massive and continuous everywhere. The repetition of 'loosed' and 'turning', it adds more emphasis to the poet's description of the circumstances around him. Using the passive form 'is loosed', 'were vexed', it indicates the horror and secrecy of what is happening around. The repetition of some expressions as 'the second coming', such expression is used as a relief or a glimpse of hope that change is coming eventually.

The heavy use of noun phrases as 'the falcon', 'the blood', 'the darkness', 'the ceremony of innocence', such noun phrases establish visual images in the reader's minds about the difficult situation; this image is associated with the blood and darkness. The deliberate use of definite articles 'the' and the indefinite 'a' in limited cases. The poet uses 'the' intentionally by addressing the audience that are accustom to those images every day.

Finally, the poem consists of 13 sentences that are marked by certain repetitions. The expression 'is at hand' is repeated twice in the poem. The negation is repeated twice in lines 2, 3 and the remaining lines are affirmative. The main principal clause that is often repeated is 'is at hand' as well as the phrases 'the second coming'.

7.4 The Semantic Level:

The significant semantic features of style are the stylistic devices in the poem. The main employed devices are simile, metaphors, allusion, symbols and imagery. The similes 'blank and pitiless as the sun', reflects the vast indifferent universe and the loss of mercy and pity in the heart of people. Metaphors cover the poem, starting from its title until the end an all salvation idea. 'The Second Coming' as a tittle is a metaphor for the salvation that Yeats is calling for. 'The falcon cannot hear the falconer' is a metaphor describing the loss of control. 'The blood-dimmed tide is loosed', the purity of the souls has been corrupted by the destruction that accompanies chaos. 'And everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned', a metaphor show how the value of life, health of country and civilized order have died. 'The center cannot hold', this metaphor refers to one socio-religious theme i.e. society has lost order and in turn lost faith in God. The idea of illusion appears from the title and in the poem, which is the idea of the 'The Second Coming'

7.4.1 The use of symbols in the poem:

It is obvious that Yeats' language is very symbolic i.e. he portrays what he wants to say indirectly. The 'gyre' symbolizes the collapse of the authority and society as well. Another crucial symbol is the falcon and the falconer one. The 'falcon' represents the people, the society or the age. However, the 'falconer' represents the core of the moral sense, which binds people.

The 'sphinx' in the second stanza represents punishment of humans who leave their religion and back to God just in their hopeless case. 'Blood-dimmed tide' is a symbol for war that is WWI. The last symbol is 'the rocking cradle' that is a symbol of the cradle of Christ at the nativity.

7.4.2 Imagery:

The last element in the semantic level is imagery. Imagery is amazingly applied in the poem. The opening of the 'widening gyre' brings forth the idea that a vortex of some type, a black hole has descended upon humanity. This lack of clarity and uncertainty is why the normally reliable 'falcon cannot hear the falcon'. The idea of the center being unable to hold a 'things fall apart' is another symbolic image, which brings the idea that the political and moral structure that guided people has been broken. Finally, the image of the beast that symbolizes the evil or antichrist is very vivid.

8. Conclusion:

A language-based approach is necessary for the study of literature since literature exists only in and through language. The viable linguistic approach has to be based on the concept of language as communication since it has to deal with the ways of creating meaning in language. The stylistic analysis of 'The Second Coming' composed by W.B. Yeats reveals the following stylistic significances at different levels of language organization. The phonological level, the lexical level, the syntactic level and lastly the semantic level can get the whole idea the above levels carry within. It is the collapse of the world by 'The Second Coming'. It could be another thing than the effect of the wars Yeats lived in; something personal in his life stimulated him to write such negative and bitter poem.

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