

## 512 B- English Language Teaching and Stylistics

### Unit IV, No-120 (ELT IV: Stylistics)

#### Stylistic Analysis: A Sample

##### Introduction

Stylistics is an attempt to interpret texts systematically and objectively by looking into the language and by application of linguistic principles to do so. It is a major branch of Applied Linguistics and can be used to gain insight into the domain of not only literature but advertisement, films and other arts. According to Misra: “Lexically speaking, stylistics is the systematic study of style used in Language (5)

While writing or talking we deliberately choose from the available codes of a particular language and thereby communicate in a unique manner. Each of us convey a message in a way which is different from others. We select from an array of syntactical and lexical possibilities. In this sense all of us have a ‘style’ of writing or speaking.

However literary critics are generally interested in exercising of this choice of Linguistic codes in the domain of literary texts and the kind of meaning that such a liberty gives rise to. In, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (1975), H.G. Widdowson defines Stylistics as the ‘study to literary discourse from a linguistic orientation.’ Etymologically the ‘style’ component of Stylistics comes from ‘literary criticism’ and the ‘istics’ component comes from Linguistics. According to Jan Mucarovsky, style is an ‘aesthetically purposeful distortion of language.’ Thought in this manner then, one of the objectives of Stylistics is also to discover how such distortions or unusual combinations of linguistic codes create an exclusive meaning or conceptual novelty in literary texts.

Continuing the trend set by Practical Criticism and New Criticism in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Stylistics approaches objectivity in analyzing and interpreting literary texts. It tries to harness the patterns of ‘defamiliarization’ (Viktor Shklovsky) in a text by a close study of the text itself. There is a belief that the text itself is sacrosanct and complete in itself. Therefore any sort of background study is discouraged. The investigation of the text is carried out at the level of its various components, beginning with sound (Phonetics and phonology) and gradually ascending to the level of words (Morphology), phrases and sentences (Syntax) and ultimately meaning (Semantics).

Usually the author or the poet draws the readers’ attention to the literary text which is self-reflexive. This is done by bringing into prominence or foregrounding (from the Czech term ‘actualisace’ used by Prague school of Linguists in 1930s) the linguistic features. For the readers at first these experiments appear as deviations or irregularities at the levels of spellings, punctuation, words, sentences and larger chunks of the writing- Sometimes, instead of employing deviations, the poet exercises over or excessive regularities creating a cohesive pattern of unusual thoughts. Stylistic analysis thus, attempts to identify and understand in a systematic way the foregrounded features and the underlying semantic implications in the interplay of codes of language.

## Sample Analysis

### Sample Text:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,  
And after many a summer dies the swan,  
Me only cruel immortality  
Consumes

### General Interpretation:

The speaker laments his suffering caused by the curse of immortality and compares his miserable state with the good fortune of other elements of nature. Everything on earth including humans is blessed to be born, live the stipulated years and die when their allotted time ends on the earth.

### Foregrounded devices:

#### 1. Orthographic / graphological deviation:

i) Spellings- 2<sup>nd</sup> line- 'burthen', the spelling is a variation of the modern word 'burden'. 'Burthen' is archaic and thereby lends a primitive charm to the excerpt.

ii) Punctuation- The use of excessive commas(,) in a single long sentence which is inconclusive with no full stop (.) or commas in the last two lines.

The commas in the first four lines including the one in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> line create an effect of mounting anxiety as well as emphasis. The specific and halting nature of complaint with references to things in particular builds cohesion in the text. The absence of punctuation in the last two lines indicates a sense of despair coupled with a sense of eternal suffering.

#### 2. Morphological deviation and lexical grouping:

All words in the text are monosyllabic or di-syllabic. This essentially supports the simplicity in the life cycle of the natural elements. As opposed to this, a single word – 'immortality' in the 5<sup>th</sup> line is polysyllabic-this hints at the complexity of living that it entails for the speaker.

The text offers no morphological deviation but lends itself to interesting lexical groupings.

Nouns – Group 1- woods, vapours , ground, man, field, summer, swan [obviously indicating that the domain of discourse is nature]

Group2- Me, immortality [unknown persona and a domain of abstraction]. The groups seem to be in conflict- Nature vs Immortality/me.

Verbs – Group 1- decay, fall, weep, tills, lies, comes, dies – [the verbs are a mixture of kinetic and static ones indicating natural movements]

Group 2- Consumes- [a kinetic verb which rings artificial and aggressive in its slow , laborious and painful protraction of suffering.]

Articles- ‘The’ in all the four lines, ‘a’ in the 4th line. The repetition of definite article implies an emphasis on the particular elements of nature-also ‘the’ indicates the entire species or class rather than any individual. This effectively means every one of the species has to die.

Preposition- The long preposition ‘beneath’(line 3) shows the distance between life and death.

Conjunction- the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ is repetitively used in lines 1,2,3 and 4 to give a continuous and linking effect. The sameness of the fate in case of all elements of nature is hinted at. By referring anaphorically and cataphorically, the conjunction provides cohesion to the text.

3. Syntactical deviation- The text is one long sentence without punctuation mark at the end establishing and reiterating that immortality has no pause or end.

Line 4 is an example of poetic inversion for the sake of effect: ‘And after many a summer dies the swan’

Line 5 is syntactically an important line, where the object (‘me’) is brought to the fore for the sake of emphasis and singles out thereby, aberration in the natural process. The passive form of the sentence would have been –‘Only I am consumed by immortality’. The form of personal pronoun is also changed from ‘I’ to ‘Me’ to emphasize the self.

Line 6- The placement of the word ‘consumes’ in isolation ( it is actually a part of a long sentence) reiterates the slow yet cruel power of immortality to devour the identity of ‘me’.

#### 4. Repetitions :

- i) Lexical Repetition: The 1<sup>st</sup> line is an instance of lexical repetition creating an emphatic effect- ‘The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,’

- ii) Syntactical Repetition: Throughout the text is in the active voice, following the repetitive pattern of ,Subject+ Verb, Subject+Verb+ compliment or Subject+ Verb followed by coordinating clauses.

It is only in the last two lines that the pattern is inverted. The sentences in the active voice reveal the ordinary events of the everyday natural world, but the last two lines invert the sequence, thus depicting the extraordinariness of the never-ending catastrophe which compels the speaker to continue living in spite of his wishes.

- iii) Phonological repetition: the repetition of soft vowels like u,u:, i , i: , (wood, weep, decay, tills etc) and diphthongs like ei, au, ai (decay, ground, lies etc) creates a soothing and lulling effect of the natural order of things. This also gives the necessary poetic effect.

#### 5. Figures of Speech:

Personification: a) An element of nature is bestowed with human quality- line 2-‘vapours weep’.

b) An abstract concept is given human attribute- line 5 &6 –‘immortality consumes’

These lead to conceptual deviation.

#### 6. Scansion:

The passage is in Iambic metre. However the 1<sup>st</sup> foot of the 5<sup>th</sup> line is a spondee i.e. of two consecutive stressed syllables, since there is an intense emphasis on ‘me only’ .

**[ Note: You need to identify and explain only those foregrounding devices that are found in the passage. Those not found, need not be mentioned.]**

#### References:

1. Brad ford , Richard . *Stylistics*. London :Routledge , 1997.
  2. Widdowson , H.G. *Practical Stylistics* . London: O.U.P, 2000.
  3. Leech N. Geoffrey . *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. New York : Longman Group Ltd :1969.
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  5. Misra, Partha sarathi . *An introduction to Stylistics* . New Delhi :Blackswan Private Limited, 2009
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