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

Muhammad Aqeel¹, M Amin Sajid², Muhammad Irfan Shakir³, Tanveer Ahmed⁴
Department of Linguistics, Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract: The main purpose of this article is to analyze the stylistic devices and techniques of the poem, at syntactical, lexical, graphological, morphological, phonological and semantical level. It is helpful for better understanding of the poem. In this symbolic poem, Robert Frost encompasses his life’s achievements and his hard work by using the figurative tool (symbol, metaphor and personification). The poem is related to the appreciation of the beauty and wondering of nature. The poet is so much excited with the sight of snow falling in the fields that he stay to enjoy it. After a while, he thinks that he should move on due to his responsibilities and “miles to go before I sleep”.

Key Words: Applied Linguistics, Stylistics, Understanding Literary Devices and Figure of speech in Literature.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Rao Muhammad Aqeel, “Style is the particularly way in which a work is written. It consist of various linguistic features and devices common to language and which are chosen and presented by the author in his individual manner”. Havelock Ellis, The Art of writing (The Dance of Life, London 1955, p-163) is of the view that “Style, indeed is not really a gramend but as Gourmont said, the very thought itself, It is the miraculous transubstution of a spiritual body, given to us in the only form in which we may receive and absorb that body…”

1.2 STYLISTICS

Stylistics is the scientifically the study of style. Different scholars define style in his/her own way at different time. According to Buffon “Style is the man himself”. According to Widdsowson 1975,p.3) “Stylistics is the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation”. In Stylistics point of view, Stylistics is the systematic study of style, ranging from features of language which can be identified with an individual to those which identify major occupation groups and those characteristic of speakers and writers in particular situations (for example, parliamentary style).
1.3 LEVELS

1.3.1 GRAPOHOLOGY According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, “the study of handwriting, for example as a way of learning more about somebody’s character”. Simply we say that graphology deals with writing system eg: uses of capitalization, punctuation marks, bold italics etc.

1.3.2 PHONOLOGY According to Bloomfield, “Phonology is the organization of sounds into patterns”. In more simple sense, “the study of sounds in a language is called phonology”. Phonology is the study of vocal sounds and sound changes, phonemes and their variants in a particular language. What is sound? How and where it is produced from? How it received by the ears? How and why is one sound different from the other? ___ questions these are the subject-matter of phonology. Every language makes its own selection of sounds and organizes them into characteristic patterns. This selection of sounds and their agreement into patterns constitute the phonology of the language.

1.3.3 MORPHOLOGY Mark and Kirsten 2005, p.1) said that, “Morphology refers to the meantal system involved in word formation and how they are formed”. Bloomfield calls it the study of the constructions in which bound forms appear among the constituents.

1.3.4 SYNTAX The word syntax is derived from a Greek word meaning ‘ordering together’, ‘systematic arrangement’, or ‘putting together’. It is the study of sentence building, of the ways in which words are arranged together in order to make larger units. A syntactic analysis is generally concerned with sentences and the constituents of sentences. Briefly speaking, syntax is the grammar of sentences; it is the science of sentence construction. ‘It is perhaps best to define syntax negatively, as the study of the combinations of such morphemes as are not bound on the levels of either inflection or derivation’ (Robert A Hall, 1969 : 91). By this definition, most of the elements involved in syntactical combinations will indeed be free, but some will be pharasally or clausally bound.

1.3.5 SEMANTICs According to David Crystal, “Semantics is the study of meaning”. Semantics is also called “semasiology”. It is the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning. It deals with the study of meaning, changes in meaning, and the principles that govern the relationship between sentences or words and their meanings.

1.4 DEVICES IN STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

1.4.1 Graphological Devices include

1 **Punctuation:** Punctuation marks are used in writing that divide sentences and phrases.
2 **Paragraphing:** Paragraph contain at least one sentence or more than one sentences, usually consist on lines. The first sentence of each paragraph starts on a new line containing capital letter of the first word of the sentence.

1.4.2 **Phonological Devices Include:**

3 **Rhyme Elements** (It consist on Rhythm, Rhyme (masculine, feminine and triple), Internal Rhyme, Rhyme Royal, End Rhyme)

   a. **Rhythm** A regular pattern of sound, time intervals, or events occurring in writing.

   b. **Rhyme:** A word that has the same sound or ends with the same sound as another word.

   c. **Internal Rhyme:** Rhyme that occurs within a single line of verse.

4 **Alliteration:** The repetition of initial consonant sounds. Usually poets use this device to imitate sounds. Specially to create musical effects.

5 **Consonance:** A near rhyme that consists of identical consonant sounds proceeded by different vowel sounds such as with “stuff and off”.

6 **Assonance:** The repetition of similar vowel sounds in poetry.

7 **Onomatopoeia:** Onomatopoeia is the use of words that imitate sounds.

1.4.3 **Morphological Devices Includes**

8 **Affixes:** If we put morphemes bfore the words; which also forms new words, this procedure is called affixcation. It further Divide:

   a. **Prefixes:** The process of putting morphemes to change its meaning, to the beginning of a word such as unhappy.

   b. **Suffixes:** The process of putting morphemes to make another word, at the end of the word, such as quickly.

1.4.4 **Lexical Devices include**

9 **Ellipsis:** Ellipsis is very similar to subsitution, it is omission of noun, verb, or a clause, on the assumption that it is understand from the linguistic context for example:

   A: Where are you doing?

   B: To town.
Anaphoric: It occurs when the writer refers back to someone or something that has been previously identified, to avoid repetition. For example; ‘the taxi driver’ with the pronoun ‘he’ or ‘two girls’ with ‘they’.

Cataphoric: It is the opposite of anaphoric.

Exophoric: In contrast to anaphora and cataphora, eg; rather than introduce a concept, the writer refer to it by a genetic word, such as “everything”.

Semantic Devices include

Symbolism A stylistic device/term used in literature, specially used in poetry, when an object is used to represent something abstract.

INTRODUCTION OF THE POEM

The Poem is written by Robert Lee Frost. It moves us as unobtrusively as it conveys to us the profoundity of its thought. “The lyric”, syas William O Connor, “like Milton’s sonnett On His Blindness and Arnold’s Dove Beach, seems to have established itself permanently in anthologies and textbooks of poetry. It is one of Frost’s best known poems, and we might discover, if we had the means, that it is one of the best poems of the twentieth century.” It is this lyric that appealed to the late Pandit Jawhar Lal Nehru and guided and inspired him to be constantly on the move, adhering to his duties.

The poem presents nature as standard of beauty. But no words to convey the beauty of nature have been used except the word ‘lovely’. This word simply states the whole idea of the poem. Then the idea of darkness is also very important. It is mentioned twice in the poem. And this highlight the connection between beauty and mystery. Some reviewer associates the words ‘darkness and sleep’ which the desire for death. But the poet discounts darkness by using the word ‘light’.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE POET

Robert Frost was a famous American Poet, born in San Francisco on March 26,1874. He saw an internationally acclaimed poet who won the famous Pulitzer prize for four times. His poetry focused on themes of nature in which he embedded the contemporary and philosophical issues of his time. His style of poetry is very simple and easy and straightforward. He died in boston on January 29, 1963.

The poem points out at the attractive and exciting beauty of nature and simultaneously thinks at the need to carry on with the daily affairs of life. The world of fantasy is very inviting. But one must maintain balance between the world of reality and imagination.
2.3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides stylistic analysis of the poem. The poem consists of four stanzas, each with four lines. The poem is written in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme of first stanza is aaba. Unstressed syllable is represented by \{x\} and stressed syllable is represented by \{ / \}. Iambic pattern is \{ x / \}

Whose woods these are I think I know. \hspace{1cm} A \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
His house is in the village though; \hspace{1cm} B \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
He will not see me stopping here \hspace{1cm} B \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
To watch his woods fill up with snow. \hspace{1cm} A \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\

The poem portrays the natural scene of frozen lake and falling of snow on the trees, woods and houses. The poet listen the inaudible sound of the wind falling on the woods. These dark woods symbolize death- the ultimate reality.

My little horse must think it queer \hspace{1cm} B \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
To stop without a farmhouse near \hspace{1cm} B \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
Between the woods and frozen lake \hspace{1cm} C \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
The darkest evening of the year. \hspace{1cm} B \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\

In these lines, the horse of the poet stands the role of a foil and stayed between the woods and frozen lake for a little bit. He asked from his horse whether they stop there, in the cold weather, the darkest and the longest night of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake \hspace{1cm} C \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
To ask if there is some mistake. \hspace{1cm} C \\
\hspace{0.5cm} x/ x/ x/ x/ \\
The only other sound's the sweep \hspace{1cm} D
Of easy wind and downy flake.  

In this stanza the horse acts, reinforcing the speaker’s question. This is an evidence of a sort of telepathy between the speaker and his horse which could not have been possible without perfect mutual understanding and an excellent rapport between the two.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  

But I have promises to keep,  

And miles to go before I sleep,  

And miles to go before I sleep.

This is the final stanza of this short poem. It begins with a comment on the scene. Giving us ‘very subjective comment, the speaker says the woods are lovely dark and deep’. The last two lines are famous. They are repeated. The first line could refer to the journey that he must make while the second could refer to time. Here time indicates him what he/she has do in his/her life and what is going to be done. This second line of the poem haunted him/her throughout the poem. This is the most important and interpreted line of all the stanzas of the poem.

4 ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION

FIGURES OF SPEECH

ALLITERATION

In this poem, alliteration is found in line no 2,3,4, and 9. (His - House, He – here, watch – with, and He – his – harness)

HYPERBOLE

In this poem, hyperbole is found in line no 4.

METAPHOR
Metaphor is found in this poem line no 9-10.

PERSONIFICATION

Personification is found in line no 5 in this poem.

RHYME SCHEME

First stanza, aaba Second stanza, bbcb Third stanza, ccdc Fourth stanza, dddd In each line the poet use four feet in such a way that each fot has an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. And without any doubt, we say that, the poem is written in iambic tetrameter.

INTERNAL RHYME

This is found in the poem in line no 3,5,6,7 and 8. {He see me (line 3), little it (line 5), without house (line 6), Between frozen (line 7) and evening year (line 8).

This is a lyric poem. It was first published in the New Republic on March 7, 1923, and republished later entitled New Hampshire. This collection won Frost a Pulitzer Prize. The poet realizes that his responsibility/duty are more important than his desire for rest. And the last line of the poem lies in the darker images that are hinted at throughout the poem. To conclude we say that most of the words are monosyllables and direct narrative. And the poem is tightly constructed, imbued with multiple layers of meaning, and theoretically important in its treatment.

SYMBOISM

In this poem, the poet uses symbolism to show the co-relation between the woods and village with Heaven in line no 1 and line no 2. Further without any doubt, Mythological Symbolism is also seen clearly in line no 7, when the speaker talks about the lake. It is a reference to Hell in Norse Mythology. And this is located in the frozen region of Niflehiem.

POETIC FORM AND STRUCTURE

The form of the poem is completely poetic. It consists of four stanzas containing four line of each stanza written in iambic pentameter.

3.1 FINDINGS

The poem presents one person’s momentary encounter with nature. The poet use simple language in simple way about the woods, fields snow and nature. Through this poem the writer describe the lovely scene of nature for enjoyment, but the last line of the poem “And miles to go before I sleep” remember him that he yet to be traveled before he can rest for the night. Here
night mean his last residence ie; eternal place, the place after death. So, the writer choose simple
diction but his theme is very much deeper.

5. CONCLUSION

The rhythm of the poem, the word music of stanza three, the expressive phrases of stanza four,
the distinctive rhymes scheme of the poem, the efficacy of the repetitions of the last line continue
to make it one of those poems that combine popular appeal with true artistic merit. These
qualities make the poem get a certain place in honoured, treasured lyrics of English.

The poem points out the attractive, charming, and exciting scene of nature and beauty. And also
carry on with the routine affairs of life. The world is very fantastic and inviting. But the theme of
the poem gives us moral lesson that we must maintain balance between the world of reality and
imagination. After reading the poem, we get ready to face the challenges of life. And this is the
main theme of the poem.

5.1 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATURE

The ample of this study is to explore broad avenue and open ways in which language has been
used in the poem. The uses of effects and the stylistics elements and figurative devices regards
the poem will be looked at in the analysis for the readers own satisfaction.

5.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study is based on stylistic and scientific analysis on linguistic levels for example;
phonology, morphology, graphology, syntax and semantics. This stylistic and scientific analysis
will be elpgul for the readers, specially poetry readers, about to know and understand the literary
devices and figure of speech used by the poets in their own way to enahnce their ideas through
poetry. And also helpful for further researchers of this field.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

Due to shortage of time the analysis of the poem is deal properly short. And the material is not as
much as it should be because the researcher agree that though it is a short poemsuffused with
meaning, open to varied interpretaions.

REFERENCES

LEECH (G.N.) and SHORT (M.H.):1981, Style in Fiction (London: Longman)


David Crystal, Encyclopedia of Linguistics

APPENDIX

Stopping by Woods On A Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.  
My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.  
He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.  
The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.