THE REPRESENTATION OF NATURE THROUGH STYLISTICS: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S "TINTERN ABBEY"

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper is a stylistic study of William Wordsworth's natural poem "Tintern Abbey" which was first published in July 13, 1798 in his collection of poems *Lyrical Ballads*. In this research work, we are going to discuss the major theme of the poem which is nature and country landscape and how the poet does celebrate virgin nature in a very evocative way. This paper is far more concerned with Stylistics which is a branch of Applied Linguistics that links literary criticism to linguistics. As a matter of fact, our attempt in this paper is to approach Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey" from multiple stylistic perspectives, in another way, to focus on the different linguistic features used by the poet when describing natural scenes in his poem. The main purposes of this research work are first, to externalize the different elements of style used by the poet to express nature in "Tintern Abbey", then, to see whether the visualization of nature is apparent through the use of linguistic features (common nouns, proper nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs) and finally to try to answer the research question which is to what extent are natural landscapes stylistically portrayed in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"?

Keywords: William Wordsworth, Stylistics, "Tintern Abbey", Nature.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of this research paper was initially inspired from a statement that was made by Wordsworth (1800) in his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads"* in which we can notice that he escaped some poetic traditions and brought new perspectives to the English poetry: "[...] in these Poems I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men." (p. 11). In his poetic theory, Wordsworth assumes that the language of poetry should be near to the human heart; it should not be complicated nor elevated i.e. the pure language of ordinary men. In addition to that, he emphasizes the importance of the poet's role to interpret everything that happens in real life; the poet is a poet just because his feelings allow him to enter into the souls of others and to translate passions from nature into words that please the ears. As a matter of fact, Wordsworth uses a language that is plain and straightforward in a way that it deeply reflects the simplicity of his chosen themes. Different linguistic features of his style will be analyzed throughout this paper in order to see how the theme of nature and landscapes is stylistically portrayed in his poem "Tintern Abbey".

NATURE AND LANDSCAPES IN "TINTERN ABBEY"

In his Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth announces at the very beginning that the materials of a poem must be found in human real life. Landscapes, nature, lakes, love, happiness and childhood memories are all useful themes for the poet because they are part of nature and of "humble" and "rustic" human life. Wordsworth claims that peasants and ordinary people who belong to simple rural communities are purer and closer to the natural

world than people who live in cities, corrupted as they are, by their empty urban life and its obscurity.

Thus, Wordsworth's main interest in his poems is the natural world; he simply "belongs to the Romantic Movement, which attempted to express feelings and arguments that man's happiness lies in his maintenance of organic links with nature." (Arab, 2011, p. 230). He believes that nature is a healing power and it provides a good influence on the human mind. All the manifestations of the natural world, from the highest mountain to the smallest flower, produce elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in people who observe these natural elements. As he is a worshipper of nature, Wordsworth describes landscapes in all his poems and "Tintern Abbey" is one of them. It is fully loaded with descriptions of the natural surroundings of that site.

In fact, in "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth deals with different major themes like memory, experience, and family love but he always insists on the traditional theme of nature and country landscape; trying to link nature to every treated theme. As we can see in the beginning of the poem he connects his past memories to the natural surroundings of that place when he says:

> Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters! And again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a sweet inland murmur.- Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> Which on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (1. 1-8)

Furthermore, we can say that "Tintern Abbey" is a nature poem that is full of splendid descriptions of landscapes and nature which provide relief and serenity to the poet. Wordsworth really sees nature as a source of regeneration and rebirth. For him, nature has a good influence on the human mind and helps the individual to reach intellectual and spiritual maturity. The poet in "Tintern Abbey" is tired of living in cities; this is why he escapes to a more peaceful and quiet world, in search for remedy in Mother Nature.

DEFINITION OF STYLISTICS

In this research paper we will be using Stylistics as a tool to investigate and analyze our text which is the poem "Tintern Abbey". We define Stylistics as an approach that is mainly concerned with the theoretical explanations for the linguistic choices that writers and poets make. It concentrates on studying texts rather than authors and readers. Geoffrey Leech (1969) defines Stylistics in these few introductory lines of his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*: " I mean by 'Stylistics' simply the study of literary style, or, to make matters even more explicit, the study of the use of language in literature. When we discuss 'style', we often have in mind the language of a particular writer, a particular period, a particular genre, even a particular poem." (p. I). He provides the reader with a detailed work in which he offers a general scheme for the discussion of the language of literary texts and a framework of reference on linguistic matters.

Furthermore, Stylistics is considered to be a useful tool for analysing poetry and specifically poetic language used by poets. Its aim is to explore linguistic features used by a poet in his

verses; how does this poet choose one word over another? How does he use one device and neglect another? Stylistics can answer all these questions by providing different analytical approaches. Major leaders of this discipline are: Roman Jackobson, Richard Bradford, Mick Short, Paul Simpson, Geoffrey N. Leech and G.H Widdowson. They have all contributed in developing important theories and practical approaches in this field of research.

Moreover, in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary terms* (2006), the author points out to "Quantitative Stylistics" in which counting different categories of words when analyzing authors' styles, is a very important aspect. It is also necessary to find out about the writer's psyche and interest and confirm our perceptions:

> A particular diction may be prominent, or a persistent rhythm, or a certain reiterated syntactic organization. This density in one part of the language may not catch our conscious attention, but it causes a certain stylistic impression in us: we feel that the text belongs to a familiar authorial or cultural milieu. 'Density' suggests counting, and indeed stylistics (unlike linguistics) is implicitly quantitative, and is sometimes explicitly so. Extreme instances of quantitative stylistics would be G. U. Yule's statistical work on literary vocabulary, and the more recent computer-assisted studies in authorship-detection. Here counting is directed to discovery; usually we count to confirm hypotheses – that there *is* a syntactic or lexical tendency which explains our perception of a peculiar period-style, for instance. (Peter Childs, p. 229)

Therefore, "Quantitative Stylistics" may be useful and practical in our present work since we are going to analyze and at the same time count the words that are related to nature and landscapes.

FORM AND POETIC DEVICES IN "TINTERN ABBEY"

"Tintern Abbey" is a poem of 159 blank verse lines broken into five verse paragraphs. When reading the poem, it seems that it is not written in verse because there are no strict end-rhymes and the structure of sentences does not fit that of lines. This may exemplify what Wordsworth (1802) argues in his 'Preface':

> […]it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written. (p. 10).

Wordsworth wants to escape those regular metrical rules. He does not want his verse to be obvious; this is why his "Tintern Abbey" is written in blank verse, i.e. unrhymed iambic pentameter. An iambic is a set of two syllables whose patterns go "Da-DUM" and pentameter means that there are five iambs per line as in: "The day is come when I a-gain re-pose" (1. 9). This form is probably chosen to fit the poet's aimed simplicity and to make the poem sound natural and conversational.

Instead of an obvious rhyme scheme, Wordsworth works many more subtle echoes into his line endings in the first part of his poem: "springs ... cliffs" (3-5), and in the second part: "sweet ... heart" (29-30), "behold ... world", "world ... mood ... blood" (39-42-46). In addition

to that, in few places, separated by one or more lines, there are full rhymes and the same words' endings: "thee ... thee", "hour ... power", "decay ... betray", "lead ... feed", "gleams ... stream".

"Tintern Abbey" in which we consider the existence of three mid-line breaks i.e. between the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next one when the poet says, "Though absent long, (2. 1)/ If this (3. 1)/ Nor, perchance, (4. 1)". We can say that the meter is not interrupted; each of these three lines is an iambic pentameter (five iambs), but the sentence break is signaled not only by a period, but also by an extra vertical space between the two parts of the line, which marks an important turn of thought in the poem as we can see in the lines below:

> Nor, perchance,
> If I were not thus taught, should I the more
> Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
> For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
> Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
> My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights. (4. 1-8)

Another point that attracts the reader's attention in "Tintern Abbey" especially the first section, is that it is very remarkable that the poet has used at least a word which begins with 'S' in almost each line: "summers", "spring", "sweet", "steep", "secluded scene", "seclusion", "sky", "simple", "smoke", "sent up", "silence", "some", "seem", "sits". This frequent use of the "S" sound may reflect the poet's mood, an atmosphere full of serenity and peacefulness, while writing his poem.

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF WORDS CONNECTED TO NATURE IN "TINTERN ABBEY"

As we have mentioned before, Wordsworth's main concern is to connect his thoughts to nature and to emphasise the importance of natural landscapes in shaping the human mind and widening its imagination. In this part of our work we are going to rely on "Quantitative Stylistics" in order to show to what extent nature is visualised in "Tintern Abbey" and what are the different word categories that Wordsworth uses to tackle the theme of nature and to externalize the beauty of the landscapes around him and bringing it into his poem. To be more precise and concise, we will be using two practical tables that distinguish the different natural words that have been used in "Tintern Abbey". In addition, throughout this section we will provide details and pertinent justifications of the use of these words.

Common nouns	Collective nouns	Proper nouns	Pronouns
Summers, Winters, waters, mountain-springs, cliffs (2), scene, seclusion, landscape (4), quiet, sky, day, sycamore, cottage-ground, orchard-tufts, fruits, woods (6), hedge-rows, farms, trees, hermit's cave, fire, shapes, day-light, wanderer, hills, roe, mountains (5), sides, rivers (2), streams, nature (5), man (2), movements, cataract, rock, colours, forms (2), lights (2) , suns, ocean, air, things, objects, the meadows, banks (2), winds, stream.	The world (3) The season Earth The moon	Sylvan Wye Nature (2) My dearest Friend, My dear, dear Friend	These, thy, her, she

In the table above, we have extracted the common nouns, the collective nouns, the proper nouns and the pronouns that are related to nature in "Tintern Abbey"[1]. Wordsworth uses a great deal of nouns and in his poem. "Woods", "Nature", "Mountains" and "Landscapes" are the most repeated nouns throughout the poem. For their importance, Wordsworth mentions them four to six times; they are very reflective and can help the reader to know the primary concern of the poet. We also find other common nouns that describe the natural scene in the poem such as: waters, seclusion, winds, stream...etc. In the category of the collective nouns though there is only a short list of them but they seem to be highly symbolic. Wordsworth wants his poetry to be universal for this reason the noun "World" is repeated three times in the poem; we have also the noun "Earth". He relates nature to everything happening in the world and sees in it the healing power of all the human minds. For the proper nouns we have only few but very significant like the noun "Nature" which is written with a capital letter; Wordsworth personifies nature as if it is his friend, his guide, the guardian of his heart and the anchor of his purest thoughts. Finally, for the pronouns we can see that the poet uses the personal pronoun "She" to replace nature which might show that for Wordsworth, nature is not just an object, indeed it is the main source of pure thoughts, inspiration, sweet memories, healthy emotions and a good soul.

Verbs related to nature	Verbs related to the poet	Adjectives	Adverbs
Rolling, lose, led, flying, haunted, did betray, lead, inform, shine, to blow.	Hear (2), behold (2), repose, see, felt, trust, stand (2), dare, hope, came (2), turned, learned, recognize, were not taught, catch, make, remember.	Long (2), sweet (2), inland, steep (2), lofty (3), wild (3), secluded, deep (3), dark, unripe, green (5), simple, little, sportive, pastoral (2), uncertain, houseless, joyless, glad, animal, tall, gloomy, thoughtless, sad, round, living, blue, moral, fair, shooting, lovely, healing, delightful, dear.	Hardly, wild, very, alone, lonely (2),

In the second table we can say, it is obvious that Wordsworth uses a large number of adjectives in "Tintern Abbey" in view of the fact that he needs them in his pertinent descriptions of the natural landscape around him. In addition, even though he describes natural objects such as the river, the air, the stream the poet uses adjectives of emotions rather than adjectives for abstract. In fact, the poet's need of these adjectives is evidently linked to his profound belief that everything around him belonging to Mother Nature is full of life. On the other hand, the poet employs a list of verbs related to nature in a very metaphorical way "betray, inform, and lead"; they are verbs which are associated to humans and not nature and concrete items. Besides, Wordsworth concentrated more on using verbs that describes his personal relationship with nature. These verbs are extremely evocative since they are abstract verbs such as hear, feel, and remember. At last, in "Tintern Abbey", the adverbs were used to intensify verbs but as we can see, not in many places.

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[1] The number put between brackets after each word in the tables, refers to how many times these words were used throughout the poem.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to what has been said throughout this research paper, one can say that Wordsworth has merely depicted the beauty of nature and landscape in "Tintern Abbey". He is totally convinced that only in nature that peace and tranquillity are to be found and only by recalling sweet past memories that one can survive longer in happiness. This research study has also revealed that Wordsworth uses different word categories in order to express nature; common nouns and adjectives related to nature are the most dominated category in the poem. Wordsworth employs them to describe his surroundings and to show the importance of nature on the human imagination and how he considers it a healing power of the minds. He put emphasis on the relationship between the beauty of landscapes and the human way of thinking and how this last can act as a worthy source of delight and inspiration. Thus, in "Tintern Abbey" the poet has reached his main purpose which is to transform his own imagination to that of his readers; when reading the poem one can feel that everything in it is real. Hence, it is noticeable that the visualisation of nature in "Tintern Abbey" is really apparent through the use of linguistic features.

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