Diction and Foregrounding in Dylan Thomas' "And Death Shall Have No Dominion": A Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

There are various approaches to study literature from numerous perspectives. Considering analyzing poetry from stylistic viewpoint is a new trend in this context. For this reason, the aim of the present study is to seek the significance and relevance of stylistic approach to explicate and analyze poetry by using the theory of foregrounding with the supplement of the Checklist of Leech and Short. In this respect, the current study is utilizing one of the early poems of Dylan Thomas. Findings show that the poet exploited words carrying multiples meanings and explanations, however, when the researcher employs the theory, these variety of explications are more clarified. In addition, the results also show that parallelism and repetitions are dominant features in the poem which support meaning through their similarities and enriching the aesthetic value of the poem. The paper ends with list of references and further recommendations.

1. Introduction

Poetic language is usually deviated from the rules of ordinary language in certain aspects (Leech, 1991, P. 5). Therefore, the poet tries to break the constraints of the language to gain creativity based on linguistic features (Leech, 1991, P. 5). Such linguistic insights are applied to explicate meaning and reach at interpretation. As Thorne (2006, P. 48) notes the words selected by the writer carry mood, situation and character. Such diction might also convey and develop imageries, they are inclined to several structures of grammar and rhetorical tools to make an integral part of the literary work. Thomas' use of linguistic insights is obvious and in turn they heighten a variety of rhetorical devices to manifest his personal reaction to different experiences. His poems are distinct by complex linguistic features resulting in obscurity to a great extent. This is apparently seen in his poem "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" which is regarded as one of the early difficult poems. In the following sections, through the theory of foregrounding in stylistics supplemented by the Checklist of Leech and Short, the poem is going to be analyzed and interpreted.

Objectives of the Study

In order to analyze the connection between style and content in this poem, and show how Thomas uses diction, deviation, parallelism and other aspects of stylistics to contribute to foregrounding, and to the significance of the whole, the study employs the descriptive qualitative method and the stylistic analysis, through using theory of foregrounding and the checklist of Leech and Short (2007, PP. 60-72). Within these objectives, the study tries to investigate the dominant stylistic features which are foregrounded in this poem of Dylan

Thomas. The study also attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. What are the prevailed stylistic features in the poem?
2. How do these features support meaning and enrich the aesthetic value of the poem?
3. What does the analysis show about the main stylistic features?

Methodology

The study is analytical, qualitative and descriptive by identifying certain features and analyzing them so as to interpret the selected poem "And Death Shall Have No Dominion". This poem of Dylan Thomas is considered as a sample of the study. For this reason, the study employs the descriptive qualitative method and the stylistic analysis, through using theory of foregrounding supplemented by the checklist of Leech and Short (2007, PP. 60-72). In the checklist, the main focus is on the diction of the text. Therefore, the research study is regarded as both theoretical and analytical so the researchers apply the theoretical framework of stylistic features which best suits the selected poem and then the researchers make use of literary criticism so as to support meaning. Finally, the results show that how stylistic features are exploited to explicate literary texts, namely, poetry and Dylan Thomas' poem and they might be used to convey theme and meaning of the poem.

The Concept of Style and Stylistics

Style is described as the way in which language is utilized in a given context, by a given person and for a given purpose or it refers to "the linguistic characteristics of a particular text". Style may refer to spoken and written languages and to both literary and non-literary texts. However, it originally refers to written literary texts (Leech & Short, 2007, PP. 11-15).

Concerning stylistics, there are various definitions by scholars. According to Widdowson (1975, PP.3-4), stylistics deals with literary discourse in a linguistic method. Moreover, stylistics is different from literary criticism and linguistics as it occupies a position between linguistic and literary criticism which acts to mediate between the two fields. Since it connects the two disciplines, it has an interdisciplinary function. Widdowson further states that stylistics is an attempt to indicate that stylistics is a combination of literary criticism and linguistics which provides the ways to describe a text supports reader's response. On the other hand, Short (1996) believes that stylistics construes the relations between linguistics and aesthetic function. Thus, stylistics analysis tries to explore and extract artistic elements based on the authors language choice. One of the theories of stylistics utilized in the analysis of the poem is foregrounding which includes either deviation from the norm or a state of a text or repetition and parallelism (Simpson, 2004, P.50). According to Leech (2008, P. 30), foregrounding as a deviation from linguistic norms is a basic principle of aesthetic communication. Additionally, Wales (1989, P. 182) states that foregrounding is achieved by a variety of means labeled under two types of deviation and repetition.

An Overview of the Poem

The poem was written in April 1933 and revised in February 1936. It was first published in New English weekly, on 18 May 1933, Twenty-five Poems (1936) and Dylan's Collected Poems (1952). It was regarded as one of the first poems by which Thomas achieved his first breakthrough. It is the first poem when Thomas fuses and recognizes the divine in nature which views the universe as a reflection of God. The theme of resurrection is plainly stated in the poem. Not theme, however, but rhythm is the triumph here- rhythm, symphonic vowels, grandeur of manner, and other devices. (Tindall, 1962, PP. 121-2). According to Goodby (2014), "The poem now contained the rhetoric of faith, but the substance of non-belief, and seems to simultaneously endorse two mutually incompatible messages." In this breakthrough, he carried out the combination of pantheistic, apocalyptic vision and regular stanza form, rhyme, refrain and meter. It is flanked in N3 by poems that refer to WWI, and the image of the naked dead body exposed on ground or a battlefield became a staple. In the N3 version of the poem, the doctrine message of bodily resurrection overrides the less comforting pantheistic one that after death we simple rejoin the natural cycle. The poem is composed of three stanzas, each stanza has nine lines. The syllable structure of each line is not regular. Most of the lines end with punctuation pauses and sound 'n'. In the first stanza stress falls on the content words, for instance on, "death, dominion, dead, men, naked". Moreover, these syllabic structures similar to the resonance of breathing. Crystal (as cited in Abbas & Ahmed, 2012, P. 16) defines it in auditory terms as "strings of sounds some are intrinsically more sonorous than others and that each peak of sonority corresponds to the center of a syllable, which have greater sonority". As if the author here, wants to depict picture of the struggle of a dead naked man lying between death and resistance to death. There is alliteration of the sound 'd' in "death and "dominion." Its use is for aesthetic value and inviting the reader to immediately investigate the theme and message of the poem. There are unstressed syllables between these stressed syllables. There is also the consonance of sound 'n' in the word 'no' and 'dominion'.

Table. No. 1 Number of Syllables per Stanza

Sta nza	Number of Syllables of each line								
I	8	8	10	11	9	8	11	8	8
II	8	8	10	9	9	8	10	7	8
III	8	8	8	11	9	8	11	9	8

This instance is also repeated in the second line of the first stanza in words "man" and "moon" and "wind" and "west". These structures are linked by alliteration and create a sort of melody in auditory pattern. The word "wind" is also related to the word "with" by assonance. The word "with" in turn is related to preposition "in" by assonance. The word "man" and "moon" are connected by alliteration and consonance.

Lexical Features

On the lexical level, the author in the first stanza starts with general vocabularies such as "death", "men", "moon", "wind", and "sea" to universalize and generalize the theme and the message of death and humankind. Most of the nouns in the poems are common nouns, they are divided into abstract and concrete nouns. The poem includes the abstract nouns like "death", "dominion", "love", and "faith" to depict the content that through human faith that death has no dominion over him and to show how man controls death. The poem also includes concrete nouns of "man", "wind", "moon", "bone", "star", "sea", "racks", "flower", and "sun". The importance of these concrete nouns is to show the relation of human and nature, and the elements of nature in the poem. Thomas skillfully selects the diction so as to hold the theme of resurrection. For instance, the choice of "moon" is in parallel with the idea of regeneration and resurrection. In many cultures, the phases of moon symbolize regeneration, fertility and resurrection (Hall, 1996, P. 104). Within these concrete nouns, the words "bone", "sea", "flower" and "sun" are related to the idea of resurrection, death and

human's merging to nature after death to these elements. As Cirlot (1962, P. 31) believes bones are seen in the character of a seed, also symbolic belief in resurrection and are compared to the symbol of the chrysalis from which the butterfly appears. Similar meaning emerges from choosing "flower" because by its very nature it symbolizes transitoriness of beauty and spring. (Cirlot, 1962, P.110). Also, Tindall (1962, P. 122) states that the flowers dying in the autumn and returning in spring require the parallel of Paul and Apocalypse.

Cirlot further (1962, P. 281) analogizes it to life and death as the water of the oceans are not only seen as the source of life but also as its goals. In another words, to return to life means to return to the mother, that is to pass away. The diction of the poem often embraces multiple meanings and explanation. When considering the linguistic context of the poem, the word "sun" implies death, life and resurrection. The word "sun" was once worshiped as god of light and regarded as a source of fertility and life and even a symbol of death and rebirth due to its setting and rising (Hall, 1996, P. 109). The explication of the diction is enhanced throughout the poem by verbs such "sink" and "rise". In addition, some nouns in the poem are used with definite articles, for example "the man", "the wind", "the sea", "the sun", and "the characters", the idea of employing these nouns referring to the familiarity of these nouns to the reader, and these nouns have fixed and unique and generic referents. This means that these nouns are part of the immediate socio-physical context or are generally known cosmic elements and universe. The purpose of having these nouns is to easily connecting them with the theme and other linguistic elements in the poem. The idea of using these definite articles is to strengthen that the persona assumes that since the reader

belongs to the same community, he and she share specific knowledge of their surroundings.

The poet employs "wind" in the poem so as to highlight the picture of universe for the reader. According to Cirlot (1962, P, 373), the winds are numbered and made corresponded with cardinal numbers and the symbols of Zodiac in order to manifest their cosmic significance. Contrary to definite articles, the poem also contains some indefinite articles in words of "a wheel" and "a flower", the idea of having them is to enhance that the identity of these nouns is not known to the reader. That is to say, the reader is not quite familiar with a place where soldier got punishment, "Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break," because according to Goodby (2014), **"Strapped to a wheel"** in WW1, refers to 'Field Punishment No. 1' for a soldier guilty of indiscipline specified the fastening of the offender to a fixed object for a specified time.

There are also uses of some adjectives in the poem. In the first stanza, the adjective "clean", in "When their bones are picked clean" is used to describe the clean bones of soldiers lying in the battlefield. The same line is repeated in line 5 in "clean bones", which modifies the noun to emphasize the same description of the bones. Adjectives such as "mad", "sane" are the first semantic relation of antonymy appear in the poem. These two adjectives have psychological attribute. They show the psychological states of the men lying in the battlefield. Verbs carry important part of the meaning. The first instance of the verb is the use of model verb "shall + base" which appears in the title of the poem and it is repeated in the first and final lines of the first stanza. According to Greenbaum and Quirk (1990, P. 64), it has a prediction and intentional sense, it is used in formal style with first person subjects (I and we). There is a clear deviation of this structure

because the subject of this verb structure is "death" rather than "I, and You". This might indicate and mean "our death", which has a sort of inclusive states. Therefore, the use of this verb is to confirm that death is the destiny of us all and our idea of resurrection and resistance to death in the future, when death will be defeated. Moreover, the structure of "shall + base", is repeated throughout the whole poem in order to consolidated the coherence of the main idea and the theme of the poem.

Other instances of verb types include dynamic verbs referring to actions and movements, for example, "go", "sink", "rise", and "run" are used to indicate the cyclic motion of death and resurrection of human and their being merged into nature again. The use of "sink" and "rise" offers the reader the content of the message. "Sink" is the action verb of submerging of an object under water, like a sinking ship or a sunk boat. On the other hand, "drown" is the act of suffocating under water and dying. Thus, a person jumps in water and doesn't know swimming, he would be sinking. If someone saves him and pulls him to the shore, he will not drown. However, if no one helps him, he will drown and suffocate under water and die. That is why, the word "sink" is used instead of the word "drown" in order to develop the idea and tone of resistance to death, where the word "sea" represents death and the word "rise" symbolizes, resurrection and pantheistic vision.

In the second stanza, certain verbs are used to depict the way men punished and suffered to death and how their dead bodies are nakedly exposed on a battlefield. In this respect, words such as "lying", "twisting", "strapped" are used in lines: "They lying long shall not die windily; Twisting on racks when sinews give way, Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break". Though these same ideas and thoughts are responded by the use of sentence adverbs of

"yet" and the negation of "shall not die windily" and "shall not break". So, whenever there is a verb that brings in ideas of death, there is also other contrary examples to defeat them. In the last lines of the final stanza "Heads of characters hammer through daisies; Break in the sun till the sun breaks down, And death shall have no dominion." Heads of the characters represent heads of the dead men which are compared to nail, are hammered back into the world above as daisies. That is, heads of dead are blossoming again through daisies. Daisies represent life and returning to life. All this interpretation is carried out by using the verb "hammer". The idea of after death is that man simply rejoins the nature is reinforced by the verb "hammer". In lines 27 and 28: "Breaks in the sun till the sun breaks down, And death shall have no dominion." In the poem, the noun "The sun" represents the power and energy of the dead men which is indirect contrast to the powerless of the living and the dead. The word "the sun" may also indicate how by the power of the sun forces the daisies break or open in the sun, and they continue to do so till the sun is no more shining. It was considered as a source of fecundity and life and even a representation of demise and revival because of its setting and rising (Hall, 1996, P. 109).

The largest group of adverbs is that of sentence adverbs "though" and "yet". The use of "though" is more frequent than "yet" which appears in all stanzas and it tends to combine two opposite sentences. They also act as conjunctions with other conjunctions such as "and" and "or" to combine two sentences. The poem starts with "And" and ends with it. As a conjunction "and" joins sentences, but it also implies the addition and continuity here. According to Greenbaum and Quirk (P.186), the conjunction "though" also has a concessive meaning. There is a frequent use of "though" at the beginning of sentences in the first and final stanzas to introduce two opposite or contrasting pieces of information as in "Though they go mad they shall be sane/Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again" and "Though they be mad and dead as nails, Heads of characters hammer through daisies". The aim of using "though" is to show immortality and how after all the difficulties human being suffers, yet in the end, dead human body is rejoining to nature after death.

There are only uses of statements in the poem. The usual function of them is to make a statement, tell the reader something and give some information. There are also some minor sentences in the text, for instance in line 3 of the first stanza, "With the man in the wind and the west moon" and in line 11, "Under the windings of the sea". These minor sentences are incomplete sentences that still make sense without the necessary information. There are fragments which is often missing a main verb or a subject. Their main use in this poem is to emphasize and introduce more descriptive value to the main idea. The sentence structure sounds more sophisticated due to the use of semicolon. It is usually used to connect two independent clauses which are closely related in thought. It is used to join those ideas and then give equal position and rank to them. These types of parataxis represent equal relationships between clauses grammatically. The most common type is juxtaposition where it is clearly seen through the lines of all the three stanzas. The purpose of using them or placing them together is to realize their contrasting effect. Lists of nouns tend to occur within three members. For example, the first group of nouns such as "star", "moon", and "sun" are all related to the semantic field of universe or Cosmos in order to convey the faith and the universality of

death. The second group of nouns are of "sea", "wind", and "seashore", which have more negative associations in that they are close to death and grave. Other groups such as "flower", and "daisies", they are used to reinforce the idea of merging human soul into these types of the natural elements.

Foregrounding Features and Figures of Speech

This section of analysis is devoted for the features of foregrounding. As it has been mentioned before, one of the aspects of foregrounding, usually occurs by virtue of departing from the regular norms of language and communication. Another aspect of foregrounding is repetition or parallelism which is regarded as a repetition of a linguistic structure. There are some instances of parallelism, for example "And death shall have no dominion", which is syntactically repeated in all the three stanzas. The purpose of repeating the same line throughout the poem is for the rhetorical effect so as to reinforce the main theme which is death shall not have control over human being. Other structural repetitions are the use of, "Though + they + base + complement". According to Tindall (1962, P. 122):

 "The thematic first and last line is from St. Paul, Romans 6:9: "Death hath no more dominion." Rising again from the sea in the first and second stanzas is based on Revelation 20:13: 'the sea gave up the dead."

These are clear religious allusions Thomas used in his poem; however, Tindall (1962, P. 122) believes that they only prove that Thomas had attended chapel and do not make the poem a Christian one. Such Allusions help to elucidate meaning of the text and indicate the literary modes and conventions the author works on (Wheeler, as cited in Sabah, 2016, P.22). Their

use is very effective because these structures are seen as powerful tools for the coherence of foregrounding elements of a text. They are used as cohesive devices to combine the poem as a whole. The same is true for the repetition of the pronoun "they", it is used as anaphora of the "dead men", appears in the second line of stanza one and occurs in all stanzas. Lexical repetition is employed in this poem in a very well manner, for instance, the word "Break" is repeated four times, the word "sea" is repeated three times, words such as "clean", "bone", and "mad" each of these words are repeated twice throughout the poem. These repetitions are used for the sake of reinforcement and the coherence of all the linguistic features exploited in this poem. In rhetoric language of poetry, chiasmus is the reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases, this type of rhetoric is apparently seen in this poem, as in line 4 and 5 "When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones are gone", and in line 27 "Break in the sun till the sun breaks down". The purpose of creating them is to have an aesthetic value and effect in the poem.

One of the great exploitations of semantic relation in this poem, is of using synonymies and antonymies. Throughout the whole poem, groups of words "break", "snap", "crack", and "give way" have the same or close meanings. The same pairs like "cry", and "break loud" have close meanings in the context of this poem. With their negative prefixes, they indicate the silence of the dead men after death. On the other hand, pairs of words such as, "sink", and "rise" as well as pairs like "mad", and "sane" are regarded as antonymies in the setting of this poem. They are used to consolidate the cyclic motion of human being. One of the peculiarities of poetry is deviation, or the violation of the linguistic norms. In terms of graphological deviation, there are several cases in the poem.

The use of capital letters in the use of "Strapped" after the comma in line 15, and the use of "And" in line 17 after the use of comma. Again, their usage might be due to the consistency of drawing attention of the reader to the message of the poem. Thus, the word "Strapped" is capitalized to let the reader focus on how the soldiers in battlefield got punished. Another clear instance, is the use of "Lift" in "Where blew a flower may a flower no more Lift its head to the blows of the rain". The focus on this word is due to the meaning of the word "rise" in line 8, to remind the reader of the belief of human rebirth.

Poetry is rich in figurative language. In this poem, there are several uses of figurative language. The first instance of this kind, is personification of "death" in the title of the poem and its repetition throughout the whole poem. The abstract noun of "death" is personified so as to convey the message of human struggle against death. Synecdoche is another use of the figurative language. In line 15 of the poem, "Strapped to a wheel" is an obvious example of synecdoche as the word "wheel" refers to a vehicle so as to tell reader how the offender used to be fastened to a wheel to get punishment during WW1. As Hall (1996, PP. 95-6) notes "The Greek myth of Ixion, whose punishment was to be tied to an ever-turning fiery wheel, was an echo of primitive human sacrifice to a sun-god." It is obvious in line 25 of the final stanza "dead as nails", dead men are compared to nails. This expression is also close to the idiomatic expression "dead as a doornail". According to Larson (as cited Sabah 2016 p. 246), "an idiom carries certain emotive connotation not expressed on other lexical items". In lines "may a flower no more Lift its head to the blows of the rain" and "Heads of the character hammer through daisies". In these sentences, "a flower" is a metaphor compared to a dead man and its "head" is compared to the head of the dead men. The heads of the dead men may return to life by the force of life and merge with natural elements like daisies after the rain. Rain is mainly regarded as fertilizing agent related to symbolism of life and water. Therefore, it signifies purification (Cirlot, 1962, P. 271). This drama has been depicted through using the verb "hammer". This shows the faith of returning to life after death. In this way, the poem contains some religious elements. Throughout the whole poem, there is the use of litotes. The clearest examples are in the repetition of "And death shall have no dominion" in the whole poem. Likewise, in line 15, "Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break", and in line 17, "Split ends up they shan't crack". The aim of using them is to use negative to state positive, that is, to show that death is powerless and the men will not give up. Thomas' choices of words are selected symbolically in reference to themes of the poem. In the fable, "unicorn" is associated with a virgin, on the account of the phallic aspect of its horn. Its horn purified everything it touched and they turned into a Christian allegory of a "spiritual unicorn" descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary (Hall, 1996, PP.50-1).

Cohesion and Congruence of Foregrounding

Parts and portions of the text are related. Based on the above discussion, one way to consider how the sentences and elements in the structures of the poem are connected is by the repetition and parallelism. It has become obvious that there are several structural and lexical repetitions throughout the entire poem so as to treat the poem as a whole and as one package. The repetition of "And death shall have no dominion" throughout the whole poem

creates coherence in the poem. Repetition of lexical items such as "though", "and "dead men", and pronoun "they" as cross-reference are all indicating the internal organization of the text. The way grammatical deviations are done for the sake of phonological effect and metrical patterns are good instances of the textual coherence. Therefore, it can be said that the text contains logical links and cohesive devices between sentences. For example, the use of coordinating conjunctions "And", "though" and "yet", and the use of semicolon between sentences as implicit ways of connections are good ways to link sentences and the whole structure together.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, the study concludes that there is connection between the style and the content of the poem since the majority of the foregrounding features of the poem carry meaning, and literary appreciation of the poem. In this respect, aspects of foregrounding such as deviation and parallelism are interrelated to convey the message of the poem. As long as the checklist of Leech and Short are adapted to study the language of the poem, it appears that not only foregrounding features are put forward to help the reader interpret and evaluate the poem. Repetition and parallelism are the most common stylistic features used by Dylan Thomas. The use of grammatical deviation and figurative language are also well designed in the poem for literary interpretation, and phonological effect. Through word choices, Thomas provides symbolic narration on the one hand, and creating figurative language on the other hand.

Appendix

And Death Shall Have No Dominion

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead man naked they shall be one

With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the
clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.
(Goodby, 2014)

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