



ALFRED TENNYSON'S "THE LADY OF SHALOTT": A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS.

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ABSTRACT

Stylistics is not a literary theory but a method and a technique. Stylistics is the study of literary discourse that has a linguistic orientation. It is the bridge between literary criticism and linguistics. This paper presents a stylistics analysis of Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott". It analyses the poem using the tools of linguistics to find out new interpretations and to explore Tennyson's genius as a craftsman and as a metrical artist. Tennyson is not only the glass of fashion and the mould of form of the Victorian period, his architectonics is also awe-inspiring. The poem has been dissected from different levels of stylistics analysis such as Graphological, Phonological, Lexical and Grammatical level. This study shows that the whole poem flows like a river, sometimes speeding up, again rushing down and crashing, and then slowing down again. The short refrain the Lady of Shalott at the end of most stanzas, is like the bubble in the flow of the river. This stylistics analysis may lead a reader easily to the characteristic features of Tennyson's poem, even if the reader does not have prior knowledge about the literary works of Tennyson. Naturally, based on linguistic data, the stylistic analysis contains several new interpretations which open up new vistas for further studies.

Key Words: Stylistics, Style, Graphological, Phonological, Lexical and Geammatical level.

Style is a concept as common as it is elusive. Generally, style means the particular way in which something is done. This noun has a long history and wide sets of meanings. Style, in literature, includes the manner of expression characteristics to a particular writer or of a literary group or period or a writer's mode of expression in terms of effectiveness, clarity, sincerity, beauty and the like. Style is the basic thing which gives uniqueness to every writer. It also means any particular and somewhat distinctive way of using language. Style is related to a person's personality. Style is the sign of personal qualities, specific to individual. The manners of expression differ according to moral and emotional temperament, mental nature, physical and aesthetic qualities, inborn qualities, acquired skill, habits and ways of life. It justifies the common saying that "Style is the man". Style is also the author's voice reflected in their diction, sentence structure, linguistic materials, narrative techniques and the other related factors.

From style, "stylistics" is derived as a branch of literary study. Stylistics is the systematic study of style used in language. It is the modern version of the ancient discipline known as "rhetoric." Generally, this ancient discipline absorbed into linguistics and stylistics was born at the time of the birth of modern linguistics. In course of time, stylistics developed as a recognized academic discipline which can be placed on the borderline between the study of language and of literature. Critics and scholars have defined stylistics according to their ideas and beliefs. This branch of linguistics is concerned to engage in technical study of analysis in the discourse



of literary criticism and theory. Stylistics is also described as a historical division of criticism with its own principles and methods. It is “a critical approach which used the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts”. (Berry 196)

Stylistics is not a literary theory but a method and a technique which is very close to the “close reading” of the New Critics or to the “practical criticism.” According to H.G. Widdowson, stylistics is the “study of literary discourse that has a linguistic orientation.” Naturally, stylistics is the bridge between literary criticism and linguistics. G. Turner writes, “Linguistics is the science of describing language and showing how it works; stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language, often, but not exclusively with special attention to the most conscious and complex uses of language in literature”.

Stylistics is not confined to the analysis of literature only. It can be applied equally to political speeches, advertisements etc. “The goal of most of stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic “causes” where there are felt to be relevant.” (Wales, Dictionary of Stylistics, 2011) Therefore, stylistics analysis is objective and scientific and it is applied in a systematic way. In all the genres of literature - poetry, drama, novel literary essay – the creative writer devises his/her own way of selecting words and phrases, constructing sentences, creating words or sound effects and so on. Stylistics analyses and studies these innovative aspects in the use of language for the following purposes –

- i. to establish general points about how literary meanings are made,
- ii. to open new interpretations based on linguistics data,
- iii. to support or to challenge existing readings and
- iv. to juxtapose literary and other kind of discourse (i.e., comparing the linguistic devices used in poetry with those of advertisement)

Thus, different levels of understanding of a text is achieved through the different levels of stylistic analysis. These levels of stylistic analysis can be categorised under the following heads:

- 1) **Graphological Level**
- 2) **Phonological Level**
- 3) **Grammatical Level**
- 4) **The Lexical Level**
- 5) **Phonetic Level.**

Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809 – 1892) is “the glass of fashion and the mould of form” (*Hamlet*, Act-III, Scene-I, L-155) of the Victorian period. He was the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, grief and their triumphs. He is a gifted poetic craftsman and a metrical artist. His dignified and melodious utterances, his exquisite variety, his pictorial quality, his mastery in vowel music are unparalleled in the history of English poetry. “The Lady of Shalott” is one of the most beautiful poems of Tennyson. It was first published in 1833 in a volume entitled “Poems Chiefly Lyrical”. The poem is remarkable for numerous exquisite qualities. But the architectonics of “The Lady of Shalott” is really awe-inspiring. The



grandeur of Spencer, the simplicity of Wordsworth, the fantasy and narrative of Coleridge, the music of Keats and Shelley – all mingle magnificently in “The Lady of Shalott” to make it a wonderful piece of material composition. Naturally, a stylistic analysis of this poem is very relevant and significant to unfold various facets of Tennyson as a poet. This paper, therefore, aims at analysing the text of the poem” The Lady of Shalott” from the different levels of stylistics: graphological, phonological, lexical and grammatical level.

Objectives: The objectives of this study are:

- i) to make the meaning of the text of “The Lady of Shalott” explicit using the tools of the stylistics,
- ii) to explore Tennyson’s genius from the perspective of stylistic analysis,
- iii) to find out new interpretations based on linguistic data.

Now, let’s dissect the text of “The Lady of Shalott” from the different levels of stylistic analysis.

1) Graphological Level.

It examines the writing system of a language and analyses the formalised rules of capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure etc. The poem “The Lady of Shalott” by Alfred Tennyson consists of four parts. There is no division of stanzas. But the poem can easily be divided into stanzas for the better understanding of its structure and style. Each stanza contains nine lines. The four parts of the poem have the following number of stanzas and lines:

Part – I contains four (4) stanzas, i.e., $4 \times 9 = 36$ lines.

Part – II contains four (4) stanzas, i.e., $4 \times 9 = 36$ lines.

Part – III contains five (5) stanzas, i.e., $5 \times 9 = 45$ lines

Part – IV contains six (6) stanzas, i.e., $6 \times 9 = 54$ lines.

Thus, the whole poem has nineteen ($4+4+5+6 = 19$) well-knit and tightly woven stanzas and a total of 171 lines ($19 \times 9 = 171$).

Again, each stanza can be divided into two sections. The first section comprises five lines and almost always ends with “Camelot.” The second section comprises four lines and almost always ends with “Shalott”. Only exception is to be found in the lines 77 and 108 where “Sir Lancelot” is used instead of “Camelot” and Shalott”. The increasing number of stanzas from Part - I to Part – IV is also very significant. The river in the poem may be taken as the poem’s spine. Just like a river, in the first two parts (both consisting of four stanzas) the poem speeds up, but gradually slows down in the last two stanzas (Part III, five stanzas; Part – IV, six stanzas). The increasing number of stanzas, as it were, is indicative of the wide bank of the river to slow down its speed

Flow of the Poem Vs Flow of a River

Part - I & II Each 36 Lines	=	Upper/Mountain Flow
Part - III 45 Lines	=	Middle Flow
Part - IV 54 Lines	=	Lower Flow



Undoubtedly, the poem is noted for its pictorial quality and delicate music.

The poem contains usual punctuations and significant capitalization. In each stanza the fifth and ninth lines contain “Camelot” and “Shalott” in capital to highlight the importance of the place and the lady in the whole design of the poem. “Sir Lancelot” is also there twice. Tennyson has dexterously used punctuations to keep up the flow of music and rhythm.

“The Lady of Shalott” has the features of both medieval romance and medieval ballad. Tennyson has created the atmosphere by introducing Camelot, Lady of Shalott, Sir Lancelot, Knight, magic web, simple language and frequent repetitions like ballad-makers.

The four part of the poem can also be compared to the four acts in a play. The whole tragic plot can be divided thus:

Act – I (i.e., Part – I) give the background of the story.

Act – II (i.e., Part – II) describes the Lady of Shalott and her magic mirror.

Act – III (i.e., Part – III) introduces Sir Lancelot and the mirror cracks.

Act – IV (i.e., Part – IV) relates the tragic death of the Lady of Shalott.



2) Phonological Level.

Phonology, a branch of linguistics, is concerned with the study of sounds in a particular language or in languages generally. It fulfils the communicative functions of language by organizing the material and vocal noises arranged into sound pattern. Therefore, the study of formal organization of language is referred to as phonology. In stylistic analysis, two types of devices at phonological level are studied, i.e., sound devices and literary devices.

2.1. Sound devices:

Sound devices are generally known as musical devices. These devices are used to make poetry a special form of art. Through the use of sound devices, poets create auditory imagery for their readers. It includes rhyme scheme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, repetitions etc.

In “The lady of Shalott”, Tennyson can be discovered as a great musician. An excellent sense of music prevails the whole poem. Music, truly, governs the style of Tennyson’s versification. He has carried the art of material construction to a height of perfection never before attempted in English poetry. It is difficult, here, to find a false rhyme or a halting meter. Undoubtedly, this musical effect is produced by Tennyson’s mastery over meters and by the aid of sound devices. Let’s have a look at those aspects:

2.1.1. Rhyme Scheme: It has already been pointed out that the poem in four parts has 171 lines which can further be divided into 19 stanzas chunked into nine lines each. Each stanza rhymes in exactly the same way with the rhyme scheme of **aaaabcccb**. The following stanza, for example, would illustrate the whole rhyme scheme:

<i>Only reapers, reaping early</i>	a
<i>In among the bearded barley,</i>	a
<i>Hear a song that echoes cheerly</i>	a
<i>From the river winding clearly,</i>	a
<i>Down to tower'd Camelot:</i>	b
<i>And by the moon the reaper weary,</i>	c
<i>Piling sheaves in uplands airy,</i>	c
<i>Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy</i>	c
<i>Lady of Shalott."</i> (28 – 36)	b

A noteworthy aspect is that each stanza comprises two sections, i.e., the first five lines and the next four lines. The first five lines in each stanza follow the rhyme pater **aaaab**. The next four lines, then, follows **cccb**. Both the sections end with similar sound, coded as “**b**” sound which is “Camelot” and “Shalott” throughout the poem. Only twice Tennyson has used “Sir Lancelot” instead of “Camelot” and “Shalott”. What a great masterpiece is this work of art! Great attention has been paid to rhymes by making most of the lines end -



stopped. The flow of words is brought to a halt by proper punctuation. This magnificent rhyming in “The Lady of Shalott” is of immense aid to memorization.

2.1.2. Internal Rhyme: The poem also contains internal rhyme, as in the following lines:

The bridle bells rang merrily (87)

The willowy hills and fields among (142)

2.1.3. Meter: Most of the lines in “The Lady of Shalott” have eight syllables, although there are a bunch with five or seven too. The rhyme and meter of each stanza is delicate and must exactly the same. There are two different feet – iambic and trochaic. Let’s scan the first few lines of the poem to unfold the meter:

On EI.. |.. ther SIDE .. | .. the RI .. | .. ver LIE iambic tetrameter
 Long FIELDS .. | .. of BAR ... | .. ley AND .. |.. of RYE, iambic tetrameter
 That CLOTHE .. | ..the WOLD .. | .. and MEET .. | .. the SKY;iambic tetrameter
 And THRO’ .. | .. the FIELD .. | .. the ROAD .. | .. runs BY iambic tetrameter
 To MA .. |.. ny TOW .. | .. er’d CA .. | ... me LOT;iambic tetrameter
 (1 - 5)

We can easily follows the rhyme in the above lines:

da DUM da DUM da DUM da Dum.

Tennyson like a competent band master reversed the order in the next stanza:

WILL ows .. | .. WHIten ... | ..ASPen .. | .. QUIver,trochaic tetrameter
 LITtle .. | .. BREEzes .. | ... DUSK and .. | .. SHIver trochaic tetrameter
 THRO’ the .. | .. WAVE that .. | .. RUNS for .. | .. EVer trochaic tetrameter
 BY the .. | .. ISland .. | .. IN the .. | .. RIver trochaic tetrameter
 (10 - 13)

Now the reversed rhythm goes thus:

DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da



It is evident that Tennyson switched from iambic tetrameter to trochaic tetrameter to suit the mood of the poem and to create a suitable music for the rest of the poem.

Another magnificent aspect of the poem is that Tennyson, here, has played with the sounds of words. The flow of the poem, as has already been pointed out, is like the flow of the river which is the spine of the poem. Just like a river, the poem produces different sounds at its different course. The opening lines, written in iambic tetrameter, has the magic of creating quiet, lazy, open sound which is analogous to a river running slow and flat at its origin and producing clam, relaxed and soft sounds:

On either side of the river lie,

Long field of barley and of rye, (1-2)

Suddenly, in the second stanza written in trochaic tetrameter, the sounds move to a different scale. Now the sounds are like the sounds of a river flowing through its mountain course. It starts to pick up speed and rushing down rapidly:

Willows whiten, aspen quiver,

Little breezes dusk and shiver (11-12)

Thus, the whole poem flows like a river, sometimes speeding up, again rushing down and crashing, and then slowing down again. Most of the stanzas end with the short refrain “The Lady of Shalott,” is like the bubble.

2.1.4. Alliteration: In alliteration, the same letter, syllable, or sound is repeated at the beginning of successive or nearly successive words. The poem contains many alliterations to create the musical effect. The following lines may be cited as examples:

*But **who** **hath** seen **her** wave **her** hand? (24)*

Here the “**h**” sound is repeated several times.

*Only **reapers**, **reaping** early*

*In among the **bearded** **barley**, (28-29)*

*The **bridle** **bells** range merrily (85)*

2.1.5. Repetition: Repetition is a device that repeats the same words or phrases a few times to make an idea clearer or to emphasize its significance in the whole text. Examples are as follows:

***Four** gray walls, and **four** gray towers, (15)*

***She** left the web, **she** left the loom,*



*She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot. (109 – 113)*

Moreover, the repetition of “**Camelot**” and “**Shalott**” in each stanza is in the manner of the medieval ballad-makers and it establishes the poem as a medieval ballad.

2.2. Literary Devices:

Literary devices are divided into two groups: **Schemes** and **Tropes**. These are used to create a particular style of writing.

Schemes and Tropes in “The Lady of Shalott”:

Schemes are literary devices that deal with letters, word order, syntax and sounds rather than meaning of the word. On the other hand a trope is a figure of speech or a literary device that has a different meaning from its literal meaning. A few schemes and tropes that have enriched the stylistic feature of “The Lady of Shalott”, are given below.

2.2.1. Allusion: It is a trope. In an allusion, a word or expression refers to a well-known incident of the past, some legend or the writing or saying of some great man or some great characters. In the poem, allusion is to be found in the following lines:

*“Tirra lirra”, by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot. (107-108)*

The allusion is to Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* where Autolycus says,

“The lark, that lirra-lyra chants”

(Act – IV, scene – III, Line – 10)

Besides, the theme of weaving by the lady of Shalott, is an allusion to the famous epic **Odyssey** where (the hero’s wife) Penelope sits by herself and weaves while she waits for her husband to return.

2.2.2. Epanaphora: It is a scheme. It consists in the reiteration of the same word or words at the beginning of successive lines, clause or sentences. In “The Lady of Shalott”, there are many examples as follows;

*And there the surly village- churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls, (53-54)*



*She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot. (110 – 113)*

2.2.3. Personification: It is a trope in which human qualities or abilities are assigned to inanimate object or abstraction. In “The Lady of Shalott,” there are many examples of personification, the following is an example:

The broad stream in his banks complaining. (120)

The river (stream) is here personified. The river is so sad for the fate of the lady of Shallot that it is complaining.

2.2.4. Refrain: It is a scheme in which a word, a phrase, a line or lines repeated at intervals and especially at the end of a stanza. In this poem, the name of the lady i.e., the Lady of Shalott is a refrain. It has been used at the end of almost every stanza. The word “**Camelot**” is also a refrain and is used in the fifth line of almost every stanza. These repetitions are meant to make the place and the lady seem more like a far off dream than an actual place or human being. The repetition of the lady’s name hypnotizes readers like a magic spell.

2.2.5. Smile and Metaphor: Both are tropes. In a simile, an implied comparison is made between two unallied things or ideas. On the other hand, in a metaphor, an implied comparison is made between two different things or ideas. The examples from “The Lady of Shalott” are as follows:

*The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy. (82-84)*

Here horse’s bridle, all covered with jewels, has been compared to a constellation of shining stars. Besides, the mirror and the magic web of the poem can be interpreted as metaphors for the life of the artist.

2.2.6. Imagery: It is trope in which the language is used by a writer to create a visual picture and to describe vividly an abstract idea, visible objects and scenes. Tennyson is one of the best word-painters in English literature. In “The Lady of Shalott”, his pictures are remarkable for their vividness. Each picture is like a pre-Raphaelite painting, exquisite in detail and growing in colour. The sights seen by the lady of Shalott in the mirror are a long succession of exquisite word-picture:

*Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ampling pad*



Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,

Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad (55-59)

2.2.7. Symbols: It is a troupe in which something, animate or inanimate, either suggest, or stands for a different thing. In “The Lady of Shalott” the island is a major symbol of the lady’s isolation and loneliness. The island is a prison to the lady. Again, the mirror is the symbol of her intense, terrible isolation from the world. Camelot is also a symbol of heaven, a place which the lady can dream about but not actually see or reach there alive.

2.2.8. Rhetoric Question: It is also a troupe in which leading questions are asked as in the following lines.

But who hath seen her wave her hand?

Or at the casement seen her stand? (24-25)

Who is this? And what is here? (163)

3) Lexical Level

This level is concerned with the way in which individual words, phrases or idioms tend to pattern in different linguistic context. Some items of the lexical level in “The Lady of Shalott” are given below:

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Proper Noun
barley, rye, river, people, lilies, island willows, brizes, flowers casement, reapers, moon, web, market, girls, pad, mirror, blue, knights, sick, shadows, bank, web, loom paces, room, bloom, plume curse, woods, stream, sky, prow, seer, fields, tide, balcony, tower, gallery, wharfs, lord, dame, prow, face, grace, God.	Lie, blow, overlook, embowers, trailed, seen, known, echoes, weavers, say, stay, know, echoes, weaves, say, stay, know, appears, sees, pass, went, said, rode, came, knelled, sparkled, glittered, shone, burned, moves, sang, left, made, flew, floated, cried, found, left wrote, loosed, lay, bore, flew, leaves, floated, heard, turned, died, reached, floated, came, reds, crossed, were, warring,	Long, whiten tittle, grey, airy, magic, gay, glad weary, loyal silent, half dazzling, remote, purple unclouded, bold bright, snowy mournful, high darkened, silent, frozen, lovely, snowy, glassy, low,	Camelot, Shalott, Sir Lancelot.



Hyphen-words/compound words.	Adverb	Pronoun	Gerund	Collective Noun
Many-towered, willow-veiled, sunken-sailed, curly shepherd-lad, long-haired page, bow-shot, bower-caves, barley-sheaves, red-cross knight, thick-jewelled, helmet-feather, saddle-leather, war-horse, coal-black, water-fly, east-wind, boat-head, water-side, garden-wall, dead-pale	Early, cheerly, clearly, near steadily, surly, often, merrily, underneath, heavily, holy beneath, loosely, slowly, wholly, loudly,	She, her he, his, their, him, they, who, themselves	Piling, skimming, listening, complaining	A troop of damsels, branch of stars, starry cluster

Tennyson is, undoubtedly, a consummate artist. He selected his words and phrases with great care to decorate “The Lady of Shalott.” His felicity of diction in this poem reminds us of Keats and Shakespeare. The use of hyphen- words or compound words is wholly the influence of Keats. Moreover, the words of nature like, river, island, flower, woods, moon, sky, stream, field, lilies, tide, galaxy, meteor etc. emphasize the whole setting and beautiful landscape in the poem. Besides, Tennyson as a master-craftsman has used splendid colours to heighten the overall effect. The following phrases from “The Lady of Shalott” remind us of Keats’ *“The Eve of St. Agnes”* – “Willows whiten”, “grey towers”, “crimson clad”, mirror blue”, “golden Galaxy”, “purple night”, “sunlight glow’d”, “pale yellow woods”, etc.

4) Grammatical Level.

Both the morphological and syntactic levels are thoroughly analysed in this level. It also discusses the internal structure of sentences. Tennyson has artistically maintained the rules of syntax and punctuation to suit a narrative poem in the form of a romantic ballad. Some aspects has already been highlighted and the following aspects from “The Lady of Shalott” would also be helpful to look at the poem from different angels.

4.1. Full Stop: Tennyson has used the full stops at the end of each stanzas and at the end of a few sentences to show completion of thought or ideas. There is no internal full stops and there are total 27 full stops.

4.2. Colon and Semicolon: The poet has used colon 8 times at the end of sentences. In most cases, after “Camelot” colon has been used to elaborate his thought. The semicolons are also very significant in this poem because it helps to flow the poem like a natural rive. There are 11 semicolons in total.



4.3. Question Mark: In “The Lady of Shalott” all the questions are rhetorical questions. Examples are given below:

Who hath seen her wave her stand? (24)

Who is this? And what is here? (163)

There are five question marks in the poem. These questions are very important for the development of thought and for the communication of the poet with the readers.

Conclusion: “The Lady of Shalott.” is undoubtedly a masterpiece for stylistic analysis and Tennyson is definitely a mastercraft in the art of metrical composition. This stylistic analysis can easily distinguish Tennyson from his predecessors and successors as a poet. Based on linguistic data, the stylistic analysis contains several new interpretations which open up new vistas for further studies. Besides, this analysis leads a reader easily to the characteristic features of Tennyson’s poem, even if the reader does not have prior knowledge about the literary work or its author. The stylistic analysis, therefore, strengthens the understanding of the text of “The Lady of Shalott” and explores its literal and hidden meanings.

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