



EXPLORING THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY THROUGH STYLISTIC ANALYSIS: A STUDY OF “O FOR A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD”

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1. Abstract

This research work explores the spiritual journey in William Cowper's poem "Oh! For A Closer Walk with God". This work examines the stylistic elements in the poem to better understand how Cowper uses ornamental language to create a powerful work that speaks deeply to readers. This work conducts a comprehensive stylistic analysis on one of the poem of William Cowper "Oh! For A Closer Walk with God" under the theoretical framework of Leech and short (1981). This analysis is based on phonological, graphological, morphological, syntactic and semantic to understand the deep meaning covered by the writer. Through these features, poet gives an understanding of spiritual journey. It further covers the spiritual transformation due to tragic events of life. This poem explains the feeling of joy and peace when a person makes a walk towards God. This study gives an understanding to readers about the connection of God and Human. This work not only give another dimension to read this other it also covers this poem how literature is effective in spiritual journey.

2. Key Words

Spiritual Journey, Stylistics devices, Morphology, Syntactic Level, Semantically.

3. Introduction

This aims to take a view on spiritual journey. The stylistics tools are used to take a deep analysis on the verses of poem *Oh! For A Closer Walk With God*. First effort is made to know the stylistic elements and in second effort is to explore how peaceful it is to walk with God. Stylistics is study of style. Kumar (2022) makes a comparison between the traditional and modern definition of style. It was considers that style is the use of words and grammar structure but it is actually the author's way of writing, his word choice, speech, syntactic patterns especially in literary text. Stylistics is based on the idea that certain words, phrases, and ideas can be used to create a specific effect in a text. Holman (2001) proposed the use of language in literature and how it affects the reader's experience. It analyses how stylistic devices are used to evoke the readers' emotions. Jean (2012) explore the ways how stylistic approach use to approach translation effect on the reading text.

4. Introduction of poet

William Cowper was an English poet and hymnodist who wrote some of the most beautiful poetry of the 18th century. His works are known for their lyrical style and emotional intensity, which speaks to readers even today. He is often credited as one of the first poets to bring emotion into poetry, a trend that has since become commonplace in literature. Cowper's work has a lasting impact on English literature. His work has a great influence on the modern writers'



work. The idea of expressing human emotions by using pen greatly influenced the writers to express human sensitivity with the help of words. In short, William Cowper gave another dimension to the modern writers. He used his words to express his views on religion, politics, slavery, and other social issues. His famous works include *The Task*, *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, *The Negro's Complaint* etc. Exploring the spiritual journey explores the inner workings of the individual, as well as his efforts and feelings when he follows the God's path.

5. Research Question

1. How does the poet use stylistic devices to represent the theme of spiritual journey in poem "O For A Closet Walk with God?"
2. How do the phonological, graphological, morphological, syntactic and semantic features contribute to the spiritual journey of "O For A Closet Walk with God?"
3. How do Leech and Short (1981) theories enhance the religious experience in this poem?

6. Research Objectives

1. To highlight the use of stylistic devices to represent the theme of spiritual journey in poem "O For A Closet Walk with God?"
2. To analyze how phonological, graphological, morphological, syntactic and semantic features play a crucial role in spiritual journey in "O For A Closet Walk with God?"
3. To elaborate how Leech and Short (1981) theories enhance the religious experience in this poem?

7. Introduction of Poem

The hymn *Oh! A Closer Walk with God* is written by William Cowper in 1769. This poem is based on six stanzas with simple language. This simple language consists of a complex philosophy of religion. The use of various literary devices is used to express a religious journey. In this poem alliteration, Assonance, Consonance, metaphor, personification and imagery and different stylistic devices are used to create a vivid picture of spiritual journey. These literary devices show that how spiritual journey of poet is captured in poem. Further, these devices create a magical effect in hymn that brings the spiritual journey from the hymn to readers' life. By using these devices, readers can gain a better understanding of how words are used in literature to express faith and how it can be used to inspire people on their own spiritual journeys.

8. Level of Language in Stylistics

There are six levels of stylistic analysis. This current study discusses the following levels.

i. Phonological level

Phonology is the study of sounds. Ufot (2013) explain phonology as a concrete characteristic of sound in relation with stylistics and poetry. He claims that phonetics is arrangement of sounds of a particular language.



ii. Graphological level

Graphological level is the study of different punctuation marks like full stop, commas, question marks, inverted commas etc. These graphological level includes literary devices like rhetorical questions, enjambment etc.

iii. Grammatical .level

In stylistic analysis grammar level is further divided into sublevels.

i. Morphological level

At morphological level the work formation is studied. Booij (2015) claims that word formation is a complex method. It includes affixation, stress, conversion (to change class of words), Stem alternation, tone.

ii. Syntactical level

At syntactical level sentence structure is analyzed. It includes the positions of words at right place and the formation of sentence.

iv. Semantic level

This level includes the study of meaning. It is one of the most complex and interesting level of stylistics. This level is arbitrary level. It may call as arbitrary level because the meaning is depending upon the reader. It may vary from one reader to another.

9. Theme of Spiritual Journey

Religion and spirituality are one of the most important and complex part of everyone life. Bean (2000) defines spirituality as extracting the meaning of life through the experiences of life. Tisdell defines the spirituality as a spiritual journey. He explains that it is a journey from an individual to the wholeness.

10. Literature Review

A very few studies are done on William Cowper's work. A work done by Cruickshank(2006) examines the poem Appeared as crucified for me. He examines different themes sight, suffering and spirituality and analyse their relation. Further he describe how this hyme play role in spiritual transformation.

Another work done on an hyme "Teaching everyone to live like a Crist". Boaheng (2021) affirmed that this poem was written in the support of Methodist Church Ghana for Christians. This study is based on literary analysis. It is basically a teaching for Christians.

These studies include Lee (2022) work. Lee explores Olney Hymn that includes 348 hymns written by John Newton (1725-1807) and William Cowper works that influence modern writers.

Schwanda (2012) use William Cowper's work Olney Hymns as primary source for his study. He examines William Cowper's work as a dynamic attraction between world and spirit.



Kohler (2021) makes a small effort to analyze children literature. His main focus was to explore children hymns. The first phase of Ulrike's work was to find the role of hymn to fight religious norms and second phase is based on its stylistic analysis.

Zhuk (2021) work was about the problem of genre faced in Thomas Moore poetry and lake poets. This study was based on stylistic analysis. He declared that these hymns as a significance transformation which will be added in late Romanism.

11. Research Methodology

In this study qualitative approach is used. To better understand this journey, present study follows the theory of Leech and short (1981). Leech theory for Stylistics is an approach covers the use of different stylistic element to create an effective work. This work analyzes the stylistic devices and a deep study of religious journey through works. A deep analysis of previous works and the theory of leech and short is made to understand the complex phenomena of religion.

12. Theoretical Framework

According to leech and short model of stylistics, there are seven types of meanings. It includes conceptual, connotative, social, Affective, reflected, collocative and Themantic. Conceptual meaning is complex type of meaning. In this stage an entangled meaning is explores with in the text. They gave two structural principles of conceptual meaning. First is based on contractiveness and other is based on constituent structure. Connotative meaning is the perception of addressee. It can be positive, negative or neutral. Social meaning is purely based on social context. It is arbitrary due to geological status. Affective meaning is purely related with the feeling or emotions or writer. In this meaning the attitude of reader is also included. Sometimes a reader gets more than one conceptual meaning from same text. Collocative meaning is a type of meaning that is based on collocation. Thematic meaning is the change in meaning by shifting stress.

13. Data Analysis

I. Phonological Level

i. Alliteration

Alliteration is the frequent repetition of initial consonant sounds in single line. It makes the poem more attractive. In the present poem there is repetition of /s/, /θ/ and /m/sound. The initial consonant sound /s/ is repeated in (sweet and still), (made and mourn) and (thy and throne).

ii. Rhyme

Rhyme has great importance in poetry. It is used in poems to make the readers more approaching for the analysis. In short it enhances the beauty and interest of reader. This analysis and interest help a reader to follow the path portrayed in hymn. In this poem end rhyme is mostly used. The examples of rhyme are given below

1	God and Road
2	Knew and view
3	Rest and breast
4	Known and thrown
5	Thee and be

iii. Consonance

Consonance is repetition of consonant sounds in the sequence of words several times. /s/ is richly used in the poem *O! For A Closer Walk with God*. In this poem the best example of consonance is present in the line “sweet messenger of rest”.

iv. Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. This device has ability to change the mood of poem. The higher vowel sounds make the poem energetic but lightens the mode. Long vowel makes the poem serious. In the current poem long vowel are highly used to convey a elaborate a complex phenomenon of spiritual journey.

v. Syllables

Syllable is a unit of pronunciation. It is a technique by which word can be break on the basis of pronunciation. Syllable must contain one vowel. Words can be monosyllabic, disyllabic and tri-syllabic. Syllables effect the rhythm of poem. There are different types of syllables

Mono-Syllabic	Disyllabic	Tri-Syllabic
Throne	Closer	Blessedness
For	Hev'nly	Refreshing
Walk	Aching	Messenger
With	Peaceful	
God	Mem'ry	
Frame	Dearest	
Sought	Worship	

II. Graphological Level

i. Contractions

The contractions used in poets are rarely used in daily life language. Contractions lower the number of syllables in lines. It is used in poetry to maintain rhythm in verses. It increases the joy and interest of reader. Cowper used large number of contraction in the present poem.

Examples

Contractions	Full Form
Heav'nly	Heavenly
Mem'ry	Memory
whate'er	Whatever

ii. Semicolon

Semicolon has great importance in poetry. Semicolon is used when two ideas are written in same sentence. It is use an alarm for readers to take a small pause. It make easy for readers to understand two separate ideas.

Example

1. In fourth stanza, poet separated two ideas. A comparison between good and bad days of poet is made.
2. In sixth stanza, poet separated two ideas. In first part he elaborate that when he follow the path of God it is peaceful. In second part, It explains how God makes things easier when we start walking in His way.

iii. Enjambment

Cowper use enjambment throughout the poem. Enjambment is used to continue the idea with a little pause. Through enjambment reader takes a small pause and continues his idea smoothly. It adds the characteristic of prose in poem.

Example

1. Return, O holy Dove, return,
sweet messenger of rest

In this example, Cowper completes his idea in two lines. In first line he is calling dove and in second line he explains why he is calling dove. Enjambment is use in the end of verse and represented through comma.

iv. Exclamatory mark

Exclamatory mark is widely used in Cowper's work. Poet uses exclamation marks to express his feeling and to draw the attention of readers toward his feelings.

Examples

- (a) a light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb!
- (b) How sweet their mem'ry still!
- (c) What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!

All of the above mentioned examples show the feeling of joy and peace. Through these lines poet want to convey the message that it is religious journey and a walk with God is very peaceful.

v. Rhetorical Question

It is persuasive style of writer. A written write a question statement in his work but answer is not requirement of writer. Writer just wants to peruse his reader about a specific idea. In second stanza Cowper use Rhetorical question to explain how blessed he was when he start finding the God. Now he is exploring the blessedness and wants to peruse about the feeling of blessedness achieve by following path of God.

vi. Grammatical Level

III. Morphological Level

Morphological level is based on the words used in language. In the current study an effort is made to make a chart of parts of speech. For this effort POS tagger is used.

O for a closer walk with God ,
a calm and heav'nly frame ,
a light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb !
Where is the blessedness I knew
when first I sought the Lord ?
Where is the soul refreshing view
of Jesus and His Word ?
What peaceful hours I then enjoyed !
How sweet their mem'ry still !
But they have left an aching void
the world can never fill .
Return , O holy Dove , return ,

Adjective
Adverb
Conjunction
Determiner
Noun
Preposition
Pronoun
Verb

sweet messenger of rest ;
 I hate the sins that made Thee mourn ,
 and drove Thee from my breast .
 The dearest idol I have known ,
 whate'er that idol be ,
 help me to tear it from Thy throne
 and worship only Thee .
 So shall my walk be close with God ,
 calm and serene my frame ;
 so purer light shall mark the road
 that leads me to the Lamb .

i. Suffix

Cowper use simple words but the complex and deep phenomenon of spiritual journey is elaborated to explain the nuance of word used by Cowper. It was observed this work is enriched with suffixes.

Sr#	Words	Suffix
1	Leads, Hours, Sins	-s
2	Closer, Messenger, Purer	-er
3	Blessed, Enjoyed	-ed
4	Blessedness	-ness
5	Refreshing	-ing
6	Dearest	-est

ii. Morphological Repetition

Poet use repetition to make the reader focused towards a particular idea. In the current poem Cowper repeat words to emphasis the idea. In the current poem poet repeats the word return two times in same line *Return, O Dove, Return*. It shows the necessity of returning dove.

IV. Syntactic Level

Current poem is analyzed at syntactic level. Cowper uses simple sentences but lengthy sentences in the poem *O! For A Closer Walk with God*.

i. Parallelism

Parallelism is basically putting some sentences in same structure. In current poem, poet use parallelism in first and last stanza. This device is use to emphasis an idea and to make the work more attractive for the readers. In second stanza Cowper uses parallelism both statements are interrogative both statements show how curious the writer is to find the God. It makes the readers curious for the spiritual journey.

ii. Syntactic Repetition

Repetition is a way to draw attention of readers towards a specific idea. It was observed Cowper repeats the last three lines of first and last stanza. It attracts the readers toward primary focus of poet. In these lines poet is trying to make a way toward God through words. Repetition defines the importance of this theme.

iii. Semantic Level

At this level of stylistics meanings are studied. It can be surface meaning or entangled meaning

iv. Symbols

Cowper use symbols widely in his work. It makes the work complex and attraction readers to explore the meaning. Following are some examples of symbols

Symbols	Explanation
Dove	It is the symbol of peace.
Road	It symbolized the journey.
Light	It is the symbol of faith
Lamb	It is the symbol of innocence.
Walk with God	It symbolize the journey towards religion

v. Allusion

Allusion is basically a reference to another piece of information within a text. William Blake used lamb as a symbol of innocence. He wrote a poem *The Lamb* in his collection song of innocence.

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
 Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
 He is called by thy name,
 For he calls himself a Lamb:

These lines show the soft corner of the creator. In the current poem, poet wants to find the lamb. Actually, we want to meet God. As in third stanza poet claims about “aching void” and in the next line he claims “the world can never fill”. It shows he is fed up from this world. Only God can cure his pain.

vi. Pleonasm

It is a type of literary device more word than the necessity are use. It is use to show the intensity or to draw the attention of readers towards a specific idea.

Example

- (a) So purer
- (b) Aching Void

In the above example (a) “so pure” or “purer” is enough to convey the meaning. Cowper use the term “so purer” to show the purity of light of faith. In example (b) the word void is enough because the next line in poem shows how pain the gap is. But poet use this term to explain the “void” word is not enough to show his distance from the religion.

vii. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a literary device where a part is used instead of whole. In the poem *O For A Closer Walk with God* poet uses the word lamb to represent the whole creation of God. It may be use to represent the creator of lamb. There are countless creations of God. But Cowper only used “lamb” because he is the seeker of God’s mercy.

viii. Metaphor

Metaphor is a literary device use for the comparison without using like or as. In this work of Cowper, he uses “dove” for the peace. The poet is a seeker of peace and purity. Poet want to be as pure a new born baby is. In Christianity holy dove is the symbol of new beginning. In the third stanza, he emphasizes the idea in the line "Return, O holy Dove, returns”.

ix. Personification

Personification is a literary device that is use to add human characteristic in non-human objects. In this poem Cowper is using the term “O” for dove. Through personification The poet is directly addressing Dove.

14. Conclusion



This small effort is made to analyze spiritual journey in one of the most famous work of Cowper. It is analyzed under the theoretical framework of leech and short. Meaning is deeply analyzed by the seven lenses provided by them to explore meaning. All these lenses help to understand the deep phenomenon of religion. The model of leech and short helps to understand how hymn take a man from individual to the wholeness. This is an innovative effort to draw attention of readers towards spiritual journey. This work will help readers to understand the powerful phenomenon of religion.

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