



Stylistic Analysis of Tennyson's Poem “*from The Princess: Tears, Idle Tears*”

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7981754

Abstract

This research paper aims a comprehensive stylistic analysis of Alfred Lord Tennyson's profound poem, “from the Princess: Tears, Idle Tears.” The purpose of the study is to scrutinize the utilization of various stylistic devices and examine how they contribute to the overall emotional depth, thematic significance, and aesthetic appeal of the poem. A systematic investigation is conducted, highlighting the poet's use of imagery, metaphors, similes, alliteration, assonance, and other rhetorical devices. Additionally, the research delves into Tennyson's use of diction, rhythm, and rhyming scheme, to uncover how these elements combine to create a melancholic and introspective tone. The study also explores the influence of Tennyson's personal life and Victorian era context on his stylistic choices. Our analysis confirms that Tennyson's artistic and emotional mastery, demonstrated through his adept use of stylistic devices, effectively conveys poignant themes of longing, sorrow, and the passage of time. This research paper enhances the understanding of Tennyson's unique stylistic methodology, offering new perspectives into the emotive power and lasting impact of the poem “from the Princess: Tears, Idle Tears.”

Keywords: Stylistic, Analysis, Tennyson, Poem, *from the Princess: Tears, Idle Tears*.

Introduction

Alfred Tennyson's “*from the Princess: Tears, Idle Tears*.” combines beauty with sadness in a way that causes a reader to feel empathy for the speaker. Tennyson's speaker can depict the sorrow of mourning and the devastation of lost youth. He brings attention to what it means to age and become aware of the darker side of life. In particular, the speaker mourns over the days that are gone and will never return. He also feels sorrow for those who have lived and died before his time. By the time a reader gets to the end of the poem, it will be clear that the speaker is narrating the piece from beyond the grave. In conclusion, *Tears, Idle Tears* brings attention to feelings intimately associated with aging, such as regret, reminiscence, and despair. For doing stylistic analysis, phonological, morphological, semantic and lexical analysis have been made.

Phonological Level

Phonology is the study of linguistic systems. It describes how speech sounds are organized in English into a correct system. The phonological devices are rhymes, alliteration, consonance, assonance etc. Generally, the phonological study in stylistics explores the sounds and sound patterns used in literary texts. It examines the use of rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and other literary sound devices to convey meaning that create aesthetic effects. According to Simpson and Mayr (2010), “phonological analysis enables the stylistician to explore the ways in which sounds are deployed to create various forms of musicality, from the rhythmic to the



melodic" (p.142). By doing an analysis on the phonological features of a text, one can gain deep insight into the poet's intentions and the impact on the reader.

Stanza-1

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair

Stanza -2

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more,

Stanza -3

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Stanza -4

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

Alliteration: In the above stanzas, one can see that there are lots of alliterative sounds that has been found under an underscore - " _".

Assonance: Assonance can also be seen in the poem, for example, in the repetition of the long "i" sound in "I know not what they mean" and "deep as first love."

Consonance: There are many instances of consonance where the same consonant sounds are repeated, such as in "sink with all we love below the verge."

Rhyme: The poem has a irregular rhyme scheme.

Metre: The poem is written in iambic tetrameter, meaning each line has four iambs, or unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

Repetition/Refrain: The phrase "the days that are no more" is repeated several times throughout the poem, emphasizing the theme of nostalgia and loss. It induces the melancholic nature of the poem.

Imagery: The poem uses vivid imagery to describe the tears and the sad memories that evoke them. For e.g. "fresh beam glittering on a sail" and the "dark summer dawns."

Morphological Level

Morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are created or formed. A morphological study in stylistics involves a deep analysis on the structure of words and their contribution to the meaning and shows the effect of a literary text. This includes of Free Morphemes and Bound Morphemes. According to Leech and Short (2007), morphological analysis is a key aspect of stylistic inquiry that can reveal the subtle nuances of a text's linguistic structure.

Table I - Free and Bound Morphemes

Stanza	Free Morpheme	Bound Morpheme
1	Tears, idle, tears, know, not, they, mean, tears, from, depth, some, rise, heart, eyes, days, that, more,	Divine, despair, gather, looking, happy, thinking,
2	Fresh, first, beam, sail, brings, friends, from,	Glittering, underworld, reddens,



	our, sad, last, one, sinks, all, love, verge, sad, fresh, days, that, more,	over, below,
3	Ah, sad, strange, dark, dawns, pipe, birds, ears, when, eyes, grows, square, sad, strange, days, that, more,	Summer, earliest, dying, unto, dying, casement, slowly, glimmering,
4	Dear, death, sweet, those, feign'd, lips, that, deep, first, wild, all, love, death, life, days that, no, more,	Remember'd, kisses, after, hopeless, fancy, others, regret,

Semantic Level

A semantic study is an analysis of the meaning and interpretation of language in literary works. It examines a variety of semantic features such as word choice, metaphor, imagery, and connotation used in a work. In this analysis, the focus is on exploring the nuances of meanings created by the literary devices. According to Verdonk (2002), it is important to study the semantics of a text to gain a deeper understanding of the literary work and multidimensional interpretations. The semantic analysis of a literary work enables to unveil the layers of meaning in a text. It will also provide deeper insights into the author's intentions and the strategies employed in narration.

Stanza One

In the first lines of this piece, the speaker describes how he feels tears in his eyes. He doesn't know why they are there or what has caused them. This leads to the description of them as being "idle tears." (L 1) It is an emotion that has suddenly overwhelmed him and his brain is yet to catch up to his heart. The only thing that is clear at this point is that they come "from the depth of some divine despair." (L 2) The lines show the yearning of the poet. In looking on the happy Autumn-fields, / And thinking of the days that are no more. (L 4, 5)

Stanza Two

In the second stanza, the speaker reveals that the pain he feels at this moment of recollection is as fresh as it was the moment he first experienced it. Then, in the second line, he reveals why thinking about lost days causes him such pain. He claims that these memories "bring our friends up from the underworld." (L 7) Here, it becomes apparent the speaker is thinking about people who have died before him. The wound feels fresh as the memory of their lives and deaths spring upon him. And also the speaker reveals that the pain he feels at this moment of recollection is as fresh as it was the moment he first experienced it. It is a strange thing for "dying ears" (L 13) to hear the birds beginning to wake. As he hears the birds and thinks about the days gone by and how few days he has left, he considers "the casement." (L 14) This is a reference to the part of a window that hinges open. It is dissolving before his eyes into nothing more than a "glimmering square." (L 14)

Stanza Three

In the third stanza, the speaker says that he finds these days gone by very strange. Throughout *Tears, Idle Tears*, the speaker seems unable to fully understand his feelings. He does not know exactly where the tears come from nor does he know what divine despair causes them. The speaker states that the feeling in his heart is, "strange as in dark summer dawns." (L 11) He then describes the sound of birds as they are just awakening, and contrasts that sound with his feelings. The speaker knows that he is in his last days, unlike the birds.

Stanza Four

In the final stanza, it becomes clear the speaker is narrating from beyond the grave. He tells the reader that "kisses after death" are sweet and "Dear." (L 16) They are compared to those experienced in life that is "hopeless fancy feigned." (L 17) The speaker is relating

the emotions of death to those of love. Death is filled with the same mourning and, hopefully, joyful reception into another world. Lips will often want kisses that are meant for “others.” (L 18) The same goes for the speaker who wants to continue in his life but is unable.

Lexical Level

A lexical level study refers to the analysis of the choice, use, and meaning of individual words or lexis in a literary text (Simpson, 2004). This approach is concerned with the stylistic effects of linguistic features such as semantics, connotations, collocations, and figurative language, and how they contribute to the overall meaning and impact of a text on the reader (Short, 2014). For instance, a lexical level study can examine the use of metaphors and similes in a poem to reveal the poet's attitudes, emotions, and themes. Additionally, this approach can reveal how the author uses language to create different impressions and effects on the reader. Therefore, a thorough lexical study can provide insights into the style, technique, and meaning of a literary work.

Table II – Lexical Analysis

Stanza	Noun	Pronoun	Verb	Adverb	Adjective	Preposition	Conjunction	Interjection
1	Idle, depth, rise, heart, eyes, autumn, fields, days,	I, what, they, some,	Tears, tears, knows, mean, tears, despair, gather, looking, thinking, are,	Not, more	Divine, happy,	From, of, in, to, in, on, of,	And, and, that,	
2	Beam, sail, friends, underworld, sinks, love, verge,	Which, one, we,	Brings, our, reddens, are,	As, up, as, over, all, more,	Fresh, first, glittering, sad, last, sad, fresh,	On, from, with, below,	That, so, so, that,	
3	Summer, pipe, birds, ears, eyes, casement, glimmering, square,		Dawns grows, are,	As, when, slowly, more, no,	Sad, strange, dark, earliest, half-awakened, dying, dying, sad, sad,	Of, to, in,	And, unto, so, so, that,	Ah,
4	Dear, kisses, death, sweet, fancy, lips, others, love, love, o, death, life, days	Those,	Remember'd, feign'd, regret, are,	After, as, as, as, all, no, more,	Hopeless, deep, deep, first, wild,	By, on, with, in,	And, that, for, and, that,	



Conclusion

The comprehensive stylistic analysis of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Tears, Idle Tears," has unveiled the complexity and depth of this renowned piece of literature. By exploring various stylistic devices such as imagery, metaphor, simile, alliteration, assonance, and others, it has become evident how intricately these elements intertwine to create the poem's melancholic tone and underlying themes of longing, sorrow, and the transience of time. The distinct characteristics of Tennyson's use of diction, rhythm, and rhyme scheme have further underpinned the poem's emotional weight and introspective mood, reinforcing its enduring appeal to readers. This exploration has shown that these stylistic choices, while unique to Tennyson's artistic voice, were also profoundly influenced by his personal experiences and the broader context of the Victorian era. Tennyson's masterful use of these stylistic devices not only imbues the poem with emotional intensity but also gives it a universal resonance, as the themes explored touch upon shared human experiences and emotions. This research reaffirms the enduring relevance and emotional power of Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears," and underscores its value as a seminal work in the study of stylistic analysis in poetry. In addition, this study deepens our understanding of the way that stylistic devices can be deployed to convey complex themes and emotions, providing valuable insights for both the analysis and creation of poetry.

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Annexure

from The Princess: Tears, Idle Tears

- Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,



Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.
Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.
Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

Author (s) Contribution Statement: Nil

Author (s) Acknowledgement: Nil

Author (s) Declaration: I declare that there is no competing interest in the content and authorship of this scholarly work.



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