

A Stylistic Analysis Of Robert Frost's Poem Nothing Gold Can Stay

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate stylistic analysis of a distinguished American poet, Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay". Robert Frost's literary heritage is valued greatly in the world of global literature and without proper mention of this outstanding poet, American Literature, especially poetry may lose its worth. Theoretical framework of the paper is built on Paul Simpson's book *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* (2004). The analysis presents the phonological, graphological, lexico-syntactic patterns of stylistic orientation. It is observed that the objective analysis of the poem is helpful in clear understanding of various themes and basic concepts of the poem such as nature and its impermanence. Change is vital for all living things and it also brings about decay and decline. The Garden of Eden as a metaphor discusses stages of life and death. The poem is simple and brief piece of literary composition but its themes are universal in nature. In addition, it also portrays the basic difference of ordinary language and figurative language. Findings suggest that Robert Frost has skillfully conveyed his poetic message with the application of stylistic devices. This study can be an extension to the already research work carried out on the poet.

Keywords: Stylistic analysis, Robert Frost, graphological, syntactical, phonological patterns

Introduction:

The current study objectively presents a stylistic analysis of the American poet Robert Frost's wonderful poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" which discusses a universal law that everything good, beautiful and precious cannot stay permanently in this world. It is ultimately bound to fade away and perish. The proposed poem, through various natural images and poetic art, portrays real life situations in extraordinary way. It is observed that nature plays a central role in the poem as it illustrates various stages of life, demise and the "loss of innocence" significantly. It also depicts scenes and sights of short-lived phases of life and beauty. In this regard, Cen and Garner (2021) state that, in his poems, nature functions as a chief

symbol to represent phases of life and death. Here nature demonstrates how quickly living things come to an end. They are of the views that the poet has artistically carried out presentation of life. In addition to it, Robert Frost has used beauty of nature to draw our attention that all beautiful and artistic things are bound to decay. They do not hold any perennial existence. According to Cox (2021), the lyricist, in this poem explores the elements of "the inevitability of change. At first glance, the poem appears to be lines of conflicting words forming loose references to the changing of seasons. The vague references to nature and paradise do not, at first, appear to work together to create a main idea. However, Frost's use of paradox, ambiguity, imagery and irony reveal the

true complexity of the poem, pulling the lines into a unified whole” (p.1). Cox points out that the poet has discussed a certainty of change in his marvelous creation. In the beginning, the poem appears to depict a conflict of words only, but afterwards, his use of literary devices like paradox, ambiguity, imagery and irony illustrates truthfulness of his observation. In this context, Swope (2016) asserts, it is about the concept of short-lived life. The poet explains that all things decay and it is their prime quality which makes attractive and stunning. The poem describes “the fleeting nature of beauty by discussing time’s effect on nature. The poet is saying that the commonly accepted beauty of the first buds of green shooting up after a long winter is worth as much as gold. It is of course a fleeting beauty; the seasons will inevitably march on. The soft beauty of spring soon fades to summer and beyond” (p.22). Additionally, Cureton (2006) states that the poet has deftly discussed the concept of four seasons metaphorically. Here spring and summer are shown vigorous, warm and full of life while autumn is presented as a withering and winter symbolizes demise. Human beings begin to decline this way. In the period of youth, we are healthy, physically active and charming. “Many of our golden qualities emerge early then they are slowly lost”. The poet has depicted this appealing landscape in poetic words. Alupoaipei (2021) asserts Frost with the help of poetic technicalities like rhyme, meter, symbolism and literary devices communicated to us the themes of the poem. He explored that everything in nature “changes and decays over time”. He urged us that life is very short so we should carefully appreciate natural scenic beauties and people around. Moreover, Yustisiana (2018), in his study on Humanity in Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, reveals that this poem about the ephemera of the law of life of the people. He explains it masterly with the power of metaphorical expression. Moreover, Ply and Curter (2003) assert that it is “a poem which

shows ephemerality to common to youth in nature, the early theological beginnings and the passing of each day. Frost’s poem focuses on blossoming, of potentials met, and of the inevitable downfall or decay of these. Frost gives no consolation for the ‘grief’ after this decay, but merely states the fact of its occurrence” (p.1). Ply and Curter point out that Robert Frost has painted ephemeral flight of life. It is very short-lived and fleeting. He has attempted to present his powerful observation about the existence of human life through natural objects.

Significance of Research

This study is essential for researchers interested in analysis of literary works, especially poetry, with academic reference to the field of stylistics. It is anticipated that findings of the study and conclusions will contribute to a better comprehension of Robert Frost’s poems. This study is significant in stylistic analysis, especially phonology, graphology, lexico-syntactic and literary devices.

Limitations of Study

The current study was limited only to stylistic analysis of phonological level, graphological level and lexico-syntactic level of stylistic analysis. In order to validate the study on scientific grounds of research and objective analysis only one poem of Robert Frost was selected.

Literature Review

It is generally believed that stylistics emanates from word style. Style is understood as the proper position of words used in a manner which communicate the individuality of the writer and “the idea and intent in mind”. In this regard, Hussain (1992) claims that style is based on two components: the expression of ideas and distinctiveness of the author. Style, in general terms, is composed of various components like diction, imagery, rhythm, consistency, stress, construction of sentence and arrangement of

ideas. In support of Hussain, Bilal & Cheema (2012) mention that stylistics originates from the word style which means “appropriate use of words in a sentence or writing” (p.25). Bilal and Cheema in their arguments state that the foundation of the field of stylistic comes from the word style. And stylistics generally focuses on the peculiar choice of words in the body of sentences.

Furthermore, it is stated that stylistics is a branch of linguistics that discusses study of literary texts. For example, Barry, in his exceptional book, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to literary and cultural theory* (2002), writes "stylistics is a critical approach which uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts" (p.203). Barry is of the view that the discipline of stylistics holds some critical techniques which are applied for objective analysis of any literary work. Here the word "linguistics" suggests "scientific study of language". However, Khan, Khan and Qasim (2021) assert that stylistics is a tool to interpret text all the way through language. It has achieved marvelous importance in the course of analysis of literary works owing to its method of objective analysis. In addition to it, Simpson (2004) highlighting the purpose of stylistics argues "To do stylistics is to explore language, and more, specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways of thinking about language and, as observed, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts" (p.3). In Simpson's intellectual remarks, stylistics discovers creativity in the use of language, particularly. It broadens our rational level and supplies a big key to unlock concepts of various literary works. Moreover, Widdowson (2013), in his orientation, describes the concept of stylistics as a study of discourse with regard to linguistic attitude. He terms stylistics as a method of interpretation with the help of different language

devices. In order to portray a simple definition, in simple words, stylistics is based on various components of style and it is an academic approach to texts. According to In addition to it, Gregoriou, a stylistician of high repute, in her brilliant work, *English Literary Stylistics* (2009) discusses that “Stylistics was, initially, born of a reaction to the subjectivity and imprecision of literary studies, and in short, attempted to put criticism on scientific basis (see Fish, 1980, Short, 1982). In other words, literary criticism was thought of as imprecise and subjective, and so stylistics was born in order to objectify claims made about the way in which literary texts carry meaning” (p.3). She, being an expert in the field, believes stylistics was propounded and theorized as a reaction to subjectiveness and “lack of exactness and accuracy” of literary works. It attempts to explore and provide scientific foundation to criticism. In support of Gregoriou, Simpson (1993) believes “Stylistics, first of all, normally refers to the practice of using linguistics for the study of literature. Exponents of stylistics are quick to point out, however, that stylistics techniques can be applied to texts other than those included in the established literary canon” (p.2). Moreover, Stockwell and Whiteley (2014) discuss “Stylistics has become the most common name for the discipline which at times has been termed literary linguistics, rhetoric, poetics, literary philosophy and close textual reading” (p.11). Similarly, Lattig and Hoover (2007) describe stylistics as a major component of linguistic approach while Iqbal, Iqbal and Kanwal (2014) in their study on *Stylistic Analysis of W.H. Auden’s Poem “O Where are you Going”* believe that this research is meant to discover concealed and literal meanings and develop the understanding of the verses. The poet illustrates a clear difference of hope and despair. These two different sides of human life are meaningfully presented vice versa. He thought it compulsory to narrate that the basic duty of a poet is to guide readers and listeners. Furthermore,

through different levels of stylistic analysis not only the basic sense of words and thoughts are revealed but also the understanding of the texts gets richer. In this context, Batool, Khan, Iqbal, Ali & Rafiq (2014) move ahead and assert that stylistic “analysis covers the different aspects such as the lexico-syntactic patterns and choices, semantically, grammatically, graphological and phonological patterns. This analysis is helpful in understanding the basic concept of poem that is the contrast between the selection of right and wrong of life. the poet conveyed his message, themes, views and handling of conflict forcefully by using different stylistic devices” (p.52). The above scholars are of the opinion that stylistic analysis is the basic method of linguistic approach that helps us to discover the originality of thought through various stylistic devices. They also suggest that this objective analysis can be helpful in understanding the writer’s philosophical view. In this regard, Khan & Khan (2016) in their study on ‘Stylistic Analysis of Maya Angelou’s Poem’ “Woman Work” describe stylistics is the product of style. It is a way of written and spoken structure. They focused on phonological pattern, figurative language and lexical devices employed by Maya Angelou in her poem. Their stylistic analysis illustrates themes of slavery, black woman and exploitation. Moreover, it is also revealed that the world of nature is a healing influence to her troubled life. Apart from the above arguments, Huda, Ali and Mahmood (2014) in their study “Stylistic analysis of William Blake’s poem A Poison Tree” present that “stylistic analysis examines various aspects of the style of a text. They reveal that the text of the said poem underlines human beings, along with the ability to reason and question, possess the capacity to hate, and yet also to forgive” (p.76). The authors believe that William Blake’s poem A Poison Tree was deeply and clearly understood when it was scientifically analyzed under the levels of stylistic analysis.

The above arguments of different scholars point out that, stylistics is a modern discipline which attempts to objectively analyze literary texts with linguistic tools. In other words, it is a linguistic approach to discover literary concepts behind literary texts. Therefore, Robert Frost’s above poem is chosen for stylistic analysis and the following questions are framed to discover relevant answers.

Research Questions:

- Q1. Which levels of stylistics have been used by Robert Frost in the said poem?
- Q2. How many literary devices are integrated in “Nothing Gold Can Stay”?

Research Methodology

As far as the section of research methodology is concerned, it follows the principles and techniques of content analysis and its theoretical framework is built upon Paul Simpson’s brilliant book *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* (2004). The analysis presents phonological, graphological, syntactical, and semantic patterns of stylistic orientation as suggested by Paul Simpson. The aforementioned three levels of stylistics are objectively explored from “Nothing Gold Can Stay”. In terms of content analysis, it is said that interpretation and analysis of written texts or verbal stuff is termed as content analysis. As far as its origin is concerned, Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language used this term in its 1961 edition. However, Parveen and Showkat (2017) shedding light on this research technique define that “Being the scientific study of the content of communication, content analysis is actually the study of contexts, meanings, sub-texts, intensions contained in the messages. In simple terms, content analysis is what is being said, written or recorded” (p.1). In this connection, Krippendorff (2004) asserts “Content analysis is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences. The content analysis views data as representations not

of physical events of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind” (P.xiii). Krippendorff explains content analysis is one of the major research tools of social sciences. It reveals and interprets what is being expressed by the writers, poets, novelists, speakers and presenters in their respective works. Moreover, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) illustrate distinctive approaches to content analysis. They believe “Content analysis show three distinct approaches: conventional, directed and summative.....In conventional content analysis coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or research findings as guides for initial codes. A summative analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content followed by interpretation of the underlying context” (p.1277). Hsieh and Shannon technically discuss three different approaches to content analysis. They state that content analysis is flexible to be used as a research technique.

Levels of Stylistic Analysis

There are many levels of stylistic analysis presented by Simpson but here only three levels are objectively analyzed and interpreted.

1. **Phonological Level:** This level of stylistics discusses how words are pronounced. In other words, it also describes "sound of spoken language".

Rhyme Scheme: Rhymes are technical components of poems. Rhyme makes poetry musical and different than that of prose.

Alliteration: It is a major literary device to add rhythmic beauty to the field of poetry. Alliteration is the repetition of the same vowel sounds written in a line one after another.

Consonance: It is a literary device in which the "same consonant sound repeats within a group of poetry"

Assonance: It is also called "vowel rhyme". It describes the "repetition of vowel sounds across a line of poetry"

2. Graphological Level:

Graphology illustrates that how language is shaped when it is written on any page. It means "patterns of written language". Graphological level discovers how the author has used graphic sources of language to present his artistic ideas. It includes "capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing and spacing".

Capitalization:

The concept of capitalization reveals using "capital letters" in writing. Proper adjectives, proper noun, titles, designations, names of cities, countries and currencies are usually written in capitalization.

Punctuation: Punctuation is extremely significant for written expression. It is used in every piece of writing based on literal or literary language. This short poem also contains various signs (marks) of punctuations such as "comma, full stop, colon, semi-colon, question marks" which add technical grace to poetry.

Paragraphing

It means separate units of a written text in prose and poetry. Paragraphing in the language of poetry is called stanza arrangement or cantos.

3. Lexico-Syntactic Level:

This level of stylistic analysis discovers vocabulary of a language and sentence structure is formed. There are several elements of lexico-syntactic but this poem presents only one item of "Anaphora".

Anaphora: It is a rhetorical device which brings about the concept of "the repetition of the same word at the beginning of two lines".

Introduction of the Poem

The poem chosen for analysis is an exceptional creative energy penned by Robert Frost, a major voice of the American poetry. This beautiful short narrative poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" first published in "Yale Review" in 1923 and later was compiled in poetic collection New Hampshire in the same year. The poem presents the idea of "change and decay". Robert Frost, in a philosophical way, expresses his thoughts about the changing nature of beautiful objects. He deftly discusses that the even the most beautiful and joyous moments of life are bound to wither and perish. Consequently, happy and precious moments should be approached and valued before they fade away and lose their glory. It is observed that the poem is a "condensed work where every word and sound has a complete role to perform". It has been minutely witnessed that Robert Frost's poems reflect a natural world because the natural environment is the cornerstone for constructing lyrical truths, within which are concealed meanings and thoughts. In this context, Spacey (2022) claims that "Nothing Gold Can Stay" is "a compressed piece of work in which each word and sound plays its part in full. Written when Frost was 48 years old, an experienced poet, whose life had known grief and family tragedy, the poem focuses on the inevitability of loss: how nature, time, and mythology are all subject to cycles. As with many a Frost poem, close observation of the natural world is the foundation for building poetic truths, inside of which lie hidden messages and ideas". Spacey has wonderfully presented his view point about various elements of this musical poem. Minute natural observation and environmental consciousness is the foundation of this poem.

Biography of the Poet:

Robert Frost is one of the most prominent verse-writers of the American Literature. His short and long poems all are tremendously valued and publicly read owing to his thematic variety and originality of presentation. In this respect, Yustisiana (2018) believes "Frost is highly regarded for his realistic depiction of rural life...His literary works stand at the crossroads of the 19th century American poetry and modernism. He is realist and his works abound in metaphors of life using nature. His works make use of colloquial American language, and many of his poems can be interpreted on many levels. Much of his poetry holds undertones of sadness and tragedy" (p.122). Though he was born in California but later decided to migrate to England. After spending some years in England, he was back to his native country, America, and earned sound reputation in different countries due to his mind-blowing poems and scholarly contribution. Cain, Burto and Barnet (2006) throwing light on Robert Frost's life and poetic achievement, express "In fact he was well read in classics, the Bible, and English and American literature. He believed 'a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom'" (p.931). These intellectual giants state that Robert Frost thoroughly studied classics along with the holy book of Christian faith, the Bible. Additionally, he was expert in American literature as well English literature. He viewed that a poem begins with pleasure and comes to an end with sagacity and insight.

From the flight of his poetic journey, he had suffered great tragedies but despite all these tensions he found solace and shelter in the world of poetry. His countryside environment and images made his poetry worth reading. Rural setting has found out an enormous space in his artistic energies, poems. His poetry is loaded with universality and comprehensive views about different stages of human behavior.

Text of the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

"Nature's first green is gold,	A
Her hardest hue to hold.	A
Her early leaf's a flower;	B
But only so an hour.	B
Then leaf subsides to leaf.	C
So Eden sank to grief,	C
So dawn goes down to day.	D
Nothing gold can stay".	D

Stylistic Analysis of "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

1. Phonological Level:

Rhyme Scheme: As far as rhyming scheme of the poem is concerned, it is based on AA-BB-CC-DD.

Alliteration:

1. Green and gold
2. Herhardest, hue and hold
3. Dawn, down, day

A. Consonance:

Nature's first green is gold

Then leaf subsides to leaf

Assonance:

Her early leaf's forever

So Eden to sank to grief

2. Graphological Level:

Capitalization:

The title of the poem is written in capital letters. Moreover, every line of each poetic line begins with capital letter.

Punctuation:

As far as punctuation is concerned, Comma is used twice in line number one and six while full stop has been applied 5 times in this 8-lined poem. Full stop is placed after line number 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 respectively but semi colon is used only once in line 3.

Paragraphing

In terms of paragraphing, it is observed that this 8-lined short poem consists of four couplets. Each couplet is formed of two lines.

3. Lexico-Syntactic Level:

Anaphora:

Robert Frost has used literary device anaphora in lines number 7 and 8 respectively.

“So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down today”.

Literary devices in poem:

Apart from the above levels of stylistic analysis, the following literary devices are used. Literary devices extend help to the authors to effectively communicate their thoughts, emotions, and sentiments richly using precise language.

Imagery:

Imagery presents mental picture of different elements and objects used in poetry. It brings a clear visual image of living and non-living things. The following lines carry out a transparent reality about imagery. “Nature's first green is gold,”; “Then leaf subsides to leaf,” and “So dawn goes down today.” In this poem, Robert Frost has employed several literary techniques. The

following is a breakdown of some of the poem's literary strategies.

Personification:

"It is the process of enriching lifeless objects with human characteristics. Across the poem, Robert Frost has taken on the role of nature's personification. Nature is referred to as "she," implying that she is a person who undergoes seasonal changes".

Allusion:

"It is an idea that alludes to a historical, cultural, political, or literary figure, place, thing, or concept indirectly. For example, **“Eden sunk to grief.”** It is a nod to the Garden of Eden, emphasizing that the Earth, too, is beautiful, but only for a short time.

Paradox:

“Nature’s initial green is gold,” as stated in line one, is the first example. “Her early leaf is a flower,” as mentioned in line three, is the second example. Frost has used these uncertainties to underline the poem’s theme of how good things might end.

Metaphor:

It is an employed simile. A simile can be changed into a metaphor and metaphor into a simile. "The poet used nature as a metaphor to represent the thought that nothing good and alluring can last forever."

Symbolism:

"The use of symbols to represent ideas and traits by assigning them symbolic meanings other than their literal meanings is known as symbolism. For example, "gold" stands for happiness and all the lovely things in life, while "green" stands for nature".

Major Themes:

“Nothing Gold can stay” presents the themes of "transitions, timelessness, and environment" which dominant themes in the poetry of Robert Frost. He has used the concept of "seasons and nature" to portray a clear picture in the minds of readers. The readers might imagine how the gold petal transforms into green leaves, signifying how hours of pleasure are lost in time's ever-changing cycle. As a result, one should appreciate the beauty surrounding them before it vanishes over time.

Findings:

After a careful study of Robert Frost's selected poem, it was revealed that his poetry is sound with universality. The text is not dull and boring rather interesting and full of meaningful concepts. Even a new or an ordinary reader will enjoy its reading. The words on which stressed is placed, they attract readers’ and listeners’ attention. Through splendid poetic language Robert Frost shows us “how nature, time, and mythology are all subject to cycles. He wrote short poems to herald his innovative poetic thought. All research questions put up in the section of literature review have been logically and clearly addressed. Moreover, it was also learnt that his poetry is replete with pastoral elements. A deeper analysis of his verses portrays that his poetry is also loaded with romanticism, naturalism, symbolism and ecocriticism, great literary movements of world literature. Furthermore, there is also a need to carry out a detailed study of his poetry with poets of Pakistani Literature, especially Shaikh Ayaz, Parveen Shakir, Munir Niazi, Tanveer Abbasi, etc. The present study will pave the way for more research on Robert Frost's literary genius and his works can be analyzed in terms of various literary approaches and cultural theories.

Conclusion:

The greatness of Robert Frost stands owing to his poetically artistic excellence. His poems are

teeming with lofty ideals. As a front-rank American poet, his poetry doesn't carry any harsh note. He composed his poems as a painter. His poems are almost short, musical and full of rhythmic qualities. His poetic novelty is of extraordinary level which holds a perennial appeal even though centuries have passed. He was a poet of the people as he has applied very simple and conversational language to transmit his unique ideas publicly. In addition to it, his poetry is rich with figurative technique and stylistic patterns.

Robert Frost has deeply and successfully conveyed his poetic message to the people of world which cannot easily be understood by common men. Different theories, approaches and techniques could be used to discover his poetic heritage. That is why the current study is an attempt to explore various levels of stylistics used in the proposed poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay". Though stylistics is a new discipline in the field of linguistics yet its critical methods help scholars to investigate the originality of poetic texts written by this giant poet of the American nation.

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Appendix

“Nothing Gold Can Stay” By Robert Frost

“Nature’s first green is gold,
 Her hardest hue to hold.
 Her early leaf’s a flower;
 But only so an hour.
 Then leaf subsides to leaf.
 So Eden sank to grief,
 So dawn goes down to day.
 Nothing gold can stay.”