

## STYLISTICS ANALYSIS OF THE POEM “A BIRTHDAY PRESENT”: STUDENTS’ GROUP DISCUSSION IN GOVT POSTGRADUATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN MARDAN

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### Abstract

Stylistic analysis is one of the major branch of linguistics, which deals with the study of style as well as identification of different figurative devices, and meanings present in a poem. This research paper examines the poem “A Birthday present” which is composed by Sylvia plath from the perspective of stylistics analysis. The paper aims to identify the significance of the title “A Birthday present” and to analyze the poem at phonological level. It also explores thematic development through figurative devices used in the poem. In the given poem, “A Birthday present” the researcher identified the phonological level, thematic level and significance of the title of the poem for better understanding of the poem, also the researcher acquired detailed stylistics analysis of the poem. In this poem, Plath discussed “Death” as a birthday present. Plath showed that death is the best thing for her. She considered “death” a better salvation for women to get rid of this meaningless life.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

According to Thomas Hardy, “Poetry is emotion put into measure”. Poetry is something that recalls or feels an emotion or can be defined as imagery. Poetry promotes beauty, awakes emotions and thoughts. Good poetry promotes the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual sense of the people. A poem expresses the deep feelings, thoughts and emotions of a poet. The poet communicates with the readers through poetry. The Poet conveys message to the readers through his poems. In order to understand the real meanings of poetry, the readers must understand the deeper meaning of the words.

There are two types of poetry:

1. Subjective/personal
2. Objective/impersonal

### STYLE

It deals with the presentation of the writer’s writing that how he or she choose the words or figurative language to transmit his or her opinions or feelings to the readers.

### STYLISTICS

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics which deals with the study of writer’s style. A writer uses different stylistic devices in order to decorate his works .It is a way of discovering literary passage. It is a manner of textual understanding in which dominance is given to language. Stylistics deals with the evaluation and analysis of literary text. It concentrates on the stylistic devices in order to provide unique characteristics of

writer's writing. A stylistics analysis is a method in which we find out the writing style of a writer. In stylistics analysis importance is given to language because various forms, levels and patterns combine to form the passage.

Stylistics analysis is a literary study which deals with the hidden devices and meanings used in a poem. The focus of stylistics is on the style of literary texts. Stylistics deals with the literary devices like structure, theme, tone and syntax. Stylistics is the modern version of the ancient discipline called "rhetoric" by Peter Barry, in his book "Beginning Theory."

According to different views, style deals with different meanings. Some people consider that style totally depends upon linguistics levels, which means that writing and texts are different from each other. For instance, it is said that the way one speaker performs or writes reflects the thought of a person. In short we can say that stylistics combines together both literary criticism and linguistics.

The present research stylistically analyzes the poem. Hence the current study analyzed the poem at phonological and thematic level and highlights the significance of the title.

## STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The present research raises an attempt to analyze the poem stylistically, to find out the themes, analyze elements at phonological level and highlights the significance of the title.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does the title "A Birthday Present" signify?
2. How can the poem be analyzed at phonological level?
3. How do the figurative devices helps in the development of themes?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify the significance of the title "A Birthday present"
- To analyze the poem at phonological level.
- To explore thematic development through figurative devices used in the poem.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present research study is very significant as it introduces stylistics analysis of the poem "A Birthday Present". This study is helpful in understanding the poetic works of Sylvia Plath. It guides the researchers who study the poetic contributions of Sylvia Plath. Moreover different themes and significance of the title are explored through this study. It also analyzes the poem at phonological level.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Mark A Runco in his article "Suicide and creativity: The case of Sylvia Plath" (1998) find out the suggestion which can be well read by viewing the poetry of Plath. Her poetry is the result of her appearance and thinking. Plath had done a lot of writing which were mainly the cause of her thinking and sadness. The researcher also discovered the emotions that inclined her to anxiety and sadness. This perception is interlinked to her prose and inventiveness and also mingled and compared with the awful demise and description of Plath's work.

Tracy Brain in his work "Dangerous confessions: The Problem of reading Sylvia Plath Biographically" (2006) mentioned that some writers are well known for being confessional by their own prose and poetry to enlighten their incidents than Plath. In order to support Plath as a confessional poet, her biographies take various methods. There are some important weaknesses which reveal Plath as a confessional writer. In most of her literary works, Plath talks about her personal life experiences and incidents. The suggestion or opinion of being Plath as a confessional writer widespread among many biographers and reviewer. In the opinion of Janice Markey, few poems of Plath discussed actual life and incidents (1993). From her work we can conclude her death and life.

In the article "Confronted Patriarchy in Sylvia Plath poems", (2009) Kukuh Prayitno Subagyo asserts that women are considered subordinate or lower in the society. The symbols used by the Plath are mainly connected to the theme of Death. Quoting Anderson, she says that women's suffering is due to the male leadership in social roles; due to this women are subordinate to men. Death symbolizes the freedom in her poems. She experiences a situation of reserved and revolt against the men's supremacy. She illustrates that how female determined for identification and

how they are depressed by her poetry. She described that women struggles for identity because they are subjugated in the society. They are incapable to solve their issues and they have missed their status and identification. They are oppressed in the male dominating society. She says that it is complicated for women to gasp liberally in the society and they live in a depressed situation. Actually they live a comfortable life with husbands and their children but emotionally they are subjugated. They cannot speak to their subjugators. She shares her sufferings, tragic and depressing situations that she cannot live openly every time in that tragic life. She describes that they will get free from male's supremacy only through death. (pp. 82, 83, 85, 86, 91, 92)

Haneen Hamza and Harwa Hadi in a research paper "Gender in Sylvia Plath's Daddy" (2018) discusses that Sylvia Plath is the main figure of the confessional poetry. She was a well known and prominent figure of confessional poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her father passed away when she was eight years old. Father's death fall her into a deep sorrow and after it the poetry of her is represented by the quality of central problems. In 1950, she entered Smith College and she feels loss. In the progress and improvement of American poetry, the thirty years of her life is very significant time. She expresses her sufferings, pains of her own life in her poetry. She committed first suicide when she was twenty years old. When she meets Ted Hughes she loved him and thought that he is suited for her. In 1950 she married him but their relation was not successful. She wrote very good poems before her death which is included in the Ariel. She wrote most of her poems about the domination of men and she fights against this system. Women have lost status, identification and they are oppressed under the men. Gender means qualities of men and women in a society. It means that how they behave and live in a society. In the nineteen century there were a lot of female writers. In this century women were educated and they wants to learn more things to promote their skills. Daddy is a well known poem written by Sylvia Plath in 1965. She wrote about her father's death in this poem. Her father passed away when she was eight years old. She wrote about the female that they are oppressed by men's power. She described about father that how she spent life with him. It was a complex

relation between them. She was very angry with this power of men.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study followed analytical method of research for the stylistic analysis of the poem "A Birthday Present." It also analyzes the poem at phonological level, thematic and highlighted the significance of the title. Data is collected from primary source, text of the poem and secondary sources are articles, journals and research papers.

### RESEARCH PARADIGM

This current research study obeys qualitative method, and answers all the three research questions. The data is collected from primary source and some of the secondary sources. (as webs, articles, journals, papers etc).The present study paradigm for this research is based on the theory of stylistics.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of the current study is qualitative and analytical in nature. The structure of the poem is analyzed analytically. The current research stylistically analyzed the poem. Hence the current study analyzes the poem at phonological level, thematic and highlighted the significance of the title.

### DATA COLLECTION

The data for the current research is collected from different sources. The primary source includes the text of the poem. And the secondary sources are websites, articles, books, journals and research papers.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Another step is data analysis. After collecting data from different sources, the next is the close reading of the poem. This poem is studied through textual analysis as well as the themes, phonological level and the significance of the title are identified stylistically.

### THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics which deals with the study of writer's style. A writer uses different stylistic devices in order to decorate his work. It is a way of discovering a literary passage and is a manner of textual understanding in which dominance is given to language. Stylistics deals with the evaluation and

analysis of literary texts. It concentrates on the stylistic devices in order to provide unique characteristics of writer's writing. This is a method in which we find out the writing style of a writer. In stylistics analysis, importance is given to language because various forms, levels and patterns combines to form a passage. Stylistics analysis is a literary study which deals with the hidden devices and meanings used in a poem. The focus of stylistics is on the style of literary texts. It deals with the literary devices like structure, theme, tone and syntax. It is the modern version of an ancient discipline called "rhetoric" by Peter Barry, in his book "Beginning Theory".

According to different views, style deals with different meanings. Some people consider that style totally depends upon linguistics levels, which means that writing and texts are different from each other. For instance, it is said that the way one speaker performs or writes, it reflects the thought of a person. In short we can say that stylistics combines together both literary criticism and linguistics.

#### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The main concern of stylistics in literary passage or text is to give importance to textual analysis. "New criticism" is a new name given to stylistics. In stylistic analysis significance is given to the main ideas and literary devices that are present in the poem and that the writer wants to portray to his/her audience. The term "stylistics" was invented by the editors of the journal *Scrutiny* in 1930s. Stylistics analysis explores the poem at textual level. The main purpose of stylistics analysis is to explore the poem and to find out the literary devices which are present in the poem. In short, we can say that stylistics is the study of style of a literary text.

It deals with literary and non literary texts and is scientific and objective in nature. The technical terms which are used in stylistics are derived from linguistics. The main characteristics of writing are shown through stylistics analysis. Close reading of the text is essential for analyzing a text.

Stylistics is the study of features of language in text. The main concern of stylistics is with the text as well as with literary devices which are present in the poem like parts of speech and figures of speech.

Different types of stylistics include;

- Literary
- Stylistics
- General
- Stylistics
- Phono-
- Stylistics
- Stylo-
- Stylistics

The focus of current research is on literary stylistics, which is the study of language used in literature. A text is analyzed on objective ways in literary stylistics and it also has an impact on different kinds of critical study.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF TITLE "A BIRTHDAY PRESENT"

"A Birthday Present" includes in Sylvia Plath's collection of poetry named "Ariel". It is written six months before her suicide. In this poem Plath has discusses "Death" as a birthday present. Plath thinks that the only best thing she could do for herself is to kill herself. Due to anxiety and depression she always thinks of committing suicide.

Sylvia Plath emphasizes the responsibilities and duties which are assigned to every woman since the time of her birth. Every woman has to obey the rules and perform each and every task of the household. As a result, no charm of life is given to her. Women gets no happiness and freedom for themselves. Life becomes meaningless and useless for her. Sylvia Plath shows that they are given some specific tasks like getting married and pro creation which prevents them from getting education and to know about their roles in society.

Sylvia Plath considers "Death" a better salvation for women to get rid of this meaningless life. The household chores and responsibilities kills her each day, therefore, she wants an escape from them. Death seems a good opportunity to get freedom.

In this poem she is convincing herself that suicide is a best way for releasing her hardships in life. It is a personal poem based on her personal emotions.

In this poem, the speaker tells that the birthday present is death or something else whether it is attractive or unattractive but it has a real form or any woman like traits. She thinks about birthday present for a longer period of time and thinks that birthday is special for her.

As a woman, she wants to get this birthday present because she is fed up of all the rules and regulations of being a mother and wife. By receiving this birthday present, she will get joy, happiness and therefore death is a form of declaration for her and she cannot think of its good and bad effects.

Throughout the poem, she expresses her feelings and beliefs about the patriarchal society that she wants death to become free from the supremacy and dominance of males and wants to die peacefully.

All of her works shows her behavior towards cessation of life. In the given poem, Plath uses death as a mark of satisfaction and happiness in her life. She uses different literary devices in the poem to show the readers that all the time her opinion towards death is delightful and satisfactory.

### PHONOLOGY

Phonology is the branch of linguistics which deals with the study of sound identification as well as it is used to portray the sound of a word. The main concern of phonology is to identify and interpret different categories of sounds in a literary text or passage in order to ensure about the different aspects, themes, subjects, feelings and concepts of a text.

### PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

Elements of phonological level includes; Alliteration, Repetition, Onomatopoeia, Consonance, Tone of the author, End rhyme

### ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a figurative device used to repeat similar ideas at the start of two or more than two words. Alliteration produces a musical or tuneful effect in the text. It means that alliteration is only used for the purpose of melody in a literary passage or text.

Sylvia Plath uses alliteration in the present poem in order to create musical effect and to attract the reader's attention.

Bossed, brazen,

There is repetition of consonant sounds [b]. It refers to her willingness to death that she is not ashamed of attending suicide and imagines that the giver destroyed her reaction.

great-grandchildren

There is repetition of consonant sounds [g]. It refers to the death that we should not be terrified of death.

### REPETITION

Repetition is a stylistic device which refers to the use of words or phrases intentionally two or more than two times in order to create an effect in the text. It means that repetition is a literary device in which similar words or phrases are repeated again and again in order to produce a musical effect in the utterance. Repetition is used to bring clarity to a poem as well as it is used to make it easier for the audience or receiver to remember it.

to rules, to rules, to rules

Repetition of the phrase "to rules" is used. Here, the poet scorns the patriarchal rules of the society.

Sweetly, sweetly

Repetition of the word "sweetly" is used. For the poet, death is a moment of charm and enjoyment.

the veil, the veil, the veil.

Repetition of the phrase "the veil" is used. The repetition of this phrase shows her strong desire for death that she desperately wants the most.

I am sure, I am sure

Here, again the repetition of the phrase "I am sure" is used. She has a great desire for death and she thinks that it is the death which wants me.

### ONOMATOPOEIA

Onomatopoeia is a figure of speech which is used to reflect the sound of the things. It means that onomatopoeia is the quality of words which is used to produce sound of things.

Onomatopoeic words include;

Shriek and Crackle

Sylvia Plath used onomatopoeic words in her poem in order to capture the reader's attention about her feelings and emotions. Plath makes use of shriek and crackle sounds to express her feelings. Shriek means to cry with high sound which shows the speaker's sufferings and hopelessness. While crackle refers to sharp noises which also indicate speaker's hardships and pain about the dominance of men in society. The speaker used these words to make the readers aware of her feelings that she is not happy from the supremacy of males in society and welcomes death as a moment of pleasure.

### CONSONANTS

It is a sound which is produced by the blockage of air in the oral cavity or the nasal cavity.

Consonance in the poem was observed in the following lines:

White as babies' bedding and glittering with dead breath. O ivory!

Must you stamp each piece purple,

Let it not come by the mail, finger by finger.

## tone of the author

Tone means mood of the speaker that what is the behavior or mood of the speaker towards the main idea of the poem, the speaker as well as the readers. Mood refers to the sensation and emotions of the poet that the poet wants to convey to the readers with the help of main idea, subject matter or theme. Every literary text has its own main idea or theme that the speaker portrays through the use of his/her specific diction. The tone of the writer always depends upon the mood of the writer that the writer portrays; it can be comic, serious, formal, informal, regretful, cheerful, sarcastic, as well as optimistic and pessimistic etc.

The tone of speaker in the current poem is highly serious and dejected because the poet is unhappy with the patriarchal society and its rules that are imposed on women. Men always enforce women to live life according to these patriarchal rules that is why the tone of the poet is dejected. She is in a miserable mood and always welcomes death as a pleasing moment in her life.

For Plath, the link between existence of life and cessation of life is as near and closer that can be easily dignified without any hurdle.

Plath's tone is highly contemptuous and dejected. She has lost hope and desires for death willingly. Throughout the poem she expresses her feelings and beliefs about the patriarchal society that she wants death to become free from the supremacy and dominance of males and wants to die peacefully.

All works of Plath shows her behavior towards cessation of life. In the given poem "A Birthday Present" Plath uses death in the poem as a mark of satisfaction and happiness in her life. She uses different literary devices in the poem to show the readers that all the time her opinion towards death is delightful and satisfactory. She uses devices like; sounds, images, repetition and diction to express her dejected mood to the readers which clearly indicates her opinions about death.

## END RHYME

It is a special kind of rhyme used when a poem lines finished with same sounds is called end rhyme. Apart from that, end rhyme can also be defined as similarity of sounds of the end words of lines in a literary text.

## Free Verse

Free verse can be defined as a literary device in a literary text that is free from the boundaries of following the rules and regulations of rhythm or meter is called free verse. As it is clear from the title of free verse that free verse is a verse that does not follow fixed rhyme but always rhyme differently. Such type of poems has no rhyme schemes because it always rhyme distinctly and the poet have a chance to express his feelings, emotions, ideas, sentiments, and desires in a text or poem, and gives the text or poem a special kind of result or action that the poet wants in his/her literary text or poem.

The structure of the present poem "A Birthday Present" written by Sylvia Plath is highly limited to free verse because the poet expresses her feelings and emotions freely to the readers without following a fixed boundary.

The poem ignores the rhyme scheme as well as the stanzas length throughout the poem and this will make the poem highly ironic in nature.

Free verse always focuses on the definite forms of words, ideas, opinions as well as her own way of thinking of life that are comprises of the art of literature in order to take self minded or self centered judgment in her life.

Such type of poems which do not follow rhyme scheme comes under the group of free verse. "A Birthday Present" which is composed by Sylvia Plath comes under the category of free verse because there is no fixed rhyme scheme in the poem. In it the poet explicitly present her own life incidents, emotions, feelings as well as her cessation of life freely that's why the poem does not follow any rhyme scheme.

## FIGURATIVE DEVICES

Figurative devices are universal in spoken form and in all kinds of written forms. It gives the information about the actual and accurate context. Authors uses the literary devices in their works to make it more effective. Readers can learn and know something broadly by using of figurative devices of the authors. They wants to catch the attention of readers and

transfers knowledge to them. They are very essential because they make a strong bond between readers and story. Contexts are very entertaining, impressive and delightful because of figurative devices. Authors describe their opinion, feelings in a more specific, delightful and in different style. We can say that context is very splashy, remarkable and broad due to the figurative devices.

## PERSONIFICATION

It is one of the figurative device in which the author give or nominate some human qualities to the non-human body, object etc. It makes a relationship between the readers and the personified objects or things. It can be useful for the readers to know about the main idea and the author describes his idea in a fanciful style.

The writer use personification in this poem.

When I am quiet at my cooking I feel it looking, I feel it thinking

## METAPHOR

A figurative device which forms a strong connection between the things which are irrelevant and they are not literary correct called metaphor.

## SYMBOLISM

A figurative device in which one object represents another object called symbolism.

In the title, "A Birthday Present", "present" represents death.

What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful? It is shimmering, has it breasts, has its edges?

These lines points out the interest of Sylvia Plath about death which is the main theme of this poem.

## IRONY

A figurative device in which there is contradiction between expected and actual content/meaning is called irony.

In this poem title "A Birthday Present". The word "present" represents the happiness but in this poem it represents misery and sufferings.

## RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

It is one of the figurative device which is used for the reader's attraction towards the main point. It is used for the effect not to discover an answer.

In this poem rhetorical questions is used in the following lines.

Can you not give it to me?

Must you kill what you can?

## REPETITION

A word or group of words which is used for the reader's attention and it is used several times in a text known as repetition.

In this poem repetition is used in the following lines.

Adhering to rules, to rules, to rules.

There is repetition of phrase "to rules".

When I am quiet at my cooking I feel it looking, I feel it thinking

There is repetition of phrase "I feel".

## THEMES

A part of narrative which gives some meaning, idea and message. There are two parts of theme; major theme and minor theme. A major theme is that in which the author discusses the important message. A minor theme is that in which the author gives the message in few words.

## DEATH

Death is the main theme in most of her poems. In this poem, death is also the main topic. She describes the ambition of death in most of her poems. She thinks that her terrible and suffering life will be finished due to death. She thinks that she will gain happiness and pleasure by death. Death seems a good opportunity to get freedom. She considers death a better salvation for women to get rid of this meaningless life. She tells that the sufferings of the worldly matters compels her to commit suicide. She thinks about a birthday present for a longer period of time and thinks that birthday is special for her. In this poem she is convincing herself that suicide is a best way for releasing from hardships in life. She has discussed death as a birthday present and she always thought of committing suicide. At the end she commits suicide on February 1963.

## PATRIARCHY

It is also the main theme in most of her poems. She wrote most of her poems about females oppression. Females are considered inferior and males are dominant in the society. She expresses the sufferings of pregnant women who suffers laboring pains in the

ward. They are oppressed in a male dominating society. She emphasizes the responsibilities and duties which are assigned to every women since the time of her birth. Every woman has to obey the rules and perform each and every task of the household. In this poem, in the eighth line, there is the repetition of the phrase “to rules” which gives theme of patriarchy. It means that they are under the order of males and they are only bounded to their own duties.

### FIGURATIVE DEVICES AND THEME

Figurative devices gives the meaning of a text and give entertainment to the readers while reading. We can understand/know the meanings of a text by the mood of writing. Mood and theme have deep connection with each other. If the mood of writing is sad and dark so theme will be death, suicide.

Metaphor and symbolism give the meaning and it develops the mood of writing. Title “A Birthday Present” Present is used for death in this poem. By the use of symbolism, the author transfers some idea to readers. The first lines of the poem shows the curiosity of Plath that what will occur after death. These figurative devices gives the theme of death.

The repetition of some words in this poem give us the theme of the poem. For example the repetition of phrase “to rules” in this poem gives the theme of patriarchy which means that they are just bounded to their rules. They are under the oppression of males and are considered inferior in the society and are only bounded to their own assigned duties.

The use of irony give us the actual meanings of a text. The title “A Birthday Present” “Present” shows happiness and joy in general but when we read this poem it is a sign of suffering and misery. So the use of irony in this poem also give us the theme of death.

We can say that figurative devices are very significant to learn because it helps in the development of themes and makes the text beautiful and enjoyable.

### CONCLUSION

Sylvia Plath is one of the great feminists poet in the history of English literature. Her writing is greatly affected by her sadness. She expresses her own experiences, troubles of life through poetry. It means that most of her poems reflects hers personal life. A birthday present is one of her famous work which discusses death as a birthday present and is a good

opportunity to get freedom. She thinks that she will get happiness by this birthday present.

Stylistics deals with the study of writer’s style. Different stylistic devices are used by the writers in order to decorate their works. Stylistic analysis studies the meanings and hidden devices used in a poem. This poem is rich in the development of themes through figurative devices, significance of title of the poem and in phonological level.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the poem “A Birthday present” written by Sylvia plath, the researcher examine the phonological level, thematic level and significance of the title of the present poem. It is recommended to explore the poem and to search out few more phonological and themes other than the researcher has identified. This poem should be studied from feminists perspective as it is about male supremacy present in the society. For further research detail critical analysis of this poem is proposed. It is recommended to examine the poem from different angles i.e phonological level, thematic level and significance of the title of the poem.

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