

A Stylistic Analysis in the Select Short Poems of Robert Browning

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Stylistics, the *objective* or *scientific* analysis of the style of literary text, bridges the gap between linguistics and literature (Abram 299). The very name Robert Browning makes us think of the term Dramatic Monologue, that heightens and is heightened by the poet. 'It isn't by size that you win or you fail —/ Be the best of whatever you are!' says Douglas Malloch. This is especially true with the case of Browning's short poems. Some of his short poems are discussed here, for *his style has been the subject of endless discussion* (Albert 379). The selected poems are *After*, *A Face*, *My Star*, *Life in a Love*, and *Love in a Life*.

Lexico—Syntactic Patterns such as anastrophe, ellipsis and anaphora beautify the selected poems. *Anastrophe*, as defined by *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, is *the inversion of usual syntactical order of words* (Britannica). The poet's peculiar use of the pattern is shown below: 1. "While the one eludes, *must the other pursue.*" (*Life in a Love* 7), 2. "Room after room, / I hunt the house through" (*Love in a life* 1-2), 3. "Which fears to lose the wonder, *should it wink.*" (*A face* 22).Anastrophe, in sentence 1, shows the lover's despair due to the repeated 'loth'. In sentence 2, it expresses the lover's disappointment and weariness. In sentence 3, it is used to secure emphasis and to get the reader's attention.

Ellipsis, the deliberate omission of words that can be understood in connection with the content, is also used: 4. *Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled* (*The Star* 10), 5. *It is but to keep the nerves at strain, / To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,* (*Life in a love* 12-13), 6. "But these are only massed there, I should think, / Waiting to see some wonder

momently/Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky” (A face 17-19). In sentence 4, Ellipsis is used to create brevity and in sentence 5, it expresses the lover’s despair. The 6th statement, gives a lively picture of the poetic fantasy.

Anaphora is the deliberate repetition of a word or a phrase at the beginning of each one of a sequence of sentences, paragraphs, lines of a verse or stanzas (Abrams 267):7. “Now a dart of red,/Now a dart of blue;” (The Star 5-6). The repetition of words helps to establish a marked rhythm in the sequence of clauses. This scheme, here, is used to amaze the readers.

The poet chiseled the lyrics with the *Lexico-Syntactic Choices* like simile, periphrasis and hyperbole. *Simile* is an explicit comparison which is conventionally identified by the use of ‘as/like’:

All that I know

Of a certain star

Is, it can throw

(like the angled spar) (The Star 1-4)

Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:(The Star 10)

Simile, here, helps the readers to visualize the poet’s thoughts and feelings.

Periphrasis (antonomasia), Alabi says, is the substitution of a descriptive word or a phrase for a proper name or of a proper name for a quality associated with the name (Agemo 19): 10. “honey-colored buds” (A face 9). The fascinating description of tender ‘lips’ adds more grace to the face.

Hyperbole, the bold over statement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility, is identified (Abrams 133): 11. “What matter to me if their star is a world?” (The Star 12). 12. “All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye” (The face 21). In sentence 11, the poet exaggerates a mere star which can never be turned into the whole world. It is to show how subjective the lover is. In statement 13, the speaker condensed ‘All heaven’ into one eye, which is humanly impossible.

The contrary figure is understatement (*meiosis*), which represents something as very much less in magnitude or importance than it really is (Abrams 133):

13. “If one could have that little head of hers / Painted upon a background of pale gold,” (The face 1-2). Gold is always known for glittering. But in sentence 13, the poet underestimates even the gold to glorify the face.

Irony is the contradiction between what is expected to happen and what actually happens. Browning uses irony to make the lyric more realistic: 14. “Still the same chance! She goes out as I enter.” (Love in a Life 13), 15. “Me the loving and you the loth,” (Life in a Love 6)

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to signify the whole, or the whole is used to signify a part (Abrams 109):16. "Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her," (Love in a Life 4). 'Heart', here, represents the speaker himself. The lover consoles himself by saying so.

Personification (prosopoeia) is a figure of speech in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings (Abrams 109). The poet personifies the star as if it were in possession of a soul which is explored to the speaker. 17. "What matter to me if their star is a world? / Mine has opened its soul to me;" (The Star 12-13)

Phonological devices such as alliteration, consonance and assonance make the lyrics crisp to read and easy to crack. *Alliteration*, the initial repetition of consonant sounds, is remarkably applied in the select poems: 18. "If one could have that little head of hers" /h/ (A Face), 19. "Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furred; / They must solace themselves with the Saturn about" /ð/, 20. "What matter to me if their star is a world? / Mine has opened its soul to me ;...." /m/ ,21. "And are lost in the solemn and strange/ Surprise of the change." /s/, 22. "Me the loving, and you the loth," /l/.

Consonance is the repetition of a sequence of two or more consonants, but with a change in the intervening vowel (Abrams 19). Some examples are: 24. "Take the cloak from his face, and at first" /f/, 25. "Death has done all death can" /d/, 26. "In the field, by the fold: /f/, 27. "My life is a fault at last", I fear /l/, /f/, 28. "And baffled, get up to begin again,"-- /b/, 29. "At me so deep in the dust and dark," /d/.

Assonance is the repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sequence of nearby words (Abrams 19). The select poems have this feature also: 30. "Is, it can throw" /i/, 31. "They would fain see, too," /eI/, 32. "Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furred:" /ɜ:/, 33. "How he lies in his rights of a man!" /aI/, 34. "Nor his wrong nor my vengeance; both strike" /aI/, 35. "Painted upon a background of pale gold," /p/, 36. "And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this." /I/.

The phonological devices enhance the musical quality and aid the readers' memory.

Robert Browning shows his artistic supremacy not only in dramatic monologues; his poetic genius, in fact, extends appreciably in his short poems also. His careful choice of diction such as 'hunt' for 'search' (Love in a Life) proves his mastery over the language. His use of Ellipsis gives soul to the lyrics. The select poems are, indeed, marked by attractive anastrophe, superb simile, pleasing periphrasis, fanciful hyperbole and teasing irony. Even the minor phonological devices such as alliteration, contributes to the musicality. Each of these elements, no doubt, gives the selected poems their identity.

Works Cited

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5. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. New Delhi: Encyclopaedia Britannica (India) Pvt. Ltd., 2010. CD ROM.
6. *A typical way to do stylistics is to apply the systems of categorisation and analysis of linguistic science to poems and prose, using theories relating to, for example, phonetics, syntax and semantics. (Wynne)*