

Stylistic Analysis of the Poem “Leisure”

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ABSTRACT

Today the trends and priorities of modern man have been set on a new pattern. The fabric of social life has been changed. The pre-occupations of man are in abundance and multi-layered. The scientific inventions have made the life of people hurried, rushed and monotonous. They were made to facilitate man and to save time but the scientific advancement has deprived man of leisure. Beauty of nature is present with its full charm and fascination. Allah almighty created it for man. But modern man has indulged himself in material matters. All the times he is hankering after wealth, fame and status. He is, fully or partially ignoring the natural phenomena which are a great gift of God for mankind. The company of nature can release man from his tension and a lot of psychological problems. Nature is peace giving. It is very necessary for man to enjoy beauty of nature for his mental and physical health. The poem, Leisure, expresses the same idea in a simple and frank manner. Through stylistic analysis of the poem, we would try to highlight the beauty of nature so that modern man can be motivated to enjoy it.

Keywords: Leisure, modern period, nature

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research article is to analyse the famous poem of William Davies “Leisure”. The poem is analysed from the perspective of linguistic stylistics. This article discusses the poem “Leisure” in the perspective of post modern era. It observes the research questions, objectives, research methodology and literature review in the field of stylistics. After mentioning the theme of the poem and its handling by the poet, conclusion is stated.

Leisure is a thought – provoking poem, written by William Davies. Although it is not in sonnet form as it comprises seven rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter. William Davies is a modern poet. He was born in 1871 and died in 1940. So he lived through two ages in English literary history. The first was Realistic Period (1870-1914) and second was Modernist Period (1914-1965). The poem under consideration reflects the features of the contemporary ages: Realistic period and Modernist period in English literature.

In reaction to Romanticism, a movement started in Queen Victoria’s reign and reached its peak during the reign of Edward VII. This movement resulted in Realism. Realism is, in its broadest sense, simply fidelity to actuality in its representation in literature. William Dean Howells, one of the most vigorous advocates of Realism, defines the term as, “The truthful treatment of material”. Realists are believers in democracy. They describe the common and average materials. Realism can also be thought of as a middle class art and it focuses bourgeois life and manners.

The Modernist period in English literature was from 1914 to 1965. In a general sense, “modern” means having with in recent times and the present day. But in literary history, it implies “a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss and despair”. The rejection of traditional values and assumption was a common feature of the age. The Rhetoric was absent during modernist period which used to be an essential part of artistic creations in the past. The common day phenomena was the main focus of the writers. William Davies also wrote on common matters of a common man. The present poem is also a good example in this connection.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research article has the following questions:-

1. Why are people in the modern age losing their aesthetic sense?
2. Why are people so busy having no leisure in their life?
3. Are the people really not interested in the beauty of nature?
4. What is the reason of monotonous routine life of people?

OBJECTIVES

The study of any piece of art pertains two basic purposes, one is for the cultural sense and the other is of linguistic features. As stylistics is interdisciplinary approach, it consists of language and literary studies in a way that both are interlinked with each other.

The objective of the study is to analyse William Davies’s poem “Leisure” according to the notion of modern stylistics. The final destination of the research is to search out how modern man is losing his aesthetic sense. An endeavour has been made to demystify the importance of natural beauty, in a sense to make people aware of the aesthetic pleasures. This research will investigate some certain linguistic patterns stated as a linguistic cue to shed off the burdon of mental fitigue in the modern era.

METHODOLOGY

The research work concentrates on the famous poem “Leisure” by William Davies. The nature of the research is analytical. The research uses various approaches to obtain data for this study but we mainly get benefits from the published material.

The researcher applies the methods of stylistic analysis proposed by Geoffery Leech and Mick Short as stated in their works “A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry” Longman (1969) ; “Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose (1996) respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stylistics is a branch of linguistics dealing with the study of language properties and variation and it searches the principles behind choice of certain words.

According to H.G.Widdowson (1986, p. 4) Stylistics is an area of applicability between language and literature. It is a multidimensional study concerned with its relationship with linguistics and literature.

The study of literary discourses is a linguistic orientation and stylistics is a linguistic strategy that studies the literary texts, it focuses on the language description. Short (1996) shows that it is not merely the (linguistic) forms of texts but also meaning of the text in the sense of the plot and over all message of a piece of work. To him “stylistics can sometime look like either linguistics or literary criticism, depending upon where you are standing and where looking at.”

Leech (1985) defines Stylistics which can be applied on literary and on nonliterary texts. For a nonliterary text style matters so when one wants to explain something but literary stylistics explains the mutual relationship of language and function of art.

Crystal and Davy points out Stylistics as a controversial branch of language study, stating Stylistics a developing and controversial area of language study.

To Gabriela Missikova (2003, p. 15) “stylistics is a field of study where the method of selecting and implementing linguistic, extra linguistic or expressive means and devices in the process of communication are studied.”

Jean Jacques Lecercle (1993) describes that nobody knows what the term “stylistics” mean, to him it is a branch of linguistics hardly any university student seems to eager to take research in it.

But recently the valuable publications on stylistics have seen light of the day. Geoffery Leech, “Language and Literature; style and foregrounding (2008)” is a noteworthy work done on stylistics.

Paul (2006, p. 2) writes “ It is taught and researched in university departments of language, literature and linguistics the world over.

"LEISURE"

William Davies

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

The poem contains fourteen lines and the Rhyming Scheme of the poem is aa, bb, cc, dd, ee, ff and aa. The Rhyming words are “care, stare”, “boughs, cows”, “pass, grass”, daylight, night”, “glance, dance” and “can, began” . These rhymes make a pleasing sound and the readers enjoy it. The poet has also employed some sound devices to make the poem memorable and fantastic. The second line of the poem has alliteration of the “t” and “s” sounds. “time to” and “stand and stare” present the described alliteration. In the second couplet, “beneath the boughs” and “when woods we.....” are the linguistic features displaying the alliteration as a sound device. In the 9th line, the words “time to turn” are also a vivid example of alliteration.

The Repetition of some specific words, phrases and lines create a pleasing effect on the reader’s mind. The repetition of the words “No time” for five times in the beginning of the lines expresses basic the idea of the poem and thus relates the entire poem to its theme and the topic. The repetition of the line, “we have no time to stand and stare” emphasizes the poet’s basic idea that modern man has no leisure to enjoy the beauty of nature.

Various figures of speech have also been used to consolidate the theme of the poem.

The device of “Personification” has been employed by the poet. “Beauty” is personified in the poem. William Davies depicts its glance, dancing feet, mouth, lips and charming smile. All these attributes are specific for a person. This personal nature has been attributed to “beauty” which is an abstraction. The poet has personified beauty to consolidate and highlight his point of view.

Imagery has also been employed in the poem. The image of beautiful woods where squirrels are busy in their play. They hide the nuts and seek them in the grass. The image of shining streams is also very common and attractive. The sun-rays produce stars on the surface of the water. So the streams are full of stars like skies at night. The cattle, like sheep and cows standing beneath the boughs and staring at the natural beauty, create natural imagery in the minds of the readers.

In the line, “streams full of stars, like skies at night”, the device of simile is used. Here is a comparison between two phenomena of nature with the use of ‘like’. When the rays of the Sun fall on the surface of the water, the water of streams shines like stars in the sky at night. This is very charming scene but modern man has no leisure to taste even this accessible scene. So, the poet satirizes the busy and rushed life of modern man. In this way he applies the tool of satire with the intention of reformation of modern man’s life.

The Theme and its Handling

The theme of the poem is that modern man has no time to enjoy the beauty of nature. Modern man has become insensitive to beauty. The poet is lamenting the rushed and hurried manner of spending life. This manner is a gift of modernity to modern man. Modern man works like a machine from dawn to dusk. The beauty of nature is present all around him. But he pays no heed to the beautiful phenomena of nature. He has deprived himself of the savour, the richness and diversity that phenomena of nature offer. The poet feels that life must be relished in a leisurely manner. An instinct for beauty distinguishes man from machine. Modern Man has been insensitive to beauty. So instead of man with fine feelings and tastes

for beauty, mere human engines are observed everywhere in this modern era. The poet expresses this painful awareness in a very simple and frank manner.

The life of modern man is full of cares and worries. The rate of change is stupendous. So it becomes increasingly difficult to stabilize oneself in such a fast changing world. To keep up with the pace of time, modern man fully ignores the beauty of nature. He has no time to stand and stare at the beauty of fauna and flora spread all around him. Modern man is so much mechanized in his attitude that he has lost his aesthetic sense. He can't enjoy the starry streams. In broad daylight, the water of streams shines like stars at night. But modern man is unable to taste even this capturing sight.

Modern man has indulged himself in material matters. He is unable to discover beauty. The poet has personified "beauty" to consolidate his point of view. He depicts her glance, her dancing feet and her smile that twinkles in her eyes. Her rosy lips further enrich that smile. But her charming smile takes some time to reach its full bloom. And modern man has not leisure enough to wait for it.

The poet seems quite successful in handling the theme of the poem just from the very first line to the last one. The very first sentence is interrogative which shakes the reader and gets his attention. After that there is a direct comparison of modern man's life with that of animals. The poet describes that unlike modern man, animals have more time to enjoy the natural beauty. Then the poet describes the two common natural scenes to which every person has an easy access. Someone may think that it is not the case. Although man is busy in this modern era yet he tastes the natural beauty some way or the other. But the poet is not satisfied with this partial relishment of natural beauty. Being very sensitive, he does not leave any stone unturned to realize modern man about his inability and unavailability to taste the beauty of nature. According to him, the real beauty of nature reveals itself only when it is observed for a long time while staying in its lap. The real beauty of nature takes some time to reveal itself completely to its lovers but modern man cannot wait for it. He becomes satisfied with the initial and partial beauty, according to the poet, the full bloom of charming smile of beauty can only be relished by standing and staring at it for a long time. The following four lines indicate this strong viewpoint of the poet:

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

The last two concluding lines are actually the direct and frank answer to the question raised in the very first two lines. The poet concludes that life devoid of beauty and pleasure is poor, dull and drab. It becomes a tale told by an idiot.

CONCLUSION

The poem is a master piece in the sense that it targets the very sensitive and core issue of modern man's life. He has lost his aesthetic sense. He has become a machine. He has no leisure enough to taste and relish the beauty of nature created by God for him. The poet expresses this painful awareness in a very simple and frank manner. The diction of the poem is very simple and suits the theme of the poem. All the details are quite relative to the theme.

No exaggeration is found in the description of any feature of the poem. So William Davies is quite successful in track and does not stray towards unnecessary and futile details.

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