

A Stylistic Analysis of Oscar Wilde's *the Nightingale and the Rose*

By

Sarab Kadir Mugair and Aswan Jalal Abbas

Linguistics, College of Basic Education, University of Diyala, IRAQ.

Abstract

Oscar Wilde's fairy story The Nightingale and the Rose, like other Oscar Wilde's short stories, is written in an aesthetic voice. During this fairy tale, Oscar Wilde uses various stylistic devices for the interpretation of aesthetic and artistic notions. Here our focus is on finding out the literary stylistic devices that bestow idiosyncrasy on the writing of the concerned writer. His manipulation and careful choice of words make his language rich, and his penchant for innovative expression and syntax makes his style unique. All the stylistic devices which are used by Hemingway in his literary works create cohesion and coherence i.e., they make a literary text sensible. He handles the literary stylistic devices in a way that makes his style deviant from the language norms and different from other writers' style as well. To prove how Oscar Wilde attract his readers in this interesting story via stylistics analysis, this research mainly showcases an overview of stylistics based on Xu Youzhi's book English Stylistics and gives a brief introduction of Oscar Wilde and some knowledge on The Nightingale and the Rose. After that, with the references to stylistic theory, a comprehensive stylistic analysis of the tale in lexical, syntactic, semantic, phonetic and contextual features will be presented. Finally, this paper will tend to give a brief statement of summarizing the stylistic features, which assist Oscar Wilde create a story that successfully absorbs and shocks whoever reads it.

Keywords: *Stylistics, Oscar Wilde, The Nightingale and the Rose*

1. Background to the Stylistics

Definitions and Terms of Stylistics

Stylistics, sometimes called linguo-stylistics, is a branch of general linguistics, which deals with expressive resources and functional styles of a language and also refers to stylistic study specially. In stylistic study, linguistic elements are identified and analysed as they appear in discourse. In fact, there are many definitions on the stylistics. For example, Leech (1969:1) defines stylistics as a study which focuses on the use of language in literature and asserts that stylistic analysis provides a 'meeting-ground of [both] linguistics and literary study' (ibid:2). To him the main purpose of the stylistic study is to interpret the aesthetic use of language in texts that have aesthetic elements such as oral narratives and poetry or explain the literary meaning and aesthetic effect of literature texts linguistically (ibid). Beside the above definitions on the stylistics, Leech and Short (1981:23) remark that "Compared with many other studies, literary stylistics is a new science, a linguistic approach towards literature works. It applies theories of modern linguistics to the study of literature and attempts to relate the critic's concern with aesthetic appreciation and the readers' intuition with the linguist's concern with linguistic description". Cureton (1992) explains that stylistics or literary stylistics is concerned with aesthetic use of language both in text that are typically aesthetic such as canonical literature, oral narrative, jokes and in other text that have other predominant aims like conversation. As such, stylistics contributes to the study of literary discourse and similarly to the study of verbal texture in other discourse varieties. Stylistics mediates between two disciplines that are linguistics and literary criticism. It applies the methods and insights of linguistics to traditional problems in literary analysis and the methods of literary criticism to the analysis of language. That is why some scholars like Fowler (1986) prefer to call it 'linguistic criticism' and some other like Fabb *et al* (1987) call it 'literary linguistics'. Thornborrow and Wareing (1998:3) define that "By far the most common kind of material studied (by stylistics) is literature." While Simpson (2004: 3) says "Stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primary of place is assigned to language." This method discusses the style of language use. This paper basically bases on Xu Youzhi's notion on stylistics. To him (2005: 1): "The stylistics we are discussing here is modern stylistics, a discipline that applies concepts and techniques of modern linguistics to the study of styles of language

use. It has two subdivisions: general stylistics and literary stylistics, with the latter concentrating solely on unique features of various literary works, and the former on the general features of various types of language use.” It is noted that , stylistics tries to study the linguistic description of the literature texts; its final objective is to relate literary effects to relevant linguistic causes It is the most explored section in the stylistic range. In short, stylistics and stylistic analysis, in particular, contribute to the study of various varieties of literary discourse.

The Focus of Stylistics

The style is a term in criticism has been widely used for a long time before, often in a rather impressionistic way to refer to the pattern of linguistic features distinguishing one piece of writing from another or one category of writing from another. A style of writer often varies from work to work; there is usually enough uniformity in one’s article to allow the readers to notice that this overall style differs from the other’s style. In other words, style attempts to draw attention to the characteristic or peculiar use of language in a specific text, author or period. Modern stylistics is a way to approach the question of style on stricter, and more methodical lines; it is not so much a discipline in itself as a cross over point between linguistics, for which literary text are only items of interest in the broad study of language and literary criticism. It starts from the proposition that any idea or concept may be expressed in one of a number of different ways, and that an author exercises a choice (conscious or unconscious; dictated by personal taste or the demands of the reader, genre or whatever) in determining the precise form of the words to be used. Such a proposition is incidentally anathema to new criticism which refuses to distinguish between the form and content of literature; what is written is written.

In the scope of stylistics, the focus is majorly on the usage of stylistics, which is a discipline that studies the sum of stylistic features of the different varieties of language, the language, aspects of the speech event, language varieties and function, stylistic study and other spheres of study. Xu Youzhi (2005: 7) states “Stylistic study concerns itself with the situational features that influence variations in language use, the criterion for the classification of language variety, and the description and interpretation of the linguistic features and functions of the main varieties (both literary and non-literary) of a language.”. Thus, the main focus in stylistics is language. By using stylistics, the readers are able to analyze the style how the authors tell the story in choosing words and sentences become unity of beautiful writing. In addition, stylistics also helps the readers describe the sound, form of words, and the meaning that contained in the text.

The Need for Stylistic Study

In Xu Youzhi’s opinion, stylistic study is of vital importance. He mentions the significance of stylistic study from three aspects.

First, stylistic study can help cultivate a sense of appropriateness. We know that the language usage should depend on the concrete occasions. In formal occasions, we use standard expressions. In casual context, the colloquial speeches are under considered. Therefore, we should develop a sense of appropriateness in order to choose the suitable speeches in such situations. The choice of a particular speech style is corresponding with the context. If we talk to the people who are not well educated using more formal speech style, the communication effects will be inconspicuous. Otherwise, the stylistic study is necessary to develop a sense of appropriateness. (Xu Youzhi, 2005: 10)

Second, stylistic study sharpens the understanding and appreciation of literary works. Literary works use various devices to achieve a particular effect or meaning. And usually the devices are the representation of style of the works. However, different readers have different understanding on the devices used in the literature works. In the process of discussion, a new understanding of the works begins to emerge as a more coherent description emerges. The stylistic study can sharpen the understanding and appreciation of literary works. (Xu Youzhi, 2005: 12)

Third, stylistic study helps achieve adaptation in translation. All languages have different features, so in the translation process, it is not enough to transfer the original meaning of the source language but ignore the target language readers. A good translated version should be able to exert on an impact similar to that of the original text on the readers of the source language with the target language readers in style. If the original text is full of humor, the translated text should also be full of humor. If the original is ironic in tone, then the translated text should be like that too. (Xu Youzhi, 2005: 14)

The Levels of Language

As a code, language is multi-leveled. As Xu Youzhi said, there are three levels of language: the level of semantics, the levels of lexis and grammar and the level of phonology/graphology.

The Level of Phonology/Graphology

Phonology is the study of the rules for governing the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds and the shape of syllables. It deals with the sound system of a language by treating phoneme as the point of departure. (Hu Zhuanglin, 2001:18) Phonological level is the expression or realization of language in its spoken form.

Graphology is the study of the writing system of a language. Each language selects only a few alphabets and the selected marks are used in a limited number of combinations. Graphological level is the expression or realization of language in its written form. (Xu Youzhi, 2005: 25)

The level of Lexis and Grammar

Grammar is the science of the structure of a language and both the syntactic and semantic rules of the generally accepted used. (Chen Linhua, 2004: 4) Lexicology is the study on the choice of specific lexical items in a text, their distribution in relation to one another, and their meanings. (Xu Youzhi, 2005: 25)

The Level of Semantics

Semantics deals with the meaning system of language. It is the scientific study of the meaning of words. Besides, semantics is a very complicated and more abstract subject because it has much to do with logic, psychology and some other fields of science.

Brief account of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was an excellent playwright, poet and a short-story-writer. He is also famous for his taste in clothes and his homosexuality. Furthermore, his works influence people even nowadays and are still considered to have topical relevance.

Oscar Wilde, known for his acerbic and urbane nonfiction, was also a master of fairy tale. While some of his inimitable irony remains, Wilde created lovely tales filled with princes and nightingales mermaids, giants, and kings. In fact, all of his fairy tales are written in an erudite, aesthetic voice. As one of the representatives of Aestheticism, his fairy tales are studied as a model of Aestheticism in terms of style. Wilde showed the particular appeal of language to the readers and made the literature, the art of language more charming. His fairy tales is characteristic of making use of rhetoric means and ironic humor to convey its theme, such as love or art and the spirit of self-sacrifice as in *The Nightingale and the Rose*.

Nightingale and the Rose and its major theme

1. This is a fairy tale. Fairy tales are stories in which fairies play a part or which contain other supernatural or magical elements such as imaginary persons, animals, and inanimate objects. These stories are of course primarily meant for children, but the best fairy tales such as those by Hans Andersen, are also eagerly read by older people who are interested in their deeper meaning.

2. The plot of the story is very simple. *The Nightingale and the Rose* was published in 1888. It is a story

about a brave nightingale which sacrificed her life for a student's love. A nightingale sees a student one day. He is crying for a red rose which he needs to bring to his loved girl to be able to dance with her at a ball. Unfortunately, no red rose grows in his garden and he is hopeless. "Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched" (Wilde 23).

The good nightingale wants to help him to fulfil his love and decides to find a red rose herself. She flies from one rose tree to another until she finally comes to a red rose tree. Nevertheless, it does not have any red roses. The only way to get one is to sing and to sacrifice her life.

'If you want a red rose,' said the Tree, 'you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.' (Wilde 26)

The brave nightingale agrees on it. "Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,' cried the Nightingale, [...] Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man" (Wilde 27) That night, a beautiful rose grows up and the poor nightingale dies. The student finds the rose in the morning and is very happy about it. He runs to the professor's daughter right away. Unfortunately, she turns him down as she prefers the Chamberlain's nephew who gave her jewels. She does not appreciate student's rose and it ends up on the ground and is damaged because the professor's daughter really wanted was ascendancy and wealth. The student goes back home and turns to his books and studying again.

'What a silly thing Love is,' said the Student as he walked away. 'It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.' (Wilde 31).

Oscar Wilde has great passion for love and has been persistently pursuing it for his whole short life. In the famous fairy tale *The Nightingale and The Rose*, the nightingale became his tongue and mouth. She sang to death with a thorn in her heart for the passion which she thought was the most precious thing in the whole world. Her passion is pure passion, and she doesn't want anything in return except that the student should be a true lover.

All he wrote in this tale like an ill omen in his later life. The passion of nightingale reflects the deep theme Art is for Art's Sake. It also shows Wilde's aestheticism in its ongoing conflict with utilitarianism. What he did for his love is like what the nightingale did for the student. However, all she did was in vain, because although the student listened, he couldn't understand what the nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books. And the red rose- -the fruit of great passion - - was thrown away into the gutter for something unworthy.

Past studies on The Nightingale and the Rose

Scholars such as Pugsley (1990), Sakadolki (2003), Hoffman (2013), Lonanda (2013) have studied the fairy story *The Nightingale and the Rose* by Oscar Wilde from different angles. For example, the first research is conducted by Pugsley (1990). The purpose of her research is to identify the role of figurative language in advertising from the existing linguistic point of view. She limits the object of the research by discussing metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. She also discusses a bit about simile and personification. The second study is investigated by Sakadolki (2003). He focuses on the use of figurative language in construction of musical meaning. The study case of the research is conducted on children who are in sixth grade general music classes. The class will be taught by the teacher by listening to the music and then the students and the teacher will describe the music Mary Hoffman (2013), writes

about magical classics: a poignant tale of love and sacrifice, Lonanda (2013) studies the use of figurative language in characterization of *The Nightingale and the Rose*

In this study, the researcher discusses several stylistic devices and show how the relation of these devices especially the figurative language to the characterization of main characters in Wilde's short stories by applying the theory of stylistic analysis that is described by Xu Youzhi, (2005) to interpret linguistic features in literary work.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study will help the readers to: (1) understand how the stylistic devices help to create meaning in context; (2.) learn how to use the important words and phrases in the text; (3.) acquire some background knowledge about Oscar Wild.

3. The Present Study

The focus of the present study--linguistic presentation of the theme

Phonological features

In the description of *The Nightingale and the Rose*, Wilde applies onomatopoeia to make the vivid and lively description. It is very helpful to describe the different characters' inner mental activities thoroughly and show the exact feelings, respectively. (Zou Tao, 2003) For example:

"The prince gives a ball to-morrow night," murmured the young Student.

In this sentence, it is just by using the word "murmur" to show the student's feelings of grievance and helplessness. Responding to the word murmur, the word "tomorrow" may be twisted as to-morrow and the normal pronunciation of it is changed into/tu:mo rou/.Because the vowel sound/ u:/and the diphthong are usually connected with the words blue and low respectively, naturally we can imagine the student's feelings of anxiousness, fret as well as his low spirits .

Lexical Features

The words used in the fairy story are accurate, vivid, expressive and plentiful. There is a sentence listed below to illustrate the lexical features.

Her hand will be clasped in mine.

Here, "clasp" means to hold tightly. But why does not the author use the word "grip" or "grasp"? This word is powerful enough to express the student's strongest passion and love to the Professor's daughter. And the action of the word clasp is also capable of revealing the student's eagerness as well as his beautiful daydreaming.

Syntactic Feature

The syntactic features of the tale are that the short but elliptical sentences are applied frequently. The language is very clear and easy to be understood, which makes the tale more close to the readers. It is featured by the colloquial style. According to Wang Shouyuan (1990:52), ellipsis is the omission from a sentence of words needed to complete a construction. Ellipsis in spoken English and normal everyday written discourse is usually a grammatical device for economy of words. In literature, ellipsis is not merely a grammatical means to make the work compact, but a stylistic device to express the meaning or message of the work. For example:

"No red rose in all my garden!" He cried.

"Why, indeed?" said a Butterfly.

The complete sentence should be "There is no red rose in all my garden". While "Why, indeed?" should be "Why is he weeping, indeed?" These elliptical sentences have the same expressive effect as a whole. The ellipsis here, from a stylistic perspective, seems to be multifunctional

Moreover, in this tale, Oscar Wilde also used inversion devices to make the languages rich and colorful. Here are some syntactic parallel constructions to show the inversion. For example:

... louder and louder grew her song ,
... bitter and bitter was the pain, wilder and wilder grew her song
.... fainter and fainter grew her song.

The above sentences are inverted, but they are more important in view of parallelism. When we read, the tone is up and down with strong rhythm. It gives us a musical effect to the readers.

The writer also uses the plural form to achieve coherence to the text, i.e., recap the plural form of nouns that end with the letter "f". For example: life (lives), wife (wives), knife (knives), thief (thieves), roof (roofs or **rooves**), proof (proofs) , hoof (hoofs or hooves) , loaf (loaves) , cliff (cliffs)

Semantic features/figures of speech

In the tale, Oscar Wilde uses many figures of speech to accomplish the semantic expressions. Personification is a typical rhetorical device in fairy tales. In the fairy tale, the Nightingale just symbolizes Oscar Wilde himself, and the Rose stands for the true love and the true art. Furthermore, this tale also applied simile, metaphor, and antithesis, which make the language diversified and beautiful. Here lists some examples excerpted from this tale to illustrate the semantic features in the tale.

- 1) She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl.
- 2) She sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.
- 3) She sang of the Love is perfected by Death of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

These three sentences run through the whole process of the tale, in which the Nightingale fostered the red rose by heart and blood, accompanied with her sad and moving songs. The readers are moved not by birth, neither love nor death, but by the determination and devotion to foster the true love perfected by death. (Zou Tao, 2003).

In short, this fairy tale has a few interesting features:

- 1) The frequent use of personification

This is self-evident because it is the very definition of fairy tales. In this story, the rose-trees, the lizard, the daisy, the butterfly, the oak, the moon, and of course the Nightingale are all personified.

- 2) The symbolic meaning given to words

The rose of course is the symbol of love, but many things mentioned in the text also stand for something, including the lizard, daisy, and butterfly, which the author used on more than one occasions to stand for certain character types.

- 3) The vivid, simple narration, which is typical of the oral tradition of fairy tales

- 4) The repetitive pattern used

A typical fairy tale would often have a sequence of three episodes or three steps or three people. It might go something like this: Once upon a time, there were three sisters. The first was ugly, and the second was

stupid, but the third was both pretty and clever. They would then marry three men. The first two were invariably obscenely rich whereas the third was always poor. Then they were for some reason sent to look for some treasure. The first two failed and the third succeeded, but he only succeeded in his third attempt after overcoming many difficulties.

4. Conclusion

The style of the language that Oscar Wilde applied is tactful in *The Nightingale and the Rose*. Oscar Wilde has set a brilliant example of achieving the delicate harmony between the language and his own artistic view. For Oscar Wilde, the purest art is worthy of his life and is the highest in society. This paper mainly adopts the pattern for stylistic analysis in Xu Youzhi's book *English Stylistics*, to illustrate this tale which may give readers a new angle to know better about Oscar Wilde's fairy tale.

Bibliography

- Leech, G., & Short, M. *Style in Fiction*. London and New York: Longman, 1981: 23~31
- Thornborrow and Wareing, *Patterns in Language: an introduction to language and literary style*. London: New York: Routledge.1998:3
- Wang Shouyuan, *A Course in English Stylistics*. Shandon Education Press,1990: 52
- Xu Youzhi, *English Stylistics*. Shandon Education Press.2005.
- Hoffman, M. (2013). "magical classics: a poignant tale of love and sacrifice". *Seven Miles of Steel Thistle*.
- Lonanda, F. (2013). *The Use of Figurative Language in Characterization of The Nightingale and the Rose Short Story By Oscar Wilde*. Padang: Andalas University.
- Pugsley, Maristela. (1990). *Figurative Language and Its Use in Press Advertising*. Brazil: Curitiba. Retrieved: May 23rd, 2013. <http://dspace.c3sl.ufpr.br/dspace/bitstream/handle/1884/24389/D%20-%20PUGSLEY,%20MARISTELA.pdf?sequence=1>
- Sakadolkis, Emilja A. (2003). *The Use of Figurative Language in the Construction of Musical Meaning: A Case Study of Three Sixth Grade General Music Classes*. United States: University of Maryland. Retrieved: May 23rd, 2013. <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/60/1/dissertation.pdf>
- Simpson, Paul. (2004). *Stylistics*. London: Routledge.
- Wilde, Oscar. (1888). *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*. New York: Copyrighted, 1918 by Frederick A. Stokes Company.