

Stylistic Analysis of the Poem “O Where are you Going” by W. H. Auden

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the text of the poem ‘O where are you going’ on three different levels of stylistics: Pragmatics, Phonological and Morphological level. The purpose of this study is to explore the literal and hidden meanings and to enhance the understanding of the poem. In this poem, the poet exhibits a conflict between optimism and pessimism; the two attitudes towards life overlap each other. He was torn between aesthetics versus truth. He believed that it is duty of poet to guide the readers about the morals.

Keywords: Pragmatical, level, Phonological level, Morphological level, and conflict

Introduction

It is one of the most beautiful poems of W. H. Auden. He is one of the finest famous poets of the 20th century. He was English born American poet. His work is known for his style and structure, commitment with moral, social, religious and political issues. The main themes of his poetry are love, religion, human relationship and nature. He is one of the most renowned poets of his time. He lived during the age of great totalitarian dictators. W. H. Auden was a critic, play writer, and a poet, has greatly influenced English poetry of his time. He belonged to the post-First World War generation, with its curious mixture of despair and *joie de vivre*. His poetry was a refine blend of prospect and dismay. O Where Are You Going is an abstruse poem which gives multiple meanings to its readers. On surface level, it is a dialogue between two imaginary persons: the ‘reader’ and ‘rider’, ‘fearer’ and ‘farer’, ‘horror’ and ‘hearer’. On deeper level, it is the conversation between inner self and outer self, it depicts the never ending battle within human mind and soul. The Inner self who is always scared of exploring the new avenues, and forecasts bad luck, but if one is brave enough he can move forward and win the world. It is a combination of hope and fear.

Research Questions

1. How to explore the poem at Pragmatic level?
2. How to analyze the poem at Morphological level?
3. How to assess the poem at Phonological level?
4. How to evaluate the language devices that has been integrated in the poem?

Objectives

1. To explore the contribution of Pragmatics in the poem.
2. To investigate the poem at Morphological level.
3. To examine the poem at Phonological level.
4. To evaluate how language devises has been integrated in the poem.

Pragmatical Level

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. It addresses expression at the level of utterances, which can range from one word to a lengthy discourse. It works at the level of meanings and how other people comprehend those meanings.

This study is about *narrative poem* of W.H.Auden "O where are you going". It is in Quatrain form. W.H.Auden is famous for writing about the burning questions of his time, his poetry invoke the fright of living in an era, when Europe was blazed with war. In the poem "furnace burn" symbolizes Holocaust, "Whose odor will madden" refers to Nazi Gas Chambers. The "spot on skin" alludes to the tattoos which each prisoner received on their bodies in concentration Camps and the connotation of "the shocking disease" is to someone who is Jew.

The tone of poet in the first three stanzas is quite horrifying and intimidating. "shapes in the twisted trees", even the alliteration 'twisted trees' here also sounds ominous as the 't' sound is sharp and bitter, he has used cacophony to enhance the impact of appalling setting. The use of sibilance "the spot on your skin is a shocking disease" intensifies the frightening atmosphere of the poem. It creates an ominous effect, it may be a suggestion of guilt. The diction; "fatal", "grave", "the figure comes softly" contributes profoundly in creating petrifying ambience.

The imagery is remarkable the poet has used visual "furnace burn", olfactory "odors" will madden", tactile "footsteps feel...". Contrast is the conspicuous aspect of the poem, the juxtaposition of "midden" and "gap", "grass" and "granite", "reader"(man of words), and rider"(man of action) the two selves the inner and outer self, the negative and positive side of human mind is emphatically depicted in the poem. It also indicates inner turmoil especially of the poet and common people of that era in general. The poem also makes use of rhetorical questions, in second and third stanzas to persuade the "rider" to believe in the "reader".

There are many different voices in the poem representing different aspects of human personality. The use of direct speech enable us to understand our inner thoughts. The personification of human mind exposes the inner conflict which all of us face in our journey of life. The conflict reveals that last decision in life is taken by whatever is the true nature of a person. The repetition of "as he left them there" shows that the positive action one is leaving behind the horror and fearer as well, going to explore new avenues. The use of Gerunds 'looking' and 'lacking' are used to create apprehension, harasses and alarm in the poem, as if something is going wrong. They highlight the fear which the fearer feels about going out and exploring the world. It makes him uncomfortable.

In the last stanza, Auden retains some hope for the future, pointing out the success for those who will ready to face the hardships, with his faith in the enduring human spirit he tries to rectify the tyranny.

Phonological Level

Phonology, a branch of linguistics, is concerned with system of sounds in language. It fulfills the communicative functions of language by organizing the material and vocal noises arranged into sound pattern. So we can say that the study of formal organization of languages is referred to as phonology. Phonology studies two types of devices e.g. sound devices and literary devices.

Sound Devices

Sound devices, also known as musical devices, are resources which the poets use to make the poetry a special form of art. Poets through the use of sound devices create auditory imagery for their readers in which include alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia, repetition cacophony many more. Sound devices which are used in "O where are you going" are as follows:

Alliteration	Consonance	Assonance	Repetition	Rhyme scheme
<u>R</u> eader, <u>r</u> ider <u>F</u> atal, <u>f</u> urnaces <u>M</u> idden, <u>m</u> adden <u>G</u> ap, <u>g</u> rave <u>F</u> earer, <u>f</u> arer <u>D</u> usk, <u>d</u> elay <u>P</u> ath, <u>p</u> ass <u>D</u> iligent, <u>d</u> iscover <u>L</u> ooking, <u>l</u> acking <u>F</u> ootsteps, <u>f</u> eel, <u>f</u> rom <u>G</u> ranite, <u>g</u> rass <u>H</u> orror, <u>h</u> earer <u>T</u> wisted, <u>t</u> rees <u>S</u> wiftly, <u>s</u> oftly <u>S</u> pot, <u>s</u> kin <u>T</u> hem, <u>t</u> here <u>L</u> eft, <u>l</u> eft	Reade <u>r</u> , ride <u>r</u> Furn <u>a</u> ces, bur <u>n</u> Valle <u>y</u> , fata <u>l</u> Yonde <u>r</u> 's, od <u>o</u> rs Yonde <u>r</u> 's, mid <u>d</u> en, ma <u>dd</u> en Furn <u>a</u> ces, bur <u>n</u> Feare <u>r</u> , fare <u>r</u> Dus <u>k</u> , pass Look <u>in</u> g, lack <u>in</u> g Gran <u>i</u> te, <u>g</u> rass Footstep <u>s</u> , grass Bir <u>d</u> , horr <u>o</u> r, hear <u>e</u> r Swi <u>ft</u> ly, soft <u>l</u> y Left, le <u>ft</u>	Reade <u>r</u> , ride <u>r</u> Fear <u>e</u> r, far <u>e</u> r Pat <u>h</u> , pass Dil <u>i</u> gent, di <u>s</u> cover Gran <u>i</u> te, gr <u>a</u> ss Horr <u>o</u> r, hear <u>e</u> r See, tre <u>e</u> s Swi <u>ft</u> ly, soft <u>l</u> y Sp <u>o</u> t, sh <u>o</u> cking Sk <u>i</u> n, shock <u>i</u> ng Left, le <u>ft</u> Them, the <u>m</u>	In the last line of the poem As he left them there, As he left them there	ABCB

Consonant Cluster

Consonant cluster refers to a sequence of two or more consonant. Consonant clusters may occur at the beginning of a word (**initial cluster**), within a word (**medial cluster**) or at the end of a word (**final cluster**). These three types of consonant clusters are frequently used in the poems “O where are you going” which are as follows:

Initial consonant clusters	Medial consonant clusters	Final consonant clusters
Granite Grass Shape Twisted Trees Spot Skin Shocking Them There	Midd <u>e</u> n Madd <u>e</u> n Vall <u>e</u> y Footst <u>e</u> ps Furn <u>a</u> ces Yond <u>e</u> r's Horr <u>o</u> r Twist <u>e</u> d Shock <u>i</u> ng	Swi <u>ft</u> ly Soft <u>l</u> y Left Go <u>in</u> g, look <u>in</u> g, lack <u>in</u> g Tall Return Dus <u>k</u> Pat <u>h</u> Pass Od <u>o</u> rs Burn Diligent Footstep <u>s</u> Grass Bir <u>d</u> Behi <u>nd</u> Left

Morphological Level

Study of word formation and its structure is known as morphology .It involves “word derivation” in which words form from the words ,”word inflections” in which grammatical category of a word changes within syntactic category of the word and details about smallest unit morpheme. Various morphemes used in the given poem is listed below:

Free	Bound	Root	Prefix	Suffix
Where ,	<u>Going</u>	<u>Going</u>	<u>Return</u>	<u>Going</u>
Are	<u>Reader</u>	<u>Reader</u>		<u>Reader</u>
You	<u>Rider</u>	<u>Rider</u>		<u>Furnaces</u>
Said	<u>Furnaces</u>	<u>Furnaces</u>		<u>Odors</u>
To	<u>Yonder's</u>	<u>Yonder's</u>		<u>Madden</u>
That	<u>Odors</u>	<u>Odors</u>		<u>Looking</u>
Valley	<u>Madden</u>	<u>Madden</u>		<u>Twisted</u>
Is	<u>Fearer</u>	<u>Fearer</u>		<u>Swiftly</u>
Fatal	<u>farer</u>	<u>Farer</u>		
When	<u>Looking</u>	<u>Looking</u>		
Burn	<u>Lacking</u>	<u>Lacking</u>		
The	<u>Footsteps</u>	<u>Footsteps</u>		
Midden	<u>Hearer</u>	<u>Hearer</u>		
Whose	<u>Twisted</u>	<u>Twisted</u>		
Will	<u>Trees</u>	<u>Trees</u>		
Imagine	<u>Swiftly</u>	<u>Swiftly</u>		
Dusk	<u>Softly</u>	<u>Softly</u>		
Delay	<u>Comes</u>	<u>Comes</u>		
On	<u>Shocking</u>	<u>Shocking</u>		
Your	<u>Yours</u>	<u>Yours</u>		
Path				
Pass				
Diligent				
Discover				
Feel				
From				
Granite				
Grass				
What				
Was				
Bird				
Horror				
Did				
See				
Shape				
In				
Behind				
Figure				
Spot				
Skin				
A				
Disease				
Out				
Of				
This				
House				
Never				
As				
He				
Left				
Them				
There				

Word Formational Process

Word class to which inflection applies	Inflectional category	Affix used
Noun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers • Possessives 	-s,-ese.g.furnances ,footsteps Trees. yours.
Verb	3 rd person singular present	Comes
Indefinite aspects	1st form of verb	Return,imagine,discover ..etc
Continuous aspects	Present participle	Going,looking

Word Derivational Process

Word class to which derivation applies	Derivational category	Affix used
Noun	-er	Reader, rider, fearer, farer, hearer
	-ine	Imagine
Adjective	-ed,ing	Twisted,shocking
Adverb	-ly	Softly,swiftly

Parts of Speech

Noun	pronoun	verb	adverb	Adjective	preposition	conjunction	articles	Interjection
Reader	You	Are	where	That	On	As	The	O!
Rider	Whose	Going	When	This	To		A	
Valley	Your	Is	Yonder	Fatal	From			
Furnaces	What	burn		Tall	In			
Midden	Yours	Will	Behind	Diligent	Of			
Odor	They	Madden	Swiftly	Twisted	For			
Gap	He	Return	Softly	Shocking				
Grave	Them	Do	Out					
Fearer		Imagine	Never					
Farer		Said						
Dusk		Delay						
Pass		Discover						
Looking		Feel						
Lacking		Was						
Footsteps		Did						
Granite		See						
Grass		Comes						
Bird		Will						
Horror		looking						
Hearer		Left						
Shape		There						
Trees								
Figure								
Spot								
Skin								
Disease								
House								

Concluding Remarks

The poem described obstructing fate and desire to get an escape, it ended on positive note. The choice of words by the poet plays a very important role in meaning making. It helps the reader to understand the message the poet is trying to convey.

The main objective of this study is to explore ways in which language use has been synthesized in the poem. It is also aimed to analyze the poem at different stylistics levels in order to enhance the understanding of meanings. This study can be a guide and be significant to future researchers in a relevant field

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Appendix

The title of the poem "O where are you going" is purposefully in old English, it is not indicating any fixed moment of time. It gives the poem timelessness and universality. This poem is inspired by English folk song "The Cutty Wren", it is about a group of farmers going to kill a small bird; Wren (this hunting is a medieval tradition).

O where are you going

W. H. Auden

"O where are you going?" said rider to rider,
 "That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,
 Yonder's the midden whose odors will madden,
 That gap is the grave where the tall return."

"O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,
 "That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,
 Your diligent looking discover the lacking
 Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?"

"O what was that bird," said horror to hearer,
 "Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
 Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
 The spot on your skin is a shocking disease?"

"Out of this house", said rider to reader,
 "Yours never will", said farer to fearer,
 "They're looking for you", said hearer to horror,
 As he left them there, as he left them there.