

*Discourse – Centred Stylistics :
A Study in Wordsworth's
We Are Seven*

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Preliminaries

The study of any literary text always supports two types of view. The first view concerns the individuality of the poet's (or the writer's) style which is reflected in the term 'Stylistics' in particular. The second one is a means for the interpretation of individual writings. The success in such field has been sporadic and related to the individuals more than to the development of adequate models of analysis. This belongs to the reason that such systems of analysis had shown only eccentric works. For the most part, those works whose individuality does not lie in any grammatical deviation have not been illuminated by sentential analysis. The foregoing researches in discourse analysis and literary stylistics over the past decades revealed the possibility of approaching these analyses in more productive ways. Since any discourse has its unique framework, or organization, so one way of showing the individuality of a discourse is by analyzing its organization as discourse. In this paper, we attempt to prove that the discourse analysis of a poem by William Wordsworth results in a several number of readings for the poem.

The approach followed in this paper is derived from Hoey 1989 (for more clarification see Winter 1974, 1977, 1979, Jordan 1978, 1980, 1984, and Hoey 1979, 1983). Some of the basic assumptions related to the nature of written discourses are based on deliberate analyses of short discourses. Hoey states such assumptions as the following: -

First, it is assumed that every clause in a discourse is in at least one semantic relation with at least one other clause or group of clauses in that discourse. Secondly, it is assumed that out of a finite number of such clause relations an infinite number of patterns of organisation may be built. Every discourse has therefore a potentially unique organisation. Thirdly, it is assumed that the clause relations in a discourse may be between clauses, groups of clauses, or parts of clauses; in other words the relation is no respecter of syntactic boundaries, though its realization is necessarily rooted in the grammar of the clause. Fourthly, it is assumed that certain patterns of organization have become culturally dominant, of which the problem – solution pattern is a particularly good example... Fifthly, it is assumed that clause relations are an abstraction of connections readers make between the parts of a discourse as part of the effort of understanding the discourse; those connections are aptly and more precisely represented as questions asked of the discourse. What this means is that every reader is engaged in a dialogue with the discourse being read. Sixthly, lastly, and most importantly, it is assumed that the clause relations and the patterns of organization which they form are indentifiable by means of signalling devices of various kinds, includ-

ing subordination, conjuncts and lexical signals, and
by projecting the discourse into question–and–answer
dialogue. (1989: 124)

The problem – solution pattern has three essential parts: the statement which is an aspect of the situation requiring a problem, the response (whether suggested or carried out), and the evaluation of the efficiency of that response (see Winter 1976, Hoey 1979, and Jordan 1980). Also if we have a negative evaluation, then the problem is considered unsolved and therefore further responses come to follow. Furthermore, clauses relations include other signals such as systematic repetition which refers to matching relations like compatibility and contrast. All the above assumptions were mentioned in Winter 1974, 1979, 1983; Hoey 1979, 1983; and Hoey and Winter 1981.

One important thing to be mentioned here, when the study is on a literary discourse, is that the implied writer, namely the writer involved to understand the discourse and who may or may not tally with the real writer, can also be in dialogue with the implied reader who may well be different from the actual reader. Therefore, in the poem to be analysed, the implied writer is a person asking and in dialogue with an implied reader who is the little girl.

The approach to be applied in this paper requires analyzing the poem according to the above- mentioned assumptions. For achieving the understanding of the text, readings of the text are created and measured with non-linguistic evidence. Wordsworth's *we are seven* was chosen since it looks suitable to include an organization worth explaining (see the appendix).

In such a poem, Wordsworth indirectly describes the innocence and purity of the world of childhood and their dearly love for their families. Wordsworth is well- known for his wide imagination. He uses a lot of images in his poetry, particularly, those are concerned with nature, childhood, and love of man. The little girl, in this poem, does not distinguish the nature of death and continues to enjoy the accompaniment of her late brother and sister whom, she considers, to be still alive.

There are several ways of viewing this text, all of them overlapping with each other. Such ways are as a series of problem-solution patterns, as a dialogue between an adult and the little girl, as a

network of cohesive devices making ambiguous readings, as a dialogue between the discourse and the reader and as a series of matching patterns. Wherever we start with the analysis, we shall need the other patterns. Thus we can start with these patterns respectively.

The Text as a Problem-Solution Pattern

We can consider the poem as a problem-solution pattern. The first stanza seems to be the introduction of the main problem; it has the pattern: -

A simple Child that lightly draws its breath, and feels its life in every limb, what should it know of death? (Problem).

The second and third stanzas have identical patterns, they have the same intention which is to describe the little age of the girl. She looks pure and innocent, has a rustic appearance and knows very little about the outside world.

Stanzas 4,5,6,7 and 8 offer, however, a variant in their structures. In stanza 4, whereby the first two lines are problem, lines 3-4 are possible response. Stanza 5 starts with another problem (line 1). Both problems in stanzas 4 and 5 are related to each other in that they ask about the little girl's brothers and sisters. The remaining lines (2-4) of stanza 5 and all of stanza 6 can be considered as detailed response to the preceding problem.

Stanza 7 is a negative evaluation of the possible responses and thereby closing the pattern. The adult attempts to express his dissatisfaction with such responses. The stanza can be rearranged as follows: -

I pray you tell: "you say that two at Conway dwell, and two are gone to sea, yet ye are seven! Sweet Maid, how this may be".

Stanza 8 is either the reason for (or) the result of the negative evaluation. This stanza looks like an aberrant one. Stanza 9 is a comment on the preceding one. The speaker also negatively evaluates the speech of the little girl. Up to this time, they have a disagreement with each other and look differently at the meaning of death.

The stanzas 10-15 may be considered as details of the response produced by the little girl previously. Such details explain the places of the two graves of her sister and brother in the churchyard. It seems that this girl spends most of her time, day or night, beside those graves. Thus, she used to knit her stockings, hem her kerchief,

sing a song to them, and eat her supper beside them (stanzas 11 and 12). Afterwards, she mentions the circumstances of their death. Her sister first died after a terrible pain, and next her brother John did so (stanzas 13, 14, and 15). By noticing the speech of this little maid, we find out that she is completely ignorant of the nature of death. Although she mentions several lexemes referring to death e.g. graves, died, churchyard, laid, etc, she behaves as if her sister and brother were still alive. This clearly shows her ignorance of the reality of death.

The romantic poets have a great interest in the nature of perception. Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge agreed that man is capable of seeing more than the bodily eye permitted him to see. The act of human perception for the three poets is a creative act in the sense that man perceiving creates the world in which he lives (Graham, 1953:4).

Lines 1-2 of stanza 16 represent a problem. The form of the question in line 1 "how many are you then?" is similar to the question in line 2 of stanza 4 "How many may you be?" Thus, we can say that the speaker in the poem returns to the beginning of his speech with the little girl. Thereby, he links the beginning with the end of the poem. Lines 3-4 are a response to the preceding question (problem).

In stanza 17, the first two lines are negative evaluation of the responses made by the little girl. The speaker seems to be astonished for the insistence of the little girl. He expresses such astonishment by using the exclamation marks and the repetition of the word (dead). The last three lines, said by the little girl, are a comment on the negative evaluation in lines 1-2. The beginning and the end of the poem are alike in that the speaker and the little girl misunderstand each other. They have different implications for death.

Throughout the poem, all the problems are raised by the speaker and the responses by the little girl. She tries to defend her view of death by giving details of the responses but the speaker, all the times, gives negative evaluations. Apart from the aberrant stanza (stanza 8) and all the commentaries said by the little girl, the poem appears to be organized according to the normal problem-solution pattern.

The Text as a Dialogue between an Adult and the Little Girl

Considering the poem as a dialogue between an adult and the little

girl serves to make the pattern more complex .To start with, we must ask what status the possible response has. We may read the interrogatives ‘how many may you be?’ ,‘And where are they?’ , ‘How many are you then?’in stanzas 4,5,and 16 in two ways. First, it may be read as an instance of a discourse act ‘informative or as a rhetorical question (all the terms of discourse act are derived from Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). With such reading ,we can reformulate the question as ‘Little maid , how many sisters and brothers do you have?’; ‘I pray you to tell where are they?’;and ‘ I said if two are in heaven , how many are you then?’. With such interpretation, the responses may be read as actual ones; and the evaluation in stanza 17: ‘But they are dead; those two are dead! Their spirits are in heaven!’ becomes simply time–sequencing clause without any conditional meaning .

Second, the above –mentioned questions may be read as examples of the discourse act ‘elicitation, that is to say, as a real question. This `reading of those questions is equivalent to saying ‘Tell me how many may you be’ ,‘Tell me where are they’, ‘Tell me how many may you then’ in stanzas 4,5, and 16 respectively . In such case, the responses may only be possible and not actual ones and thus ,if the discourse will continue ,an answer has to be given. So, the best way of reading the evaluation in stanza 17 is to predict the answer “No” to be provided .Despite that ,the certainty is not accomplished as with the first reading , and the word ‘But’ implies a slightest possibility of a conditional meaning .Depending on the acts in stanzas 4,5, and 16, it is interpreted as performing ; we draw different conclusions due to whether the questions are answered or not. Such probability (or uncertainty) is very important since it influences our reading of the text .

The Text as a Network of Cohesive Devices

Looking now at `the poem as a network of cohesive devices, we face further difficulties. Starting with the verb form, we notice that the tense in any stanza is usually restricted by the verb form of the previous one and it also limits the tense of the next .So, the verb forms

in such discourse fit together. Most of the stanzas have a present tense which reflects the intellectual conflict, or struggle, between the adult and the little girl concerning the concept of death. Another important thing to be mentioned is that the little girl usually uses the past form of the verb when talking about the circumstances of her brother and sister's death and this suits the time of such happening. Bobert (1981: 208) shows that each item in Wordsworth's poems changes the tone of the other, each interprets the other. New subjects are new language. They do not only generate a particular vocabulary, but are symbols in their own right, whatever words are used to describe them.

Another cohesive device in such a text is the use of 'parallelism': the repetition of a formal linguistic structure, or a pattern, to create cohesion. Within the text, there is a semantic parallelism in which the connection between the stanzas is effected through an echo of meaning. Thus, the concept of death is repeated frequently along the poem. Another important cohesive evidence is the presence of several referents like the demonstrative pronouns (that, this), pronouns like (she, her, you, me....), and the definite article 'the'. Such words make the text to be cohesive. Also, the text has many anaphoric, cataphoric, and exophoric references.

The text contains many conjunctivas, which presuppose and signal the relationships between the stanzas of the poem. Such conjunctives like the additive 'and', the adversative 'but', the Temporal 'then' and etc. bind the stanzas together and make them as a unified texture.

The text has several elliptical forms which link the stanzas by the omission of parts of clauses on the assumption that an earlier clause or context can make the meaning clear. So, with such elliptical forms, the structure has some missing elements.

Other links that create cohesion in this text can be lexical. Such links or chains are relations between vocabulary items in the text. So, lexical cohesion is the re-iteration of words and the role shown through semantic relations between words in creating textuality. Reiteration, in this text, is either through the exact repetition of words, or else exploiting their lexical relations. Such semantic relations are collocation e.g. (white-snow, churchyard-death- grave, stockings-kerchief, tree - grass, porringer- supper, sister- brother-mother, seven-two) and opposition e.g. life-death. Wordsworth tried to deal with a language near to the language of men and he has tried to imitate and as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men.

The Text as Dialogue between the Discourse and the Reader

The poem is to be considered not only as a dialogue with the little girl but also as a dialogue with the reader. Much of the dialogue, within the stanzas, between the reader and the poem has already been indirectly dealt with in the analysis before. What has been left is the relationship between the stanzas. After ‘ what should it know of death?’ in stanza 1, there are several questions asked about the topic of the poem, specifically, ‘ how many may you be?’, ‘And where are they ‘?,‘how this may be?’, ‘ How many are you then?’ in stanzas 4,5,7, and 16 respectively. From all these questions, the reader may reasonably ask ‘what should be the answer?’ in which case the ends of stanzas 4,5,16, and 8 will be seen as giving the answers. This explicitly shows the contradictory readings of the questions in stanzas 4,5,and 16. Conspicuously, it is true that the adult has not finished his questions if he has more to discuss with the little girl. Furthermore, we can not work as discourse analysts with on reference to non-linguistic real world knowledge. As a matter of fact, for the rules of answering any question are that if you consciously withhold anything from the answer, then it will not be persuasive. Thus, unless the answers are complete, the first question remains unanswered; and only when the last problem is solved, the answer does become operative. However, this is a satisfactory solution as far as it concerns, but it may be the complete one if we let alone the ‘informative and ‘elicitative’ readings of the questions in stanzas 4,5,and 16 .

The Text as a Series of Matching Patterns

Let us consider the relationship between stanzas, in this section, from another point of view. The repetition of ideas within them and between them clearly shows that they are arranged by a number of matching relations in addition to the other relations discussed before. To start with the matching between the stanzas, lines 2-3 in stanza 2 are matched structurally with those in stanza 3;and if we set them out in a table fashion (see figure 1 below).We find out that they are matched for similarity in‘describing circumstance ’and also in their syntactic structure.All of these clauses have relational processes and used by the poet to describe the appearance of the little

girl. Also, lines 2-3 in stanza 4 are somewhat matched with lines 1-2 in stanza 5, and furthermore with lines 1 and 4 in stanza 16. All of these clauses discuss the number of brothers and sisters of the little girl. The beginnings of stanzas 4, 5, and 16 represent questions raised by the poet; and the ends are answers produced by the little girl for the preceding questions (see figure 2 below).

Likewise, line 1 in stanza 6 and line 3 in stanza 8 are very similar. They seem to be repeated, by the little girl, which reinforces her speech concerning the death of her brother and sister (see figure 3 below).

In addition to the matching in similarity between the stanzas, there is a matching but for difference (contrast) between line 3 in stanza 7 and the final line in stanza 17. Line 3 is said by the poet in which he expresses his objection of the speech of the little girl. While in the final line of stanza 17, the girl shows an insistence on the claim that her brothers and sisters are seven (see figure 4 below).

Stanza 2	I met a little cottage Girl	She was eight years old , she said	Her hair was thick with many a curl	That clustered round her head.
Stanza 3	She had a rustic , woodland air	And she was wildly clad	Her eyes were fair, and very fair.	Her beauty made me glad.
Nature of circumstance		Describing circumstance	Describing circumstance	
Shared Feature		Similar in their structures (relational clauses).		

Figure 1. Matching Patterns in Stanzas 2 and 3.

Stanza 4	Sisters and brothers, little maid, how many may you be?	How many? Seven in all, she said, And wondering looked at me.
Stanza 5	And where are they? I Pray you tell.	She answered'.Seven are we,and two of us at Conway dwell and two are gone to sea.
Stanza 16	How many are you then?said I if they two are in heaven	Quick was the little Maid's reply,O Master! We are seven.
Nature of circumstance	Questions about the number of the brothers and sisters.	Answers of the preceding questions.
Shared Feature	All of them were asked by the adult.	The little girl answered all of them.

Figure 2. Matching Patterns in Stanzas 4, 5 , and 16.

Stanza 6		Two of us in the churchyard lie: my sister and my brother:	And in the churchyard cottage: I dwell near them with my mother.
Stanza 8	Then did the little maid reply seven boys and girls are we:	Two of us in the churchyard lie: Beneath the churchyard tree.	
Nature of circumstance		Repetition and compassionate circumstance.	
Shared Feature		The little girl said both lines.	

Figure 3. Matching Patterns in Stanzas 6 and 8.

Stanza 7	You say that two at Conway dwell And two are gone to sea		Yet ye are seven!-I pray you tell. Sweet Maid how this may be.
Stanza 17	But they are dead; those two are dead! Their spirits are in heaven!	T was throwing words away ;for still The little Maid would have her will.	And said: 'Nay, we are seven!
Nature of circumstance			Contrasting circumstance.
Difference			The adult rejects the number to be 'seven' while the little girl proves it to be so.

Figure 4. Matching Patterns in stanzas 7 and 17.

In addition to the matching between the stanzas, there is matching within them as well. In stanza 5, lines 3-4 are repeated in which the little girl mentions the places of her brothers and sisters. Figure 5 below outlines the similarities between both lines.

On the contrary with the preceding matching relation, in stanza 5, the matching relation in stanza 7 (lines 1-2) represents a repetition of the speech of the little girl. But, in this case, the repetition is for difference rather than similarity. The poet intends to contradict the speech of the little girl in stanza 5 rather than emphasizing it. Figure 6

below shows the repetition in stanza 7. Another matching relation, though less important, lies in stanza 11, lines 1-2. Such similarity describes the intense relation between the little girl and her dead brother and sister. She does all her ordinary everyday works beside their graves and doesn't leave them whether at night or on day. Figure 7 below displays the similarity in stanza 11.

Stanza 5	
Line 3	And two of us at Conway dwell
Line 4	And two are gone to sea
Shared Feature	Explaining circumstance : Both are said by the little girl and tell about the places of her brothers and sisters.

Figure 5. Matching Pattern within Stanza 5 .

Stanza 7	
Line 1	You say that two at Conway dwell
Line 2	And two are gone to sea
Shared Feature	Inquiry circumstance said by the poet to repeat the speech of the little girl and evaluates it.

Figure 6. Matching Pattern within Stanza 7.

Stanza 11	
Line 1	My stockings there I often knit.
Line 2	My kerchief there I hem.
Shared Feature	Describing circumstance told by the little girl.

Figure 7. Matching Pattern within Stanza 11.

We can notice that this matching relation not only supplies the argumentative reading as a valid reading but goes some way to supporting the other readings as well. This will lead to the effect of making the argument the most unprofitable; for discourse organization normally demanding that a progression of any argument be followed by a persuasion. The readings of certainty (rhetorical question) or probability (real question) are not thereby enough for the response element of the problem- solution pattern in this poem.

Line 1 in stanza 17 ‘ But they are dead; those two are dead ’ can be read either as a reason for the preceding ‘ O Master! We are seven ’ or as the result and negative evaluation of it. If we take into consideration the dialogue between reader and discourse, it answers the reader’s question ‘ What is the end of this argument?’. Another important thing is that we need to get benefited by our non – linguistic knowledge to save us from the impasse in discourse analysis which leads to put all the discourse readings and the problems evolving out of them into a harmonious whole.

Since the argument is not ended unless we have a satisfying answer, then lack of answer means that the argument is not finished. Thus, the lack of answer means there is a misunderstanding between the adult and the little girl. We heavily depend on ‘what should it know of death?’ being read as a question for our interpretation of ‘ Nay, we are seven!’. So , it is better to keep the readings of the rhetorical question and real question . One thing still left, can we tell whether the response is actual or not? In other words, does ‘ the question’ get an answer?

If the last line of the poem is not a complete answer; thereby we’ll run into unbreakable circle, in which question no more leads to answer and also answer leads to question no more. Thus every thing depends on the general meaning of death regardless of both question and answer whichever comes first. Such uncertainty is essential to the poem since everything depends on whether the girl answers the major question, which does not presuppose an answer within the poem. Wordsworth describes death as a modifying power by which the mind imposes itself in the act of perception thereby immediately endowing

the thing perceived the passion and symbolic meaning. The poet has used many images about child- hood; also he uses his imagination as a means to make the reader live his poem.

Conclusion

With the completion of the analysis of such poem, there are several deductive points for work in discourse analysis and stylistics. First, the application of such system of discourse analysis will provide a variety of readings of a literary text (discourse) and hence supply literary critics with completely defined problems for them to solve. Second, the ability of such approach to produce useful readings is indirectly reflected on the discourse assumptions made at the beginning. Third, since such approach allows for several simultaneous relations between the parts of a discourse, it will be efficient to account for the complexity of a poetic text. Four, there should be some share, for non – linguistic data, made in any approach of discourse analysis.

To sum up, the study of discourse stylistics has a twofold importance. It supports discourse analysis with a useful testing basis for the hypotheses about discourses and also provides literary criticism with a useful means for appreciating literary writings and highlighting matters within them involving explanation. Thereby it seems to produce a productive way forward for both discourse analysis and stylistics. It is, after all, a natural development from both of them.

Appendix

We Are Seven is a poem written by Wordsworth of a young girl who loves her dead brother and sister and lives beside their graves. The following is the text of such poem: -

A Simple Child, dear brother Jim,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl;
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad;
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
Her beauty made me glad.

'Sisters and brothers, little Maid;
how many may you be?'
'How many? Seven in all', she said,
And wondering looked at me.

'And where are they? I pray you tell.'
She answered 'Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell
And two are gone to sea.

'Two of us in the churchyard lie;
My sister and my brother;
And in the churchyard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother'

'You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea;
Yet ye are seven! - I pray you tell'
Sweet Maid, how this may be'

Then did the little Maid reply
'Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the churchyard lie;
Beneath the churchyard tree'.

You run about, my little Maid;
Your limbs they are alive'

If two are in the churchyard laid,
Then Ye are only five'.

Their graves are green, they may be seen',
The Little Maid replied,
Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,
And they are side by side.

My stockings there I often knit
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

'And often after sunset, Sir,
When it is light and fair,
I take my little porringer
And eat my supper there.

The First that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain,
And then she went away.

'So in the churchyard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

' And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side'.

'How many are you then' said I,
'If they two are in heaven'!
Quick was the little Maid's reply,

‘O Master !we are seven’.
‘But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven’!
‘T was throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said ‘Nay, we are seven’!

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