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A STYLISTIC STUDY OF W. BLAKE'S POETRY
(with special reference to: Songs of Innocence and of Experience)

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Bibliographical Note

The edition used in the study of Blake's poems is BLAKE THE COMPLETE POEMS (ed.) (London: Longman, 1971).

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Abbreviations used in the thesis:

<<SOI>>	Songs of Innocence
<<SOE>>	Songs of Experience

1.

INTRODUCTION

Stylistics as the outcome of a reaction to the subjectivity of literary criticism aims at presenting an objective analysis of a given literary work.

Contrasted with the appreciative raptures of the impressionistic critic , the stylistician intends to sort out precise , significant linguistic descriptions about a work of art , then proceeding from those descriptions to interpretations where a sense of objectivity is claimed. The stylistician proceeds from any of the four levels of linguistic analysis: the lexical , semantic , syntactic and phonological ; to gather linguistic facts about the work of art under examination.

J.P.Thorne, the American linguist , concentrates on syntax , then moves to content or effect.

He observes that in Donne's <<A NOCTURNAL UPON S. LUCIE's DAY>>, selectional rules are regularly broken.

The poem presents sentences which have inanimate nouns where animate ones are expected and animate nouns where inanimate nouns are more likely to occur.

Thorne, finally , explains that these linguistic facts contribute to the sense of chaos and breakdown of order presented by the poem.

The London Neo-Firthian school of linguistics presents the concept of 'context of situation'.

The literary work is analysed according to the four levels of linguistic analysis (lexical , semantic, syntactic and phonological) in view of the typical characteristics of its register and in view of the dialect of the writer. In such an approach, the concept of "set" and "collocation" is essential for lexical analysis. The author may achieve his effects through the interaction between usual and unusual collocations that may result in a "collocative clash".

G.N. Leech's analysis of Dylan Thomas's <<THIS BREAD I BREAK>> illustrates the view that the poet achieves unity of the poem through stylistic lexical and grammatical devices.

His analysis shows that linguistic description leads to an objective critical interpretation of the poem.

The Prague school presents the concept of "foregrounding" that may be achieved either through deviation (from the norm) or through extra regularity. It aims at drawing attention to the ideas expressed by the foregrounded patterns. It also achieves unity and grants memorability to the work of art.

The poet makes use of various stylistic devices to achieve his effects.

On the phonogical level , the poet may set the atmosphere of the poem through a skilful use of onomatopoeia, alliteration and rhyme.

On the lexical level , he may introduce more than one lexical set , that may be contrastive or interwoven , to convey his themes. The use of unusual collocations may lead to a "collocative clash" , as in Dylan Thomas's phrase "a grief-ago" , which is a stylistically significant device.

On the semantic level , the use of metaphor and symbol may grant a sense of eternity to style. This is exemplified by Shakespeare's:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

[Macbeth, V.v]

W. Blake's symbols of the 'Lamb' , 'Tiger' and 'Sun-flower' are also clear illustrations . Compiling synonyms or combining antonyms is another effective stylistic device.

On the grammatical level , breaking selection rules is a significant device that introduces the view that reading a poem is like learning a new language.

The various stylistic devices adopted by the poet serve as the data for the stylistic analysis.

The stylistician observing the various stylistic devices in a poem , adopts one of two methods in his analysis.

He may either concentrate on a particular device in the poem under examination , and proceed to examine the various effects resulting from it; or he may reverse the method and examine the various effects by which irony , for example , is achieved in the poem.

These ideas are all included in the first chapter of this thesis.

W. Blake's <<SoI and SoE>> were first published in a combined volume in 1794.

This is the only volume of poems which Blake himself published.

The <<Poetical Sketches>> (1783) were published by the Reverend Henry Mathew. Blake's other publications are either prophetic books or prose works , not poetry in the strict sense. (*)

The fact that Blake himself published the songs reflects the great importance he attached to them. Blake was thirty-seven when he issued this volume in its complete form , which represents his mature , considered choice of his own poems. This is the reason that the <<SONGS OF INNOCENCE and SONGS OF EXPERIENCE>> are considered in this thesis a good sample for the investigation of Blake's poetic style.

The stylistic analysis of Blake's <<SoI and SoE>> is based on the four levels of linguistic description. The investigation starts by the lexical analysis proceeding to the semantic , syntactic and finally the phonological level.

A separate chapter is devoted to each level of analysis.

The lexical analysis of the songs presented in the second chapter concentrates on the various lexical

(*) Margaret Bottrall (ed.) William Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience. London, Macmillan , 1970 , p. 136.

sets running throughout the poems and the effects they produce. Special attention is given to the use of unusual collocations that sometimes give rise to "collocative clash".

The semantic analysis in the third chapter is concerned with the use of metaphor , simile , personification , symbol and Biblical images that are recurrent in the poems.

The grammatical analysis , to which the fourth chapter is devoted , throws light on the use of inanimate nouns when animate ones are expected and the use of abstract nouns when concrete nouns are most likely to occur. The front-shifting of the object or complement has been worth noting.

The phonological analysis , that occupies the fifth and last chapter in this thesis , draws attention to the alliterative patterning of the /w/ , /m/ , /s/ , /f/ and /p/ sounds.

The skilful use of phonesthemes is quite significant.

Rhyme , combining cotrary words , contributes to the

general themes of the songs.

The method adopted in the course of analysis concentrates on the observed stylistic device and proceeds to the effects resulting from it , thus moving from linguistic description to critical interpretation which is the ultimate goal of stylistics.