

## STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM “BIRCHES” BY ROBERT FROST

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*This paper aims to study the stylistic analysis of the poem “Birches” by Robert Frost. In the stylistic analysis different levels of language, phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical, semantics, and pragmatics levels, are analyzed according to the text of the poem and it also elucidates what style and stylistics are in linguistics. A binary approach, qualitative and quantitative, has been used to explore these levels along with poetic devices used by Robert Frost to make his writings unique and appealing. Frost is an eminent American poet who has written about man and his interaction with nature. Birches, written in blank verse, is about the nostalgic feelings of the poet and a blend of fact and fancy. This poem presents the relationship between man and nature. Frost has given a glimpse of his childhood memory of swinging birches of the trees in this poem in an impactful and conversational tone. This research analyzes all techniques, levels, styles, structures, and stylistic features used by Frost in this poem.*

**Keywords:** *Stylistic, Lexical, Morphological, Phonological, Syntactical, and Semantic.*

### **1. Introduction**

Style is about a writer’s way of writing, how he writes, his word choice, and the specific way of using figures of speech by him. Robert Frost has a descriptive style, the way he has used symbolism, vivid imagery, personification, and several figures of speech to appeal to the reader's senses.

#### **1.1. Style and Stylistics**

Style is derived from the Latin word *Stilus* and in old French it is *Stile*. The choice of words used by people refers to style, a set of linguistic variants with particular social meaning. An individual’s word choice or way of using language. Stylistics, a branch of applied linguistics, elucidates the study of style in texts, especially literary texts, and explores the rhetorical devices used in a literary text to make it unique. There are many sub-disciplines in stylistics; interpretive stylistics and discourse stylistics will be analyzed in this article on how different elements of style create meaning using distinctive levels of language.

#### **1.2. Stylistic Analysis**

The linguistic stylistic analysis deals with linguistic features used in a text at different levels of linguistics/language including phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, etc. it enlarges the knowledge of the language and helps to understand the meaning of a text. Stylistic analysis is based on the levels of language like phonological level, morphological level, syntactical level, lexical level, semantic level, and pragmatic level.

### 1.2.1. Phonological Level

This level is about the sounds and how writers use rhetorical devices and sound patterns to arrange the sounds in a sequence that gives them melodic expression.

### 1.2.2. Morphological Level

This level is concerned with words, their formation, and their relationship. The morphological level in stylistic analysis explores how a writer has used particular words to make his writing unique.

### 1.2.3. Syntactical Level

This level can also be called the grammatical level in the linguistic analysis as it deals with the arrangement of words and rules of grammar in a text. Writers sometimes violate grammatical rules, to give an image to their writings, which is called grammatical deviation.

### 1.2.4. Lexical Level

This level is concerned with the usage of words in a particular context and their meaning. It elaborates on which lexical categories a writer focuses more and how these lexical categories are conveying meaning.

### 1.2.5. Semantic Level

Semantics deals with the meaning. The semantic level in the stylistic analysis is concerned with the meaning of words in a text and how a writer has used words with a particular meaning.

### 1.2.6. Pragmatic Level

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in relation to context. This level deals with figures of speech such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism, and it analyzes the literal meaning of the text through these figures.

## 1.3. Biography of Robert Frost

Robert Frost is a prominent American poet of the Twentieth century, born in 1874 and died in 1963. He is famous for writing about rural life and nature in relation to man, man is the center of his poetry as he himself says, "I am not a nature poet. There is almost always a person in my poems." He is famous for writing poems such as "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "The Road Not Taken", "Mending Walls", "Birches", and "Nothing Gold Can Stay".

## 1.4. Introduction of the Poem

Although "Birches" is included in a collection *Mountain Interval* by Robert Frost, it was first published in 1915 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, a poem of fifty-nine lines without stanza breaks in the form of blank verse. Frost has depicted nature in relation to man in this poem, a mixture of fact and fancy, a blend of imaginary and real-world and nostalgic feelings of the poet. The birch trees show that there is a need for balance in the birch trees and in the real and fancy world too. According to Day-Lewis in this poem, "Observation and reminiscence, realism and fancy, the light tone and the serious are perfectly blended... soundly constructed of season's materials." This poem is about the bowed birches trees, a representation of beauty. These trees have been arched over due to ice storms according to Frost but soon he changes his opinion and says that a young boy must be the reason for the bending trees as the boy has climbed again and again. Frost is not sure what actually happened to the birches, there is a tension between reality and fantasy that can be seen perfectly portrayed in this poem by Frost.

### 1.5. Themes

The highlighted aspects of the poem are nature, man, nostalgia, balance, childhood, and adulthood, reality and illusion, death, isolation, escapement, etc. Frost depicts nature but his prime concern is always a man. Frost's childhood memories of birch trees, the amalgamation of real and imaginary worlds, escapement and isolation from the worries, and bowed birches needing balance are the major themes of "Birches".

### 1.6. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the structure and style of the poem.
- To explore the meaning of the poem by using different levels of language.

### 1.7. Research Questions

- How do different stylistic features function in 'Birches'?
- How can meaning be understood by using levels of language?

## 2. Literature Review

"Birches" is a stylistically rich poem and Frost's use of figures of speech makes it more appealing and charming. As this is stylistic research, it is important to establish certain stylistic definitions and in comparison, to the word "style" stylistics is a simple concept to describe. According to (Taylor, 1970), Charles Bally argues that Stylistics analyzes the parts and elements of a language arranged according to their emotive content; that is, the expression of emotion via language as well as the influence of language on the emotions. While (Freeman, 1971) argues that stylistics is a sub-discipline that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. (Turner, 1975) defines stylistics as "that branch of linguistics that focuses on variety in the most conscious and complicated literary uses of language."

According to (Crystal, 1981), "Linguistics is the academic subject that analyzes language scientifically, and stylistics is a subset of this study that investigates particular features of language diversity." The primary goal of stylistics, according to (Leech, 1981), is to find meanings and appreciate the linguistic qualities of the text. According to (Bradford, 1997), stylistics is an "enigmatic and slippery issue," and "any contribution to the large multidimensional discipline of literary studies will require an interaction with style." "The goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text, or to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant," writes Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, 2nd ed. (Pearson, 2001). Stylistics, according to (Verdonk, 2002), is "the examination of distinctive expression in language and the explanation of its purpose and impact."

(Sumera Batool, 2014) Sumera Batool, Abdul Bari Khan, Anser Iqbal, Khurram Ali, Rana Muhammad Haris Rafiq have published an article, "*Stylistic Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem: 'The Road Not Taken'*", in which they have elaborated different stylistic levels and devices used by Frost in his poem "The Road Not Taken". The researchers have tried to explain the idea of taking the less traveled road by Frost and made an interpretation of the power of decision and the art of indecision. Another study of OEUVRE has also done research on the stylistic analysis of Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken". According to this study, Frost has given a message of opportunity, career, and relationship by choosing the road less taken. (Stylistic Analysis Of The Poem "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN" By Robert Frost, 2021)

Muhammad Ahmad, Muhammad Asim Mahmood, and Muhammad Ilyas Mahmood have done research on the stylistic analysis of Frost's poem "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy*

*Evening*". According to their study, Frost has repeated several words such as 'The' to highlight significant ideas and objects in the poem, horrible atmosphere and despair are other interpretations of the poem. (Muhammad Ahmad, 2019)

### 3. Research Methodology

A binary approach, both qualitative and quantitative, has been used in this paper and it deals with the stylistic analysis of the poem "Birches" by Robert Frost. In the stylistics analysis, the text and structure of the poem are analyzed by using different levels of language and interpreting meaning through these levels of language such as phonological level, morphological level, syntactical level, lexical level, semantic level, and pragmatic level.

### 4. Discussion and Analysis

In this paper, Robert Frost's poem "Birches" will be analyzed using different levels of language that are already introduced in the introduction and now these levels are given below with reference to the poem with analysis and interpretation.

#### 4.1. Phonological Level

Frost has written "Birches" in blank verse. He has used some poetic devices to create a rhythm by repeating similar sound patterns in a phrase in his poetry. These devices are assonance, consonance, and meter.

##### 4.1.1. Assonance

When a writer uses words that have the same vowel sounds in them it gives a rhythmic expression, this repetition of vowel sounds is called assonance. Assonance in 'Birches', used by Frost is as follows:

*Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust- (11)*

##### 4.1.2. Consonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds while consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds. Example from the poem, repetition of s consonant:

*Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells (10)*

##### 4.1.3. Meter

This poem is written in blank verse that has no rhyming scheme. "Birches" is a poem of 59 lines that consists of one single stanza and it is arranged according to iambic pentameter in which there are ten syllables in each line, one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable.

### 4.2. Morphological Level

This level deals with words and their smallest unit called morphemes. This research highlights free and bound morphemes that are used in the poem.

#### 4.2.1. Free Morphemes

These morphemes are semantically independent and divided into open and closed-class morphemes.

#### 4.2.2. Bound Morphemes

These morphemes cannot stand alone, dependent on other free or bound morphemes to convey their meaning. They are divided into roots and affixes.

**Table 1:** Analysis of bound morphemes in "Birches".

Words	Roots (Bases)	Affixes (Prefix-Suffix)
Darker	Dark	er
Climbing	Climb	ing



Straighter	Straight	er
Swinging	Swing	ing
Misunderstand	Understand	mis
Birches	Birch	es
Carrying	Carry	ing
Branches	Branch	es
Launching	Launch	ing

### 4.3. Syntactical Level

This level deals with how words are arranged grammatically. Poets often violate this grammaticality to make their writings captivating and different, for instance, “*And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed \_\_\_ So low for long,*” In this poem, Frost has portrayed his childhood memories associated with birch trees. Frost has his own way of arranging words and in this poem, he used the enjambment technique to make compound sentences.

#### 4.3.1. Enjambment

When a writer explains the same idea in more than one phrase without giving a line break, this movement from one line to another is called enjambment. Example of enjambment in *Birches*:

*And life is too much like a pathless wood...  
...From a twig's having lashed across it open. (44-47)*

### 4.4. Lexical Level

This level is focused on word categories called parts of speech. These categories include nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions. This paper is analyzing which categories are highlighted by Frost.

**Table 2:** Analysis of Lexical Categories in “*Birches*”.

Poem's Lines	Nouns	Verbs	Adverb
Lines 1-10	Birches, trees, boy, ice, rain, winter, click, morning, breeze, sun, crazes, shed, warmth, enamel, shells, crystal	See, bend, rises, turn, stir, crack, makes, think,	Soon, as,
Lines 11-20	Snow-crust, heap, glass, dome, heaven, bracken, trunks, woods, leaves, ground, girls, hands, knees, hair, heads	Avalanching, broken, sweep, think, fallen, drag, bow, arch, trail, throw	Away, afterward, before
Lines 21-30	Ice-storm, boy, cows, town, baseball, summer, winter, father, tree, riding, stiffness	Going, say, broke, prefer, bend, went, fetch, found, play, took	Down, again
Lines 31-40	Tree, ground, poise, top, branches, pain, cup, brim, feet, air, kicking,	Hung, limp, conquer, learned, launching, carrying, kept, climb, fill, swish, flung,	Soon, away, always, carefully, up, down,
Lines 41-50	Dream, back, swinger, considerations, life, pathless, face, eye, cobwebs, fate, earth	Broken, tickle, burns, begin, misunderstand,	So, once, willfully, awhile,





<b>Lines 51-59</b>	Earth, love, trunk, half, swinger, birches, top, heaven	Return, snatch, wish, grant, going, coming, dip, bear	Away, again, down
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**Table 3:** Analysis of Lexical Categories in “Birches”.

Poem's Lines	Adjectives	Prepositions	Pronouns	Conjunctions
<b>Lines 1-10</b>	Straighter, darker, swinging, loaded, sunny, colored	Across, after, upon, like	I, them, you, they	But, and
<b>Lines 11-20</b>	Shattering, inner, withered, dry	Over	You, they, them	And, so
<b>Lines 21-30</b>	Alone, subdued	Over, until	I, them, he, his	But, and
<b>Lines 31-40</b>	Left, clear, same, outward	Through	He, his, you, him	And
<b>Lines 41-50</b>	Weary	Across, over	Myself, I, me,	So, and
<b>Lines 51-59</b>	Snow-white, better, worse, good	Till, toward	I, me	And, but

Frost has used nouns, verbs, and adjectives more than other categories of words, his use of verbs and pronouns shows his focus is on man. He has not used any interjections.

#### 4.5. Semantic Level

This level focuses on the meaning of the words. In *Birches*, Frost talks about the bending birches of trees and associates these bending birch trees with ice-storm, boy, and girls, then he further depicts his own memories of birches. There comes two meanings either the storm is responsible for the bend in birches or this is a boy who has done this.

#### 4.6. Pragmatic Level

The pragmatic level elucidates the use of poetic techniques such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism, and the literal meaning is analyzed through these devices. The poem's title symbolizes a connection between the real and fantasy worlds, it also symbolizes the poet's perceptions of life.

##### 4.6.1. Imagery

Readers' perceptions about things by using their five senses come under the literary term imagery. Imagery in 'Birches', for example:

*Across the lines of straighter darker trees, (1-2)*  
*To the top branches, climbing carefully (36)*  
*From a twig's having lashed across it open. (46-47)*  
*And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk (55)*

##### 4.6.2. Symbolism

A poetic technique to explain an idea through symbolic images is called symbolism. In 'Birches' the following lines are symbolic:

*Across the lines of straighter darker trees,*  
*I like to think some boy's been swinging them. (2-3)*

#### 4.6.3. Metaphor

In this literary technique, a writer refers to one thing while mentioning an entirely different thing. In this poem metaphor is used in lines fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen:

*They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves: (14-16)*

#### 4.7. Other Important Poetic Devices

The captivating language style of Robert Frost attracts readers, he used a number of poetic and literary devices in his works to make the language appealing. Following are the figures of speech used by Frost:

##### 4.7.1. Simile

Writers use a simile to make a comparison between two different things by using the words 'like' and 'as'. In *Birches* simile is used in the following line:

*Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair (18-19)  
And life is too much like a pathless wood (44)*

##### 4.7.2. Personification

This figure of speech is often used by writers to give human qualities to objects that make poetry alive and make the readers feel the words. For instance:

*Trailing their leaves on the ground, (18)  
Truth broke in... With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm, (21-22)*

#### 5. Conclusion

Every writer has a different style of writing that makes him unique in the world of writing. This paper inspects the poem "Birches" by Robert Frost who is a remarkable American poet, he has his own way of using words and arranging those words by using different techniques such as symbolism, imagery, personification, metaphor, and many other figures of speech to enhance the beauty of his writings. In this study, different levels of language and other stylistic features used in the poem are examined. Frost has presented his childhood memories associated with the birch trees. It is analyzed that "Birches" is a beautifully constructed art of Frost that appeals to readers and connects the real and imaginary worlds.

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*Appendix*

**Birches**

**By Robert Frost**

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.



And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.