

Stylistic Analysis of “Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep” by Mary Elizabeth Frye

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Abstract: This paper aims to stylistically analyze the poem "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" by Mary Elizabeth Frye. To achieve this, the analysis was conducted at four stylistic levels, namely phonological, morphological, graphological, and lexico-syntactic. These form the basis for the analysis which is crucial in extracting the literal and hidden meanings in the poem, which in turn, will help in knowing and understanding the poem's themes and basic content, and, the author's style. Findings revealed that Mary Elizabeth Frye uses distinct stylistic choices. Thus, the poem has proved its universality as it resonated with many readers across the world.

Keywords—stylistic analysis; phonological level; morphological level; graphological level; lexico-syntactic level

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Style

To use language means to extend beyond communication, to deviate from the conventions, and to have the right to choose from the appropriate linguistic possibilities. These characteristics all point to the term “style”. Wales (2001) defined style as the “perceived distinctive manner of expression” in writing or speaking. It encompasses one’s choice regarding linguistic elements. It reflects an author's personality and the deliberate use of literary devices which sets him/her apart from other authors. For Leech and Short (1981), style is the “dress of thoughts”. Tariq (2018) adds that “style is the result of choice-making activity in language use...” According to Manuel (2017), “through one’s style, he/she can convey more *the* message to the readers”.

1.2 Stylistic Analysis

The study of the distinctive expression of language is called Stylistics. According to Short and Candlin (1989), stylistics is a linguistic approach to “the study of the literary texts”. Tariq (2018) asserts that “stylistics, in general, is an inquiry or a study of the language of literature in all its manifestation, a study of literary discourse which tends to study different styles in language use”. Ardhani (2020) posits that stylistic analysis provides readers with valuable data for a more objective analysis of literary work. Stylistic analysis can be achieved by the various levels, as follows:

The *phonological level* is concerned with the study of the sound system of any given language.

The *morphological level*, according to Manuel (2017), aims to study and analyze words, the internal structure of the sentence, and their formation.

The *graphological level* recognizes the writing system of a language and studies the formal rules of capitalization, spelling, structure, systematic formation, and punctuation in the sentence.

The *lexico-syntactic level* deals with the level of lexis” which refers to the vocabulary items that make up a language, and with the level of “syntax” which is related to the formation of phrases, clauses, and sentences; it means an ordering of words into meaningful grammatical verbal patterns.

1.3 Introduction to the Author: Mary Elizabeth Frye

Mary Elizabeth Frye is the author of the poem “Do not Stand at my grave and Weep”. The poem for which she became famous was originally composed on a brown paper shopping bag and was reportedly inspired by the story of a young Jewish girl who had been staying with the Frye household and had been unable to visit her dying mother in Germany because of anti-Semitic unrest. The identity of the author of the poem was unknown until the late 1990s when Frye revealed that she had written it. Her claim was confirmed in 1998 after research conducted by Abigail Van Buren, a newspaper columnist (Goodreads, n.d.).

1.4 Introduction to the Poem: Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep

“Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep” is a well-known bereavement poem written in 1932 by Mary Elizabeth Frye. The 12-line verse, written from the point of view of the deceased mother of the young Jewish girl to offer hope and comfort in her daughter's grief, presents death not as an ending, but as a transformation. The speaker urges her loved ones not to mourn at her gravesite and offers reasons why they should not mourn for her. The speaker declares that she became part of the natural world – in various forms – thus, her true essence remains. With the poem’s universal elements, it

resonated with several people across the world and remained significant even in the modern day.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted in this study. It employs the content analysis research design to examine the stylistic choices made in the poem.

2.2 Source of Data

The source of data is the poem “Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep” written by Mary Elizabeth Frye.

2.3 Analysis of Data

In the analysis of data, the method applied was thematic analysis which was used to determine, interpret, and analyze the elements, themes, and meanings of the poem in four stylistic levels.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 On Phonological Level

3.1.1 On Assonance

I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
I am the swift-up-flinging rush (Line 8)
I am the day transcending night. (Line 10)
I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Abrams (1993) asserts that assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds—especially in stressed syllables in a sequence of nearby words. It is evident in the poem that Assonance is employed by the poet. The words *I*, *sunlight*, and *ripened* in Line 5 consist of similar vowel sounds, that is /ai/. The words *swift* and *flinging* in *swift-up-flinging* share the same vowel sound /i/. The words *I* and *night* in Line 10 have an /ai/ sound. The same vowel sound is contained in the words *I* and *die* in Line 12. Assonance enhances a musical effect in the text by using it to create internal rhyme.

3.1.2 On Consonance

I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
Do not stand at my grave and cry, (Line 11)

Consonance is about the repetition of the consonant sound in the words before or after different vowel sounds (Cuddon, 1999). In the poem, the words *wind* and *blow* as seen in Line 3 contain a *w* sound. In Line 5, the words *ripened* and *grain* contain an *r* sound. The same sound is incorporated in the words *grave* and *cry*. The use of consonance adds a lyrical feeling to the poetry.

3.1.3 On Euphony

Do not stand at my grave and weep, (Line 1)
I am not there—I do not sleep. (Line 2)

I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
I am the diamond glints in snow, (Line 4)
I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
I am the gentle autumn rain. (Line 6)
As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)
I am the swift-up-flinging rush (Line 8)
Of quiet birds in circling flight. (Line 9)
I am the day transcending night. (Line 10)
Do not stand at my grave and cry, (Line 11)
I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Euphony refers to the combining of words that sound pleasant together or are easy to pronounce, usually because they contain lots of consonants with soft or muffled sounds like l, m, n, and r (Bergman, 2017). Euphony is employed by the poet in all lines of the poem. This fact goes back to the primary purpose of this bereavement poem which is to offer hope and comfort to the grieving.

3.1.4 On Rhythm

Do not | stand at | my grave | and weep, (Line 1)
I am | the thou- | sand winds | that blow, (Line 3)
I am | the sunlight | on ri- | pened grain, (Line 5)

Wales (2001) considers rhythm as “the perceptual pattern of accented and unaccented syllables in a language”. The first two feet of the poem consist of a spondee (*Do not*), a poetic foot that has two syllables that are consecutively stressed. and followed by a trochee (*stand at*), following a stressed - unstressed pattern. Lines 3 and 5 consist of six rhyming couplets, each of which uses iambic tetrameter, a meter consisting of eight syllables per line, the first of which is not stressed, while the second syllable is stressed. The function of meter in poetry is to provide a rhythmic structure to a poem. Such a rhythmic structure not only produces pleasing sounds but also creates aesthetic and emotional effects (cited from Sharma, 2019).

3.1.5 On Rhyme Scheme

Do not stand at my grave and weep, (Line 1)
I am not there—I do not sleep. (Line 2)
I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
I am the diamond glints in snow, (Line 4)
I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
I am the gentle autumn rain. (Line 6)
As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)
I am the swift-up-flinging rush (Line 8)
Of quiet birds in circling flight. (Line 9)
I am the day transcending night. (Line 10)
Do not stand at my grave and cry, (Line 11)
I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Harmon (2009) views rhyme as “the identity of terminal sound between accented syllables, usually occupying corresponding positions in two or more lines of the verse”. The rhyme scheme of the poem is AABCCDDEEFF. The first couplet has the same sounds (*weep, sleep*), the second

couplet (*blow, snow*), the third couplet (*grain, rain*), the fourth couplet (*hush, rush*), fifth couplet (*flight, night*), and the last couplet (*cry, die*). Frye uses a full, single rhyme rather than a subtle slant rhyme.

3.1.7 Summary of Findings on the Phonological Level

At the phonological level, Mary Elizabeth Frye employed musical devices, such as assonance, and consonance to add a lyrical feeling to the poetry. She also made use of euphony to evoke emotional effects which goes back to the piece's primary purpose which is to offer hope and comfort to the grieving. On rhythm, the piece contains a spondee; and the rest consists of six rhyming couplets, each of which uses iambic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme of the poem is AABCCDDEEFF. Frye uses a full, single rhyme rather than a subtle slant rhyme. This stylistic choice of words, form, and pattern creates comforting, predictable music in the bereavement poem which seems to render a lullaby to the grieving individuals.

3.2 On Morphological Level

3.2.1 On Affixation

Affixation, according to Hamawand (2011), is the morphological process of deriving a new word by adding an affix, namely a bound morpheme, to a root or base.

3.2.1.1 Inflectional

3.2.1.1.1 On Nouns

Plural Form

I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
I am the diamond glints in snow, (Line 4)
Of quiet birds in circling flight. (Line 9)

Possessive Case

As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)

3.2.1.1.2 On Verbs

3.2.1.1.2.1 Simple Present

Do not **stand** at my **grave** and **weep**, (Line 1)
I am not there—I do not **sleep**. (Line 2)
I am a thousand winds that **blow**, (Line 3)
As you **awake** with morning's hush (Line 7)
Do not **stand** at my **grave** and **cry**, (Line 11)
I am not there—I did not **die**. (Line 12)

Inflectional morphemes are not used to produce new words in the language, but rather to indicate aspects of the grammatical function of a word (Lavadia, 2022). In the poem, both the inflections *-s* and *'s* are attached to nouns, thus, marking plural and possession, respectively: *wind-s* (Line 3), *glint-s* (Line 4), *bird-s* (Line 9); and *morning's* (Line 7). Meanwhile, the verbs in the poem are in simple present tense. This signifies that the poem is foregrounded on the idea that the speaker in the poem is still present on the earth.

3.2.2 On Derivational

3.2.2.1. Changes in Form Class

3.2.2.2.1 Adjective Marking

I am the sunlight on **ripened** grain, (Line 5)
Of quiet birds in **circling** flight. (Line 9)
I am the day **transcending** night. (Line 10)

The second set of bound morpheme is the derivational morpheme. According to Yule (2006), derivation is by far the most common word-formation process to be found in the production of new English words, and it is accomplished using, generally described as affixes. All affixes change the meaning of the derivative. Some affixes change the word class of the root while others do not change the word class of the root. In the poem, the words *ripened* (Line 5), *circling* (Line 9), and *transcending* (Line 10) have been changed in terms of their grammatical category. The affix *-en* and *-ed* is added to the end of the root word *ripe* (v.); hence, the resulting word is now an adjective. The affix *-ing* is added to the end of the root word *circle* (v.) to change its grammatical category from verb to adjective. The same formation is made for the root word *transcend* (v.).

3.2.2.2.2 On Morphemes Using Root Vowel Gradation

I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Apophony (also known as root vowel gradation) is the change of sounds within a word that indicates grammatical information (Boonkwan, 2018). In Line 12, the word *do* was changed to *did* to create its past tense. The change in sound within the word indicates the present and past tense of the particular verb.

3.2.3 On Compounding

I am the **sunlight** on ripened grain, (Line 5)
I am the **swift-up-flinging** rush (Line 8)

Compounding (also called composition) is the most frequently used way of making new lexemes, consisting of the combination of two words (Booij, 2005). The words *sun* (n.) and *light* (n.) in Line 5 are a compound of two nouns and when combined, they form another noun. The compound word *sunlight*, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means the light given off by the star around which the planet Earth revolves. In its simplest definition, *sunlight* means the light emitted by the sun. In Line 8, the words *swift* (adj.), *up* (prep.), and *flinging* (v.) are combined to create the word *swift-up-flinging* (n.). However, in other versions of the poem, the word *swift* is separated from the word *up-flinging*, having no dash to join them, but only a comma. The word *up-flinging* is the present participle form of *fling* which refers to throwing something up using a lot of force.

Summary of Findings on the Morphological Level

Based on the analysis made at the Morphological level, it is inferred that the poet uses morphemes to indicate aspects of the grammatical function of a word, i.e. inflectional morpheme, and also, to form words of a different grammatical category, i.e. derivational morpheme. The poet incorporated lexeme formation that can change the grammatical category of a particular word, and that can add substantial new meanings to them. Frye employed two types of compounding: closed compound and hyphenated compound

3.3 On Graphological Level

By this analysis, the study adapted Levenston's (1992) proposal where four (4) different levels within the graphic representation of language are used.

3.3.1 On Punctuation

3.3.1.1 Period

I am not there—I do not sleep. (Line 2)
 I am the gentle autumn rain. (Line 6)
 Of quiet birds in circling flight. (Line 9)
 I am the day transcending night. (Line 10)
 I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

According to Western Michigan University (n.d.), a period is a form of punctuation used to end a declarative sentence. The poet employed the period in Lines 2, 6, 9, 10, and 12 to indicate finality.

3.3.1.2 Comma

Do not stand at my grave and weep, (Line 1)
 I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
 I am the diamond glints in snow, (Line 4)
 I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
 Do not stand at my grave and cry, (Line 11)

A comma is a punctuation mark that separates elements or ideas within a sentence (Nordquist, 2021). In the poem, the use of commas is employed multiple times as seen in Lines 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 11. Based on various articles, there are several uses of commas. In this context, however, the poet uses a comma to signal a pause, to separate sentential elements within the verse, and to provide clarity.

3.3.1.3 Caesura

I am not there—I do not sleep. (Line 2)
 I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Caesura is a pause that occurs within a line of poetry, usually marked by some form of punctuation, such as a period, comma, ellipsis, or dash (Bergman, 2017). To demonstrate caesura, the punctuation used is a dash as can be gleaned in Lines 2 and 12. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, while it may seem that their most obvious role is to emphasize the metrical construction of the verse, more often we need these little stops to introduce the cadence and phrasing of natural speech into the metrical scheme.

3.3.1.4 Enjambment

As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)
 I am the swift-up-flinging rush (Line 8)

Enjambment, from the French meaning "a striding over", is a poetic term for the continuation of a sentence or phrase from one line of poetry to the next (Richter, 2020). Line 7 and Line 8 characterize enjambment, as both lack punctuation marks at their line breaks. Thus, it provides an effect that allows readers to continue reading from one line to the next.

3.3.2 On Typography

Capitalization

Do not stand at my grave and weep, (Line 1)
 I am not there—I do not sleep. (Line 2)
 I am a thousand winds that blow, (Line 3)
 I am the diamond glints in snow, (Line 4)
 I am the sunlight on ripened grain, (Line 5)
 I am the gentle autumn rain. (Line 6)
 As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)
 I am the swift-up-flinging rush (Line 8)
 Of quiet birds in circling flight. (Line 9)
 I am the day transcending night. (Line 10)
 Do not stand at my grave and cry, (Line 11)
 I am not there—I did not die. (Line 12)

Capitalization is the practice of writing the first letter of a word in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase (Turito, 2023). Each line in the poem starts with capital letters.

3.3.3 On Layout

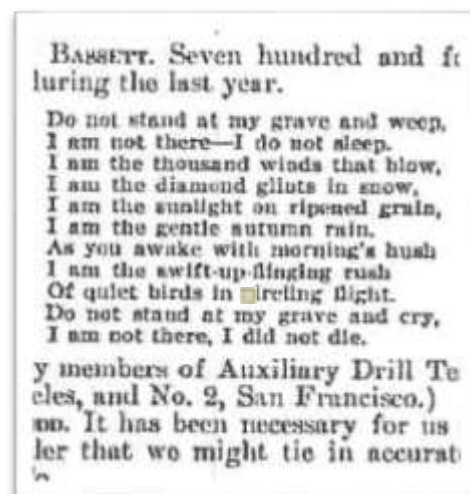


Figure 1. The version of the poem above was taken from page 62 of a memorial service document for the United Spanish War Veterans service held at Portland USA, on 11 September 1938 (the '40th Encampment') published by the US Congress in early 1939.

According to the website *Computer Hope* (2017), layout refers to “the overall appearance of a document, image, text, or another medium designed to be more appealing to the viewer and help them identify what they are observing”. Based on **Figure 1**, the poet made use of a one-stanza poem. In terms of alignment, the lines of the poem are left-justified which means that the text uses the left margin as its reference point. Text at the left margin touches the left margin, but text near the right margin wraps naturally where the words break (Bear, 2019). A justified text allows easier reading.

3.3.4 Summary of Findings on the Graphological Level

It is concluded that the poet uses punctuation marks, such as period, comma, caesura, and enjambment, and also follows a traditional layout in poetry.

3.4 On Lexico-Syntactical Level

3.4.1 On Parts of Speech

3.4.1.1 On Nouns

A noun is a word used for a place, person, or thing (Ahmad, 2022). Fourteen (14) nouns are used in the poem. *The grave* is the most frequently used, appearing twice. Other nouns that are employed are *winds*, *glints*, *snow*, *sunlight*, *grain*, *rain*, *hush*, *rush*, *birds*, *flight*, *day*, and *night*.

3.4.1.2 On Pronouns

A pronoun is defined as a word that replaces a noun in a sentence (Ahmad, 2022). Eight pronouns are employed in the poem. Possessive pronouns used include *my* (2), *I* (3), and *you*. Meanwhile, demonstrative pronouns were also used, such as *that* and *there*.

3.4.1.3 On Verbs

A verb shows the happening or state of something (Ahmad, 2022). Fourteen (14) verbs are seen in the poem. *Do* (2), *am* (5), and *stand* (2) occur frequently. Verbs, such as *weep*, *sleep*, *blow*, *awake*, *cry*, *did*, and *die* also occur.

3.4.1.4 On Adjectives

An adjective is defined as a word that gives information about a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase (Ahmad, 2022). Nine adjectives appear in the poem. These are *thousand*, *diamond*, *ripened*, *gentle*, *autumn*, *up-flinging*, *circling*, *transcending*, and *there*.

3.4.1.5 On Adverbs

An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb (Ahmad, 2022). Five adverbs appear in the poem. The adverb *did* not appear thrice. Adverbs of manner, such as *swift* and *quiet* were also used.

3.4.1.6 On Preposition

Prepositions are the words that are put before nouns or pronouns. These denote in what relation the person or thing indicated by it exists, about something else (Ahmad, 2022).

Prepositions, such as *at* (2), *on* (2), *with*, and *of* are used in the poem.

3.4.1.7 On Conjunction

Conjunctions are simply words that join sentences, clauses, and sometimes words (Ahmad, 2022). Only the conjunction *is* is used in the poem.

3.4.1.8 On Determiners

Determiners are the words that are placed before nouns or adjectives to introduce them. Only the determiner *is* is used which is an article.

3.4.2 On Metaphor

I am a thousand winds that blow,	(Line 3)
I am the diamond glints in snow,	(Line 4)
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,	(Line 5)
I am the gentle autumn rain.	(Line 6)
I am the swift-up-flinging rush	(Line 8)
I am the day transcending night.	(Line 10)

A metaphor is a trope or figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things that have something in common (Nordquist, 2021).

The poet incorporates metaphor through implicit comparison of the poem’s speaker to *the thousand winds that blow* (Line 3), *the diamond glints in the snow* (Line 4), *the sunlight on ripened grain* (Line 5), *the gentle autumn rain* (Line 6), *the swift-up-flinging rush* (Line 8), and to *the day transcending night* (Line 10). As mentioned in the article of Nordquist (2021), when using metaphors to enrich writing, consider how these figures of speech are more than just ornaments or decorative accessories. He argued that metaphors are also ways of thinking, offering readers (or listeners) fresh ways of examining ideas and viewing the world.

3.4.3 On Personification

As you awake with morning's hush (Line 7)

Personification is a figure of speech in which human characteristics are attributed to an abstract quality, animal, or inanimate object (Britannica, n.d.). The poet captures the interest of her readers through the use of personification as observed in Line 7. The use of personification in the poem helps readers connect with the object or idea.

3.4.4 On Anaphora

I am not there—I do not sleep.	(Line 2)
I am a thousand winds that blow,	(Line 3)
I am the diamond glints in snow,	(Line 4)
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,	(Line 5)
I am the gentle autumn rain.	(Line 6)
I am the swift-up-flinging rush	(Line 8)
I am the day transcending night.	(Line 10)
I am not there—I did not die.	(Line 12)

Anaphora is defined as the rhetorical term for the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses (Nordquist, 2021).

In the poem, it is evident that the poet uses much Anaphora (or Parallelism), thus, making her arguments be carried to the succeeding lines. Almost, throughout the poem, the lines are syntactically similar. Lines 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 begin with the subject "I" and the predicator "am". The pronoun "I" or the phrase "I am" is repeated multiple times at the beginning of each line. Moreover, the lines are in simple present tense, the effect of which is to emphasize that the speaker's arguments happened in the present. This conveys that the speaker still exists on earth as they are in the poem.

3.4.8 Summary of Findings on the Lexico-Syntactical Level

It is inferred that the use of Metaphor and Anaphora gives emphasis that the speaker still exists in the natural world, and also makes the speaker's arguments more insistent. On the other hand, in parts of speech, the poet uses simple lexical items, yet makes sure that these can help in transferring the poem's message and can help produce imagery.

4. CONCLUSION

"Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" is a well-known bereavement poem by Mary Elizabeth Frye. Viewed phonologically, Frye employed literary devices to add a lyrical feeling to the poetry, and to evoke emotional response from the reader. Under the morphological level, Frye incorporated lexeme formation that can change the grammatical category of a particular word, and that can add substantial new meanings to them. It is also worth noting that the verbs used in the poem are in simple present tense. With this technique, it seems that the speaker in the poem is still present in the natural world. Frye also used compounding which may help in conveying or emphasizing the message of the poem. Under the graphological level, Frye uses punctuation marks as they are normally used, and also follows a traditional layout in poetry. Under the lexico-syntactic level, it appears that Frye took advantage of techniques that make the poem aesthetic and withstand the test of time. She made use of terms that are easy to understand. Thus, such stylistic choices of Mary Elizabeth Frye make the poem more melodic and more memorable.

5. RECOMMENDATION

This paper analyzed the stylistic features of "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" by Mary Elizabeth Frye. Few stylistic analyses are conducted for this poem. Thus, future researchers are encouraged to conduct a more stylistic analysis of this poem to further discern and fully grasp the meanings and message that the poet is trying to convey. Future researchers can also investigate other literary devices, forms, and patterns not analyzed in the paper, and include other levels of stylistic analysis.

6. APPENDIX

Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there—I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints in snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
As you awake with morning's hush
I am the swift-up-flinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the day transcending night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there—I did not die.

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