

Stylistic Analysis of Mary Shelley's "The Mortal Immortal"

მერი შელის „მოკვდავი უკვდავის“ სტილისტური ანალიზი

მარიამ მერებაშვილი

თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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მერი ვოლსტონკრაფტ შელი გოთიკური ლიტერატურის ერთ-ერთი თვალსაჩინო წარმომადგენელია, რომელმაც თავისი ცნობილი ნაწარმოებით „ფრანკენშტაინი, ანუ თანამედროვე პრომეთე“ მწერალთა თაობები შთააგონა. შელის შემოქმედება გამოირჩევა იმითაც, რომ, ფაქტობრივად, სწორედ „ფრანკენშტაინის“ გამოქვეყნების შემდეგ მოხდა მე-19 საუკუნეში, იმდროინდელი საზოგადოებისთვის თითქმის სრულიად უცნობი ჟანრის, სამეცნიერო ფანტასტიკის აღორძინება. ვინაიდან, გოთიკური ნაწარმოებების ერთ-ერთი მთავარი მისია მკითხველში მძაფრი ემოციების აღძვრაა, გოთიკური ლიტერატურა მდიდარია მხატვრული ხერხებით. შელის ტექსტები წარმოადგენს გოთიკური ფიქციის კლასიკურ მაგალითებს, შესაბამისად, საინტერესოა მათი ლინგვისტური ანალიზი.

სტატიის მიზანია სტილისტურად გაანალიზოს მერი შელის მოთხრობა „მოკვდავი უკვდავი“ ლექსიკურ და სინტაქსურ დონეზე, შეისწავლოს მისი ლინგვისტური თავისებურებები გოთიკური ლიტერატურის ჭრილში და აღწეროს თუ როგორ რეალიზდება სხვადასხვა სტილისტური ხერხები აღნიშნულ მოთხრობაში. მოცემული სტატია არის მერი შელის „მოკვდავი უკვდავის“ სტილისტური ანალიზის პირველი მაგალითი, რაც წარმოადგენს კვლევის სიახლეს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სტილისტური ანალიზი, მერი შელი, მოკვდავი უკვდავი

Keywords: Stylistic analysis, Mary Shelley, The Mortal Immortal

1. Introduction

The Gothic fiction emerged in the middle of the 18th century. It is a style, an aesthetic of writing, which is characterized by the elements of horror, mystery, haunting, fear, murk and combines romance, coloured with moral ambiguity within itself. The term **Gothic** arose from the name of Germanic tribes, the Goths, who significantly contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. At first, the term Gothic carried a derogatory meaning and referred to the architecture of the Middle Ages, which was thought to be barbaric and brutal, compared to the classical times of ancient Greece and Rome, the standards of Renaissance ideals. The first time the term **Gothic** was used in regard to literature was after the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. This novel is considered to be the first piece of Gothic literature. It is likely that it was subtitled *A Gothic Story* because of the very gloomy and mysterious settings of the story (Carlick, 2024).

Just like a painter's work can be recognized by their unique techniques, brushstrokes, the way of using colours and how we, as the admirers of their art, can easily tell which art movement or artist a certain painting belongs to, a literary work can be easily identified the same way. The majority of authors have their unique writing style and so do different literary movements or literary genres. Their use of language, the way of constructing sentences, using certain stylistic devices, all play a part in building a literary language, which enriches their texts and makes them distinctive. Some authors purposefully divert from the set norms of grammar, break the standards of morphological, syntactic and semantic systems, which makes their style easily distinguishable and memorable. Each above-mentioned detail can be studied through the lens of stylistics, the field of linguistics which is concerned with the study and interpretation of literary texts.

Stylistics goes in depth to figure out how language functions in literary texts. Its field of study is not necessarily limited to literary texts. Stylistics looks into many different types of texts, such as legal documents, language of press, news reports, advertisements and also looks into the oral usage of language (Rusieshvili et al, 2024). There are fair shares of studies done on all the different aspects. However, this research will be focused on how stylistic features are realized in *The Mortal Immortal* by Mary Shelley.

This study aims at

1. Conducting stylistic analysis of the short story *The Mortal Immortal* written by English Author Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
2. Analyzing which stylistic devices the author uses to express the style characteristic of the Gothic literature.

To answer the above-mentioned questions, the qualitative method of analysis was employed. The empirical material of the research is the short story *The Mortal Immortal* by Mary Shelley.

The novelty of this research is the following: this is the first study in which *The Mortal Immortal* was thoroughly analysed from a stylistic point of view, instead of purely focusing on its literary analysis.

The comprehension of the lexical and syntactic expressive means used in the story provide practical value for literary scholars, translators and educators, who are seeking to better understand how style of the Gothic narrative contributes to the construction of suspense and mystical atmosphere.

2. The Mortal Immortal: the author and context

Best known for her novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley made a name for herself with her unique writings and is considered to be one of the pioneers of science fiction. Being the first-born daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, both celebrated figures of radical social circles, Mary reflected characteristic traits of both of her parents (Clemit, 2006). Since early and unfortunate passing of her mother shortly after her birth, Mary spent considerable amount of time by her grave, where she used to read and write. We can speculate that the environment in which she created her works had affected her writing in some kind of way. The majority of her works are very fitting to her personality, each of them illuminating her other pieces of writing. Shelley's essay *On Ghosts* might seem like a logical continuation of her Gothic sensibility for readers who are familiar with her through "Frankenstein". Even with the Gothic tone in the essay, it approaches the themes of innocence and superstition analytically, suggesting that the Enlightenment didn't fully erase supernatural from human minds and she regards it in a positive light. "*But do none of us believe in ghosts?*" she asks continuously. (Poetry Foundation, n.d.)

3. "The Mortal Immortal" Cumaean Sibyl of Mary Shelley's Work

The Mortal Immortal is a short story by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, published in 1833 and it tells the story of a man named Winzy. Enamoured of her childhood friend Bertha, Winzy drinks the mysterious elixir, prepared by Cornelius Agrippa, a professor and an alchemist. Even though he wasn't fully aware of elixir's powers, his suffering from losing his loved one prompted him to drink the potion in hopes that it would "*cure him of love*" but instead he becomes cursed with immortality and is forced to live as everything he loves dies around him.

While we are getting familiar with the story, we notice that it's not a classical horror story, with ghosts and scary supernatural creatures, but instead it awakens a sense of fear in the reader by suggesting the idea of immortality. Like the Cumaean Sibyl, Winzy is also doomed to eternal life, but the twist which Mary Shelley applies is that, unlike Sibyl, Winzy becomes immortal by accident. As ironic as it is, we could also draw parallels to the author's life. Mary Shelley lost her parents, husband (Percy Bysshe Shelley), her children and her close friend early in her life, which resulted in her sharing her character's faith partially. Because of this, the concept of outliving her loved ones became a theme in Shelley's works.

The absence of physical terror doesn't make it any less of a Gothic story, as Gothic stories are very diverse and they bring sense of fear and psychological dread to readers in various ways. Early novels in the Gothic horror subgenre feature discussions of morality, philosophy and religion (Pagan, 2018). Moreover, it's inaccurate to assume that all Gothic stories should necessarily be frightening. Everything lies on the setting and aesthetic, the ambience and

atmosphere which it evokes. To generalize this concept for the sake of drawing an image, horror stories in literature cannot rely on causing an automatic psychological reaction in readers like what they do with jump scares in movies, as a result, literary devices are employed.

4. Theoretical Background and Framework

Stylistics, which lies between linguistic analysis and literary criticism, offers a systematic approach to understand how language functions in texts to produce meaning and create certain aesthetic, as “*style was originally connected with the realization of the aesthetic function of language*” (Rusieshvili et al, 2024, p.9). The notion of *style* in regard to text refers to how the same idea can be expressed using different words, and how these word choices affect reader’s perception. Ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian treated style as a ‘proper adornment of thought’ (Rusieshvili et al, 2024). However, it must be noted that, although one of the main focuses of stylistics is the analysis of the aesthetic function of language, which is mainly achieved through the usage of stylistic devices, the absence of the latter doesn’t place a text beyond the scope of stylistic analysis.

A specific style is created when the author diverts from the “norm” of the language (Leech, 1969, as cited in Almahammed, 2020). This intentional deviation from what is considered the standard form of the language results in the development of certain characteristics, which we later associate with specific movements, authors or genres. The notion of *genre* is also quite often discussed in relation with style, but it’s rather challenging to assign a text to a specific genre, as genres frequently overlap and share common features. In case of the Gothic fiction, which is the main focus of this research, we see synthesis of fragments of Romanticism, Victorian Realism, Science Fiction etc.

Almost every text is composed with an intended audience in author’s mind, according to which he/she shapes the language and tone. The branch which studies the relation between the author and the reader is called decoding, or interpretive stylistics. The term decoding stylistics was introduced by M. Riffaterre, who defined stylistics as the science which studies the stylistic devices utilized to impose the encoder’s (writer’s) way of thinking on the decoder (reader) While creating a text, the author’s choices of words themselves carry indirect hints, which guide the reader in interpreting or decoding the underlying meaning in a way that the author had initially planned. Therefore, even though one text could be decoded in as many ways as there are readers, as each individual may have different historical or cultural background, expectations and perspective, we can speculate that the reader’s understanding consciously or unconsciously is guided by the author’s intentional choice of words, tone and the structural organization of the text (Riffaterre, 1959).

One of the aims of Gothic texts is to elicit strong emotions in readers, whether it’s fear, melancholy, sorrow, longing or anticipation, therefore, the texts share common stylistic features which creates eerie ambiance. The prominent lexical expressive means which we see in this genre are metaphors, metonymies, similes, hyperboles, epithets and oxymorons. These devices amplify the initial feelings that words carry.

“Metaphor is an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Geoffery Leech suggests an interesting idea about metaphors and similes. A simile is a figure of speech in which two distinct things are compared by using words “like” or “as” (Leech, 1969). Leech described metaphor as “covert comparison” and simile as “overt comparison”, as the comparison between two objects is indirect in case of metaphors, while it’s made explicit in the latter.

Metonymy, which is also closely related to metaphor, is based on a different type of relation between the dictionary and contextual meanings, a relation based not on identification, but on some kind of association connecting the two concepts which these meanings represent (Galperin, 1977).

Hyperbole can be defined as a deliberate overstatement or exaggeration of a feature essential to the object or phenomenon (Galperin, 1977). Hyperboles aren’t meant to be taken literally, as they don’t depict actual reality, but rather, emotionally coloured perception (Rusieshvili et al, 2024).

Epithet is a stylistic device based on the interplay of emotive meaning in attributive word or phrase, which is used to characterize an object, giving an individual perception of its features and properties (Galperin, 1977). *“Sometimes, epithets with figurative meaning are referred to as ‘transferred’. The transferred epithet can be used to emphatically introduce an idea that an author plans to develop”* (Rusieshvili et al, 2024, p. 94-95).

Oxymoron is a combination of two words in which the meanings are opposite in sense (Galperin, 1977).

Syntactical expressive means play a significant role in building the aesthetics of the story and setting an overall mood. Syntax is the main composer, alongside lexical devices, when it comes to expressing sentiments and intensity in the written work. In her undoubtedly most famous work, 1818 novel “Frankenstein” Mary Shelley captures and tenderly explores different types of human emotions, thoughts and feelings and constructs her sentences in the way that reaches right to the readers’ hearts. We encounter many interesting sentences in *The Immortal Mortal* as well, such as anaphora, antithesis, asyndeton, polysyndeton and stylistic inversion.

“Anaphora is the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, common in conjunctions with climax and parallelism” (Rusieshvili et al, 2024, p.100).

Antithesis is a stylistic opposition based on relative opposition which arises out of the context through the expansion of the objectively contrasting pairs (Galperin, 1977). Generally, two types of opposition should be distinguished in antithesis: logical opposition and stylistic opposition.

Asyndeton is a connection between parts of sentence or between sentences without any formal sign, when there’s a deliberate omission of the connective where it is generally expected to be according to the norms of literary language (Galperin, 1977, p.226).

In contrast to Asyndeton, “Polysyndeton is a stylistic device of connecting sentences, or phrases, or syntagms, or words by using connectives” (Galperin, 1977, p. 226).

Stylistic inversion occurs when the fixed word order of English (S-V-O) is altered (Galperin, 1977). “Inversion is often used as an independent stylistic device. In the inversion, the direct word order is changed, either completely or partially” (Rusieshvili et al, 2024, p. 100).

5. Stylistic Analysis of the Story “The Mortal Immortal”

Each and every literary genre has its own specific language, that defines it. Gothic fiction includes numerous motifs, themes and devices which makes it simply identifiable. In the frames of this study, I will be analysing the text on lexical and syntactical level, exploring how different figurative parts of speech are used in Mary Shelley’s work.

Metaphor: *The Mortal Immortal* is rich in metaphors. E.g. “Bertha was clad in silk” (p.150), “Her pleasure was to divide them in my bosom”(p.151), “She was surrounded by silk-clad youths, -the rich and gay” (p.151), “Jealousy, with all its venom, and all its misery, entered my breast” (pp.151-151), “I shed a torrent of tears” (p.152), “Sleep weighed upon his eyelids” (p.152), “Serpents and adders were in my heart” (p.152), “the vessel seemed one globe of living radiance” (p.153), “sleep of glory and bliss” (p.153), “bathed my soul in paradise” (p.154), “my thoughts were in heaven. Earth appeared heaven” (p.154), “The hours danced away” (p.154), “He was shut up with his books and drugs” (p.154), “her eyes flashing fire, her cheeks glowing with impatience and anger”(p.155), “Her proud spirit rose in arms at the threat”(p.155), “imprison the soul for even within its carnal habitation” (p.157), “dealer in the black art” (p.159), “Her jealousy never slept” (p.161), “My youth was a disease” (p.161).

Instead of saying that Cornelius Agrippa was simply tired, Shelley uses metaphor “sleep weighed upon his eyelids” to deepen the reader’s sense of exhaustion. Metaphors such as, “Jealousy, with all its venom, and all its misery, entered my breast” and “Serpents and adders were in my heart” serve the purpose of drawing an image of the hatred and venom within Winzy, as the serpents and adders are often associated with evil and malice. We see this a lot in Gothic literature, since the genre relies on emotional extremes and symbolism as *venom* is something that not only harms the others, but it poisons from within. “Bathed my soul in paradise” is another example where Shelley exaggerates the psychological states which the character undergoes. “Her eyes flashing fire, her cheeks glowing with impatience and anger” creates a vivid image of Bertha’s emotions in the reader’s mind, emphasizing her immense anger by comparing it to fire that burns at the touch.

Simile: Shelley uses similes to make her descriptions more vivid. “His memory is as immortal as his arts have made me” (pp.148-149), going against the usual flow of life is one of the key themes in Gothic fiction, therefore, the ideas of immortality, achieved through dark arts or by making a deal with the devil, like in the case of Dorian Gray, is a common motif. “Flashes of admirable beauty, more bright than those which the diamond emits when the sun’s rays are on it” (p.153), this simile highlights enchanting, almost otherworldly beauty of Bertha.

“She sprung with a light fawn-like bound down the marble steps” (p.154). This example is particularly interesting, since it's marked by gender. Shelley is comparing Bertha to a fawn, highlighting her delicacy and innocence.

Metaphors and similes serve the purpose of blurring the line between reality and imagination. This is one of the key elements of Gothic fiction, as it distorts the real world and helps to reflect madness in characters or the environment.

Metonymy: Some examples of metonymies in this text are: *“He was a wise philosopher, but had no acquaintance with any spirits but those clad in flesh and blood”*. (p.157). *“Spirits clad in flesh and blood”* in this context is referring to human beings and not to actual supernatural creatures. *“Before I go, a miserable vanity has caused me to pen these pages”* (p.164), **pen** is a generic term for writing.

Metonymies in Gothic fiction are often used to draw an image of an atmosphere or the inner emotional state of a character. An author might use metonymy to show that a character is experiencing an emotional distress, but instead of stating it directly, they may describe a raging storm or other natural phenomena to draw the parallel lines between the weather and the character.

Hyperbole: The text is heavy on hyperboles, as it perpetually uses emotive language. Hyperboles are: *“All the world has heard of Cornelius Agrippa.”* (p.148), *“I have heard of enchantments, in which the victims were plunged into a deep sleep, to wake, after a hundred years, as fresh as ever”*(p.148), *“I cannot remember the hour when I did not love Bertha”* (p.149), *“I imprecated a thousand curses on her inconstancy”* (p.152), *“She slighted me in a thousand ways”* (p.151), *“She was thousand times more graceful and charming than ever”* (p.155).

By exaggerating the numbers, Shelley highlights the importance of the author's feelings, creating an effect of emotional tension. In the genre which thrives on intensity, whether it's emotional or atmospheric, hyperbole serves the purpose of giving the narrative an almost surreal sense. As Gothic fiction often contains the elements of magic, we encounter hyperboles that pulls us away from the real world and helps us immerse ourselves deeper into the alternative reality of the literary work.

Epithets: The examples which we see of epithets in *The Mortal Immortal* are: *“His venerable head”* (p.152), *“False girl! False and cruel”* (p.152), *“Worthless, detested woman!”* (p.152), *“Flashes of admirable beauty”* (p.153), *“His piercing eyes”* (p.156), *“The radiant hues and grateful scent of that delicious beverage”* (p.157), *“Faded beauty of Bertha”* (p.158), *“Vivacious spirit”* (p.158), *“We sat by our lone fireside – the old-hearted youth and his antiquated wife”* (p.159), *“Dark-haired girl, with smiles of enchanting archness”* (p.161), *“Mysterious, ill-visaged friend of weak humanity”* (p.162).

Epithets not only characterize objects or characters, but they also put symbolic meaning into the narrative. Unlike logical attributes, epithets are purely subjective and they often attach abstract ideas to the characters. Therefore, these epithets become symbols in Gothic literature, expressing various concepts such as innocence, monstrosity, guilt, and fear. By doing so, they deepen the emotional vibrancy of the narrative and reflect the inner feelings of characters.

Oxymoron: We encounter an oxymoron right in the title of the story itself. *The Mortal Immortal*, where **mortal** refers to a living being subject to death, as opposed to a divine entity, whereas **immortal** directly highlights the impossibility of the occurrence of death.

The coexistence of opposites, such as life and death, beauty and grotesqueness, sanity and madness are very common in Gothic literature. Therefore, oxymorons highlight the irony of life and human existence, making readers wonder about existential themes.

Anaphora: Examples of Anaphora in the text are: “**I will tell my story**, and my reader shall judge for me. **I will tell my story** and so contrive to pass some few hours of long eternity, become so wearisome to me.” (p.148), “**I have heard of enchantments**, in which the victims were plunged into a deep sleep, to wake, after a hundred years, as fresh as ever. **I have heard of the Seven Sleepers** – thus to be immortal would not be so burthensome” (p.148), “**Again and again** he threw off drowsiness with more than human energy; **Again and again** it stole away his senses.” (p.152), “**A second time** my hopes are about to be crowned, **a second time** they are destroyed” (p.156).

Anaphora builds emotional intensity, as the repetition can evoke sense of obsession, anxiousness, pulling the reader into the turmoil of emotions.

Antithesis: Examples of Antithesis found in the text are: “She had smiled in disdain and triumph – she knew my wretchedness and her power.” (p.153), “Swiftly let me leave the detested luxuries and wretchedness of this noble dwelling – take me to poverty and happiness.” (p.155), “And the more I live, the more I dread death, even while I abhor life” (pp.162-163).

As we already stressed the importance of contrast in Gothic literature while we were discussing oxymoron, antithesis also serves the similar purpose of setting opposites against each other and highlights the conflict between the two elements. This results in deepening the complexity of the text, making it almost paradoxical.

Asyndeton: Asyndeton examples in *The Mortal Immortal* are: “They had faded by degrees, yet they lingered long – and painted life in hues of splendour” (p.156), “The fire of the medicine was quenched – the fragrance died away – he grew calm, as a philosopher should under the heaviest trials, and dismissed me to rest.” (p.153), “I turned my eyes towards the philosopher; he had fallen back – his eyes were glassy – his features rigid – he was dead!” (p.157), “My brow was untrenched – my cheeks – my eyes – my whole person continued as untarnished as in my twentieth year” (p.158), “Such an enigma is man – born to perish – when he wars, as I do, against the established laws of his nature” (p.163), “Thus I have lived on many year – alone, and weary of myself – desirous of death, yet never dying – a mortal immortal” (p.163).

Asyndeton is often used to create a sense of urgency or emotional intensity. As illustrated, it reflects character’s overwhelmed or panicked state. The lack of conjunctions helps the reader to connect better with character’s psychological experience

Polysyndeton: Polysyndeton examples found in the text are: “And, my task achieved, I shall adopt more resolute means, and, by scattering and annihilating the atoms that compose my frame, set at the liberty the life imprisoned within, and so cruelly prevented from soaring from this dim earth to a sphere more congenial to its immortal essence” (p.164).

Polysyndeton slows down the flow of the narrative and puts greater stress on emotions, horrors or other details of the story. It can also reflect character's spiralling thoughts as the sentences feel almost inescapable, adding to the psychological disturbance of protagonist.

Stylistic inversion: Examples of stylistic inversion in the text are: *"In spite of his anxiety, sleep weighted upon his eyelids"* (p.152), *"My youth was a disease, she said"* (p.161), *"A sailor without rudder or compass, tossed on a stormy sea – a traveller lost on a wide-spread heath, without landmark or star to him – such have I been"* (p.162).

Stylistic inversion creates an archaic tone. It can sometimes make the language feel slightly unusual, giving it more dramatic, almost theatrical quality, which is one of the key characteristics of Gothic literature.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the story covers lexical and syntactical levels of language, providing examples of stylistic devices, which Shelley uses in her work to amplify the emotive tone of the tale. The research highlights how certain stylistic features contribute to the formation of the style, which is associated with Gothic literature and how these elements are developed throughout the text. The author's deliberate and consistent use of figurative language effectively reinforces the Gothic atmosphere. Shelley's language evokes sensations of fear, awe, melancholy, her syntax often mirroring the character's emotional states. These stylistic choices do not merely adorn the prose but serve the purpose of heightening emotional language, which immerses the readers substantially more into the story, drawing them into its emotional landscape. By evoking vivid imagery and sense of wonder, Shelley engages the audience not only intellectually but emotionally as well, allowing for a more profound reading experience.

Mary Shelley's works represent classic examples of Gothic literature which makes it an interesting subject of study. Shelley enriches her story with stylistic expressive means and creates an ambiance typical to the Gothic genre, exploring the themes of mortality and immortality, alchemy or witchcraft and ill-fated romance condemned to failure.

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ავტორის შესახებ:

მარიამ მერებაშვილი ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ინგლისური ფილოლოგიის საბაკალავრო პროგრამის მეოთხე კურსის სტუდენტია. მისი ინტერესის საგანს ლიტერატურა წარმოადგენს და ამავდროულად გატაცებულია უცხო ენების შესწავლით.

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სამადლობელი:

მინდა გულწრფელი მადლიერება გამოვხატო ჩემი ხელმძღვანელის, ნატო ფერაძის მიმართ, რომელმაც თავდაპირველად მიბიძგა სტატიის დაწერისკენ და ამ პროცესის განმავლობაში მუდმივად მაძლევდა სასარგებლო რჩევებს.

Acknowledgment:

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Nato Peradze, who initially encouraged me to write the article and for guiding me through this process.