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Application of Rhetorical Relations in the Analysis of Two English Romantic Sonnets

Baidaa Abbas Ghubin Al-Zubaidy*

Dept. of English/College of Education / Ibn-Rushd / University of Baghdad

baidaa.abbas@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract:

This paper investigates the application of the theory of rhetorical relations in structuring two English Romantic sonnets: Coleridge's: "To the River Otter", and Keats's "To Ailsa Rock" both dealing with elements of nature – by using Crombie's model (1985) in describing their logical and imaginative thematic progression. The paper also investigates the quantitative relevance of the densities of rhetorical relations and the sonnets' thematic structure. Data analysis has shown that rhetorical relations are not mutually exclusive, but can be superimposed upon each other; thus, contributing to the sonnets' high semantic load and coherence. Also, the ordering of rhetorical relations' members is flexible in that one member can precede or come after the other, allowing either member-anticipation or member-retrospection. Moreover, the very high densities of the rhetorical relations of setting/conduct and matching in the data is indicative of their centrality to the coherence of Romantic poetic diction. In contrast, the absence of the rhetorical relations of truth-validity and alternation in the data is suggestive of their being not particularly coterminous with such a poetic diction.

Key Terms: Rhetorical Relations, Romantic Sonnets, Matching relation, Coherence, Poetic Diction, Stylistics, quantitative study

1. Rhetorical Relations

1.2 A Brief Introduction

Coherent discourses consist of certain stretches of linguistic units that can vary in length from single words, to phrases, sentences, paragraphs, whole articles, poems, and books. Each one of such constitutive linguistic units has a relatable logical function that contributes to the unity of the whole of their own discourse. One approach to studying the relational links holding between parts of any type of discourse is that of *rhetorical relations* - also termed: *clause relations* (Winter, 1977; Hoey, 1983), *semantic relational structures* (Crombie, 1985), or *rhetorical structures* (Mann & Thompson, 1988). This approach is geared to explaining how different units of written discourse are cognitively interwoven with each other by a means of finite set of binary logical relations (such as: *cause-effect*, *problem-solution*, *claim-evidence*, *statement-denial*, etc.) that function as the building blocks of thought in discourse (Hoey, 1994: 27). For example, the first verse line of Marlowe's lyric ((Hayward, 1956: 31):

(1)

Come live with me, and be my love.

can be interpreted as conjoining two consequential sentences of *cause* (Come live with me) and *effect* (be my love). Similarly, Surrey's sonnet: "A complaint by night of the lover not beloved" starts with these two verse lines that exemplify the rhetorical relation of *claim- evidence* (Hayward, 1956: 4)

(2)

Alas so all things now do hold their peace. (*claim*)

Heaven and earth disturbed in nothing.. (*evidence*)

Rhetorical relations theory expects that whenever two clauses are put next to each other in coherent discourse, this textual juxtaposition suggests the existence of "some *logical* connection between them" (Martin, 1992: 165). Moreover, patterns of logical relations are contextually predictable in that the mentioning of one sentence (first member of the relation) raises the expectation of the next one to follow (the second member), for "the readers normally are able to anticipate the relations that are to come (Winter, 1977: 35; 1982: 87; Hoey & Winter, 1986: 126). However, the interpretation of one member strictly depends on the lexical selections made in the other, since the actual "writer's words activate knowledge in the mind of the reader which the reader brings into play in his or her interpretation of the text" (Hoey, 2001: 120). Such a division of labor between the addressor and addressee in discourse interpretation is made possible due to the fact that these logical relations

constitute a 'shared cognitive process' among human beings in the interpretation a clause relation; hence, their finite number (Winter, 1992: 141).

1.2 Crombie's (1985) Taxonomy of Rhetorical Relations

Of the many taxonomies of rhetorical relation available in the literature, the researcher has selected Crombie's (1985: 111-118) model of "semantic relations" - which she adopts in analyzing Milton's pamphlet: *Areopagitica* - due to its familiar terminology and extensiveness. Her model classifies the set of rhetorical relations into the following main nine categories:

1.2.1 Temporal

Temporal adverbs in text offer the time relations holding between events by showing either their sequential chronology or temporal overlap. The researcher will consider this rhetorical relation as one type of the *setting-conduct* described in 1.2.9.

1.2.2 Matching

This relation involves the comparison of two things or abstractions in terms of some particular aspect in respect of which they are similar. It is quite functional in analyzing poetic tropes.

1.2.3 Cause-effect

This is a cover term for a subset of wider relations that can be subdivided into three subcategories:

i. General causative (a. reason-result b. means-result c. grounds-conclusion)

ii. Means-purpose

iii. Condition-consequence.

1.2.4 Truth and Validity

This relation can express:

i. Statement-affirmation

ii. Statement- denial

iii. Denial-correction

iv. Concession- contra-expectation.

1.2.5 Alternation

This is an elective relation that involves some sort of choice, through:

i. Contrastive alternation

ii. Supplementary alternation.

1.2.6 Bonding

Bonding is essentially an additive relation, covering non-elective, non-sequential relations between conjoined or juxtaposed propositions. Four subcategories are distinguished: a. Coupling b. Contrastive coupling c. Statement-exemplification d. Statement-exception.

1.2.7 Paraphrase

In paraphrase, the same proposition is expressed in a different way, without amplification.

1.2.8 Amplification

In this relation, one member amplifies the information expressed in the other by providing a specific term (Term specification), specifying the content of the predicate (Predicate specification), or when a general term is illustrated with reference to a particular one (Term exemplification).

1.2.9 Setting / conduct

In this relation, the adverbials used in the text function to indicate the location of the event (Event /state location), give the direction of an event (Event-direction), or give the manner in which an event was conducted (Event-manner). Since this relation is related to the setting of a state or an event, the researcher will incorporate temporal relations within this category in the analysis.

2. Data Selection

The researcher has selected for the analysis the following two Romantic sonnets:

1. Coleridge's: "*Sonnet: To the River Otter*" (1796) (Henceforth: T1);

2. Keats's "*To Ailsa Rock*" (1818) (Henceforth: T2).

The above two short poems share the characteristics of being sonnets (a poem of fourteen verse lines), belonging to the British Poetry Romantic Era, written by contemporaneous British poets, and both deal with elements of nature (a river and an island rock).

It is worth mentioning here that sonnets are traditionally known to offer some kind of argument, which logically relates their first eight lines (the octave) with the last six (the sestet) via the usual *turn* (volta) in the poem around the ninth verse line (Feldman and Robinson, 1999: 4). Hence, their particular relevance to the study of rhetorical relations.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Analysis of Rhetorical Relations in T1

Samuel Coleridge's Sonnet*: To the River Otter*

1. Dear native brook! wild streamlet of the West!

(*state-location, state-manner; matching; amplification*) (4)

2. How many various-fated years have passed,

(*temporal-; state-; matching*) (2)

3. What happy and what mournful hours, since last

(*-paraphrase; matching; contrastive coupling*) (2½)

4. I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,

(*-temporal; manner; matching; means-; event-*) (3½)

5. Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep impressed

(*-purpose; -manner; reason-*) (1½)

6. Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes

(*matching*; predicate-) (1½)

7. I never shut amid the sunny ray,

(*event-location; -result*) (1½)

8. But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,

(*event-manner*) (1)

9. Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,

(*coupling*) (1)

10. And bedded sand that, veined with various dyes,

(*bonding; matching; -specification; state-*) (3)

11. Gleamed through thy bright transparence! On my way,

(*-manner*) (½)

12. Visions of childhood! oft have ye beguiled

(*reason-result; state-manner; matching*) (3)

13. Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs:

(*manner; reason-result*) (2)

14. Ah! that once more I were a careless child!

(*term specification; manner*) (2)

3.1.1 Discussion of Rhetorical Relations in T1

The first verse line presents the topic of the sonnet: 'dear native brook', and offers its setting both in manner 'wild streamlet', and location 'of the West'. These make up the members of the first two rhetorical relations of *state-manner* and *state-location*, both part of the general *setting/conduct* relation. While such an interpretation is quite obvious from the quoted lexical choices above, it does not rule out the legitimacy of considering the elaboration: "wild streamlet of the West" as the second member of the *amplification* relation for the preceding first "dear native book". Significantly from the poetic point

of view, the noun phrase: 'wild streamlet' also likens the brook to a wild animal, triggering the rhetorical relation of *matching*. These add up to four overlapping rhetorical relations laden within just one verse line, which is remarkably revealing of its high semantic content. In addition, it shows that rhetorical relations need not be mutually exclusive, but can stand in complementary distribution. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is one new contribution to the theory of rhetorical relations.

The second verse line of *T1* offers the second member of the rhetorical relation of "*event-temporal*" embedded in the rhetorical question: "How many various-fated years have passed". The first member of this rhetorical relation is spelled out at the end of the third verse line, plus the whole of the fourth verse line: "since last.. I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast". Such a segmentation in word-order and logical structure is dictated by the necessity of rhyming the words "passed" with "last" and "breast" at the end of verse lines: 2, 3, and 4. This implies that the ordering of the two members of all rhetorical relation is not strict, but flexible and interchangeable, since any one member can precede or follow the other. Yet, when the second member of the rhetorical relation precedes the first one, the relation becomes identifiable via retrospection, rather than anticipation when the opposite familiar order obtains. Another *matching* relation is triggered in this verse line by the NP: "the various-fated years" which likens the "time units of years" to the "fates of human beings".

In the third verse line, the conjoined phrases "What happy and what mournful hours" function as *paraphrase* member of the previous *state* "How many various-fated years" in verse line 2. The rhetorical relation of *matching* relation is also present in the comparison made between "hours" and "happy and mournful human fates". Also, *contrastive bonding* is offered between "happy" and "mournful" hours.

As mentioned above, the fourth verse line: "I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast" offers the *event* member to the *event-temporal* relation mentioned in verse line 2. The relation of *matching* is also present in this verse line in the comparison made between the brook's surface with the breast of a human being. The verb "skim'' and the adjective "smooth" are also indicative of an *event-manner* relation

The fifth verse line offers the –*purpose* member: "Numbering its light leaps" to the *means* of stone skimming mentioned in the previous verse line. The adjective "light" offers the *manner* member to same *event* of stone-skimming. As for the for the compound adjectival phrase: "deep impressed", it amplifies the *event*: "Sink the sweet scenes of childhood" in the sixth verse line.

Linking the verb "Sink" with the adjacent phrase of "the sweet scenes of childhood" in this same verse line also matches between the sinking of the skimmed stone into the river and the sinking of "the

sweet scenes of childhood". At the same time, the clause: "that mine eyes I never shut amid the sunny ray" of sixth and seventh verse line gives the relation of *event-location*. In retrospection, the clause: "that mine eyes I never shut amid the sunny ray," offers the *result* member for the previous *reason*: "Yet so deep impressed sink the sweet scenes of childhood". Now for a relevant question in this textual context: "What are "the sweet scenes of childhood" that the verb "sink" predicates? The answer is that this predicate is exemplified by *amplification* throughout verse lines (8-10) with the *states* and *events* of: "straight with all their tints thy waters rise", "thy crossing plank", "thy marge with willows grey", and "bedded sand that, veined with various dyes". This is one example how the distribution of rhetorical relations over wider textual spans can enhance the overall text coherence.

In the eighth verse line, the conjoined clause: "But straight with all their tints thy waters rise" offers the rhetorical relation of *event –manner,* while the *bonding* in the ninth verse line: "Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey" gives the rhetorical relation of *coupling,* which also incorporates the noun phrase: "and bedded sand" in the tenth verse line. The relation of *matching* is also present in the phrase "sand ..veined with various dyes", which likens the brook's bedded sand to both blood veins and variously dyed threads. This *state* member of the bedded sand is linked to its *manner* member in next verse line: "Gleamed through thy bright transparence".

In the twelfth verse line, the sonnet reiterates the "visions of childhood" describing them as the *reason* that brought about the *result*: "oft have ye beguiled lone manhood's cares". But if the noun phrase: "visions of childhood" is understood as a *state* or an *event,* then the clause "oft have ye beguiled lone manhood's cares" can function as its *manner* member. In addition, the metaphorical use of the verb "beguiled" – which likens the act of remembering childhood to that of cheating - also triggers the rhetorical relation of *matching*. Again, here there are three different rhetorical relations remarkably intermingling with each other.

The rhetorical relation of *manner* is carried over to the thirteenth verse line, where the memories of childhood also bring about the: "waking fondest sighs". However, that act of "waking fondest sighs" can also been read as the *result* caused by the memories of childhood.

The last verse line - which reads: "Ah! that once more I were a careless child!" specifies the term "fondest sighs" that appears at the end of the previous verse line via *amplification*. In addition, this same verse line expresses *state* of the child as being careless; thus describing its *manner*.

The results of rhetorical relations analysis of T1 are statistically summarized in Table (1) Hereunder:

Table (1) Types and frequencies of rhetorical relation in T1

No	Type of Rhetorical Relation	No	%
1 1	*Setting / Conduct (Manner, Temporal, Location)*	*11*	40
2	*Matching*	7	**24.1**
3	**Cause-Effect**	**4**	**13.8**
4	*Amplification*	3	**10.3**
5	**Bonding**	3	**10.3**
6	*Paraphrase*	*1*	3.5
Totals		**29**	**100**

Table (1) above shows that the two rhetorical relations of *truth and validity* plus *alternation* are absent in this sonnet, whereas the two relations covering the setting and tropes (i.e. *matching*) account for (74.1%) of all rhetorical relations used; a rate which reflects their high functionality in the realization of poetic diction when describing an element of nature. It remains to be seen how such a particularly absent and high density compare with the results of analyzing T2 in 3.2.1, since both sonnets deal with describing elements of nature.

3.2 Analysis of Rhetorical Relations in T2

John Keats: *To Ailsa Rock*

1. Hearken, thou craggy ocean pyramid!

(state-manner, matching) (means-) (2½)

2. Give answer from thy voice, the sea-fowl's screams!

(-purpose, matching) (1½)

3. When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams!

(*bonding, temporal, matching*) (3)

4. When, from the sun, was thy broad forehead hid?

(*bonding, matching*) (2)

5. How long is 't since the mighty power bid

(*bonding, temporal, cause-effect, matching*) (4)

6. Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams?

(*bonding, temporal, matching*) (3)

7. Sleep in the lap of thunder or sun-beams,

(*bonding, manner, matching*) (3)

8. Or when gray clouds are thy cold cover-lid?

(*bonding, temporal, matching*) (3)

9. Thou answer'st not, for thou art dead asleep!

(*cause-effect, matching, matching*) (3)

10. Thy life is but two dead eternities —

(*contrastive coupling, manner*) (2)

11. The last in air, the former in the deep;

(*contrastive coupling, manner*) (2)

12. First with the whales, last with the eagle-skies —

(*contrastive coupling, manner*) (2)

13. Drown'd wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep,

(*cause-effect, manner, matching*) (3)

14. Another cannot wake thy giant size.

(*contrastive coupling. matching*) (2)

3.2.1 Discussion of Rhetorical Relations in T2

The starting verse line in this sonnet presents its topic within a *state* (thou) – *manner* (craggy ocean pyramid) rhetorical relation. The addressee (rock island) is matched here to a "craggy ocean pyramid", too. Also, the initial directive verb "Hearken" functions as a *means* to the *purpose* given in the second verse line: "Give answer from thy voice, the sea-fowl's screams". Significantly, the latter *predicate*: (Give answer) is *specified* in the next six verse lines, whose five consecutive questions become co-extensive with the compound members of the rhetorical relation of *amplification*: "When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams"; "When, from the sun, was thy broad forehead hid"; "How long is 't since the mighty power bid thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams"; "Sleep in the lap of thunder or sun-beams"; and "Or when gray clouds are thy cold cover-lid". In addition, these same five consecutive questions are examples of *bonding*. Moreover, their extended metaphors of: "shoulders", "mantled", "forehead", "bid thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams", "sleep in the lap of thunder or sun beams", and "cover lid" ascribed to the rock offer six further examples of *matching*. The initial question words: "when" (thrice), and "how long" all spell out temporal relations, too. As previously observed in (3.1.1), the carrying over of the same rhetorical relation over extended spans of the poem enhances its logical unity. Last, but not least, the rhetorical relations of *manner* and

means-purpose are also present in fifth and sixth verse lines: "How long is 't since the mighty power bid thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams".

The ninth verse line offer a clear reason-result relation, triggered by the causal conjoining lexical marker "for": "Thou answer'st not, for thou art dead asleep". Two additional matching relations are also offered by the figures of "answer" and "sleep" related to the rock.

Three *contrastive couplings* dominate the next three (10-12) verse lines: "Thy life is but two dead eternities", "The last in air, the former in the deep", "First with the whales, last with the eagle-skies" Each one of these couplings is also one example of the *manner* rhetorical relation.

Again, the rhetorical relation of *reason-result* is expressed in the thirteenth verse line, triggered by the use of the verb "made": "Drown'd wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep". The lexical items "drown'd" and "steep" also describe *event-manner.*

The rhetorical relation of *contrastive coupling* and *matching* - triggered by the lexical items: "another cannot" and "wake" - make up the last verse line: "Another cannot wake thy giant size".

The results of rhetorical relations analysis in T1are statistically summarized in Table (2) Hereunder:

No	Type of Rhetorical Relation	No	%
1 1	*Setting / Conduct (Manner, Temporal, Location)*	10	27.8
2	*Matching*	12	33.3
3	**Cause-Effect**	4	11.1
4	*Amplification*	4	11.1
5	**Bonding**	6	16.7
Totals		36	100

The table above shows that only six types of rhetorical relations appear in T2. Similar to T1, neither *truth-validity*, nor *alternation* are used. This result of the whole data is suggestive that these two rhetorical relations are not particularly coterminous with poetic diction, which is generally characterized by imaginative language. The densities of the rhetorical relations of *setting/conduct* and *matching* are also the highest in S2, adding up to (81.1%), which is indicative of their centrality to poetic diction. The frequency of *bonding* (at 16.7%) is significantly higher in T2 than that in T1 (at 10.3%) since it helps to unite nine of its fourteen verse lines. The frequencies of *amplification* and *cause-effect* remain comparably similar in the two sonnets, as shown in Table (3) below.

Table () Types and densities of rhetorical relations in the data

No	Type of Rhetorical Relation	T1		T2	
		No	%	No	%
1	Setting / Conduct (Manner, Temporal, Location)	11	40	10	27.8
2	Matching	7	24.1	12	33.3
3	Cause-Effect	4	13.8	4	11.1
4	Amplification	3	10.3	4	11.1
5	Bonding	3	10.3	6	16.7
6	Paraphrase	1	3.5	0	0
Totals		29	100	36	100

4. Conclusions

1. The theory of rhetorical relations is quite functional in unravelling the logical and imaginative progression of English Romantic sonnets.

2. The use and densities of such relations greatly enhance the sonnets' overall textual coherence.

3. Rhetorical relations in sonnet are not mutually exclusive, but can be superimposed upon each other, to the effect that four different relations can be identified within a single verse line, thus contributing to the sonnets' high semantic load.

4. The order of the members of rhetorical relations in sonnets is flexible in that one member can precede or come after the other. Retrospection is required to distinguish the postposed members.

5. The absence of the rhetorical relations of *truth-validity* and *alternation* in the data is suggestive that these two rhetorical relations are not particularly coterminous with poetic diction.

6. The very high densities of the rhetorical relations of *setting/conduct* and *matching* in the data is indicative of their centrality to poetic diction.

المستخلص

تطبيق نظرية العلاقات البلاغية في تحليل اثنتين من السوناتات الرومانسية الإنجليزية

بيداء عباس غبن الزبيدي

يطبق هذا البحث نظرية العلاقات البلاغية في تحليل بنية اثنتين من السوناتات الإنجليزية الرومانسية : سوناتة الشاعر (كولرج) : "إلى نهر أوتر"؛ و سوناتة الشاعر (كيتس): "إلى صخرة آيلزا" ـ اللتين تتعاملان مع عناصر الطبيعة – و ذلك باستخدام نموذج (كرومبي) لعام (1885) في وصف تطورهما المنطقي والخيالي. وقد أظهر تحليل عينة البحث أن العلاقات البلاغية ليست متنافية بالنوع ، بل يمكن أن تتراكب على بعضها الآخر؛ وبالتالي، فإن هذا التراكب يسهم في تركيز الحمل الدلالي العالي للسوناتات وفي تلاحمها. كما أن ترتيب شطري العلاقات البلاغية يتميز بالمرونة، بحيث أن أحد الشطرين يمكن أن يسبق الشطر الثاني أو أن يأتي بعده ، مما يسمح إما بتوقعه لاحقاً ، أو استرجاعه بالعودة إلى سابقه. علاوة على ذلك، فإن الكثافة العالية جدًا للعلاقات البلاغية الخاصة بالمقام و اتجاهاته و كذلك بالمطابقة في عينة البحث تؤشر إلى مركزيتيهما في تلاحم الأسلوب الشعري الرومانسي. في حين أن غياب العلاقات البلاغية الخاصة بالحقيقة / المصداقية وبالتناوب في عينة البحث يؤشر لعدم توافقهما بشكل خاص مع ذات هذا الأسلوب الشعري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقات البلاغية، السوناتات الإنجليزية الرومانسية ، تلاحم الأسلوب الشعري الرومانسي.

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