

Narratological Analysis of P.B. Shelley's "A Vision of the Sea"

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Abstract

This paper narratologically analyzes one of the most difficult, complex, and ambiguous poems by P.B. Shelley, "A Vision of the Sea." The poem is painstakingly analyzed through narrative techniques and tools, particularly voice and time, which have probably not been investigated yet. In other words, this paper practically illuminates this niche through transgeneric narrative analysis that is still in its early throes. It reveals a sophisticated mixed mode of narration with a third-person omniscient narrator and embedded character discourse. Temporality creates a dynamic yet coherent rhythm. Its sonic textures subtly counter the depicted chaos, in which the narrator's psyche remains untroubled by the tumultuous landscape. It deftly weaves strands of trans, self, and re-narration with scientific, religious, and symbolic registers that create a dual perception of it both as a metaphysical allegory and visceral perception. It combines analytical, interpretive, and integrated approaches, with a reader-oriented response. In a word, the narrativity of this poem presents itself as a complex and complete narrative matrix that is skillfully orchestrated rather than being described as a fragmented narration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Narrative is a deep-seated part of our life. It can be found in all societies and literary works, and "it has penetrated all the human sciences and practicing professions" (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). Nevertheless, within the medium of poetry, the study of narratological structures—particularly voice and temporality—remains undertheorized, a lacuna only recently brought into critical focus. As McHale (2009) observes in *Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry*, in which he states that "Contemporary narrative theory is almost silent about poetry" (p. 11), while Schmid (2010) presumably contends that "the laws of narrative prose spread onto poetry" (p. 123). This paper seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical speculation and practical analysis by examining the fertile, yet often overlooked, terrain of narrative poetry through a transgeneric narratological lens. The poem under discussion employs a heterodiegetic narrative framework, privileging a third-person narrator and a concurrent present tense, while deploying vivid similes, metaphors, and imagery to heighten its narrativity. The result is a richly imaginative work that invites closer scrutiny. Furthermore, Percy Bysshe Shelley is a pro-imaginative personality. He believed and was largely perceived as the one who dedicatedly pays attention to imaginative potentialities. This poet perceives imagination as the source of each goodness and magnanimity in such a world; "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination" (Shelley, 1904, p.34). Moreover, he defines poetry as "the expression of the imagination" (1904, p.12). With regard to the poem "A Vision of the Sea" it was labeled by Barcus (2003) as "A piece, which for grandeur of expression, originality of thought, and magnificence of description, stands almost unrivalled" (p. 249). Despite such a description, it remains not only the most difficult but also the least studied of the poet's poems, i.e., researchers seem to have veered away from deciphering its core and essentiality. This can be

proved in Ketcham, who states that “the result is that most scholars, including the most recent, have ignored “A Vision of the Sea,” and those who feel obliged to include some account of it in their work are obviously baffled by it.” (1978, p. 52). This neglect may stem from its dense scientific, spiritual, and symbolic layers, as well as its unconventional narratological techniques. This paper, thus, investigates the following research objectives:

- Providing a deeper illuminative understanding of the poem’s narrative complexity and imaginative force.
- Analyzing narrative techniques such as voice and time.
- Studying the to which extent voice and time can be given a linguistic identity, and thus constitute specific forms of narrative features inherent in Shelley’s poetry.

2. THE NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

2.1. Narrative Voice: Heterodiegesis, Omniscience, and Embedded Discourse

Narrative is not only a multi-dimensional process but also an international, trans-cultural, trans-historical, and trans-generic mode. Applying the narratological analysis to P.B. Shelley’s “A Vision of the Sea” reveals a structure that begins with *simultaneous* narration. This technique ostensibly demands an *intradiegetic* narrator since it supposes an attendance in the scene as the poet verses, “Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail / Are flickering...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 1-2). Yet the poem’s narrative remains unequivocally *heterodiegetic* in recounting events of what counts as a narrative world in which the narrator did not have any participation. This tension of the narrative situation between immediacy and detachment is sustained through a third-person singular, marked by the pronouns ‘she,’ ‘they,’ and ‘it,’ with present tense in narration: “She sees the black trunks of the water-spouts spin.” (Shelley, 2002, line 5) and direct quotes as in “So dreadful since thou must divide it with me!” (Shelley, 2002, line 79). This narration starts *in medias res* like “Tis the terror of tempest.” Such usage can be interpreted as “the method of starting a narrative with an important situation or event (rather than with the first situation or event in time)” (Prince, 2003, p. 44). In this technique, “the point of attack is set close to the climax of the action” (Jahn, 2005, para. N4.9). The narration further complicates its authority through speculative language, as in the verb ‘seem,’ so as to indicate his/her cognitive limitations, as in “they seem’d to sustain with their terrible mass” (Shelley, 2002, line 7) and “The great ship seems splitting!” (Shelley, 2002, line 26) with an emotive language that is exhibited in ‘terror,’ ‘fierce,’ ‘terrible,’ ‘agony,’ ‘aghast,’ ‘horror,’ ‘dreadful,’ etc., in addition to mentioning the physical circumstances like ‘earthquake,’ ‘thunder,’ ‘wind echo,’ ‘whirlpools,’ ‘chaos of stars,’ ‘whirlwind,’ and ‘lashing rain.’ These speculative, emotive, and physical phenomena appear to reveal an authorial voice, oscillating between reportage and visionary excess, as if heard in the mind’s ear of an implied author.

2.2. Temporal Structure: , Analysis, and Duration

Identifying narrative voices in the poem represents a complex interpretive challenge. The primary narrator operates as a *heterodiegetic* voice (absent as a character within the story world) that s/he has neither an actional role nor participation. At the same time, s/he appears as an observer of events, “... dreadful to see / The wrecks of the tempest...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 126-7). This leads to perceiving it as an *allodiegetic*, as per Van der Voort’s suggestive classification. This narrator is a covert one “who neither refers to him- or herself nor addresses any narratees” (Jahn, 2005, para.N3.1.4.) Moreover, s/he “is not, and never was, a character in the story itself” (Jahn, 2005, para. N3.3.5.); consequently, s/he may be perceived as an *authorial* narrator- mentioned so far. It is worthwhile to propose that it is the first poem yet studied of Shelley’s in which the extra-fictional narrator employs only third-person with no first-person narrative except between two inverted brackets. Therefore,

this kind of narrative is mainly *simultaneous* in recounting the narrative synchronously with its occurrence. It is primarily a *concurrent* narration, while the narrative voice is *heterodiegetic* (using third-person narrative as in 'she sees'. What is more, *ulterior* narration seems to be employed in narrating the death of crewmen or past events, as in the verbs 'glutted,' 'pierced,' 'mixed,' 'hurried,' 'came,' 'lulled,' 'beheld,' 'paved,' and 'bones crush'd.' The narrative order appears to have used an internal *anachrony* that has not interrupted telling-story since it takes place by the heterodiegetic narrator. It, too, blends metadiegetic narrative with an overt-narrator of an explicit blocked character's alteroquotations of we-narrative that refers to the mother's narrated monologue as a homo-intra-diegetic narrator, as in "That when the ship sinks we no longer may be? / "What! to see thee no more, and to feel thee no more?" (Shelley, 2002, lines 83-4). Thus, this narrative employs what may be known as a mixed mode of narration.

It is worth mentioning Gerard Genette's (1980) tripartite model of narrative time, encompassing order, duration, and frequency. This classification provides a foundational framework for analyzing temporal structures in narrative discourse. *Order* is further delineated into *analepsis* (flashback) and *prolepsis* (flashforward), though subsequent scholars have expanded this taxonomy to include *simullepsis* (simultaneous narration). In this poem the narrator seems to have mostly depended on a simultaneous narrative time, with analepses so seamlessly woven into the discourse, as exemplified in the lines "...their comrades cast / Down the deep, which closed on them above and around" (Shelley, 2002, lines 54-5). The second category is *duration* that has been accelerated in this narrative through an explicit and definite-exactly measured period, as in "Nine weeks the tall vessel had lain / On the windless expanse of the watery plain" (Shelley, 2002, lines 45-6). Such acceleration is projected through ellipsis when "the discourse halts, though time continues to pass in the story" (Chatman, 1978, p. 70) as in "... a wreck on the wreck. / No more?" (Shelley, 2002, lines 65-6), in which the question halts the discourse yet time accelerates in the story, leaving a gap for the reader to infer the power of the destruction while the storm rages on, "Some critics consider ellipsis a special case of speeding-up. Genette (1980 [1972], pp, 93, 95, 106-109); Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 53); Toolan (1988: 56)" (as cited in Jahn, 2005, para. N5.2.3.) along with a *pause* to allow the authorial voice to interject commentary that can be labeled a *self-conscious* narrator, as in "(What now makes them tame, is what then made them bold;)" (Shelley, 2002, line 42). And summaries, where events are condensed into evocative imagery as in "... Death, Fear / Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere" (Shelley, 2002, lines 161-2). The last category is frequency, which appears here to be a *singulative* (narrating once what occurs once). Beyond temporality, the narrative's mood further shapes its texture.

The narrator appears not to be a character in the story but gives an internal analysis of events. S/he may be perceived as an unequivocally omniscient author who tells the story with psychological perceptions. S/he reflects certain attitudes like 'ghastly,' 'solid,' 'infinite,' 'hot,' 'rage,' 'adamantine voluminousness,' and 'wounded the veins.' Such attitudes and descriptions may entail a homo-intra-diegetic narrative. The narrator employs *reported speech* in which "The character's words are cited verbatim by the narrator" (as cited in Guillemette, 2016) what can be called a *self-narrated monologue* as in "'Smile not, my child/" But sleep deeply and sweetly" (Shelley, 2002, lines 76-7) and a monologue in which the woman asks but does not reply as in "Alas! what is life, what is death, what are we / " That when the ship sinks, we no longer may be ?" (Shelley, 2002, lines 82-3). The use of first-person present tense further heightens immediacy of the narrative situation. The narrative ultimately resolves with an authorial voice, as the narrator reflects upon the encompassing atmosphere, drawing the discourse to a meditative close, as in the following lines:

... Death, Fear
 Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere;
 Which trembles and burns with the fervour of dread
 Around her wild eyes, her bright hand, and her head,
 Like a meteor of light o'er the waters!
 (Shelley, 2002, lines 161-5).

2.3. Plot, Setting and Characterization

Remarkably, the dyadic nature of narrative structure is worth being examined. It is made up of content and form, or 'what' and 'how.' The content focuses on plot, setting, characterization, style, mood, tone, point of view, causal relations and themes. Such an analysis, as per Herman and Vervaeck's (2005) assertion, "a narratological analysis does not have any value as long as it does not connect with the contents of the story" (p.4). Foremost among these elements of the content is plot. Its *taxonomization* here may be perceived as a sentimental plot in which "weak or passive protagonists succeed at the end" (Prince, 2003, pp. 73-4). Prince (2003) posits that "since a story consists of at least three ingredients: an initial situation, an action or event, and an outcome. Connections must be temporal as well as causal" (p.13). As this narrative launches *in medias res*, the sudden change in weather, especially the terrorizing tempest, may be perceived as the complicating action that is accompanied by calamities such as 'fierce gale,' 'lightning,' 'thunder-balls,' 'dim rain,' 'lashing rain,' 'cloudy array,' 'earthquake' and 'hurricane,' that caused a toll of death to crewmen with mental and psychological stress to the woman. It can be evidenced in William Labov's perception of complicating action as "(the event that triggers a chain of events), [Parenthesis in orig.]" (as cited in De Jong, 2014, p.39). Moreover, Labov & Waletzky deem it as "sufficient to constitute a narrative" (as cited in Franzosi, 2010, p. 14). The researcher cites, "Of these six functional parts, the complicating action, usually made up of a series of events, is both necessary and sufficient to constitute a narrative" (p. 14). The narrative climax crystalizes in the visceral rupture of the ship, "The great ship seems splitting! it cracks as a tree" (Shelley, 2002, line 26), before resolving in an outcome that borders on the redemptive: the woman and her child are rescued by twelve seamen; "Lo ! a boat / Advances; twelve rowers with the impulse of thought / Urge on the keen keel" (Shelley, 2002, lines 153-4). Though the narrative medium is poetry- an economic language- rather than prose fiction, the plot's architecture remains meticulously engineered while exploiting the lyric's capacity for compression and intensity.

Similarly, it can be evidenced in the setting of the poem or its *spatiotemporality*. As the Russian literary critic Bakhtin speaks of a *chronotope*; a textual combination of time (chronos) and place (topos) (as cited in Herman & Vervaeck, 2005, pp. 56-7). Likewise, Prince (1982) in *The Form and Functioning* defines setting as "a set of propositions referring to the same (backgrounded) spatiotemporal complex" (p.73). He (2003) redefines it in his *Dictionary* rev. ed as "The spatiotemporal circumstances in which the events of a narrative occur" (p.88). Accordingly, the setting of such fictional narrative has taken place during a terror of tempest on the sea setting during a sudden climate chaos and dreadfulness "as if heaven was ruined in" (Shelley, 2002, line 6). Spatiality moves around waters: ocean, sea, river, stream, flood and vale; beside, chasm of the deep (Ocean), lakes of the desert, cave, cavern, and from Andes to Atlas. Temporality, meanwhile, operates through simultaneous narrative mode in which the narrator looks an allodiegetist, as above-named. The narrative uses certain temporal dimension like 'eve and morn (evening and morning), eve of this day, sunrise, noon, sunset (as in sinks with the sun), day , night, day by day, beams of moon and sunbow. In addition to that the poem is portrayed with a scared and solitude mood which is married with wondrousness, fear and love as versed; "... Death, Fear / Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere" (Shelley, 2002, lines 161-2). This narrative inhabits a liminal

space, perpetually oscillating between binaries of perception. Far from mere backdrop, the chronotope here functions as an active participant in the narrative, its instability mirroring the physical tumult on the characters' psyches.

The narrator's temporal orchestration relies heavily on deictic markers. Particularly, the recurrent use of the discourse 'now' of the narrator, "The vessel, now toss'd / Through the low-trailing rack of the tempest, is lost" (Shelley, 2002, lines 11-12), "now down the sweep / Of the wind-cloven wave to the chasm of the deep / It sinks" (Shelley, 2002, lines 13-15), with the character's 'now' of the story, "Have so long called my child, but which now fades away / "Like a rainbow" (Shelley, 2002, lines 89-90). Such a story-*deicticity* possibly enhances simultaneous narration and creates a sense of presentness in its recipients. Moreover, this narrator exploits a *metalepsis*, which is "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe.." ([1972] 1980: 234-35)." (as cited in Pier, 2013, p. 7) as in "(What now makes them tame, is what then made them bold)" (Shelley, 2002, lines 42). This bracketed line with the deictic 'now' looks to expose an intrusion by an authorial narrator. In addition to that, the narrator employs deviance of time expression like 'then,' 'that,' 'those,' and 'these,' as in "Whose breath was quick pestilence; then, the cold sleep / Crept" (Shelley, 2002, lines 50-1), "... Are those / Twin tygers..." (Shelley, 2002, lines 39-40), and "Are these all?..." (Shelley, 2002, line 44) with first-person narrator, 'we' that is used as an *alteroquotation* of the figural narrator, as in "... what are we, / "That when the ship sinks we no longer may be?" (Shelley, 2002, lines 82-3). A figural voice momentarily usurps the narrator's discourse, further destabilizing temporal and perspectival fixity. Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2007) observe in *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* that "Counterparts of first-person deixis expressions are there, then, and that/those...suggest that these sets of expressions express different distances between the conceptualizer and the object of conceptualization." (p.65); here, the deictic "now" juxtaposed with "then". Collectively, these strategies affirm the presence of an authorial narrator, one who manipulates *deixis* not merely to situate events but to interrogate the very ontology of narrative time.

This narrator appears to prioritize narrative architecture over intricate characterization. S/he employs a functional rather than developmental character scheme that is central to this framework of the unnamed female figure- a recurrent archetype in Shelley's oeuvre that portrays the trans-narrator's common perception of feminine culture. For instance, in "Rosalind and Helen," "The Daemon of the World," "Marianne's Dream," "The Sensitive Plant," and "The Revolt of Islam," females have the most focus and dominance. This poem is no exception, as the narrator uses a female figure with a common name instead of a proper name, like 'Marianne's Dream' and 'The Sensitive Plant.' It likely portrays the extra-fictional narrator as perceiving "women as a source of every goodness and beauty" (Saleh & Khan 2020, p. 202). The poet was probably devoted to females due to their "virtue, benevolence, compassion, and sympathy" (Crook, 2019, p. 136). Moreover, it can be found that the narrator narrates the story of a mother and her child who appear to be flat/static and consistent characters "(in which actions and attributes are harmonized)" [Parenthesis in orig.] (Barthes, 1977, p.137). The main reason for such usage is possibly that the narrator has "focused on developing narrative with all its dimensions, strategies, features and techniques rather than developing characterization" (Saleh & Khan, 2020, p. 248) since it is restricted to a woman 'more fair' her 'fair infant' and crewmen. The latter seem to be used as helping characters who are mentioned through different vocabulary like 'crew,' 'seamen,' 'mariners,' 'twelve rowers,' and 'marksmen,' who are perceived as 'comrades' conducting the same sea-mission aid. In addition to that the narrator recounts the existence of different types of animals, beasts, and birds like twin tigers, sharks, dog-fish, serpent, elephant, seabirds, sea-snakes, cormorant and a centipede. This narrative, too, imposes binaries of

hope and despair, blood and bloodless, as in "... Death, Fear / Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere" (Shelley, 2002, lines 161-2). The poem's symbolic lexicon thus invites dual reading: as metaphysical allegory and as a poetic, almost visceral perception.

2.4. Critical Debate on "Fragmentary" Closure

It cannot be ignored that, the narrative closure of this poem has been accused of being a fragmentary work. It is a charge that seems to be emanated from its abrupt termination mid-syntax with the subordinating conjunction "whilst." This stylistic rupture occurs at a moment of heightened tension, juxtaposing the child's serene activities—"... her child / Is yet smiling, and playing, and murmuring" (Shelley, 2002, lines 165-66)—against the mother's suspended "... fervour of dread" (Shelley, 2002, line 163). This deliberate incompleteness has generated a critical consensus around the poem's fragmented nature. As summarized by Peters (2019), critics like Mayer and Cameron explicitly classify it as such, with the former noting how "the addition of the final "whilst" that emphasizes the fragmentary nature of the poem" (p. 18) and the latter stating it was "abandoned and left fragmented" (p. 292). Scott McEathron offers a mediating position, in holding the stick from the middle, and suggesting the work exists "between fragment and finished piece" (Peters, 2019, p. 170). This view is echoed by West (2016), who identifies "Shelley's decision to conclude the poem in [a] deliberately fragmentary manner" (p. 159). A more nuanced perspective is advanced by Ketcham (1978), who argues for a thematic, rather than structural, fragmentation. He contends that "The abrupt breaking off at line 169 merely announces that the struggle continues on both the physical and moral plane" (p. 59), implying the poem is constructively complete as a statement on "the poem is not really a fragment in the sense of being incomplete. Shelley has finished what he has to say about Nature and man's dealings with her." (p. 59) while remaining open-ended thematically. Ketcham's analysis touches upon a central challenge: the difficulty of articulating profound existential dread. This resonates with Arthur C. Doyle's observation, cited in Clausen (1984), that "It is not easy to express the inexpressible" (p. 107). The omission of the clause following "whilst" may thus be seen as a concession to the limits of language itself.

2.5. Narratological Wholeness and the Rhetoric of Ellipsis

Far from a mere lapse, the poem's abrupt cessation can be analyzed as a sophisticated instance of *clausal ellipsis*. As Toolan (1996) explains, such clausal ellipsis occurs "when there is omission of the whole clause where it would otherwise occur after a verb of communication or cognition," typically because the missing element is "retrievable in the given context" (p. 27). This grammatical phenomenon, whereby "elements of a sentence which are predictable from context can be omitted" (Quirk & Crystal, 2010, p. 82), creates a calculated ambiguity. The punctuation marks—three dots—serve as a narratological cue, inviting the reader to actively postulate, imagine, and feel the unspoken experience of the lady within the chaotic atmosphere previously described: "...This pale bosom... / ...'Tis beating with dread!" (Shelley, 2002, lines 80-81). The narrator's use of the subordinator "whilst"—which Quirk and Crystal (2010) note is "synonymous with the subordinator 'though'" (p. 645)—invokes a muted contrast. The ellipsis marks are congruent with this subordinator, formally indicating the omission of a clause that the co-text and context render intelligible. The final lines, "...her child / Is yet smiling, and playing, and murmuring.../.../ Whilst..." (Shelley, 2002, lines 165-69), thus designate a stark contrast of perception between the unconscious child and the conscious mother, whose own state is foreshadowed earlier: "...its bosom beats high /.../ Whilst its mother's is lusterless..." (Shelley, 2002, lines 74-76). Through a narratological lens, the poem is not incomplete but structurally and rhetorically whole. Its so-called "fragmentary" rupture is, in fact, a consummate stylistic gesture, one that compresses the ineffable into a potent and significant silence.

2.6. The Sonic Narrative: Phonetics as Counterpoint

Furthermore, the poem's narrativity is profoundly amplified by its sonic texture. This creates a striking counterpoint to its turbulent subject matter. While the events depicted—tempests, shipwrecks, and existential dread—evoke visceral terror, the poem's phonetic orchestration cultivates a tranquility. The majority of rhyme nucleus blends either diphthongs or long vowels that, as Bassey Garvey Ufot (2013) proposes, "Long vowels and diphthongs generally sound more peaceful and more solemn than short vowels, which have a general tendency towards quick movement, agitation or triviality" (Ufot, 2013, p. 119). Approximately the remaining third, though dominated by short vowels, is strategically deployed to punctuate moments of tension without destabilizing the poem's overarching sonic equilibrium. The narrator further reinforces this auditory serenity through the recurrence of soft consonants: the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, alongside alveolar stops /t/, dominate lines such as "It sinks with the sun on the earth and the sea" (Shelley, 2002, line 63) and "Tremulous with soft influence; extending its tide" (Shelley, 2002, line 132), evoking what Ufot describes as "brief activity" and "tend to be quiet and soothing" (2013, p. 119). Similarly, the sibilant /s/—as in "She sees the black trunks of the water-spouts spin" (Shelley, 2002, line 5)—lends a liquid smoothness, while labial consonants (/w/, /f/) mimic the kinetic energy of wind and water, "whirlpools of fire-flowing iron" (Shelley, 2002, line 19). Nasals (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/) and liquids (/l/) deepen this effect, their sonorous resonance evoking both fluid motion 'stream' and sensual languor 'voluptuousness', as in "The child and the ocean still smile on each other" (Shelley, 2002, line 168). Even plosives (/b/, /p/), typically markers of abruptness as they 'represent quickness, movement' (Ufot, 2013, pp. 119-20) are tempered into rhythmic cadence as in "But sleep deeply and sweetly, and so be beguiled" (Shelley, 2002, line 77) and "The pyramid-billows with white points of brine" (Shelley, 2002, line 23). Only in rare instances does the narrator deploy harsher phonemes—such as the /æf/ in "... the whirl and the splash / As of some hideous engine whose brazen teeth smash" (Shelley, 2002, lines 144-5)—to mirror outer violent impact. These moments of onomatopoeia, "the clash of the lashing rain" (Shelley, 2002, line 98) serve as deliberate disruptions, heightening the poem's tension before resolving back into inner euphony. In addition to that, the narrator employs *anapestic* meter, in which each poetic foot consists of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable; "This foot creates a feeling of urgency or forward momentum, often used in fast-paced, energetic poetry" (Saxena, 2025, p. 280). Such a prosody device looks integral to the poem's meaning and depiction. It mimics the tumultuous waves and winds to create a rapid falling and leaping movement. Ultimately, this phonetic patterning transcends mere aesthetic ornamentation; it constructs a subliminal narrative of resilience. Amidst the chaos, the poem's sonic landscape—with its preponderance of mellifluous vowels and consonants—betrays an almost meditative detachment, as if the narrator's psyche remains untroubled by the storm it describes. This auditory duality not only enriches the poem's narrativity but also invites a phenomenological reading: the sounds themselves become agents of meaning, whispering calm where the words scream tumult.

2.7. Diegetic Functions of Punctuation and Figuration: as Narrative Apparatus

This narrativity is significantly elaborated through punctuation and a sustained figural discourse. This strategic textual apparatus functions as a crucial component of the narrative discourse itself. These marks include apostrophes, full stops, and colons that are projected in the opening two lines of Shelley as in "'Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail / Are flickering in ribbons within the fierce gale:" (Shelley, 2002, lines 1-2), hyphenated words, commas, and parentheses as in "The vessel, now toss'd / Through the low-trailing rack of the tempest, is lost" (Shelley, 2002, lines 11-12), semicolons as in "Dim mirrors of ruin hang gleaming about;" (Shelley, 2002, line 17) exclamation marks "The great ship

seems splitting!” (Shelley, 2002, line 26), brackets-to indicate a parenthesis- “(What now makes them tame, is what then made them bold;) (Shelley, 2002, lines 42)” question marks as in “Alas! what is life, what is death, what are we / ” That when the ship sinks we no longer may be ?” (Shelley, 2002, lines 82-3) and last but not least is two hyphens or dots at the end of a line, as in “The child and the ocean still smile on each other / Whilst—” (Shelley, 2002, lines 168-9). It is worth noticing that various interpretations can be elicited through using such punctuation marks. For instance, “as an imitation of nature, a projection of fragmented life in tyrannical and oppressive societies, expressing narrator’s psychological and cognitive states of mind and overwhelming feeling” (Saleh & Khan, 2020, p. 168). In other words, it may signify complex cultural, psychic, rhetorical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions embedded within the narrative’s affective intensity. Simultaneously, the narrative constructs its diegetic world through pervasive comparative structures and imagery. The recurrent conjunction ‘as if’. The narrator verses “as if heaven was ruining in,” (Shelley, 2002, line 6) and “As if ocean had sank” (Shelley, 2002, line 8) explicitly bridges the real and the imagined, generating hypothetical scenarios that expand the narrative’s ontological boundaries. This figural dimension is further elaborated through an extensive network of similes, predominantly signaled by ‘like’ approximately twenty-four instances, as in “... like a chaos of stars, like a rout / Of death-flames, like whirlpools of fire-flowing iron” (Shelley, 2002, lines 18-19) “Or like sulphur-flakes...” (Shelley, 2002, line 21) and “Like a corpse on the clay” (Shelley, 2002, line 33) with ‘as’ about eight times as in “the lightning inconstantly shine / As piercing the sky from the floor of the sea.” (Shelley, 2002, lines 24-5), “it cracks as a tree” (Shelley, 2002, line 26), “as mummies on which Time has written / His scorn of the embalmer” (Shelley, 2002, lines 62-3) and “As an arrowy serpent” (Shelley, 2002, line 103). These similes, alongside the ‘as if’ constructions, function not merely descriptively but structurally, weaving a complex figural tapestry that profoundly shapes the narrative's semantic and affective resonance, thereby deepening its narrativity.

2.8. Numerical Diegesis, Symbolic Ontology and Intertextual Layers

2.8.1. Numerical Narratology and Symbolic Structures

The narrative in question operates not merely through figurative language but also through a deliberate numerical narratology. The narrative consciousness strategically integrates specific integers, ‘one,’ ‘three,’ ‘six,’ ‘seven,’ ‘nine,’ and ‘twelve’—which function as more than quantitative markers. These numerals serve to expose deeply embedded “cultural associations including religious, philosophic, and aesthetic” (Stewart, 2007). For instance, the number ‘one,’ a traditional signifier of monotheism and unity, appears six times within the text, as in the lines “... at one gate / They encounter, but interpenetrate.” (Shelley, 2002, lines 119-20), while Ian Stewart perceives this number “as a symbol of unity,” its biblical resonances, as cataloged by Ryken and Wilhoit (1998), are particularly illuminating. They note its associations with a “first child born to parents” (p. 1001), “the renewal of the natural forces” (p. 1548), and “the mystery of God’s providence, grace and election” (p. 2417). These perceptions align perfectly with the poem’s thematic concerns, particularly the fate of the lady’s son amid turbulent and dangerous natural forces. Similarly, the number ‘three,’ which Stewart (2007) identifies as “a very mystical and spiritual number,” is deployed with clear intentionality, as in the description “... At the stern / Three marksmen stand levelling...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 154-55). This numerical patterning extends to ‘seven,’ versed in the lines “The mariners died; on the eve of this day /.../ But seven remain'd...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 59-61). Here, the number carries a sense of finality and the “summing up of a life” (Newton, 1997, p. 116). In contrast, the number ‘six’ is introduced ominously: “...Six the thunder has smitten” (Shelley, 2002, line 61). This aligns with its traditional characterization as a “sinister number,” distinct from the perfection signified by “three, seven, ten, and twelve” (Ryken & Wilhoit, 1998, p. 168).

The numerical schema expands to include the number 'nine,' which appears once in the phrase "... Nine weeks the tall vessel had lain" (Shelley, 2002, line 45). This integer holds profound symbolic weight. Cirlot (2001) defines it as "the end-limit of the numerical series before its return to unity," representing a "triple synthesis...on each plane of the corporal, the intellectual and the spiritual" (pp. 234). Further layering its significance, Adamia, Shelia, & Marghanian (2021) note its sacred status as a "cosmic number of angels" and a "symbol of the Virgin Mary," while also acknowledging its ambivalent connection to religion and death in Orthodox Christian traditions (p. 15). Finally, the number 'twelve' is introduced with celestial resonance: "... Lo! a boat / Advances; twelve rowers with the impulse of thought" (Shelley, 2002, lines 152-53). Stewart (2007) observes that this number is "strongly associated with the heavens" and thus "incorporates many distinct virtues." This significance is paratextually reinforced by the extra-fictional narrator's subtitle for "The Revolt of Islam," which is designated "A Poem in Twelve Cantos." This structural choice elevates twelve to a 'sacred,' 'holy,' or 'perfect' number within the work's architecture. While manuscript evidence shows "numerical calculations...in the margin" where Shelley was "working out the number of stanzas he needs to make up the required number of lines" (as cited in Duff, 1996, p. 155), critics like Saleh and Khan (2020) argue that researchers such as Duff "appear to restrict these numbers to prosody rather than adding any further significance." They contend that "These numbers may be perceived as an indication of broad and essential meanings" (p. 257). Concisely, the extra-fictional narrator employs this numerical narratology both diegetically and symbolically. This is a strategic deployment by narrative consciousness to imbue the text with layers of spirituality, mysticism, dread, and religiosity. The deliberate numerical patterning constitutes a significant apparatus for enhancing the narrative's overall complexity, ambiguity, and narrativity.

2.8.2. The Scientific and the Sacred: Speculative Ontology and Intertextual Imagery

This narrative seems to operate at the intersection of sacred and secular construction. It is a multi-experiential textual field imbued with a suggestive scientific sensibility. The narrator portrays various scientific perceptions, invoking chemistry through images like; "sulphur-flakes hurl'd from a mine of pale fire / In fountains spout o'er it" (Shelley, 2002, lines 21-2), physics in "whirlpools of fire-flowing iron" (Shelley, 2002, line 19), mechanics via the concealed engine and hints at its teeth that are made of brass and turn thin winds and soft waves into a loud noise as in "... The whirl and the splash / As of some hideous engine whose brazen teeth smash / The thin winds and soft waves into thunder" (Shelley, 2002, lines 144-6), embalming: "Like a corpse on the clay which is hung'ring to fold" (Shelley, 2002, line 33), 'cold sleep' and "And they lie black as mummies on which Time has written / His scorn of the embalmer" (Shelley, 2002, lines 62-3), marine; "The chinks suck destruction. The heavy dead hulk / On the living sea rolls an inanimate bulk" (Shelley, 2002, lines 31-2). In addition to self-narration of the child whom his mother is afraid to lose, "It was possible that Percy's and Mary's grief over the death of William was represented within the poem by the woman holding the child" (Peters, 2019). This intra-textual grief of the extra-textual voice mourns his son, "It seems to me as if, hunted by calamity as I have been, that I should never recover any cheerfulness again" (as cited in Gallant, 1989, p. 71). Consequently, the narrative can be theorized as a complex re-narration of "slice of life story," generating its verisimilitude through the sustained illusion of these *heterogeneous* scientific discursive formations.

Likewise, this poem constructs a speculative ontology through the synthesis of scientific observation and theological archetypes. Such images may be perceived as a cornerstone to such poetic narrative. It has contained a lot of mental pictures to the level that it has led S.T. Coleridge to designate it as a "pure imagination" (as cited in McEathron, 1994, p. 11). Equally, Barcus (2003) states that "we have often heard praised as a splendid

work of imagination.” (p. 258). It is, too, described as having a “suggestive imagery” (Peters, 2019). On the face of that, Barcus proposes that “A Vision of the Sea” is one of the most awful pictures which poetry has set before us.” (Barcus, 2003, pp. 247-8). Similarly, King-Hele (1984) supposes that “its imagery riotous” (p. 236). The poet appears to employ a continuous flow of images. Moreover, a number of these images seem to be intertextualized with Holy Scriptures and other poets, while most may remain virgin. For instance, it was stated that “Shelley borrowed many images and details from Coleridge, especially in an earlier draft. His focus was on the concept of death and judgment.” (Peters, 2019). He, too, refers to the biblical narrative of manna for Jews in the wilderness: “like Jews with this manna rain'd down / From God on their wilderness” (Shelley, 2002, lines 57-8). In addition to that, the researcher comes up with several images that may be intertextualized with the Holy Quran. The poet who named one of his longest narrative poems “The Revolt of Islam,” in which he even mentioned “Islam’s creed” (Shelley, 2002, line 5220) possibly found numerous images, especially in certain Chapters of the Holy Quran like the Sundering (Al-Inshiqaq), the Unleashed (al-Mursalat 77), the Snatchers (an-Nazi’at 79), the Rolling (al-Takweer 81), and the Shattering (al-Infitar 82), as in “heaven was ruining in,” (Shelley, 2002, line 6), “fear / Is outshining the meteors” (Shelley, 2002, lines 73-4), “Of the pang that awaits us,” (Shelley, 2002, line 78), “a chaos of stars” (Shelley, 2002, line 18), “And 'tis borne down the mountainous” (Shelley, 2002, line 96), “sun cast no shadow at noon,” (Shelley, 2002, line 47), “whirlpools of fire-flowing iron” (Shelley, 2002, line 19), and “When the tempest was gathering in cloudy array” (Shelley, 2002, line 60). Though such an analysis requires a broader comparative reading, which is beyond the scope of this paper, intertextuality can be evidenced in Garret (2013) that Shelley “wanted to learn Arabic” (p. 120), and in his letters the poet asked his “friends to find ‘Arabian grammars, dictionaries & manuscripts’”. He wrote to Claire Clairmont that he had begun studying Arabic with his cousin Thomas Medwin,” (as cited in Nilchian, 2011, p.145). In a word, this poem seems to be highly imaginative and full of specific theological intertextualized images. These imagistic practices constitute a narratological heteroglossia through a convergence of scriptural voices, scientific precision, and poetic indeterminacy.

2.9.The Narrative Kernel: Symbolic Conflict, Embedded Narration, and Existential Proposition

It can be stated that Shelley’s poem constructs a sophisticated interplay between re-narration and symbolism, foregrounding a symbolic conflict between serpent and tigers that functions as a potent narrative kernel. This configuration reworks the archetypal serpent and an eagle in “The Revolt of Islam.” Here it uses two tigers and a serpent. One of the tigers “... is mingled in ghastly affray / With a sea-snake...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 137-8) while the other was shot; “... Hot bullets burn / In the breast of the tiger...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 155-6). These figures operate within a dense hermeneutic field. The tigers potentially signify mind/spirit locked in combat against the serpent’s embodiment of desire, materialism, or religious fanaticism— a struggle often “... crush'd by the infinite stress” (Shelley, 2002, line 140). It may, too, symbolize wind and sea as in a metaphorical fight: “Of the air and the sea...” (Shelley, 2002, line 71) and “Of the wind-cloven wave to the chasm of the deep / It sinks...” (Shelley, 2002, lines 13-14). The serpent seems to symbolize the terrorized tempest or ‘the heaped waves’ as metaphorically “Swollen with rage...” (Shelley, 2002, line 44), while the twain tigers may symbolize hope/joy and fear/pride since these are the main characteristics that the extra-fictional narrator keeps oscillating in almost all poems. For instance, in his poem “Marianne’s Dream” which verses “half in hope and half in fright” (Shelley, 2002, line 11) and in “The Daemon of The World” when it verses “With all the fear and all the hope they bring” (Shelley, 2002, line 525). More evidence can be found in “Rosalind and Helen,” like “I feel desire, but hope not” (Shelley, 2002, line 773) and in “Prometheus Unbound,” verses “Charming the tiger joy” (Shelley, 2002, line 501); and one

more evidence can be found in "Rosalind and Helen," in which the poet-narrator verses "With him lay dead both hope and pride / Alas! all hope is buried now" (Shelley, 2002, lines 600-1). Therefore, the symbolized serpent metaphorically and symbolically crushed the bones of hope, while the other tiger that may symbolize fear was shot down as soon as twelve bowers on a rescue boat appeared on the scene. More to the point, the serpent can be perceived as a symbol of fanatic religious people "despite the serpent's evil connotations, Christ calls on his followers to be "wise as serpents" (Matt. 10.16)" (Garrett, 2013, P.186) and the tiger of open-minded people. This may be evidenced in Stoddard's "The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality: they limit thought." (228) and the Lord Byron refers to the poet when "they hooted him out of his country like a mad-dog, for questioning a dogma..." (Stoddard, 1877, P.229). He adds, "Shelley is truth itself-and honour itself-notwithstanding his out-of-way notions about religion" (*BLJ* 8: 132 [letter to Kinnauld, June 2nd 1821])" (as cited in Cochran, 2006). As the poet did not accept being prevented from godly and scientific inquiries, and he "seems to accept no limitations on his powerful thought or being deprived of contemplating aptitude" (Saleh, 2018, p. 3). It may symbolize such conflict between closeness and open-mindedness. Consequently, the violent encounter can be read as a symbolic matrix crystallizing core Shelleyan tensions: between fanaticism (delimiting thought) and open inquiry "...crush'd by the infinite stress" (Shelley, 2002, line 140); between life and power, slavery and freedom "Twin tygers, who burst, when the waters arose, / In the agony of terror, their chains in the hold" (Shelley, 2002, lines 40-1); or between abandoned spirituality and dominant materiality. In addition to that, different hydro-imagery such as 'ocean,' 'sea,' 'river,' 'stream,' 'flood,' and 'vale,' is employed in this narrative. They seem "to symbolize essentiality of life, beauty of nature, its destructive power and spiritual knowledge." (Saleh & Khan, 2020, p. 122). This narrative appears to portray a highly rich and multi-experienced narrative of trans, self, and re-narration with various scientific and symbolic perceptions. Structurally, the poem employs embedded narrative strategies. It begins diegetically with a mother and child, then embeds a secondary narrative concerning the tigers' fates- and how the latter tiger was shot; "... Hot bullets burn / In the breast of the tyger, which yet bears him on / To his refuge and ruin..." (Shelley, 2002, lines 155-7) while the former tiger enters into a bloody fight with a serpent. The narration of such a fight may be perceived as symbolic, as mentioned so far, and a poetic narration with subtle details. It discloses that the narrator goes a little deeper in adding visual, auditory, and tactile images of "And the hum of the hot blood that spouts and rains / Where the gripe of the tyger has wounded the veins" (Shelley, 2002, lines 142-3). This complex narrational architecture, shifting subtly between *intradiegetic immediacy* and *authorial* symbolic projection, positions the narrative consciousness to explore profound existential propositions- namely, life conceived as an inescapable struggle or an undeserved demise. As in the following lines:

... the rattle
Of solid bones crush'd by the infinite stress
Of the snake's adamantine voluminousness;
And the hum of the hot blood that spouts and rains
Where the gripe of the tyger has wounded the veins,
Swollen with rage, strength, and effort.
(Shelley, 2002, lines 139-44)

3. CONCLUSION

Shelley's "A Vision of the Sea" is a complex narrative matrix. It is as a richly ambiguous and imaginatively layered text, deploying a third-person heterodiegetic narrator whose omniscience is tempered by moments of speculative and emotive engagement with the poem's physical and metaphysical resonance. The narrative blends metadiegetic framing

with a narrated monologue, while numerical patterns and, crucially, sonic texture actively enhance its narrativity not merely as a stylistic feature but as a distinct narrative agent. Significantly, these sounds themselves become agents of meaning that construct a subliminal narrative of resilience, as if the narrator's psyche almost remains untroubled by the storm being described, subtly counterbalancing the depicted chaos. Furthermore, temporality masterfully employs simullepsis, and analepsis, seamlessly integrating narrative situation without disrupting narrative flow—a technique facilitated by the authorial narrator's fluid control over chronology. Internal anachrony creates a dynamic yet coherent storytelling rhythm, as the narrator oscillates between perceptual binaries, reinforcing the text's dialectical tension. Duration is manipulated through acceleration, summary, and rhetorical omission with pauses to allow the self-conscious, authorial voice to interject commentary. Punctuation and prosody function as refractive indices of inner and outer states, heightening the poem's rhetorical intensity. Far from being fragmented, the poem reveals itself as a deliberately built narrative, weaving together trans, self, and re-narration alongside scientific, religious, and symbolic registers; this matrix invites a dual reading as both metaphysical allegory and visceral perception. It offers a new critical lens for re-evaluating Shelley's corpus. Its architecture, subtly shifting between intradiegetic immediacy and authorial projection, positions the narrative consciousness to explore profound existential propositions. Therefore, the narrative poem exemplifies a sophisticated mixed-mode narration, rendering it not merely a depiction of maritime disaster but a meditation on perception, temporality, and the nature of both narrative, and nature itself. Its cohesion lies precisely in its ability to balance chaos with potent narrative, accelerated narrativity, interpolated narration, and an omniscient narrator, affirming its status as a complete and meticulously orchestrated narrative poem, thereby demonstrating the expanded potential of poetic narrative when analyzed through a transgeneric narratological lens.

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