

Role of Dynamic and Stative Verbs in Two English Ballads: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the different types of dynamic and stative verbs are used in two lyrical ballads composed by two contemporaneous English romantic poets in order to find out which verb category is statistically dominant in each poem. The two chosen poems have been qualitatively and quantitatively examined, using an eclectic model incorporating Quirk et al. (1985) and Kreidler's (1998) classification of stative and dynamic verbs. Results of data analysis demonstrate that the category of dynamic verbs rate higher than stative verbs in both Wordsworth's *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known* and Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. However, no single one lower category of dynamic or stative verb is comparatively equally dominant in both poems.

Keywords: Stative, dynamic, verbs, Dominant, *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Remarks and Statement of Problem

Generally speaking, writers develop their own style in the production of their works through their distinctive choice of structures, words, and verbs (Traugott and Pratt, 1980: 29). Within the last category of verbs, one important semantic division is that between dynamic (denoting an action) and stative (denoting a state of being) ones, according to their quality of either being durative or instantaneous (Cf. Dowty, 1979; Quirk et al. 1985; Kleidler, 1998; Zeitoun, 2000; Huddleston and Pullum, 2002; Michaelis, 2011). Some English verbs can be either durative or instantaneous, but others are restricted to only one of these two categories. Dynamic verbs can be either durative or instantaneous, whereas stative verbs are restricted to being durative (Kreidler, 1998: 201). The choice of which type of verbs to use in a literary work relates to the message the writer wants to convey since different verbs have different effects to the piece of writing, triggering various impacts of feelings or emotions.

This paper examines which category of verbs (stative or dynamic) is being used most frequently in the two poems under study: *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* ("The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy"). In addition, an attempt is made to examine the thematic impact of the dominated category on each poem.

1.2 Aims

This study aims at:

1. examining the types of verbs employed in the two ballads: *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.
2. specifying which verb-category is used most frequently and what impact it's textual density has on each poem.

1.3 Hypothesis

The current study hypothesizes that:

1. dynamic verbs have a higher frequency than stative verbs in both ballads; and:
2. activity verbs constitute the majority of dynamic verbs in the data, so are stative verbs of inert perception and cognition.

1.4 Procedures

The following procedures are followed in the study:

1. Reviewing the minutes of the adopted eclectic model of analysis.
2. Collecting data on genre basis. Two ballads by two different Romantic poets are selected:
 - a. William Wordsworth's: *Strange fits of Passion have I Known*; (henceforth: WB). and
 - b. John Keats's: *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (henceforth: KB).
3. Analyzing the data with the immediate aims of:
 - a. examining the types of verbs occurring in the two ballads, and:
 - b. specifying which verb-category is used most frequently and what impact it has on each poem.
4. Discussing the findings of each poem to unravel how different types of dynamic and stative verbs are employed in each poem.

1.5 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to the identification and computation of the frequencies of dynamic and stative verbs (and their different types) in the two selected ballads via the textual implementation of the model of analysis. The main concern of the study is not the literary era, but the poems in themselves.

1.6 Layout of the Study

The study consists of five sections. The first section is an introductory one to the study of stative and dynamic verbs. The second one presents the theoretical background. The background of the selected poems and the methodology adopted for the current study are illustrated in the third section. Section four introduces data analysis and findings. The conclusions are displayed in section five.

Literature Review

2.1 English Verb Classification

The speech form of the English verbs can be classified into many categories. Most notably, verbs are categorized into transitive and intransitive ones, depending on their complementary possibilities. As for their categorization into dynamic and stative verbs, this stems from their durative or instantaneous quality. The latter distinctions are further defined in the sub-sections below.

2.2 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Classifying verbs into transitive and intransitive is dependent on whether or not one verb admits a direct object as its complement. Verbs that require direct objects as their complements are called transitive verbs, such as get and criticize in (1) and (2):

1. He will get a surprise. (Quirk et al. 1985: 170)
2. Many MPs criticized the prime minister. (Quirk et al. 1985: 171)

Unlike transitive verbs, intransitive verbs require no direct objects, as in (3):

3. The child laughed. (Quirk et al. 1985: 167)

2.3 Dynamic and Stative Verbs

Kreidler (1998: 206) describes four kinds of situations: states, accomplishment, action, and achievement. A state indicates a condition that will proceed with or without energy once it becomes a given state (ibid. 201). Hence, a state is a verb which is durative. Unlike state, action, accomplishment, and achievement verbs consume energy to allow a situation to persist. The situation continues as long as an input energy exists, and it may end when there is no more energy. Therefore action, accomplishment, and achievement verbs may either be durative or immediate. Durative or instantaneous qualities precipitate them to be categorized into two classes of verb namely dynamic and stative verbs.

2.3.1 Dynamic Verbs

As already mentioned, dynamic verbs have the characteristics of being durative or instantaneous. When the verb denotes an energy input, it is durative; and when there is no more energy, it is instantaneous. In contrast, dynamic verbs demonstrate action, activity, and temporary or altering conditions (Quirk et al. 1985: 21).

4. My dog was walking.
5. The door opened.
6. The key opened the door. (ibid. 172)

The above sentences offer dynamic verbs. Such verbs can express numerous meanings and the meaning includes:

- a. Verbs that express any form of activity, or activity verbs: abandon, ask, beg, call, come, drift, drink, eat, float, go, help, hop, learn, pound, rain, read, slice, throw, rotate, turn, vibrate, walk, work, and write (ibid. 46). Activity verbs can be either durative or instantaneous. Instantaneous verbs appear in simple tenses, whereas they are progressive when they indicate continuing activity (Leech, 1981: 19).
- b. Transitional event verbs – such as arrive, die, fall, land, leave, and lose – describe a process moving towards completion. (Quirk et al. 1985: 46; Kreidler, 1998: 206).
- c. Momentary verbs – such as hit, jump, kick, knock, nod, tap – refer to actions that do not have duration. These verbs imply the meaning of the repetitive and iterative (Kreidler, 1998: 203).
- d. Verbs of bodily sensation: ache, feel, hurt, itch, tingle.
- e. Process verbs - such as: change, deteriorate, improve, slow down, and worsen – refer to change that takes place over a period of time (Quirk et al. 1985: 46; Kreidler, 1998: 202). According to Leech (1981: 9) these verbs have duration, however, it is not an indefinite one.

2.3.2 Stative Verbs

These are verbs that do not refer to something that is in progress - hence, they are labelled 'stative' – referring to the inner, mental, and psychological status (Quirk et al. 1985: 21). They are subdivided into two categories:

- a. Verbs of inert perception and cognition. This category includes verbs that express feelings (abhor, regret, desire, envy, fear, hate, like, long for, mind, prefer, adore, enjoy, wish, and want);

and verbs that imply mental states (believe, doubt, expect, intend, interest, know, suppose, suspect, think, and understand...).

b. Relational verbs include: belong to, contain, consist of, cost, depend on, deserve, equal, fit, have, include, involve, lack, matter, mean, owe, own, require, resemble, like, suffice, tend (Quirk et al. 1985: 47). Leech (1981: 21) labels these as state verbs of Having and Being.

c. Verbs that express a physical stance or position refer to a state instead of an activity, although they might seem to be dynamic. These verbs include : kneel, lean, lie, sit, asleep, awake and stand (Kreidler, 1998: 202).

d. Verbs that express non-action: remain, stay, and wait (ibid.).

7. The occasion requires formal dress.

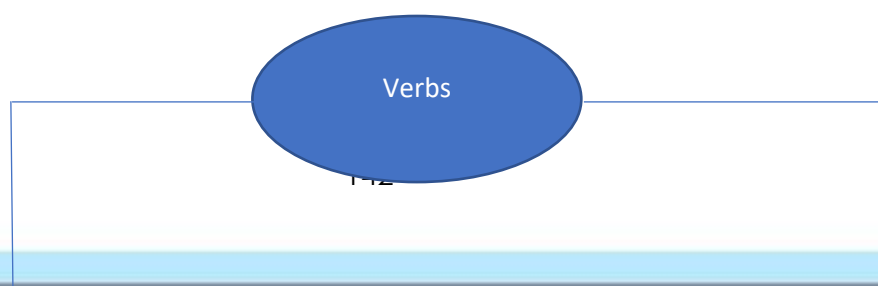
8. The box contains old letters.

Model of Analysis and Data Collection

In this section, the writer specifies the theoretical model used in data analysis and describes the data selected.

3.1 Adopted Model

The researcher has opted to make use of an eclectic model of analysis, complementing Quirk et al's (1985) approach to the description of dynamic and stative verbs with Kreidler's (1998) broader classification of them as shown in (Figure 1) hereunder:



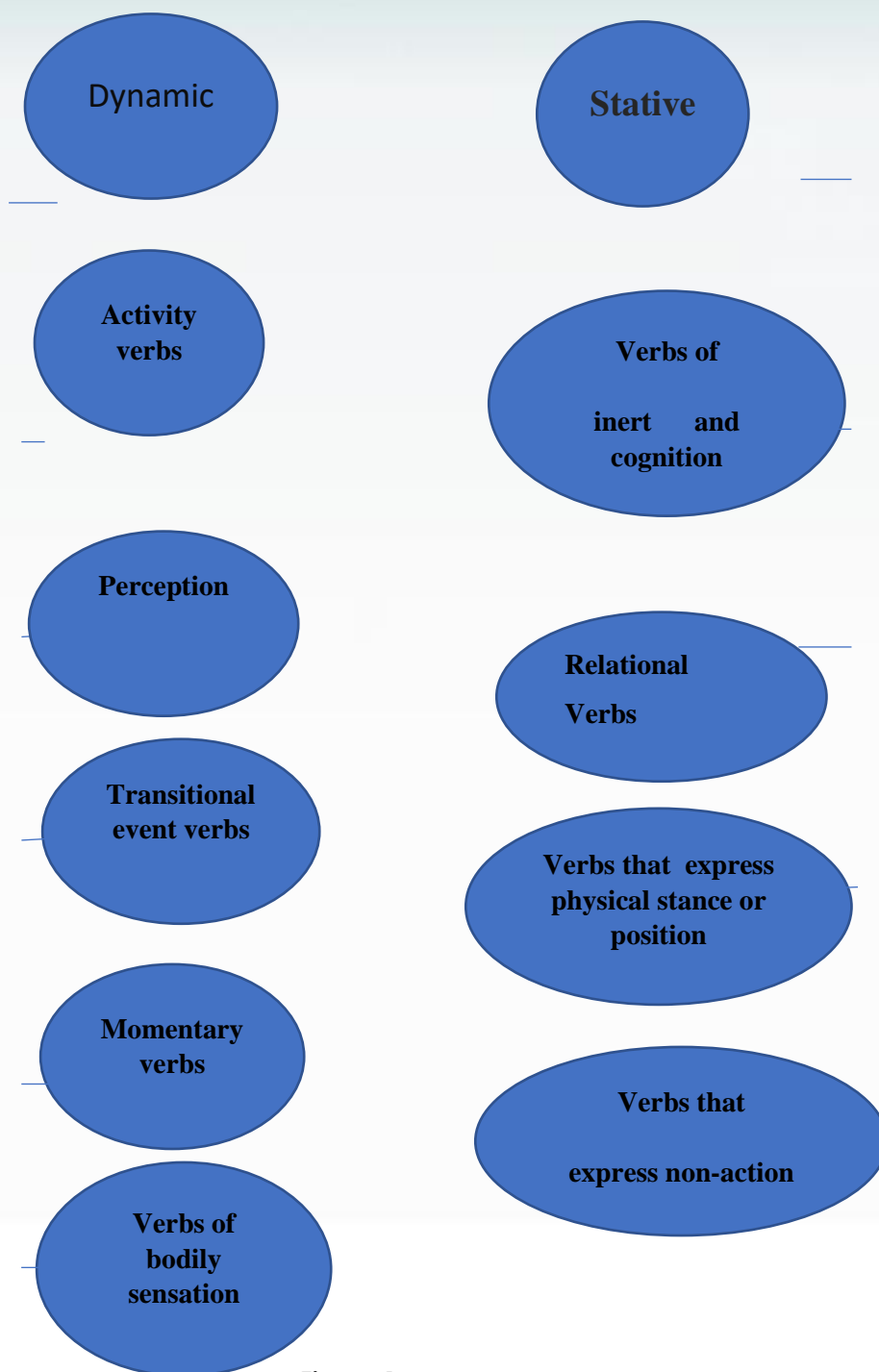
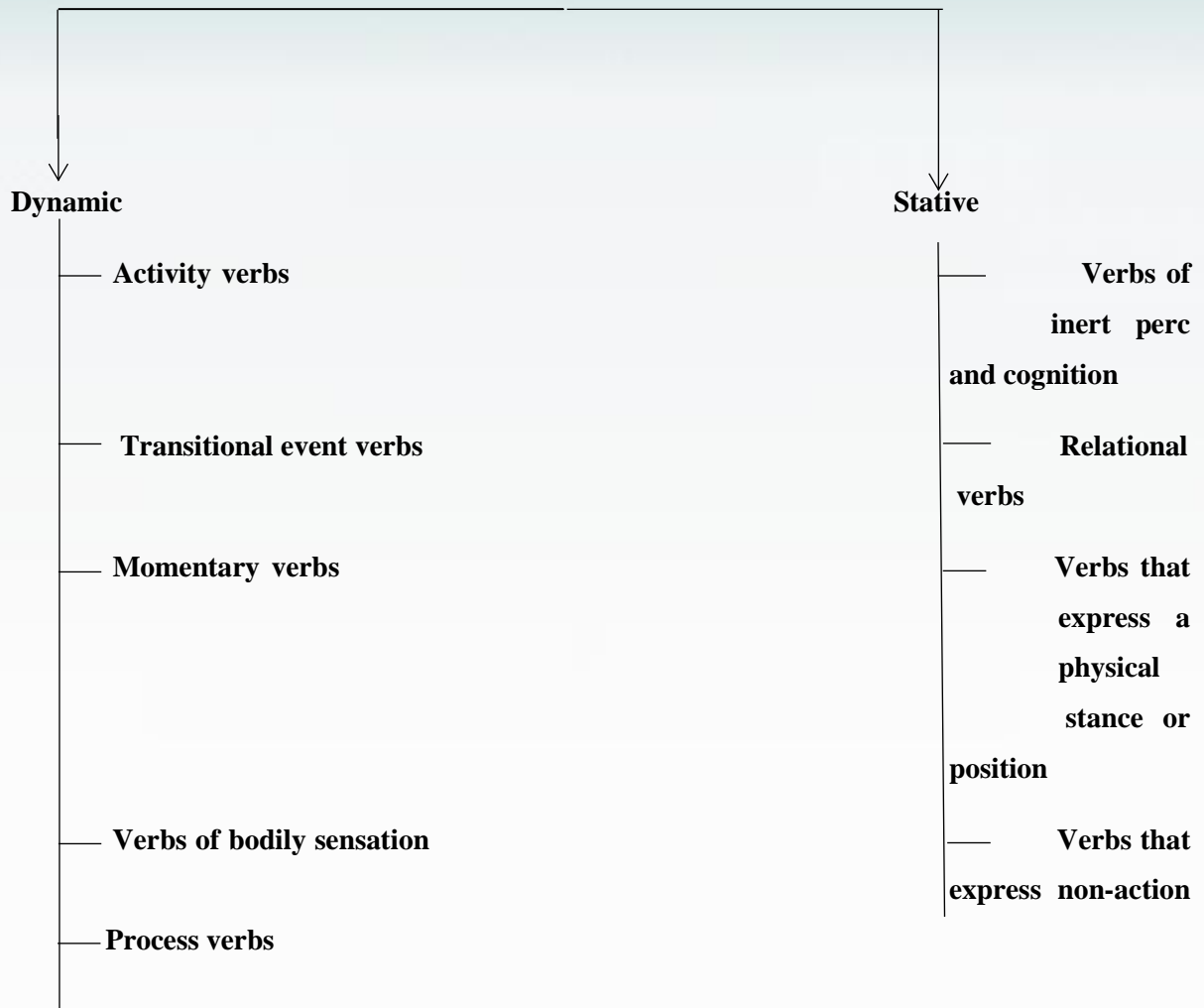


Figure 1.

Dynamic and Stative Verbs



3.2 Data Collection

For data collection and analysis, the researcher has chosen two lyrical ballads composed by two contemporaneous English Romantic poets: William Wordsworth's (1800) *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known* (WB), and John Keats's (1819) *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (KB). These two poems are both lyrical, of the same verse-genre (i.e. ballads), and are composed by two poets belonging to the same English Romantic school. In addition, both of the two texts are primarily preoccupied with the theme of love and death, and composed in quatrains. WB is a seven-stanza ballad composed during the Wordsworth visit to Germany in 1798, first published in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). It relates the poet's thoughts and feelings on his way to visit his sweetheart Lucy's cottage. KB is a twelve-stanza ballad composed by Keats in 1819, in which he tells the story of a fairy (a symbol of femme fatale) who condemns a knight to a tragic fate after seducing him with her enchanting eyes and songs (Cooper, 1986: 27).

The researcher is going to analyze just the types of verbs occurring in the data in terms of their functioning as dynamic or stative ones. However, the researcher is still going to discuss data's themes within the analysis.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

In this section, the two ballads are analyzed to get at the outcomes of the study that can answer the problem presented in section one. This section is going to be divided into three parts. In part one, the researcher is going to count the verbs used in both poems that share the same semantic component and dynamism. In part two, the dynamic and stative verbs are going to be distributed

into their subcategories. Finally, the researcher is going to demonstrate the thematic impact each type of the verbs has upon the two poems.

Related to the rates of dynamic and stative verbs, and by using the equation (the number of a strategy used the total number of processes \times 100), the rates will be illustrated by using tables. Then, the two poems are compared by counting the frequency each type of the verb is deployed to get at the dominant type of verb (stative or dynamic) in each text.

4.1 Verbs in WB

Wordsworth's ballad contains (21) verbs in total, spanning (28) verse lines. Of these, a majority of (17) verbs are dynamic ones, (i.e. at (80.96%). These are:

tell, dare, befell, bent, fixed, drew, reached, climbed, came, slept, kept, moved on, raised, stopped, dropped, slide, and cried.

In contrast, stative verbs add up to a total of only (4) in number, i.e. at (19.4%), which are:

known, loved, looked, and be.

4.2 Verbs in KB

Keats's ballad makes use of a total of (45) verbs, within its (48) verse lines. Similar to WB, dynamic verbs are more frequent than stative, accounting for (68.89%) of the total of verbs used in the text, with (31) instances. These are:

loiter, withered, sing, see, withereth, met, made, looked, made, set, saw. bend, sing, found, said, took, wept, sighed, shut, lulled, betide, saw, cried, saw, gaped, awoke, found, sojourn, loiter, withered, and sing.

As for stative verbs in KB, they account for (31. 11%) of the total number of verbs occurring in the ballad, with a frequency of (14) instances, which are:

ail, ail, is, is, was, was, were, love, love, dreamed, dreamt, were, hath, and is.

The figures in (4.1) and (4.2) subsections validate hypothesis (1) proposed in (1.3), which reads: 'The current study hypothesizes that dynamic verbs have a higher frequency than stative verbs in both ballads' as illustrated in Table (1) below:

Table 1 Types of Verb in the Data

WB			KB	
Type of Verb	No	%	No	%
Dynamic Verbs	17	80.96%	31	68.89%
Stative Verbs	4	19.4%	14	31. 11%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%

It is worth noting that the relative density of dynamic verbs in WB (at 80.96%) is significantly higher than its counterpart in KB (at 68.80%), which is indicative of the greater action offered in Wordsworth's ballad.

4.3 Types of Dynamic Verb in WB

Of the (17) dynamic verbs in WB, the majority (i.e. seven) are transitional event verbs: reached, bent, kept, raised, dropped, climbed, and drew nigh (=near). These constitute (41.2%) of the total number of dynamic verbs occurring in the ballad. Given that most of the poem

describes the poet's evening trip on a horse to the cottage of his sweetheart Lucy across the pasture, past the orchard spot, up a hill and down, such a high density of transitional event verbs contribute to delivering the bulk of the poem's message. One transitional event verb, dropped, is even ascribed to the moon, which helps to engage it within the events taking place. This same verb also forebodes Lucy's eventual death, with which the ballad ends.

Second in frequency are dynamic activity verbs, with four instances, at (23.6%): dare, tell, came, and moved on. They are related to the activities of "daring to tell", "coming " and "moving"; and collaborate with the greater number of transitional event verbs to spell out the stations of the poet's journey.

Momentary and process dynamic verbs are both exemplified by three items each, at (17.6%). The first subcategory includes the verbs: fixed, stopped, slide, which express moments in the poet's journey. Significantly, all dynamic verbs of the process category: befell, cried, and slept are related to adverse changes the poet has undergone.

Also significant is the absence of verbs of bodily sensation verbs in this ballad, which signifies the fact that the poet is more interested in conveying what has happened to him via dynamic verbs, rather than expressing his personal feelings, which he saves as a function to stative verbs as described in the next subsection. Table (2) summarizes the description given in this subsection.

Table 2 Types of Dynamic Verb in WB

Types of Dynamic Verb in WB			
Category	Verbs	No	%
Transitional Event Verb	reached, bent, kept, raised, dropped, climbed, drew nigh	7	41.2%
Momentary Verb	fixed, stopped, slide	3	17.6%
Activity Verb	dare, tell, came, moved on	4	23.6%
Process Verb	befell, cried, slept	3	17.6%
Verbs of Bodily Sensation	0	0	0
Totals		17	100%

4.4 Types of Stative Verb in WB

Three of the four stative verbs (i.e. 75%) relate to acts of inert perception and cognition experienced by the poet himself: known, love, and look. The singular relational verb – occurring in the very last verse line of the ballad – is be (at 25%), which is related to the death of the poet's sweetheart, triggering his eventual tragic loss that closes the final curtain. Static verbs expressing a physical stance and non-action do not occur in this text, which is rich in describing aspects of movement and change. Hereunder the distribution of stative verbs is tabulated.

Table 3 Types of Stative Verb in WB

Types of Stative Verb in WB			
Category	Verbs	No	%
Verbs of Inert Perception and Cognition	known, love, look	3	75%
Relational Verbs	be	1	25%
Verbs Expressing a Physical Stance or Position	0	0	0

Non-action Verb	0	0	0
Totals		4	100%

4.5 Types of Dynamic Verb in KB

Activity verbs are the most frequent category of dynamic verbs in KB, with (9) instances, at (29%): sing, met, made, made, sing, said, took, shut, and sing. All of these verbs are linked to the Knight's encounter with the Fairy, his seducer, with emphasis laid upon her act of singing as a means of enchantment, which is repeated thrice.

Transitional event and momentary verbs obtain second highest frequency, with (6) items each, rating (19.4%). The items of the first category are: bend, sojourn, found, found, set; the latter's are: loiter, wept, cried, loiter, awoke, sighed. Six of these dynamic verbs signal the distress and grief experienced by the victimized male lovers: gaped, loiter, wept, cried, loiter, and sigh.

Dynamic verbs of process come third in frequency, with five instances, at (16,1%): withered, withereth, betide, withered, lulled. The three occurrences of the verb withered textually highlight the loss of life-force due to the deceptive entrapments of femme fatale, the key theme in the ballad.

The density of the dynamic verbs of bodily sensation is the same as that of process verbs, with (5) instances, at (16.1%): looked, see, saw, saw, saw. Significantly, all of these recurrent verbs are related to the act of "seeing", which helps promote certainty in the truthful proceedings of the narrative, since "seeing is believing" as the saying goes.

One notable characteristics in KB is the deliberate repetition of the same dynamic verbs or their synonyms for the sake of emphasizing the events of the narrative offered, a poetic device which is not found in WB. Keats keeps deploying this same poetic device consistently in his choices of stative verbs as well (See 4.6). The descriptions above are summarized in Table (4) below.

Table 4 Types of Dynamic Verb in KB

Types of Dynamic Verb in KB			
Category	Verbs		
Transitional Event Verb	gaped, bend, sojourn, found, found, set	6	19.4%
Momentary Verb	loiter, wept, cried, loiter, awoke, sighed	6	19.4%
Activity Verb	sing, met, made, made, sing, said, took, shut, sing	9	29.0%
Process Verb	withered, withereth, betide, withered, lulled	5	16.1%
Verbs of Bodily Sensation	looked, see, saw, saw, saw	5	16.1%
Totals		31	100%

4.6 Types of Stative Verb in KB

Relational verbs of being and having are by far the most dense stative verbs in KB, with eight instances, at (57.1%): is, is, was, was, were, were, hath, and is. Repetition is also notable here, Second in frequency are verbs of inert perception and recognition, with four items, at (28.6%), in which two token verbs denoting "love" are juxtaposed with two tokens of a verb revealing "pain": ail, ail, love, and love. Least in frequency are two repeated verbs (at 14.3%) expressing a physical stance or position: dreamed and dreamt, as shown in Table (5).

Table 5 Types of Stative Verb in KB

Types of Stative Verb in KB			
Category	Verbs	No	%
Verbs of Inert Perception and Cognition	ail, ail, love, love	4	28.6%
Relational Verbs	is, is, was, was, were, were, hath, is	8	57.1
Verbs Expressing a Physical Stance or Position	dreamed, dreamt	2	14.3%
Non-action Verb	0	0	0
Totals		14	100%

4.7 Categories of Dynamic and Stative Verbs in the Data

In order to test the validity of the second hypothesis of this study presented in (1.3), the relative densities of all verb categories in the whole data require to be juxtaposed for comparison. Table (6) below has been organized to serve this particular purpose.

Table 6 Categories of Dynamic and Stative Verbs in the Data

Verb Category									
		WB		KB		WB		KB	
Dynamic Verbs	No	%	No	%	Stative Verbs	No	%	No	%
	Transitional Event Verb	7	41.2	6		19.4	Verbs of Inert Perception and Cognition	3	75
Momentary Verb	3	17.6	6	19.4	Relational Verbs	1	25	8	57.1
Activity Verb	4	23.6	9	29.0	Verbs Expressing a Physical Stance or Position	0	0	2	14.3
Process Verb	3	17.6	5	16.1	Non-action Verb	0	0	0	0

Verbs of Bodily Sensation	0	0	5	16.1		0	0	0	0
Totals	17	100	31	100		4	100	14	100

The rates in the table above show that the dynamic verb category of transitional event is the most frequent in WB, at (41.2%); so is the stative verb category of inert perception and recognition, at (75%). In KB, the dynamic verb category of activity plus the stative verb category of relation have the dominant densities, at (29%) and (57.1%), respectively. These rates refute hypothesis (2), which reads: "Activity verbs constitute the majority of dynamic verbs in the data, so are stative verbs of inert perception and cognition". This result indicates that there are less possibilities of arriving at valid generalization across similar poems as far as the lower categories of dynamic and stative verbs are concerned.

Conclusion

After presenting the outcomes of the analysis in the previous section, this section sums up the findings of the analysis. The aims stated in chapter one have been achieved within the comparative analysis which has shown that the category of dynamic verbs is the most frequently used in the two ballads: Wordsworth's *Strange Fits of Passion have I Known* and Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. In addition, the impacts of this frequency dominant verb category - plus the distributions of their subcategories - have been found to be coterminal with the variations in narrative action and thematic development in each poem. The comparative analysis has also shown that while it is possible to arrive at valid cross-poems generalizations at the highest level of verb-meaning hierarchy (dynamic or stative), such a possibility dwindles when going down to their lower subcategories.

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