

Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of Sparks' *The Last Song*: In-Depth Exploration of Literary Writing

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Abstract

This study aimed to reveal the elements of Sparks' writing style and his chosen themes for an in-depth exploration of literary writing. The data for this study was textual, coming from Sparks' *The Last Song*. It was conducted within the framework of two theories: Aestheticism and Stylistics. It was found that Sparks utilizes binary opposite themes, which are: Hatred Vs Love, Death Vs Life, Adultery Vs Fidelity, Distrust Vs Faith, Alienation Vs Closeness, Poverty Vs Wealth, and Illusion Vs Reality. These themes become completely effective as they are supported by his style of narrating the story. Sparks' style is analyzed in terms of the following elements: Figurative languages of speech, Syntax/Sentence Fluency, Diction/Choice of Words, Point of View, Types of discourses, and Plot Devices. Through the analysis of Sparks' novel, implications for literary appreciation and creative writing were drawn. The implications for literary appreciation are: read to enjoy the literature, enhance the enjoyment of literature, and develop a passion for literature. The implications for creative writing are: practice creative reading, think critically and analytically, write pictorially and aurally, and fictionalize a true-to-life story.

Keywords: *Text analysis, literature, literary appreciation, themes*

INTRODUCTION

Students and teachers have the ability to write by reading the stories of excellent authors who provide profound examples of settings and plots that provoke images that readers can probably experience in real life to explore their writing fluency (Rasinski, 2010). Bautista (July, 2006), a literature enthusiast, said, "I read whatever I could lay my hands on. Newspaper, magazines, handbills, candy wrappers, pocketbooks, library books; anything with writing on it fascinated me for I was learning about the nature of words. My taste inclined toward language as description, rather than language as an idea" (p. 25). Taylor, Kaufman, and Barbot (2021) accentuate that there is an awesome work to be done if people are to be brought together around the love of writing and literature, around its possibilities, its limitations, and also its actualities. One of the reasons to do research about the literary works that people read is to understand them better. Scholars who have devoted their lives to the study of particular authors, periods, and genres have the ability to provide insights that can enrich people's understanding and deepen their appreciation of literature. Richards and Schmidt (2002) state that writing is considered to be one of the most valuable parts of a language to enable students to express their ideas and feelings freely. It is considered to be a complex and lengthy process that involves writing; planning, designing, reviewing and reassessing, skills that contribute to individuals in all kinds of academic activities to explain ideas and put them together to form a meaningful concept.

'Becoming an adept writer involves more than knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, it depends on high levels of personal regulation because writing activities are usually self-planned, self-initiated, and self-sustained. We present a social cognitive model of writing composed of three fundamental forms of self-regulation:

environmental, behavioral, and covert or personal. Each of these triadic forms of self-regulation interact reciprocally via a cyclic feedback loop through which writers self-monitor and self-react to feedback about the effectiveness of specific self-regulatory techniques or processes' (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

English learners should be guided to read and peruse literary works and figure out the writing style of the author to acquire creative writing skills. One of the famous legendary writers is Shakespeare. He is generally acknowledged as the greatest literary genius of the English Language; his writings have touched the world (McCuen & Winkler, 2004). Hemmingway, who is known for his unique elements of style, won both a Nobel Prize and a Pulitzer Prize for his profound fiction. His direct and unadorned writing style has been much imitated by subsequent writers (DiYanni, 2001). Dickens is one of the best classic writers of the 19th century. He is known as one of its foremost figures and wondrous personalities (Gissing, 2005). Sparks, a prolific, contemporary novelist, who started his career in 1994, has written several best-seller novels. Most of his masterpieces have been shown as major motion pictures and watched by millions of people. People are falling in love not only with the movies but also with his writings (Miller, 2010).

Spanich (2006) stated that Sparks' writing ability shines through his popular narratives at the levels of form and technique. Therefore, this researcher chose to analyze one of Sparks' masterpieces. His great achievement has piqued this researcher's curiosity to fully delve into his works in order to find out what makes his writings known worldwide. The study was conducted within the framework of two theories: Aestheticism and Stylistics. Aesthetics is the theoretical discourse which attempts to comprehend literary works (Joughin & Malpas, 2003, p.2). It is one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century; it deals with the social dimension of art that combines a comprehensive grasp of aesthetics as a discipline with an astonishingly intimate knowledge of a wide range of works of art (Hullot-Kentor, 1996). Aesthetic theory accentuates the beauty of art (Tatarkiewicz, Harnell, Barret, & Petsch, 2005). Meanwhile, in the twentieth century, it seemed that nobody paid attention to what stylistics was all about. Stylistics was on the wane, and only a few researchers were eager to do research in stylistics. However, in the twentieth-first century, stylistics becomes very much alive. Stylistics is taught and researched in the department of language, literature, and linguistics all over the world (Simpson, 2004); it is a well-established field in literary and linguistic studies (Raton, 2002). Stylistics has important contributions to make to literary criticism, and, by adopting a more cultural approach to linguistic analysis, the writers might also achieve a richer conceptualization of the materiality of the literary text (Paton, 2000). In this study, the researcher analyzed literary elements and devices to provide learners with an in-depth exploration of reaching writing fluency.

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in nature. The research design that the researcher utilized was descriptive analysis. According to Paller-Calmorin and Calmorin (2007), descriptive analysis describes the nature of an object by separating it into its parts. Its purpose is to discover the nature of things. The researcher should determine the composition, structure, and substructure that occurs as units within a larger structure. The descriptive-analytic method was meant to reveal the elements of Sparks' writing style and his chosen themes. This study is also called a literary analysis. Literary analysis explains the meaning of a text by analyzing its structure and features. Literary analysis helps readers understand what makes a literary work thought-provoking, revealing, or enjoyable. The literary analysis also contributes to the larger scholarly conversation about the meaning and purpose of literature. (Manyak & Manyak, 2021).

Source and Type of data

The source of this study was the literary writing of Sparks. Sparks' masterpieces have a predominant feature, whether thematic or structural that will ease his readers to position literary features with a particular location in the literary spectrum. The data for this study came from Sparks' novel entitled *The Last Song*. The reason for choosing *The Last Song* was because this novel was believed could bring an impact on the beauty of life to its readers, and it is reachable to all ages. Moreover, Sparks' *The Last Song* is contemporary. The data collected by this researcher was textual and consisted of themes and the elements of Sparks' writing style, such as Figurative language, Syntax/Sentence fluency, Diction/Choice of words, Point of view, Types of discourse, and Plot devices.

Data Gathering Procedures

To come up with the data for this study, this researcher had to read the text closely several times. At the first reading, data was gathered around obvious themes or topics on a trial-and-error basis. In the process of re-reading, certain data that did not fit into the categories had to be discarded, or else new categories had to be created to accommodate the newly found data. The whole book was used as a source of data, except in terms of syntax/sentence fluency where only the three longest chapters (35, 26, and 13) and three shortest chapters (36, 7, and 22), out of 37 chapters, were chosen as the basis for analysis in order to ascertain Sparks' predominating sentence type and his average sentence length. In order to find the sentence types, the researcher segregated the sentences into four types; simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, and sentence fragment. In order to be able to get the sentence length, the researcher carefully counted the number of words and then divided it by the number of sentences. Needless to say, only the narrative sentences were considered in this particular analysis, disregarding the dialogue portions. In referring to quotations taken from the novel *The Last Song*, the researcher used only page numbers to avoid wordiness.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The themes of literary works convey fundamental messages to give thought to human conditions that are derived from the outcome of the conflict (DiYanni, 2001; Hudson & LeClair, 2004; Bucher & Manning, 2006).

Emerging Themes of '*The Last Song*'

After a careful analysis of the treatment of *The Last Song*'s themes, it was found that Sparks uses binary opposition. Binary opposition is considered a device to form two distinctive classes which contradict each other (Culler, 2002). The use of binary opposite themes is seen as the epitome of the controversy between good and evil, the underpinning theme or plot of fiction in general. The following are the themes that Nicholas Sparks accentuated in the novel: Hatred versus Love, Death versus Life, Adultery versus Fidelity, Distrust versus Faith, Alienation versus Closeness, Poverty versus Wealth, and Illusion versus Reality.

Hatred Versus Love

Hatred and love are the most common feelings that all mankind experience. Sparks employs the theme of hatred versus love to illustrate how love can conquer hatred. The following are the scenes that Sparks uses to exemplify the theme:

Ronnie and Steve. It is a father-son relationship. The story revolves around seventeen-year-old Ronnie Miller, who is shipped by her mom, together with her ten-year-old brother Jonah, to spend the summer with their father. Ronnie abhors the idea of spending the whole summer with her father

because she hates him but she cannot refute her mom's idea. "She supposed she could live with a visit. But to stay until late August? Pretty much the entire summer? That was banishment, and for most of the nine hours it had taken them to drive down, she'd felt like a prisoner being transferred to a rural penitentiary" (p. 17). Sparks utilizes the word 'prisoner' to describe Ronnie's feelings about the visit. For Ronnie, being with Steve was the ultimate misery. Through this hate-love theme, Sparks also accentuates that a father will always love his daughter no matter what his daughter does to him. Steve's love eventually melts the hardened heart of Ronnie.

Ronnie and the Piano. The piano had been a major part of Ronnie's life, and when she was younger, she had been consumed by the desire not only to play but also to compose songs with Steve. Ronnie's great talent in piano has been acknowledged by the administration and the teachers of Juilliard. Steve had taught her to play the piano when she was a child. "*He taught me to play from the time I was able to walk. I played for hours, seven days a week, for years. We even did some composing together . . .*" (p. 256). However, since Steve left Juilliard, she had refused to play the piano—their shared passion. "*Ronnie hated the piano and swore she'd never play again, a decision even some of her oldest friends thought was strange. . .*" (p. 12). Initially, Ronnie does not hesitate to irritate Steve about her quitting the piano as she spends her summer with him. She yells at Steve when he plays the piano at home, "*I don't like this little game you're playing*" (p. 74). She even hates seeing the piano, "*I hate the piano. I hate that I had to play every single day! And I hate that I even have to see the damn thing anymore!*" (p. 108).

Ronnie and her Life. Ronnie hates everything that is going on with her, including her own life. She especially hates it when her mom sends her to spend the summer with her dad. She prefers to stay in New York; a city where people can find amusement contrasted to life in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. She wants to go back to where she belongs. "*Her first thought was simply to hitchhike to the bus station and buy herself a ticket back to New York*" (p. 66). Ronnie loathes being at her dad's place. "*She wanted nothing more than to get the hell out of this place*" (p. 173). Ronnie hates her life even more when Blaze comes along and frames her for shoplifting. Blaze is jealous of Ronnie talking with her boyfriend Marcus; thus, Blaze comes up with a plan to get rid of her. Ronnie believes that her life is getting worse. "*She could not imagine having to spend an entire month in her room, a room she had to share, no less, in a place she didn't want to be. She wondered if things could get any worse*" (p. 124). But as the novel progresses, Ronnie falls totally in love with her new life.

Death Versus Life

Sparks indicates the importance of life so that all mankind realizes that life is not meaningless simply because death will somehow snatch one's life away. Sparks says, "*Life is much like a song. In the beginning there is a mystery, in the end, there is confirmation, but it is in the middle where all the emotion resides to make the whole thing worthwhile*" (p. 445). Sparks gives his perception and valuation of life by setting it against a backdrop of death. In most of his novels, Sparks dwells on the theme of death. It is most likely related to his real life in which several times he experienced the loss of a loved one. Kridler (2010) stated that Sparks' mother was killed at the age of 47 in a horseback-riding accident, his father died at the age of 54 in a wreck, and his sister at the age of 33 died of cancer. The tragedies he had gone through could have prompted him to pour his feelings about death into his writings. To support and accentuate the theme of death, Sparks portrays several death scenes: Steve's death, Steve's parents' death, and Mikey's death. To emphasize the theme of life, Sparks even depicts the birth of sea turtles and highlights the struggles of Mable, a female loggerhead turtle who survived to live in spite of all odds.

Steve's Death. Spark shares his thoughts through Steve about how people are scared to face death, and how they think of a thousand dark scenarios as death approaches. Steve receives his death sentence in February when he visits a doctor's office after giving his last piano lesson. The doctor says that he has stomach cancer and it has metastasized to his pancreas and lungs. Naturally, Steve wishes to live longer; however, he has little hope to survive. "*The oncologist was compassionate and yet was telling Steve that there was nothing he could do*" (p. 359). Knowing that his life is coming to an end, Steve dreaded to know the fact, "*But the memory of the doctor speaking the actual words began to recur in his mind, like an old-fashioned record skipping on a turntable. On the beach, he began to shake. He was scared and he was alone. Head lowered, he put his face into his hands and wondered why it had happened to him*" (p. 362).

Steve's Parents' Death. Sparks does not only picture the death of Steve but also that of Steve's parents in a flashback—about how they struggled with the disease. He illustrates how death affects the life of the family members who are left behind. Sparks narrates, "*Steve's mom passed away suddenly a few years after that encounter when an artery burst in her brain*" (p. 97). And Steve watches helplessly as his dad is dying a slow painful death because of stomach cancer. "*His cheeks were sunken, and his skin was translucent. Up close, Steve thought his father's breath smelled of decay, another sign the cancer was announcing its victory*" (p. 92). First, Sparks portrays Steve in a position to witness losing his loved ones to death, and afterward, Sparks portrays Steve in a position to face death himself.

Birth of Sea Turtles. Sea turtles are regarded as endangered animals; only one out of a thousand lives to maturity. Sea turtles lay their eggs at night (p. 126). Sparks depicts the miraculous birthing of sea turtles. Through their birth, Sparks emphasizes that life is amazing. Steve finds a nest of sea turtle eggs near the house and shows it to Jonah and Ronnie. The experience brings Ronnie closer to her father. Steve explains to Ronnie that sea turtles are beautiful creatures. They have a reddish-brown shells and they can weigh up to eight hundred pounds. They seldom hatch because usually the eggs are eaten by some raccoon. Raccoons can smell the urine of the female loggerhead turtle when she lays her eggs. Sparks highlights the sea turtle episode by situating a Sea Turtle Project at Wrightsville Beach. It is a place to rescue and rehabilitate endangered sea turtles.

The Life of Mable. Mable is a female loggerhead turtle at the Sea Turtle Project. "*She was hit by a boat propeller. She was rescued about a month ago, barely alive. A specialist had to amputate part of her front flipper*" (p. 159). It is a miracle that Mable lives long after what happened to her. She is stronger than she was before. Sparks includes the Mable incident to highlight the theme of death versus life. Sparks gives the idea that escaping death is a miracle to human beings. Sparks portrays Steve as he witnesses new life and stares death in the face at the same time: "*Now, on a dark night in August, baby turtles were skimming the surface of the ocean, and he was coughing up blood*" (p. 364). All humankind has to experience death. Somehow, someday death can suddenly snatch one's life. Sparks also wants to share the idea that human life is in danger as much the life of sea turtles; therefore, people need to take care of their life properly, and only through God can we ask blessings to live longer.

Adultery Versus Fidelity

Sparks spices up the story by presenting fidelity vis-a-vis adultery. The theme of fidelity versus adultery is common in romance stories. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is known for its adultery theme (Stovian. 2014). Sparks supports this theme by portraying two couples whose marriage ended because of adultery: Steve and Kim, and Blaze's parents. In contrast, he pictures two couples who remain faithful to each other against all odds: Steve's father and mother, and Tom and Susan.

Steve and Kim. Steve and Kim are Ronnie's and Jonah's father and mother. Their marriage ended when Steve found out that Kim was having an affair with another man. It is a pure coincidence that he sees Kim, dining with someone a few years older than she. Sad to say, he sees the man touch and kiss his wife. Steve does not know what to do. "*He could not remember feeling much of anything. . . So he shifted the small carry bag he'd packed the night before to his other hand, turned around, and headed back in the direction of Penn Station*" (p. 404). Sparks portrays Steve as, unlike most men who will confront the guy and make a scene in the restaurant. He does not explode with anger; he knows that his marriage is in trouble. He and Kim have gone through some counselling. Sparks narrates, "*Steve was uncomfortable; the counselling had been Kim's idea, and she'd already gone alone. This was their first joint session, and by way of introduction, she told the counsellor that Steve kept his feelings bottled up inside but that it wasn't his fault*" (p. 99). Deep inside Steve's heart, he did not want to divorce his wife; he just did not know how to express his feelings to Kim. But faced with his wife's affair, he slowly backs up from the marriage and returns to his hometown, leaving both his career and family behind.

Blaze's Parents. Blaze's mother and father, also divorced, have started moving on with their own lives with their respective new partners. Sparks illustrates through Blaze's viewpoint that living in a broken home is miserable. Blaze says, "*My dad lives with his girlfriend. This is his third one since the divorce, by the way, and she's the worst by far. She's only a few years older than I am and she dresses like a stripper. For all I know, she was a stripper. It makes me sick every time I have to go there*" (p. 41). Blaze does not like the partner of her mom either. "*She has a boyfriend, and he's at the house all the time. And he's a loser, too. He wears this ridiculous toupee because he went bald when he was like twenty or something, and he's always telling me that I want to think about giving college a try*" (p. 42). So it is not just Ronnie who becomes bitter and cynical about everything, it also happens to Blaze. Ever since the divorce, Blaze reasons a lot about everything and has become a different person. Sparks again shares the idea that children suffer the most when their parents get divorced. Since children cannot do anything about it, they become rebellious children.

Tom and Susan Blakee. Tom and Susan are Will's parents. Sparks describes how the Blakees had weathered hardships in their marriage and emerged strong and faithful to each other at all costs. They have been married for thirty years and had struggled to overcome all trials together. "*Through it all, they had loved each other well, celebrating their successes and supporting each other during the tragedy. Neither of them was perfect, but he'd grown up certain that they were a team, and eventually, he had absorbed that lesson*" (p. 238). Tom and Susan have built a strong foundation in their marriage to remain faithful. This strong bond brings meaning to Will, and he wishes to have such a marriage someday.

Steve's Parents. Another couple who remain loyal to each other is Steve's parents. Steve had good parents who never abused him and always took good care of him. They provided all of Steve's needs. "*He visited the dentist and doctor once or twice a year, there was always plenty to eat, and he always had a jacket on cold winter mornings and a nickel in his pocket so he could buy milk at school. But if his father was stoic, his mother was not all that different, and he supposed that was the reason they'd stayed married as long as they had*" (p. 114). There were times when Steve's father and mother would quarrel; however, they always tried to show respect to one another. Steve believes that his parents loved each other. "*They didn't argue and avoided conflict as a rule. They seemed to enjoy each other's company when they were together, and once, he had caught them holding hands while watching TV*" (p. 95). Sparks presented two divorced couples and two everlasting couples to support the theme. He wants to show how the parents' relationships affect the life of their children.

Distrust Versus Faith

Sparks is not just known for his tragic twists but also for his Christian themes. With the theme of distrust versus faith, Sparks wants to convey some contrasts between the faith of Ronnie and Steve. Ronnie is first portrayed as an individual who does not believe in God. She accuses her father of putting up a false façade as he turns to read his Bible. She is cynical when she finds out about her father's disease. She has set in her mind that nobody can escape from death. *"She didn't believe in miracles. She knew that some people did, but she couldn't force herself to think that her dad was somehow going to make it. Not after what she'd seen, not after the way the doctor had explained it. The cancer, she'd learned, had metastasized from his stomach to his pancreas and lungs, and holding out hope seemed . . . dangerous"* (p. 410). In contrast to Ronnie, Steve is depicted as a person who believes in God and always makes room for God's presence in his life. Sparks pictures Steve reading the Bible five times. *"Afterward, they settled in the living room, and sensing she wasn't in the mood to talk, her dad read his Bible while she read Anna Karenina"* (p. 139). *As Steve's cancer worsens, he turns to his Bible even more. "When her dad was awake, he was quieter now, content to read the Bible or walk slowly with her in silence"* (p. 418). When his condition does not permit him to read the Bible, he forces himself to communicate with God, praying for strength. *"Her dad continued to study his Bible, and sometimes he'd read a passage or verse aloud at her request"* (p. 421). What matters is not the number of times Steve reads the Bible, but the faith that Steve had toward his loving God. The idea of the theme, distrust versus faith, is to share with the readers that one cannot live without God's profound power. Someone may consider himself strong and powerful with no need for God, but when death is about to fetch him, he will call on God's name to pray for a miracle. In addition to this, Sparks pictures it in Ronnie as she sees her father about to enter the gate of death. *"She prayed fiercely for a miracle, a tiny one. And as though God himself were listening, it happened twenty minutes later"* (p. 440).

Alienation Versus Closeness

An alienated person is someone who separates himself from society and sees himself as superior to all others and so cannot relate to anyone. Moreover, alienated persons see other people as tools and use them for their own ends (Chibuikem, 2017). On the contrary, closeness is illustrated by someone who has a family-oriented mind, someone who loves being around family and friends, and someone who tends to be loyal to those he loves. Alienation versus closeness is another contradicting idea that Sparks wants to emphasize in the novel. He portrays alienation in the life of Marcus, Ronnie, and Steve. On the other hand, he uses Will to illustrate the idea of closeness.

Marcus. The readers probably think that Marcus holds a small role in the story; however, Sparks gives him special room to showcase a person who thinks that he is superior among all—superman. Marcus is a fireball showman. That is what he does to earn a living. *"Nine fireballs. Not all at the same time, of course; they normally used six in the course of a show. But adding one more here and there, something unexpected might be enough to raise the cash he needed"* (p. 328). Marcus always thinks of himself in terms of fire: strong and invincible, and no one can get close to him because of the heat of his power. *"There was nothing better; nothing made him higher than the power he felt with a lighter in his hands"* (p. 259). Believing so much in himself, Marcus never trusts anyone, he does not need anyone. *"He was better off without her. He didn't need her. He didn't need anyone . . ."* (p. 260).

Ronnie. In the novel, Ronnie is initially pictured as an alienated individual. She alienates herself from her family, creating a different life for herself by becoming gothic and rebellious, just to express the anger in her heart. She has no good communication with her parents, especially her

father who left them three years ago. Most of the time, she spends her nights at clubs, breaking the curfew her mother has set. She always clashes with Jonah, like a cat with a dog. She tends to skip classes and misses every single question on SATs. All of which are outward manifestations of her deep-seated anger.

Steve. Aside from Marcus and Ronnie, Steve has also alienated himself from his family. Finding out about his wife's affair, he makes a decision to return to his childhood town and solitude, leaving his family behind and living all by himself in the oldest bungalow at Wrightsville Beach. He spends his time working on stained-glass windows for one of the churches in Wrightsville Beach.

Will. In contrast to Marcus, Ronnie, and Steve, Will is depicted as a person who is loyal, and who loves being around family and friends. Will is a smart guy *"and more than that, he seemed to be doing something with his life. He worked, he volunteered, he was a pretty good athlete; he even got along with his family"* (p. 170). Through the character of Will, Sparks shares his idea that humans cannot live alone. A basic human need is to love and to be loved. As the song goes, *"People who need people are the happiest people in the world."* Conversely, those who alienate themselves from others for whatever reason are the most miserable.

Poverty Versus Wealth

Will is born into a wealthy family and lives in an exclusive world. By dint of hard work, the Blakees have become millionaires, owners of a lot of business companies. Aside from being wealthy, the Blakees are a closely-knit family. Ronnie, unlike Will, comes from a broken family, with a father who works part-time as a piano teacher and spends most of his time making stained glass, and a mother who works as a paralegal at a Wall Street law firm. When Ronnie first finds out the truth about Will's family, she feels uncomfortable being with him, unsure whether Will really likes her. She feels out of place when she visits the Blakee's residence. *"Did she belong in a place like this?"* (p. 301). The relationship between Will and Ronnie is disapproved by Will's mother, Susan Blakee. Susan categorized Ronnie as low class. *"Will, honey . . . don't you get that she's not good enough for you? You've got your whole future ahead of you, and the last thing you need in your life is someone like her. I've been waiting for you to figure it out on your own, but obviously, you're too emotionally involved to see the obvious. She's not good for you. She's low-class. Low! Class!"* (p. 317). Susan wants her son to be with someone like Ashley, who is *"beautiful and rich"* (p. 238). Social status appears to block Ronnie's relationship with Will. Sparks makes it clear that the poor and the rich belong to different worlds; however, there is a way to bridge the two worlds.

Illusion Versus Reality

At the beginning of the story, Ronnie is under the illusion that Steve had betrayed his family, that Steve left the family because he had an affair with another woman. She thinks it was her mom who had suffered betrayal from her dad. Eventually, however, Ronnie finds out the truth, which was the other way around: It was her mother who had betrayed her father. It was her mother who had an affair with another man. *"The realization hit Ronnie with an almost physical force. Her mom had the affair, not her dad. And . . ."* (p. 401). All the bad things she had in mind about her dad vanished suddenly. She realizes that Steve had allowed her to think that way so that she will not hate her own mother. It is her father who had sacrificed his feelings for the sake of her mother's happiness. At this point, Ronnie's hatred toward her father turns into love. Another illusion that does not match reality is Ronnie's experience with Blaze. Through this theme, Sparks craves to communicate to his readers that it is so easy to be mistaken concerning people's illusions, impressions, or ideas about someone or something we encounter for the first time. Through this

theme, he invites his readers to be careful in making judgments or conclusions about people and things.

The thematic value of Sparks' *The Last Song* has underscored generalizations of the human condition that are drawn from the resolution of the conflicts. The scope of his fiction is relevant to real life. He intends to accentuate that life is a package of surprises. Life revolves around evil and good. Finally, Sparks is trying to convey to his readers that in life people need to sift the good from the bad; and that sometimes, they need to accept both as a part of life.

This is a tubular summary of *the emerging themes in the novel 'The Last Song'*:

Table 1. Themes of *The Last Song*

Theme	Generalizations	Generalizations
Hatred Vs Love	a) Ronnie b) Steve	Love conquers hatred.
Death Vs Life	a) Steve b) Steve's Parents c) Mikey d) Sea Turtles e) Mable	Death is the common experience of all humankind.
Adultery Vs Fidelity	a) Steve and Kim b) Blaze's Parents c) Steve's Parents d) Tom and Susan	A broken family can ruin the lives or personalities of the children.
Distrust Vs Faith	a) Ronnie b) Steve	God's presence restores faith.
Alienation Vs Closeness	a) Marcus b) Ronnie c) Steve c) Will	Human beings are social creatures. Being with family, friends, and God help one to cope with life.
Poverty Vs Wealth	a) Will b) Ronnie	Poverty is not a hindrance to success.
Illusion Vs Reality	a) Ronnie	What people have in mind is not always the same as the reality.

Elements of Sparks' Writing Style

Style is one of the things that need to be considered in literary works as a means of understanding the writing (Brainard, 2009; Torralba-Perez, 2001). Every writer or author has his or her own creative techniques. And to understand more about style, stylistics should also be understood because stylistics is the study of style. According to Simpson (2004), "Stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language" (p. 2). In this section, the

researcher will detail the elements of Sparks' writing style as evinced in his novel. In the exploration of Sparks' written language, the following elements of language were considered: figurative language, syntax/sentence fluency, diction/choice of words, point of view, types of discourse, and plot devices.

Figurative Language

Writers employ figurative language to add to the imaginative power of words (Serrano & Ames, 2009). Sparks utilizes several figures of speech to make his writing more powerful. These are rhetorical questions, onomatopoeia, simile, idiom, personification, metaphor, hyperbole, and symbol.

Sound of Music Versus Sound of Silence. The title of the novel is *The Last Song*; thus, it has a connection with music. The instrument that Sparks employs is the piano. Steve is portrayed as a music professor in Julliard. He also holds concerts in different cities. Music has always been his passion; whenever he feels lonely, playing the piano is his way to escape the lonesome feeling. Sparks says, *"By that point in his life, the piano had become an obsession, and Steve would often practice for four to six hours a day, lost in his own world of melody and composition"* (p. 190). For Steve *"music had always been a movement away from reality rather than a means of living in it more deeply"* (p. 17), *"without music he felt aimless and adrift"* (p. 194), and *"he had written music throughout much of his life"* (p. 195). Music stands for joy and happiness, and silence stands for sorrow, pain, and indifference. Again, these are the common experiences of mankind. This is a tabular summary of the figures of speech used by Sparks in the novel.

Table 2. *Figures of Speech*

No.	Elements	Number of Times Used
1.	Rhetorical Questions	36
2.	Onomatopoeia	32
3.	Simile	17
4.	Idiom	24
5.	Personification	18
6.	Metaphor	13
7.	Hyperbole	5
8.	Symbol	8

Syntax/Sentence Fluency

Experienced writers know how to vary their sentences in order to make their writing more interesting and lively (Lynne & Lli, 2009). Good writing reads fluently and pleasurably. The principal focus of attention thus far in this study has been figurative language. In this section, the focus shifts to the syntax or the structure of Sparks' sentences. The syntax is a significant feature to consider when analyzing the style of a writer (Tallerman, 2005). The two aspects of sentence fluency that were treated in the study are sentence type and sentence length. The novel consists of 37 chapters, excluding the prologue and the epilogue. To analyze the syntactic structure of Sparks' narrative technique, the researcher chose the three longest chapters (35, 26, and 13) and the three shortest chapters (36, 7, and 22) as the basis for the analysis. Furthermore, the sentences considered for the analysis are just narrative sentences, excluding the dialogue. The following is a tabular summary of Sparks' Syntax/Sentence Fluency.

Table 3. Syntax/Sentence Fluency - The Three Longest Chapters

Chapters	Average Sentence Length	Sentence Types	No. of Times Used
35	16.4	a) Simple	149
		b) Complex	73
		c) Compound	117
		d) Compound-Complex	118
		e) Fragments	2
26	16	a) Simple	152
		b) Complex	51
		c) Compound	103
		d) Compound-Complex	72
		e) Fragments	14
13	14	a) Simple	122
		b) Complex	18
		c) Compound	47
		d) Compound-Complex	34
		e) Fragments	2

Syntax/Sentence Fluency - The Three Shortest Chapters

Chapter	Average Sentence Length	Sentence Types	No. of Times Used
36	23 words	a) Simple	1
		b) Complex	1
		c) Compound	3
		d) Compound-Complex	4
		e) Fragments	-
7	15.1	a) Simple	10
		b) Complex	5
		c) Compound	10
		d) Compound-Complex	3
		e) Fragments	3
22	13	a) Simple	22
		b) Complex	12
		c) Compound	5
		d) Compound-Complex	7
		e) Fragments	10

Diction/Choice of Words

Writers write to express, not to impress (Spandel, 2009); therefore, they have to be able to choose their words in order to establish their tone or voice (Stanford, 2006; DiYanni, 2001), and to make

their words clear and accurate to their readers (Serrano & Ames, 2009). Good diction shows a mastery of the fundamentals of the language--grammar, pronunciation, or orthography (Bautista, 2007). In the exploration of Sparks' choice of words, the following elements of diction were considered: Diegesis and Mimesis, powerful verbs, verbalization, and compounded adjectives

Powerful Verbs. The use of power-packed verbs is one technique which Sparks harnesses to energize his mimetic mode, to make the "showing" more convincing. By means of powerful verbs, the reader is not just told, he is empowered to see for himself, hear for himself, smell for himself, and taste for himself. Powerful verbs are verbs that do not need any adverbial modifiers because they have built-in modifiers; they add life and interest to writers' sentences (Montgomery & Rainey, 2009). There are at least 50 such verbs in the novel which may be grouped under generic verbs such as *walking, looking, saying or talking, taking, and sitting*. Generic verbs are lazy verbs; they are waiting for adverbial modifiers to energize them. Power-packed verbs are bursting with energy because they have built-in modifiers.

Verbalization. Verbalization is yet another technique used by Sparks to further energize his mimetic mode. Verbalization is the practice of changing nouns into verbs. An example is: He *caught fish* from the brook—He *fished* in the brook. In the original sentence *fish* is a noun used as the direct object of the verb *caught*. In the second sentence, *fish* has become the verb of the sentence. There are at least 32 instances of verbalization that this researcher found in Sparks' novel.

Compounded Adjectives. The use of compounded adjectives is perhaps Sparks' defining style. It is his unique way of foregrounding. Foregrounding, according to Simpson (2004), refers to a "form of textual patterning which is motivated specifically for literary-aesthetic purposes" (p. 50). Sparks' compounded adjectives, among others, constitute his textual strategy to develop his characters and images for stimulating the minds of his readers. Adjectives are used to describe something—to modify a noun or pronoun (Montgomery & Rainey, 2009); it provides colour to any descriptions (Parrott, 2000). While compound adjectives are not a novel idea, Sparks is fond of using original, compounded adjectives of sometimes three or more words to make his sentences intriguing, sometimes hilarious, and fresh. There are about 55 such compounded adjectives found in the novel.

The following is a tabular summary of Sparks' diction or choice of words:

Table 4. *Diction/Choice of Words*

No.	Elements	Number Used
1.	Powerful Verbs:	22
	a) Verbs of Walking	10
	b) Verbs of Looking	8
	c) Verbs of Saying or Talking	5
	d) Verbs of Taking	5
	e) Verbs of Sitting	50
	Total	
2.	Verbalization	33
3.	Compounded Adjectives	55

Point of View

Point of view is sometimes called angle or focus of narration. Morrison (2006) states, “Choosing a point of view for a particular story can be a matter of intuition” (p. 99). Writers of a novel should be aware of choosing their point of view, because it is through point of view the readers see the action, thought, and speech of the characters. They need sharp eyes to understand the details of their characters’ world (Hewings & Hewings 2005). Sparks utilizes the subjective-third-person point of view—in this point of view, the narrator knows what his character observes and feels internally and externally (Morrison, 2006). And the narrator makes the reader privy to everything that he knows and feels. But in this novel, Sparks does not limit the subjective-third-person point of view to only one character. Sparks writes his story in thirty-seven chapters. There are four main characters in the novel: Ronnie, Steve, Will, and Marcus. Sparks skillfully enters the mind of these four characters, shifting from one character to another. Chapters are titled for the viewpoint character. Sparks enters Ronnie’s mind 17 times, in chapters 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 26, 29, 31, 33, 35 and 37. Sparks enters Steve’s mind for eight times, in chapters 2, 9, 11, 16, 25, 30, 34, and 36. Sparks also enters Will’s mind for eight times, in chapters 5, 7, 13, 18, 20, 23, 28, and 32. Sparks, inside Will’s mind, narrates Will’s impressions and feelings toward Ronnie. Will is portrayed thinking about Ronnie, wondering what Ronnie thought of him. The antecedent of the subject pronoun 'he' and the object pronoun 'he' is Will. Sparks enters Marcus’ mind in four chapters, chapters 4, 15, 22, and 27. Marcus is the antagonist in the novel. Sparks applies the name of the viewpoint character as the title of the chapter. Hence, his readers will easily know that the narrator is in the mind of the title character. This technique provides an express lane for his readers to better observe the internal world of his characters. Sparks has greater freedom as he employs subjective third-person point of view, willing his readers to connect with the characters. Through this point of view, he gives full power to his readers to imagine the feelings and even the appearances of his characters, because there are times that writers do not convey the physical appearance of their characters; they focus more on their characters’ internal world.

Types of Discourse

This is the area wherein writers present the speeches and thought processes of their characters in a narrative voice (Silvia & Beaty, 2012). There are four main types of discourse: Direct Discourse (DD), Indirect Discourse (ID), Free Direct Discourse (FDD), and Free Indirect Discourse (FID).

Direct Discourse (DD). Direct discourse is the prime means of characterization; lending an air of verisimilitude in order to increase variety in a text (Black, 2006). It remains in the present tense which is the normal choice for our expression of current actions and reactions (Toolan, 2001). Direct discourse refers to the use of dialogue; it is usually marked by quotation marks in order to set it apart from the narrative text. Dialogue moves the story forward (Hudson & LeClair, 2004). A prolific writer, Sparks makes his characters come to life with dialogue. His dialogues are suitable for the personality and background of the people who are speaking. Sparks’ direct discourse or dialogue may be grouped into categories, some of which are: scintillating, intense-scintillating, intense, romantic, and emotional. The following is an excerpt of scintillating discourse:

Steve: “I hear you are not playing soccer this fall.”

Jonah: “I’m not very good at it.”

Steve: “So what? It is fun, right?”

Jonah: “Not when other kids make fun of you.”

Steve: “They make fun of you?”

Jonah: “It’s okay. It does not bother me”

Steve: “Ah”

Jonah: “Ronnie did not read of the letters you sent her, Dad. And she will not play the piano anymore, either.”

Steve: "I know"

Jonah: "Mom says it is because she has PMS"

Steve: "Do you even know what it means?"

Jonah : "I'm not a little kid anymore. It means pissed-at-men-syndrome"

Indirect Discourse (ID). Indirect discourse is also known as reported speech. All the forms of indirect discourse are characterized by the back-shifting of tense in the reported clause; therefore, the present tense becomes the past tense and the past perfect, while the present continuous becomes the past continuous (Black, 2006). Indirect discourse is indicated with the word 'say' or 'tell'. Writers must be aware of using indirect discourse in their writing; too much use of indirect discourse will make the writing tedious. While direct discourse emphasizes the showing mode, indirect discourse is more on the telling mode. Sparks employs very little indirect discourse in his novel. There are about ten instances of indirect discourses found in the novel.

- a) "The oncologist was compassionate and yet was telling Steve that there was nothing he could do" (p. 360). The idea of this indirect discourse is that Steve is recalling what the oncologist has said to him about his disease. The word 'tell' is noted as the indication that the writer utilizes indirect discourse, used in a continuous form.
- b) "Later, he answered her questions. He told her about his father and the history of cancer in his family, he told her about the pains he had begun to feel as the New Year rolled in. He told her that radiation was not an option, because the disease was present in so many of his organs" (p. 368). Sparks employs the word 'tell', using the past form 'told'. Sparks is just reporting what one character said to another character, instead of using dialogue to narrate what his character exactly says.

Free Direct Discourse (FDD). Free direct discourse is similar to direct discourse; however, free direct discourse is not marked by quotation marks. FDD is more like a monologue, or a mental dialogue. The character speaks to himself, in his or her mind (Silvia & Beaty, 2012). Writers employ free direct discourse to accentuate what the characters think in their minds. Sparks seems fond of using free direct discourse in his writing; there are about 33 instances of free direct discourse in the novel.

- a) "In her mind, she could already hear the conversation. *Hey sweetie, how did it go? Not too well. Blaze is completely under the spell of a manipulative sociopath, and lied at the cops this morning, so I'm going to jail. And by the way? The sociopath not only decided he wants to sleep with me, but he followed me and practically scared me to death. How did your day go?*" (p. 138). The italicized statements constitute the FDD. The character creates the dialogue in her mind; it is her thought; it is not stated aloud.
- b) "She froze, staring down at her shirt in disbelief. *You've got to be kidding*" (p. 36). The FDD (in italics) flows freely with the character's thoughts, actions and utterances, revealing the personality of the character.

Free Indirect Discourse (FID). Free indirect discourse allows the author to embed the voice of the character into the voice of the narrator. Free indirect discourse involves the elements of indirect discourse. The readers need to have knowledge of who the narrator is and of how or why the characters create specific thoughts. Sparks also utilizes free indirect discourse in the novel; there are about 15 instances of free indirect discourse found in his writing.

- (1) "Besides, he wasn't really angry at Blaze. Hell, when he had first heard what she had done, he had been kind of pleased about it, thinking it might smooth the road between him and

Ronnie. *You scratch my back; I scratch yours, that kind of thing*” (p. 185). The italicized portion contains the free indirect discourse. It could be the narrator or the character who says: *You scratch my back; I scratch yours, that kind of thing*. And it could be the reader or another character who is being addressed.

- (2) “He watched her rise from her spot and grabbed the bottle of lighter fluid. *Good. At least she was working a little to earn her keep*” (p. 328).

Sparks accommodates all his actions, thoughts, and speech in a profound package to intrigue the minds of his readers. The following table presents a numerical summary of the types of discourse Sparks used in the novel.

Table 5. Types of Discourse

No.	Type of Discourse	Number of Times Used
1.	Direct Discourse	18
	a) Scintillating Dialogue	15
	b) Intense-Scintillating dialogue	30
	c) Intense Dialogue	8
	d) Romantic Dialogue	28
	e) Emotional Dialogue	
2.	Indirect Discourse	10
3.	Free Direct Discourse	33
4.	Free Indirect Discourse	15

Plot Devices

Writers use a variety of devices to develop and advance the plot of their stories. Three of these are flashbacks, foreshadowing, and chronological order. These are the devices Sparks utilizes to tell his story.

Flashback. Flashback is a device to present events or episodes that happened earlier before the current narration in the fiction. He cautions writers using the flashback device because it could result in awkwardness. Sparks have proven himself adept in the use of flashback. Five of his books--*The Notebook*, *A Walk to Remember*, *Nights in Rodanthe*, *A Message in the Bottle*, and *Dear John*-- also utilize flashbacks extensively. In the prologue, Sparks opens with a scene that takes place after the events in the story proper; however, the same prologue contains a flashback to the fire, an event that took place before the events in the story proper. And then the whole story (Chapters 1-37) is told in flashback (Cruz et al., 2004).

Foreshadowing. While flashback tells the reader what happened in the past, foreshadowing gives a hint of what will happen in the future. It is believed that truly good writers utilize foreshadowing in order to give hints or clues to the readers about what will be happening later.

Chronological Order. Sparks employs all the plot devices in his writing; although he uses flashback as the main device for telling the story, most of the flashback is done in chronological order. The story ends in an epilogue, which is written in chronological order—portraying the events that took place after the events.

Implications for Literary Appreciation

Literature is made up of language (Watson & Zyngier, 2007). It is a work that involves thought and feelings (DiYanni, 2001). The beauty of literature impacts its readers. Literature writers accentuate a deep meaning of life through their literary works. It goes without saying that it is impossible for someone to appreciate something he or she is not familiar with. To develop an appreciation for literature, a person must first read works of literature. Appreciation comes as the natural consequence of acquaintance with and understanding a literary work. Sparks' *The Last Song* is a novel, a fictional prose narrative that is considered one form of literature.

Enhancing the Enjoyment of Literature

There are two main theories regarding the function and purpose of literature (or art), each sitting at the opposite ends of a continuum. One of these is the theory of didacticism. This theory holds that the main purpose of literature is to solve the problems of society; hence literature must instruct and provide guidance on how people should behave (Widdowson, 1975). The other theory is aestheticism, which holds that the main purpose of literature (or art) is to provide pleasure; hence literature must be enjoyable to read. This study is conducted on the basis of the theory of aestheticism—the purpose of literature is to provide pleasure. For many people, reading in itself is a pleasure. The pleasure is enhanced if the material read is inherently interesting because of its story. Not all literature gives enjoyment to the reader, but one will always find plenty of literature to enjoy. Therefore, it is essential to read widely with the purpose to find what is enjoyable. Once the enjoyment settles, appreciation comes in. Some stories are written in veiled terms and their meanings are not readily seen or understood; however, they can give powerful resources for learning. Such stories may turn off the average reader, but these are the kinds of stories that give greater pleasure to the serious reader.

Reading a critique, interpretation, or analysis of the work in question could serve as the initiation. If no written critique or interpretation is available, hearing someone give an evaluation of the piece will serve the same purpose (Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005). There will be different ways of looking at or interpreting a literary piece. One may or may not always agree with someone's interpretation, which implies that one has his or her own way of interpreting or analyzing the work (Matsumura, Correnti, & Wang, 2015). The very act of analyzing, interpreting or critiquing a work of literature leads to a better understanding of the work. As soon as a deeper and wider understanding dawns on the reader, the pleasure deriving from the work is enhanced (Manyak, & Manyak, 2021). Literary study is one way to enhance literary appreciation—a step further from just reading to enjoying. It involves analyzing, critiquing, interpreting, and evaluating a literary work. But it requires certain skills and background information to be able to do it: close and systematic reading, reading between the lines, knowledge of literary devices and story elements, and intuition, to name a few. One must have the knowledge and understanding of what the literature is all about, what it means, and how it has been put together in order to fully enjoy it.

Developing a Passion for Literature

The more a person reads, the better the understanding; the better the understanding, the greater the appreciation; the greater the appreciation, the deeper the passion. Possessed with a deep passion for literature, one cannot help but share the joy and beauty of literature study with others, causing them to fall in love with literature. Passion cannot be taught, but it is caught. It is contagious. Those who are still searching for something to enjoy will be most vulnerable. With the proper motivation, they will find value in literature, appreciate it, and cherish it forever. Sparks has helped to inculcate a passion for literature in this researcher's heart. Reading his books has been a source of abiding joy. It is this researcher's desire to help others

see the beauty of literature and develop a passion for it. The first step could very well be reading Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song*.

Implications for Creative Writing

Reading Sparks' novel *The Last Song* opens a 'creativity process' for readers. By exploring Sparks' themes and writing style, this researcher was able to get a good grasp of the process of creativity. Creative writing is basically defined as the power to create an imaginative and original literary production (Ramet, 2001). The literary excitement resides in creative writing because the readers participate in the world that is created by the writers (Bautista, August 2005). This view of creative writing involves commitment and conscious work. Hence, the following are the implications for creative writing that can be drawn from this study:

Practice Creative Reading

Creative reading means to read by utilizing the imagination. It is also to train the eye to become aware of writers' use of language (Harper, 2014)). It is the gateway to the world of creative writing. Writing and reading share the same world of language (Morley, 2007). It also creates a discipline in the readers' minds that helps them to immerse deeply in the writers' world of words. They will have a phenomenological experience of words (Morrison, 2006). By reading lots of healthy literature the readers will explore more the functions, meaning and values of writing (Beck & McKeown, 2001). The readers are involved directly in the language world of the writer. Creatively reading Sparks' literary writings means exploring the language of Sparks.

Think Critically and Analytically

Creative reading also helps readers to be experienced readers, because being experienced readers is to be able to make sense of the reading. Practicing creative reading will trigger readers to think analytically and critically (Hicks, 2007; Swander, & Cantrell, 2007). Thinking critically and analytically helps in the organization of written work. Hence, as a person becomes a creative reader, he or she will naturally develop into a better writer (Harper, 2010). Sparks' writing gives ideas to creative readers to become creative writers. They read Sparks' writing without having Sparks sitting next to them, explaining everything; such as his themes, his style of writing, his thoughts, and so forth. Vividly known, writers write and leave everything to their readers.

Write Pictorially and Aurally

To write pictorially and aurally is to write words, phrases and sentences that appeal to the readers' senses of seeing and hearing, to create images that could be seen as well as heard. Pictorial writing involves the use of the mimetic mode (showing) and does not rely solely on the Diegetic mode (telling). Pictorial writing involves description, the use of powerful verbs, and the use of concrete, specific nouns. Aural writing involves onomatopoeia, which means choosing words that approximate the sound that is being described. Writing is an art, and art is a form of self-expression (Wells, et.al., 2018). Pictorial and aural writing will help students develop their watching and listening skills (Ramet, 2001). In his writing, Sparks tries to involve his readers to be able to see with their minds' eyes the movement of the story and hear the voices of his characters. Sparks' literary writing is a useful tool to give readers pictorial details of the characters and settings and aural skill to hear their discourses in the imaginative world. By reading Sparks' novel, the readers will learn to bring their writing to life and obtain crucial ingredients to portray their characters. Sparks' *The Last Song* also contains themes that contradict one another and yet stimulate the minds of his readers to imagine using their minds'

eyes and ears. Sparks has successfully woven the story in such an intriguing way. Every chapter of Sparks' novel contains movements to bring the story to life.

Fictionalize a True-to-Life Story

Creative writing involves imagination and creativity, however, many works of the imagination are based on actual life experiences (Harper, 2010; Swander, & Cantrell, 2007). Sparks harnesses his sensory perception, direct life experiences and memories to bring the story to life. Sparks grew up in Wilmington—a town where Wrightsville is located. His novel is set in Wrightsville Beach; it is not an imaginary place—this place exists. It is clearly seen how fluently Sparks describes Wrightsville Beach. Most novels by Sparks are relevant to his true life experiences. Readers can also follow what Sparks has done to create his novel by bringing direct experiences and memories of life into the story. Sparks experienced a series of death events in his life, and in almost all of his novels, the theme of death is found. His mother was killed at the age of 47 in a horseback-riding accident, his father died at the age of 54 in a wreck, and his sister at the age of 33 died of cancer. The tragic events evoke the expression of his emotions by putting them as a theme in his writings (Kidler, 2010). Sparks' novel *Dear John* tells a story about an autistic child and an autistic father. In his real life, Sparks has an autistic child; hence, it is easy for him to portray a character suffering from autism. Sparks communicates his feelings to his readers by fictionalizing his true-life stories. Aspiring writers might be able to create their own literary works by fictionalizing their true-to-life stories; it will be relatively easier for the writer to weave the story since it is based on a real-life experience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to give in-depth insights for English learners to enhance their creative writing skills, and gain familiarity with story elements and literary devices with the purpose to increase the number of words they may include in writing and developing their writing fluency. Wang (2021) states that creative writing is prevalently applied in both EFL and ESL classroom settings. There is ample research on creative writing in EFL/EFL education that demonstrates positive impacts on developing learners' writing skills. Therefore, promoting creative writing skills is a good way to encourage learners to be alert to writing stages, understand the concept of identifying theme, style, word/sentence lengths, development of character discourses as well as figurative language. Therefore, the stylistic and thematic analysis of Spark's *The Last Song* help activates learners' cognitive, linguistic and cultural aspect in their minds.

When the results of the study were analyzed, it was observed that learning literary elements and literary devices provide certain techniques in developing creative writing skills. Additionally, this study drew some literary implications of creative writing which may enable learners to challenge themselves to read a variety of creative writings and develop their stories in written form. As a person develops his or her reading and writing skills, vocabulary growth will follow. With a larger vocabulary, the person may understand different kinds of reading easily and will be able to express his or her thoughts more accurately and clearly in his or her writings. Reading Sparks' writing helps readers to build their vocabulary (Miralpeix & Munoz, 2018). Through creative writing, English learners are able to deepen their understanding by training themselves on how certain words (Lou & Xu, 2016). Individuals with advanced creative writing skills have advanced language acquisition namely grammar and vocabulary compare to other individuals (Çetin & Çetin, 2021). Hence this study is deemed to help learners make aware of the choices they make in their own writing.

The findings of the study show that the controversy between good and evil is the superordinate theme of Sparks' novel which is specifically delineated as binary oppositions: Hatred Vs Love, Death Vs Life, Adultery Vs Fidelity, Distrust Vs Faith, Alienation Vs Closeness, Poverty Vs Wealth, and Illusion Vs Reality. In the manner of style, Sparks has chosen different specific strategies and techniques to develop and accentuate his theme. He exhibits dexterity in the use of figurative language. His choice of words and point of view is admirable. His dialogue is impeccable. He utilizes all three plot devices: flashback, foreshadowing and chronological order. He uses a variety of sentence types and keeps his sentences short. In short, his writing contains all the elements of what may be considered an effective style. Reading, analyzing and interpreting Sparks' *The Last Song* has not only been a source of abiding joy to this researcher but has also given rise to implications for both literary appreciation and creative writing. The findings have laid writing prompts for learners to enhance their creative writing.

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