

Linguistic Peculiarities of Poetry in Contemporary English

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ABSTRACT

The article provides detailed analysis which reveals the ways to carefully manage to balance the structure of contemporary poetry with the intended meaning. The research provides space for a simultaneousness of contemporary poetry and its linguistic peculiarities which are melded in the tension between poetic form and explicit meaning, within which the modern poets create and assert their voice. While conveying the research we discovered that poem is a peculiar composition. At first glance, the reader recognizes the traditionally 'poetic' text as such by its line breaks, stanzas, and perhaps rhymes. Later, however, poetry in contemporary English did not meet with the same level of appreciation from the public. We analyzed the linguistic peculiarities of contemporary poetry and drew conclusions according to our findings.

Keywords: poetry, contemporary poetry, composition, explicit meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words, said Robert Frost. Human beings are never devoid of emotions and some have the wit to express them in words. The beauty created when words put together is remarkable. Thus Edgar Allan Poe said, "Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words." Poetry in its form has evolved over the years. This paper throws light on prose poetry; its definition, historical origin and how different it is from other poetry. Poetry is a genre of literature which is different from other genres because it is more musical, more imaginative and more figurative. There are different forms of poetry. Some of them are lyric, ballad, sonnet, elegy, ode, dramatic monologue, epic etc. Johnson defines poetry as the art of "uniting pleasure with truth by recalling imagination to the help of reason". Hudson considers poetry as an "interpretation of life through imagination and feelings".

MATERIALS AND DISCUSSIONS

Poetry is a type of literature in which sounds and meanings of language are combined to create ideas and feelings. For Wordsworth, poetry is the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility”. Poetry is not an “assertion of truth, but the making of that truth more fully real to us”. Robert Frost assumes that poetry provides the one “permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another”. Poetry does not normally follow a traditional way of grammar. It accepts new forms. Widdowson views poetry to be characterized as “deviating from the norms of language.” It has been argued that poetry frequently breaks the rules of language, but by doing so, it “communicates with us in a fresh, original way”. When it comes to major qualities of poetry it is a special kind of word game which includes a blending of musical and linguistic dimensions. Sounds and senses move together in poetry. Some major qualities of poetry are given below. Musical quality of poetry is a kind of musical word game. Musical quality in poetry can be realized through alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhythm, rhyme, onomatopoeia and so on. Wales asserts that alliteration is the “repetition of the initial consonant in two or more words”. It is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of the stressed words in the same line or adjacent lines of verse: *Full fathom five thy father lies.* (William Shakespeare: *The Tempest*) In the above poetic line, the consonant sound "f" is repeated at the beginning of the words full, fathom, five, and father. Alliteration does not only link related words, but it also provides musical effects. It reinforces the meaning and makes the expression emphatic and emotive. Abrams defines assonance as “the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds –especially in stressed syllable in a sequence of nearby words”.

He clasps the crag with crooked hands, Close to the sun in lonely lands; Ringed with the azure world, he stands. Tennyson. *The Eagle*.

In the above poetic line, the same vowel sound "æ" is repeated in the words clasps, crag and hands. Similarly, there is a repetition of the diphthong "əʊ" in the words close and lonely. Assonance produces a particular effect of euphony. It is usually used within a line of poetry for unity and a rhythmic effect. Consonance Cuddon considers consonance as the “close repetition of the identical consonant sounds before and after different vowel sounds”. Consonance is the

repetition of the consonant sound in the words before or after different vowel sounds, and such a repetition often occurs in the middle or at the end of the words:

So tired, so thirsty, so hungry and so sad, Ten lean boys sat on a bench under a fan.

Sharma: Boys under a Fan

In the above poetic, the consonant sound "n" is repeated at the end of the words ten, lean and fan with their different vowel sounds e, i: and æ respectively.

Life is not a blank slide, It falls down heavily. Sharma: Life's fall

In this line, the consonant sound l is repeated in the words "blank" and "slide" before different vowel sounds æ and a respectively.

Rhythm is the pattern of the stressed and unstressed syllables which make the flow of pleasing sound in prose or verse line. Wales considers rhythm as "the perceptual pattern of accented and unaccented syllables in a language". Regular rhythm is created by the regular appearance of the stressed and unstressed syllables:

We think our fathers fools so wise we grow; Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.

Alexander Pope: An Essay on Criticism

In the above poetic lines, the unstressed syllable is followed by the stressed syllable to form an iambic meter that intensifies the sadness. It makes the readers meditate.

Rhyme Harmon opines rhyme as "the identity of terminal sound between accented syllables, usually occupying corresponding positions in two or more lines of verse". Rhyme refers to the identical sounds generally at the end of verse lines:

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright In the forest of the night. William Blake: The Tyger

In the above poetic lines "bright" and "night" are the rhymed words. It supports meanings and creates harmonious effect. It makes the readers easy to memorize the poems.

The playful quality of poetry involves playing with words and their meanings. Poetry is a means of expressing the poet's feelings in various playful ways as in the following poetic lines:

How frail is our uncertain breath! The laundress seems full hale, but death Shall her 'last linen' bring; The groom will die, like all his kind; And even the stable boy will find This life no stable thing. Thomas Hood: Uncertain Breath

Here, the word "stable" is used in a playful way. It is used twice but it is used for two different meanings. One is "working at a stable" and another is as "constant".

Poetry has an expressive quality. Poetry can be used to express the poet's feelings, ideas, emotions, and desire in a fewer words in a better way:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty." –that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

John Keats: Ode on a Grecian Urn

In these lines, great ideas are expressed by using a very few words. The things which are beautiful in imagination are true, and that truth is beauty. We all need to know this essence while we are alive on earth. It reminds us of Hindu philosophy "Satyam Shivam Sundaram".

The emotive quality of the poetry is its power to produce feelings and emotions in a reader. It is an impulse that stirs the heart of the reader:

Decorated by the beauty of spring Velvety as a flower Soft as feather Your cheeks I feel like caressing always. Your graceful cheeks Adorned by rosy-ness and the blushes that spring up I feel like cupping them with love Falling drop by drop into my hands. And I feel like migrating to the mole of your cheek popping up like a centre of gravitation for the whole of my life Oblivious, unconscious. Jaya Chhangchha: As Soft as a Flower

This poem provokes a sort of passionate and emotive feeling in the reader. Such a feeling dwells deep in the young hearts.

Poetry is rich in a meditative dimension. The meditative quality of poetry makes the reader think deeply on something:

And you, O my Soul, where you stand, surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space, Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,-seeking the spheres, to connect them; Till the bridge you will need, be form'd-till the ductile anchor hold; Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul. Walt Whitman: A Noiseless Patient Spider

The question of the relation between linguistic material and aesthetic significance is considered in a positive light by Stankiewicz (1960): "Poetic organization is completely embedded in language and is fully determined by its possibilities" (p. 70). The linguist is not a mere technician. Jakobsen (1960) states his view of the language -literature relation in strong terms: "If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself · a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unversant

with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms" (p. 377). The important point is that the inadequacy of conventional critical methods may be overcome by the linguistic analysis of poetry. Rifaterre (1964) sums up the function of linguistics in criticism as follows: "The conventional study of literature is inadequate to describe literary style per se, because (1) there is no immediate connection between the history of literary ideas and the forms in which they are manifest; (2) critics are misled in trying to use formal analysis only to confirm or infirm their aesthetic evaluations - what is needed is a statement of existence, not a value judgment; (3) the intuitive perception of the relevant components of a literary utterance is insufficient to obtain a linguistically definable segmentation of the verbal sequence" (p. 316). On the one hand, the lingual features of the literary work of art imply that the linguistic analysis of poetry is vital; on the other hand, critics view the linguistic analysis of poetry as a corrective to errors in existing methods of analysis: "A corrective is provided against overpersonalized interpretations of linguistic features" (Spencer and Gregory, 1964, p. 87). The fact that form and meaning are inseparable is the critical principle which makes the linguistic analysis of poetry essential. By features of literary universals we can conceive the following. Literary universals are the general qualities of literature which make literature a universal work of art. All those features in literature that are common in all times and places are called literary universals. I consider that poetry is a perfect genre of literature for it retains all the major features of literary universals. The formal feature of literature simply refers to the organizational shape or the existing shape of literary genre. It is the visible shape of literary form and can be broadly interpreted. Here, the poetic persona compares himself with a seed ground. Wales identifies simile as a figure of speech whereby two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared. Simile uses like or as to make a comparison between two dissimilar entities:

O my love is like a red, red rose That's newly sprung in June, O my love is like the melody That is sweetly played in tune. Robert Burns: A Red Rose

In the above stanza, the poet has compared his love with a red, red rose and the melody by using a Syntactic marker "like". A red, red rose suggests freshness that is pleasing to behold and the melody suggests tunefulness that is pleasing to hear.

I wandered lonely as a cloud That floats over vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd A host of golden daffodils. William Wordsworth:

I wandered lonely as a Cloud

In the above stanza, the poet has compared himself with a cloud by using a syntactic marker “as”. This comparison shows loneliness and wandering nature of the poet. Wales defines personification as a figure of speech or trope in which “inanimate objects animate non-human or abstract quality is given human attributes”. Personification can make an expression more compressed, intense and effective:

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers From the seas and the streams, I bear light shade for the leaves when laid In their noonday dreams. Shelley: The Cloud

In these lines “the cloud” has been personified. It has been treated as a person who says that he brings showers for the flowers and bears light shade for the leaves classified into two forms: verse form and prose form. Poetry is composed in verse form. Stories, novels, essays, letters, biographies etc. are written in prose form. Dramas can be written in both prose and verse forms.

Rhetoric feature is the art of effective use of words in writing or speaking. The rhetorical feature of literature involves the special use of language such as the special arrangement of words and the employment of figures of speech like metaphor, simile, personification etc. The rhetorical feature makes language expressive and elevated. Cuddon defines metaphor is a figure of speech in which “one thing is described in terms of another”. I am the seed ground. Sandburg:

I am the People, the Mob

Prosodic Feature refers to the literary devices as rhyme, meter, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia which are used very often in literature and particularly in poetry. Musical quality in poetry can be realized through these prosodic features of literature.

Symbolic feature of literature refers to the use of symbols in literary writings. A symbol is something that signifies or represents something else. In literature, a symbol is a word or a phrase that signifies an object or person or event or idea. Symbolic use of language makes expressions implicit and suggestive:

Rose thou art sick. The invisible worm, That flies in the night In the howling storm, Has found out thy bed Of crimson joy: And his dark secret love Does thy life destroy. Blake: The Sick Rose

It is a highly symbolic poem. “Rose” stands for beauty, virginity, innocence, creation, love etc, whereas “worm” stands for destruction, selfishness, experience, masculinity, violence etc. These symbols make imagery of love and destruction.

Aesthetic feature refers to that aspect of literature that makes it beautiful and pleasant. It involves the blending of beauty and mental satisfaction. Beauty depends on the style, diction, presentation of the theme etc. Lazar writes that poetry does have some “fairly distinctive features which differentiate it from other forms of discourse”. Poetry reorganizes syntax, invents its own vocabulary, freely mixes registers and creates its own punctuation. Poetry draws creatively on a full range of archaisms and dialects, and generates vivid new metaphor. It patterns sounds and orders rhythms. Lennard assumes that poetic syntax has “additional license and must be more complex still”.

Crisis and Contemporary Poetry - The ascetic and innovation-hungry nature of the poetic modernism that followed in the wake of Mallarmé and other French Symbolists is more aptly diagnosed as a cause for crisis than as a fruitful response. Certainly, if poetry is to be an alternative to, rather than a simple abettor of, the news media’s sensationalism, then it must scrupulously question its own medium and ethos. The poet Geoffrey Hill has called attention to the pervasiveness of what he calls the ‘Entertainment overkill’, acknowledging the Romantic William Wordsworth as a precedent for his own sceptical, sidelong glance on how poetry must find its own voice at a distance to that of the news media. According to this view, poetry can aspire to a more meditative and less self-serving vantage point on the issues that plunge the world into collective turmoil. The chapters in this collection attempt to do something similar on behalf of literary criticism – rearticulating the position of poetry in light of some of the central crises of recent decades, while also keeping an eye on certain elements of continuity with poetry written in the last couple of hundred years. In some ways these crises are new and specific to our age, in others they resemble questions that are much less so. If the Romantics responded to what they perceived as a crisis of artistic expression, the human community and the rural landscape at the rise of industrial capitalism, poets in the new millennium are faced with the challenges of the global marketplace where humans, both as members of communities and as individuals, are constantly subjected to the impersonal forces of the market economy. Similarly, if the perceived threats of ‘the smoking chimneys and noisy factories’ to nature and the countryside concerned

the Romantics, the escalating ecological crisis of our days has in recent years been attracting an increasing number of responses from poets. And if the ‘age of revolution’ was concerned with the ‘universal human values of freedom and equality’, the rise of minority groups and their claim for a voice in an increasingly multicultural society has led to a continuation of struggles with questions of identity, difference and social justice. The focus of this volume is on those events and dilemmas that both society and poetry have faced in the past sixty years or so, in other words during the period experienced first hand by the generations forming our contemporary society. The poetry discussed in this collection addresses crises from the Holocaust to the fall of the Twin Towers, from the marginalization of ethnic minorities and the destruction of the environment to the ‘war on terror’. At the same time, these events have influenced various ways of questioning the role of poetic discourse introduction and reception. The organization of this volume is thus based upon an understanding that crisis, in contemporary poetry, is not a simple or easily-defined phenomenon, but rather a condition that moves through the entire communicative chain. This can be illustrated via the schematics of Roman Jakobson’s landmark essay ‘Linguistics and Poetics’. Famously, Jakobson suggested that evaluation of linguistic and poetic discourse requires an awareness not only of the ‘message’ of the poem or other verbal utterance, but also of the speaker - addresser and the listener - reader - addressee – as well as the functions of context, contact and code. Context makes the message ‘graspable by the addressee’ and may be either ‘verbal or capable of being verbalized, a common code makes it possible for the addresser to encode and the addressee to decode the message, and contact signifies ‘the physical channel and physiological connection between the addresser and the addressee. Thus, the chapters focus on the addresser: on poetic responses to, and encodings of, events of crisis. Analysing poetry from the Holocaust to the fall of the Twin Towers, they confront the understanding of poetry as a lyric phenomenon that, in Jakobson’s terms, aims for ‘a direct expression of the speaker’s attitude toward what he or she is talking about. They relate to late twentieth-century debates on expressive subjectivity in poetry by demonstrating the ways in which material and historical turmoil force the poetry to highlight and question its own devices in line with Jakobson’s poetic function. Part II, which is centred on Northern Irish poetry with essays by Ruben Moi, Seán Crosson, Stephen Regan and Charles I. Armstrong scrutinizes the factor of ‘context’ in Jakobson’s model inasmuch as it focuses on the various attempts by poets

to communicate to an audience one specific experience of historical crisis in the twentieth century, one particularly intensely approached through poetry, namely the Northern Irish Troubles. Jakobson notes that even though ‘an orientation toward the context – briefly, the so-called referential, “denotative”, “cognitive” function – is the leading task of numerous messages, the accessory participation of the other functions in such messages must be taken into account. Thus the questioning of the linguistic and poetic medium’s capacity to grasp the particular events to which they respond has been a constant preoccupation for poets from Northern Ireland, and is also examined in the chapters here. Part III, on place and landscape, emphasizes the factor of contact, and the function of the phatic in Jakobson’s terms: in the essays by Brendan Corcoran, Lucy Collins, Janne Stigen Drangsholt and Anne Karhio, emphasis is on the materiality of place and the materiality of language, and the possibility of establishing a channel of communication.

Method after studying several poems of different poets for a long time, remarkable poetic lines that hint at the main features and qualities of poetry of English have been mentioned as the sample of the study. The study method involves presenting, illustrating and explaining poetic lines to focus on the qualities of poetry to attain the main objective of the article.

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