

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THEODORE ROETHKE'S POEM *DOLOUR*

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Abstract: The article studies the stylistic analysis of Theodore Roethke's Poem *Dolour* through phonological, lexical, semantic-pragmatical level.

Key words: phonological, lexical, semantic-pragmatical

Introduction. Poetic analysis involves the explication of a poem by focussing on the process of semiosis in it. It is through semiosis that linguistic meaning is transformed into stylistic meaning. An examination of semiosis brings us to look at the hypersemanticized poetic structures which are none other than the style features of a poem. Since style functions in a literary text by conveying meanings other than literal ones any poetic analysis necessarily centres on the examination and function of style features. The present poetic analysis involves the study of the style features along with their functions at three levels, viz, the levels of the 'sentence symbol' (Level 1), 'symbols in art' (Level 2), and the 'art symbol' (Level 3). These three levels are hierarchical and semiolinguistically conditioned, i.e. the analysis proceeds from the Level 1, through Level 2 to Level 3 (see Gargesh 1990:).

At the level of the sentence symbol the language structures as symbols are primes which are denotative in function, which evince stylistically prominent linguistic patterns, which may be termed as style features. Here, the unit of analysis is the grammatical sentence and an analyst requires a linguistic competence to comprehend the text. At Level 2, i.e. at the level of sentence symbols one can identify semantic deviations which remain unaccounted at Level 1. Here, the symbols function as connotators, and the competence required to identify them is communicative and the function to manifest connotation. At Level 3 one can view the art symbol as an organic whole meant to express the poem's signification. At

this level that we find two contexts for its existence, viz., Levels 3a and Levels 3b. At Level 3a one can study the text as an expressive entity and the competence required is textual competence. The fictive context of the poem here can be identified and the style features have the potential for signification within the context of the poem or text. The study of the verbal configurations at this level permits us to undertake a close scrutiny of the properties of text- construction and stylization. At Level L3b, one views the text as an open-ended entity, as an actualized or concretized variant of the art symbol in the reader's mind. It is an articulated and a fully specified object experientially concrete and subjectively charged. In fact, the art object, which is before us in the form of a literary text, and the aesthetic object, which is realized by the reader in his/her experiential world, are at once one and the same and also not one and the same. While the former is conceived as a potential artistic form the latter is its experienced, actualized and articulated variant.

The analysis of the readers' responses is performed at the level of the 'aesthetic symbol', i.e., the aim is to study the aesthetic concretions in the minds of the readers and thereby to arrive at a viewing the text as a composite aesthetic symbol.

Main part. Let us now proceed to examine the poem. The text of the poem is in the APPENDIX I.

Analysis of 'Dolour' at Level 1 as a Sentence Symbol:

At the level of the 'sentence symbol' the poem is explicated at the level of significant linguistic structures. This involves the identification of linguistic patterns within and across sentences. The linguistic patterns can be studied by analysing the poem from the perspective of phonology, lexicon, and syntax. The semantics at this level is purely denotative, but the semantically loaded non-denotative structures can be identified. The principle for identifying the significant linguistic style features, to put it simply, is one of identifying parallel and contrasting or deviant linguistic structures.

1.1.1 The Phonological level:

The analysis at the phonological level is mainly conducted to study the patterns of poetic rhythm and rhyme. While the study of rhythm involves the analysis of the metrical structure of the poem, the study of rhyme involves the study of the external and the internal rhyme schemes in the poem.

The rhythm, as can be seen in this 13-line poem, is controlled at line ends. The stressed syllables in each of the lines of the poem vary from 4 to 5 to 6. Lines 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9 have five stressed syllables each, while lines 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 have 4 stressed syllables, lines 11, and 12 have 6 stressed syllables and line 13 has 7 stressed syllables. Lines 1, 5 and 11 can be taken up as examples of the above three types, with the stresses marked on top of the syllables:

Line 1 : ' I have kn ' own the inex ' orable ' sadness of p'encil,

Line 5 : L ' onely rec'ption room, l ' avatory, sw ' itchboard,

Line 11 S'ift almos t inv'isible, thr'ough l'ong 'afternoons
of t'edium

In these metrical structures a noteworthy thing is that all lines, except line 6, contain instances of 'dactyl', i.e., metrical feet where a strongly stressed syllable is followed by two weak ones (' ~ ~). Consider, e.g., line 2:

Line 2: N'eat ~in ~their b'ox'es, d'ol'our 'of p'ad ~and
p'aperw'eight

Feet = 1 2 3 4 5

It can be seen in the above that feet 1, and 3 are dactyls while 2, 4 and 5 are trochees. The sequencing of dactyls is, however, not uniform in the poem. Line 6 has instances of 'anapaest', i.e., a metrical foot where two unstressed syllables are followed by a stressed one (~ ~ '):

Line 6: Th'e ~un 'al t'er~able p' a th'os ~of b' a s'in ~and p'itcher,

[Feet = 1 2 3 4]

Here feet 1, 2, 3 and 4 are anapaests. In addition to these two features lines 11, 12 and 13 have instances of 'spondees', i.e., metrical feet consisting of two stressed syllables each. Consider e.g. line 13:

Line 13: Gl'az'ing ~the p'ale h'air the d'upl'ic~ate gr'ey st'and~ard
f'ac~es

[Feet= 1 2 3 4 5]

Here feet 1 and 3 are dactyls, feet 2 and 4 manifest spondees, and the 5th foot is a trochee.

Keeping in mind the above, it may be said that at Level 1 the control over lines through meter is a significant style feature. The change in the number of feet from 4 to 6 represent the change in the rhythm of the verse.

In addition to rhythm, rhyme is an important style feature of any verse. in this poem there is hardly any significant external rhyme at line ends, in the fom óf any rhyme scheme, except at the end of lines 4 and 13 where places rhymes with faces. However, there are plenty of instances of internal rhymes in the form of alliteration, assonance and consonance. Some instances of alliteration in the poem are '...pad ...paperweight' (line 2), '...misery...manila..mucilage' (line 3), ...public places' (line 4) etc. Instanceş of assonance can be seen in examples of the type '...inexorable...pencils' (line 1), paperweight (line 2), ...misery ... manila (line 3) etc. Examples of consonance can be seen in the expressions such as 'All ... manila ... folders (line 3), 'film ... nails ... delicate (line 12) etc.The internal rhymes identified above function as style features that help in weaving the poetic texture of the poem.

The lexical level:

The lexicon of 'Dolour is quite central to its organization as a poem, for it reveals certain patterns. The most important pattern revealed is that of 'abstract' and 'concrete' nouns along with their further sub-categories. e

The concrete nouns in the poem comprise the following words: pencils, boxes,

pad, paperweight, folders, mucilage, room, lavatory, switchboard, basin, pitcher, multigraph, paper-clip, dust, walls, flour, silica, nails, eyebrows, hair and faces. The abstract nouns, on the other hand, comprise the words sadness, dolour, misery, desolation, pathos, tedium, ritual and duplication.

The concrete nouns can be further subdivided into (+Anatomical) and (—Anatomical) nouns. The (+Anatomical) category comprises ‘body’ words, namely, nails, eyebrows, hair and faces in lines 12 and 13. The [—Anatomical] category comprises the remaining concrete nouns like pencils, boxes, pad etc. which are conventionally unpoetic words.

The abstract nouns can also be subdivided further into 'emotive' and 'mechanical' nouns. The emotive nouns are sadness, dolour, misery, desolation, pathos, and tedium, while the mechanical ones are ritual and duplication.

In addition to the above patterns only two words are repeated in the entire poem. The first set consists of the noun duplication (line 8) and the adjective duplicate (line 13). The second set, on the other hand, consists of adjectives finer (line 10) and fine (line 12), though the former is of comparative and the latter of positive degree.

The syntactic level:

The analysis of the poem at the level of syntax reveals some significant features too. The poem consists of two sentences: lines 1- 8 forming sentence 1, and lines 9-13 forming sentence 2. Within these two sentences the significant style features are the forms of the main verb, the violations of selectional restrictions, the pattern of nominalized forms, and the profusion of adjectives.

The forms of the two main verbs of the poem in lines 1 and 9 are in the present perfect tense : have known and have seen. The use of the same form of verb, depicts the perfective nature of the two activities, thus bringing the two sentences together in a common bond.

The poem reveals a systematic violation of the selectional restrictions in lines 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8. The expressions in each of the lines above are as follows: inexorable sadness of pencils; dolour of pad and paperweight; misery of manila folders and mucilage; The unalterable pathos of basin and pitcher; Ritual of multigraph, paper-clip, comma; and endless duplication of lives and objects. In all these expressions the (+Human) attributes like sadness, dolour, misery, etc. are being given to [—Human) entities like pencils, pad and paperweight, manila folders etc.

The poem also depicts a pattern of nominalized structures. Firstly, the two sentences of the poem have a common subject in the first-person singular pronoun. The direct objects in both the sentences are a concatenation of a number of noun phrases. These noun phrases have significant syntactic structures, the dominant forms being genitive forms, such as the structure Art Adj N Gen N in lines 1, 9 and 11; Art Adj N Gen N Conj N as in lines 2, 3, 6 and 8; and the structure N Gen N N as in line 7. Despite these parallels there is a striking difference in the structure of

the object phrases in the two sentences. In sentence 1 there is a simple concatenation of noun phrases, while in sentence 2 we have co-ordinate structures of one infinitival and two participial constructions in lines 11 and 12-13 respectively.

In addition to the syntactic structures, finally, the adjectives too form a significant pattern. Almost all the lines (except lines 2, 7 and 9 contain adjectives. In the 1st sentence lines 1, 3, 5, 6 and 8 contain one adjective each. In the second sentence the use of adjectives per line increases from two in each of the lines 10, 11 and 12 to four in line 13. Also, in contrast to a single qualifier to a noun everywhere in the poem the last phrase in line 13 has three qualifiers duplicate, grey and standard for the same noun faces. Further, the adjectives of the poem fall into two broad categories: 'physical' and 'sensible' (i.e., relating to senses). The adjectives denoting physical state are immaculate, endless, finer, more dangerous, delicate, pale, grey, duplicate and standard, while the adjectives delineating feelings are inexorable, lonely, and unalterable.

Finally, another significant feature is the repetition of the first person singular pronoun as the grammatical subject of the two sentences in lines 1-8 and 9-13 respectively, functioning thereby to connect the two units of the poem.

1.1.4 The semantic-pragmatic level:

The analysis of the poem at the semantic level involves identification of the semantically striking features. The semantically charged significant features are the use of the present perfect tense, the personification of the [—Human] elements, the metonymic use of some words, an example of ellipsis, an instance of semantic linkage between disparate items in the same phrase, and finally, the use of a single colour term in the whole poem.

First, the use of the present perfect tense in the expressions I have known (line 1) and I have seen (line 9) convey a sense of definiteness of the experience. Second, there are instances of personification where common nouns like pencils, pad and paperweight, mucilage, basin etc. are given [+Human] attributes of sadness, dolour, misery, and pathos respectively etc. Third, the words lives and faces in lines 8 and 13 have been used metonymically, for, they represent 'people'. Further, words like pencils, pad and paperweight, manila folders etc. are also metonymic for they represent something more than themselves. Fourth, there is an instance of ellipsis in line 7 where the expression Ritual ... has been used elliptically to refer to the kind of use of kind of equipment like multigraph etc. Fifth, in line 8 the words lives and objects have been juxtaposed in the same phrase by a conjunction forcing us thereby to see a connection between the lives of the people and objects like pencils, pad etc. And finally, the use of the only colour term grey in the poem through contrast seems to represent the shade of experience depicted in the poem.

2.1 Analysis at Level 2 – Symbols in Art

At this level an analyst begins to view the functions of each of the significant

style features isolated at the level of the sentence symbol. Let us look at the style features again in the order they were identified at Level 1 of the sentence symbol.

At the phonological level the analysis of the significant patterns in the poem reveals, firstly, that the rhythm of the poem is controlled at line ends. Within the lines the number of stresses, however, range from 5 to 4 to 7 indicating variation in rhythm for focussing attention on the lines. Secondly, the dactyls and the trochees, with their strong stresses at the beginning of the syllables, give the rhythm a sense of 'fall', iconizing thereby a sense of fruitlessness in the poem. The anapaest in line 6, by inverting the syllable pattern, makes us more conscious of the expression by quickening the rhythm. Further, the spondees in the last three lines lend an element of additional weight, thus focussing attention on the expressions. Thirdly, the lack of a rhyme scheme at line ends functions to give the poem a sense of prosaicness. Fourthly, and finally, the internal sound patterns in the form of alliteration, assonance, and consonance function to lend the poem some quality of musicality.

The analysis at the lexical level also reveals some significant facts. Firstly, the 'unpoetic' lexicon such as pencils, pad and paperweight, multigraph etc., functions to represent equipment used in an office. Secondly, the contrast between abstract and concrete nouns brings into focus the contrast between human emotions (through the use of nouns such as sadness, dolour, pathos etc.) and the office routine (as it appears to be represented by nouns related to office equipment). Further, since human body nouns and the office equipment are part of the concrete noun category, the two are in this way co-related and they function to equate human life with the office routine. Moreover, the abstract nouns, such as sadness, pathos etc., which are emotive in nature, through their syntactic linkage to concrete nouns representing office routine imbue the latter with a sense of emptiness and sterility.

The analysis at the syntactic level also reveals some significant features. First, the parallelism of the perfective verbs in lines 1 and 9 functions to link up the two types of experiences encoded in sentences 1 and 2. Secondly, the violation of selectional restrictions in lines 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 functions to foreground the deviated expressions in the poem. Thirdly, the nominalized forms function to concretize the statements nominalized. Fourthly, adjectives which represent physical state function for the specification of experience, while the adjectives of senses function for the intensification of experience. Fifthly, while the simple concatenation of noun phrases in sentence 1 functions to represent bits of discrete objects scattered around in a purposeless manner, the co-ordinate structures in sentence 2 are more coherent, and through the infinitival and participial structures represent the indistinguishability or the uniformity between human life and the ordinary objects. Sixthly, and finally, the two uses of the first-person singular pronoun as subject of the two sentences in the poem function not only to link the two symbols together but also to impress that the two symbols are an utterance of the same person.

The features taken note of at the semantic-pragmatic level of the sentence symbol

also function in significant ways. Firstly, the use of the perfectives in lines 1 and 9, in addition to conveying a sense of finality, are linked up through the conjunct and (I have known (line 1), And I have seen ... (line 9)), show that the present experience is in no way different from past knowledge. Secondly, the personification of inanimate objects like pencils, pad, paperweight etc. functions to correlate the inanity of human life with those of the objects of office use. Thirdly, the metonymic words like pencils, pad, manila folders etc. represent the whole of which they are a part, i.e., office routine. Fourthly, the linkage between lives and objects in line 8 connects human life to the office equipment of daily use. Fifthly, and finally, the use of the colour grey functions to project a monochromatic picture of sterility and emptiness.

Along with the above-mentioned significances a coherent meaning of the poem also begins to emerge at the mimetic level. In sentence 1 of the poem the 'poem I' observes, which he states as 'known', the various objects and activities in an office, and these he presents as personified. In sentence 2 he focusses on the people working in these offices or institutions, and describes the metaphorical dust falling over them and covering their nails, eyebrows, hair and faces completely. The dust image appears to be representing some negative influence of the offices or the institutions on the people.

2.2 Analysis at Level 3a – the Art Symbol

At this level the individual symbols begin to fall into a pattern. They no longer remain isolated symbols but form part of the whole text. The text is now transformed into an art symbol which is autonomous in form and expressive in function. The art symbol as a semiotic entity reveals a single pattern of signification.

The significant phonological patterns are the dactylic 'falling rhythm', the spondees in the last three lines, and the lack of a rhyme scheme. The falling rhythm in the poem appears to iconise the sense of sterility and drabness in life. The spondees, by making the last three lines heavier, focus on the lines where matter interpenetrates the intimacy of the human body to make it heavy and lifeless. And finally, the lack of a rhyme scheme appears to iconise the sense of purposelessness in life.

The lexicon, too, furthers the semiotic pattern. The conventionally 'unpoetic' lexicon functions to focus attention on the mechanical aspect of human life. With respect to the concrete nouns two things can be noticed, firstly, that the [+Human] attributes have been given to [—Animate] nouns, as in the expressions sadness of pencils, dolour of pad and paperweight, etc., and secondly, that too, in contrast, [—Human] attributes have been given to qualify the [+Human) noun faces in the last line in the expression duplicate grey standard faces. There is, thus, a transference of qualities suggestive of the inanimate objects to human beings and vice-versa. Furthermore, the concrete nouns in sentence 1, by their random order, signify the

mindless routine of office or institutional life and the lack of any purpose in this activity.

The significant patterns at the syntactic level are the parallel use of the perfective verbs, the repeated violation of selectional restrictions in sentence 1, the pattern of the adjectives of physical state and that of the senses, the randomness of the noun phrases in sentence 1 contrasted with the coordination of structures in sentence 2 and the repetition of the first-person singular pronoun. The perfectives, firstly, have stative verbs signifying thereby lack of any activity, and secondly, the use of the verb 'to know' for the knowledge concerning inanimate objects, and the verb 'to see' regarding the knowledge concerning human life, represents a process whereby the distinction between the inanimate objects and human beings is obliterated. Thirdly, the violation of selectional restrictions present the personification of inanimate objects signifying thereby the inanity of human experience. Fourthly, the adjectives of senses intensify the 'feelings' of objects, while the adjectives of physical state specify the state of human beings, and this opposition also tends to signify the dehumanization of human experience. The same idea is reinforced by the randomness of phrases in sentence 1 and co-ordination of phrases in sentence 2. The repetition of the first person singular pronoun leads us to identify the poem I as the subject of utterance, for the poem is an autonomous entity. The art symbol can be viewed as an utterance of the poem I (the subject), who calls up an experience of the past (the verb) into the present which is objectified through nominal structures (the object).

The significant features at the semantic-pragmatic level are the use of personification, the metonymic use of some words, the semantic linkages between the colour grey and the use of the dust image. The consistent use of personification in expressions like the sadness of pencils etc. signifies the reduction of human lives somehow to that of the ordinary objects of office use. The metonymic use of these objects of office use signifies the reduction of human life to that of institutional routine. The semantic linkage between lives and objects creates an identity between the two and makes them indistinguishable from each other. The colour term 'grey' connotes the drabness and sterility in human life. And finally, the image of the all-pervasive dust functions as a metaphor for the gradual process of degeneration of human beings through the covering of the nails, eyebrows, and hair, thus creating a powerful image of the loss of human individuality and identity under the influence of office routine etc.

It is evident from the above discussion that the art symbol is a verbal constitute having the different levels of its organization, i.e., levels of the symbols in art and the sentence symbol. The sentence symbols, comprising the units of phonology, lexicon, syntax and semantics, and other devices, when routed through symbols in art, function as connotators. At the level of the art symbol these connotators begin to serve two functions. Firstly, they function to converge at one point, in this case to

create a picture of 'dolour' with its shades of emptiness, sterility and inanity resulting from a reduction to the same level of men and mechanical objects. This associative total of life can be said to have come into existence through cross-references and linkages between the various sentence symbols and the symbols in art. Secondly, the connotators function to make the poem perceptually diffuse where the art symbol begins to express and articulate the sensibilities encoded in the text, and, further, in becoming perceptually diffuse the art object does not refer to any object beyond itself but focusses our attention on itself as a created object which objectifies the beauty conceived in it. It may be said that the poetic world in the art object is a stylistically marked and an aesthetically charged verbal form. Style, as revealed by the process of integration of the various levels, is not something extraneous to the art object but is constitutive of the art object. It is a creatively employed verbal device for artistic purposes. It has also been pointed out that an art symbol is created out of an autonomous semiotic system which has a life of its own. It has been considered autonomous because all the contexts for its interpretation are built within the text itself and call attention only to themselves. This organic constitute is self-sufficient for it is not a constituent of any higher level of organization. Here both the structure and the texture of the poem coexist in mutual harmony.

Conclusion. The above kind of study at the level of the art symbol, however, can only be treated as a potential for perception. By undertaking a study at this level, a stylistician can perceive the aesthetic potential of the text only. It is in such a context that Srivastava (1980: 67) considered the art symbol to be 'an abstraction in form' differing from the 'unique and specific events of sentience and experience presentable with a texture', and hence saw it as an entity 'with the potentiality of perceptual unity'. This clearly means that the significance of the text is not complete till it is perceived and concretized by some reader(s). The concretion of the potential of art symbol is carried out by the creative activity of a reader/perceiver. The art symbol is said to be fully actualized only when a reader/perceiver has concretized the potential elements in the work, and it is then said to be an 'aesthetic object'. A systematic study of the text as an aesthetic object by different readers would give us the text as an 'aesthetic symbol'.

APPENDIX I

Dolour

(Theodore Roethke)

I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils
Neat in their boxes, dolour of pad and paperweight,
All the misery of manila folders and mucilage,
Desolation in immaculate public places,
Lonely reception room, lavatory, switchboard,
The unalterable pathos of basin and pitcher,

Ritual of multigraph, paper-clip, comma,
Endless duplication of lives and objects.
And I have seen dust from the walls of institutions,
Finer than flour, alive, more dangerous than silica,
Sift, almost invisible, through long afternoons of tedium,
Dropping a fine film on nails and delicate eyebrows,
Glazing the pale hair, the duplicate grey standard faces.

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