

Formalism As A Linguistics Theory: A Comparative Stylistic Analysis Of Poetic Literature

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Abstract: A good piece of literature usually carries a good form with aesthetic pleasure. Form of a literary piece of work is highly significant for its recognition and tagging to a particular genre. The most popular genres are usually followed by the poets even after centuries of their acceptance and recognition. The study in hand has examined two literary pieces of the same genre but different literary ages stylistically. One written by William Shakespeare and other by John Keats. Both are the popular poets of their ages. The comparative stylistic analysis has targeted the form in terms of structure, simile, metaphor, symbolism, imagery, etc. in both poems. The analysis is theoretically linked to the linguistic theory of formalism. Both poems fall under the category of sonnet and share the similar form although they stand centuries/ages apart in terms of their production/creation. Metaphors, similes and imageries have been used by the poets to achieve the same literary objectives. Moreover, one (produced in the eighteenth century) seems to be the copy of other (produced in the sixteenth century) in terms of its form.

Keywords: Formalism, Linguistics, Theory, Comparative, Stylistic, Analysis, Poetic-Literature

Introduction

A good piece of literature may result into a positive reform in the society. It has a definite impact on the minds of the people living in the contemporary world or the following ages. Literature is usually divided into different genres like poetry, drama, novel, prose etc. on the basis of its form and function. Generally, both form and function control each other. When a form is recognized and it becomes popular among literary or non-literary social actors then it is quite difficult and sometimes impossible to ignore, deviate or digress its salient principles. There are number of linguists in the 19th century who highlighted the newness of their work and claimed a breakthrough with the pre-scientific past (Morpurgo, 1998). Their theoretical notions along with the practice in vogue were infused by a rational inheritance stretching back over

centuries, in which “form” occupied a principal place McElvenny (2019). In the present study this linguistic aspect of literature is explored in view of the formalism a renowned theory of linguistics because the job of the linguist is to capture these forms and study them how they divulge about the mental, social and corporal life of language users (Morpurgo, 1998; Trabant 1986 & McElvenny, 2016). It is basically a school of literary criticism and literary theory emerged in the early twentieth century as a reaction against Marxism that believes in the roles of society in the text and the text in society. The path was also taken by such movements as the medieval Scholastics and the Enlightenment-era General Grammarians (Law, 2003), whose descendants were similarly involved in a research/search for the cognitive, biological or aesthetic bases of linguistic form.

This particular criticism under the umbrella of formalism focuses on the empirical underpinnings of art in terms of its form. The dimensions in this regard might be 1) how things are usually done and 2) how they are structured. The objective in terms of what it is about is comparatively less significant here because we understand stories or realize the messages through form, for example, the moves of the dances differentiate them from each other and form the story of ballet or relevant genre of dance accordingly. The formalists are more concerned with the structural goals of a specific text. It means they study the particular text without taking into account its outside influence in terms of extra-linguistic, metalinguistic or paralinguistic deliberations. This is the reason that cultural, social, communal or traditional influences are not taken into consideration in formalism. Instead, modes, genres, discourse, and forms are focused more.

One of the prominent underpinnings of the formalism is the classification of literary works into multiple genres according to their formal attributes. The researchers are of the point of view that generic forms of the literature in various dimensions are too stringent and they continue sustaining their peculiarities for centuries and in some cases for indefinite time period. Present study is meant to analyze and authenticate this particular aspect of formalism in English literature. For the purpose two poems under the category of sonnet written by two of the most popular writers of English literature have been selected purposively. The sonnet "When I have fears" was written by John Keats in the eighteenth century and the "Sonnet 18" was written by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century. These two different sonnets have been analyzed stylistically in terms of their various attributes of form in specific. The comparative analysis may help us understand the aspect of consistency and constancy of recognized linguistic forms in the

world literature in general and English literature in particular.

Research Objectives

It is deemed highly significant to determine the objectives of the study because a good study is always controlled by its objectives. Research objectives are supposed to be to the point and explicitly focused. However, in view of its targeted objectives the study is meant:

- (a) to carryout comparative stylistic analysis of two different poems of the same genre, and
- (b) highlight the consistency or constancy of form in literature.

Research Questions

Research questions set the direction of the study. There may be multiple aspects of a problem which may require multiple solutions. It is therefore, important to determine the nature of the problem under consideration and it can be done very well by formulating good research questions. Following research questions have been formulated for the present study:

- (a) What are the similarities in sixteenth and eighteenth century poetic literature in terms of their literary forms?
- (b) How is the form of sixteenth century sonnet consistent to eighteenth century?

Rational of the Study

Formalism is one of the most popular theories amongst the core theories of linguistics. Students of linguistics and literature usually find these theoretical concepts difficult to grasp. This study will be a gateway and practical example for new researchers and students to gain the idea of comparative study of two literary texts of the

same genre and it will also help the students of linguistics to understand the concept of formalism in empirical terms. Last but not the least the study covers only one particular part or dimension of the formalism not all underpinnings. This specific aspect is connected to the concept of consistency and constancy of form because the form in itself conveys number of things and stands dominant and significant.

Research Methodology

Method of research explicitly determines the course of action in a research work. It highlights the pathway for the research and researcher in scientific and systematic terms. The research in hand is analytical and descriptive in nature. It falls under the category of qualitative research. There are two poems of the same genre (sonnet) one is written by William Shakespeare and other by John Keats. The poems are selected with mutual understanding of the authors and may be tagged under the category of purposive sampling. These poems were named as Sonnet 18 and When I have fears by the authors Shakespeare and Keats respectively. First was written in the sixteenth century and second in the eighteenth century. The comparative analysis of the both literary pieces has been conducted in the perspective of four elements of their forms. The elements comprise symbolism, use of figurative language, structure, and imagery. The analysis focuses on significant similarities of form in both sonnets.

Literature Review

Literature plays important role to reform a society. It keeps the society alive and vibrant. According to Cambridge online English dictionary, the word literature refers to those written artistic works which possess high and lasting artistic value. The piece of literature with these characteristics have definite impact on the readers or target audience. Following the literary traditions since the time immemorial literature furnishes aesthetic

pleasure for its readers. It is divided into different genres and categories on the basis of its taste and pleasure. These multiple categories carry different forms which are usually recognized by the readership as they are aesthetically tuned to the tastes of their genres. The forms of these genres carry their own meanings and violation to the norms of these standard genres is not appreciated in literary circles. Chomsky (2009) also wanted to integrate Humboldtian form to his own novelty of generative rules. In terms of phonological, grammatical and semantic description of apparatuses of languages, the researchers (structuralists) were diligently involved in the exploration of linguistic forms (Lyons 1968: 54–70). This trend was followed by the movements like medieval Scholastics and the Enlightenment-era General Grammarians (Law, 2003), where people were engaged in a search of linguistic form on different bases and multiple dimensions.

Ultimately, literature stands nowhere without language. It is all about language use in different forms for multiple social and communal purposes that makes literature functional and objective oriented. Notions of “form” have a long history in Western thought on language McElvenny (2019). There are some basic linguistic theories which help us understand the phenomenon of language and language use. The linguistic theory of formalism carries paramount significance in this regard. Formalism is a well-known school of criticism on literature as well as theories in literature. It appeared in response to Marxist theories on literature in the early twentieth century. In accordance with Marxist literary theory the production of a text is influenced by the society and the society is equally influenced by the text. It means that text is influenced by the external world and subsequently influences outside world. Whereas formalists claim that text is self-sufficient and complete in itself without external world. Some of the basic and paramount

underpinnings of formalism are mentioned in the following paragraphs:

(1) The criticism under the rubric of formalism targets on the empirical aspect of art and literature. The emphasis is put on the forms of the things, that is, how things are actually done, and function of the things, that is, what they are about is not focused much. It is because form speaks the stories or develop possible meanings. This is what happens in case of dances, the specific moves of a dance form the story of the dance.

(2) They are always some structural tenacities of a specific text and that is the focus of formalism. The outer influence is not taken into consideration and inside world of the text is targeted more. The proponents of formalism discard the notions of cultural values, influence of the community or society, stakeholders in the process of production and infused content, rather focus on discourse, modes, genres and forms- two tendencies that may in fact manifest independently of one another (Newmeyer 1998).

(3) Formalism believes in the classification of literary and nonliterary productions into genres in accordance with their formal attributes. This particular aspect of formalism is further extended by the researchers. They believe that when a particular form is donated to a piece of art especially in literature then it becomes quite difficult to deviate or ignore that form even after centuries. This research is meant to explore this particular stance through comparative analysis of two different poems of the same genre written by two different poets.

(4) The theory of formalism supports meticulous, methodological, procedural and systematic reading of texts. This is how the literary criticism adopts scientific approach to literature. This type of readings may be claimed as text-oriented readings.

(5) The language of literature is different from the language in common use or ordinary language. This concept keeps the sense to prevail that the language of literature is independent from external, outside, extra-linguistic, metalinguistic, paralinguistic and nonlinguistic conditions.

(6) Literature is nothing without language. It is simply because literature is produced by the use of language. Here begins the space for linguistics as an element of the science of literature.

An empirical example may be furnished through film criticism. In case of film studies under formalistic approach analysts may focus on filmmaking and language of film. In specific terms, it may include editing, composition, camera movement, the effects of different position of camera, etc. In other words we may say that the focus is more on the graphical qualities of the image which play significant role to develop form of the film.

Sonnet is a genre of English literature for writing poems comprising or limited to 14 verses. These verses are artistically arranged into three quatrains and one rhymed couplet. It is a popular genre in literature. Shakespeare has written multiple sonnets. Sonnet 18 is one of the most popular. The very first line "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" has become quite famous among the readers of English literature. The sonnets written by Shakespeare became so popular that his style was followed by the other poets and it became a standard by the name of

“Shakespearean sonnet”. The second sonnet named as “When I have fears” (selected for the study) was written by John Keats in the eighteenth century. There is a gap of almost two centuries between the productions of these two great poets. In spite of this huge gap we may witness enormous similarities between these two remarkable literary pieces and the same is going to be reflected in the analysis section of the study.

Comparative Analysis

In this section of the study comparative analysis will be carried out in view of the research questions and research objectives. Before proceeding for the analysis in specific, particular and relevant terms, some general understanding about the selected poems is being furnished for background knowledge of the general, common or nonliterary readers or researchers. Sonnet 18 is not just a beautiful poem in terms of its literary components. Its style is also quite unique and distinctive. It possesses all the specifications of Shakespearean literary style of sonnet. The imagery is quite rich and images seem to be revealed like living things through the literary power of The Bard’s verses (Hassan & Lavin, 2021). The uniqueness of stylistic as well as linguistic amalgamation in the form of lexical and rhythmic concurrence intensify the depth, texture and aesthetics of linguistic expressions. This reflection of imagery appeals to the senses vehemently. The risk of using unpopular and archaic lexicon removes the shackles of time and space and adds universality to the portrayal and thematic links to the sonnet. It may be because of this literary sublimity that Sonnet 18 is still popular in twenty first century.

Although Shakespearean sonnets are unique and famous all over the world but there is lot of difference of opinion in terms of the interpretations of sonnet 18. It is because of the fact that Shakespearean literature attract all and sundry and everyone finds its own story in

accordance with one’s own aesthetic pleasure. It may be said without any hesitation that Shakespeare stands amongst the best poets of the 16th century. The fact of this argument may be realized by the fact that there was even a style of sonnet named after him-the “Shakespearean sonnet”. The study in hand will furnish evidence for this argument and elaborate that Shakespearean style of sonnet was followed by the poets of the eighteenth century as well. The form of the sonnet used by Shakespeare was not recognized only in the 16th century but followed by the eminent poets of 18th century as well. Therefore, it may be emphasized that Shakespeare enjoyed success by influencing not the readers only but the writers as well. And this influence may also be witnessed in the 18th century.

According to Young (2020) the sonnets of Keats earned him big name. There are multiple reasons which may support this argument. Keats was quite famous amongst his contemporaries in the 18th century. He was well known as a medical brethren and because of the entertainment and aesthetic pleasure invested in his literary work he was tagged as a “literary” physician. He went through a genuine and arduous process of medical training. He had patients at his home. His mother and brother were patients of tuberculosis. He tried his level best to cure them but could not succeed and they died on his watch. He described tuberculosis as a family disease and subsequently died of it. Tuberculosis was an epidemic at that time when he was quite young.

The theme of love is dominant in the poetry of Keats. It is depicted in his poems and letters which he produced during his poetic career. The theme of love in his literary pieces may be triangulated in terms of 1) his relations with women, 2) his relationship with his relatives and 3) his relations with other classes or categories of people (Gashti, 2020). This all may be very well examined in his very first volume of poems,

sonnets, letters and scattered pieces which were published in 1817. The scholars are of the point of view that the understanding of Keats regarding love is considerably different from the poets of romantic and neo-classical age. It is pertinent to be mentioned here that his special considerations for love had significant impact on his both literary and personal deliberations in life. He finds the element of universality in love that may be reflected in different shades in different societies all over the world since the time immemorial. However, there is no doubt that positive materialization of love may result into social harmony, peace and comfort. Keats has portrayed some ideal situations in his literary work where love is possibly given space for materialization.

Beside some general considerations regarding literary and poetic products of Shakespeare and Keats which was deemed highly significant for general readers in terms of poetic contextualization and background awareness, the focus of analysis now shifts towards comparison between Sonnet 18 and When I have fears in terms of unanimity of their forms as objectively propounded by the researchers. The following lines are taken from the sonnet When I have fears written by John Keats in 1818:

And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,

That I shall never look upon thee more,

For the purpose of comparison as depicted earlier undermentioned lines are selected from the Sonnet 18 written by William Shakespeare in 1609:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

There are wonderful similarities of form in the selected lines. Let's look into the linguistic choices first. Keats has used the pronouns thou

and thee instead of you like Shakespeare. The language was quite standardized during the time of Keats' productivity and he could use the word you very well. However, quite astonishingly, Keats preferred the linguistic choice of Shakespeare after even two centuries. Secondly if we look into the form of the lines there are enormous similarities. The similes, metaphors and personifications are also quite perfectly used in the parallel lines. Following lines are selected from Sonnet 18:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

**By chance or nature's changing course
untrimm'd;**

The following lines are chosen from When I have fear:

When I behold, upon the night's starred face,

Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,

And think that I may never live to trace

Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;

According to dictionary of literary terms or otherwise, a sonnet is a fourteen-line poem with the depiction of similar or single idea, notion or thought throughout the poem. There is wonderful similarity in this regard. The selected poems are exactly on the pattern of Shakespearian sonnet and consist of one couplet and three quatrains. If we look into the history of quatrain it was used in Persian poetry and as the name suggests it comprises four lines. These two poems carry the similar form of quatrains. A couplet comprises two lines constructed with the same meter and joined by rhyme scheme. A sonnet ends with the couplet which generally conclude the main idea

of the poem. Both poems end with the same category of couplet.

In general a sonnet consists of fourteen lines in terms of its length. It is constructed in a regular rhyme scheme. The construction is strictly metrical in nature. Usually, the category of the meter is iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is defined as a line with ten syllables and these are found in five pairs. Quite interestingly, the second syllable of the pair enjoys the requisite stress. The similar taste may be enjoyed in both poems. Another alarming similarity may be observed in the use of metaphors. It has been used as a main literary device in Shakespearean sonnet in general and Sonnet 18 in particular. Keats has also used this figurative device quite beautifully in the selected sonnet. Keats has used the literary devices like imagery, consonance, alliteration, simile, personification, and assonance to express his fears in the selected poem. And the Sonnet 18 is also ornamented with repetition, assonance, alliteration, and internal as well as end rhyme.

Conclusion

The linguistic theory of formalism portrays different aspects of the language which becomes part of the texts or linguistic expressions in different oral or written genres. The form of a particular genre may consist of multiple aspects, elements or components. The form in itself is significantly valuable and, when becomes mature and popular, sustains itself for a longer or indefinite period of time. Present study has examined this particular aspect of the theory by comparing two poems of the same genre produced by two different eminent poets of two different literary ages. One of them named as Sonnet 18 was written in 16th century by Shakespeare whereas the second named as When I have fears was written in the 18th century by Keats. It is however, concluded after the thorough analysis of both poems that they are written in almost the same form although they stand

centuries apart in terms of their production. They are quite similar in the use of metaphor, similes and imageries. The figurative language in terms of figures of speech in both sonnets is also similar as discussed comprehensively above. Finally, we may conclude that When I have fears is a 'Shakespearean sonnet' although written by Keats in 18th century after two centuries of the 'Shakespearean sonnet' tradition.

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