



NATURE AND KINDS OF POETRY : READING LINGUISTIC
PERSPECTIVES

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Poetry is a form of art that comes from the poet to reader. There is a diversity of opinions about nature and kinds of poetry. As a form of literature e art it has a long history and had acquired a high degree of sophistication at the same time, the critical ions, analysis and judgments about poetry have also reached to high peak in our age. Not that poetry had the same prestige and position down the ages with ups and downs it has survived and quite often survived with glory.

Approaches to poetry have been different for all kinds of reasons-the temper of the age, the understanding of life, the poet's and the reader's vision. It would not be possible nor desirable, to go inot a detailed analysis of the various approaches to poetry to establish the supremacy of one over the others. However, it would be useful and helpful to mention the basic facts about the nature of poetry in general. Undoubtedly, this is being done with an eye on the topic of the thesis and the nature of the work followed in the thesis. There are two basic facts about poetry is a linguistic act. (That is to say it is an artistic activity in and through) language, secondly, as a communicative activity it reaches the reader and the reader responds poetry. Surely, these are simplified 'Truths' about poetry and they are necessarily associated with certain aspects and dimensions which cannot be ignored. We mention these aspects as basic starting point and not the end point. We believe that a careful analysis of these aspects will unfold substantially the basic nature for the sake of analysis and understanding we do 'dissect' or 'deconstruct'. But there is no denying that poetry functions in totality. The reader's response to poetry is the result of its comprehension intotal rether than an analysis of one or two aspects of its critics rightly maintain that there is a technique

implicit in poetry, the technique is also involved. But in spite of this, critics have felt it is necessary to account for the various dimensions and aspects that go into the making of a poem. It is necessary and desirable also for an intensive study of poetry must not be ignored. The aspects and dimensions are there alright but in the ultimate analysis they are all submerged into the end product which is a poetic composition.

“Poetry”, as have been said, “is made of words” this is an obvious fact and is the undeniable truth but the complications and controversies might develop in the discussion and elaboration of this aspect. We try to steer clear of these controversies, however, we do accept that poetry is an act in language and therefore, all that goes into language is automatically included in the language of poetry. As said earlier we also accept the organic nature of poetry being a whole rather than in parts. However, it is desirable to look upon the various dimensions of language in order to arrive at an intensive understanding of the nature of poetry.

It is customary to consider language as having two forms spoken and written. In linguistics the distinction is basic in order to understand the fundamental nature of language. It is outside the scope of the thesis to go into detailed discussions as to which of the two forms is a primary and the other derivative. There are strong and compelling reasons to look upon the spoken form of language as primary because it is this form that men learn first. It is also true that the written form of language is historically derived from the spoken form. Consequently even the most sophisticated form of written language cannot contain within itself all the subtleties and nuances implied in the spoken form. We briefly mention this without justifying the arguments given above. A poet is a maker of poetry and consequently explores and exploits all the possibilities that language has to offer. Obviously poets have been exploiting the oral and spoken possibilities of language in their poetry. This certainly gives richness and depth to poetry.

Poetry is also an activity in the written language. That is to say it is not only spoken and heard but is also written and read. In fact, in the twentieth century the oral tradition of poetry has considerably weakened and the written form has gained importance. Not that is to say in spoken language as referring to the poet's name. On the level of phonology, the two words ‘done and ‘Donne’ have the same pronunciation and therefore, an interpretation of the poem with the poet's name may provide a new experience. This experience communicated through an ambiguity of this kind reveals the poet's total surrender. Thus, in this particular

poem, the phonological dimension: provides a new aspect of interpretation and meaning. Both the graph logical and the phonological are significant aspects and need to be carefully examined and not to be ignored. We do not maintain that this is all in poetry. In fact, in some poems, they may be of marginal importance or even some times they may not be significant at all. What we uphold is the view that the exploitation of the visual and the auditory aspect is both natural and legitimate.

Visual poetry - rather 'poetry for the eye' if such a phrase can be coined-is significant dimension of poetry. So is auditory poetry- 'poetry for the ear'. We emphasise this because the eye and the ear are powerful sense organs and their response could help in the total comprehension of poetry. It is also worth mentioning that the visual aspect of poetry has acquired some importance in the twentieth century and several poets have tried in varying degrees to make use of this aspect. The possibilities of the ignored by poets but the possibilities of the written form have also been given or are being given their due importance. This is not to suggest that the tendency has suddenly come up in the twentieth century. In fact it has a tradition going back to centuries. What is emphasized here is that a poet rightly and justifiably explores the features of both kinds of languages in order to reach comprehensiveness. Every poet doesn't do every thing. So naturally some poets given more importance to one or the other. Dylan Thomas is one such poet who has sometimes given weigh age to this aspect of language but before discussing Dylan Thomas' poetry on this dimension it would be worthwhile referring to some other poets who have exploited this aspect of language the aspect of the written medium or the visual of poetry.

Similarly, let us look at the following poems : 'Now' on first looking at this poem, we find it obscure, vernon watkins called this poem of "unwarrantable obscurity", and Henry Treece said "Verbal doodling". A good way to approach this dazzle of images is, ignoring syntax, to fix on images, which other poems have made us familiar with. Another good way is to notice pattern, which, proceeding from a simpleword,l becomes more and more complex. Thomas was fascinated by Genesis, Gospel and Apocalypse, it is possible that "Now" is the creative word of Genesis from which all proceeds. The last stanza is a kind of Apocalypse, and the middle stanza concerns Jesus. The poem may be a Bible in miniature, and each stanza may mimic creative process. The stanzas are of seven lines, Seven is a magical number, suitable according to occult tradition, for unions of above and below and for

magicians busy uniting them, the poem is esoteric lean, elliptical, intense, and suggestive, but so are things in nature.

The poetry of Dylan Thomas presents creativity not only on one dimension including the dimension of the medium. The two poems discussed above sufficiently reveal this aspect of Dylan Thomas' poetry. There are other poems like 'Love in the Asylum' and 'Poem in October', though not outstanding in terms of graphological features, provide reasonable evidence of Dylan Thomas' consciousness of the quality of medium. These poems are significant in terms of semantic and syntactic features also and references to them will be made in subsequent chapters.

We shall be referring to some of the features of the medium in these poems. 'Love in the Asylum' is not a simple poem of romantic love but the wings of romanticism have not been entirely clipped. While referring to a mad man living in the Asylum, the poet brings about a kind of salvation in love in the arms of 'A girl mad as birds'. Too much emphasis need not be given on the shape of the poem but it should not be ignored either. The six stanzas have a uniform design in terms of shape – each stanza consists of three lines but the lines differ in sizes. The number of sentences also does not remain constant. The poet gradually builds up to climax and towards the end we find the tense climax over-riding the entire poem. The short lines in the poem refer either to some short description or to compressed feeling of the poet. The poem is a combination of images, rather a succession of images and all these images are suggested through the arrangement of lines. A careful reading of the poem cannot miss this dimension as well and this is what we maintain that the graphological dimensions reinforces the thematic and stylistic pattern of the poem.

References

1. Leavis, F.R.
2. G.M. Hopkins who experimented with this idea and developed the notion of what is usually called "sprung rhythm".
3. Watkins, Vernon, (ed): Dylan Thomas: Letters to Vernon Watkins, London, Dent and Faber and Faber, 1957.
4. Treece, Henry: Dylan Thomas: 'Dog Among the Fairies', London, Lindsay Drummond, 1949.