Formalistic analysis of 'A Poison Tree' by William Blake

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ABSTRACT

The position of literature in society so far is considered a mirror of society. However, formalism declares that the basis of literature is literariness. Formalism prescribes in the independence of literature by cutting its connection from external society and makes it an independent literary science which is centered only upon the form of works. This paper aims at analyzing the formalistic nature of 'A Poison Tree' a poem by William Blake. The research demonstrates how form and content relate through poetic devices, writing style and phrases in the construction of meaning in this poem. This analysis is done at grapholoical, phonological, morphological, lexical and textual levels to achieve the same result. This study pinnacles the formalistic techniques in the analysis of any piece of literature while delating its mastery of William Blake's writing.

Introduction

The branch of literary theories which deals only with the form of the literary text is named as formalism. Formalism is considered the first critical movement in Russia which attacked the problems of meter, rhythm, style and composition of a literary work (Erlich 2005, p. 20). Formalism is a form of literary criticism whose core purpose is to investigate only the structure of a text. It also highlights the fundamental affinities within a text. It analyzes only the text's content such as grammar, syntax, figure of speech and the literary devices. Therefore, regarded as a syntactic or grammatical model of analyzing sentence structure. According to this theory, there are specific grammatical principles for sentence construction. It favors form of a text over the thematic concern. The external elements such as history, society, culture, politics and even the author's intent are factored out in formalism.

Steps of formalist analysis:

To overcome a formalist analysis, there are certain steps which enable us to have an in-depth study of a text.

- **Form:** Form is a critical approach of formalism which describes the structure rather than the content of a work.

- **Diction:** The choice of words and their connotations for better understanding of meaning of a text.

- **Unity:** How all elements of the text work together to create meaning by using close reading technique to indicate how internal structure of a text is made coherent.

- **Literary Devices:** Use of metaphor, symbolism, irony, etc. are the key factors in creating the aesthetic experience rather than the external factors.

- **Complexities**: Tensions, ambiguities, paradoxes within the text. This approach values the negative capability to "be in uncertainty" unaccompanied by fact and reason.

By doing a deep analysis on the above mentioned steps, a formalist is a being able to uncover how all the components contribute in generating the overall meaning and aesthetic experience of a text for its reader.

Research Objectives:

It is extremely significant to define the objectives of the study as a noble study is always organized by its objectives. Research objectives are made-up to that extent which make a study explicitly focused. The targeted objective of this study are;

i. To carry out the formalistic analysis of the poem "A Poision Tree" by William Blake.
ii. To point out the consistency of form in poetic literature in meaning formation.

Research Questions:

Research questions direct a research study in a right way. It is essential to know about the nature of concerned problem and it can only be done very well by generating good research questions. The research questions framed for this study are;

i. What are the key concepts employed in formalistic analysis of "A Poison Tree" by William Blake?
ii. What features are present there to generate meaning?

Rational of the Study:

Formalism is one of the primary theories in the history of world linguistics. It is considered somehow a difficult theory by some students of literature and linguistics to grasp. This study will be an access to the new researchers to establish the idea of formalism in its pragmatic terms. This study covers all the key concepts of formalism. This stud is only confined with the analysis of the poetic form as in itself, it conveys the deeper meaning and stand still and governing.

Background of the Study:

In different areas of the world, it developed differently. It was not a unified literary moment with a set of desired goals for literary criticism. Initially this moment was started in Eastern Europe I'm early 20th century. In Poland it emerged by Kazimierz Wóycicki (1876-1938) who is regarded the founder of Polish formalism. The Polish school of formalism was initiated by Manfred Kridl (1882–1957) and centered in Warsaw and Wilno. It was influenced by the Russian school of formalism which was centered around Moscow and St. Petersberg in 1915 and New Criticism. The sole purpose of Russian formalism was to provide a scientific basis for the study of literature especially in poetry. Russian formalism further has two schools of thought: Moscow Linguistic Circle, and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOJAZ).

The starting point of formalism was the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915. Roman Jacobson, Boris Tomashevsky were prominent members of this group. The other school of thought was established in 1916 and Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, and Yuri Tynyanov were among the leading figures of this group.

Formalism Literary Theory: Main ideas

1. Autotelic:

According to the formalists, the use of literary devices gives a reality within a text. One of the main ideas in formalist criticism is that poetic language is autotelic- that the language we use in every life is noticeably different from the language used in any kind of literature. Whittemore (1965) defines autotelic as self-exemplifying and self-illustrating which means a poem stands alone and it develops its own circumstances for being and is inspected only by them. (p.3).

2. Defamiliarization:

The idea of defamiliarization was formulated by Victor Shklovsky. It is a technique to make things unfamiliar which in turn to describe somethings in a very strange way and make the reader to pay attention to the commonplace things which he fails to notice because they are less familiar to him. Greene (2012) states that the function of defamiliarization is to highlight the artist's attention towards the literary devices and creation. The aim of literature is to get the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known (p.343).

3. Foregrounding:

Simpson (2004) states that foregrounding in literature is considered as a form of textual pattering which is inspired categorically for literary aesthetic reasons in the form of deviation from the norm (p. 50). This term is taken from art criticism to differentiate the distinct features of painting. Foregrounding in literature is a stylistic device used to separate an aesthetic form from its content to show the influence of form over its meaning. This effect is achieved by the use of literary devices such as parallelism, alliteration, metaphor, similes and deviations. It is aimed at 'drawing reader's attention to a particular part of a poem, short story, novel, drama or any other literary work.

4. Plot/Story:

Victor Shkolvsky made distinction in plot and story also named as syuzhet and fabula. The natural sequence of events that take place in texts are termed as story (fabula) and the order through which events take place in literary work are named as plot (syuzhet). This distinction is made only to

show that how a narrative is constructed and how a particular structure effects meaning as well as interpretations. Plot in formalism is defined by Berov (2003) as a series of dependent character functions (p.36). Plot is constructed only to manipulate the reader's emotions and creating meaning.

The function of plot in fictional narrative is to reveal the reader the divergence of chronological sequences of the story. This distinction between plot and story is stylized as plot/story or syuzhet/fabula, only to emphasize the importance of the form to express the story and to gain reader's careful attention towards it.

5. Literariness:

According to Baldick (2008), literariness is described as the quality of a language which makes differences in the literary language from the ordinary use of language in our practical lives, We use ordinary language just for communication purposes whereas the artistic use of language is to draw reader's attention towards it's linguistic features. The literariness in poetry consists of rhyme, meter and repetition. According to formalist, general linguistics rules are not applicable to literary language.

Strengths of Formalism:

According to Parsons (2008), the aesthetic approach of formalism to nature has many strengths. This approach enables us to perceive nature more aesthetically without bringing the thought component of what is being admired into our minds. It gives us an escape from our daily life, family, work and society. This sense of ' natural beauty ' is linked with tranquility, renovation and spiritual revival (p.39) When we admire things aesthetically, we reach at their sentimental form. Formalism has a power to transport us to a new world of aesthetic description which gives us an acquaintance with simplicity and purity of the world around us. Hence formalism finds a link between aesthetic of art and aesthetic of nature.

The systematic approach of formalism is to do an in depth analysis of a text by keeping an eye on all the intrinsic elements of a text and excluding all the external components to reach at the exact meaning of a text. It deals with the syntax, diction and the use of figurative language to recognize the repeated motives. It also determines how the literary devices contribute to extract meaning from a text which further enables to identify the formal elements of a text. This formalistic approach deals with the deconstructive technique of evaluation to form a text a unified whole which in turn examines the internal consistency of theme and meaning.

Limitations of the Study:

There are certain limitations imposed by formalistic approach as it neglects author's intent, contextual meaning which results in limited amount of text's interpretation. The structure of a text is overemphasized. Sleinis (2013) states that formalism is considered as an inadequate theory of literary work (142). There is a problematic relationship between form and content of a text. In this study, this relationship of form and content is always remained a crucial predicament in philosophy and literature. McClendon (2005) states that formalism separates form from content. But Hegel's philosophy is defined as a dialectical whole as there is no difference between form and content, on the form tells us about the existence and termed as self-reflection. There is no absolute difference between the two (p.86). But this approach does not have a varied instructional goal. In this approach, more importance is given to the form than the subject matter. The standard feature of

formalism is the aesthetic essence of a text. This study only deals with the formal attributes of literature as the main purpose of literature is to recognize world differently.

Methodology:

Method of research determines the reasercher while conducting a formalistic analysis of the poem "A Poision Tree" of William Blake. The lexico-syntactic pattern and word choices, ghraphological, phonological and morphological patterns in this poems are the basis of formalistic analysis.

Graphological Level:

This level consists of foregrounding, paragraphing, punctuation, commas, colons, semicolons are the contracted forms to develop a hallucination of speech. These contracted forms are used in the poem in the line 14 and 16.

i. **Foregrounding:** The poem's title is written in bold letters and poet's name in italic.
ii. **Paragraphing:** The poem consists of 4 quatrains with double spacing among the paragraphs.
iii. **Punctuation:**
   a. **Commas:** The presence of 5 commas demonstrates a very short pause and detach elements of the sentence in the poem.
   b. **Colons:** 2 times colons are used for an explanation.
   c. **Semicolons:** Semicolons are used 3 times for a longer pause than that of a colon but shorter from full stop.
   d. **Full stops:** Full stops are used 7 times to show a complete end.

Phonological Level:

Phonologically, the poem is analyzed in terms of alliteration, consonance and assonance.

a. **Alliteration:**
I **w**as angry **w**ith my friend;
I **w**as angry **w**ith my foe:
Night and **m**orning with **m**y tears:
And I **s**unned it with **s**miles,
And **w**ith soft deceitful **w**iles.
Till it **b**ore an apple **b**right.
b. **Consonance:**
I was angr**y** with m**y** friend;
I tol**d** m**y** wrath, m**y** wrath di**d** en**d**.
I was angr**y** with m**y** foe:
I tol**d** i**t** no**t**, my wrath di**d** grow.
An**d** I watere**d** it in fears,
An**d** I sunne**d** it with smiles,
An**d** it grew both day an**d** night.
Till i**t** bore an apple brigh**t**.
An**d** my foe behel**d** it shine,
And he knew tha**t** i**t** was mine.
When the night ha**d** veil**d** the pole;

c.   Assonance:
I told my wr**a**th, my wr**a**th did end.
I t**o**ld **i**t not, my wrath d**i**d gr**o**w.
And I watered **i**t **i**n fears,
T**i**ll **i**t bore **a**n **a**pple bright.
And m**y** foe beheld it sh**i**ne,
And he knew th**a**t it was mine.

Morphological Level:

In this poem, there is no use of affixation and coinage found.

- **Form:** This poem consists on quatrains with a rhyming pattern is an iambic meter consisting of AABB rhyming pattern throughout the poem.
- **Diction:** The use of words 'friend' and 'foe' make it accessible to a large audience.
- **Literary devices:** The used literary devices in this Poem by Blake are metaphor (growing anger to a tree), imagery (detailed description of apple and tree), symbolism (poisonous effect of depressed anger represented in the form of apple), personification (anger as a living entity), and illusion (reference of The Garden of Eden to apple) demonstrate the destructive nature of subjugated anger.
- **Complexities:** The suppression of anger towards an enemy allowing it to grow like a poisonous tree leading towards the demise of his foe ultimately forming the deconstructive nature of subjugated emotion are the real complexities and ambiguities.

Lexical level:

There is no such need of lexical analysis to be found which consists of anastrophe, asyndeton, anaphora, parwnthesis and epizexuxis.

Textually:

According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) stated that there are seven standards of textually are defined by linguists for a text to be considered meaningful. These seven standards of textually in this poem are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informatively, situationally and intertextuality. All these standards ae meet altogether by the use of metaphor of poison tree, highlights the significance to express negative emotions than to harbor them inside and all about an open communication.

Conclusion:

William Blake is considered as a poet of an extraordinary mind whose artistic----opus-- is still respected with high esteem. However, he has distinct artistic features among his contemporizes, and is admitted the first English poet to generate factious, imaginary in his poetic work of Romantic era. The poet's word choice plays a significant role in generating meaning. It helps the reader to understand the intended message of the poet. Formalism, through this analysis has revealed that a poetic and non-poetic languages are two sides of a coin.

Pedagogical implication:

The purpose of this study is to define ways in which the form of the poem is described. It is also analyzed some specific formalistic features of defining its self-identity. These are the present

characteristics of the formalism utilized by the poet. In simple words, this study will be considered with the marked use of words to enhance the effectiveness of meaning transfer.

Scope of the study:

This study will exclusively formalistic in its approach and the analysis will be done by using different analytical levels i.e. morphologically, lexically, graphically, stylistically, syntactic patterns and word choices in such a way to give a guideline for future researchers related to this field.

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