

Linguistic Ingenuity in Poem '*Wedding in Flood*' by Taufiq Rafat

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Received: Nov. 10, 2012 Accepted: December 3, 2012 Published: February 28, 2013

doi:10.5296/ijl.v5i1.2651 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i1.2651>

Abstract

The words of poetry not only speak of their ideology but also carve pictures in the minds of

the readers. I chose this poem, ‘Wedding in the Flood’ for many reasons: it certainly manifests the Pakistani culture but its structure speaks of its complex narrative ingenuity, its syntactic and phonological parallelism, its unique lexical and semantic features and how all these features collectively enhance the cultural aspect of the poem. This research article tries to analyze the unique features of the poem ‘Wedding *in the Flood*’ in order to have a deeper understanding of the content and form of the poem.

Keywords: Wedding, Pakistani culture, Complex narration, Tragedy, Semantic deviation

1. Introduction

“Poetic language may violate or deviate from the generally observed rules of language in many different ways, some obvious, some subtle (Leech 1969).” The stylistic analysis renders great help in investigating the nature and potential effects of linguistic variation in a particular poem. Stylistic analysis not only helps the reader to appreciate the function of language but also reveals the writer’s skill and excellence of his technique.

English poetry in Pakistan is marked with very prolific poets but Taufiq Rafat holds an important place among all others due to his unique style and his uncanny skill in depicting the culture of Pakistan. His major work *The Arrival of the Monsoon: The collected poems 1947-1978*(1985), was acknowledged as memorable event for Pakistani Literature in English. The present research work analyses his classic poem ‘*Wedding in the Flood*’ from his work : *the arrival of Monsoon*.

1.1 Literature Review

Since its beginning, Pakistani English poetry has been maintaining a major place in South Asian writing, notably with the work of Shahid Suhrawardy, Ahmed Ali, Alamgir Hashmi, Daud Kamal, Taufiq Rafat, and Maki Kureishi, and later of M. Athar Tahir, Hina Babar Ali and others; whereas fiction from Pakistan began to receive recognition in the latter half of the 20th century, with the fame of the Parsi author Bapsi Sidhwa who wrote *The Crow Eaters*, *Cracking India* (1988), etc.. In the latter fiction, Hanif Kureishi started his prolific career with the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), which notched the Whitbread Award, and Aamer Hussein wrote a series of popular short stories collection. Sara Suleri published her literary memoir, *Meatless Days* (1989).

Mubina Talaat (2002) studied the linguistic ingenuity in *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri (1989). Ghulam Murtaza (2010) studied the metaphors in *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri (1989). The present research work analyzes stylistically the poem ‘*Wedding in the Flood*’ by Rafat and highlights the linguistically unique features of this poem that speaks itself for its linguistic ingenuity.

1.1.1 Text: *Wedding in the Flood*

They are taking my girl away forever,	1
sobs the bride’s mother, as the procession	
forms slowly to the whine of the clarinet.	
She was the shy one. How will she fare	
in that cold house, among these strangers?	
This has been a long and difficult day.	
The rain nearly ruined everything,	
but at the crucial time, when lunch was ready,	

it mercifully stopped. It is drizzling again
as they help the bride into the palankeen.
The girl has been licking too many pots.
Two sturdy lads carrying the dowry
(a cot, a looking glass, a tin-trunk,
beautifully painted in grey and blue)
lead the way, followed by a foursome
bearing the palankeen on their shoulders.
Now even the stragglers are out of view. 17

I like the look of her hennaed hands, 18
gloats the bridegroom, as he glimpses
her slim fingers gripping the palankeen's side.
If only her face matches her hands,
and she gives me no mother-in-law problems,
I'll forgive her the cot and the trunk
and looking-glass. Will the rain never stop?
It was my luck to get a pot-licking wench.
Everything depends on the ferryman now.
It is dark in the palankeen, thinks the bride,
and the roof is leaking. Even my feet are wet.
Not a familiar face around me
as I peep through the curtains. I'm cold and scared.
The rain will ruin cot, trunk, and looking-glass.
What sort of a man is my husband?
They would hurry, but their feet are slipping,
and there is a swollen river to cross 34

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They might have given a bullock at least,

grumbles the bridegroom's father; a couple of oxen
would have come in handy at the next ploughing.

Instead, we are landed with

a cot, a tin trunk, and a looking-glass,

all the things that she will use!

Dear God, how the rain is coming down.

The silly girl's been licking too many pots.

I did not like the look of the river

when we crossed it this morning.

Come back before three, the ferryman said,

or you'll not find me here. I hope

he waits. We are late by an hour,

or perhaps two. But whoever heard

of a marriage party arriving on time?

The light is poor, and the paths treacherous,

but it is the river I most of all fear. 51

Bridegroom and bride and parents and all,

the ferryman waits; he knows you will come,

for there is no other way to cross,

and a wedding party always pays extra.

The river is rising, so quickly aboard

with your cot, tin trunk, and looking-glass,

that the long homeward journey can begin.

Who has seen such a brown and angry river

or can find words for the way the ferry

saws this way and that, and then disgorges

its screaming load? The clarinet fills with water.

Oh what a consummation is here:

The father tossed on the horns of the waves,

and full thirty garlands are bobbing past
the bridegroom heaved on the heaving tide,
and in an eddy, among the willows downstream,
the coy bride is truly wedded at last. 68

2. Stylistic Analysis

The analysis was carried out keeping in mind first Crystal Davy's approach discussed in *Investigating English Style* by David Crystal and Derek Davy (1969). Second, deviations at different levels were studied keeping in mind the discussion given in Leech (1986) *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*.

Greek poet Simonides once said, "Poetry is the picture with sound while the pictures are the silent poems." (Zhu, 2005). I chose this poem for stylistic analysis because of many reasons: no doubt, the poem depicts the cultural identity of the Pakistani wedding culture but my initial feel after reading this poem was that it depicts the wedding, the felicitous occasion in tragic way and this sombre mood has been heightened in the linguistic ingenuity manipulated by the author and the poem is deeply marked with certain unique features at the lexical, semantic, grammatical and narrative levels.

The theme of the poem is of a traditional Pakistani Wedding but with different **narrative voices** which provide vivid insight into how they feel about the wedding and its journey while crossing a river into which the wedding party is stuck due to the monsoon rain which flood it. Each of the stanzas deals with common perspective through the personal reflections as well as descriptions of the monsoon. There are comments upon the dowry that the bride takes with her "a cot, a looking glass, a tin trunk" and there are also judgments of the bride that connect her with the monsoon. The final stanza concludes the episode.

2.1 Lexical Features

Open class words are those words which carry the crux of meaning in a language, as opposed to closed class (grammatical) words such as determiners (e.g. this, that, the) and prepositions (e.g. in, at, on). Closed class words prove like sentence 'glue' and produce a link together with all open class words in meaningful arrangements (sentences).

Table 1 shows how the open class words are distributed throughout the poem, and whether they are nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs.

Table 1. Distribution of Nouns in three Semantic Classes

NOUNS RELATED TO HUMANS	NOUNS RELATED TO WEDDING/PAKISTANI CULTURE	NOUNS RELATED TO FLOOD
Girl, strangers, face, lads, shoulders, paths,	Bride, palankeen, Hennaed hands, cot, dowry, Looking-glass, tin-trunk Procession, mother in law, bridegroom, marriage party, Pot-licking wench, ferry, curtains	Waves, river, water,

The comparison in the table 1 certainly makes it clear that the majority of nouns belong to wedding custom of Pakistan. The Pakistani culture has been given maximum importance through the lexical category of words which clearly dominates the other categories of humans and flood and therefore, the wedding theme makes the foregrounding feature reflecting the Pakistani culture in its true colour.

Similarly, the verbal pattern has been used in very meaningful way. Simple Present and present progressive tense (taking, licking, drizzling, gloats, forms, depends, coming , knows) have been deliberately used to heighten the impact of immediacy as the marriage procession moves on in flood to reach its destination.

Verb ‘gloats’ depicts the greedy animal nature of the husband who will forgive the petty dowry if the bride’s appearance comes up to the expectations of the bridegroom." **If her face matches her hands''**.

2.1.1 Narrative Ingenuity

The poem consists of four stanzas each consisting of 17 lines and in each stanza a different narrator expresses his personal feelings and reflections. The narration becomes complex that reflects the confusion in the minds of the narrators in its intertwining the present tense and past tense and above all, interrogative sentence has been uttered by each narrator which also depicts the confused mentality of the all the marriage party stake -holders. " Mother is confused about future of her daughter and the use of question sentence in almost third line of each stanza has been also expressed by each narrator. Free Direct Narration (FDS) and Free Indirect Narration (FIS) seem to have been used in a very purposeful way to depict the mental states of the characters in the poem. In the first stanza, the mother's confused mind mixes the present narration with past reflecting the mental confusion of the mother.

**She was the shy one " How will she fare
in that cold house, among all strangers."
This has been a long and difficult day**

L4-7

Similarly the third stanza speaks for its narrative ingenuity when the third person narration turns into direct Second person narration and the mental disturbance of father becomes apparent in the expression of talking about *ferry man* and the narration has changed in Free Direct Narration (FDS) which becomes quite complex to be understood:

when we crossed it this morning **L 44-46**
come back before three, the ferryman said
you will not find me here .

Yet again narration takes a turn in the very first line depicting the mental confusion of the father in the next line and Free Indirect narration becomes apparent fusing the opinion of both narrator and character. The final stanza tells the tale of the disaster but its narrator is hard to be identified and most likely it is the fused authorial voice with the third person narrator and FIS again is very marked deviation seen here in the whole stanza which is also complex to be understood because the third person speech is mingled with second person speech depicting the impending sad ending of the wedding party.

I hope he waits. **L-47**
the ferryman waits; he knows you will come **L53**

The fact that the ferryman will wait because of the payment he receives gives the situation an authenticity but complex narrations speak highly about the uncertain ending of the marriage caravan as it moves ahead in the unfavourable circumstances.

2.1.2 Semantic Deviation and Parallelism:

The most striking deviation that Rafat uses is semantic deviation conveyed again through Free Indirect narration (FIS) in the last stanza when the marriage procession crosses the angry river and reaches its destination:

Oh what a consummation is here: **L 63**

Through FIS, the authorial voice seems to have been mingled with the narrator's voice which again becomes quite marked feature in this stanza. The way word *oh* has been used along with the word *consummation*, it changes the whole outlook of the felicitous tone of marriage party in a sombre way and the total meanings of the poem seem to have changed into a tragic look and this semantic deviation is endorsed in the very next line when condition of the father of the bride is also expressed in the same tone:

The father tossed on the horns of the waves **L 63S**

The bridegroom's topsy-turvy fate also becomes apparent in the same stanza after the use of semantic deviation which seem to have affected the bridegroom tragedy :

the bridegroom heaved on the heaving tide, **L 66**

The bride seems to have been carried inside the coffin instead of *Palankeen* and the coffin

reaches its destination

When the coy bride is truly bedded at last. L 68

This semantic deviation is also heightened by the way the word **river** has been used in the whole poem and each narrator discusses it with certain impending fever that it will become the cause of their tragedy. Then for the first time there is personification in the “angry river” to suggest its tempestuousness and uncontrolled physical force. This is matched by the personification of the ferry as it “disgorges” effectively the wedding party into the river which then swallows the group “consummation” and it happens with the use of deviation of word **oh & Consummation** in the last stanza.

**Swollen river,
But it is the river I most of all fear. L 51
then disgorges its screaming load L 61**

Parallelism is found at the phonological level in the whole poem through the repetition of certain sounds either vowels or consonants which renders metrical pleasure and sense of immediacy to the poem as the marriage procession carries on:

***I Like the look of Hennaed hands L 18
Familiar face L29
The river is rising L56
Heaved on the heaving tide L 66***

Parallelism may also be seen on the syntactic level when **As-clause** has been used in the first two narrations that also add to the metrical and rhythmical pleasure of the poem:

***As the procession forms slowly to the whine of clarinet. L2
As he glimpses her slim fingers gripping the palankeen's side L20***

2.1.3 Proverbial Alliteration

The poem is marked with another unique feature as it narrates a proverb directly linked to Pakistani culture as whosoever licks the pots while eating meals brings a lot of rain on his/her wedding day and the same proverb is echoed by almost every narrator: the bride's mother admits this fact:

The girl has been licking too many pots L11

Then it is the bridegroom who ponders over the fate of his married life by remembering his wife with the same proverbial cultural identity:

It was my luck to get a pot-licking wench L25

Even in the third stanza father also speaks about his daughter in the same way and all this proverbial alliteration gives the poem a clear-cut cultural identity.

3. Conclusion

The poem written by Taufiq Rafat with its unique style has rich connotation with its unique form. In this poem with supreme blend of complex narration and form, the cultural aspect of

the Pakistani wedding custom becomes quite apparent. Moreover, the combination of narrative ingenuity and the semantic deviation renders a tragic look to the felicitous wedding ceremony. Alongwith this, the unique features on the lexical level and parallelism on phonological and syntactic level enhance the implicit meanings of Pakistani cultural customs.

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