



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING BASIC MODES OF EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to explore basic modes of expression in English poetry. A number of poetic lines or stanzas from diverse poems composed by various poets have been presented as a sample to explore the varied modes of expression in English poetry. Presentation and description of poetic lines that indicate the modes of expression are executed as a method of analysis of verse lines that function as data. This article can turn to be useful to those who are interested in studying and teaching English poetry. It is concluded that better understanding of the basic modes of expression in English poetry leads the readers to make better interpretation, more precise analysis and fairer evaluation of poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Studying and teaching English poetry is a rigorous act. Students and teachers have to face some intricate aspects such as vocabulary, structure, contexts, use of literary devices, ironic assertions, musicality and forms of poetry while reading English poetry. They also have to face with the problem with identifying the basic modes of expression in poetry. English poetry has been studied and taught at school level, campus level and university level as a compulsory subject in the faculty of management and as a major as well as compulsory subject in the Faculties of Humanities and Education in Nepal, but unfortunately, most of the teachers and students do not have sound understanding of the modes of expression in poetry. It is necessary for them to have the concept of the basic modes of expression for understanding poetry in a better way. The article attempts to explore the four basic modes of expression in poetry. Some verse lines or stanzas from different poems composed by different poets are the categorical / nominal / qualitative data that are presented and described as analysis. Such verse lines or stanzas indicate the modes of expression. This article is based on a qualitative research design that involves presentation and description. Poetry is a widely studied and taught genre of literature. Literature is an artistic expression of feelings, emotions, ideas or subject matters with the help of language. It is a very important aspect to understand how such feelings, emotions, ideas and subject matters are presented and dealt with in the poetry by poets.

Statement of the Problem: The key problem of this research is to explore appropriate verse lines or stanzas that hint at the modes of expression in poetry.

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It is a perplexing step to elicit the precise as well as facile verse lines as data from a vast corpus of poems.

Significance of the Study: Several researches have been carried out in the field of poetry, but such a study that sounds like covering only a small field has not been done before. It is innovative in this sense. This article is useful to those who are interested in studying and teaching English poems.

Literature Review: Literature review in this article involves the following aspects:

Literature: Literature is a precious asset of human beings. It reflects the human civilization. Hudson (2002) asserts that literature is fundamentally an "expression of life through the medium of language" (p.10). For Sidney (1907), literature is an art of imitation for a specific purpose. It imitates to "teach and delight" (p.10). These definitions indicate that literature is an art of expressing feelings, emotions and ideas using language with the purpose of teaching and delighting the readers.

Poetry as a Genre of Literature: Poetry is different from other genres because of its pleasing musicality, heightened imaginative tinge and extensive figurative devices. There are different forms of poetry. Some of them are lyric, ballad, sonnet, elegy, ode, dramatic monologue, epic etc. Johnson (1965) defines poetry as the art of "uniting pleasure with truth by recalling imagination to the help of reason" (p.57). Hudson (2002) considers poetry as an "interpretation of life through imagination and feelings" (P.80). Carlyle (1956) views poetry as "a musical" (p.317). Poetry is a type of literature in which sounds and meanings of language are combined to create ideas and feelings. For Wordsworth (1800), poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (p.213). Eliot (1951) states that poetry is not an "assertion of truth, but the making

of that truth more fully real to us" (p.22). Robert Frost (1957) assumes that poetry provides the one "permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another" (p. v). Poetry does not normally follow a traditional way of grammar. It accepts new forms and styles.. Widdowson (1984) views poetry to be characterized as "deviating from the norms of language." (p.146). It has been Lazar (1993) who argues that poetry frequently breaks the rules of language, but by doing so, it "communicates with us in a fresh, original way" (p.99).

Basic Modes of Expression in Poetry: Poetry is not only musical, but it is also expressive. Its nature is not rigid, but it is flexible. It expresses the poet's feelings, emotions, ideas and experiences by exploiting his/ her language and imagination in an artistic manner. There are four basic modes of expression in poetry. They are: dramatic mode, narrative mode, descriptive mode and meditative mode. These different modes are not always clear-cut. They overlap in most of the cases. It means a poem may have more than one mode. If a poem is long, there is possibility of occurrence of more modes.

Dramatic Mode: Dramatic mode of expression in poetry forms dramatic poetry which shares some features of drama. The features are the employment of characters, dialogues, action, setting etc. A dramatic poem presents a fragmentation of an action through the voices of the characters involved in that action. Dramatic poems are very short and compressed in comparison to plays. The readers need to do a good deal of guessing or inferring in order to grasp the elements of character and situation. Brent (April 17, 2017) asserts that dramatic poetry is essentially any poetic verse that is meant to be spoken as well as performed by actors in front of an audience. Dramatic poetry expresses the deep emotions of a poet and is quite a popular genre for operas.

Narrative Mode: Narrative mode of expression in poetry makes narrative poetry which shares some elements of story. The elements are character, events, situations and the commentary of the narrator. In a narrative poem, the story is generally told by a narrator from the perspective outside the action. The narrator tells us about characters, their situations etc. A narrative poem often contains a moral at the end of the poem. It is because it narrates a story which must have some conflict and resolution. However, the moral lessons may be explicit or implicit. Hence, the readers have to draw the meaning of the poem through analysis and evaluation of the characters and their actions. Narrative poems use a narrator to tell a story, they include poetic and figurative language, and they aim to entertain the reader. A narrative poem is a longer form of poetry that tells an entire story, with a beginning, middle, and end. Narrative poems contain all of the elements of a fully developed story, including characters, plot, conflict, and resolution. These poems are typically told by just one narrator or speaker. Traditional forms of narrative poetry include epics, ballads, and Arthurian romances. In comparison to stories, narrative poems are compressed and elliptical, shifting their focus, concentrating on striking details, and leaving us to make appropriate connections and draw appropriate conclusions.

Descriptive Mode: Descriptive mode of expression in poetry forms descriptive poetry in which a vivid description is employed with descriptive words. Description is the element in poetry closest to painting and sculpture which use persons, animals, or things, their shapes, colors, textures, qualities and

decorations. The poet presents visual pictures and scenes or the descriptions of persons, animals, or objects their shapes, colors, movements, textures and qualities with the help of words. Descriptive poem is a poem that contains a large amount of descriptive detail.

Meditative Mode: Meditative mode of expression in poetry forms meditative poetry in which meditation is a central element. During the meditation, the speaker speaks to himself or thinks aloud for us to hear. Meditative poetry is rich in symbols. Normally serious and religious poems are meditative.

Narrative and Dramatic Mode: A poem may have a combination of the narrative mode of expression and the dramatic mode of expression. Narrative is almost always then and drama is almost always now. The compactness and brevity characteristic of poem often moves narration into the direction of drama.

Descriptive and Meditative Mode: Meditative poetry is rich in an expression of subjective thoughts and feelings on something or someone. The meditative dimension in poetry usually comes together with the descriptive dimension. These dimensions or modes work together to suggest and express ideas and feelings of the poet. There is a strong tendency of the descriptive poem to move from description to overt meditation. The descriptive-meditative structure is a kind of dramatic monologue that has three parts: it opens with the description of a scene, then (often due to an external trigger) turns to an interior meditation (for example, the expression and/or consideration of memories, concerns, anticipation), and then turns to a re-description of the scene, a scene that now seems different due to the changed mindset of the poem's speaker.

Presentation and Description: Some verse lines or stanzas as qualitative data are elicited from different poems of some poets. The verse lines or stanzas that indicate the modes of expression are presented and described as a method of analysis.

Presentation No. 1

"Where have you been , my long lost lover,
This seven long years and more?"
"I have been seeking gold for thee, my love
And riches of great store." (1-4)
(Anonymous: The Demon Lover)

Description

This stanza is written in a dramatic mode of expression. In this stanza, there are two characters the lover and his beloved who speak to each other and their speech is overheard by the audience or reader. The beloved asks her lover where he has been lost for more than seven years. He replies that he has been away from her for seeking gold and valuable properties for her.

Presentation No. 2

As they were walking up the street,
Most beautiful for to behold,
He cast a glamour over her face
And it shone like brightest gold. (29-32)
(Anonymous: The Demon Lover)

Description

This stanza is written in a narrative mode of expression. In this piece of ballad, the story is told by a narrator from the perspective outside the action. The narrator describes two characters and their activities. The character 'He' seems to have some supernatural power with which he makes his beloved's face shine like the brightest gold.

Presentation No. 3

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me. (1-6)
(Edgar Allan Poe: Annabel Lee)

Description

This stanza is also written in a narrative mode of expression. The poem is narrated by a young man who describes himself as a 'child.' The man fell in love with a young woman named Annabel Lee. They lived in a kingdom by the sea. The narrator, who is also a character in the poem, narrates his story. He and Annabel Lee were very happy. Their love for each other was so intense, in fact, that the Seraphim in Heaven (angel) become jealous and murder Annabel Lee, by sending a wind that chilled her to death. He was devastated but did not give up on their love. Lee was so loving that she had no other thought except loving him and being loved by him. He believed that his soul is inseparable from Annabel Lee's. Every night he dreamt of her and slept next to her in her tomb.

Presentation No. 4

Visible, invisible
a fluctuating charm
and amber-tinctured amethyst
inhabits it, your arm
approaches and it opens
and it closes; you had meant
to catch it and it quivers;
you abandon your intent.
(Marianne Moore: A Jellyfish)

Description

This poem is written in a descriptive mode of expression. It is an excellent descriptive poem in which the speaker describes a jellyfish with its color, shape, movement, beauty and nature. The speaker presents the jellyfish as a charming, flexible, visible, invisible, swift and fascinating creature. It is like our dream or desire that is difficult to hold.

Presentation No. 5

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my Chevalier. (9-11)
(Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Windhover)

Description

This piece of the poem "The Windhover" is written in a meditative mode of expression.

It is a religious poem which deals with Christ, his beauty, greatness and grace. This piece of poem presents God as a lovelier as well as more dangerous savior.

Presentation No. 6

She took her eldest son into her arms
And sweetly did him kiss;
"My blessings go with you and your father too
For little does he know of this?" (25-28)
(Anonymous: The Demon Lover)

Description

This stanza retains two modes of expression. The first two lines of the stanza have the narrative mode of expression that the story is told by a narrator from the perspective outside the action and the last two lines have the dramatic mode or element that presents a fragmentation of action through the voice of a character involved in the action.

Presentation No. 7

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep. (13-16)
(Robert Frost: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening)

Description

This stanza employs two modes of expression. In this stanza, the first line is a description about the woods. The speaker describes that the woods are lovely, dark and deep. The last three lines have the meditative mode of expression that focuses on the importance of fulfilling promises. He was highly enchanted by the woods in a snowy evening, but all of sudden he comes to realize that life is a long journey that must be completed before his death. The promises need to be fulfilled. Serious English poems have usually embodied a movement from description to overt meditation.

Presentation No. 8

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan. (1-4)
Release me, and restore me to the ground;
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
And thee returning on thy silver wheels. (72-76)
(Alfred Lord Tennyson: Tithonus)

Description

This stanza is written in combination of two modes of expression: descriptive mode and meditative mode. The poem begins with the poet's speaker, **Tithonus**, son of Laomedon, a King of Troy, bemoaning his immortality as he looks around the woods. Around him he can see the "woods decay." He repeats phrase twice for emphasis as this simple act of life moving on to death is beyond the realm of his understanding. After decaying the woods, "fall," and a "vapour" or mist

covers the ground. This vapor is part of the process of reincarnation through which every living thing participates. "The vapors weep their burthen to the ground," and the men come along and till the field and all that lies within it. The swan also dies. The earth is reused and reborn; every living thing goes through this except for Tithonus. The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by Tithonus, primarily to his beloved, Eos, goddess of the dawn. In a meditative tone, he requests her to release him from the suffering and unnatural condition of immortality. He urges her to liberate him and restore him to mortality and the grave because his nature can never truly mix with hers. He experiences the coolness of her "rosy shadows" while the men below are still warmed by the day. These men are happy and possess "the power to die," and are even happier in death. By letting him go, she would still be able to see his grave eternally. By returning to the Earth he would forget "these empty courts," while she would continue to bring the dawn on her silver wheels.

Conclusion

Poetry, a popular ancient genre of literature, retains the flexibility of structure, multiplicity of the meaning, diversity of subject matter as well as the overlapping of modes of expression. Such an overlapping nature of modes of expression in poems makes the poems unique and supple. It avoids monotony for reading. If the readers/students/ teachers have profound knowledge of the modes of expression in poetry, they will certainly gain pleasure as well as better understanding of poetry through reading them. Understanding the basic modes of expression in English enables readers to analyze, interpret and thematize the poems well.

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