

## To Analyze a Poem Stylistically “The Hand” by Ibrahim Nasrullah

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### تحليل أسلوبى لقصيدة "اليد" للشاعر إبراهيم نصر الله

**ملخص:** يهدف البحث إلى بيان المنظور "السيبولساني" في التحليل الأسلوبى لتحليل قصيدة "اليد"، فقد نتج هذا المنظور عن التفاعل بين السيميائية واللسانيات. ويضع البحث نموذجاً هرمياً متعدد المستويات متداخل الرؤى. ويستخدم الباحث مقارنة لدراسة قصيدة إبراهيم نصر الله "اليد" في المستويات المقترحة للرمز في الجملة، والرموز في الأدب، والرمز الأدبي ولا يمكن إدراك هذه القصيدة كعمل فني إلا على مستوى الرمز الأدبي.

**Abstract:** The present paper intends to highlight the semiolinguistic perspective of a stylistic analysis of a poem. The semiolinguistic perspective is born of an interaction of semiotics and linguistics. An interlocking multileveled hierarchical model has been outlined for conducting such a study. This approach has been used here to study Ibrahim Nasrullah's poem "The Hand" at the proposed levels of sentence symbol, the symbols in Art and the Art symbol. It is only at the level of Art symbol that the poem is realized as an artistic potential.

### 1.0 Introduction

Poetry, like all language forms, is an event in communication. Being a specific genre, the language of poetry has distinct functions. Roman Jakobson (1960) in his classic article on "Linguistics and Poetics" defines the poetic function. Jakobson, in fact had perfected the Prague school version of the poetic function which for them consisted of "the maximum of foregrounding of an utterance."

In defining the poetic function, Jakobson (1960: 358) states : "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of sequence."

The principles of equivalence is further clarified by Jakobson (1968:602-3) in terms of an operational device which takes into account various forms of linguistic symmetries and asymmetries. This means that a poetic style feature is represented by parallelism of various linguistic configurations.

The view that the poetic function is based solely on linguistic configurations has been criticized by Werth (1967) and Culler (1971) etc. Following Riffaterre (1959; 1966; 1978), other scholars like Fish (1980), Iser (1978), Jauss (1982), Srivastava (1980) and Gargesh (1990) have all provided an active role to the reader. This means that any stylistic analysis of a text will be based on significant linguistic style features identified by a reader. Since poetic language involves a signification process, the method of analysis followed here is

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semi-linguistic, the one proposed by Srivastava (1980) and further modified by Gargesh (1990).

In the context of semi-linguistic approach to poetic analysis. Three facts are to be emphasised:

1. The nature of language as a poetic sign.
2. The dynamic and organic nature of a poetic text.
3. The different linguistic levels posited for textual analysis.

In the context of the semi-linguistic framework, it may be pointed out that a stylistic study is based on the conceptual apparatus supplied by semiotics in relation to verbal communication. All semioticians agree that the sign system of language, like any other system of communication, needs a human agency and the system finds its manifestation in written or spoken forms. Each form neutralizes its own mechanism to generate cognition.

However, language is a poetic sign, written or spoken, it differs in function from the ordinary language forms. The contexts of ordinary language are referential and the meanings generated are denotative while the contexts of literary language are fictive, and the meanings generated are connotative in the Barthean sense. Barthes (1967). Using Guiraud's (1975:10) distinctions it may be said that ordinary denotative language is "a logical sign" which is "arbitrary", "homological", "objective", "rational" and "abstract".

On the other hand poetic language is "an expressive sign" which is "motivated", "analogical", "subjective", "effective" and "concrete". (Gargesh 1990: 84, 85).

In brief it can be said that while ordinary language refers to objective facts of life the poetic language is emotive in nature.

The second point needs to be emphasized is that the poetic text is fairly autonomous. It encapsulates meanings unique to itself. Although it utilizes language and facts of the "real word", this reality becomes a new one just as light after passing through a person. We know that light before passing through a prism is white and after passing through a prism it breaks into its different colors. Similarly, ordinary language and facts of real life in a poetic text do become prismatically metaphoric. In this historical sense, it can be said that language in facts of life is fairly autonomous after undergoing a process of transmutation. Therefore, poetic texts need to be analyzed as significant semi-linguistic signs.

Finally, the semi-linguistic method of analysis of a poetic text needs to be elaborated.

The method here is essentially of Srivastava (1980) and modified by Gargesh (1990). Both scholars have analyzed the stylistic facts in terms of linguistic "semi-ology" by defining the nature and function of signs, signifier, signified, and the process of signification at different levels of language organization.

They promote the view that any reflection on language used in literary or unliterary discourse is a reflection on signs, and further, that language, more specifically grammar serves as sense making system for all other sign systems. They point out that language as a semiotic system has the unique capacity for observing and expressing the communicational intent of all other codes, a capacity which is not

inherently present in any other non-linguistic code used by humans. They developed their semiolingustic level by demonstrating how a verbal constitute with a hierarchical setup of interlocking levels or layers of different kinds of signs systems expresses the multilevel nature of a poem’s signification. This development involves the poetic construction as a semiosis process involving the transformation of one level into another, namely, the transformation of the first material level of the sentence symbol into the second level of the symbol in art, and further, into the third level of the art symbol and the aesthetic symbol. The fact that is stressed is that all the levels and their corresponding units are inherently verbal in nature.

The different levels of analysis are given below:

Symbols	Unit	Competence	Function
L3b Aesthetic Symbol	Art object concretized	Aesthetic	Sentience
L3a Art symbol	Total text or Art object concretized	Artistic	Expressive
L2 Symbols in Art	Limited text Discourse	Communicative	Suggestive
L1 Sentence Symbol	Grammatical sentence	Linguistic	Discursive

The table above shows (L<sub>1</sub>) is the level of sentence symbol, (L<sub>2</sub>) is the level of symbols in art and (L<sub>3</sub>) is the level of art symbol. Each level is distinct and requires a specific kind of language and a specific function.

At (L<sub>1</sub>), the sentence symbols conceived are denotative in nature and referential or discursive in function. These require a simple linguistic competence for analysis. At (L<sub>2</sub>), the symbols in art function as connotators take discourse units as their domain and for their analysis require a communicative competence.

At level (L<sub>3</sub>), the function of the art symbol is expressive and it is geared to express the full poem’s signification and the competence required for analysis is artistic. Srivastava (1980) and Gargesh (1990) mention a level of aesthetic symbol having a sentience function, which attempts to study the text as concretized in the mind of the readers by using an aesthetic competence.

In the present paper, the focus is only on the study of the art symbol as an expressive form. In the light of the above concepts the poem “The Hand” composed by Ibrahim Nasrullah(\*) is being analyzed. The text of the poem is as follows:-

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(\*) A poet and a novelist, Nasrullah is one of the most promising Palestinian literary figures to rise to fame in the diaspora. He has published several collections of poetry to date

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#### *The Hand*

It is the hand 1  
day's beautiful branch 2  
blossoming with fingers, 3  
soft as the dove's cooing, 4  
that neither catches the wind, 5  
nor arrests the water. 6  
But it takes in space 7  
and embraces the earth 8  
from the wild flower 9  
to the palm tree. 10  
It is the hand 11  
comforts us when we are broken, 12  
consoles when we cry, 13  
offers solace to our tiredness. 14  
It is the hand 15  
dream's miracle 16  
legend of creation 17  
columns of light 18  
or a handful of embers 19  
that quicken or subside. 20  
It is the hand 21  
a field, and a posy of children's songs, 22  
and a planet. 23  
The hand isn't a book, or lines. 24  
Don't scrutinize the details 25  
Don't read its silence 26  
nor its contours 27  
you will find nothing. 28  
All the lines that have invaded it 29  
all the bends 30  
are our fault 31  
from the first aberrations 32  
to the advent of misery. 33  
It is the hand 34  
do not read it 35  
read what it will write 36  
read what it will do 37  
and raise it 38

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including: *The Rain Inside* (1982), *Morning Songs* (1984), *The River Boy and the General* (1987). These collections have been highly praised by critics. He has also been three times the recipient of the Union of Jordanian Writers Prize for best volume of poetry.

raise it 39

till it becomes a sky. 40

(Jayyusi 1992: 241-42)

## 2.0 Stylistic Analysis

The analysis of the text will be at the levels of the sentence symbol, the symbol in art and finally the art symbol.

### 2.1 L<sub>1</sub> Analysis at the level of the sentence symbol

At the level of sentence symbol, the poem is explicated at the level of the individual sentences.

Here the linguistic patterns are identified within and across sentences. The sentence symbol can be analyzed by working at the poem from the syntactic, phonological, and lexical (which includes nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs etc.) levels.

The poem does not contain major phonological patterns. There is no end rhyme and no regular phonological rhythm. For focus, there are examples of alliteration (branch, blossoming...; wind... water; comforts... consoles; creations and columns), assonance (hand... branch; soft... dove; take..., space; comforts... consoles, it... is... miracle); and consonants. (spaces...an embraces; wild...flower; dreams...miracle...legend...creation...columns of light or a handful of embers).

At the level of lexicon, it is the noun *hand* that is repeated six times in the poem. The other nouns are either concrete or abstract nouns. The concrete nouns are book, branch, fingers, dove, water, earth, flower, tree, embers, children and planet. The abstract nouns consist of day, cooing, wind, space, cry, solace, tiredness, dream, miracle, legend, creation, light, songs, details, silence, nothing, fault, aberrations, misery and sky). There are two qualitative adjectives (beautiful and wild).

In the use of the verb, existential verb has been used seven times.

The action verbs are (catches, arrests, takes, scrutinized, read, write, raise, comfort, embraces, console and quicken). The stative verbs in the poem are (subside, scrutinize, verbs to be, become).

At the level of sentence structure the poem consists of 8 sentences which are marked by certain repetitions. The expression 'it is the hand' is repeated 5 times in the poem like a refrain. The negation is repeated in lines 5, 6, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 35, the remaining lines are affirmative. The main principal clause, which is often repeated 'is the hand' but the remaining phrases/clauses serve as qualifiers of the principal clauses.

In the end, there is a repetition of the expressions related with reading and raising.

### 2.2 L<sub>2</sub> Analysis at the level of symbol in art

At this level the poetic figures like metaphor, simile, imagery etc. are explicated.

There are many expressions in this poem which violate selectional restrictions such as the hand being, the day's beautiful branch and blossoming with fingers etc. which function as metaphors.

In fact all the activities associated with the hand as qualifiers are figurative.

The metaphors from line 2, 3, 4 describe the *hand* as an organic entity imbued with growth. Figurative expressions from line 7 to 10 represent the all encompassing

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power of the hand. The qualifiers in lines 12, 13, 14 represent the soothing effect of the hand. The qualifiers in lines 16-20 describe the quality of the marvelousness of the hand. The qualifiers in 22 and 23 represent the spatial dimension of the hand. The qualifiers in lines 24-28, 35 represent the fact that the lines of the hand should not be read physically. Qualifiers in lines 29-33 interpret the lines of the hand in terms of our faults from the very beginning of our history. The qualifiers in lines 36, 37 /are expressive of/ the fact that the hand should be viewed in terms of what it can do. The last 3 lines, I suggest, metaphorize the hand into a sky i.e., into a vast canopy that protects every thing below it.

#### **2.3 L<sub>3</sub> Analysis at the level of the art symbol**

At this level, the linguistic patterns with their meaning, in linkage with the figurative language, give a new specificity to the entire poem. The analysis at the level of sentence symbol gives us some signification of the poem which are being discussed below:

The phonological patterns perceived at (L1) lend an element of musicality to the poem. Clearly, the poem is in free verse and is marked by uneven line length. At the level of the lexicon, the various nouns represent the movement of the hand as an abstract entity more than a concrete reality.

The study of the verbs presents the hand as an existential reality having various powers of action. At the level of syntax, the existential state of the hand is represented in both the affirmations and the negations representing what the hand is. The various configurations at the level of symbols as art when taken together lead us to the representation of the hand in terms of semantics and pragmatics. Taking all the figures together, the hand becomes a polysemantic fact. It is an organic entity which is beautiful and soft. Further, it is not presented as belonging to the realm of natural processes, though it still gives the impression of encompassing everything existing on the earth. It is a great courtesy and a marvel in itself. It is not to be seen physically but it is to be perceived with all the positive features that it can perform in order to become an umbrella like a protective force.

At this level of the art symbol through the kind of analysis that we have conducted that it is now possible to know what the hand is. It is an all protective hand that always helps and is an essential part of our life's force. The poem does not tell us whose hand it is. If we study the various concretizations of this poem in the mind of various readers, then perhaps the hand may be identified as that of the almighty God or of some natural force while for others it may even represent the mother as a source of warmth and protection.

#### **3.0 Conclusion**

The stylistic analysis envisaged here takes into account levels of organization or different kinds of sign systems which express the multileveled nature of the poem's signification. Such analysis comprises the principle of poetic construction as semiosis process, involving the transformation of one level into another, (i.e. the transformation of the first material level of the sentence symbol into the second level of the symbols in art, and further, into the third level of the art symbol). All

these levels are verbal in nature. At the level of L1 sentence symbol, the poem is explicated at the level of the individual sentences. At the level of L2 symbol in art, the poetic figures like metaphor, simile, imagery etc. are explicated. At the level L3 the art symbol, the linguistic patterns with their meaning, in linkage with the figurative languages give a new specificity to the entire poem.

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