

From Stylistic Analysis to Interpretation: A Pedagogical Illustration From K.K. Daruwalla's 'Hawk'

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According to Widdowson (1992), "Poems are uses of language and they can only be understood as uses of language" (p. 10). The language of poetry usually takes as its subject matter, what is conventionally considered to be commonplace, ordinary or even insignificant. What is then significant about poetry is simply the way language is used to reformulate in unfamiliar terms the simple propositions capturing the underlying mystery of the commonplace. It is imaginative, insightful and subtle thought which renders into poetic language simple truisms such as "nature is beautiful" or "love is a wonderful feeling". The language of poetry thus brings into existence new or elusive images of reality. This puts poetry on a pedestal as it becomes an especially prestigious discourse, different from the world of ordinary affairs. The message contained in a poetic text is the poet's perception, but it is meant for others and thus of general significance. To understand the message, readers must not only relate the language of poetry to ordinary day to day activities but also discover the deviations to understand the meaning, the message or the objective of the poet. To understand the language of poetic communication or discourse, the reader needs to interpret its language to understand how it has been laden with certain values, which make for a coherent world in the context of that poem.

Before taking up a poetic text in the class, a teacher must do a stylistic analysis of the text. The teacher must then act as a facilitator by providing the students with linguistic props or language clues which would help them arrive at

the evidenced interpretation. The teacher's role in the class should in fact be to encourage the students to come up with more than one interpretation, or ask the students for their individual interpretations based on the linguistic indicators/signs in the poem. The teacher can begin by telling the students that every piece of literature whether poetry or fiction, is a negation of the norms of a social system. It is only when the accepted ideas, conventions or values of a society are represented in a new light or in an unfamiliar manner, that the search for the unformulated meaning begins and this, in the vocabulary of the reader response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, is due to the negation of the standard manner of representation in the code. A student who is on a guided tour of a poetic text begins his search by looking for elements represented in a "defamiliar" manner, or focuses on those utterances which are odd or deviant from the standard language. The teacher can also guide the student to look for "extra regularities, not irregularities, into the language" (Leech, 1969), such as repetition of similar structures on the levels of sound or meaning and the use of parallel structures or utterances which appear to be too simple and linear. The student must therefore analyse the poet's choice of words or lexical items, sounds, sentence-structures, the use of deictics, or any other overarching structures. Further, the teacher must instruct the student on how to relate the linguistic or formal properties of the language of the poem to the normal paradigms of language to establish their literary significance. The student must look for those attributes which

have been acquired by lexical items in the context of the poetic text, and these attributes, in the words of Widdowson (1975), are those where an additional value has been added to their significance in the already existing code. Thus the meaning of a word in the poem becomes equal to its value and significance. It is the poet who adds value to the already existing significance of a lexical item or word in a poetic context; and it is the sum of the superimposed values which helps the student in arriving at a coherent interpretation of the poem.

The teacher must also explain that it is the poet's distinct usage at the levels of sound, lexis, syntax and semantics that constitutes his distinct style in a chosen text and this could be similar or different in other texts. The student thus comprehends the meaning of style as a choice, and the stylistician's or the analyst's task as that of relating specific choices to the poet's intended meaning. The teacher analyst also draws the student's attention to any structure formed by these meanings explored at different levels, because it is the coherence of meaning studied at various levels that is of prime importance. Let us now look at Daruwalla's poem 'Hawk' and attempt to understand its pedagogic significance.

The teacher first draws the students' attention to the title of the poem and the expectations it arouses in the readers. A hawk is a bird of prey which feeds on smaller animals, and is usually found in habitats such as deserts and fields. It is known for being an aggressive predator which kills with its claws, and its preferred time for hunting is when daylight reduces. A hawk's diet includes snakes, lizards, mice, rabbits, squirrels or any other type of small animal. The teacher directs the student to read the poem at least twice and identify utterances or parts of the text which are different from the commonplace representation of a hawk. The student reader is asked to look at and reflect about sentences such as:

A frustrated parricide on the kill.
The fuse of his hate was burning still.
A rapist in the harem of the sky
The ones he would scoop up next,
Those black dregs in the cup of his hate!
Hawking is turned to a ritual, the
predator's
Passion honed to an art;
But I am learning how to spot the ones
Crying for the right to dream, the right
to flesh,
The right to sleep with their own wives-
I have placed them.

(Daruwalla, K.K. 1992, pp. 80-82)

These portions of the text persuade the reader to think that the human feelings of hate, forced sexual assault, passion and the intelligence to target "them", i.e., those who wish to lead normal lives have been added to the normal traits of a hawk. The hawk is thus behaving more like a human being than a bird of prey. The anthropomorphic qualities of the hawk are the elements of value added to the existing qualities of the hawk. The baser instincts of hatred and frustration consume him so much that even after parricide he wants to target other birds for his vicarious pleasures. The sky has been compared to a big harem where he can assault anyone. Here the teacher can explain the metaphorical use of the word "harem" by elaborating how the sky has become a substitute for a "harem", as the hawk is free to choose and assault any creature of the sky. His passion to kill is transformed into an art and he now acquires the skill to target those "human beings" that he desires to target. It is indeed strange that the hawk targets humans and the reader is persuaded to look for the cause. The teacher then introduces the students to the lexical item "anthropomorphic" and explains that

Daruwalla's poetic creation possesses these qualities. The teacher can further motivate the student to think about the poet's objective in creating an anthropomorphic hawk. The idea of a hawk being vested with human-like qualities is not very different from the childhood experience of playing with toy animals with human faces, arms or legs, or of reading stories about such creatures. The teacher can also draw the student's attention towards animation films which feature speaking and thinking animals. Thus, it can help the students to understand the idea of a hawk vested with human emotions or attributes.

The teacher then directs the students' attention to the structural contrasts or thematic contrasts

in the poem. They observe that the structure of the poem contrasts between sections one and three (describing the wild hawk), and sections two and four (describing the tamed hawk). Also, there is a prominent repetition in section two

The tamed one is worse, for he is touched
by man.

The reader is coaxed into thinking of the contrast between wild and tamed hawks. The teacher can ask the students to focus on this contrast and use a table to list the differences between the two. This would help them understand the poet's objective in representing the tamed hawk as worse than the wild one- something which is contrary to the reader's expectations.

Table 1

Differences between Wild and Tamed Hawks

Wild Hawk- Free	Tamed Hawk- Kidnapped by man
King of Sky	Blinded, starved, tortured (scar is swelled up)
Hunts-crow, mynah, pigeon, parakeets, hare	Hunts-"them" or those wishing to lead normal lives, i.e. human beings
Speck of barbed (controlled) passion	Trained for havoc-ferocious; eye targets his torturers
Human traits-full of hatred, attacks fearlessly all birds without distinction, Rapist	Human traits-Vengeance for torturers-eye focused on them
Wild nature provides for hawk	Nature cannot satisfy hawk, unnatural torture breeds unnatural desires
Normal Predator	Maniac

It is evident from the table that contrary to domesticated animals, the tamed hawk, in order to satisfy man's lust for hunting, acquires uncontrollable traits of violence. The lexical item "tamed" therefore carries the positive value of becoming less dangerous, but also simultaneously the negative value of being subdued and subjugated to the will of the master. The hawk too is enslaved to the violent instincts of man.

Hawking or hunting smaller animals, which is the natural trait of hawks in their usual habitat is turned into a ritual or a compulsory practice which they do when they accompany a hunting expedition. Hunting thus becomes a forced trait. The violence unleashed on a hawk in captivity makes it more aggressive, and ferocious as a predator. The students thus understand that in the context of the poem, a tamed hawk is more

violent and this is a negation of the normal expectations of a domesticated bird or animal. Moreover, a tamed hawk's violent nature is in proportion to the violence it is subjected to in his captivity. Hence the message or the discourse which emerges from the analysis of the table is that violence begets or breeds more violence. The tamed hawk is thus:

...a black prophecy
Weaving its moth-soft cocoon of death
Over each and everything that it looms
over.

The student is persuaded to think about the intention of the poet who uses the tamed hawk as a persona. In section four, the poet wears the mask of the kidnapped hawk; in fact sections two and four have been written from the hawk's perspective. Poets generally absent themselves from a scene when they apprehend that the blame for an action will fall on them. Wearing the mask of the enslaved hawk gives the poet the advantage of being acquitted of the blame for the excessively violent acts on the part of the tamed hawk. The enslaved hawk becomes responsible for all his acts. The poet uses the third person for the wild hawk and a description of all its actions, right from the actions. Also, not much space is given to the wild hawk as the poet has appropriated his habitat and all his actions. It is the tamed hawk who reveals his perspective by making use of the first pronoun in the last stanza, thereby acting as the poet's spokesperson or his persona. The greater space accorded to the tamed hawk and its actions in the poem's architecture are indicative of man's power over the tamed hawk, its torture, its exploitation in hunting pursuits and its subjugation for his selfish motives. The hawk in this poetic context has imbibed the baser instincts of taking revenge, of being violent in unexpected proportions and casting a shadow of death over whatever comes in its way.

Towards the end of the class, the teacher questions the students on the value added to the significance surrounding the hawk. Using the table to make note of the expected traits and the use of pronouns, the teacher guides the student to arrive at or at least approximate the communicative message of the poem that the violence unleashed on the kidnapped hawk makes him much more violent and like "a black prophecy"-spelling death all around. The human traits of hatred and revenge acquired by the hawk are also the result of this unnatural torture and habitat. Unnatural habitats create unnatural desires and hence a state of continuous frustration and dissatisfaction. The tamed hawk is trained in spreading havoc and in a period of drought,

...it will rain hawks

This means that the tamed hawks will outlive everything as man has contributed to the large-scale destruction of nature and hence its wild and natural habitat. The wild hawk was somewhat satisfied and happy in his wild surroundings which provided for him, but for the tamed hawk, nature in its wildness is certainly not enough and hence man too becomes a victim of the tamed hawk. Thus the proverbial message is that what man did to the hawk now comes back to him as man becomes a prey to the unnatural violence of the hawk. Arriving at this point of understanding, the students will hopefully appreciate the power of the poem.

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