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METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTUAL FORM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Poetry in its phenomenological form has been a matter of issue since the Formalists and New Critics averted their most attentions toward it. Rhythm and brevity are keys for discerning a poetry and its counterpart prose however, it is in essence all form which distinct the two. Form per se, is seen interminably to face two digressions in trend, either considered as a physical ontological construction or as a perception of its subjectivity of the reader in a Valerian sense which says physiological movement of the subjective points. This essay tries to compare the Formalists' and New Critics' definitions of the form as a concrete observable structure versus Valerian views of it. In addition, the ontological study of form is traced among some Iranian critics such as Golshiri and Barahani and Hashemi. It is discussed that a general phenomenally defined module can exist for explication of Valerian views of form which suits more comprehensive to the criteria of the poetry.

Keywords: Form, phenomenological, formalism, Valerian, poetry, Ontological

1. INTRODUCTION

In literary studies and almost as a major proportion of criticism, poetry has been constantly considered a challenge in a coterie of issues, such as its concept, its intentions, its meaning and most importantly its form. We are more and less, confronted with various definition of the so-called *form* of poetry. Although poetry had been a challenge not only since the very time of Plato and Aristotle, it became formally known as what we call the poetry by its very means, something ontological and complete in itself (Richards 1934) in Formalists and New Critics' time after 1915 onward.

Since the off shooting of Formalism and New Criticism, the notion toward literature gradually changed to the text and the form and the language of a text especially with contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure (Bressler 2007). Formalists believe that to study literature is to study poetics which is an analysis of a work's constituent parts-its linguistic and structural features- or its form. Form, they asserted, included the internal mechanics- or what the Formalists called devices-comprise the artfulness and literariness of any given, not a work's subject matter or the content (Bressler 2007). L. F. Searle, in *New Criticism* (2005) cited from Ransom who articulates the principles of these various groups and calls for an ontological critic, one who will recognize that a poem is a concrete entity. What is in the center of their attentions, is to study the form of poetry which is considered as the meaning for them. So, what is the form of the poetry? Is it the structure equivalence? What does it mean to study the form of a poem?

It is, of course, not a new matter to discuss as a lot of critics have tried to answer the questions regarding the form of poetry, such as, Roman Jakobson, de Man, Riffaterre etc but it is to state that dedication to studying the form of a text or poetry is not satisfactorily in comparison to the elements and meaning of the poetry. For New critics, however, the form is more than the external structure of a poem; a poem's form encompasses and simultaneously rises above the usual definition of poetic structure. For New Critics, form is the overall effect that poem creates (Bressler 2007). But what makes a poem's form different from the other sorts of poems'? What differentiates a poem with prose? Is not the same procedure applicable to a prose in part the overall effects? What is this form, physical? Can we see it? How can we recognize the form of poetry then?

We are faced with many a question if we cessate taking the form pragmatically, because when we talk about poetry, we spontaneously, consciously or heedlessly talk much about the form of it and if we cannot find a logical definition, then we are just encountered with and disseminating the casuistries.

The focus of this paper will be elaboration on an essay on poetic form called “Contemporary Literary Studies and Concept of Methodological Form” by Dr. Hashemi (2006), which I believe an update to this essay, based on hypothesis and theories of Paul Valéry, can increment its comprehensibility in understanding of the form of poetry and its methodological concepts.

So in this essay I will try to analyze the following historically challenging questions. 1. What is poetry and how can we recognize prose and poetry? 2. Traditionally, is the rhythm and brevity a key for discerning a poetry and its counterpart prose? 3. What is form of a text, poem and in general the very form? 4. What is the role of reader in understanding of the poetry? And 5. Whether a general phenomenally defined module can exist for explication of form?

Among many theories which have been applied to the definition of poetry and its specifications since Victorian era, there is one which carries a close affinity with what Paul Valéry stated later as “physiological life”. Poetry was considered quite literally as magnetic, a direct transfer of energy i.e. the charge of thought/feeling as it moves—magnetically, electrically—from page to body mostly known as Electric Meter (Physiological poetics). The so-called fleshly school of the 1870s, Victorian poetry demands to be read as physiologically inspired: rhythms that pulse in the body, a rhetoric of sensation that readers might feel compelled to experience. “Physiological poetics” thus, in Victorian era, referred to the metrical, rhythmic, and sonic effects. Victorian poets ultimately came to see their work as physiologically based, as connecting intimately and instantaneously word, mind, and body. The Victorians’ physiological approach to poetry manifests both thematically and, more important, as a part of poetry’s formal structure. Rhythm in particular becomes a key element for poetic communication, suggesting through its stress and release a physiological give and take that, like a telegraphic transmission, connects individuals via bodily sensation. This is a clear substantiation which rhythm constitutes the principles of a poem in difference with prose. Example of such poetry can be found in Maxwell and Tennyson. In an instance, the reader of *In Memoriam* feels Tennyson’s feeling movement from the paper to his body. Percy Shelley tells us that poetry “startle[s]” with “the electric life which burns within . . . words,” and this electric life is precisely what enables poetry, in Shelley’s view, to rejuvenate language and thought. John Stuart Mill’s 1833 assertion that poetry represents “thoughts and words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself”; poets, he concludes, are “[t]hose who are so constituted that emotions are links of association by which their ideas, both sensuous and spiritual, are connected together” (1:356). Besides, Matthew Campbell’s *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (1999), for example, encourages readers to experience rhythm as “more than just a sound,” to understand poetic impulses as permitting “the speaker to express an experience of the activity of the body” (Campbell, 18). Kirstie Blair’s *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (2006) situates such bodily rhythmic experiences within the Victorian physiological sciences. Blair (2006) shows how rhythm pervades Victorian scientific discourse and comes to be understood “as an organic force, related to bodily movements and hence able to influence the breath or heartbeat of both poet and reader” (p.17). Prins in 2000 article explains that Yopie Prins’s work on meter has pushed our understanding of form in new and important directions, most especially by way of her notion of a “linguistic materialism” that allows voice to “materialize” in Victorian poetry “through the counting of metrical marks” (p.92)

All made important contributions to the theorization of poetics. Even when writing about essays explicitly on the nature of poetry—Paul Valéry’s lecture “Propos sur la poésie” and George Eliot’s “Notes on Form in Art” resists acknowledging that it was often to poetry that nineteenth-century thinkers turned when considering the connections between literature and physiological effects (Dames, 26–27, 49). Subsequently, *Electric Meters* entered the ongoing conversation around physiology and literature to help make sense of the enormous shifts in British poetics that occur across the nineteenth century. However, if we distance our theories from the Victorian era with that in mind which we are no longer depending to that time, we are making a fallacious mistake since the role of meter and rhythm is far from denial to the nature of poetry i.e. this rhythm and metric sounds is widely what mostly believe to be the true molder of a poem in difference with a prose. Conventionally this theories were thus categorized in physiological life of poem. Since then, the most prominent critic in its defense, has been Paul Valéry.

Paul Valéry has innovatively talked about poetry more than the others in this favor, in fact he devoted his life to poetry. So, it is to be taken a serious matter of debate to be so comprehensive and challenging which can’t be stopped and looked as if it is all answered and no mystery ever yet has remained about poetry and form. In his theory “physiological life of poetry”, we can infer priceless and logical pointers and guidelines about the mentioned issues. I have tried to set forth a logical understanding of the poetry and form through checking into a very comprehensive essay devoted to the methodological concepts of the form by my master, Dr. Mansour Hashemi, Paul Valéry’s *Poetry as physiology and pure poetry*” and Riffarrete’s theories and their importance.

2. DISCUSSION

Before the definition of form, I incumbent it upon myself to expatiate what poetry and prose are. Due to the historical facts, once we consider it, we mean the poetic text or in particular the entity of poetry itself. Poetry was considered seriously since the time of Aristotle though that's not going to help anything in recognition of the form. Poetry has been gravely challenged by Formalists, New Critics, and Deconstructionists up to the very recently. Stuart Mill in 1833 article 'What Is Poetry' defines it as "the distinction between poetry and what is not poetry, whether explained or not, is felt to be fundamental and appearances too like other things, must have a cause (...) poetry, when it is really such, is truth; and fiction also, if it is good for anything, is truth: but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly: the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life". He doesn't necessarily talk about the form, as more he considers poetry as such".

Besides, Roman Jakobson discusses the matters related to the poetry in an essay called "Linguistics and Poetics" saying "Poetics deals with problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. Since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics". Hence, it can be one of the very obstacles which makes the process of understanding of the form very much difficult because it is a matter of non-substantial language.

Nonetheless, one of the most important critic figures regarding the importance of poetry is Micheal Riffarrete who tried almost all his life to purvey a logical framework for poetry and its reading, according to Barakat in 2010. He focused mostly on the reader and the process of the reading of the poetry rather than endeavoring for provision of a methodological form of it. We shall not forget that poetry needs an act of all elements such as language, structure, semantic, semiology, reading and the reader. So it is a casuistic to refute one of these elements if one elaboration is needed to be expatiated i.e. if I am going to elaborate on form it doesn't necessarily mean reading is to be put aside. Poetry is more of a phenomenon in mind, a conglomeration of a social network of all these elements come together. By the way, according to Riffarrete, based on what Barakat in 2010 article states "I would like to wrap up my work focusing on the reader, because he is the only one who interlinks the inter-contacts of the text, its significations and its intertextuality and transferring of significations to one and other, takes place in his mind". Since the principle spotlight of this essay is not on the reading process and more on the definition of poetry and its form, Riffarrete is to be obligatory sufficed so far.

For understanding the form, it is necessary, as I personally think, to first be able to differentiate between prose and poetry because they are almost the same though not just in form. By doing so, I mean, recognition of what prose and poetry are, the form is spontaneously and inherently cogitated and explicated.

So far just a matter of feeling was added to the recognition of poetry, but what is the difference between poetry and prose? What comes to mind, is a mechanical feature which Dr. Hashemi (Methodological Concept of Form) discusses thoroughly, which says poetry has rhymed structure and musical beauty, whereas prose doesn't. But there are to be more profound explanations since just a rhymed structure and musicality cannot for sure end up to poetry as we have rhymed structurally musical proses too. There is a fundamental difference between the physical sensations that poetry or prose gives to readers. According to Valery, between readers of poetry and prose there are different "physical features that can be easily observed". Readers of prose, based on Ito Asa 2011, "exist, move, suffer and are worried only in spirit and the bodies don't exist", on the other hand "poetry doesn't impose on its readers a false reality that demands abstention of the body"

What's more, Dr. Hashemi, in his essay "Contemporary Literary Studies and Concept of Methodological Form"(2006), expatiates historically the ideas on the poetry and especially its form. According to his, New Critics normally avoided defining and explicating any concept of methodology and always sufficed and attributed to Form is the Meaning. There are two forms, as he quotes from Barahani Reza and Golshiri Hooshang. The concept of form in literary studies doesn't end in sounds hence, Brahani Reza states in the second type of the form as:

For the first one, Barahani in 1371 in "Mental form in poem" states that "the first one is a exterior form" which is including the rhythm or un-rhythm, the equity of lines and verses, rhymes and sounds and the exterior movement of the word". Though since the sounds repeat themselves in phonology, not many read a poem for its sounds as music is a better sound-source in this regard. It is not the case subsequently since sound cannot for sure be the reason, that's why, it moves from phonology to semantics which encompasses the processes between language, phonology and the writing since sound in the mind is a signifier which signifies the other signifieds and the circle of chains go on.

But what these definitions are indicted of is that merely these qualifications can't count specifically for poetry as these exist in music too. Second is the mental or internal form which interacts with the emotions which creates the unity of the poetry. However, this internal structure or so-called form, cannot be easily justified or explained, because

it is more of a perception and is attributed to the post-metaphysical non-substantial branch of language. But how then we want to explain something which is inter-mental?

Dr. Hashemi in the 2006 article continues that Barahani defines the second form saying “There is another form; more important and deep with a higher and wider range which shall be called the internal form or mental form. This mental form includes an environment in which poem moves and proceeds and takes along things and emotions [...] the reader of the poem, in this form, interacts with the poet’s feeling, thought and fantasy and he is eager to know what behavioral trend the poet has taken with things. The way the poet behaves towards the things and feelings, gives way the poem its true form. This is what cannot be heard and seen through touch and sight though through the internal vision [...] what is meant by internal form is exactly what gives a poem its integrity (Haman 73-75)

Golshiri Hooshang, also has a definition of the structure of the poem which as Dr. Hashemi reiterates shall not be confounded with the French Formalism; “what we mean by structure is the arrangement and array of constituents in a complete whole at which the parts are in an interplay of integrated interactions. On the other hands, Golshiri 1374 says “the poem’s whole not only is the accumulation of the constituents but also the way the significance and meaning protrudes”.

As also, De Man, in his essay ‘Form and Intent’ in 1983, bases all the Western interdisciplinary studies in a tension between sensory appearance and meaning which according to him, the epistemological and ontological concepts are resulted and separately being studied. The form protrudes in the epistemological part of language and thus is very complex to be explicable to the audiences. De Man believes that form and intention of the text, are very integrated and very hard to be separable.

However, among all, one of the most comprehensive and cogent definitions and explanations, were given by Paul Valery who calls to a particular phenomenon called physiological phenomenon, which shares a lot with what Barahani in his second definition and what Golshiri defined. He represents his explanations about the poetry’s nature and form in a rather different manner which seems to bear no relevance to either poetry or art. It comes from the nature of our retina, our sight power. It is taken from the natural act of staring at a physical objects while under the light, that object’s color becomes an emission of a complementary color that comes to our eyes after staring at it for a constant length of time. As he exemplifies, “the organ of retina responses to the color which impressed it by the subjective emission of the other color, namely, the complementary color of the first. For instance, when you stare at a red object under the light, this redness intermingles with a light green over time. This correlation between red and green continues. The emitted green doesn’t obliterate the first red and instead allows it to be sensed again more vividly. Thus the recovering red responses to the declining green and conversely the recovering green responds to the declining red and so on. Once an automatic chain of alternate two colors is established, it will last forever until retina becomes tired. Valery called this everlasting chain aesthetic infinity”.

So, here he implies that there is no distinct physical line between the emitted colors since the second color is inborn in the first which is more of a personal exaction rather than a demonstrable object. Valery calls it a subjective but universally valid experience because it comes from physical structure. This argument assumes that there is close relationship between poetic experience and physical sensation. For him, “poetry as a fruit was nothing but the physiological life expressed as poetry”.

Valery simulates the poetry as a physiological organ and explains very clearly what happens in the process of the perception of the poetry. He believes in perception as a key in understanding the poetry and its form. “The eye becomes then a sensation that interferes with vision, it is another order of thing which intervenes, that’s why the perception of the complementary colors is taken into the account”. Thus, the perception of the complementary color is a unique and precious occasion for us to feel the functions or capabilities of organs that are normally hidden to us. This subjective impression is nothing but the perception of organs themselves. It shall be remembered that this perception lacks external references.

Now it can be said that what shapes the form of poetry or prose, is not a mechanical shape of the written text. More often, Valery refers to the understanding of a poetry as a psychological act. In his words, poetry doesn’t involve any visible movement body as walking. Nevertheless, poetry, he states, “is developed in our richer domain of functions of movement” which signifies that poetry has, unlikely of prose, an invisible physical movement”. This term, in my idea, shows that, when we have two texts, besides the very first standards of poetry which is to be in the broad sense, rhythm at least, what differentiates the one which is to be considered as a poetry, is the way it reveals the movement of it, i.e., if the process of development is invisible and integrated to the whole unity, it can be called poetry as Valery argues that” between the action of poetry and that of prose, the distinction is the physiological order”.

Therefore, the fundamental differentiation between prose and poetry which can be said to be a property of poetry, is its unity of internal process of revealing its movements, which in this case, by movement, it can be taken as soul of poetry, the essence, or in short, what it wants to reveal. Therefore, what is the form now? Form is nothing at all a physical entity or a solid phenomenon. It is the subjective, intuitive, silent and internal movement of the constituents and differs from person to person's subjectivity, a kind of a physiological retina of on the text from the subjective point of view. In fact, it is a definition for poetry in the first place, and what differs the form of a poetry from the form of a prose, is the gradual direct or indirect movements of the text.

3. CONCLUSION

Although Paul Valery's idea, particularly "physiological life", are more investigable and applicable in the notion of poetry, what was inferred was based on the need from a coterie of theories and hypothesis he set forth in differentiating the prose and poetry because what makes them different according to him, is the very idea of the form, which subsequently recognition of the distinctions, equals the recognition of the form. A wise combination of what Riffarrete, de Man and Paul Valery's theories are, can lead us to a very comprehensive understanding of the form even in explicable level of the term. It is what Dr. Hashemi reiterates in "Literary Studies and Concept of Methodological Form" that what underpins the concept of form is placed in the grounds literary theories and theoretical inferring.

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