THE ESTHETIC OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTIC DEVICES [1]

YAO SHEN
University of Hawaii
(Received October 16, 1969)

'The esthetic of Literature' (Martin Joos 1962:33) is a form of human experience. It arises out of some other human experience, which is so expressed, that each experience derived is a part of the other, but also departs from it. It is a re-creation of the other, yet remains a singular new creation. This Protean impregnation is in the nature of literature itself distinguished by its power and beauty to enable the imagination to take flight and to leave the emotions in a state of 'sweet unrest'. The realization of this power and beauty is generally attributed to the various literary means, such as imagery and allusions, to name only two. Little attention has been paid to the endowment in the imaginative and emotive powers of another kind of device, that is, the linguistic device. Linguistic devices together with literary devices fulfill 'the esthetic of literature'.

1.0 THREE LINGUISTIC DEVICES

Three linguistic devices in the form of grammatical features are the second person pronoun, the question form, and the comparative degree of the adjective.

An example in which all three may be observed within 20 successive lines occurs in the canonized Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus.*[2] The lines are:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee
Instead of Troy shall Wittenburg be sack'd,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest,
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
O, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars,
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter

[1] This is one of the Ford-Foundation-Consultant-in-Linguistics-and-Language-Teaching lectures delivered at the Philippine Normal College, summer, 1969.

[2] All excerpts from *Doctor Faustus* are from Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (edited by John D. Jump). The Revels Plays, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1962.

When he appear'd to hapless Semele,
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms.
And none but thou shalt be my paramour. Scene XVIII, 99-118

2.0 Second Person Pronoun

The second person pronoun in Late Middle English and Early Modern English went through four common forms ('thou, thee; ye, you' with distinctions in both case and number) to one common form "you" (with no distinction in either case or number). 'Ye' is outside the present discussion. 'You' in the singular, nominative or objective, occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. Research on 'thou, thee' and 'you' as second person singular can be traced back a hundred years to 1869 when E. A. Abbott in his *Shakespearian Grammar* attempted to show some differences between Elizabethan and Modern English. A substantial amount of similar work has been done since then. 'You' in the singular is not a replacement of 'thou, thee'. There is the social significance of rank. 'You' is used toward the superior, and 'thou, thee' toward the inferior. Recent illuminating contribution comes from Professor McIntosh, who points out the psychological significance expressed by the difference between 'thou, thee' and 'you'. There is an emotive factor in the shift from 'you' to 'thou'. He says (1963:55):

> For when a character in a Shakespeare play shifts from a more formal pronominal mode to *thou*, it is usually for one of two very different reasons:
>
> 1. Because of a surge of personal satisfaction with, or affection towards, the person addressed;
> 2. Because of a surge of feelings of quite the opposite kind: anger, contempt, or the like.

Both the social and psychological implications indicated by the use of 'thou, thee' and 'you' in the singular can be clearly seen in *Hamlet*[3] Act I, scene ii. Gertrude, though being a queen but also Hamlet's mother speaks to Hamlet with 'thou, thee, thy, thine' and not 'you, your', while Claudius being the king but Hamlet's uncle does exactly the reverse. The complementation of the two sets of the second person singular shows that there is more distance between Claudius and Hamlet than there is between Gertrude and Hamlet. On the other hand, when speaking to Laertes, Claudius uses both sets of the second person singular. This gives evidence that the king's relation to his lord chamberlain's son is closer than his to his own brother's son who has now become his own stepson.

Hamlet's use of 'you' in the singular to his mother and to Marcellus, and 'you, your' to Horatio indicates not only his courtesy but also his aloofness. The

[3] All excerpts from *Hamlet* are from *Hamlet, Volume I,* a *New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* (edited by Horace Howard Furness), American Scholar Publication, Inc., New York, 1965.

only time in the entire scene in which Hamlet speaks with 'thee' is when Horatio tells him that he has come back to Elsinore from Wittenberg to attend King Hamlet's funeral. At this Hamlet bursts forth with:

> I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
> I think it was to see my mother's wedding. 177-178

Hamlet no doubt was deeply troubled by the death of his father whom he regards as 'a man. . . . . all in all', and his mother's marrying none other than his father's own brother and also in 'most wicked speed'. Being the prince, he uses the socially prestigeous 'you', and being polite, he uses the psychological reserved 'you'. But learning Horatio's reason of return releases his smouldering emotions which call forth the use of 'thee'.

Contrary to his recurrent use of 'you, your' in Act I, scene ii, in which Hamlet and Horatio converse for the first time in the play, Hamlet repeatedly speaks to Horatio with 'thou, thee, thy' in Act V, scene ii, when he dies:

> . . . —Horatio, I am dead,
> Thou livest; . . .
> . . . .
> . . . As thou'rt a man,
> Give me the cup; . . .
> . . . .
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story.— 325-336

This is said at a moment when a man bares his inner self to an intimate friend, and his words are touchingly full of the second person singular 'thou, thee, thy'.

In a similar vein, Horatio had his own internal strife. He does not know how to interpret the appearance of King Hamlet's ghost nor how to initiate telling its appearance to the prince. Socially he is Hamlet's subject and psychologically he tries to restrain himself. Throughout the entire second scene of Act I—the first time Hamlet and Horatio are together in the play—Horatio addresses his prince in 'you, your'. His last words in the play (Act V, scene ii) to the same prince, however, are:

> . . . —Good night, sweet prince,
> And flights or angels sing thee to thy rest!— 346-347

These words are uttered when he has lost not only his prince, not only his fellow student, but also his friend dear to his own heart. It is an occasion that calls for the emotive second person singular 'thou' and 'thee' and 'thy'.

Both Horatio's and Hamlet's use of 'thou' and "thee" in social situations that call for 'you' are not evidences of their breech of etiquette. Rather they are indications of their emotional involvement.

In Act I, scene i, upon seeing the first entrance of King Hamlet's ghost, Horatio remarks to Bernardo:

. . . it harrows me with fear and wonder. 44

He does not fail to recognize the ghost as:

. . . that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march . . . 47-49

Nevertheless, he speaks to the ghost in terms of "thou, thee":

What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
. . . .
. . . by heaven I charge thee, speak!
. . . .
. . . I charge thee, speak! 46-51

He is still gripped by paralyzing emotions after the ghost has disappeared. This is noticed by Bernardo who says to him,

How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale 53

Horatio's excitement is deepened by a sense of frustration due to the ghost's refusal to utter any word which brings forth his continuous addressing of him in 'thou, thee, thy' throughout its second appearance:

If thou hast any sound . . .
. . . .
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
. . . .
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
. . . .
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life 128-136

Hamlet's respect for his father must never be denied. In his soliloquy in Act I, scene ii, he refers to him as 'so excellent a king'. The social relation between them in Act I, scene iv, calls for the use of 'you'. But the psychological relation is not that between a king and his prince but one between a father and a son, and the language thus is in 'thou, thee, thy'. Seeing his father's ghost and swept by emotion, he says to the ghost:

Be thou a spirit of health . . .
Bring with thee . . .
Be thy intents . . .
Thou comest . . .
That I will speak to thee; I'll call thee Hamlet,
. . . .
Why thy canoniz'd bones. . . .
. . . .
To cast thee up again . . .
That thou, dead corse . . . 40-52

In Act I, scene v, when the ghost has disappeared, Hamlet turns to the use of "you" and invokes:

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else.
> . . . .
> And you, my sinews, grow not instantly old, 92-94

This is the plural form of 'you'. No sooner does he remember his father, than Hamlet returns to the emotive second person singular 'thou, thee, thy':

> . . . Remember thee?
> Ay, thou poor ghost, . . .
> . . . Remember thee?
> . . . .
> And thy commandment all alone shall live 95-102

Moments later, referring to Claudius as villain and calling him 'uncle', he says:

> O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
> My tables, meet it is I set it down,
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
> At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark.— [Writing.
> So, uncle, there you are.— 106-110

This is the second person singular pronoun 'you', the 'you' used by Hamlet with social distance and emotional coolness, even though Claudius by now is his father who addresses him as 'my son'.

Shakespeare and Marlowe shared the same English speaking community which used the second person singular pronoun with a distinctive meaning, and understood the psychological significance. One such example is Faustus's last speech which begins:

> Ah, Faustus,
> Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
> And then thou must be damn'd perpetually. Scene XIX, 133-135

Hence Marlowe's choice of 'thou, thee, thy' as in:

> . . . and for love of thee
> . . . .
> And wear thy colours . . .
> . . . .
> O, thou art . . .
> . . . .
> Brighter are thou . . .
> . . . .
> And none but thou shalt . . .

In the 20 lines was made in the light of the emotive attitude of Faustus toward Helen. The second person singular pronoun has brought out the psychological display of the emotional movements. And it is a grammatical feature that has touched literature with artistry.

3.0 The Question Form

The second grammatical feature which contributes to 'the esthetic of literature' is the question form. For it is the question form that has the undeniable ability to rouse the 'fugitive and cloistered' mind. Applied to the lines under consideration, after Helen appears 'in twinkling of an eye', Faustus asks 'Was this the face?' instead of stating 'This was the face'. The imagination is called upon to take an active part by the question.

Metrically speaking, in the first iambus of the pentameter, the heavy stress in this question falls on the second stress of a two-stress foot, which is 'this' in 'Was this?'. If the question 'Was this' were changed to a statement as 'This was', and if the heavy stress of 'this' is kept, the metric government would classify this foot as a trochee. Marlowe could have used a trochee in an iambic pentameter for effectiveness. This practice is permissible and frequent, and often it serves its purpose well. An outstanding example is the five trochees in King Lear's 'Never, never, never, never, never' in an iambic corpus. Between the choice of a regular iambus in an iambic pentameter for a question, and a trochee in an iambic pentameter for a statement, Marlowe selected the question form, a grammatical feature that invites the imagination to participate actively.

That the question form calls upon the imagination to take an active part can be witnessed by a few arresting moments in *Hamlet*. The play opens with seven questions in the first twenty-one lines:

> Who's there?
> . . . .
> Bernardo?
> . . . .
> Have you had quiet guard?
> . . . .
> . . . Who is there?
> . . . .
> Who hath relieved you?
> . . . .
> What, is Horatio there?
> . . . .
> What, has this thing appear'd again to-night? 1-21

After the first exit of King Hamlet's ghost in Act I, scene i, Bernardo asks Horatio:

> How now, Horatio! . . .
> Is not this something more than fantasy?
> What think you on't? 53-55

In Act I, scene ii, immediately following Horatio's relating to Hamlet of the appearance and re-appearance of the ghost, and his conviction that it is without doubt the king's ghost, Hamlet asks 12 questions in the 13 times he speaks.

Hor. . . . A figure like your father,
. . . .
. . . thrice he walk'd
. . . .
. . . I knew your father;
These hands are not more like.
Ham. But where was this?
Mar. . . . .
Ham. Did you not speak to it?
Hor. . . . .
Ham. . . . .
Hor. . . . .
Ham. . . . .
Hold you the watch to-night?
Mar. } . . . .
Ber. }
Ham. Arm'd, say you?
Ber. }
Mar. } . . . .
Ham. From top to toe?
Mar. }
Ber. } . . . .
Ham. Then you saw not his face?
Hor. . . . .
Ham. What look'd he frowningly?
Hor. . . . .
Ham. Pale, or red?
Hor. . . . .
Ham. And fix'd his eyes upon you?
Hor. . . . .
Ham. . . . .
Hor. . . . .
Ham. . . . Stay'd it long?
Hor. . . . .
Mar. }
Ber. } . . . .
Hor. . . . .
Ham. His beard was grizzled? No? 199-240

In Act III, scene i, when Ophelia tells Hamlet that she is returning to him his gifts:

. . . for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind 100-101

the conversation between them is in questions:

Ham. Ha, ha! are you honest?
Oph. My lord?
Ham. Are you fair?
Oph. What means your lordship? 103-106

Although the question form invites the imagination to take an active part, among the various kinds of questions there is a difference in the degree of participation sought, which is inherent in the specific types of questions. Some questions such as Faustus's 'Was this the face...?' or Bernardo's 'Is not this something more than fantasy?' or Hamlet's 'Are you honest?' and 'Are you fair?' ask for a choice between 'yes' and 'no'. Others, like Hamlet's questions to his father's ghost:

> Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
> Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
> Be thy intents wicked or charitable, Act I, scene iv, 40-42

request designation from the alternatives named. Though the mind called upon to participate is allowed the privilege to make a choice, both types of questions, do exert a certain amount of restriction since they expect a choice to be made from what is implied in the question, yes, or no; or stated in the question, one or the other. The obligation in the choice is not absolute; nevertheless, it is assumed.

A much more arresting type than the other two is the group of questions that begin with some of the interrogative words, such as 'who, what, where, why, and how'. Questions beginning with such words give the imagination more freedom of choice than the others do. The play *Hamlet* opens with a two-and-half word sentence, 'Who's there?' The answer could be anyone or anything imaginable or even unimaginable.

In Act I, scene i when Horatio sees King Hamlet's ghost, he asks, 'What art thou that usurp'st this time of night?' The 'what' in the question allows the mind full freedom. That which confines is the clause 'that usurp'st this time of night'. Soon after the ghost disappears, Bernardo speaks to Horatio two and half lines which begin with 'how' and end with a question of 'what':

> How now, Horatio . . . .
> . . . .
> What think you on't? 53-55

Marcellus if full of 'why...why...why...what...who...?'

> Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
> Why this same strict and most observant watch
> So nightly toils that subject of the land,
> And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
> And foreign mart for implements of war;
> Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
> Does not divide the Sunday from the week;
> What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
> Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day,
> Who is't that can inform me? 70-79

In Act I, scene iv, Hamlet ends his first speech to his father's ghost with 'what...why...wherefore...what...?':

. . . what may this mean,
. . . .
. . . why is this? wherefore, what should we do? 51-57

Similarly after Hamlet questions her personal behavior, Ophelia's searching mind manifests itself in the form of a question that begins with 'what' in 'What means your lordship?' One of the most touching questions in English literature which also begins with an interrogative word is in *Hamlet* Act IV, scene v. Opheila asks in line 21, 'Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?' Her love and respect are in the words 'beauteous majesty'. The word 'where' lends wings to the imagination. The lexical content called for by 'where' is a location. The interrogative function of 'where' makes the mind seek company with Puck and roam from above heaven to beneath earth, in the Universe and beyond, or in the mind's own kingdom. In this question of Ophelia's, there is also the tragic note of a deep sense of fruitless search, endless longing, with wish unanswered and hope unfulfilled. The touchstone of 'the esthetic of literature' is the emotive imagination or the feel-think. This feel-think is brought into play by the grammatical device of the question form.

4.0 Comparative Degree of Adjectives

The third grammatical feature is the comparative degree of the adjective. In the positive degree, an adjective states the lexical content. The comparative degree extends what is stated yet without stating. In this kind of extension, the imagination exercises its 'infinite variety'. The comparative degree also rescues lexical failures.

How does Faustus tell Helen how beautiful she appears to him? He is not tongue-tied. On the contrary, he is eloquent. Nevertheless, when he wants to express how 'fair' Helen is, how 'bright' she is, and how 'lovely' his paramour is, he is poverty-stricken for words. He suffers a lexical failure. His exaltation is executed in the comparative degree of '-er than..., -er than..., more ... than...' as in 'fairer than..., brighter than..., more lovely than...' Had Faustus had some adjectives capable of expressing Helen's fairness, brightness, and loveliness, the stating nature of the positive degree of the adjectives would have clipped the wings of the imagination. It is the comparative degree of the adjective here that sets the imagination free as to the extent of Helen's fairness, brightness, and loveliness.

One cannot help recall less than two years before the young Keats died on the morning of July 1 when writing to Fanny Brawne from Shanklin, Isle of Wight, he too experienced a lexical failure. In fact, his failure even reminded him of a similar one recorded by some other poet whom Keats read one day. He said (1958:123-4):

Some lines I read the other day are continually ringing a peal in my ears:
To see those eyes I prize above mine own
Dart favors on another—

> And those sweet lips (yielding immortal nectar)
> Be gently press'd by any but myself—
> Think, think, Francesca, what a cursed thing
> It were beyond expression!

Keats was not in a state of ecstasy which might have been responsible for the lexical failure. Being a man of poetic theory, he was discreet about expressing undisciplined emotion. This can be testified by the following excerpt from the same letter (1958:122):

> The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another.

His emotion that morning was definitely tempered by reason. He was consciously aware of his being in that state. The letter began (1958-122):

> I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night—'t was too much like one out of Ro[u]sseau's Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning.

Later on in trying to express his devotion to Fanny, Keats complained of the lack of words, a lack similar to that which Faustus experienced, except for the difference between Keats, an intellectual poet-lover who was unaware of the lack. He continued the letter (1958:123):

> For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair.

Like Faustus, Keats resorted to the comparative degree of the adjective. He used a grammatical device to repair a lexical short-circuit and thus brought about an emotively imaginative expression to fulfill the feel-think.

Full experience of 'the esthetic of literature' is derived from seeing each piece of work in its proper perspective. The message sent by the writer to the reader is not only for thinking but also for feeling-thinking. The reader does not get the message in its full spectrum unless he understands it as the writer creates it, and he will not get the full spectrum until the features used and understood in the system in which both the writer and the reader communicate are taken into full account by the reader. Great literature like John Milton (1959-493):

> a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.

Its beauty extends beyond its own time when the significant features within its own time are understood the way they were in their own time. Its power lies not only in being felt and thought, and refelt and rethought but also of rousing

feeling-thinking, and refeeling-rethinking. As Martin Joos says (1962:33), the 'esthetic of literature' comes from:

> not just the text first seen in print or heard, and the feelings first rousing themselves then, but also—and rather—the continuations created by one who refeels and rereads them together in their dissoluble marriage.

Each refeeling-rethinking is in itself a new experience, a new creation.

Of the three grammatical features taken up, the question form and the comparative degree of the adjective are both very active in present day English. The regretful fact is that such features are treated almost solely as grammatical matters and have seldom been included among the contributing factors in literary fulfillment. Within the last 300 years, the gradual crowding of 'thou, thee' by 'you' has narrowed them into the exclusive area of the poetic and the religious. Occurrences of 'thou' and 'thee' have become physical labels of the poetic and the religious is neglected. The sign remains; the significance is slighted. Just as it is essential to feel-think a specific literary allusion, such as the hungry generation that did not tread Keats' nightingale down, so must a grammatical feature be taken in its specific significance such as the emotive set of the second person singular pronoun in these lines from Marlowe. Various literary means and linguistic devices contribute respectively and conjunctively toward the emergence of great literature characterized by depth of beauty, loftiness in stature, majesty in scope, and time beyond time. It satisfies not only the thinkers but also the feeling-thinkers. And to consummate a feeling-thinking experience capable of refeeling-rethinking calls for the full account of both kinds of devices, the literary devices and the linguistic devices.

REFERENCES

JOOS, MARTIN. 1962. Five Clocks. International Journal of American Linguistics. Volume 28, No. 2, Part V, p. 33. This work has been republished by Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York.

MCINTOSH, ANGUS. 1963. King Lear, Act I, Scene I. A stylistic Note. The Review of English Studies. New Series. Volume XIV. No. 53.

ROLLINS, HYDER EDWARD, ed. 1958. The Letters of John Keats. Volume II 1814-1821. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.