

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF VERBAL PARALLELISM IN THE LANGUAGE OF 'ASH-WEDNESDAY' BY T. S. ELIOT

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role that verbal parallelism was intended to play in the language of Ash-Wednesday by T.S. Eliot. Well aware of the strategic use of language in literature, Eliot prefers the common idiom accompanied with formal repetitions and figures of verbal parallelism in his poetic discourse. These regularities of expression enable him to properly actualize his philosophy that good poetry effectively appeals to the reader before it is understood by him. Further, the non-material nature of the spiritual encounters that the persona of the poem under analysis experiences demands specific repetitive and parallelistic tropes. Leech (1989) accounts for this verbal parallelism in terms of anaphora, epistrophe, symploce, epanalepsis, antistrophe, polyptoton and homoioteleuton. Deliberating over the functions of verbal parallelism, Leech says that it is "physically sensible - i.e. audible to the listener and visible to the reader" (p.85). Keeping this phenomenon in mind, Leech's theories on regularities that occur in his book A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (1989) are used as a theoretical framework for the present study. It is hypothesized that T. S. Eliot makes use of all the typical types of verbal parallelism in his poem under analysis; he employs specific parallelistic device in specific situations to achieve the particular goals. The study also intended to trace and examine the figures of verbal parallelism that Eliot had to invent for the materialization of this poem.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, foregrounding, verbal parallelism, Ash-Wednesday, Leech

Introduction

The modernist art, in general, makes a break with the Victorian brand of realism that was static in orientation. Art in the first half of the previous century is called avant-garde; it is innovative in character and experimental in behaviour. New subject matter was treated with new techniques (Kenner, 1979). One of the literary artists of this era is Eliot who believed that art should change its form in accordance with the needs of the times. Keeping this idea in mind, he got inspiration from the norms of the theory of formalism that ultimately culminated into New Criticism. He felt modern man's close thickness with materialist realities as the biggest problem of his life. To make him critically conscious of the dilemma he is immersed in, Eliot makes use of banal language which is armed with rhetorical tropes (Reeves, 1989). Free verbal repetition that consists of intermittent repetition and immediate repetition, syntactic parallelism and formal and verbal parallelism are the strategic devices he uses to enlist the reader. Drew (1950) says these literary tools, on the one hand, foreground the poetic message and, on the other hand, tempt and

facilitate the reader to interpretively look into the waste land that he inhabits.

Eliot's huge popularity across the globe, the enormity of his vast poetic corpus, the irresistible appeal of his art and the big range of his strategies of form demands an analytical investigation and exploratory research at a large scale. The temporal and spatial constraints do not allow the present researcher to go for this project. However, at present, the researcher has selected his famous poem *Ash-Wednesday* for analysis. The role of verbal parallelism in the language of the poem is targeted. The study is pursued out at the phrase, the clause and the verse line level.

This study is designed to examine the role of the elements of form in the language of the poem *Ash-Wednesday* by Eliot. Verbal parallelism that makes a very significant aspect of poetic diction is selected for the investigation. This research effort aimed at discovering the artistic goals that tempted Eliot to choose a range of linguistic parallelism in the poem. Simpson (2004) opines that the modern poets of the previous century used various forms of verbal and free verbal parallelism very consciously. It is not the result of linguistic poverty on the part of a

poet rather it is devised to serve his aesthetized targets. What is the variety of verbal parallelism used in the poem? Why a particular device is used for a particular situation? To what an extent Eliot succeeded in achieving goals? Are the theories of Leech sufficient enough to carry out the proposed critical study? To address all these questions constitutes the aims and objectives of the present study.

Literature Review

Modern literary artists and modern literary genres took a lot of inspiration and help from the discipline of rhetoric (Bradford, 1997). Russian formalism is an important movement to appropriate its norms and strategies. Peck and Coyle (2002) hold that Eliot richly benefitted the norms and strategies that new criticism introduced in the 20th century. Eliot is a critically constituted artist-cum-thinker who is well aware of the strategic employment of language for the transmission of his ideas to the reader. For a successful communication, he chooses very appropriate tool from the kit of linguistic resources available to him. Keeping all this phenomenon in mind, an attempt is made to survey the chosen patterns of verbal parallelism that stick out in the poem under analysis. Anaphora, initial repetitions of the consecutive phrases, clauses and lines, is one of the popped up figures of verbal parallelism. Epistrophe is the opposite of anaphora: the final linguistic material in consecutive clauses and lines is repeated. Symploce combines anaphora and epistrophe in the consecutive clauses and constructions; sometimes, the medial portions are also repeated. Polyptoton stands for the recurrence of the same word but along with the different inflections. Homoioteleuton is the name of a type of verbal parallelism in which the same derivational or inflectional ending is repeated on various lexemes. All these figurative devices are commonly used in Eliot's poetic discourse.

Richards's book *Practical Criticism* (1930) played its important role to enrich the formalistic poetics. A new approach was introduced to the readers, researchers and

scholars to formally and systematically interpret a piece of literature. A set of linguistic devices was devised that instigated the reader to trace the meanings that lie beneath the formalistic surface. This investigatory technique not only questioned the relevance of traditional literary theory of expressive realism, it also set a new standard to analyze a piece of literature systematically. Following Richards, a range of scholars and researchers came forward to raise the formalistic criticism to the level of the most popular poetics of the times. For instance, Leech in his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1989) elaborated the concepts of parallelism and deviations as two types of poetic license. For the elaboration of his theories, he quoted extracts from the poems of Whitman, Eliot, Larkin, Keats etc. Parallelism which is basically the repetition of grammatical structure has so many manifestations. On the other hand, deviation is primarily the name of violation of some rule(s) of a language; it deals with the content of the piece of literature. The formal devices explained by Leech attracted the world scholars to use them in their research and studies. Devardhi and Nelson (2013) also took help from the formalistic devices that Whitman used in his poem poems. To understand the mechanism of artistic foregrounding, different parallelistic devices and various deviations of content are analyzed. This study is remembered for its different dimensions. For instance, it proves that the very sensibility of the poet is dependent on his habit of employing defamiliarizing strategies. He is a well-recognized poet for his art of estrangement. This is a close reading that produces very significant meanings for the readers.

The research paper by Kousar (2013) offers a systematic investigation of Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. She examined anaphora, epistrophe, symploce, homoioteleuton, polyptoton and some other stylistic devices that Eliot employed in his world known poem to make the reader understand different mental states of the reluctant anti-hero Prufrock. The problem of

the hero who is too much conscious of his feeble self is simple: his cowardice. But the aspects and complications of his un-heroic situation is the only mental state that controls him. The above said defamiliarizing devices are analyzed by Kousarin such a way that the various miserable realities of the hero's life are exposed quite clearly. The tragedy of Prufrock is realized through abstractions only but these linguistic and research techniques betray the very width, length and depth of his problem. It is an important study on Eliot's famous poem. Eliot's other poems are also rich in the artistic use of linguistic devices that alienate the reader to make him confront the dismaying and shocking realities about the modern man. One of these Eliotique poems is *Ash-Wednesday*. It is a beautiful poetic narrative to characterize the vehement tussle between the spiritual and worldly self of the persona. No one had attempted seriously, according to my knowledge, any study of *Ash-Wednesday* with reference to its verbal parallelism.

While pursuing her comparative study on Chaucer and T. S. Eliot, Hall (2001) analyses *Ash-Wednesday* in the light of different critics on Eliot. She investigates the theme of the poem with the help of binaries and dialectics. The will of the hero of the poem i.e. to go for spiritual elevation is contrasted with his self that is firmly glued to the world of senses and materialism. The persona of the poem is just helpless in his struggle to get rid of his mundane existence. She, one by one, describes all the important difficult situations that the central character of the poem is exposed to. No doubt, it is a significant study on the poem under investigation but it does not examine the role of different types of parallelism to dig out the meanings of the poetic discourse. Hence the present study that made an effort to access the meanings of the poem through verbal parallelism of its form.

Research Methodology

The present study identified and analyzed the foregrounded linguistic devices used by the poet to convey his critical aesthetics to the reader. The research is conducted on all the

levels of artistic expression: phrase level, clause level and verse line level. An attempt is made to sort out and analyze the other types of linguistic parallelism which are specific to Eliot only. As far as the theoretical framework of the present study is concerned, the relevant portions of Leech's book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1989) were tapped. Chapter four of this book i.e. Foregrounding and Interpretation provided the theoretical stimulus to pursue and further the project. To conduct this study in a systematic way, the following questions were devised so that the entire analysis might gravitate to the marked labels and nodes of the research project.

- i) What types of verbal parallelism are used by Eliot in *Ash-Wednesday*?
- ii) To what extent, these formal devices proved helpful to the poet for realizing his artistic goals in the above cited poem?
- iii) Did Eliot make use of some other artistic devices in *Ash-Wednesday* which were not covered by Leech in his above mentioned book?

Analysis of Data and Discussion

Eliot's poetic art consists in two things: the description of the tantalising problems of the modern day life and his search for the solution. *Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* give a graphic picture of the miseries of the mechanical life that the modern man, bereft of spirituality and tilted towards the materialist sensate culture, is confronted with. This hellish life is a degradation of man; it insults him at every step of life. To get rid of this inferno, he recommends recourse to the spiritual world that is free from the pangs of materialist world (Atkins, 2012). *Ash-Wednesday* records Eliot's experiences that he does have at various stages of his spiritual ascent. In this voyage, the reader observes the tug of war between two selves of the poet: the materialized Eliot and the spiritual Eliot. The poet starts his spiritual journey with a resolution not to turn to the gravitational pull of worldly life. But soon he realizes that just mental decision is not sufficient to stabilize his steps towards the blissful domain. He again and again needs the help from Mary, Christ

and God to continue his journey. This poem, like many other poems of Eliot, deals with the mental states and psychic environment of the persona. It is very difficult for a poet to make the reader fully follow the invisible psychic activities that the persona is going through. To address this problem, Eliot used the form of his poetic discourse in a smart way. He took help from different types of formal repetitions and verbal parallelisms. One of these linguistic tools of the Eliotique formal strategies is anaphora. It is the repetition of initial word(s) that falls over successive phrases, clauses and verse lines. The purpose of this example of anaphora is to stress a particular point or to create a specific effect at a specific occasion; it lays emphasis on persona's having grown old but still struck in the dreams of the mundane world. The following lines make an example of anaphora in the poem under analysis:

(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)

Why should I mourn

The vanished power of the usual reign? (6-8)

The initial linguistic expression 'why should' exactly repeats itself at the start of the two successive clauses; the verbal parallelism also parallels the syntactic parallelism. This anaphoric repetition is deliberate; it makes the textual chunk popped out to serve different purposes. Bush (1983) holds that the invariant part of verbal parallelism represents "the rational self" (p.135) of the speaker and the variant part is the sign of the powerful lure of the worldly attractions. The invariant part deals with the speaker's strenuous efforts and attempts "to persuade himself of the justice of turning from the world" (p.134). The formal repetition brings home the content of the text. It tells us the overwhelming intensity of his determination to renounce the 'eagle' and 'usual reign' which stand for worldly pomp and show and common kind of success, respectively. The clamour and bang of 'why should' is a concerted struggle to stamp the imprints of the superiority of the rational self over the speaker's memory; the repetitious noise of the invariant part is also an effort to drown the worldly pomp. This thrust of argumentation does not work for a long time

and soon the speaker realizes the limitations of the rational self in the pursuance of spirituality. Again anaphoric repetition is used by Eliot to foreground the irritating noise that persona's reasoning mind has produced.

These matters that with myself I too much discuss

Too much explain (28-29)

Repetition of 'too much discuss' and 'too much explain' is artistically devised to generate some desired effects. The speaker-poet struggles, on the level of rational discourse, to achieve thorough renunciation of temporal life but in vain. The forces of "internal resistance" (Bush, 1983, p.135) create a lot of debate in his mind which is a big obstacle on his way to "a kind of higher aimlessness" (Rajan, 1976, p.57). The anaphoric repetition of the adverb 'too much' is easily intelligible; it makes the problem of the speaker "audible to the listener and visible to the reader" (Leech, 1989, p.85). Intellect, reasoning and human will like other worldly attractions also have existence and "life in time" (Gish, 1981, p.68) only; therefore they are linked with pain, agony and impermanence. We know that Christ cannot stay amidst the noise as it is the emblem of pure materiality and worldliness. The persona, a few lines ago, was proud of his intellectual decision to reject the calls of the sensuous life and to move for the spiritual realm. But this instance of verbal parallelism makes faces at his declaration and announcement on the renunciation of the material world he has been a part of. The verbal parallelistic example ridicules the high sounding slogans that he made at the start of the poem.

Leech (1989) says that anaphora is often used along with climax and parallelism. This foregrounded repetition of expression is a conspicuous rhetorical figure, used in poetry, to draw the reader's attention directly to the message of the sentences. Gray (1994) says "often this kind of syntactical repetition is associated with the depiction of strong feelings" (p.23). The first section of *Ash-Wednesday* is a preface to the entire poem. It records the start, the medial processes and the climax of the spiritual ascent of the speaker.

There is a very quick succession of events to grip the attention of the readers. In all events, these are only the examples of formal verbal repetitions that tell us about the cyclic nature of the persona's movement. If the piece of verbal parallelism 'why should' is used to exhibit the intellectual resolution of the speaker, the formal figure is employed to show the helplessness in the course of the journey and the prayers to get assistance in this adventure.

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still. (38-39)

Both the above cited clauses are imperative in linguistic construction and nature. There is an exact verbal correspondence of 'teach us to' at the start of both the clauses. This unusual use of language is well contrived to serve the artistic purposes. The 'I' of the poem endeavored a lot, through reasoning and argumentations, to bring a complete detachment of the speaker from 'the infirm glory of the positive hour' but in vain. A roaring noise of debate occupied his mind; and now as a helpless person he turns to God for help. Bush (1983) says the 'I' of the poem "dissolves in prayer" (p.137) because the love of the lost and renounced worldly things does not permit the speakers to turn to the 'high dream' peacefully. At this critical moment, it is only the prayers he has to rely upon. Rajan (1976) says 'teach us to' is a prayer for "a withdrawal of the mind from its natural functions that maintains intact its integrity as mind" (p.58).

Sometimes the artists make use of formal repetition, verbal parallelism, refrain and anaphoric repetition to expose the pettiness of a situation or the futility of an idea. For example, the central characters of *Waiting for Godot* indicate their existential worthlessness through the repeated utterances like "nothing to be done" (Beckett, 2009, p.80). In the political plays of Bertolt Brecht, a German artist of the previous century, also we see the repetition of those images which are petty and trivial in character. For example, in *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939) we again

and again come across the activities of the heroine that are based on her petit bourgeois figure. Eliot is also well aware of such usage of language in his poems. For example:

And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for on time
And only for one place (17-19)

The anaphoric repetition of 'and' and the syntactic parallelism of these lines operates like the ringing of the bell for some announcement, assertion, reasoning and argumentation. The speaker intends to forget the magnetism of the life of senses because its flavour and taste is connected with limitations, transitoriness and impermanence. That is why he refuses, now, to drink in the worldly paradise. Every worldly joy and success is limited by time and place; therefore the speaker is fed up with every colour of this life. He is fully determined, first, to expose the hollowness of the sensuous life and then to cut all the possible harmonies with it. He has made up his mind to reject the temporal because everything, which is apprehended in time, is impermanent therefore it should be abandoned. While discussing this aspect of the poem under investigation, Gish (1981) says "central to the argument is the idea that time is only time; that is, it contains only what is impermanent and therefore once lost, forever lost" (p.73).

Figures of speech take the form of exact verbal repetition in equivalent positions. These equivalent positions are very important places in the equivalent units and pieces of language. Here lexical repetition works like a hammer to strike, announce and assert some idea. Epanalepsis is one instance of such types of linguistic parallelism. Leech (1989), while discussing epanalepsis, writes: "the final part of each unit of the pattern repeats the initial part" (p.82). It works on the line :(a...a) (b...b), etc. Lines 16-17 of the poem *Ash-Wednesday* offer an example of this linguistic regularity of expression:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
(16-17)

The pattern in this example consist of two units; the first unit starts and ends with the same lexeme 'time' while the second unit finds in the lexical item of 'place' both the beginning and the end. Both the units also have a reasonable degree of structural uniformity. There is an exact verbal repetition of the lexemes 'is always' too. It is an abnormal arrangement of the linguistic material, to foreground the lines and realise the desired artistic effects. 'Because' in the poem is the argument which is justified in the above said example of regular pattern. The repetitive words of 'time' and 'place' at the start and at the finish of the two successive linguistic units, pronounce like the ringing of the bell, that all the things apprehended in time, are welded with limitations, deficiencies, losses, agonies and frustrations only. The loss of both of the loves, temporal and spiritual, is destabilizing to the speaker due to the fact that both are "apprehended in time and no moment can be retained" (Gish, 1981, p.74); and 'what is actual is actual but for one time'. Here repetition of the words is not due to the poverty of linguistic resources; rather it has been used to indicate its own eloquence. Leech (1989) says "by underlying rather than elaborating the message, it presents a simple emotion with force" (p.79).

Homoioteleuton and polyptoton, as two important rhetorical devices, are a sharp contrast to each other. Polyptoton is a root-repeater and homoioteleuton is an end-repeater. These two repetitions are within the structure of the word. Polyptoton is a morphological counterpart of anaphora and homoioteleuton that of epistrophe. Polyptoton is a tactic and clever use of language to present a simple emotion with full force; it underscores instead of elaborating a message. Leech (1989) calls this figure of rhetoric "the repetition of a word with varying grammatical inflections" (p.82). The following lines of *Ash-Wednesday* offer the different instances of polyptoton:

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly

But merely vans to beat the air

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will (34-37)

Here the lexemes 'small' and 'smaller' have the same root 'small'. In the same way the linguistic items 'dry' and 'dryer' have the same stem 'dry'. This unusual use of the above lexemes with varying grammatical inflections is devised strategically to generate the longed for artistic effects. The wings of the aged eagle are unable to fly any more as now they are only vans to beat the air. The air in which these wings are found is also rarefied; it (air) does not support the wings and vans to take a flight. The unusual occurrence of 'small', 'smaller', 'dry' and 'dryer' is to emphasise that though the aged eagle is unable to fly, the difficulty is less in the will than in the power and present air; the air is so "rarefied that it no longer supports the notion of flight" (Rajan, 1976, p.58). The definite article 'the' and the abstract noun 'air' at the end of line 35 and at the beginning of 36 is an example of anadiplosis. Leech while giving the definition of this verbal parallelism says: "the last part of one unit is repeated at the beginning of the next" (Leech, 1989, p.81). Through this example of anadiplosis, the character of air is singularized; if the wings are no longer wings to fly, the air is also no longer air to support the wings in flight.

No doubt, Eliot makes an appropriate use of different rhetorical terms and figures in poetry to create the desired effects, but it is also important to notice that some of his linguistic regularities and repetitions are the result of his creative and innovative mind only. For example:

Because I do not hope to turn again (1)
Because I do not hope to know again (9)

Both the above cited lines possess the similarity of syntactic structure; they seem to be an exact example of symploce, a type of verbal parallelism in which anaphora and epistrophe are combined. But it is only a deception as these two lines are not successive or adjacent constructions; rather they occur at the beginning of the first and the second verse-paragraph, respectively. Therefore, they are an example of Eliot's own creative and unconventional linguistic repetitions. This

unusual and unique example of parallelistic repetition foregrounds the lines to generate the desired stylistic effects. The gist of the argument of *Ash-Wednesday* (1) is pursued, realized, and ploughed through the linguistic resources of these lines. The first line tells us about the “loss of passion and power” (Gish, 1981, p.74) and the second describes the loss of God. The repetition of lexical items ‘In this brief transit where the dreams cross/The dream crossed twilight between birth and dying’ is also the innovative use of verbal parallelism by Eliot.

Findings

The present study, conducted within the conceptual framework given by Leech (1989), generated very useful and inspirational results. Anaphora, a very significant type of verbal parallelism, is the most favourite formal technique of Eliot in *Ash-Wednesday*. The researcher came across a rich variety of anaphoric parallelism: at phrase level and at clause level. The first level is used to mark the critical tension during the course of events and processes. For example, ‘because’, ‘why’, ‘I’, ‘and’, ‘rose of memory/rose of forgetfulness’, ‘spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden’ normally start the consecutive phrases which present the idea and feeling that is very striking for the reader and is very meaningful for the speaker of the poem. As far as the use of anaphora at the clause or verse-line level is concerned, it is used to verbalise the declaration, conclusion, or the final decision of the persona of the poem. For example, ‘teach us to care and not to care/teach us to sit still’ is the prayer of the persona that comes to him as the only way to accomplish the spiritual journey. Next to anaphora, polyptoton and homoioteleuton are the distinctive formal verbalisms that Eliot makes use of it shrewdly in the poem under analysis. These are in fact the root-repeaters and end-repeaters on words. The use of homoioteleuton is to emphasise a thing that has become established. For instance, ‘white light, folded sheathed’ betrays the atmosphere that is blessed by the presence of Mary. On the other hand, polyptoton is used by Eliot in the poetic discourse under

investigation to exhibit the different situations in a contrastive and graphic manner. For example, ‘the air which is now thoroughly mall and dry/smaller and drier than the will’ quite clearly tells us about the big but subtle difference between the images of the material world and those of the blessed world. Other varieties of verbal parallelism like symploce, anadiplosis, epanalepsis, epistrophe and antistrophe are also used in *Ash-Wednesday* with mature poetic sensibility. They may be counted as a few ones, but their artistic value is not less than that of any other figure used in the data. In addition to all these above mentioned parallelistic strategies, the researcher also encounters some innovative types of verbal parallelism invented and successfully used by Eliot in his poetic discourse. For example, ‘Redeem the time/Redeem’ is an Eliotique figure of repetition that operates marvelously to betray the forceful prayer of the persona for salvation in life. Here, both the form and content are superbly blended, hence a unique piece for stylistic study.

Conclusion

Verbal parallelism that operates as a parallel to the artistic deviations found in *Ash-Wednesday* plays a very significant role in the realization of Eliot’s argument that great poetry is grasped before it is understood by the reader. This parallelistic technique not only helps in the concretisation of Eliot’s poetic art in the poem under analysis, it also turns the thematic contents into something irresistible and dynamic. As far as the impact of these examples of verbal parallelism is concerned, there are various goals that are achieved through their use. It is observed during the study of *Ash-Wednesday*, that the same figure of formal parallelism is used for different purposes at different occasions. For example, ‘I do not hope to turn again’ is used for showing the strong and impressive looking declaration of not to turn to the worldly life in future. But in the middle of the poem this linguistic construction is used to show his helplessness before the lure of the sensate culture; here it accounts for the self-ridicule of

the persona. To stress a particular idea or feeling, to show the helplessness of the spiritual voyager, to display his dependence on prayers, to awaken his intuition, to denounce the worldly self, to ritualize his being, to emphasise the worldly calls and to avoid the worldly calls are the common goals that the

range of verbal parallelism used in *Ash-Wednesday* are supposed to achieve. With the help of his favourite range of verbal parallelism, Eliot successfully presents the mystic theme of spiritualization in tangible and sensuous images.

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