

Formalist Criticism of “The Rain Song” (*Enshoudah al-Mattar*) by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

Ali Najafi Ivaki⁴

Associate Professor in Arabic Language and Literature Kashan University, Iran

Amirhossein Rasoulnia

Assistant Professor in Arabic Language and literature, University of Kashan, Iran

Mahvash Hasanpoor

PhD Candidate in Arabic Language and Literature, University of Kashan, Iran

Received:22 May2017 Accepted:30 October2018

Extended Abstract

1 Introduction

Formalist criticism is a text-based critical approach in which special attention is paid to the form of literary works. Rather than searching for what the author is attempting to convey in their literary creation, a formalist critic is striving to comprehend how a writer or a poet expresses their intention; formalist critics attempt to achieve meanings and concept via examining the form of a text. Despite its prominent fame, “The Rain Song” (*Enshoudah al-Mattar*) by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab has not been examined through formalist criticism. Consequently, the present study attempts to analyze this poem in terms of formalist criticism.

The main factor that has led the authors to write the essay is that the study of the titles and content of the research has shown that although some research has been done on the poetry of Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and his unspoken poem, the present poem is still from The point of view of formalist critique has not been criticized and evaluated, and its beauties have not been seen by the audience, and it was necessary to critique this poem, which is a universal poem, from this angle.

2 Theoretical framework

The present study will try to introduce the two important schools of formalist criticism in the first step and in the second step to review the three important components of the critique of Russian formalism, namely the error of intention, literature and de-familiarization. In the third step, after a general picture of the framework of the mentioned critique is presented to the audience, an attempt is made to formally critique and analyze the unfinished poem of Al-Matr Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab in eleven cycles and to bring the mentioned critique theory to the adaptation stage. At the end of the work, a statistical analytical look at the poem was discussed.

3 Method

In light of the significance of the poem and the strategic position of formalist criticism in literary analysis, the present study is an attempt to analyze said poem using the existing references and library studies, the descriptive-analytical approach, and the principles of the Russian school of formalism. Accordingly, it was attempted to provide answers to the following questions: What are the techniques employed by the poet to elevate the aesthetics of his poem’s formal structure? To what extent the techniques involved in this poem has played a

⁴. Corresponding author. E-mail: najafi.ivaki@yahoo.com

role in its literary level and text coherence? To what extent the use of techniques under formalist criticism has helped the poet to convey his intended concepts to the audience?

4 Results and Discussion

After Sayyab released “The Rain Song”, the entire country of Iraq was facing oppression, tyranny, and colonialism. At the time, he was living in Kuwait. Subsequently, his commitment to his home country’s sociopolitical affairs are highly reflected in his poem. In other words, the poet is an individual who is grieving over collective pain and suffering, as his concerns also stemmed from a collective, pervasive issue. Symbolism is the method he chose in order to express this issues as well as Iraq’s undesirable situation under colonialism. He has employed symbols alongside four legend including Tammuz, Ishtar, Gilgamesh, and Jesus Christ to state what direct speech is incapable of expressing. Moreover, Sayyab did not suffice to exclusively express the concerns present within the society; as a poet theoretician with his unique ideologies, he also presents strategies to mitigate the issues in that society. His ideas include calling for rebellion, revolution, intractability, dynamism, and optimism towards the future and future generations.

In this text, the poet’s happiness and optimism are intertwined with his grief and pessimism, leaving behind a black and white outlook; he is clearly upset and pessimistic when addressing the present account of the Iraqi society and resorts to the use of words implying the people’s stagnation and acceptance of tyranny. The 5.69% use of words demonstrate the poet’s pessimism towards current times. Yet, as he returns to the glorious history of Iraq and remembers the incredible energy and capabilities hidden inside the people, especially the children, he is content and optimistic; as a result, 6.7% of words used in this poem are related to this semantic area.

5 Conclusion

Formalist examination into “The Rain Song” suggest Sayyab’s use of the present capacities and potentials in *Bahr Rajaz* to offer balance to the contents and form of the poem. The analysis of the musicality level of the text shows that in addition to the use of the music arising from Arabic prosody, he is also inspired by devices such as repetition, rhythm and puns. Word repetition has played a significant role in the beauty of the audible, formal and musical structure of words and conveyance of the intended contents. Because such a repetition provides a space where the words used in Sayyab’s work are not restricted by their dictionary definition. Here, they may bear unconventional meanings that are unfamiliar to the audience before reading the poem and upon comprehension, they would become fascinated.

One of the rare features of this poem involves the frequent use of secrets and symbols. Being afraid of the Iraq’s atmosphere under tyranny and oppression, the poet chose to use implicit expressions. In addition to increasing the artistic aspect of the poem, such encryption has also resulted in dynamism in the audience’s minds. Because rather than being used with respect to meanings familiar to the reader, these words are secrets and symbols of concepts that would surprise the audience upon understanding them. By employing this style and a number of other ploys, Sayyab has aimed for semantic defamiliarization. The literary level of his work has been raised considerably through his frequent use of metaphor, simile, paradox, irony and other literary devices.

All in all, the analysis of the poem through formalist criticism perspective shows that the poet artistically conveys the concept of being far from an old fellow (Iraq) and the suffering imposed on the nation by using affections, nostalgic emotions, suitable atmospheres, involvement of various audiovisual imagery, soliloquies and dialogues, portrayal of the past, animism,

connections to the heritage and creating intertextual relations, use of paradoxes, ironies, etc. Accordingly, he offers a text with a significant level of coherence to the audience.

Keywords: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, The Rain Song, Formalist Criticism, Arabic Literature, Defamiliarization

References (In Arabic)

- Abbas, H. (1998). *خصائص الحروف* [The characteristics of letters]. Damascus, Syria: Ittihad al-Kitab al-Arab.
- Al-Awi, I. (1983). *بدر شاكر سيّاب شاعر الأناشيد و المراث* [Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, the poet of song and elegies]. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Lobnani.
- Al-Javari, A. A. (2006). *نحو المعانى* [The structure of meaning]. Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Mo'asisa al-Arabia li-Dirasat va al-Nashr.
- Al-Sad, N. (n.d.). *المكونات الشعرية في بائية مالك بن ريب* [Poetic elements in Baiya of Malik bn Reib]. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 14, 39-60.
- Al-tavanesi, Sh. (1998). *مستويات البناء الشعري عند محمد ابراهيم أبي سنة* [Standards of poetic structure of Muhammad Ibrahim Abi Sina]. Cairo, Egypt: Al-Hai'a al-Misria Al-Amma lil-Kitab.
- Anis, E. (1965). *موسيقى الشعر* [Music of poetry]. Cairo, Egypt: Maktaba al-Anjelu al-Misria.
- Araji, H. (2007). *مقالات في الشعر العربي المعاصر* [Article on modern Arabic poetry]. Baghdad, Iraq: Dar al-Sho'un al-Saghafia al-Amma.
- Barism, Gh. (2000). *منهج النقد الصوتي في تحليل الخطاب الشعري* [Phonetic criticism method in discourse analysis of poetry]. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kanuz al-Adabia.
- Frazer, J. (1982). *أدونيس أو تموز* [Adonis or Tamuz]. Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Mo'asisa al-Arabia li-Dirasat va al-Nashr.
- Ibn Jinni, A. O. (1954). *سر صناعة الإعراب* [The secret of Arabs' art]. Cairo, Egypt: n.p.
- Jayda, A. (1980). *الاتجاهات الجديدة في الشعر العربي المعاصر* [New approaches in modern Arabic poetry]. Tripoli, Lebanon: Dar al-Chimal.
- Kanvan, A. (2002). *من جماليات إيقاع الشعر العربي* [Some of beauties of rhythm in Arabic poetry]. Rabat, Morocco: Dar Abi Farigh.
- Nazim, H. (2002). *البنى الأسلوبية؛ دراسة في أنشودة المطر للسيّاب* [Stylistic structure; Exploring "the rain song"]. Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Markaz al-Saghafi al-Arabi va Dar al-Baiza'.
- Qnanimi al-Hilal, M. (1973). *النقد الأدبي الحديث* [Modern literary criticism]. Beirut: Dar al-Saghafa.
- Salman Darvish, I. (2003). *الموت في شعر بدر شاكر سيّاب و نازك الملائكة* [Death in the poems of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab Nazik Al-Malaika].

References (In Persian)

- Ahmadi, B. (1991). *ساختار و تؤول متن* [The structure and interpretation of text]. Tehran, Iran: Markaz.
- Alavi Moghadam, M. (1998). *ظريه‌های نقد ادبی معاصر؛ صورتگرایی و ساختارگرایی* [Theories of modern literary criticism; Formalism and structuralism]. Tehran, Iran: SAMT.
- Ghoveimi, M. (2004). *آوا و القاء؛ رهیافتی به شعر اخوان ثالث* [Sound and inspiration: An approach to the poems of Akhavan Sales]. Tehran, Iran: Hermes.
- Payandeh, H. (2004). *تباين و تنش در ساختار شعر نشانی* [Contrast and tension in Sohrab Sepehri's "The address"]. *Journal of Faculty of Letters and Humanities (Tabriz)*, 47(192), 195-212.
- Rohani, M. (2011). *بررسی کارکردهای تکرار در شعر معاصر* [Exploring the functions of repetition in modern poetry]. *Boustab Adab*, 3(2), 146-168.
- Safavi, K. (2011). *درآمدی بر معنی‌شناسی* [An introduction to semantics]. Tehran: Soureh Mehr.

- Shafiei Kadkani, M. (2012). *رستاخیز کلمات؛ درس گفتارهایی درباره‌ی نظریه‌ی ادبی صورت‌گرایان روس* [The resurrection of words: Some speeches on literary theory of Russian Formalists]. Tehran, Iran: Sokhan.
- Shayeganfar, H. (2001). *نقد ادبی* [Literary criticism]. Tehran, Iran: Dastan.
- Tahmasi, A., & Zare, N. (2011). *متناقض نما در نمادهای شعر أنشودة المطر* [Paradox in poetic symbols of Unshūdat al-Matar ('the rain song')]. *Arabic Literature*, 3(1), 177-197.
- Tajlil, J. (1988). *جناس در پهنه ادب پارسی* [Pun in the literature of Persian literature]. Tehran, Iran: Ministry of Culture and Higher Education.
- Tavousi, S. (2012). *آیین صورت‌نگری؛ تأملی در فرمالیسم و کاربرد آن در شعر معاصر ایران* [Formalism principles; A reflection on formalism and its application in modern poetry of Iran]. Tehran, Iran: Ghoghnoos.