



## RESEARCH PAPER

### John Donne's Song 'Sweetest Love I Do Not Goe': A Structuralist Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the song through the lens of structuralism. In the course of the discussion, the emphasis is particularly on literary aspects of structuralism. The Song by Donne 'Sweetest Love, I Do Not Goe' is analyzed structurally as well as critically. Various figures of speech concerning structuralism is given due importance in the study. By studying the poem following the elements of structuralism in literature, it can be concluded that each word is important in its place and to other words. Words as signs not only convey the differential or relational aspects of structure but also the bulk of ideas related to them i.e. they also have their value. In addition, the phonological aspects of the language will be discussed. This paper is an integrated study that encompasses all the basic elements of structuralism i.e. how words, signs, and phonological substitutions affect the semantic patterns in poetry.

**KEYWORDS** Formalism, John Donne's Poetry, Phonology, Poetic Language, Structuralism

## Introduction

There is a huge difference between an ordinary language and the language of poetry. In poetry, we consider the literariness i.e. the use of various poetical and stylistic devices, which in themselves confer meaning to the language. On the other hand, in an ordinary language no such thing, as literariness is involved; language is seen as the language with its various functional and structural aspects. However, these devices not only give literariness to language, they also give structure to the language. As the structure is an essential part of anything, without which it cannot exist, in the same way, the poetic language retains some structure. All the literary devices, phonological aspects, and the rules of combination and selection of words lead to the structure of poetic language. To reveal this underline structure in poetry, one has to study the poetic language very deeply. To grasp this structure is not an easy task, as it is in the common or everyday language. Even the trivial and subtle phoneme is to be counted and the very nuances are to be explored. It is why sometimes the structural analysis of any poetry seems to be the critical evaluation or critical appreciation of that piece of poetry. It is important to examine poems in detail and with a critical eye to understand their structure. However, the purpose of this examination should not be to judge the poet's abilities or limitations. Instead, the focus should be on identifying the structural principles of the poem, including how the poet has used words and language in both a sequential and thematic manner. These two aspects majorly lead to the structural analysis of any piece of poetry.

Any student of literature or language will confront the two main movements i.e. formalism and structuralism, the first mostly concerned with the study of literature and

the latter with the study of language. However, it does not mean that literature is completely devoid of structure. It does have a structure and we shall see how its formal aspects lead to the structure of a literary work. The very movement of formalism became a base for structuralism.

In literary theory formalism, it refers to such a critical method that will evaluate, analyze, and interpret the hidden qualities of a text. In this method not only syntax and grammar but also literary devices that as tropes and meters are also included. This method will minimize the historical, cultural, and biographical importance of the text. This method was one of the most dominant academic literary styles in the US after the Second World War. At the very beginning of the 1970s, formalism was believed and looked at a very suspicious nature that a text cannot be separated from its original shape.

Structuralism adds paling to the realm of literary studies. It completely ignores the actual text and treats it as if it is like a text pattern produced by some magic power, not as a result of human power. In Structural analysis, the uniqueness of the text is completely ignored for the sake of structure, patterns, and system. It is believed the author is merely presented as pre-existing not to make any further story, in Saussurean (1983) concept, the *langue* and *parole* (Peter, 1946).

There are three main principles of structure in literature that is structure, system, and explanation in novels or dramas, we have plots and characters. But broadly speaking the work of literature can also be judged based on certain minor elements of structure; namely, the oppositional element which constitutes the opposition of views, characteristics, and ideas of various characters, this being the spatial element; the element of form, which is the genre to which a particular work of literature belongs; the element of real-world timelines, which means the telling of a story in a play and its relation to real world-time during which it may happen; the element of rhetoric which means the strength and power of language and dialogues and the element of conventionality which means that structure in literature can be understood by the idea of conventions or patterns that the individual genres follow (Peter, 1946).

## Literature Review

Russian formalism refers to the literary theories developed by the society of OPOYAZ, which was established in 1916 by Boris Eichenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, and Yury Tynyanov. Additionally, the Moscow Linguistic Circle, founded by Roman Jakobson in 1914, played a role in the development of this movement. It emerged in the 20th century as a response to Romantic literary theories that focused on the artistic genius of the individual and the author, supporting the text and describing the formation and interpretation of literary works. (Peter, 1946). Two schools of thought formalist literary criticism and Russian formalism were developed soon after New Criticism (Brooks, 1979).

Roman Jacobson, after migrating to America became slowly structuralist as he said that a work of literature could not be separated from how the literary work says it, and therefore the form and structure of a work, far from being merely the decorative wrappings of an isolable content, are part of the content of the work (Peter.1946). Levi Strauss was influenced by De Saussure's theory of signs (1983) and applied the theory to the literature. He said that as in language one uses various signs, in the same way, the culture of a society has many such cultural codes like dress, fashion, meal habits, etc. Language is just one code or sign in the culture of any society. On the other hand, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in English and America, New Criticism was the most overriding movement, from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Its supporters were emphatic in their advocacy of close reading the text and

attention to the text themselves, and their rejection of criticism based on extra-textual sources, especially biography. The work of literature was considered self-contained by the New Critics. They are not in a position to consider the reader's response, the author's intention, or historical backgrounds and cultural contexts. They are in favor of close reading of the text and believe that the structure and meaning of the text should not be examined separately and appreciate the use of literary devices in a text. Sometimes this approach has been called an objective approach to literature. It means that the proponents of this approach consider literature as a closed system like Saussure, who considers the linguistic system as closed. This thing paved the way for structuralism in literature (Andrei, 2004).

John Donne's poem "SWEETEST LOVE I DO NOT GOE" is a poignant and lovely portrayal of love and yearning. The reader can feel the poet's intense passion and profound feeling via the use of words and images.

Boyd (2010) argues that Donne's poetry celebrates and acknowledges the diverse range of women's capabilities, without depreciating them. He realizes this by exploring not only the physical aspects of love-making but also the divine and intellectual dimensions of relationships. The researcher states further that Donne's poetry can identify and celebrate the full range of women's skills and aptitudes. Anthony Low refers to the male-female competition in Donne's works as Ovidian game-playing. He clarifies that if they can resolve their issues with status in the relationship, they have a chance to get married and live happily ever after.

This ode, which is often disregarded in research, is analyzed from the perspectives of humor, sexuality, double entendre, and bawdry. Scholars read the poem differently, even though most current criticism sees the speaker as serious (Wright, 2016). The ode is among the Donne's most wonderful love ballads. The poet is leaving for overseas travel, and his sweetheart is grieving much over this news. In light of his leaving, the poet begs her not to weep. He tells her wife that he believes she is the most beautiful woman on the planet and that he will love her even more than he does now, promising not to search for another lady outside of their union (Babu, 2017).

## Material and Methods

The methodology of this research will be purely descriptive and argumentative from a qualitative perspective. The researcher has gone through several research articles of various authors who have conducted their research on the poetry of John Donne, to gain an insight into the various structural elements, underlying Donne's poetry.

This paper aims to bring about the various major and minor elements of structuralism in the study of poems. The researcher will try to find out the various syntagmatic and paradigmatic parallels or otherwise in the study. The focus of the researcher will be the 'Song: *Sweetest Love I Do Not Goe*' by John Donne and the researcher will show through the study how these various major and minor elements of structuralism work within this poem.

## Structural Study of Donne's 'Song: *Sweetest Love, I Do Not Goe*'

This love song by Donne is a system of structure, which is composed of five stanzas that follow the tradition of Petrarch; following the octave rhyme scheme *ababcddc*. Each stanza is in turn composed of eight lines, having a tripping meter; as against the Petrarchan meter which was so cheap, boring, and tiresome. Each sign or word within the stanzas is

either relational or differential i.e. it produces either connotative meanings or denotative i.e. symbolical meanings. Each word within each line is related to the next word syntagmatically. There is a horizontal relationship among words in sentences and a vertical relationship among the stanzas i.e. they convey the thoughts one after the other.

### Stanza- 1

*Sweetest love ... deaths to dye.*

The first stanza is an apostrophe or direct address made by the poet to his beloved that is Anne More; the poet's wife. The negative sentence 'I Do Not Goe', is deliberately used as it shows the very act of loyalty and faithfulness in love. Instead of the words beloved, wife, or sweetheart, the word 'love' is used and it is so because it is a vast term that covers the whole of passions and emotions concerning matrimonial love. Again paradigmatically, in line 3, the word 'world' instead of the people or human beings as a whole, is used. This symbolizes the tours and trips that he undertook. In line 4, the adjectival phrase 'fitter love' is used. In the place of 'fitter,' the word truer, etc. might be used but in that case, it could not possibly have served the purpose. Along with the quality of alliteration of /tt/ that is produced in the second syllable of the word 'fitter', it also is important paradigmatically. 'Fitter' in the sense that there is nothing else that can fit in the gap of his love. 'Love' in the same line (with the initial capital letter) conveys the idea of this present love than the former one if it existed there at all. The alliteration of the sound /f/ in the words 'For' 'Fitter' and 'feigned' is important syntagmatically. The idea of fitness is directly conveyed in the word 'mee' through the medium of 'for'. In the same way, line 8 conveys the element of pessimism in the form of alliteration of the sound /d/ in the expression 'feigned deaths to dye'.

### Stanza- 2

*Yesternight ... then hee.*

The pessimism of the first stanza is vertically conveyed into optimistic thinking in the second stanza. This is done through the medium of reasoning which is the striking feature of Donne's habit of charging emotions with thoughts. Syntagmatically, the word 'Sun' is used in place of any other material thing, but the fact is that here the word 'sun' is the sign that is used symbolically. It conveys the idea of enlightenment, happiness, newness, freshness, and retreat, as Donne will make a retreat after having completed his journey. If seen closely, the sentences are combined vertically through the joining words by conjunctions like 'and', 'nor', 'then', and 'but' etc. In line 3, the alliteration on 'n' and the negativity element in 'no' and 'nor', are also to the point and convey the feelings of 'no compromise' in love. The same aspect of alliteration and negativity is continued in lines 4 and 5 respectively in the forms of 'nor' and 'not', which convey the same tone of emotional love. In line 7, the word 'speedier' instead of swifter, etc. is used. It is because swifter is more abstract in quality than 'speedier', which is more concrete and material. Donne will come back with the speed of a ship, towards his wife. As his poetry is metaphysical, he uses more concrete images like 'wings' and 'spurs' to convey the idea in a more comprehensible form. This choice of words in a paradigmatic fashion is one of the greatest structural equivalences, used in Donne's poetry.

### Stanza- 3

*O how feeble ... advance.*

As Donne is the master of shifting thoughts abruptly, so in this stanza again he has become a pessimist. This shifting of thought from stanza to stanza makes his poetry of a different mode. It becomes unconventional lyrical poetry. The adjective phrase 'good fortune' of the second line is placed in contrast with the 'bad chance' of the fifth line. This vertical relationship not only states the association between the two phenomena but also shows the paradox involved here. In the second stanza the alliteration of the sound /f/ in the words 'if', 'fortune', and 'fall', harmoniously conveys the confusion in the mind of the poet which culminates in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> lines. The use of the pronoun 'we', 'our', and 'us' in lines 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> respectively, shows the behavior of humans. Here the use of pronouns is to make the confusion particular to humans; otherwise, the statement might have been generalized if there were no use of pronouns.

#### Stanza- 4

*When thou sigh'st ... of me.*

Here we can see two beautiful conceits as elements of structure in literature. The sighs of beloved are compared to the very puffing out of his soul and the tears of her to the drops of his blood. In line 1 the use of the word 'sigh', instead of the word puff, breath, is used. The tone of this stanza is somewhat gloomy and dejected so words other than the 'sigh' would not be proper. In line 3 the use of paradoxical collocation 'unkindly kind' is used which is an excellent example of an oxymoron, besides containing the alliteration of the sounds /n/ and /k/. The word cruel in place of 'unkindly' might have been used but in that case, the alliteration would have been absent, the presence of which creates a magical and rhythmic effect in the production of meaning. Line 4 produces the effect of assonance by focusing on the later 'd' in 'blood' and the former 'd' in 'doth'. Again, this pair is followed by the word 'decay'. This syntagmatic arrangement of decaying of blood conveys the suppression of love, more emphatically than any other combination. Lines 6, 7, and 8 have the recurrence of 'thou' and this stress and redundancy in the choice of the word means an emphasis. It is here that the author's extreme passion of love for his beloved wife is revealed---the central and structural part of his being.

#### Stanza- 5

*Let not thy ... parted bee.*

Vertically the sorrow in the preceding stanza is conveyed in this stanza. Here the sorrow is cast away and the idea of parting is dismissed as something irrelevant. The use of the words 'divining', 'rethink', 'destiny', 'fears', and 'think', in the first five lines show the apprehension in the heart of his beloved wife, concerning his safety. The choice of these words along paradigmatic lines is the best as no other substitutions would have served the purpose. In line 4 the alliteration of the sound /f/ in the words 'fears' and 'fulfill' makes the very idea of becoming the apprehension as true. The word realized other than 'fulfill' would not have served the purpose. The negativity 'not' in the first line and 'never' in line 8, again relates the whole poem to the very title 'Sweetest love, I do not Goe'. It confirms the 'no-compromise' element, which is elaborated in the first stanza.

#### Conclusion

Structure in literature is not only the words as building blocks of any genre for example poetry (in this case) but their syntagmatic and paradigmatic association or in simple words their combination and selection is also important. Moreover, the particular subject, a genre conveys, also constitutes its structure for example poetry, novel, drama,

etc. In the same way, the use of various literary devices and figures of speech also accounts for structure in literature. By studying all these minor elements about their vertical and horizontal association, make a poem, a structure; a system, and a whole. These various parts, if disturbed, lead to chaos and confusion and the possibility to study literary language either diminishes or is lost all at once.

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