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# Poetic language: Presenting factual information

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**Abstract:** The aim of this essay is to show the way which poetic language provides the reader with factual information about the events which happen in the world. At the beginning, the poetic language will be explained and discussed. Then, a brief introduction will be given about the Iraqi war in 2003. For discussions and to support the arguments in the essay, three poems are chosen. They will be analysed and it will be shown the way that poetic language presents the factuality.

**Keywords:** Poetic Language, Factual Information, Iraqi War, Abu Ghraib

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## 1. Introduction

Today, language has a main role in the modern world. It is used to obtain rights and to provide people with facts. It can be said that it is generally used more than weapons. The war of language is a new version of fighting against opposite groups or ideas. It is language which increases human beings awareness about the events happening around them. Scholars and freedom fighters show people the real world through the use of language. This use can be in media, negotiations, forms of literature and the like.

Language has a main role in creating media: newspapers, news programs and etc. Almost all events are screened through the TV channels. In newspapers, the recent news and arguments can be read daily. People, through following them, are able to follow the events which are happening in the world. The events are delivered to audiences which relate to the general issues and they can reaction after their evaluations to the situation.

Poetry is a form of showing facts which helps the reader to be aware of the happening events. It is a form which is chosen by people who are interested in this type of literature. As it is known, people would prefer to obtain information through different sources: it might be a novel or watching a documentary program. In informative poetry, it is the poets' duty to form a poem in the best way to attract the reader as well as giving a message or factuality. The reader should analyze the poem during reading to understand the message which shows the poets' notes regarding to the factuality. Poetic language is one of the main tools which are used to tell the reader about the Iraqi war, especially Abu Ghraib.

This essay will discuss and analyze the ways which poetic language presents the reader with factual information about the world.

## 2. Poetic Language

Language is one of the main tools of communication to convey messages. Heidegger (2001) claims that language speaks; according to his claim, language is very important in communication because it is something which speaks and makes communicative exchanges. He says that human beings are using language when they are speaking, listening, even dreaming. Strachan *et al.* (2000) argue that language is the medium of poetry. They say that poets can provide the subject matters through their poems with the help of language. According to the argument, language is the most important element of poetry and it has the major role when a poem functions. The language can inform the reader about realities or any other information which a poet tries to share. When a poet attempts to give the reader some information which is accepted by him and some other people as factual, the language becomes the best tool to be used. In other words, a poet benefits from language in conveying messages to present the reader with factual information.

Wainwright (2011) argues that although language is used to convey information, it is also used to invent and fantasize. The reader should be aware of poems' factuality and imaginary. That is to say, a reader need to judge while reading to decide whether a poem is based on facts or it is simply invented by a poet for different purposes like misleading the reader or to romanticize the situation. Unreal

information might sometimes be found in a poem which is written purposely. It can be seen how some poets are influenced by some politicians and they are writing untruthfully to get some advantages. In modern world, the facts are sometimes neglected by the writers; they write what some certain people may like. For instance, a country which involves in a war would ask writers to avoid writing about war crimes as it affects their status. As a result of such a request, some poets may accept it to get some benefits, while some others would refuse such a nasty demand. They may deny doing this because of feeling responsibility and they may think that they should pass the facts to the readers who do not know about the realities.

Skelton (1978) says that poetry is emphasizing the subjective nature of the universe, in other words, poets sometimes are writing about subjective issues. He says it is almost impossible to judge the rightness or wrongness of some actions which are related to an individual that we may not have information about. On the other hand, he demonstrates that the moral principles of poetry should be applied in a poem. That is to say, there are some actions which are special to some related events to a poet and that might not be possible for the reader to judge about, for example a poem about a poet's personal life. In contrast, when it comes to the information related to other people and not personal events, poets should be aware of the morality rules of writing, for instance when they write about a war. In case of writing a poem about a war, they have to represent the real data and events; they are not expected to write in the way they believe the realities might be and they desire to hear or see. Skelton (1978) demonstrates that it is an essential moral rule to show the facts in the poems. According to him, it cannot be accepted if a poet presents some untruth information in order to giving some people priority and support them for some special reasons.

Generally speaking, it can be said that poems are providing the reader with information. The provided information can be factual or imagined. Usually, readers can judge and decide while they are reading. This process needs some information about the subject matter of the poem and a deep analysis. Being familiarized with these two elements can make readers find out either a poem is based on factual or invented information.

### 3. Iraqi War in 2003

In 2003, the USA with its allies invaded Iraq to fall down Ba'ath Regime which was led by Saddam Hussein. The occupation started under the name of saving world from the chemical weapons which were supposed that they were being manufactured by Saddam's regime. After the invasion and loosing many innocent people, it was found that there were not the expected chemical bombs. According to Pilger (2006), George Bush and Toni Blair lied to people. He says they had a target to achieve which was invading Iraq and they used media as a helpful tool for their aim; they convinced the media about their expectations, then they

made most people to accept the attack. As a result, they attacked Iraq and invaded it.

The death of innocent people started with the start of the invasion, but it did not stop after the completion of the mission. Pilger (2006) shows that some researchers from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, working with Iraqi scholars, made a conservative assumption on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004 about the number of civil people who lost their life since the beginning of the conquest; the estimated number was about 100,000 excess deaths or more. The deaths were primarily the result of military actions by coalition forces; most of those killed by coalition forces were women and children. This number was estimated at that time which can be said that it is doubled or tripled till now. Additionally, that estimation does not include the soldiers' deaths and people who died as a result of terrorist attacks as they were being planned in response to the invasion: the victims were almost always civilians.

As a result, it can be said the war was planned and it was made acceptable to people and media trickily. The victims as usual became civil people; it does not matter the victims were from whatever country. Iraqi people died as well as soldiers who participated in the invasion. They all died without having any idea about the war and desiring for such a nasty decision. Another fact, except deaths, was the dehumanization in the prisons which were controlled, Abu Ghraib as an example. Scherer and Benjamin (2006) say that prisoners in Abu Ghraib were humiliated and sexually abused by the American Army soldiers. The prisoners were forced to masturbate in front of each other and many other undesirable commitments. Those all commitments were committed by some soldiers and high ranked officers who were in charge of the prison.

After the war, many documentary programs were produced to show the truths; many poems were also written in various languages from different countries. They all aimed to show the world what happened there and the war consequences were tried to be revealed. The realities were shown through words and documents. Many pictures and videos of the crimes were used as evidences; usually they were shown directly and sometimes they were used in poems as factual information to tell the reader about the facts of the war. To show how the poems were written to provide the reader with the factual information, this essay is going to analyze and discuss some poems about the Iraqi war.

#### 3.1. Keston Sutherland's "Song of the Wanking Iraqi"

The poet wrote this poem after the Abu Ghraib scandal. In the poem, the poet tries to show the facts that happened in the prison. He uses many words which relate to the abuses which were committed by American soldiers and army officials. At the beginning of the poem, he describes the cells of the prison. The cells are with "no windows or doors". As he states, there are not any window to let light pass into the cells. There are also no doors; the cells have metal pipes instead of the doors to keep the prisoners in their cells. The walls are very thick as they are made of "ferro-concrete". It

can be recognized through the description of the cells how would it be difficult for a human being to stay in such a place. It should not be a matter who stays there; as a result we are all human beings. Such a place for a human being must be very difficult to live in. It seems through describing the place with very strong and negative words, the poet thinks that prisoners should live in a better situation even if they commit crimes.

After the description of the cells, the word of "permethrin" occurs in line seven. Katko (2010) says that permethrin is an agricultural insecticide which is used by the US military: military uniforms are filled with the chemical. The chemical is not harmful for human beings, but it cannot be desired when it is spread into a cell with no windows and doors. In the seventh line of the poem, the poet says "permethrin hated by crayfish". Katko (2010) declares that the chemical is proven to be a toxin and crayfish hates it. It is also hated by the prisoners when "the vapor becomes a total block". Here, the poet tells the reader about the situation that the prisoners live in. The case should be very disgusting because the chemical is even hated by an animal. Something which should be avoided from animals, it must certainly be kept away from human beings as human beings are superior to the other creatures. The poem shows the unsuitability of the place to stay in through showing blocking the air in such a cell as the gas vapors into it and does not come out because of having no gates.

After permethrin, the poet mentions a portrait which was painted by Auguste Renoir in 1876 and it is named *A Girl with a Watering Can*; it is put in National Gallery of Art. The poet says "we look at the world from her own altitude" and the word of "altitude" here is used specially instead of the height of the key figure which is the girl. The poet may mean three different ideas by using this statement and the meanings can be argued through different personal interpretations.

Firstly, he may try to say that "we" are looking to the events very simply just like a child does; human beings are having no reactions against the crimes which are committed. Even if there is a reaction, they might be very worthless and not effective as a child may have such as crying which is usually cannot change anything. It can be argued that this idea is meant by the poet because there are still invasions in the name of freedom and democracy; people are being humiliated and tortured either in prisons or their homes. Nevertheless, criminals and the responsible people are accused or get enough reaction from the human beings. Because of these reasons, our altitudes to the events can be seen as an altitude of a small girl to her surroundings.

Secondly, the poet may attempt to say that all we see our surroundings like the girl in the picture who sees her surround in the garden. The girl has an altitude in the picture and we have it as well. So, this expression might be meaningful because having an altitude and looking around is a beginning to react or at least it is something which mainly considered as an important action. That means we are standing as the girl is standing and we both have an altitude

which is better than sitting and looking at nothing.

Thirdly, the poet might also attempt to tell us that there is something optimistic. The girl has an altitude in the garden and she waters the grass or trees. She is watering because she feels that they need help and she is doing what should be done; the girl tries to keep the plants alive through watering them which can be accepted as a kind of help towards them. She has a reaction to the world around herself that she waters and feels that she has to do something. It can be said that the poet says we are also feeling the responsibility of reacting; even if it is not very powerful, but we feel it and try to react against crimes and unlawful commitments.

It can be said that trying to draw a real picture of the place in the poem is providing the reader with factual information about the event. The poet describes the cells and shows the unsuitability of the places to stay in. the poet also brings other objects into the poem to make a relation between them and to make the poem clearer and more understandable, for example permethrin and the portrait. As a result of describing and showing the place and comparing the real situation with some other real figures, it can be argued that the poetic language of the poem gives the reader the fact as it happened.

### 3.2. Andrea Brady's "Saw Fit"

The poem tries to show the way which prisoners in American Force's prisons are treated. It is commonly known that the fact is disgusting as the prisoners are usually treated inhumanly. This fact has been usually shown to the world through the pictures that were taken during the dehumanized treatments. In the poem, the poet uses some key figures which were the participants or the places of the scandals.

Dall (2009) argues that the poet reacts to the events successfully, but it can be also seen that the poem is made complicated through the use of stories, symbols and the like. The poet quotes some lines of Lynndie England's interview that was in charge of Abu Ghraib tortures. It can be argued that using speeches from someone who accused of a crime cannot be very wise to be used in a poem which aims to show the facts to the readers because someone who commits a crime, she or he tries to defend and deny the realities or accusations. It can also be argued that quoting her speeches would be good to make between the released evidences and the speeches. The evidences and her interview are controversial as she says that she did not desire to participate in the humiliation crime, while the pictures prove the opposite.

Generally, it can be said that the poetic language of the poem provides the reader with factual information. The most important is focusing on the key person of torturing and humiliating in the prison. Throughout the poem, the reader can realize the events which happened in the prison. The person in charge can be identified and the reader can judge about the situation. In this case, it can be said that the poetic language provides the reader with the factual information as it helps them to explore the realities through evaluating the situation and reaching a decision to decide what happened in

that prison was humanly or not.

### 3.3. Wally Glickman's "Abu Ghraib"

The poet wrote this poem in 2004 as a reaction to the scandal of Abu Ghraib. While I was searching on the internet to find a poem related to the scandal, I found this poem which seems that it can be helpful for the readers to be familiar with the events. The poet is not a professional and he is an amateur, but the poem can be useful for the reader especially for the young people who were not aware of this event in the past. It will also have its significance for the future generations to give them the factual information about the scandal. The poem mainly shows how some people, especially who decided to fight, made Americans unlovable.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet criticizes Bush and his followers and mentions "whole Bush crew". According to him, the new torturing style in Abu Ghraib was invented by them as the prison is "under new management". Through the poetic words, he says that Iraqi people are wounded in different way: physically and/or psychologically. Then he starts to ask questions to the reader to tell them that he shows them the facts. One of the most impressive questions is "Made a hypocrisy of freedom and democracy?". Pilger (2006) says that noble words such as "democracy" and "freedom" were emptied of their true meaning by their enemies. He means that those words which are giving a good meaning originally, but they were made hypocrite by some people to help them in gaining their aims. He argues that these words were used by Toni Blair and Bill Clinton on their "War on terror" speech which was a fake metaphor that insulted human beings' intelligence. The war is also sometimes called "Operation Iraqi Freedom". Mehta (2010) argues that the war had an ironical impact which is the opposite of what was claimed to be. She says that Iraqis were deprived and denied to access fundamental necessities such as drinking water, food and medicine.

The poet also asks "Was there one shameful abuse they didn't commit?"; this is a very challenging question. It makes the reader think how big and horrible the issue is. Human beings were sexually insulted and humiliated which might be a very harmful torturing style for human beings especially for Muslim people and those who are living in Middle East. Katko (2010) argues that homosexuality and sexual abusive are a real matter for Muslims as they believe that it is a big sin and they are expected to avoid it by the community and religious beliefs; this kind of torturing does really harm them more than any other kinds of mistreating. It can be argued that this type of abuse is the peak of mistreating especially for Muslims; that is why the poet states this question here and he may try to say that even the worst was done.

Then, the poet starts criticizing the officials by saying either that would be enough to blame some soldiers or not. He says that is not enough to finalize the case by punishing some soldiers, while the criminals are those who are deciding to fight because of their political thoughts and weak concerns which even cannot be proven. He also argues that it

is not only Abu Ghraib at which human beings are tortured and sexually abused, but there is "Guantanamo" and some other prisons in Afghanistan and elsewhere, which are managed by American forces, around the world and the mistreating is not known at those prisons. By saying "Two million American prisoners all part of the same plan", it seems he thinks the soldiers are also victims just like tortured and mistreated prisoners. The soldiers would not be happy to guard a prison in which they become prisoners too as their freedom is limited. Through this speech, the poet blames the decision makers who decide to fight while most people disagree or they are misled by tricky ways like lying or giving them untrue information regarding the countries which they fight with.

This poem uses some facts and questions to increase the readers' awareness about the factuality of the events. The poet tries to challenge the reader to think wisely about the events. He wants them to evaluate and decide rather than just listening to the politicians as they might not say the truth. The poetic language here is used to tell the reader what exactly is happening around them which need reactions by human beings as other human beings are insulted. It can be said the poetic language of this poem can provide the reader with factual information and increase their awareness about the world as well. Such poems always can be successful in achieving their aims as they tempt the reader to own a position while decisions are being made; this success is achieved through challenging them to think and providing the facts to the reader with the help of the poetic language.

## 4. Conclusion

This essay has discussed the way in which poetic language presents the factual information to the reader about the world. Language is the weapon of critiques and those who try to react against the deeds which cannot be accepted as they are being done improperly. That is to say, there are some deeds which harm human beings and they are needed to be stopped. Poets mainly use the poetic language to stand against things which should be changed. Some of the major issues are wars and international conflicts. The poets can achieve their aims, which are reactions, through the language they use to express their thoughts in their poems.

In the poems which have been analyzed in this paper, some facts could be seen. The readers are provided with factual information; they can be aware of what happened as a result of the wars through the presented facts, which are presented by the poets with the help of the poetic language. When the readers understand the points which are being made by a poem, they can react as those bad treatments need reactions to be changed. The factuality is very important for the reader to be convinced and to be not misled as they are sometimes being misled by politicians.

It could be seen through the poems how Abu Ghraib scandal undesirable is. It has been shown that the poets tried to show the scandal to the reader to be aware and responsible for the future to avoid any kind of repetition of such

disastrous commitments. All the three poems have had the same aims; they all try to show the facts about Abu Ghraib scandal and it seems through the analysis that they can provide the reader with factual information which makes an increase in the readers' awareness. This awareness can make the reaction which is needed to help humanity; the reaction is needed to help all human beings to live in peace and to have a respectable life because if most people disagree to a commitment, that commitment probably will not be done.

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