A REFLECTION ON THE USE OF POETRY IN DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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1. Introduction

Lovejoy, cited in Abrams (1960: 5), indicates that the function of the human mind, with its ultimate depth surrounded by ultimate mysteries, is to be regarded as peculiarly 'romantic'. The mind is defined by some as the heart opposing the head, and for others, it is the realm of the imagination that works as the mind's eye, the inner eye, which contrasts with reason and any sense of fact. Typical manifestations of the spiritual essence of a romantic is a free flow of the imagination and creativity that goes beyond any kind of calculation and reason, as well as a passion for anything ephemeral, making it everlasting, primarily for one's own self and then universally, for everyone. The traits of this ever-mysterious mind take their shape on the pages, turning the non-verbal into a vivid verbal landscape. This is the world of 'literature' where one discovers oneself better through the minds and hearts of fictional characters, who ultimately become alive in one's inner mind.

The focus of this paper is on the genre of poetry, which combines all the traits of a literary piece. The discussion encompasses the relevance and application of the genre to the classroom setting, and seeks to show that the appropriate use of poetry in the language classroom may be an effective resource in developing learners' reading comprehension and interpretative skills, leading to significant language improvement.

A small empirical study was conducted among a group of tertiary level learners who had decided that the genre of poetry, so capable of initiating inquisitiveness, was also the most complicated and fearsome of areas where they decided not to tread, unless absolutely necessary. The fear factor associated with reading and understanding poetry initiated this study, which aims to help learners to realize poetry through a language-based stylistics approach. It is hoped that reading and analysing poetry by following the advocated approach will help to enhance interpretative skills, leading to improved comprehension.

According to Halliday (1985: 98), 'Learning is essentially a process of constructing meanings…involving cognition and interpretation'. Poetry, a reflection of reality and of life, may thus have plural interpretations as individual experience, and may contribute to one's overall language development. The following idea and method is implemented for the present study:

> Reading following appropriate activities (language-based stylistics approach) → improvement in interpretation, comprehension and critical analysis ability

2. Poetry in the Language Classroom

Poetry is a genre that undoubtedly has its very distinct qualities in the language learning scenario. It is recognized both as a point of attraction and a point of distraction. Poetry recognises syntax, invents its own vocabulary, freely mixes registers and creates its own punctuation. In this way, the reader will either fall for it or create a significant sense of mystery that may initiate an opposite reaction too. Poetry is a powerful resource in the classroom, having fictional characteristics and conveying its message by paying considerable attention to language which is rich and multi-layered. The genre also draws creatively on a full range of archaisms and dialects, and generates vivid new metaphors, along with patterning sounds and ordering rhythms.

However, it is also true that poetry employs a higher concentration of such linguistic devices or effects than other forms of discourse. As pointed out by Leech (1988) and Widdowson (1984) poetry has been described as deviating from the norms of language, nevertheless, as observed by Ainy (2010), it also has the quality of a story; usually each poem narrates a story, having a beginning, middle and an ending, sometimes abrupt and open, initiating further interpretation, understanding and provoking deeper thought.

One of the main aims of introducing poetry in the classroom should thus be to teach learners to enjoy the genre as a piece of writing rather than reading it for some practical purpose, i.e. to be able to manage everyday matters by obtaining information. However, analysing a text in terms of what it might mean symbolically and philosophically will initiate interpretations that will be connected to everyday affairs and further multi-layered language improvement potential.

Moreover, once the learners are in the habit of understanding a text, they begin to enrich themselves with the language and expressions of the text that set them thinking. They thus become involved as a whole person, and start taking the opportunity to express their personal opinions, reaction and feelings towards their understanding. The text becomes a resource for generating discussion, controversy and critical thinking in the classroom, rather than leading towards a stereotyped definitive interpretation of the text.

A poem that is rich in multiple levels of meaning can initiate issues of interest for discussion, accelerate the students' acquisition of language through activities where students need to share their feelings and opinions. According to Maley and Moulding (1985: 135), 'if carefully selected, poems can open up themes which are common to us whatever your cultural background, and can thus act as a powerful stimulus to the students' own reflective thinking, which will lead to more mature and fruitful group discussion'. Based on this assumption, the article attempts to show how reading poetry can be beneficial in developing learner's interpretative and analytical abilities, paving the way to become successful readers of this mystifying genre. The following section briefly discusses the approaches that are drawn on while using poetry in the classroom as relevant to the present article.

2.1 A language-based Stylistics Approach
Poetry is a useful resource for encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions. The themes and subject matter are universal, and thus they help learners to become more actively involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English, and hence, aid acquisition. In this approach, material is chosen on the basis of whether it is appropriate to students' interests and will stimulate a high level of personal involvement initiating motivation and points of attraction.

In a language-based approach, each poem written illustrates certain stylistic features of the language and a detailed analysis of the language is likely to help students to make meaningful interpretations, as well as to better appreciate the creative value of the text better.

This approach also includes techniques and procedures which are concerned more directly with the study of the literary text itself. Here, the method of stylistics or stylistic analysis is frequently introduced that involves the close study of the linguistic features of a text. This approach helps to arrive at an understanding of how the meanings of the text are transmitted by providing the students with the tools they need to interpret the text and develop their critical judgments of it.

Stylistics enables one to reach an aesthetic appreciation of a text which connects its specific linguistic features with intuitions about its meanings. As pointed out by Leech and Short (1981: 74) stylistics is a method which 'uses the apparatus of linguistic description' to examine how meanings in a text are communicated. Widdowson (1975: 4) has described stylistics as a mediating discipline between linguistics and literary critics in that it uses linguistic analysis to understand how messages are conveyed. In order to realize how particular linguistic forms function to convey specific messages, stylistics uses terminology and a set of procedures reasonably familiar to students to reach and justify literary intuitions. Thus, the method helps students to use their existing knowledge of the language to understand and appreciate literary texts, and also deepens their knowledge of the language itself.

3. Reading and Reading Poetry
According to Hess (2003: 20):

> …poetry seems to bring out emotions and entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality.

In order to become proficient in any language, it is but an imperative to master the language through reading any material that is available in that particular language. It is likely that the development of reading skills, one of the two receptive language skills, will encourage the learner to reflect upon the issues and ingredients raised through the reading.

The purpose(s) for reading and the type of text determine the specific knowledge, skills, and strategies that readers need to apply to achieve comprehension, which is much more than only decoding a text. Referring to the quote by Hess at the beginning of this section, it can be noted that reading comprehension is achieved only when the reader knows which skills and strategies are appropriate for the type of text, and understands how to apply them to accomplish the reading purpose. An effective reader will be able to read accurately and efficiently while filtering material that caters to his/her own (unique/indigenous) palate.

Reading poetry can make learners conscious of the way particular formal features are used to construct meaning within the context of an authentic reading task.

3.1 Reading as a Process

Reading is an activity with a purpose. Before starting to read, it is always worthwhile taking a minute or two to ask oneself *why read* and *what is expected* from reading in the first place. Confusion about the purpose of reading may result in diversion, boredom, lack of comprehension and misunderstanding, or simply time wasted. The purpose also determines the appropriate approach to reading comprehension. At the outset, a reader reading poetry for enjoyment needs to recognise the words the poet uses and the ways they are put together. However, for a better comprehensive understanding, the reader also needs to identify the main ideas and the supporting details related to them. The ultimate purpose of reading that is connected to this article is to read to comprehend, realize, understand the meaning of the words that go beyond the surface, and then to be able to interpret a poem on the basis of newly achieved knowledge.

Any reading process involves at the least two segments – the reader and the text that presents characters via letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs/stanzas, not to forget, punctuation marks. The interactive process that takes place between the reader and the text is one of encoding the inner meaning represented by the words on the pages, resulting in comprehension where the reader is expected to exercise his previous world knowledge or schemata, reading skills, and comprehension strategies to determine the meaning and interpretation of the text.

3.2 Understanding Poetic Devices

It is already noted that poetry is poetry because of its use of special poetic devices that also makes the genre to be one of the most untouched of the genres, especially by the students. In order to break the inertia connected with an intricate and ambiguous poetic language, it is important that learners are introduced to some of the basic but major poetic devices before comprehension. This introduction to terms, for example, characterization, connotation, denotation, imagery, image, metaphor, personification, rhyme, rhythm, simile, stanza, style, symbol, theme, tone, etc. with definitions and examples are likely to lessen the fear that works on the reader in reading poetry.

Moreover, in order to achieve efficiency in reading, a learner needs to follow some basic strategies, for example, detecting the main information and ideas in a poem and then trying to build up a story line based on that. The detection of the main idea will help find the supporting ideas of the verse.

The stanzas of a poem can be organised depending on the message or the theme that the writer wants to reciprocate. The learner needs to realize why the stanzas are laid out the way they are, and not in another way, and whether they help convey the intended message in the best possible manner or not. Moreover, before reading a poem, the reader may explore what s/he already knows about the subject matter and its background. This makes the task of inference and interpretation easier. Developing this technique ensures that the learner is not overloaded with new information rather makes proper use of his/her schemata while reading.

In addition, the reader needs to be able to infer the indirect information that serves as the main point of the poem. The title is usually a good source of inference of the theme of the poem. Moreover, a common obstacle of the inability to make sense out of words and expressions can be made manageable by reading the context. Also, the use of a number of stylistic devices and feature may be helpful in understanding the style of the writer. The learner also needs to make an attempt to find out the simple tone and message that lies underneath the apparently complex expressions, and vice versa.

Finally, readers should be encouraged to interpret the poem according to his/her own view on the subject being dealt with, in order to broaden their creative as well as their logical faculties.

The following section discusses some activities that can be devised following the language-based stylistics approach to poetry, aiming at improving the reader's reading comprehension. Once through the activities, the learners will analyse a text from their own perspective making use of the devices and techniques discussed above and offer individual rationale behind their analysis.

4. Developing Reading Comprehension

According to Kermode (1957: 128) poetry is 'concerned with intuited truth, not with what is discursively explicable by the reason'. Many poems rich in language and imagery represent aspects of human experience in direct but intuitive, concise and rich terms. The imaginative space which poetry allows the reader is exactly in the realm of 'intuited truth', and that is what gives the reader the widest range of intuitive possibilities (Ainy,

2010). This section of the article will try to project how the idea of 'intuitive truth' can be expanded by devising appropriate activities and thus demonstrating the effective use of poetry in the language classroom.

4.1 The Selection of 'Independence'

It is already noted that poems that relate universal personal experiences can appeal to readers from all cultures and age groups because of their common nature in providing a good basis for discussion. Thus, a theme-based approach to poetry can help students to relate the situation to their own experience and interpret the poem accordingly.

The writer of the poem 'Independence' is a non-native poet of English and the poem is chosen for its oriental, familiar nature of style and vocabulary use for non-native learners of English. However, it is also chosen because of its universal theme of liberty and freedom. The very word 'independence' is vast in meaning, indicating the freedom of the body and soul, as well as that of the spirit. It can begin with the freedom of thought, leading to the independence of a geographical onset/boundary. The sense of freedom, which can both be soft as well as rebellious, is reiterated through the use of imagery and metaphor. To maintain the tone, the reader needs to locate supports that actually convey the particular tone associated with the theme.

The poem 'Independence' is, on the outer level, a simple poem talking about a free spirit who finds freedom by enjoying very small elements of nature, sometimes insignificant to general eyes. The poem also depicts the imagery of the free spirit enjoying freedom. However, a deeper meaning may come out once it is compared with the larger connotation associated with independence - from peoples' struggle to free speech and human rights even to the liberation of the mother land. Although this poem is written in deceptively simple language, it is still capable of evoking strong views in regards to the sense of freedom and independence. This is a theme within the experience of every living soul.

Independence

This is the feeling of a *muslin* sunrise

In all quietness

Sudden appearance of the white feathered morn.

The breeze touches my each entity

The girl walks on

Honey soaked dew drops

Fingertips get soaked

Ecstasy of the butterfly

Shines around that little being

Around her lips

The seven colours play.

The lips get soaked

The eyes get wet

Eyelids too

In infinite beauty and bliss.

Wishes spread their wings

Clouds play hide and seek

Will weave a carpet of feathers

Will wear a crown of fluffy grass.

Calm and quiet

Gifts from my independence!

- Salma Ainy

4.2 Activities Devised for 'Independence'

Activities devised for a poem need be created in such a way as to encourage learners both to develop their own responses and to read and enjoy poetry in the target language on their own. The aim is therefore to individualise each student's experience to poetry. In order to serve the purpose of the present paper, activities on 'Independence' are devised following a language-based stylistic approach that s likely to initiate a lot of personal involvement too.

The aim of the activities is also to revise some vocabulary and to introduce a new function expressed by the item. The tasks, therefore, encourage students to decode a simple poem and sensitise them to the notion that non-standard forms exist in English by focusing on the unusual linguistic features of a poem. They can begin by analysing what is linguistically unusual about the poem, and then proceed with activities which exploit those features.

Using poetry is not seen simply as an activity done for its own sake, but as a way of improving language knowledge. In order to devise activities which use stylistic analysis, a procedure or strategy for analysing the text is required. The following is one possible procedure, adapted from Lazar (1993) which involves two main steps:

STEP 1: It is important to note down any linguistics features which are particularly noticeable in a particular text, since they may recur with unexpected frequency in the text, or they may deviate slightly from what might be considered more grammatically or lexically usual.

STEP 2: Develop a series of questions which alert learners to the poetic features and encourage them to an interpretation or appreciation of the text bearing these features in mind.

The jotted-down, open-ended nature of the comments from the students initiates the feeling that poems can be more easily explored or challenged. As pointed out by Lazar (1993: 101) 'Making the language of the poem the basis for classroom study is a helpful first step towards enabling students to make confident interpretations of a poem'.

The activities devised for the poem 'Independence' can be further adapted and tried out. A set of related activities are designed to help students appreciate the lyrical and melodic quality of poetry as well as its metaphorical richness. The learners are to grasp the effect of the words and be able to infer their meaning in many different ways. Based on the language-based stylistics approach, the activities are divided into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. A few of the sample activities are presented below:

Pre-reading/warm-up activities

1. Students discuss/ describe pictures/ photographs relevant to the theme of the poem and suggest a title.

2. Before the learners hear or see the poem, they are asked to imagine a situation in which a person feels claustrophobic. They can compare the situation with a fish in a jar or a bird in a cage or a black panther in a zoo. What are the ideas that are associated with the given situation?

3. Learners are asked to think about the word 'independence'. They write down any associations the word has for them.

4. To guide students towards an understanding of more metaphorical or symbolic meanings in the poem, students could be asked to free-associate round some of those words in the poem which carry powerful symbolic connotations.

5. All the lines in the poem 'Independence' can be jumbled up and learners are asked to reorder them in a complete poem. Now, their versions can be compared with the original poem and learners can discuss about their preference with reasons.

Most of these activities involve far more than comprehension of meaning. They involve drawing on the student's knowledge and experience of the way poetry is structured.

While-reading activities

The following activities will further develop the learner's comprehension ability.

1. Students discuss the theme of the poem from their own perspective. Then they compare their ideas with the emotions in the poem – are these individual to the writer or indicative of cultural norms?

2. Students underline all the words connected with a particular lexical set and then speculate on their metaphorical or symbolic meaning. They point out the adjectives, similes, metaphors that are used to convey the message of the poem. What effect is being created by using all the details?

3. Students are given the poem but without its title. They read the poem and detect some key words that may be indicative of the title. They infer meaning and interpret the words in order to reach a conclusion about the title. They must have their observation and analysis ready.

4. Students look for culture words e.g. muslin. The understanding of the culture specific simile may also help drawing the picture later on based on culture specific connotation (the east and the west). Learners describe nature and the characters of the poem in greater detail and indicate what the concrete images could mean.

5. Students prepare a description of the landscape projected through the poem. In order to create a story line, they find out the vocabulary and expressions used to create the picture. Also they try to interpret the words and expressions according to their understanding. They can also try to find the tone of the poem: soft or rebellious. In order to decide and clarify their responses they can make two columns on a piece of paper with the headings 'soft' and 'rebellious'.

6. Apart from the vocabulary exercise there will be questions about style of the poem that will include the layout of the poem. Students are to recognize the punctuation marks used in the poem and come up with reasons behind

using them, for example the 'exclamatory mark' at the end of the poem. What is the implication of this mark, why was it not a full stop?

7. Throughout the poem there is mention of body parts. Which ones are they? What do you think is the effect of using them?

This session of activities can be called the feedback session and are effective activities which help develop critical thinking skills.

Post-reading activities

These activities will help learners towards a better interpretation of the poem.

1. Students imagine they are filming the poem. They have to decide what visual image they would provide for each line or verse of the poem as it is recited.
2. Learners are also asked to recall any other poem/song (or any piece of writing) that they have come across, either in English or in Bangla, having the same theme. This is to improve the sense of association of thought and comparison. Two of the major poems in Bangla titled 'Bidrohi' by the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam and 'Shadhinota' by Shamsur Rahman along with some popular spiritual and patriotic songs can be read out to serve the purpose.
3. Students discuss the values and world-view which are either implicitly or explicitly expressed in the poem.
4. Students begin to prepare their own descriptions and definition of the sense of the theme 'independence'. Learners shape and mould their ideas and come with their own interpretation of the poem.

These activities begin by focusing on those aspects of poetry which are linguistically and stylistically distinctive. The subjects of the empirical study tried the activities and then interpreted the poem 'Independence' according to their understanding. The following section presents three sample analysis of 'Independence'.

4.3 Learner Analysis of 'Independence'

This section presents three sample analyses (verbatim) of 'Independence' by students who had never done any poetic analysis before. This aims to show whether or not the language-based stylistic approach to reading poetry may bring out any significant changes in learner's reading, while trying to decipher a piece of poem.

Sample 1:

Multidimensional varieties of nature are used in the poem to show how they practice their independence without interruption and awe not only the spectators but also touch the entities present there. The suppleness of something to change its form without interruption or obstacle is the charm that makes the reader wish to be as free as the nature. The layout of the poem is simple and left-indented – to me it reflects the seriousness of the word 'independence' in a straight forward manner as well as leads us through the softer tone having a deeper meaning beneath. The use of punctuation mark is also interesting. It repeats in the stanza however reaches its zenith in the last line by finishing the tone with a mark of exclamation which can be interpreted as a mark of excellence, fulfilment and totally.

In the first stanza, we see the sunrise given the quality of soft and delicate *muslin*. 'Muslin' is a culture specific word which is also associated with softness, delicacy, extreme fineness, rarity and extravaganza. Sunrise itself is meant to be soft and tender and the addition of the word 'muslin' takes the common sun beyond everyday routine matter and is thus given a new facet. The morning is also newly attributed with white feathers again referring to the soft and delicate atmosphere, which is said to appear after a patient wait.

In the second stanza we see the speaker talking about her/his own feelings of how the breeze had affected her senses. The intensity of the little dew drops is said to indulge a being into its freshness and honey like sweetness. The mention of fingertips represents a living being and the delicate edge of the finger. The tone of softness is maintained very craftily. We also find a young girl being continuously charmed by the nature's arrangements.

In the following stanza the girl's amazement is elaborated. Everything overwhelms her. A butterfly's usual fluttering too seems to be a happy dance to her. The colours of rainbow hold new meanings and emotions for her. The imagery and metaphoric use of 'butterfly' and a 'rainbow' refers to the delicate surrounding which also gives way to transparency and transience. The body parts of the girl mentioned in the poem belong to the softest parts of the body, for example, 'lips', 'eyes' and even softer are the 'eyelids'.

The nature continues to spread its charm. It is so contentious that emotions become passionate and profound. The beauty of nature shows a getaway. It gives new hope of happiness. Emotions outburst in the form of gentle tears.

The nature gives a new ray of hope, which was never seen before. It gives expectations anew – a promise of independence just like the nature. It encourages one to dream without limits, to think and do the unconventional. The speaker here fantasizes her desires (weaving carpets and wearing a crown). She now retrieves her power to have independence from the nature. The nature which was always there in front of her appears differently to her now. The calm and quiet nature was always independent and the speaker too now wants to be like it.

In the whole poem, vivid imagery helped readers to see and realize what the speaker felt. As nature is the collection of the environment around us, common elements like butterfly, sunrise and dew drops have been used to represent the whole nature. Similes like white feathers and honey along with personification

of the clouds and wishes have been incorporated here too.

The speaker illustrated nature to be free and independent which can be a motivation for an individual. Nature has its own course and is bound free, unlike us. According to the speaker creativity of people are getting lost. However, we can always retain it back with a little motivation from Mother Nature, who has always been discipline yet free.

Sample 2

The introduction is very spot on and elegant. It had a punch to it especially with the witty use of the word *muslin*. The italicized word has its own weight and speciality. It is a word from the East and refers to the golden reign of The Mughals. It is a representation of all surrounding, all engulfing, mesmerizing beauty. It blends into the scenario nicely when the first rays of sunlight hits the horizon and suddenly we notice the white color of the clouds. Overall the beginning is very 'fresh' and 'pure'.

The soothing nature of the breeze encourages the girl to continue walking through a field. 'Honey soaked dew drops' is a beautiful expression. It helps me picture how the honey ended up in the dew. And as the girl walks through the field her fingertips feels this sensation. I found this stanza difficult to understand at first but I tried to create a picture/image of what could have happened. But now since I have figured it out I am beginning to appreciate the 'poetry' in it.

In the next two stanzas the writer, tries to amalgamate the beauty of a morning butterfly with a small girl. It basically creates the image of a butterfly with its grotesque wings (seven colours) whisking around the lips. The girl is overwhelmed with the aesthetic nature surrounding her that she ends up shedding a tear.

"Clouds play hide and seek" – I could not attach meaning to this sentence. The last two sentences basically meant to say the following: if the little girl's aim/goal is to be on the ground then it's to create a crown of fluffy grass and if her wish is to be among the clouds then it's to wear a 'carpet of feathers'. Hence every wish, aim or goal are like a pair of wings – independent and distinct –that has the freedom to be either be simple (as in being on the ground) or 'elevated'.

Finally, the writer says the serenity s/he feels in the midst of her thoughts and the aesthetic nature surrounding her are gifts of her independence.

I may be am not perfect with the analysis, but nevertheless it made me one with nature and helped me imagine and draw things in my mind. I felt the strong points were the use of the word 'muslin' (I haven't used it for the longest time), the butterfly with its beautiful colours skirting the little girl's lips (I enjoyed how the girl was introduced as a little being), and the best part for me was how the girl wished to 'weave a carpet of feathers' or 'wear a crown of fluffy grass' (Imagery used was BRILLIANT!!!). I was almost on my toes using all my five senses in order to appreciate this piece of poem!

Low points for me could be shedding a tear at the helm of all the beauty. It felt 'soby' at that point in time. The final stanza felt abrupt but it just might work, in this context. In conclusion I found it difficult at first to understand (maybe I am slow), but it was refreshing, witty and vividly visual.

Sample 3:

The poet begins by speaking of the way a 'muslin sunrise' makes one feel. The use of the word 'muslin' makes us think of a soft and smooth environment during the sunrise. She talks about the quiet surroundings during this time, and her description of the morning as 'white feathered' makes us visualize a fresh, cool and breezy atmosphere.

In the second stanza, she talks about the breeze touching every inch of her being. Here, once again, she uses words which describe something soft. The sense of touch is pointed out in this line. Then she mentions that a person is present in the scene. It is a girl who is walking, and her presence is mentioned along with the presence of dew drops. The dew drops are described as being honey soaked. This gives the reader a feeling of sweetness as well as wetness. The poet, then, mentions about the girl's fingertips getting soaked. It is clear by the use of the poet's choice of body part that she wants to give out a feeling of being sensitive, delicate and fragile, because our fingertips are small, soft and highly sensitive to touch.

In the next stanza, the first line speaks of the ecstasy of a butterfly. This, undoubtedly, is meant to create an image which is somewhat of euphoria and somewhat of restlessness. The analogy of the butterfly is used to describe the girl in the scene and the aura she is giving out.

Next, it is mentioned that the seven colors of the rainbow can be found around her lips. The concept of the rainbow gives us a vision of something beautiful and colorful, but also something which does not last very long. By describing the girl's lips, the poet has once again chosen a part of her body which is delicate and soft.

In the fourth stanza, the poet talks about the girl's lips, eyes and eyelids get wet. This goes to show that it had started to rain. The process of her face getting wet is beautiful and blissful, according to the poem. This paragraph is meant to make the reader visualize a scene where something soft and beautiful is being touched and drenched by something wet, yet equally soft and beautiful.

In the second last paragraph, the poet talks about wishes spreading their wings, which essentially means that the girl's hopes and dreams are expanding and becoming bolder. The line which talks about the clouds playing hide and seek speaks of the clouds in the sky going in and out of her view. The next two lines talk about weaving a carpet of feathers and wearing a crown of fluffy grass. Through these lines and use of the words 'feather' and 'fluffy' , the poet, again, gives out a feeling of something which is soft as well as natural. 'To weave a carpet' and 'to wear a crown' are phrases which can give us a sense of creation/accomplishment and excitement, respectively.

The last two lines talk about a calm and peaceful environment, which happen to be gifts that come from the independence which is experienced or felt by the poet. This poem is consistently trying to evoke a sense of beauty, softness and exhilaration within its readers. Every expression or word used to describe the scenery had been carefully chosen by the poet so that the smooth and delicate nature of the poem is not distorted in anyway. Personally, what I find most interesting about this poem is the fact that the poet has presented the readers with specifically defined scenery, but she has also left a lot of other things to the readers' imagination. For

example, we know that the girl is walking, she is ecstatic, she is getting wet in the rain, and she is full of hopes and dreams. However, each reader can decide for himself/herself what the reasons behind her state of mind and actions may be. In other words, each of us has the freedom to interpret for ourselves what kind of independence it is that the poet has experienced.

Concluding Remarks on the Analysis

As previously mentioned, the subjects of this study were students who had remained absolutely quiet about trying out poetry reading, let alone trying to have a better comprehension of the poems. When they were introduced to the poem 'Independence' for the first time, it was difficult to get them moving. They would not talk about it, and they were afraid of making little sense of their understanding; poetry was felt to be a genre not to be played around with, given its high standards of composition.

However, after explaining a few basic features of poems, for examples, types of poems, devices and norms associated with the genre and the linguistic approach with stylistics, they began to enjoy the activities devised for the poem. Initially slow, their speed increased with their enthusiasm, and opened up a new horizon in front of them; this was the horizon of imagination, creativity, comprehension and understanding. They began reading between the lines and came up with imaginative interpretations of the words on the page. Through their smiles, they conveyed the fact that poetry reading has now become something that was enlightening, creative and enjoyable. Their power of interpretation and comprehension came to be reflected in their analyses of the poem 'Independence', and took on a multidimensional shape at the beholder's eyes. This whole experience of taking the learners through the method of reading, and eventually shaping their own individual understanding, was both refreshing and resourceful for the writer.

5. Conclusion

In some respects, teaching poetry requires common classroom teaching strategies. Yet to enable students to become excited, students should be allowed to interpret the poems however they choose, and discuss them amongst themselves and the teacher. Their own experiences and thoughts may also be shared in the process. To help them avoid problems when reading poems, the distinctive features of poetry, compared to other forms of writing, must be identified. It should be reiterated that poems should be introduced in class because of their poetic qualities, which can be expressed through

real language and complete texts that already exist, so as to fulfil a social and communicative purpose. The activities devised for the text here seemed appropriate in enhancing the learner's skill of comprehension to a great extent.

As has already been shown in this article, the practice of reading poetry following a language based stylistic method can do wonders for a student. This is evident from the analysis of the poem that they have produced, making full use as they do of their own emotions, feelings and understanding of the poetic devices that are used in the poem. Through the proper use and application of the creative mind, even a mediocre reader can grow into a much more mature interpreter. A key idea behind reading poems is to make the reader relive the experience and emotions that the poet has gone through while writing them. The open-ended quality of individual understanding worked wonderfully among the students in realising that 'poetry', a genre evoking feelings of awe and unfamiliarity, can now be fully nourished and enjoyed through better comprehension.

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