



Genre Analysis of Ashbery's "Sonnet"

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Abstract

This study carries out genre analysis of John Ashbery's poem, "Sonnet". Swalesian genre analysis gives a systematic scrutiny into the moves a text makes to communicate its intentions to the members of a discourse unity. Investigating the applicability of genre analysis to a literary text and revealing its strong and weak points are the main targets of the paper. The paper casts light on the way Ashbery foregrounds the audience's expectations molded by four competences: generic, stylistic, rhetoric-linguistic, and pragma-ideological. There is mention of the moves and steps the poet makes to communicate the text's intention. The experiments "Sonnet" conducts on these competences render it a parody of sonnet and accord it coherence of foregrounding. The paper concludes "Sonnet" develops out of a paradox of communication as it tries to communicate to the audience that communication is, if not impossible, at least a difficult task.

Keywords: Ashbery, genre analysis, foregrounding, sonnet, competence

1. Introduction

The present article attempts to analyze Ashbery's poem, "Sonnet" (1985, p. 14), from a genre analytical perspective. Genre analysis has initially emerged as a scrutiny into the structure of academic and research works; it has then been adopted and adapted by scholars from different disciplines to unravel the deep structures and norms of their research works. This methodology gives a systematic analysis of the text and identifies moves in communicating intentions of the text. These features have attracted our attention to investigate its potentials in reading a literary work. Genre analysis has proved highly productive in analyzing academic and research texts, news reports, obituaries, thesis abstracts, etc. Rarely has genre analysis been applied to literary works. This ambition comprises the main objective of the present study. The points that are to be addressed are: the method's applicability to a literary work and its strong and weak points. It is argued four competences are targeted by Ashbery's poem: generic competence, stylistic competence, rhetoric-linguistic competence, and pragma-ideological competence. The paper gives a detailed analysis of the poem in the light of its foregrounding the audience's expectations molded by these competences. It is argued while John Swales' genre analysis depends on coherence, Ashbery's poem accomplishes its communicative purpose through its coherence of foregrounding. Such a deviation encourages us to take "Sonnet" a parody of sonnet genre; it simultaneously demands a change in genre analysis methodology.

One of the objectives of this application is to show how a poet's experiments on different levels of a text render the notion of communication unstable. Swales' genre approach relies heavily on communication and investigates the moves and steps via which communicative purpose is achieved in an academic text. The application of his methodology to Ashbery's poem highlights the poem's blocking ways of communication to the audience.

2. Literature Review of Sonnet Studies

The sonnet has an Italian origin, "sonnetto", a small intensive song or poem to be sung or recited to music (Egri, 1985, p. 455). Invented about AD 1230, sonnet is the most long-lived genre of literature. The fact that sonnet is a prescribed poetic form encourages us to approach it mostly as a genre rather than a form. It is prescribed or closed as it has a predetermined framework which should be observed by the poet (Spiller, 1992, p.4). Yet far from being frustrating, this generic preempting has been quite conducive for the poet, or it would not have been attempted by most, if not all, major poets throughout history.

The sonneteer has to say everything in the space of only fourteen lines. Thus what is required of him is his precision in selecting the most proper diction and being to the point. A feeling or a state of mind can find its proper expression in a sonnet; but such a limited space would not accommodate a longish discussion of the feeling or mental state. In Spiller's explanation, this brevity gives an impression of "immediacy, as if it proceeded directly and confessionally or conversationally from the speaker" (1992, p.5). The other paramount feature of the sonnet is its foreclosure which is the essence of its being. Since the sonnet closes once at octet then at the sestet, the last line of the poem which is at once the closure of the octet and of the entire poem must "come to the point" if the poet is to make a sonnet at all (Spiller, 1992, p.11).

Alistair Fowler who appreciates this “mediated definiteness” argues that sonnet gives a “proportional mental space; a literary matrix by which to order his [poet’s] experience during composition” (as cited in Spiller, 1992, p.2). Any composition aims at communicating; it is exactly due to this prescribed framework that sonnet addresses itself to the reader’s generic competence since it creates the same proportional mental space in the reader as well. Explicating on the followers of Petrarch, Schoenfeldt speaks of a sonneteer’s reliance on the audience’s presuppositions so that the new surprise given to the poem could be easily recognized and appreciated (2007, p.20). In support of the sonnet’s communicative purpose, we can refer to a recent critic of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* who takes the reader as the “victim” of Shakespeare’s rhetorical devices used to create him (Spiller 1992, p.6). By the same token, Schoenfeldt writes of a sonneteer’s dependence for his effects on the conjunction or conflict of what he says with the reader’s expectations (2007, p.20). By tradition, sonnet has an amorous theme and thus marks a strong tradition in English lyric poetry. But it has not been restricted only to love issues. Its meter of iambic pentameter has rendered it flexible enough to cover up philosophical and argumentative musings on different facets of human life.

3. Theory

Sonnet is by way of conventions regarded and referred to as a poetic form, hence sonnet form. Here, however, we take it as a genre for it sets a horizon of expectations based on, and/or against, which the poem is appreciated and evaluated. For Mikhail Bakhtin, genre is a relatively stable thematic, compositional and stylistic type of utterances which are developed in a particular sphere of communication (Mikalayeva, 2011, p.290). As compared to form, genre enjoys a more general scope which has two schematic and emergent aspects. Patricia Mayes clarifies schematic aspects are those aspects that are “predictable based on experience with typified patterns” and emergent aspects are those that “change as interaction occurs” (2003, p.19). Thus we argue Ashbery’s “Sonnet” makes a link to abstract models of how sonneteers express themselves and works on schematic and emergent aspects; this makes the poem intertextual and dynamic.

Moreover, entitling the poem as “Sonnet” is highly implicative here; it is not “A Sonnet”, nor “The Sonnet”; each of these would reduce the poem to the lower level of a poetic form which mutually interacts with some other texts. The non-modified title, “Sonnet”, takes the text on the broader scale of genre and addresses itself to a body of institutionalized lyric poeticization. Like any other genre, sonnet is communicative. Fowler sees genre as “a communication system for the use of writers in writing and critics in reading and interpreting” (Swales, 1990, p.9). While for Fowler and Todorov, there lies no distinction between literary and non-literary texts, we try to show how differently a literary genre carries out its communicative purpose. Ashbery’s poem is selected on purpose since it goes beyond the limits to which non-literary works confine themselves for the sake of communication.

The methodology adopted and adapted to our purpose here is paradoxically one which has emerged and been applied to academic and research settings by John Swales. His seminal book, *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings* (1990), has mostly theorized and developed a methodology for genre analysis. Swales’ methodology has been widely applied to different aspects and requirements of academic studies to investigate their communicative goals. In this teleological methodology, the communicative purpose of genre is carried out through moves on macro-levels and steps on micro-levels. What accounts for our resort to Swales’ analysis is that it “turns to an examination of the genre’s organization, its schematic structure – often characterized by rhetorical moves it undertakes and from there to an organization of textual and linguistic features that realize rhetorical moves” (Swales, 1990, pp.18-19). Swales aptly defines a genre as a “group of communicative events similar forms of content of language is used as a significant representation of shared communicative purposes realized by the members of the same discourse community” (1990, p.93). This provides a systematic way of approaching one of the most unsystematic poems.

Typical of Swales’ methodology is three moves. The first move is “establishing a territory”. The second move is “establishing a niche”; he calls the third move as “occupying the niche”. Each move may comprise some steps. In the first move, steps such as “claiming centrality”, “reviewing previous research” are included. The second move may consist of “counter claiming”, or “indicating a gap”, or “question raising”. The third move has “outlining purposes” and “announcing principal findings” as its possible steps (Swales, 1990, pp.19-20).

4. Coherence of “Sonnet”

Any text to be communicative and carry out its communicative purpose should have coherence. A glance over Ashbery’s “Sonnet” creates this impression on the audience that the poem lacks coherence. A scrutiny into this issue has encouraged us to attend to this important feature in a separate section. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) refer to coherence as one of seven “standards of textuality” (as cited in Heuboeck, 2009, p.36). However, there is a distinction between coherence and cohesion. For Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion is the continuity of senses grounded on organizing features of the text surface; while coherence is the result of cognitive processes instigated by the text surface (Heuboeck, 2009, p.36). This study addresses text’s cohesion as well as its coherence.

Ashbery’s experimenting with the sonnet genre and language (semantically as well as syntactically) narrows down our scope of inquiry to what David Leech deftly terms as “coherence of foregrounding”. As Leech defines, foregrounding is “an effect brought about in the reader by linguistic or other forms of deviation” (Dijk, 1985, p.47). Deviation is Ashbery’s macro stylistic strategy that targets generic, rhetoric, linguistic, and pragmatic frameworks. Linguistic deviations which have formerly been appreciated by Russian Formalists as “defamiliarizations” draw the attention of the reader to themselves and demand the reader’s “imaginative interpretation” (Leech, 1985, p.47). According to Mukarovsky, coherence of foregrounding is the “consistency and systematic character of foregrounding” which is a special feature of poetic language (Dijk, 1985, p.50). Any act of deviation or foregrounding requires its related

competence to be understood and appreciated by the audience. Subsequently, we base our analysis of “coherence of foregrounding” in Ashbery’s “Sonnet” on generic competence, stylistic competence, rhetoric-linguistic competence, and pragma-ideological competence. It is against these three competences that one can fully understand the poet’s deviations and foregrounding of coherence. Table 1 shows the micro levels that are to be analyzed in each competence:

Table 1. Competences and Levels Foregrounded in “Sonnet”

Competence	Level
1. Generic	1. schematic 2. rhyme 3. meter 4. thematic
2. Rhetoric-Linguistic	1. level of word and sentence 2. syntactic level 3. semantic level
3. Stylistic	1. macro level: parody 2. micro level: reportorial
4. Pragma-ideological	1. textual level 2. intratextual level

5. Genre Analysis of “Sonnet”

5.1 A parody of generic competence

From a literary-critical perspective, "Sonnet" can be regarded as a parody of sonnet genre for its generic deviations. The poem has the form of sonnet only in two respects: its title and the number of its lines. Like all sonnets it comprises fourteen lines and is divided into a set of six lines called sestet and an eight-line octave. The sestet and octet are distinguishable only due to their arrangement on the page; the sestet is separated by a line space from the octet. Ashbery reverses the order of sestet and octet in his poem. While conventionally, sonnets start with the octave and end in the sestet, here the poem starts with the sestet and ends in the octet.

On the metrical level, “Sonnet” does not abide by the iambic pentameter which has become the norm in sonnets. Most of the lines are complete statements and can thus be treated individually. Such a strategy which renders the lines independent from each other runs encounter to the rhyming scheme of sonnets. The poem’s rhyme scheme, *a b c d e f; g h i j k l m n*, imparts to the sequestration of lines. The least contribution of the rhyme scheme is to cement the rhyming lines to each other; but Ashbery prevents such a relation to happen since he wants his lines to have a sense of finality and repose. The immediate consequence of such finality is the demarcation the lines draw between the two involved figures of the poem: the servant(s) and the reader. They sound as if no kind of merge or compromise is going to occur between these two, the same way that very rarely two sentences hark back by way of rhyme to one another.

Tinkering with the sonnet genre, Ashbery’s parody targets the thematic core of sonnet genre as well. Traditionally, sonnet revolves around love and has thus been categorized as an amorous poem. In contrast, Ashbery’s poem is on hatred and animosity between the servant and the reader.

The first move in Swales’ genre studies establishes the territory of the research. The first move in “Sonnet” is “disclosure of characters and setting”. In the first line, there are two involved characters:

Each servant stamps the reader with a look.

The setting is thus introduced as the one occupied by some servants and a reader. Every setting should have time and place. The notion of time can be derived from the second line which reads:

After many years he has been brought nothing.

The time duration which “many years” suggests historicizes the time setting. Place setting is most probably a house with a bedroom which belongs to the servant, “The servant goes to bed”, and a library with “lofty holes” on which the reader muses.

The second Swalesian move in the poem is “presentation of a problem”. This problem is already hinted at the asymmetrical power relations the sonneteer sets up from the outset between the servant and the reader. This asymmetry is reflected even in numbers of the characters; while there are more than one servant, there is only one reader, hence “the” reader. Therefore, the sestet refers to the problematic servant-reader relation which the octet picks up and develops. It should be noted that while establishing a territory in research texts (articles, theses, books, etc.) is an elaborate project which should be clearly and adequately worked on, the prescribed space of a sonnet would not allow room for such expatiation and thus many things remain implied and it is on the audience to elicit them. This is the reason Ashbery’s “Sonnet” says many in a highly compressed space. Accordingly, the sestet does two things

simultaneously; it establishes the territory and hints at the niche. The development of the niche and its (ir)resolution is left to the octet.

The third move “Sonnet” makes is “developing the problem”. This move is missing in Swales’ methodology because it only identifies the gap(s) in previous research studies, which is taken as fixed and static. A literary work, however, works on the niche, intensifies it, takes it to a climactic point, and then gives it a fall. This makes the text dynamic. Just as the first line of the sestet starts with the conflicts between the servant and the reader, the beginning line of the octet “enhances the clash” to the extent that “His [the reader’s] pain is the servant’s alive”, that is, the servant gets pleasure out of the reader’s pain. The ecstasy reaches the state that

It pushes to the top stain of the wall

Its tree-top’s head of excitement:

Baskets, birds, beetle, spools.

Since any rise or climax is followed by a fall, right in the fourth line of the octet, immediately there occurs a drastic change, “The light walls collapse next day”. This fall countersigns the highest ecstasy.

The last move in Swales’ methodology is “occupying the niche” whereby a resolution is expected. The poetic counterpart of this move in “Sonnet” can be “eradicating source of problem”. Like conventional sonnets in which the last two lines conclude the whole poem, here also we see a semi-conclusion is arrived at. Ashbery’s concluding lines come as a shock to the reader for two reasons: its unjustified dialogic tone, and the threatening gesture of the speaker. Somebody, nobody knows who, steps out of blue and directly addresses the audience and/or the reader:

Dear, be the tree your sleep awaits;

Worms be your words, you not safe from ours.

At its face value, the solution to all such clashes is sleep; yet, even in sleep, the desired state of being a tree does not remain immune from the destructive force of worms/words. Therefore, literally speaking, Ashbery’s “Sonnet” does not reach any practical resolution; more than that, there reigns even a sense of threat in the voice that directs the addressee stating, “you not safe from ours”. Thematically also, “Sonnet” with its threatening resolution runs against amorous sonnets.

5.2 Rhetoric-linguistic competence

In this section, we address different micro levels of linguistic competence which can be utilized by a poet in order to create his/her desired response in the audience. Deviation is itself Ashbery’s rhetorical move on macro level. The poem’s microlevels comprise: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, textological and graphemic. “Sonnet” attends mostly to syntactic and semantic levels of language. In addition, the level of word and sentence is also important here because as the review of sonnet studies shows the prescribed space of sonnet requires the poet to be highly selective about his diction and the arrangement of sentences. In Plett’s clarification, deviations can occur through linguistic operations such as addition, subtraction, substitution, and permutation (Dijk, 1985, p.62). We investigate Ashbery’s “Sonnet” achieves coherence of foregrounding on which levels and by deploying which linguistic operations. Plett terms the linguistic deviations on these levels as “metaboles” and the poet’s rule-enforcing operations as equivalences or “isotopes”. (Dijk, 1985, p.63). The following analysis shows the mostly drawn levels in the poem are syntactic and semantic levels and almost all the linguistic operations are deployed in “Sonnet”.

5.2.1 Level of sentence and word

Ashbery’s poem has 90 words. The word “servant” appears 4 times in the poem: thrice in the sestet and once in the octet. The word “reader” occurs 3 times: twice in the first stanza and once in the last. Within the highly limited space of the sonnet, the repetition of these two words cannot be dismissed as insignificant. The words “tree” and “wall” are both repeated twice only in the octet. The word “patience” appears twice in the sestet. The whole poem has a quite limited number of main verbs: stamps, brought (past participle of bring), goes, rambles, pushes, collapse, and awaits. These verbs do not refer to any mental processes. Mostly the sentences are linked together with different versions of the verb “be”. Within fourteen lines of “Sonnet”, there are 12 complete sentences. The length of the lines is not the same, nor do they have any specific pattern.

5.2.2 Syntactic level

The syntax of the whole text is reduced, lacking logical connectors. But the tense of the verbs, except for the second line, is simple present. Simple present tense deprives the text of temporal boundaries and makes it timeless. Ashbery’s poem owes its loosened sense of coherence to his deviations from syntactic rules of language, hence metataxemes. The beginning line of the octet reads:

His pain is the servant’s alive.

Bringing the sentence to end by “alive” which is an adjective keeps the audience wait for a noun; this is the linguistic operation of subtraction. Such a subtraction arouses frustration in the audience and, despite its apparent finality shown by the punctuation of full stop at the end of the line, leaves the statement incomplete. Here, there arises an incongruity or a tension between the punctuational finality of the sentence and the syntactic incompleteness. For the audience, this may work as an ellipsis which demands the audience’s imaginative interpretation. The other instance of metataxeme occurs in continuation of the same line:

It pushes to the top stain of the wall

Its tree-top's head of excitement:

Baskets, birds, beetles, spools.

One cannot decide for sure what syntactic role the catalogue of plural nouns which appear at the end plays in this sentence. As they are preceded by colons, so they should be either as definition, further explanation, or examples for the previous sentence. But the previous line itself stands as the direct object for the main verb “pushes”. In the first line, there is “It” which as we syntactically expect should refer back to “His pain”; then there is the verb “pushes” the object of which is “Its tree-top head of excitement”. Then the catalogue remains non-included in this. This line which is ironically finalized by full stop functions like an out-of-tune coda to the whole structure since one can find no syntactic justification for their presence there, hence an instance of addition.

The last line of the octet which is doubly significant as it ends both the octet and the whole poem bears another instance of metataxeme:

Worms be your words, you not safe from ours.

The second part of the line subtracts the main verb. It could be an ellipsis. Our linguistic competence bids us to provide the verb “be” here; but there are different versions for this verb. It could be simply “are”; “be”; “should be”; “can be”; “will be”; “would be”; “shall be”, “would be”, etc. Each of these options gives the whole statement a different meaning especially with the imperative and/or admonishing tone the whole sentence, in continuation of the previous one, bears.

As stated above, the last two lines should generically bring a resolution to the whole poem. What singles out these lines here from their preceding ones is this imperative tone which appears in the form of a direct address to the reader within the text or the audience who reads the poem. After so many conflictual relations and animosities between the reader and the servant, the unjustified appearance of “Dear” which belongs to amorous discourse gives the audience sort of shock; yet what mitigates the shock is the comma which separates “Dear” from the rest of the speech. This punctuation gives it an epistolary gesture. In official letters, the addressee is always accompanied by “Dear” and followed by comma. In this context, the word “Dear” does not bear any amorous connotations; rather, the addresser is hinting at an unbridgeable distance between him/herself and the addressee, while keeping the moral etiquettes of politeness. Simultaneously, however, the occurrence of “Dear” followed by a comma in the context of a sonnet does not evade its love-oriented discourse; in this sense, this appearance pushes the shock of the audience to its “top-tree”.

The last but not least point about the last line is the possessive pronoun “ours”. In a poem whose speaker has adopted the cold, objective third-person point of view, the sudden appearance of “ours” sounds unjustified. As the last word with which the poem ends up, there is no way to even guess who the referent of this pronoun could be. What’s more, the other obscure point here is what is the plural first-person speaker in possession of? Is it “worms” or “words”? Rewriting the sentence in either ways would give the whole poem a different meaning:

you not safe from ours [our words] or

you not safe from ours [our worms]

If one goes for “words”, the speaker most probably belongs to the same category of library and the reader; it may refer to the poet himself. Since servants are usually associated with dirt, germs, and “worms”, the speaker can be the servant(s); we derive the notion of servants from the first line of the poem which starts with “Each servant” implying there is more than one servant in the house. Either way, the destructive force is at work here.

5.2.3 Semantic level

In this level, we investigate the sign-sign relation out of which meaning arises. There is an attempt to pinpoint those cases in which Ashbery observes coherence of foregrounding by his semantic deviations, or metase-meme. The beginning statement of the poem is an instance of metase-meme:

Each servant stamps the reader with a look.

The finality of the sentence shows sense of its semantic definiteness. However, the sentence challenges the audience’s linguistic and logical competence. What does it mean to stamp somebody with a look? Initially, to stamp means to mark, to produce an imprint or an impression on something. What comes out of this first definition is the objectifying or thingification of the reader. The notion of “reader” for the audience always signifies a person, a human being; but here it is objectified, lowered to the level of a thing which is stamped. Besides, another meaning of “stamp” is “treat or classify according to a mental stereotype”. In this sense, the statement means each servant stereotypes the reader, but it is not mentioned which stereotype is the point here. Is it in terms of gender, class, or race? The other denotations one can find for “stamp” are negative like “destroy or extinguish”, “crush or grind with a heavy instrument”. Such definitions fit more into the servant-reader relation in this poem. Even when one votes for “form or cut out with a mold” or “mark, mold, or decorate” which are seemingly less negative, thingification or objectification of the reader is there. Reducing a human being to the level of an object is an instance of semantic subtraction. The other statement which takes issue with the audience’s linguistic competence occurs in the third and fifth lines:

The servant's frown is the reader's patience.

The servant goes to bed.

The patience rambles on

Musing on the library's lofty holes.

The third line assigns “patience” to the reader, so when it re-appears as the subject of the third line, it turns into a rhetorical device, synecdoche, which is simultaneously personified by the verb “rambles on”. Synecdoche is a case of semantic substitution.

The oxymoron “lofty holes” is also Ashbery’s metasememe which reflects his semantic deviation from what linguistic competence ascribes. The same oxymoron can be detected in the “top stain of the wall”. Physically, it could refer to the stain on top of the wall which has remained inaccessible to the servant. If we take “top” as an adjective showing the high quality of something, then the combination becomes self-contradictory. We take oxymoron as the operation of linguistic combination, or contrastive addition.

The catalogue of words which occupy the whole space of a line in the octet is the other case of metasememe, an unjustified case of linguistic addition. The audience finds it difficult to draw semantic links between “Baskets, birds, beetles, spools”, especially that these lack any syntactic relation. While the first three nouns have phonological resemblance and thus alliterate, the fourth one breaks this alliteration. The signs “Baskets” and “beetles” can have affinities with the servant figure, the former being a tool for the servant, and the latter an enemy, a sign of dirt. What kind of relation do “birds” and “spools” have with either the servant or the reader? The mere presence of each one of these nouns can itself demand a space for its stories, but no one can even guess what story lies with each one and how are the stories related to the poem. Thus despite its apparent finality, this catalogue remains a blind spot in the audience’s semantic competence. Another case of metasememe in the poem is the twelfth line:

Traffic is the reader’s pictured face.

With an eye on the thingification of the reader in the sestet, the expression “the reader’s pictured face” gives the impression that this reader, far from being a human entity, is a paper being, or at least a human face portrait on paper. But the relation between traffic and the pictured face of the reader proves challenging. Since traffic occurs after the collapse of the light walls, one may take traffic as the disorder and chaotic state which influences the visage of the reader; yet even this explanation cannot restore the reader its/his lost state of being a human. Thus we take this as a case of semantic subtraction.

The two last concluding lines, with its sudden appearance of “ours”, and “Dear” does not give any clue to the ambiguities of the poem. To these is added the imperative speech act: “be the tree your sleep awaits”. If we take sleep as one’s dream, then it is the person who awaits the dream world; but here the case is shown vice versa; it is sleep or dream world which awaits your being and/or becoming a tree. In this sense, sleep may be taken as death which awaits everyone. The connotation of sleep as death can be supported by the last line which is about worms and words: “Worms be your words”. If the referent of “your” is the paper-reader in the text, then the words that appear on, mark, or stamp its face will hide, and/or destroy its paper visage, hence its death as a paper-reader. If this sentence is addressed to the reader in the text, then the paper entity of the reader, or its paperliness, can justify the expectation of it being/becoming a tree, since paper and tree belong to the same family.

5.3 Stylistic competence

The prescribed space and format of the sonnet demands sophisticated stylistic strategies on behalf of the poet. Leech defines stylistics as the study of “how language use varies according to varying circumstances” (Dijk, 1985, p.39). A poem like “Sonnet” which dialogizes with the genre of sonnet demands a particular style which singles it out from all other sonnets. Thus style specifies a level for itself. By convention, if the sonnet is on love, the style tends to be expressive; if it handles a philosophical issue, the style is argumentative.

5.3.1 Macro level

This level deals with two macro stylistic features of “Sonnet”: parody and intertextuality. Deviation or foregrounding is Ashbery’s style on the macro-level which controls the whole poem. Another macro-stylistic feature of the poem is its allusive feature which sets the whole poem in dialogism or intertextual relation with all other sonnets. It can be claimed in this dialogism Ashbery parodies the style of sonneteers.

5.3.2 Micro level

Ashbery uses micro-stylistic features as well. Of these micro-styles, one can refer to his reportorial sentences. The speaker adopts a third-person point of view and thus keeps a cold, indifferent, unfriendly, and detached profile with respect to either the reader or the servant. This gesture renders his/her report impersonal and thus countersigns or parodies the romantic, emotional claims of conventional sonnets. The main verbs (stamps, bring, goes, rambles, pushes, collapse, and awaits) do not refer to any mental nor emotional processes. Rather, they denote physical force. Almost one third of the whole words are nouns; thus nouns outnumber adjectives and adverbs. This makes the language trite and less descriptive giving the least space for explicit commentary and emotive comments. The speaker’s reportorial style which lacks descriptions and emotive comments accords the poem a realism which can be found in texts of urgency, immediacy, and directness. This style generically fits the sonnet whose brevity forces the poet to be direct and to the point.

5.4 Pragma-Ideological competence

This competence deals with sign-sender/recipient relation and thereby we step out of the text and evaluate the text based on our context-bound criteria and expectations. In Robbin Woffitt’s words, pragmatics is “the branch of linguistics which studies language use, as opposed to the structure of language” (2005, p.34). “Sonnet” addresses the audience’s pragma-ideological competence both textually (that is, interpersonally) and intratextually. On textual level, the

interpersonal relation between the servant(s) and the reader is concerned. Intratextual level investigates the text-audience relationships which the text sets up. In order to analyze the poem based on this competence, a resort to stereotypes would be unavoidable; since it is with such stereotypes that Ashbery makes his poem grapple with, hence its nobility.

5.4.1 Textual level

As Ashbery's coherence of foregrounding on syntactic and semantic levels evinces, the audience's pragmatic competence is challenged by the relation the poem establishes between the two involved characters in the poem: the servant(s) and the reader. The fact that these two characters remain nameless and are instead referred to by their position and/or occupation is a clue to their social status and gives them ideological significance. Pragmatically and ideologically, the position of a servant is stereotyped as one who is subservient, obedient, subordinate, unvoiced; s/he is associated with dust, dirt, filth, stain, germ, and is thus expected to be cleaning, rinsing, wiping, brushing, erasing, etc., besides taking orders. Whenever the servant appears, its counterpart, the master, is also implied. The picture "Sonnet" gives of a servant runs encounter to these stereotypes. Here, the servant is not serving the other (the reader). The servant approaches the reader as a master. S/He is the servant who is mastering the reader. This is implied from the beginning of the poem:

The master stamps the reader with a look.

A servant is there to serve, but it is told the reader has been brought nothing for many years. It means, despite having servants, nobody has served the reader for many years. In master-servant relation, masterwise facial gestures are expected of the reader, but the third line tells us it is the servant that has the frown and in contrast the reader keeps patience. Between the servant and master, sleep and rest goes to the master, and work and toil belong to the servant. But between the two figures in the poem, it is the servant that goes to bed (line four). If the reader is cajoled to sleep in the last two lines of the poem, it is his/her death end; it by no means implies rest. The second stanza starts with an intensification of the clash between the servant and the reader:

His pain is the reader's alive.

Within such a bedrock, the admonishing and/or threatening last two lines of the poem may belong to the servant. The poem ending with "you not safe from ours" determines the speaker-servant as the locus of danger to the reader. The subversion of the servant's role in the text constructs the reader's identity as being the actual servant, subordinate to the powerful presence of the servant. It is the reader or the supposed master that is threatened and doomed to extinction. Moreover, the servant's authority is also evident in outnumbering the reader. All through the text, there is only one reader, but there is at least more than one servant; this is suggested in "Each servant" as the beginning words of the poem and "ours" with which the poem ends.

Ideologically and pragmatically, the powerful minor has authority over the subjugated majority of people. Here, the reader's minority is the only signal of mastery that he has, but in the poem this state is a disadvantage for him vis-à-vis the servants.

5.4.2 Intratextual level

The text of the poem foregrounds the audience's pragmatic competence by problematizing the identity of the reader within the text and the sense of alienation it strikes between the recipient of the poem and the reader-vision the text depicts. By naming one of the involved characters in the poem as "the reader", the audience of the poem is inevitably engaged. Such a naming may aim at drawing identifications between the text and its recipient and concurrently by coherence of foregrounding such identification alters into estrangement. This paradox renders the audience-text relation problematic and discards the ethos of the audience's pragmatic competence.

The significance of Ashbery's pragmatic-ideological deviations from the common views of reader lies in its innovation. Here, the reader is not only bereft of his/her subjectivity, but also of being a human. It has become a thing, an object, in the hands of servant(s). As the analysis of syntactic and semantic levels attests, the reader is portrayed as a paper being. This vision somehow reminds one of books like "A Reader's Guide" or "A Reader's Handbook of . . .", and the like, books which confine the reader within their own pages.

Another point of concern here is the identity of the servant. Who could be the referent of the servant in the poem? If the text's "reader" stands as the deixis for the audience who is reading "Sonnet", the servant may allude to the speaker/author of the poem. In this pragmatic framework, the paperliness of the reader may be justified.

Table 2 shows the operations and frequency of metaboles which constitute the poem's coherence of foregrounding.

Table 2. Operations and Frequency of Metaboles in "Sonnet"

Level	Operation	Frequency
1. Schematic	Subversion (parody of sonnet)	The whole poem
2. Rhyme	Not observed	<i>abcdef; ghijklmn</i> (all the lines)
3. Meter	Subtraction	Not specified
4. thematic	Subversion (parody of love)	The whole poem

5. Syntactic	Substitution, subtraction	permutation,	5cases of metataxemes
6.Semantic	Addition, substitution		5cases of metasememes
7.Textual	Subversion and subtraction		The whole poem
8. Intratextual	Subversion and subtraction		The whole poem

6. Discussion

The above analysis reveals a sheer difference between a literary piece and academic and research works. While the latter depends on coherence for its communicative purpose, the former emerges out of coherence of foregrounding for communicating its theme. This feature accounts for the non-linear structure of poetic texts. Swales' methodology studies the linearity of academic texts in a systematic way. By contrast, a literary text runs against such systematicity even within its own generic paradigm. Based on the analysis of Ashbery's poem, it can be argued while at the level of discourse, academic and research texts leave almost no room for the writer's experimentations, a literary work opens up a space for such experimentations. It is such experimentations that single out or mark a poem. Ashbery's "Sonnet" serves as an example of such experimentation which is carried out on different levels. This point justifies the differences the analysis of the poem draws between Swales' genre analysis and Ashbery's poem.

The first move in Swales' methodology has "claiming centrality" as its first step. Centrality claims are "appeals to the discourse community whereby members are asked to accept that the research about to be reported is part of a lively, significant or well-established research area" (Marefat & Muhammadzadeh, 2013, p.44). In the same vein, one can claim "Sonnet" like any other poem invites the member of the discourse community to "suspend his disbelief" (Coleridge, 1976), imagine a different world where "language, objects and events are not used in a customary way" (Levin 1976). In another register, "Sonnet" holds claims to centrality on account of its coherence of foregrounding. Swales' first move makes topic generalizations and reviews items of previous research. "Sonnet" avoids generalizations and deviates from previous sonnets by parodying the genre. Ian Gregson rightly describes Ashbery as an experimental poet whose concern is with "mimesis, with evolving sophisticated techniques for the 'miming of a way of seeing' meaningfulness" (1996, p. 223). Parodying or miming the sonnet genre, Ashbery faces up to the problem of semantic tensions.

Swalesian methodology comprises three moves; but the analysis of the poem shows the communicative purpose of the poem is achieved via four moves. In Swales, the niche is regarded as a fixed and static gap. But the poem develops the niche and gives it a rise and a fall. The prescribed space of the sonnet cannot accommodate all the requisite steps of Swales' analysis; thus the sestet of the poem is inclusive of the first and second moves. In a third move, the octet intensifies it and widens the niche both in the text and in the audience. "Sonnet" raises questions but unlike Swales' model it fails to provide answers or solutions to occupy the niche. It can be argued the whole poem is question raising; as the analysis of the three competences show, its foremost communicative purpose is to make a niche within the audience not only about the text but also about the reader him/herself.

The immediate effect of the poem's having frustrated the audience's pragma-ideological, rhetoric-linguistic, stylistic, and generic competences is coaxing him/her to "hold his/her disbelief" in the notions and expectations s/he has been nourishing for long. De-totalizing the norms and conventions of a text and its textual and intratextual relations can be Ashbery's thematic core in "Sonnet".

The question which may arise here is the utility of Swalesian methodology for literary interpretation. As the analysis evinces, this taxonomic methodology alerts the reader to a systematic and/or generic background against which the literary text is to be interpreted. Moreover, for literary texts which take experimentation to its extreme points, genre analysis can function as a means to pull up seemingly disintegrated strings of the text together in an attempt to arrive at relatively better comprehension of such texts. In this respect, Gerard Steen aptly mentions Swales' genre analysis as one of the many linguistic approaches which are useful for "the empirical study of literature" (2009, p. 110). Steen then calls for a general taxonomy of discourse which may serve linguistic (Biber 1989), psychological (Graesser & Kreuz, 1993), and sociological purposes (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995) and contends "An approach to literary discourse genres that is not limited to literature would be useful in increasing the theoretical and empirical appeal of the results of empirical studies of literature" (2009, pp. 110-111). The genre analysis of Ashbery's "Sonnet" has proved to be beneficial for its linguistic ends.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes Swalesian genre analysis despite its systematic approach to texts falls short in attending to all dimensions of a literary work. While genre analysis takes communication at its face value and regards it as the basis on which it sets itself up, "Sonnet" grapples with communication itself and via its coherence of foregrounding on all macro and micro levels of the text poses it as a problem for the audience.

Here arises a paradox: "Sonnet" aims at communicating to the audience that communication is not always easy and feasible. In another register, the poem's communicative purpose is to make communication, if not totally impossible, but a difficult task. Despite all these, Swales' genre analysis has managed to provide a systematic framework for the

description and explanation of Ashbery's experiments on generic, stylistic, rhetoric-linguistic, and pragma-ideological competences in "Sonnet".

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