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SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN HAWKEY'S POEM *HOUR*

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ABSTRACT

This research article mainly concentrates on the syntactic level of language. The writer has internalized the grammar of the language in which he creates literary works. A lot of structures are at his disposal. He leaves some and picks up some others to transform his experience into a literary artifact. He has no inhibition to violate the usually accepted norms. However, the violation is resorted to by the poet, only to create an extraordinary poetic effect. The poem "*Hour*" by Christian Hawkey is subjected to a syntactic analysis to highlight some syntactical devices employed by the poet that would enable us to discover and appreciate the poem. The title of the poem connotes some particular hour which poet is experiencing when the metamorphosis from a human into a mole. The poet has used mainly questions but all his questions have built-in answers and end up in becoming statements. Enjambment, omission of punctuations, sentence structures- all these add more to the poetic effect to picture the lively conversation between the poet as a mole talking to a fellow mole. This different experience in the poem reveals that the poet as a modernist has attempted the Surrealistic mode.

Keywords: Stylistics, syntax, metaphors, connotative, denotative.

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Poetic Appreciation using the Syntactic tool

The poem "*Hour*" by Christian Hawkey is taken from *The Best American Poetry 2006* edited by David Lehman, published in 2006. Christian Hawkey, a poet and translator of German poetry, was born in Hackensack, New Jersey in 1969. He has penned two full-length collections and two chapbooks of poem. His first collection, *The Book of Funnels*, received the 2006 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. He has also been given awards from the Academy of American poets and the Poetry Fund, and in 2006 was honored a Creative Capital Innovative Literature Award.

"Hour" is a poem of 37 lines in a long single stanza. The lines are short and are of irregular length. The form of the poem is like the slim body of the creature, "shovel-nosed mole." There are two periods (full stops) in the whole poem. One is after the first complete sentence running in to seven lines in the beginning; the other, at the end of the following sentence, comprising just four words transcending the seventh and eighth lines: "O my beloved what." These two periods actually don't complete the statement with a falling tone, but with a rising tone converting the statements into questions.

The syntactic structure "O my beloved what" is repeated consecutively suggesting the poet's sense of wonder. These two structures can also be conveniently and profitably understood as exclamations. Here the border between the interrogative and the statement is linguistically identified by the full stop and the exclamatory syntactic structure. The period dissolves into an interrogation and ultimately into an exclamation. The absence of the full stop is seen in the rest of the poem beginning from the eighth line "O my beloved shovel-nosed mole" to the end. So, the first eight lines stand apart from the rest of the poem, consisting of two sentence well- defined by the punctuation like the comma, the colon, and the full stop. The syntax mimics effectively the thought process of the speaker and symbolizes the speaker's mental experience.

The poem begins with some linguistic order and then begins to move towards a kind of chaos. The syntactic arrangement characterizes the dissolving of the poet's sixth sense. This collapse of a clearly demarcated two words "sense" and "surround" is stylistically foregrounded through the lexical item in the first line, "sensurround". The poet admits that his sixth sense is down all around him .This stepping down is stylistically highlighted by carrying over the adverb "down" to the second line. Simultaneously, he is stepping into a "second skin", thereby marking his entry from the real into the imagined world and his transformation from a human being into a rodent like a mole is made possible through his surrealistic efforts

The metamorphosis is suggested by these structural patterns by enjamming the first sentence of the poem comprising seven lines but at the same time maintaining their individual identities of three sentences by the use of two colons. The first two part of the sentence "O my beloved what" is incomplete. So, the first sentence with all its punctuation foregrounds the collapse of the sixth sense in a gradual deterioration, resulting in the loss of the sixth sense. The three part of the first sentence marks the three stages of the decline.

The second part of the poem from line 8 to 37 has a well-marked distinct regularity and it narrates the experience of the poet as a mole. Ted Hughes is a British animal poet and he observes animals and describes his experience with them as an outsider. But Hawkey breaks the physical barrier and imaginatively creeps into world of mole as a fellow-creature and experiences all that the mole does. The second part of the poem marks the division in his consciousness which constitutes the mode of Surrealism. The second part opens with an address, an apostrophe calling the "shovel-nosed mole" affectionately as "O my beloved", an effusion of fellow feeling. From this point onwards, there is a long array of interrogatives in terms of syntactic pattern. Though they are structurally interrogative minus a question mark, in function they are all expressions of endearment as if the poet as mole were talking to other mole by initiating a lively conversation

When the poet looks at the mole from the other side of the border, the image of the mole is indistinct and vague, so he exclaims how "my beloved" were to be. This is evident from the consecutive repetition of the syntactic pattern "O my beloved what". After stepping into the animal world by moving through the tunnel, the poet mole-is now able to see the other mole: "O my beloved shovel-nosed mole". The description of "shovel-nosed" reveals the poet's proximity with the animal-mole that nearness enables him to open an affectionate channel and invite the attention of the animal-mole with the series of affection-charged interrogative syntactic structures with a view to sharing the animal's space and concern. Since the poet carries his worldly experience as a human being even after the transformation that consciousness continues to function in the mole body that he has assumed now. The poet-mole offers itself to clean the soil from animal moles the "black, sightless eyes". It goes further with another offer of massaging the animal mole's "tiny, webbed feet" with fine oils. All these show that his surrealistic experience is ever-tied to his human consciousness.

Through the poet claims to have lost his sixth sense, he does the contrary when he clothes his questions with a coloring of human attributes and makes them endearments. The questions "are you tired of running into drainpipes" and "do your mouth approaching power lines" and the rest are all the result of his accumulated human experience. Of the 17 interrogative syntactic patterns, two questions begin with the "be" form of verb – "are you tired of running into drainpipes" and "are your lungs the size of earlobes". The remaining 15 interrogatives are introduced by auxiliary verbs such as "can", "do", "does", "have", and "are". All the 17 questions appear to elicit a "yes" or "no" answers. However, the absence of the question mark

stylistically foregrounds that the idea of the poet is not to wait and expect a reply but rather expresses his readiness to reveal his concern for the animal-mole.

Like the repetition of the exclamatory in the first part "O my beloved", the second part too has two repetitive syntactic patterns: "are your tunnels collapsing" and "do you have worked to do". These repetitions of syntactic patterns are used to reinforce his affection and concern and create a stronger bond of relationship between the intruder poet-mole and the real mole scurrying through his tunnel. The repetition of the first couple of lines "are your tunnels collapsing" and "do you have work to do" conveys a note of condescendence and apology too just because the poet- mole feels guilty of encroaching upon the other mole's privacy and interfering in its routine work. The questions are aimed at extending a feeling of warmth and caring.

At one point, the poet-mole feels austere when it fails to understand whether the 'dirt breathes' or 'the mole breathes between the dirt'. His idea is so confused that the dirt and the mole appear to be one and the same. The poet mole appears to be in the presence of the other at one time and in the vicinity at the other time. The question "do you hear me in the tunnel next to you" marks the conclusion and the conclusion is a result of the poet's standing between the real and the unreal. This is evident from the immediately following question "have you cut your nose on a shard of glass". Towards the end of the poem there is a subtle merger between the real and unreal and poet asks the question "have you excavated the severed, blue leg of Spider-Man. So it shows that the poet-mole coming into its own, not bereft of his "sixth sense" and its concomitant repertoire of facts. These are all signposts that single the poet's attempt to transcend from the world of human begins to the worlds of animals.

In his over-enthusiastic peep into the world of moles, the poet expects the other mole to acquire human attributes by asking yet another question: "did you pause to admire his red booties". The mole may just dismiss the "red booties" as part of the earth and it doesn't have the sixth sense to admire. So the mole is supposedly invested with the sixth sense and this supposition is the outcome of a split in the poet's consciousness. This confusion culminates in the last two lines: "am I keeping you". In fact, the interface between the poet and the mole is a flight of imagination and the poet is not keeping the mole and nor is he acquainted with a mole's experience. This imaginary conversation comprising 17 interrogative syntactic structures without any punctuation projects the sort of surrealistic experience that the poet has undergone.

The very first sentence "My sixth sensurround is down" is tagged on to the phrase "my second skin" which is in turn tagged on to another sentence "the skin I'm licking into". The phrase "my second skin" is enjambed with the following simple sentence as the nature of skin is qualified by the phrase "the skin I'm stepping into". Here the poet uses the device of deletion of the relative pronoun. The connector or relative pronoun "that" or "which" is implied. The object of the preposition "into" the "skin" is placed before the subject "I" as a structural necessity to avoid the relative pronoun. The ideas are here crowded and compressed to suggest the swiftness with which the poet's surrealistic experience begins. The poet uses the first person "I" and the first person possessive adjective "My" alternatively in the first 12 lines. From that, in another 23 lines, the second person "you" takes over along with the second person possessive adjective "your". The poet comes to the first person "I" from the second person "you" in the penultimate line and it is repeated in the last line. Structurally, the poet loses his identity and gets into the mole's identity and finally the identities are so confused that the question arises: 'who is keeping whom?' The confused state of the poet's mind is conveyed by the parallel structures, the repetition of the syntactic patterns:

am I keeping you
am I keeping you

The syntactic repetition is ingeniously foregrounded to denote the poet's identity crisis in this surrealistic world, the poet feels that he is begin held up instead of the mole holding him up.

The metamorphosis ultimately leads to the temporary loss of his identity as a human being and the doubts whether he is able to get it restored. So, the question "am I keeping you" is not at all a question and rather it is an effort to wake up him at the end of the tunnel where his vision is blurred: 'am I a man or a mole.'

The compounds "shovel-nosed" and "Spider-Man" assume some significance. In the compound adjective "shovel-nosed", there is the impression of the mole's nose itself and the compound noun "Spider-

Man” runs parallel to the theme of the poem, a man becoming a mole. The title of the poem “Hour” phonologically foregrounds the idea of commonness between the poet and the mole as it is that stands for both hour/our. It is a poem about ‘us’ and our ‘life style’. In the phonemic arrangement of the word “hour”, the first and the last two letters are silenced. The letters are in form but they don’t function. The title aptly suggests that the poet though being in his human form functions like a mole digging a tunnel very close to the other mole.

The sixth sense, though present in the poet, “is down” at this hour in his life. In the fifth line, the poet deliberately uses the symbol or the notation, an ampersand (&) for the word “and”. It looks peculiar and this peculiarity goes well with the peculiar behavioral changes of the poet: licking a new finger and holding it up to the wind. Two simple sentences “I lick a finger” and “hold it up to the wind” are connected by the coordinating conjunction “&”. Here two actions are done quick succession and it amounts for the absence of the word “and”. The coupling of qualifier like “black, sightless eyes”, “tiny, webbed feet”, and “severed, blue leg” try to present a picture of the mole which is excavating beneath the ground. The mole’s effort to dig up a tunnel is compared to an archaeologist doing excavations. The mole stops digging for a moment and then continues the process. The poet stylistically conveys this pause through the adjective clusters, each separated by a comma as the poet asks “did you pause to admire his red booties”. The syntax in the first part of the poem is suggestive of the poet’s stability of mind slowly lapsing into a kind of bewilderment. The second part of the poem has a syntactic pattern reflecting the poet’s confused state of mind.

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