

Sara Suleri's Linguistic Ingenuity in Meatless Days

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Abstract

Sara Suleri, the daughter of an eminent Pakistani journalist has written her biography called Meatless Days in America where she teaches literature now. The book has won acclaim for its extraordinary beauty of expression in English. The significance of this book for Pakistan is that Meatless Days lays down the foundation of a very important literary tradition in the expression of English for Pakistani writers. However, in Pakistan, it has not drawn much attention and lies in obscurity. Hence, in this paper, which is the first of a series to be written on stylistic aspects of the book, an attempt has been made to prepare grounds for a linguistic investigation into what is ordinarily considered to be 'ingenious' in Sara's language. In this paper, the focus of investigation is on the sentence structures and use of vocabulary, as these are the fundamental features of any literary style.

1.1 Introduction

Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is applauded the world over for its linguistic ingenuity. There is no doubt that Sara has used language to achieve a diversity of stylistic, even poetic effects. But what is regarded to be 'style' in literature is so infused with a subjective and emotional element in language that, any analysis of that language is regarded to be injurious to it. Besides, it is believed to be elusive element in that analysis will 'defuse' what is essentially a work of 'synthesis' and 'fusion.' Linguists, however, disagree and believe that whatever literary 'effect' and 'vision' is reconstructed in a poem or piece of fiction, it is constructed through language and should be subject to linguistic analysis like any non-literary language.

Attempts of linguists to study literature, especially literary prose have, however, revealed that a long piece of fictional prose can be studied only when, firstly, guided by readers' intuitive judgement, and secondly, by a 'judicious' selection of language (Leech & Short:1981, Widdowson:1975) made by a discriminating mind about what constitutes the emotional, expressive or visionary element of a text. The intuitive judgment is considered to be an important 'tool' of investigation in qualitative research methodology in general (Hakim:1969), and in the study of literary discourses in particular (Carter & Burton:1982, Leech & Short:1981).

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How these insights bear upon the method of this present investigation is explained in detail in section 1.2. After this follows an explorative discussion, in accordance with qualitative research methodology, of what appears to me to be expressive, emotional or ingenious in the language of *Meatless Days* in section 1.3. However, this discussion is confined to lexis - words, idioms and phrases used in isolated sentences across the whole text. In the next section 1.4, sentences and patterns of vocabulary within the sentences are viewed systematically into larger context of literary 'discourse' (Mills:1997). This leads on to identifying, and interpreting some general patterns of lexis and syntax that form Sara's literary style in 1.5.

But before any of this discussion can be made, it is essential to explain how we can study the language of prose fiction in linguistics. It is this point which is taken up in the following section 1.2.

1.2 Analysing the Language of Fiction

Since fiction is written in prose, all discussion about the language of fiction necessarily concerns with the language of 'prose' in fiction (Lodge:1984, Leech & Short:1981, Nash:1980). For the word 'fiction' taken alone may refer to invention of character, plot and other schemes that create and present a world of imagination. In linguistic studies, however, our concern is not with the invention of characters, or plot construction - not directly, that is. The primary concern is with those linguistic features, or patterns of the 'narrative' (Onega & Landa:1999) which distinguish literary prose from non-literary prose.

Literariness is considered to be an elusive quality. At best it is defined as the emotive or expressive element of language in poetry or prose fiction. The only linguistic element associated with the 'emotive' element in literature has been found to be lexis or vocabulary (Leech & Short:1981, Widdowson:1975). There is a special vocabulary of literature, which will look 'deviant,' outside literature, but it conveys the subjective and emotive meanings in literature. But then, much of literature is written in normal language. In that case the literary element is always difficult to define in purely linguistic terms – especially in lengthy prose.

There is generally an agreement that apart from metre, the differences between the language of poetry and the language of prose may not be readily discernible. The study of some forms of poetry may sometimes reveal more readily some linguistic features of vocabulary and grammar which appear to be 'deviant' (Widdowson:1975) when compared to the 'norm.' But then a careful examination of literary prose, especially in fiction, also reveals the same features- only differently distributed (Lodge:1984). The literary element in both, poetry and prose fiction, consists in the fashioning of 'patterns over and above those required by the actual language system' (Widdowson:1975). Now these 'patterns' need not be 'deviations' nor may they appear to be lying apart from the patterns that form the norm of language. The components of these patterns may be 'deviant' or 'non-deviant' or both (Widdowson:1975).

The literary 'patterns' fashioned 'over and above' the normal language are recognised to be images, metaphors, similes, symbols, figures of speech, irony paradox and a host of other rhetorical devices that may or may not be specific to certain 'genres.' And they may be composed of deviant, or non-deviant or both kinds of components. A linguistic study of the literary language may concern itself with any form of these components, deviant or non-deviant; or alternatively, with how both components knit together a specific form of 'literary' pattern, or effect.

Therefore, in any given investigation one must 'select' some features for stylistic analysis in one study and ignore the rest (Leech and Short:1981). This is done for the following reasons:

There is no objective way of determining a statistical norm, against which to evaluate a deviant structure or pattern. So for the sake of convenience and practical necessity we have to rely in general on relative norms.

It is not possible to have a complete list of the properties of a text; therefore, we have to select the features to study.

There is no direct relation between statistical deviance and stylistic significance: Literary considerations therefore must guide us in selecting what features to examine. There is no absolute consistency of style within a given domain, and therefore, in measuring the overall statistical properties of text, we may fail to capture significant variations of style.

Therefore, there is no agreement on the set of descriptive categories required for an adequate account of a language such as English; consequently different investigators are likely to differ in the way they identify linguistic features in a text. (Leech & Short:1981)

Hence in this investigation, only those sentences are studied that strike me as 'ingenious' expression of some kind on the basis of my intuitive judgement as an ordinary reader. My aim is merely to explore and find some linguistic patterns in Sara's sentences. I have used linguistic tools and terminology primarily for the sake of precision. But in the study of 'literary' expression, it is absolutely essential not to be confined to/by it. To seek linguistic ground for reactions or responses intuitively aroused in the reader through the experience of literary or poetic language, linguistic structures must be interpreted for functions in a literary context. Hence intuition guides linguistic analysis made here, and analysis and interpretation merely seek, at least at this initial stage of enquiry, to account for reactions and responses that Sara's expression arouses in ordinary readers, like me.

In the following section 1.3, I simply present a general but also a systematic and explorative account of what appears to me ingenuity of Sara's language.

1.3. Intuitive ‘Cue’ to Ingenious Expression

In this section, I quote a selection of sentences that I have felt intuitively to be the most ‘expressive’ in the language of Meatless Days. Although the effort to work out prominent patterns of Sara’s style is momentarily deferred, I have divided these examples in three parts for general comment, again on the basis of ‘intuition’. The measure of Sara’s mastery over the creation of such ingenious sentences is that one can quote a handful out – of the (con) text, though such an act would rob them of their beauty and significance.

The first list of sentences that strike me as unusual are given below. I have made an effort to make this list as representative as possible. Italics here and elsewhere are all mine:

I thought she was the very air I breathed, but Ifat was *prior, prior*. (p.131)
Karachi’s traffic *grew lunchtime crazed*. (p.33)
She gulped on her own eloquence, her *breakfast bosom quaked*...(p.9)

I was surprised beyond measure when that big head bent backward and wept, a quick summer shower of tears. By the time he left, all surfaces were dry. (p.38)

Dadi with her flair for drama had allowed life to sit so heavily upon her back that her spine wilted and froze into a perfect curve, and so it was in the posture of a shrimp that she went scuttling through the day. (p.2)

Sometimes, to my mother’s great distress, Dadi could berate satan in full eloquence only after she had clambered on top of the dining room table and lain there like a molding centerpiece. (p.2-3)

Dadi... waited for the return of her eldest son, my father. He had gone careening off to a place called Inglistan, or England, fired by some of the several enthusiasms made available by the proliferating talk of independence. (p.2)

I can tell this only to someone like Anita...as we go perambulating through the grimness of New Haven and feed upon the pleasures of our conversational ways. (p.1)

There are many more like these.

About these examples we notice that they contain different linguistic categories of ‘ingenious’ expression. These categories are the following:

1. Words (Ifat was prior, prior)
2. Collocations (lunchtime crazed, breakfast bosom)
3. Phrases (a quick summer shower of tears)

4. Clauses (She gulped on her own eloquence, her breakfast bosom quaked)

In linguistic description, we shall regard, 'lunchtime crazed' and 'breakfast bosom' as 'deviant' collocations (see Widdowson:1975). And though the words 'gulp' or 'eloquence' are not in themselves 'deviant,' the clause 'She gulped on her eloquence' is not a 'norm' either. According to semantic rules of English 'gulp' requires a food item and not 'eloquence' as its object. Since it is an unusual combination of ordinary words, it is 'deviant' – a form of 'ingenious' expression which has symbolic meaning in its 'context.' Similarly 'summer shower of tears' is symbolic description of tears – it is not an ordinary 'shower' but the literal meaning (of an image) are extended to apply it to a different kind of phenomenon. This symbolic use of language is what we call ingenuity of literary expression.

One can infer from this brief discussion that Sara's 'ingenious' literary expression consists in the blending of some deviant patterns into non-deviant patterns in her language. The full significance of their power and beauty can come into notice only in a larger context. A sentence like, "I try to lay the subject down and change its clothes, but before I know it, it has sprinted off evilly in the direction of ocular evidence" cannot make much sense without its immediate context:

My audience is lost and angry to be lost, and both of us must find some token of exchange for this failed conversation. I try to lay the subject down and change its clothes, but before I know it, it has sprinted off evilly in the direction of ocular evidence. It goads me into saying, with the defiance of a plea, "You did not deal with Dadi." (p.2)

Or, alternatively, only the context explains a particular 'collocation' or combination of words, revealing Sara's freedom of invention:

The following morning General Yahya's mistress came to mourn with us over *breakfast*, lumbering in draped with swathes of overscented silk. The brigadier lit an English cigarette – he was frequently known to avow that Pakistani cigarettes gave him a cuff - and bit on his moustache. "Yes," he barked, "these are trying times." "Oh yes, Gul," Yahya's mistress wailed, "These are such trying times." *She gulped on her own eloquence*, her *breakfast bosom* quaked, and then resumed authority over that dangling sentence, "It is so trying," she continued, "I find it so trying, it is trying to us all, to live in these trying, trying times." Ifat's eyes met mine in complete accord: *mistress transmogrified into muse*:" (p.9)

One can notice how Sara draws on the 'context' to create unusual patterns of language and meanings. The origin of 'breakfast bosom' becomes evident. So does the

expressive quality of the sentence ‘She gulped on her own eloquence, her breakfast bosom quaked,’ when it follows the comment uttered by Yahya’s mistress, “These are such trying times.” And then it is followed by Sara’s own comment “and then resumed authority over that dangling sentence.” One also notices the impact of Sara’s cheeky reflections, like ‘mistress transmogrified into muse’ or her perceptions of sound effects ‘yes he barked’, and Yahya’s mistress ‘wailed’. There is a variety in the use of innovative expression. Such innovation is the result of Sara’s deep, intimate, intensely personal reactions in her private thoughts.

A good many sentences gain power and beauty from the conclusions she draws from her thoughts. These form the second kind of sentences I want to comment on:

There were times, as with love, when I felt only disappointment (p.14)
In summers, too, we slept beneath the stars... until sleep came as a confirmation of the magnificent irrelevance of beauty. (p.174)

Darkness after all is too literal a hiding-space, pretending as it does to make a secret of the body: since secrecy annuls, eats up, what is significant in surface, it cannot be sufficient to our tastes. (p.175)

There is nothing that can disappoint someone who has learned to be engaged by the wavering course of disappointment (p.51)

To mourn perhaps is simply to prolong a posture of astonishment (p.172)

Something is coming to strip us to the bone.... (p.171)

Nobody can miss the suggestive power or the implied thought of these sentences, though full significance and the cutting-edge sharpness of these sentence will come home only when we put them back in their context. These are metaphoric or symbolic uses of language. They contain metaphors, comparisons or contrasts – sometimes identified by a linguistic element like ‘as’ or ‘since.’ Or, they may sometimes contain some ‘figures of speech’ (nothing can engage someone who has learned to be engaged by the wavering course of disappointment) or rhetorical devices (since secrecy annuls,...it cannot be sufficient to our taste). But most of the sentences have merely semantic connections with other ideas and images scattered in the texts. For example, the sentence ‘Something is coming to strip us to the bone...’ is a reference to the arrival of the ‘summer’ in its immediate context – but the statement also refers to ‘death’ through association of ideas like changing weather and passing time.

There is another very special feature of Sara’s style. She frequently uses sentences, echoing some already heard idiom or quotation, or gives subtle twists to some famous literary expression or phrase for her desired meanings:

Let sleeping giants lie, I would say [about Tom] and widely skirted all subjects that might make him stir. (p.84)

“Go, find yourself another legend and then return,” she quoted from a forgotten rhyme. (p.71)

I had not yet had my fill of educating America (p.73)

....but how could I do it, become Lilliput to the Gulliver of Tom? (p.79)

What a Jonah my voice feels to the whale of that context (p.47)

Ifat before him and me following so fast behind (p.91)

After the hurly burly of our childhood's constant movement (p.181)
But the hurly burly of it all?... for the trouble with hurly burly is that it can sound convincing... (p.105)

Those tales would wend their way into a final story. (p.180)

I ...watching my friend T.K formulate and reformulate sentences I knew he would never say. Down on the ground there was too much chatter anyway (p.53)

We dangled quiet thought into the water until our sentences happened to tug us... into the kind of startlement that says: “My goodness – there's actually a crab at the end of my line (p.69-70)

I felt put out of joint by such bodily statement (p.186) ...then chastened to imagined the arduous ness of what it means to scaffold me: poor winter tree, put upon by such a chattering plumage... (p.186)

These sentences resonate with what has been said elsewhere, or before; Sara draws on several contexts, near and far. I am reminded of Chaucer, T.S Eliot, Donne, Shakespeare (particularly Hamlet), Swift and several others. No doubt, deviant collocations like ‘chattering plumage’ are understandable from the immediate context, but their full suggestive power comes into play only when a reader can hear echoes of the classical writers of English literature. These examples are, then, what form the ‘suggestive’ and ‘evocative’ power of her language. She evokes in the reader a meaning, an association, already known and a response already formed. It makes her language rich and powerful – for she adds to the meaning and significance by applying them to her personal and emotional life and experience.

This section has shown that the ingenuity of Sara's literary style lies in:

- creating some deviant patterns of language and meaning
- out of ‘normal’ patterns of grammar and vocabulary
- that gain an expressive quality from several contexts both ‘near’ and ‘far’

Although we have already seen to some degree how ‘deviant’ and ‘non- deviant’ patterns are created, drawn from and blended with new and old contexts, this information is rather sketchy. It consists of examples randomly selected from the text. Since fiction is a large piece of ‘prose’ it will be advisable to look at the selection and choice of vocabulary and grammar together in larger pieces of discourse, to look for regular patterns of style beyond words. This is what is done next in the following section 1.4.

1.4. Viewing Patterns in Discourse

As already demonstrated in section 1.2, the significance of a word, collocation, sentence or phrase can be grasped only in its context. This is so because the context provides the necessary connections. However words and collocations may refer to meanings beyond the context of discourse. We have already seen in section 1.3 the last category of phrases like ‘the hurly burly of it all (p.150)’ look for meaning outside the context. It is for this reason that Sara believes that words give her a freedom that grammar does not:

“— as an infant I was absorbed with grammar before I had fully learned the names of things, which caused a single slippage in my nouns: I would call a marmalade a squirrel, and I’d call a squirrel a marmalade. Today I can understand the impulse and would very much like to call sugar an opossum; an antelope, tea. To be engulfed by grammar after all is a tricky prospect, and a voice deserves to declare its own control in any way it can, asserting that in the end it is an inventive thing.” (p.155)

Words give her the freedom to ‘recall’ many ‘contexts’ and then reconstruct them with words. Hence to study certain ‘deviant patterns’ one may have to go beyond the immediate (con) text. An extreme example of this kind can be represented through the following example.

Talking about the Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan, at the time of India’s partition in 1947, she makes strange use of ‘wail’ and ‘clattering’. The italics represent ‘deviations’ from the norm:

They tell me, *nightmare trains* had wailed them there, *clattering irreversibility* over the *tracks of that long unmaking* (p.74)

The immediate context of the text enables a proficient to work out that:

‘wailed them there’ means ‘brought them there’

‘clattering irreversibility’ means ‘making it impossible to reverse this situation’

In order to grasp the implication of these words, however, the reader should know that her reference is to trains which came to Lahore loaded with amputated

dishevelled migrants from all over India who presented pictures of gruesome massacre, and unbearable misery. There was a lot of mourning, literal 'wailing' (a word that she has frequently used in *Meatless Days*) over the loss of human life. Of course the trains came 'clattering irreversibility' after the horror of 1947. She calls them 'tracks of long unmaking,' because the making of Pakistan for her is also its 'unmaking.'

Unlike 'breakfast bosom' where the (con)text explains a deviation, it requires some knowledge of history to understand what 'trains wailed them there' refers to. Those who do not understand the context will be like the reader who does not grasp in full that 'Ifat before and me following fast behind' echoes Donne, or 'hurly burly of it all' refers to Shakespeare. One has to look 'far' to other 'contexts' or - other 'texts' to hear echoes of Swift, Chaucer and Shakespeare.

In contrast to these 'deviations' that require 'contexts' for meaning, Sara can also use a perfectly ordinary word to extraordinary effect. Notice, for example the use of 'wrinkle' in her description of her friend Mustakori's origin:

The first place where she lived was East Africa. My most trustworthy sources intimate me that Mustakori was born in the early 1950s, in the Tanganyika that was, the Tanzania of today. Her birthplace was Arusha, a coffee growing girdle of a district, lying in the shadow of Mount Meeru: a mountain, they say, which is far more shapely and satisfactory qua Kiliminjaro's inflated slopes. Her parents, Asiatics, claimed origin from Indian Punjab and Kashmir, via a de tour through Hong Kong, but I cannot stop to explain that complex wrinkle. (p.51)

Here, we suddenly come upon it, to receive the new meanings of *wrinkle*, like all of her other comments that follow statements, qualifying them, colouring them with her feelings, perceptions and moods. Evidently, her mind has been working upon the map of geographical distances from India to Africa in terms of an image. She talks about 'a girdle of a district', 'a de tour through Hong Kong' that must indeed form a 'complex wrinkle.'

Words not only help her to 'recall' or allude to context, but also 'build' (con)texts of her own choice – in relational patterns all her own. Hence I have noticed, one very special feature of her 'style' is to stay with some one word or idea through a number of sentences within a given paragraph, and move on to the next sentence or clause with the help of word associations, semantic connections and so on. In fact her paragraphs are built around the significance of one idea. Or, sometimes, in one paragraph she may simply be trying to reach from one idea to another associated thought.

It will be useful now to look at a paragraph in order to understand this. I have chosen a representative paragraph of pure 'reflection' connecting a present moment

with the past. It is an example of self-incriminating thought, a reflection over the use of 'bullying litanies' while in love with Tom. But as they part ways, Sara learns about the folly of love, and admonishes herself for hiding a 'Mother Baptist' in her attitude without knowing it at first. Each sentence diverges far from the other, but the whole series aim to reach at the word 'Mother Baptist' connecting 'stern pronouncements' and bullying litanies' in 'her imperative mood' to suggest her 'transmogrification' over the years.

This paragraph I have selected from the story called "Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom."

(1) ¹The habit broken, it was sweet relief to me to be spared the follies of each of my stern pronouncements, those bullying litanies I would deliver up to Tom, litanies of proper behaviour that sprang from hidden funds of my corrective zeal. ²At the time of their uttering, I was roundly persuaded by myself, but learned after a while to suspect the lack of conditionality in my own imperative mood. ³I had gone to school in a convent, that must be it, the fault of a building in which nuns walked in unison to the whirring of a fan. ⁴For us their very habit was admonitory, a reminder that our souls were a little dishevelled, always in flight from the duty instigated by the dawning of each day. ⁵But who could think of dawn when already by midday the combination of heat hunger and all manner of inkiness sent us wheeling down those quiet corridors impulsively calling for carnival? ⁶In those days my friend was that wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood, who had artist's hands and whose face always amazed us because it could look like James Mason and Ravi Shankar and Nazrul Islam, the mad Bengali poet, all at the same moment. ⁷"Why do photographers always catch me," she once wondered aloud, "before my smile has reached its summit?" ⁸Well she would smile today if she saw my transmogrifications and in the cast of scold or frown recognize continuing traces of Mother Baptist in me. (p.85)

There are eight sentences in this paragraph. None is simple. All are clause complexes (Halliday:1975). So we find various arrangements of alpha, beta, gamma and theta clauses (Halliday:1985), but alpha or super-ordinate clause comes always first except in S.1 which starts with 'The habit broken' – a subordinate clause. The clause complexes, one can see are built in such a manner that co-ordinate or subordinate clauses allow her to 'comment' or 'muse' on the 'statements' given usually in the main clause. Or sometimes, the following sentence 'comments' on the proposition in a preceding sentence. Now, the ratio of her declarative statement in the main clause to her 'musings' in co-ordinate or subordinate clauses is one to several at least in this 'reflective' paragraph. The only variation of this pattern is that sometimes comments act like statements, or statements like comments – producing sentences that form a

chain of comments or chain of statements, indistinguishable from each other (S.6, 7, 8).

But Sara always comments, even when she is not reflecting. In her style of writing is mirrored a need to 'color' with her perception even the most mundane of descriptions. Even a totally descriptive piece of her prose fiction will demonstrate this tendency. Notice, for instance, the following example:

2) Dadi, my father's mother, was born in Meerut towards the end of the last century. She was married at sixteen and widowed in her thirties, and by her latter decades could never exactly recall how many children she had borne. When India was partitioned, in August of 1947, she moved her thin pure Urdu to Punjab of Pakistan and waited for the return of her eldest son, my father. He had gone careening off to a place called Inglistan, or England, fired by some of the several enthusiasms made available by the proliferating talk of independence. (p.2)

In this paragraph one cannot fail to notice the use of 'appositives' structures (as defined in Quirk et:1972) - semantic reformulations in grammatical units, mainly of nouns, that stand in the relation of co-ordinates:

Dadi, my *father's mother*, was born in Meerut
...waited for the return of her eldest son, *my father*.
...a place called Inglistan, or *England*...

To this one may add, the use of qualifying clauses like 'fired by one of the several enthusiasms...' expressing again Sara's view of things. Qualifiers are, then, the most obvious and direct form of her personal thought. It is essential to identify 'qualifiers,' then, for not all sub-ordinate or coordinate clauses are 'qualifiers' representing the writer's subjective view, emotions and feelings in the following paragraphs:

3) ¹So, worn by repetition, we stood by Ifat's grave, and took note of narcissi, still alive, that she must have placed upon my mother on the day that she was killed. ²It made us impatient, in a way, as though we had to decide that there was nothing so farcical as grief and that it had to be eliminated from our diets for good. ³It cut away, of course, our intimacy with Pakistan, where history is synonymous with grief and always most at home in the attitude of grieving. ⁴Our congregation in Lahore was brief, and then we swiftly returned to a more geographic reality. ⁵'We are lost Sara,' Shahid said to me on the phone from England. ⁶"Yes, Shahid' I firmly said, 'we are lost.' (p.18-19)

Qualifiers double almost in every sentence, especially of nouns, whether lexical or grammatical. One can notice that double qualifiers occur in a series of alternate sub-

ordinate and co-ordinate clauses, here and in the following paragraph too.

4) ¹Today I'd be less emphatic. ²Ifat and Mamma must have honeycombed and crumbled now, in the comfortable way that overtakes bedfellows. ³And somehow it seems apt and heartening that Dadi, being what she was, never suffered the pomposities that enter the most well-meaning of farewells and seeped instead into the nooks and crannies of our forgetfulness. ⁴She fell between the two stools of grief, which is appropriate, since she was greatest when her life was at its most unreal. ⁵Anyway she was always outside our ken, an anecdotal thing, neither more nor less. ⁶Some sweet reassurance of reality accompanies my discourse when I claim that when Dadi died we forgot to grieve. (p.19)

There are many things to be noted here. One can start by mentioning the number and variety of qualifiers:

in the comfortable way that overtakes bedfellows	(para.4, S.2)
Dadi, being what she was.	(para.4, S.3)
She fell..., which is appropriate,...	(para.4, S.4)
..since she was greatest when...	(para.4, S.4)
she was always outside our ken, an anecdotal thing, neither more, nor less.	
(para.4, S.5)	

The variety of structures however, can be classified in co-ordinate 'paratactic' or sub-ordinate 'hypotactic' relations (Halliday:1985). The next important thing to notice is how different clauses function at lower ranks of phrases to qualify verbs, adjectives and nouns. Also sub-ordinate structures on a lower rank have been used to express paratactic or co-ordinate relations on a higher rank, or vice versa.

5) ¹For to be lost is just a moment's respite, after all, like a train that cannot help but stop between the stations of its proper destination in order to stage a pretend version of the end. ²Dying, we saw, was simply change taken to points of mocking extremity, and wasn't a thing to lose us but to find us out, catch us, where we least wanted to be caught. ³In Pakistan, Bhutto rapidly became obsolete after a succession of bumper harvests, and none of us can fight the ways that the names of Mamma and Ifat have become archaism, quaintness on our lips. (p.19)

Finally, there is also what Leech and Short call 'parallelism' – considered characteristic of literary sentences (Leech & Short:1981). Parallelism is created through juxtaposing of similar grammatical units to work out comparisons and contrasts around one or similar notion(s). The sentence branches out in different directions to work

around these comparisons, through semantic and lexical cohesion of some sort. There is a great variety in parallel structures. Hence both grammatical and lexical patterns are used systematically to qualify ideas.

The use of qualifiers is then the most significant aspect of Sara's style. She stops frequently, it would seem, at each step, in the middle of a statement to insert a comment with the help of a word, some phrases, or a variety of clauses. Hence, nouns, adjectives and verbs in each phrase of each clause are properly qualified, as she moves to the end of the sentences. Through qualifiers, she 'foregrounds' (Leech & Short: 1981) both her thought, and the thing thought upon. She uses both modifiers (through adjectives, or adverbs pre-modifying adjectives) and qualifiers in a given piece of discourse, but qualifiers (following verbs, nouns or adjectives) exceed by far the modifiers. This is clearly indicated in paragraph No.6 where modifiers are underlined for comparison:

6) ¹Now I live in New Haven and feel quite happy with my life. ²I miss, of course, the absence of women and grow increasingly nostalgic for a world where the modulations of age are as recognised and welcome as the shift from season into season. ³But that's a hazard that has to come along, since I have made myself the inhabitant of a population which democratically insists that everyone from twenty-nine to fifty six occupies roughly the same space of age. ⁴When I teach topics in the third world literature, much time is lost in trying to explain that the third world is locatable only as a discourse of convenience. ⁵Trying to find it is like pretending that history and home is real and not located precisely where you're sitting. ⁶A face, puzzled and attentive and belonging to my gender raises its intelligence to question why, since I am teaching third world writing, I haven't given equal space to women writers on my syllabus. I look up, the horse's mouth, a foolish thing to be. ⁷Unequal images battle in my mind for precedence – there's imperial Ifat, there is Mamma in the garden, and Halima the cleaning woman is there too, there is uncanny Dadi with her goat. ⁸Against all my own odds I know what I must say, because I'll answer slowly, there are no women in the third world. (p.19-20)

From all of these paragraphs it becomes evident that the use of qualifiers, appositives in particular, is the most important feature of her style. The qualifiers may consist of many different structures. They may be simple adverbs or adjectives, or prepositional and participle phrases, or adverb phrases and adjectival phrases, or a variety of clauses. But they form the bulk and exceed the use of modifiers or pre-modifiers. It allows her sentences to acquire a richness, complexity, and fullness of thought. They also impregnate Sara's style with images metaphors and comparisons.

In order to make a systematic illustration of the observations made in this section we are now ready to turn, finally, to the next section 1.5.

1.5. Qualifiers: Patterns of Ingenious Expression

In this section is illustrated systematically the linguistic patterns of sentences we have noted in the previous section of this paper. I have already commented in some detail on the use of literary vocabulary and deviant collocations. It has been shown how the choice of literary verbs, nouns, adjectives or deviant collocations make an important feature of Sara's style. In this section, my aim is to focus on patterns of sentence into which this notably literary vocabulary is organized. It has been noted from representative paragraphs in Section 1.4 and other short quotations cited in section 1.3 that:

1. Clause complexes exceed simple sentences by far in number.
2. Clause complexes usually contain both sub-ordinate and co-ordinate clauses.
3. Clause complexes have various arrangements of alpha, beta, gamma and theta clauses.
4. The use of qualifiers at all ranks is a dominant feature of sentences.

That the 'statement + qualifying comment' is the structuring principle of her sentences may be evident from following sentences of paragraph No.1:

The habit broken, it was sweet relief to me to be spared the follies of each of my stern pronouncements, + those bullying litanies I would deliver up to Tom, + litanies of proper behaviour + that sprang from hidden funds of my corrective zeal. (para.1, S.1)

I had gone to school in a convent, + that must be it, + the fault of a building in which nuns walked in unison to the whirring of a fan.(para.1, S.3)

For us their very habit was admonitory, + a reminder that our souls were a little dishevelled, + always in flight from the duty instigated by the dawning of each day. (Para. 4)

In those days my friend was that wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood, + who had artist's hands and whose face always amazed us + because it could look like James Mason and Ravi Shankar and Nazrul Islam, + the mad Bengali poet, + all at the same moment. (para.1, S.5)

One may further note, 'the layers' of qualifying phrases in clauses that follow the super-ordinate clause:

stern pronouncements, those bullying litanies + I would deliver up to Tom,
litanies of proper behaviour + that sprang from my corrective zeal
....a reminder + that our souls were a little dishevelled,
+ always in flight from the duty
+ instigated by the dawning of each day.

wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood, + who had artist's hands
+ and whose face always amazed us
because + it could look like James Mason, Ravi Shankar
and Nazrul Islam + mad poet of Bengal

gone to school in a convent, + that must be it,
+ the fault of a building
+ in which nuns walked in unison
+ to the whirring of a fan.

One can may still further note that a variety of clauses and phrases are used to qualify Nouns more than verbs.

those bullying litanies + I would deliver up to Tom
litanies of proper behaviour + that sprang from hidden funds
the fault of a building+ in which nuns walked in unison....
a reminder + that our souls were a little dishevelled,
wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood, + who had artist's hands...
Nazrul Islam, + the mad Bengali poet,

To this one could add a list from any where in the text, picked up at random:

...steaming plates of grilled lung and liver, + of a freshness quite superlative (4)
...until she had a walking stick, + all white and virgin and all her own.
The goat was killed and cooked: + a scrawny beast that would require much cooking
and would not melt into succulence (5)
My mother lived through thirty years of that daily production of that print, + the daily
necessity of sympathy. (158)
.. the second Eid,+ which celebrates the seductions of Abraham story in a remarkable
literal way. (4)

Nouns are modified through adjectives sometimes. These Adjectives + N occur as subject or object of a clause:

those bullying litanies I would deliver up to Tom,
sent us weeling down those quiet corridors..
That wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood

But most often these constructions function in phrases that act as qualifiers on a higher rank:

litanies of proper behaviour that sprang from hidden funds of my corrective zeal

Verbs are, however qualified through adverbs, adverbials and adverb phrases:

He had gone + *careening off* to a place called Inglistan, or England...
...as we go+ *perambulating* through the grimness of New Haven
Dadi could berate satan + *in full eloquence*
that big headwept, + *a quick summer shower of tears*.
...so it was in the posture of a shrimp that she went + *scuttling* through the day.
Yahya's mistress came..., + *lumbering in* draped with swathes of overscented silk. (op.cit)

In literary sentences, adverbs and adjectives are always thought of great importance because, they carry a writer's personal and subjective viewing or perception of things. Sara is inclined to use them both - though adverbs more than adjectives. We have already seen her commenting through:

1. Words

'Ifat was prior, prior'	(adjective)
'we go perambulating	(adverb)
'she went scuttling through the day	(adverb)

2. Phrases

a quick summer shower of tears	(noun phrase)
berate satan in full eloquence	(prepositional phrase)

3. Clauses

....as we go perambulating through the grimness of New Haven
....and feed upon the pleasures of our conversational ways. (op.cit)

And these lexical and grammatical qualifiers she uses in a variety of combinations.

The most dominant use of qualifiers is, we have already noticed, in the form of appositive structures:

Mustakori was born in the early 1950s, in the *Tanganyika that was, the Tanzania of today*.
Her birthplace was Arusha, a coffee growing girdle of a district, lying in the shadow of *Mount Meeru: a mountain, they say, which is far more shapely and satisfactory* qua Kiliminjaro's inflated slopes.
Her *parents, Asiatics*, claimed origin from..... (op.cit)

As can be seen from these examples, Sara has created appositive structures on the rank of words, phrases and clauses. This should explain why Nouns are qualified more than other elements of language. Appositives are created through semantic re-formulation of nouns (Quirk et al: 1972) as a general rule. Hence semantic reformulations of nouns are only a dominant kind of appositive structures, which Sara may have chosen because they suit her design and interest most. However examples of 'reformulations' of other units are also available and have already been noted (para.4, S.4). The function of

appositives is to recapture an idea or theme in the discourse by rephrasing (Quirk et al:1972) or referring to something discussed before (the idea of 'transmogrification' in para.1, S.1, S.8). This suits the general aim and artistic design of the book, as already observed and discussed in section 1.3, and 1.4 of this paper. In para.1 of section 1.4, we have seen how Sara uses appositives for different effects – to explain things, to draw analogies, to digress and ramble on, to shock and surprise us, and so on. But on top of everything else, to play with words most close her heart and express her ideas with maximum freedom of expression.

At the expense of repetition, it must be said again that an overwhelming use of paratactic structures - notably appositive indicates that, she plays with words and ideas in some one context first, and then takes them forward to other contexts. Through semantic reformulations, variations and associations (Quirk et al:1972), she looks backward to recapitulate and forward to make new starts with old beginnings.

The next most prominent feature of Sara's syntax is the use of relational clauses. They show both hypotactic and paratactic relations but in a manner that does not allow one to foresee which one type dominates the other. We have already seen this in the following sentence:

I had gone to school, that must be it, the fault of a building in which...(para.1,S.3)

We have seen that the clause 'that must be it' stands in appositive relation to the main clause (I had gone to school....) and forms, in turn, the principle clause of the following one 'the fault of a building in which nuns walk in unison..' etc. This is almost a Miltonic use of language in which the division of clauses and their placement in strategic places creates ingenious links between different parts of sentences. The use of punctuation, especially comma is, therefore, quite significant in Sara's language. It divides up information to create 'pauses' with various dramatic effects by balancing a selective, given information, against the writer's overwhelming perspective. It throws into focus Sara's thought and the thing thought upon, with equal force. It 'foregrounds' (Leech & Short: 1981) both the plain realistic statement and her subjective comment.

The dominance of the relative clauses is exemplified in the following sentence:

In those days my friend was *that* wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood,
+ *who had* artist's hands *and whose face* always amazed us + *because it*
could look like James Mason and Ravi Shankar and Nazrul Islam, +
the mad Bengali poet, + all at the same moment. (para.1, S.5)

The appositive construction 'that wonderful woman, Kausar Mehmood' does not have the same intensity as in other sentences: it is drowned in the intensity of qualifiers, which 'roll' clause after clause, phrase after phrase beginning with 'who had... and....whose....us because...' creating hypotactic relation between the clauses.

There is also co-ordination within the beta clause signalled by ‘... and whose face...’ which quickly passes into ‘appositives’ like ‘...Nazrul Islam, the mad poet of Bengal.’

A significant number of *that*, *which*, *since* clauses owe their existence, as we have already noticed in paragraph No.3, 4 and 5 in Section 1.4, to the use of qualifiers:

...catch us *where* we least wanted to be caught...(para.5, S.2)
and none of us can fight the ways *that* the names of Mamma and Ifat have become archaism, quaintness on our lips. (para.4, S.6)

Ifat and Mamma must have honeycombed and crumbled now, in the comfortable way *that* overtakes bedfellows. (para.5, S.3)

And somehow it seems apt and heartening that Dadi, being *what* she was, never suffered the *pomposities that enter* the most well-meaning of farewells and seeped instead into the nooks and crannies of our forgetfulness. (para.4, S.6)

These qualifying phrases are different from a purely relational function, like -

Some sweet reassurance of reality accompanies my discourse *when I claim* that when Dadi died we forgot to grieve. (para.4, S.6)

Also *that*, *which*, clauses joined with other clauses by *and*, serve to express paratactic relations. This makes their appearance quite deceptive, for they do not perform the function usually associated with them:

...we had to decide that there was nothing so farcical as grief *and that* it had to be eliminated from our diets for good. (para.2, S.3)

Kausar Mehmood, + who had artist’s hands *and whose* face always amazed us (para.1, S.6)

As a consequence, it is difficult to determine without statistical analysis what is the number and ratio of co-ordinate clauses versus sub-ordinate clauses in Meatless Days. Because Sara uses them both frequently although one is left with the impression, may be on account of the appositives, that the co-ordinate structures dominate. Sara, however, uses them alternately, or the one into the other, to weld certain ideas where she wants, but also to keep others isolated and free, where she wants.

Notice also that the use of ‘who’ is rhetorical in the following sentence which, nevertheless initiates the next sub-ordinate clause which contains another series of qualifying phrases ‘rolled’ into layers :

But who could think of dawn when already by midday the combination of heat hunger and all manner of inkiness sent us wheeling down those quiet corridors + impulsively calling for carnival? (para. 1, S.5)

The expressive quality of this sentence lies in 'sent us wheeling down + those quiet corridors, impulsively calling for the carnival' which followed the subject 'combination of heat hunger...' The noun gains intensity by the series of adjectives strung up to qualify it. The verb creates a whole 'picture' of the children 'wheeling downcalling for the carnival' The entire sentence is a 'comment' – an expression of her personal feelings. She combines here subtle effects of alliteration (*heat, hunger, corridor, carnival*) and assonance (*think, ink, wheeling..calling, impulsively*). The entire sentence is notable for its lexical qualifiers, and is designed to 'comment' on the preceding statement 'our souls were a little disheveled, always in flight from duty...'.

Somehow, post-positioning of 'comments' seems to be an important feature of Sara's style. Since 'qualifiers' in sentences and clauses are post-positioned, it seems that she finds in qualifiers and qualifying statement a strategy not only to 'fore-ground' her thoughts – but also the possibility to dwell on it. It is not surprising then that her sentences are also long sometimes because she uses an interior monologue to express her thoughts and feelings:

When my bone broke I was perplexed: was I now to watch my own dismantling body choose to unravel with the cascading motion of a dye in water which unfurls to declare, "Only in my obliteration will you see the shape of what I really can be?" ...I felt put out of joint by such a bodily statement, then chastened to imagine the arduousness of what it must mean to scaffold me: poor chattering tree, put upon by such a chattering plumage, castigated out of season for its lack of green! Put upon by sentences galore –like starling, vulgar congregations! (p.186)

The length of her sentences is nearly always determined by the nature of her intellectual or emotional comment on any detail singled out for this purpose; this allows her to weave symbolism into the very texture of realistic narrative - an art that began with New criticism at the turn of 20th century and is carried into post-modernism (see Onega & Landa: 1999 for detail).

Any further enquiry into her style, can now be made only when some kind of statistical analysis of the features roughly identified and discussed here is available to claim with some amount of certitude what features of her style are uniformly distributed over the text and what features stand out prominent at some significant places in her narrative. Such statistical analysis is however beyond the scope of this investigation.

Therefore, one can conclude on the evidence of paragraphs analysed here that Sara has a distinct 'literary style' with deviant and non-deviant structures blended together in a variety of contexts. The representative paragraphs analysed here bespeak of Sara's dexterity in composing sentences that convey the most trivial detail strongly coloured by her perception of things, her feelings and her angle of thought. The construction of these sentences seem to have been consciously designed to make room for an essentially personal, intimate 'comment' which follows some statement already given. The comment is made, generally, through the use of qualifying remarks, through a number of patterns – particularly through appositives, paratactic constructions (juxtapositions of co-ordinates) and relational patterns in hypotactic constructions. This leads us to conclude that Sara's 'musings' determine the structure of her sentences and paragraphs, as well as the choice of vocabulary and combination of collocations in a particular way - especially where qualifying remarks are to be made. An abundant presence of qualifiers at different ranks in her sentences provides a linguistically determined feature of 'style' that allow her to build her vision into the very texture of narrative art.

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