UNIT 3 STYLE AND CONTENT

Structure

3.0   OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we discuss the three schools of thought, among the theorists of style: the Dualists, the Monists and the Pluralists. We discuss each in detail.

3.1   INTRODUCTION

We have so far seen that Style refers to the way in which language is used in a given context. by a given person , and for a given purpose. We have also seen in how these conditions of context , speaker, purpose and cultural factors have often governed the selection and use of different aspects of a language such as vocabulary, syntax, accent, etc. leading to the evolution of standardized language variations called 'dialects' and 'registers'. Thus we have had, for example, variations of British and American English, registers of medicine and law, and cockney and other accents of speech, and other varieties of styles adopted by the addresser to the addressee. In literature, where the writer is concerned with presenting a 'story' or a 'message' through particular characters / speakers in specific circumstances or 'contexts' the writer would need to be a very careful 'manipulator of language to set up what, we shall later explain , is called the 'mock reality'. It becomes important, therefore, for an appreciater of literature to understand how the particular use of language (or style) relates to the 'content' of the mock reality and also how this mock reality is different from the 'real' reality that surrounds us in the world. This leads us to an examination of the relationship between style and content and the various theories that critics have upheld on this issue.

3.2   STYLE

STYLE has commonly been defined as a 'way of writing' or a 'mode of expression'. This has implied a separation between style and content. This tradition of thought , therefore, restricts style to those choices which are choices of MANNER rather than MATTER , of EXPRESSION rather than CONTENT. This approach has been called the DUALIST view. The MONIST view, a theory that began with Aristotle and Plato, makes no distinction in language between form and meaning. In Flaubert's

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words : "It is like body and soul : form and content to me are one." A third approach to style is the PLURALIST approach. It holds that style is a choice of language according to the function(s) it is expected to perform. We shall take up these three approaches in turn.

3.2.1 Dualism

DUALISM can be said to be of two kinds

1) **Style as the 'dress of thought'.** (Leech & Short 1981) . While the thought or 'content' remains the same, the words , phrases , language used to 'house' the thought may change without making a difference to the substance or total meaning of the thought. Underlying this idea is a distinction between what the writer has to say and how it is presented to the reader. This metaphor of style as some kind of adornment or covering , though no longer widely current, was commonly in Renaissance pronouncements on style. Alexander Pope's well - known definition of wit was an example:

"True wit is nature to advantage dressed
What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed"
(An Essay on Literary Criticism)

Such artificial styles were cultivated by Renaissance mannerists like Sydney and Lyly. For example,

As therefore

the sweetest rose hath his prickle,
the finest velvet his brack,
the fairest flower his bran,

the sharpest wit hath
his wanton will and

the holiest head
his wicked way.

While the core idea in the various metaphors is the same--- that every good thing has its weakness or wicked aspect---- the attention of the reader is chiefly drawn to the details of the metaphors, further emphasized by alliteration and parallelistic constructions. Obviously the aesthetic form tends to attract the reader's attention here rather than the meaning. However, the schematism of form cannot be divorced from the schematic relation between the ideas presented.

A converse implication of the 'dress of thought' view is that it is possible to write in a style which is the nadir of plainness and neutrality. Says Wesley :

'Style is the dress of thought, a modest dress,
Neat, but not gaudy, will true critics please,'

The French writer, Roland Barthes has referred to the ' transparency' of classical writing, and has postulated a mode of ' writing at degree zero', which "initiated by Camus's 'Outsider' achieves a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style". However this is again an extreme view.

French stylisticians have contended that no matter how 'naked, or bare the style may be, there is still an expressive or emotive element of language that gets added to the neutral presentation of language. Thus, Eliza's "Not bloody likely" in Pygmalion by

Bernard Shaw has an expressiveness and , therefore, a style which the otherwise equivalent monosyllable 'No' does not.

Every word has some associations—emotive, moral, ideological---- in addition to its brute sense .Even in 'unmarked', 'neutral' linguistic choices, say pronouns, the third person (he, she, they, etc.) may be regarded as neutral in narration as compared with 'I' and 'you'. Yet such a linguistic choice may have implications which may be fruitfully examined in stylistics: the third person pronoun, for example, distances the author and the reader from the character it denotes. So it may be safer to say that style is a property of all texts, Texts may differ greatly in their degree of stylistic interest of markedness and some texts may be more 'transparent' than others. But for all practical purposes, the idea of style as an 'optional extra' must be firmly rejected.

2) **Style as a 'manner of expression'** (Leech and Short 1981), is another kind of dualism. This understanding of dualism can be contrasted with monism. This implies that every writer necessarily makes choices of expression. While the substance or 'content' of the thought is the same , the manner of saying it , the words , phrases, language chosen to express it may slightly vary the total meaning. It is in these choices , in this way of putting things that style resides.

The dualist holds that there can be different ways of conveying the same content. The monist holds that this is a mistake, and that any alteration of form entails a change of content.

Style as a manner of doing something is also applicable in fields outside language, for example, sports ,music, architecture. And here, as in language, some elements may be invariant. Thus, in the field of tennis, the rules of the game are invariant but the choice of backhands, forehands, volleys etc. would be variant. Similarly, in literary or other texts while the writer has to adhere to the rules of syntax and graphology etc. , he still exercises choice in the matter of the words on the page. The idea of style implies ,therefore, that the words on the page might have been different or differently arranged without a corresponding difference in substance. Ohmann, in the example, offers the following paraphrase of 'After dinner, the senator made a speech.' :

1)   When dinner was over, the senator made a speech.

2)   The speech was made by the senator after dinner.

3)   The senator made a postprandial oration.

However, Ohmann here concentrates on the grammatical aspect of style where the differences are grammatical rather than lexical except for the Johnsonian flavour of the third sentence. Phrase Structure Rules and Transformational Rules of English Grammar provide a linguistic basis for the notion of paraphrase and hence for the grammar of style. However it may be noted that the lexical choice (postprandial oration) exercised in the third sentence brings in a sense of style by adding a dimension of weight and pomposity to the statement.

But dualism based on the concept of paraphrase often uses the two terms 'meaning' and 'content' loosely and interchangeably. For a more precise distinction , the words SENSE and SIGNIFICANCE may be used : 'sense referring to the basic, logical , conceptual, paraphrasable meaning, and 'significance' to the total of what is communicated to the world by a given sentence or text. Thus in the above example, the third sentence (postprandial oration) carries a 'significance' including the Johnnsonian colour that goes beyond the 'sense' of the earlier two sentences. Dualists see a valid separation of 'sense' from 'significance'. But though they assume that one can paraphrase the sense of a text, they do not treat stylistic choices as devoid of significance : if they did , they would scarcely find style worth studying. An enlightened dualist will search for some significance which can be called

STYLISTIC VALUE in a writer's choice to express his sense in this rather than that way. This view is formalized by Leech & Short in the equation :

$$SENSE + STYLISTIC\ VALUE = (total)\ SIGNIFICANCE$$

Even a seemingly 'neutral' style may be as much a choice of the writer to express a certain sense as any other choice.

3.2.2 MONISM : the Inseparability of Style and Content

The Dualists notion of paraphrase, that the basic sense of a text can be preserved in different renderings may not be challenged in workaday uses of language. But in literature, particularly poetry, paraphrase becomes problematic. For example, in paraphrasing a metaphor like

> Come steeling night

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day.   (Macbeth, III, ii, 46)

do we try to expound the hidden metaphorical meanings, or the surface literal meanings? As Terence Hawker says, " Metaphor-------is not fanciful embroidery of the facts." Metaphor denies us a literal sense and so induces us to **make** sense, i.e. to find interpretations beyond the truth- functional meaning captured by paraphrase.

Stylistic monism , therefore, finds its strongest ground in poetry, where through devices like metaphor, irony and ambiguity, meaning becomes multi-valued , and sense loses its primacy. Rejecting the form-meaning dichotomy, Monism rejected the idea that a poem conveys a message, preferring to see it as an autonomous verbal artefact.' 'A poem should not mean but be,' was Archibald Macleish's extreme statement of this position. Moreover, stylistic monism also finds its ground in prose. Features of poetry are also to be found in the most prosaic of prose, not to mention everyday speech. Some authors have expressed this sense of the artistic integrity and inviolability of their work as in Tolstoy's words : " This indeed is one of the significant facts about a true work of art--that its content in its entirety can be expressed only by itself." Thus the New Critical methods have been applied to prose fiction too. David Lodge in 'Language of Fiction' argues that the following tenets apply to both poetry and prose :

(I)   It is impossible to paraphrase literary writing.

(II)   It is impossible to translate a literary work.

(III)   It is impossible to divorce the general appreciation of a literary work from the appreciation of its style.

It is obvious that both (I) paraphrase and (II) translation if understood as expression of the same content in different words, presuppose a dualist philosophy.

A third case for style adopts a monist approach, heralding the view of the New Critics that criticism is in essence language criticism. This approach has gained momentum over the last 40 years. With regard to criticism of prose fiction too, it is upheld that there can be no separation of the author's creation of a fiction of plot, character, social and moral life, from the language in which it is portrayed. The mock reality is entirely based on the words of the text. As Lodge says the novelist's medium is language: whatever he does, he does in and through language. It is the phonological, emotional and cultural dimensions too of the particular words in the text that contributes to the total significance of the textual extract which thus gains stylistic value. All the choices the writer makes are, therefore, equally matters of language.

3.2.3 Comparing Monism and Dualism

Simply put dualism is happier with prose and monism with poetry, But as has been indicated earlier, the real situation is much more complex. The difference between prose and poetry at its most banal level is defined by the absence or presence of verse form. But a lot of prose can get poetic and poetry may be read prosaically.

The Prague School of Poetics has distinguished the 'poetic function' of language by its FOREGROUNDING or DEAUTOMIZATION of the linguistic code. This implies an aesthetic exploitation of language which takes the form of surprising the reader into a fresh awareness of and sensitivity to the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication. Thus consider the following extract from James Joyce :

" Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo---

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt. "

The foregrounding here is not limited to the more obvious poetic devices, such as metaphor and alliteration. It denies the normally expected clues of context and coherence. Joyce confronts us with a piece of apparently inept, uncontextualized, childish language lacking normal 'prosaic' logical transitions and so shocks us into a 're-experience' (rather than a reminiscence) of a childhood consciousness. This renders what may be called an OPAQUE quality of prose style where the medium attracts attention in its own right, and interpretation of sense may even be frustrated and obstructed by abnormalities in the use of the lexical and grammatical features of the medium. On the other hand, in a TRANSPARENT quality of prose style, the reader need not become consciously aware of the medium through which the sense is conveyed to him. Here is a more transparent version by Burgess of the Joyce extract quoted above :

"My earliest recollections are of my father and my mother bending over my cot and of the difference in personal odour that subsisted between my two parents. My father, certainly did not have so pleasant an odour as my mother. I remember I would be told infantile stories, altogether appropriate to my infantile station. One of them I seem to recall, was concerned with a cow coming down the lane---which lane was never specified---and meeting a child who was called (I am embarrassed , inevitably to recollect this in maturity) some such name as Baby Tuckoo. I myself, apparently, was to be thought of as Baby Tuckoo. Or was it Cuckoo? It is, of course, so long ago..........."

Thus a writer in breaking or bending the normal rules of syntax, graphology etc. does so because it is a part of the formulation of the 'new' experience of the author which thus gets transmitted to the reader with the linguistic medium becoming a part of the experience or the verbal artefact.

3.2.4 PLURALISM : Analyzing Style in Terms of Functions

A third approach to Style is called Pluralism. According to the Pluralist, language performs a number of different functions and any piece of language is likely to be the result of choices made on different functional levels.

Language can perform varied functions. These functions may be

1)   referential (e.g. newspaper reports)
2)   directive / persuasive (e.g. advertising)
3)   emotive or social (e.g. casual conversation)

To this functional variety of language, the pluralist adds the idea that is intrinsically multifunctional. For example:

'Is your father feeling better?' may be simultaneously

a)   referential (referring to a person and his illness)
b)   directive (demanding a reply from the hearer)
c)   social (maintaining a bond of sympathy between the speaker and hearer)

From this point of view the dualist is wrong in assuming that there is some unitary conceptual 'content' in every piece of language.

Pluralists tend to disagree on what the functions are, and even their number. Thus I.A. Richards (1929) distinguishes four types of functions and four kinds of meaning *sence, feeling, tone,* and *intention.* Jakobson's (1961) scheme is based on a more systematic theory of language and distinguishes six functions (*referential, emotive, conative, phatic, poetic, metalinguistic*) each corresponding to one essential aspect of the discourse situation. More recently, Halliday's functional model of language acknowledges three major functions which he calls *'ideational, interpersonal',* and *'textual'.*

The pluralists also tend to disagree on how functions are manifested in literary language. Richards holds that the 'function' of feeling tends to dominate that of 'sense' in poetry. Jakobson identifies a special poetic function which can be found in many uses of language but which dominates over the functions in poetry. Thus these linguists have different listings of functions and also hold different views the 'poetic function'. Halliday does not commit himself to a functional definition of literary language but recognizes that different kinds of literary writing may foreground different functions.

The extract below from William Golding's novel (The Inheritors) deals with the prehistoric struggles for survival between 'homo sapiens' and Neanderthal man, resulting in the latter's extinction. The special Lok- style which Golding uses to present the point of view of Lok, the Neanderthal man gradually shifts in style to the 'homo sapiens' point of view at the end of the novel. These contrasting styles represent primarily the function of language which Halliday calls IDEATIONAL: i.e. the way in which language conveys and organizes the cognitive realities of experience, roughly corresponding to what was earlier called 'sense'.

" The bushes twitched again. Lok steadied by the tree and gazed . A head and chest faced him , half - hidden. There were white bone things behind the leaves and hair..... The man turned sideways in the bushes and looked at Lok along his shoulder. A stick rose upright and there was a lump of bone in the middle. Lok peered at the stick and the lump of bone and the small eyes in the bone things over the face. Suddenly Lok understood that the man was holding the stick out to him but neither he nor Lok could reach across the river. He would have laughed if it were not for the echo of the screaming in his head. The stick began to grow shorter at both ends. Then it shot out at full length again.

The dead tree by Lok's ear acquired a voice.
'Clop!'
His ears twitched and he turned to the tree.

----- Golding (The Inheritors)

Here, we are seeing through the uncomprehending mind of Lok, a man's attempt to shoot with an arrow. Lok's view of things lacks the sense of cause and effect, as descendants of his vanquishers take for granted. This is reflected in the limited grammar of Lok's language, particularly its paucity of clauses with a direct object or clauses with a human subject (e.g. The bushes twitched again, Lok steadied by the tree, The stick rose upright). Again, there are no adverbs or adverbial phrases, except those of time and place. To represent the limited universe of Lok, Golding uses a limited language, particularly in the area of transitivity, (a term which for Halliday comprehends relations between verbs , noun phrases, and adverbials in the clause).

Halliday's view is that all linguistic choices are meaning meaningful, and all linguistic choices are stylistic. Pluralism can, therefore, be regarded as a more sophisticated version of monism. The flaw of monism is that it tends to view a text as an undifferentiated whole and by considering meaning inseparable from form, the monist cannot discuss language at all, for meaning can only be discussed by repeating the very words in which it is expressed. But the pluralist is in a happier position. He can show how choices of language are interrelated to one another within a network of functional choices. The choice a writer makes can be seen against the background of relations of contrast and dependence between one choice and another.

The pluralist therefore has a theory of language whereas the monist does not.

3.3   LET US SUM UP

We have seen that style refers to the argument about choices of manner and expression rather than matter or content. There have been three schools of thought among the theorists of style : the Dualists ,the Monists, and the Pluralists.

One group of Dualists contend that language is used as a dress of thought - when it is fancy it attracts the reader's attention and at its most transparent the degree of style is almost at zero --- in any case the degree of style makes no difference to the thought content. Another group of dualists hold that the choices operate at two levels : choice of content and choice of expression or (style). The concept of 'stylistic value' is brought in to show the difference between 'sense' and 'significance'

The Monists equate the choice of expression with the choice of content and allow no room for paraphrase and translation. It tends to eliminate any discussion of language or style.

Both these schools are based on a simplistic approach. The Pluralists take account of the complexities of literature and its appreciation. It adopts tenets of both the dualist and monist schools. It considers style in terms of the functions of language and accepts that a piece of text can be multifunctional. It distinguishes between 'sense' and 'reference' and also takes account of the variant and invariant factors involved in the choices underlying style. It studies style in terms of 'foregrounding' and 'de-automatization' and helps to a clearer, more objective and convincing analysis of style and literary appreciation.

3.4   KEY WORDS

metaphor: a figure of speech, in which one thing, idea, or action is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. In metaphor, this resemblance is assumed as an

	imaginary identity rather than directly stated as a comparison: referring to a man as *that pig*, or saying *he is a pig* is metaphorical. whereas *he is a like a pig* is a *similie*.
alliteration:	the repetition of the same sounds—usually initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables—in any sequence of neighbouring words: 'Land-scape-love, lord of language' (Tennyson)
parallelism:	the arrangement of similarly constructed clauses, sentences, or verse lines in a pairing or other sequence suggesting some correspondence between them. The effect of parallelism is usually one of balanced arrangement achieved through repetition of the same syntactic form; eg ...... the finest velvet his brack the fairest flower his bren
foregrounding:	giving unusual prominence to one element or property of a text, relative to less noticeable aspects.
referential language:	language which aims only to *denote*; for instance, the language of the scientist and the philosopher.
emotive language:	language intended to express or arouse emotional reactions towards the subject.
phatic language:	exchanges to maintain social communication, for example, about the state of the weather and a person's health.
conative:	the function of language by which the speaker tries to get somebody else to do something
ideational function:	that part of language use involving information, evaluation and judgements
interpersonal function:	that part of language use involving interactions with other people: greeting. persuading, ordering, etc.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is the simple definition of 'Style'?
2. What does the content of literature refer to?
3. What are the three views of the critics about the relationship between style and content?
4. What are the two forms of Dualism? Explain briefly the difference between them.

5. What is the different between 'sense' and 'significance'?
6. What is Monism? In which part of literature does it find its strongest ground? Why/How?
7. Can Dualism and Monism be separated for application to prose and poetry? Why?
8. What is foregrounding?
9. What are the basic assumptions on which the pluralist approach is based?
10. Is pluralism superior to both Monism and Dualism? How?

3.6 ANSWERS

1. Style is the way in which language is used in a given context by a given person and for a given purpose.

2. Content refers to the story or message presented by the writer by using specific characters in specific circumstances. The language chosen for this presentation sets up a mock reality which can be referred to as 'content'

3. a) The Dualist view makes a distinction between what the writer says and how he says it.
    b) The Monist holds that they are inseparable.
    c) According to the Pluralist, the language is chosen according to the functions it is expected to perform in the piece of writing.

4. Dualism: (a) Style as the 'dress of though' view holds that while the core content has 'zero' style value it is 'paraded' in ornamental images / expressions which attract the greater attention of the appreciator of literature.

    Dualism (b) 'Style as a manner of expression' maintains that the same core idea can be expressed in different forms for different effects.

5. 'Sense' refers to the basic conceptual paraphrasable meaning and 'significance' refers to the total effect of the text which goes 'beyond' the basic meaning.

6. (I) Monism holds that style is inseparable from content. 'Sense' and 'significance' blend into one.

    It finds its strongest ground in poetry which is considered largely unparaphrasable or untranslatable.

7. (I) No, because pros can often be poetic and poetry may also be banal prose in verse form.

8. Foregrounding or de-automatisation is the exploitation of language i.e. the bending or breaking of the automatised rules of language to use the phonological, graphological and syntactical resources of language to surprise the reader into a fresh awareness and sensitivity. It shocks him into a 're-experience'.

9. a) Language performs different functions.
    b) A piece of text could be multifunctional.

10. Superior to Dualism :

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While Dualism accepts stylistic variants with stylistic values, it does not explain how language creates a particular cognitive view of things. Pluralism, however, holds that language contributes to the entire concept of the content and does not function as a mere dress of thought or a manner of expression.

Superior to Monism

While Monism views a text as an undifferentiated whole of language (style) and content, Pluralism has a theory of language and can show how linguistic choices are inter-related to one another within a network of functional choices. Pluralism, therefore, becomes a more sophisticated approach, much better able to analyze the intricate working of literature and leading to a more enlightened appreciation of it.