

‘Abrupt Opening’ and ‘Open-Endedness’ in Modern Poetry

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Abstract

One of the most important achievements of modern poetry is brevity compared to the circumlocution of older ones. This advantage is important in attracting attention of addressees in the busy world we live in. Contemporary poets use different methods to abridge their speech, which this not only helps the brevity of discourse, but also develops the poetic structure and the variety of modern poetic language. One of the most innovative methods of brevity in modern poetry is its abrupt opening and open-ended plot, which not only has played an important role in involving addressee in completing the plot, but also has created a new poetic structure in Persian modern poetry. In this paper, we will investigate the different methods of abridging modern poetry.

Keywords: brevity, elision, abrupt opening, open-endedness, contemporary poetry

1- Introduction

Today, living in a world full of social and cultural changes, indeed forces us to spend less time on reading literature, so that few people are interested in long poems such as *Mathnavi* and *Ghasideh*¹ styles, while they are more interested in shorter poems, shorter plots, shorter imageries and shorter stanzas. Therefore, both methods of abridging modern poems and analysing and investigating them are very important.

Reviewing the literature about brevity, it is possible to find this topic at the introduction to books about eloquence in Persian. These books mostly explain subjects like circumlocution, equivalence and brevity. The last one of which is carefully classified into two types: 'brevity via omission' and 'brevity via shortening'. Moreover, in books about Persian grammar and edition, we can always find the subject 'omission', which is classified into 'contextually discoverable omission' and 'interpretively discoverable omission'. There exist some topics on poetic brevity which is outside the domain of this research.

In this paper, we are trying to answer the following questions: firstly, how much attention have contemporary poets paid to the subject 'brevity'? Secondly, what techniques did contemporary poets use to endow brevity to their discourse? Thirdly, how much have the strategies of creating a brief poetic discourse been related to ancient literature? In what respects they can be considered the achievements of contemporary poetry?

In this paper used poem's of Persian poets such Mehdi Akhavan Sales, Ahmad Shamloo, Foroogh Farokhzad, Sohrab Sepehri, Tahere Saffarzade, Seyed Ali Salehi, Esmael Khoei, Yadollah Royaei, Reza Barahani, Ali Babachahi, Gheysar Aminpoor, Behzad Khajat, Bijan Najdi, Alireza Ghazve, Hormoz Alipoor, Hadi Khansari, Mojgan Abbasloo, that are of famous poets in contemporary literature.

2- Brevity and omission

Brevity means expressing the maximum meaning via the minimum words, provided that it would not damage clarity of meaning. In literary language, brevity is not a damage to the representation of meaning, but a means of providing more eloquent and effective works of art; in other words, the best examples of brevity are those in which the minimum number of words express the maximum amount of meaning the

¹ Something like 'ode' style

best; that is why brevity has been considered a literary art. In fact, brevity is one of the most complex ways in language which leads to individuation and resurrection of words without following any special rules (Shafi'ei Kadkani, 21, 1), however, briefly speaking 'brevity' is classified into 'brevity via omission' and 'brevity via shortening'. The former is possible via omission of a part of discourse provided that it does not damage clarity (Shamisa, 193), and the latter refers to pouring lots of meaning inside the glass of words without omitting any expression (ibid, 192), which means that speaker should express the detailed subject using the minimum number of words. This is expressed in information structure theory as a series of techniques to help the addressee obtain more amount of information. Some experts believe that whenever a subject is expressed via fewer number of words, the amount of information expressed is higher (Najafi, 22). This theory emphasizes economy of words as well.

The principle of economy plays an important role in language, so that whatever uneconomically imposes wasting of time, energy and expenses upon language is automatically omitted from it (Zahedi & Sharifi, 23). Moreover, language is simple and abridged oriented, because the best speech is the one made with fewer words without damaging its meaning and eloquence. It is not an advantage of speech to have an abridged discourse at the expense of disordering the order of discourse, omitting the sentential relations and ignoring the syntactic rules

Contemporary poets who have always been interested in finding techniques for passing away the borders of standard language norms and foregrounding the poetic language, have tended brevity as the most essential factor in differentiating proses from poems. In this paper, we try to investigate the different techniques they used to present an abridged text.

3- kinds of omission in modern poetry

Contemporary poets have used different techniques to abridge their poems, which are mostly obtained via omission of a part of discourse. In these kinds of omissions, there is always 'contextual' or 'interpretive' clues which help the addressees recreate the message. But in most of omissions, there is practically no clues outside the poets' mind, which may lead either to discovering the meaning or being confused by the ambiguity. The variety and extension of omissions in contemporary poetry have created various types of modern poetry, such as omission of 'opening' and 'closing' of a poem is one of the most important achievements of modern poetry without any

precedence from classical literature. To investigate more explicitly the techniques of omission in modern poetry, we need to introduce the different kinds of omissions in Persian grammar.

3-1- contextually discoverable omission

In ‘contextually discoverable omission’, it is possible for reader to discover via physical context the expression omitted by speaker for sake of preventing redundancy (Ahmadi Givi & Anvari, 316). Basically this kind of omission falls within the rules of grammar, because examples of this is seen in standard language. Sometimes poets use this kind of omission in modern poetry to highlight their delicacy in expressing their intentions. For instance, in the following poem:

*Gofti/ zangiaan/ gham ghorbat raa dar kaase-ye marjaani-e aan geriste-and
va/ man anduhe ishan raa [geriste-am] va / to anduhe maraa [geriste-ey]
(Shamloo, 19)*

You said/ Negros/ have wept nostalgia in its coral bowl and/ I, their sadness
and/ you, my sadness

In this poem, it is possible to discover the verbs ‘geriste-am’ (I have wept) and ‘geriste-ey’ (you have wept) via comparing it with ‘geriste-and’ (they have wept). Furthermore, ‘ah’ in Persian in an exclamation to show ‘sympathy and sorrow’, that is why he alliterates these stanzas using the words ending in ‘ah’. In modern poetry, it is noticed that a poet might omit a series of verbs via this rule, so that the large number of omissions has brought about a strange and eccentric language:

*Ahle kaashanam/ ruzegaaram bad nist/ teke naani daaram, khorde hoshi
[daaram], sare soozan zoghi [daaram]/ maadari daaram behtar az barge
derakht/ doostani [daaram] behtar az aabe ravaan/ va khoda-ey [daaram] ke
dar in nazdiki-st/ laa-ye in shab-boo-ha [ast], paaye aan kaje boland [ast]/
rooye aagahie aab [ast]/ rooye ghanoone gi-yah [ast] (Sepehri, 422)*

I’m from Kashan/ not bad/ I have a piece of bread, a bit cleverness, a little
taste/ I have a mother better than leaves of trees/ friends better than running

river/ and a God who's near here/ between dicentras, at foot of that tall pine/ on awareness of water/ on rules of plants

3-2- Interpretively discoverable omission

In 'interpretively discoverable omission', it is possible for reader to discover the omitted expressions via the register used (Anvari and Ahmadi Givi, 317). For instance, in the following stanzas, it is possible to discover the omitted verbs according to the collocational clues

Maararam reyhan michinad/ naan va reyhan va panir [mi-khorim]/ aasmani bi abr [baalaaye saremaan ast]/ atlasi-ha-ey tar [dar kenaareman ast]/ rastgaari nazdik [ast]/ [rastgari] laaye gol-ha-ye hayaat [ast] (Sepehri, 138)

My mother is picking basil/ bread and basil and cheese/ the sky cloudless / the petunia double wet / salvation close/ between flowers in the yard

There are a series of omission such as: [we eat] bread and basil and cheese, [up there] the sky [is] cloudless, [here close to us] the petunia [is] double wet, salvation [is] close, and [salvation is] between flowers in the yard.

3-3- clueless omission

In speech, it is common to use conventionally made omitted expressions, this is observed traditionally in expressions such as 'good morning, goodbye, help!, fire! and etc. (Anvari and Ahmadi Givi, 316). Furthermore, sometimes collocation between words is so strong that it is still possible for speakers to comprehend the omitted expressions. In modern poetry, this kind of omission is employed to omit expressions eccentrically so that they can create brevity, break the norms of language down, and make readers get involved in the poems' completion procedure (Hassanli, 187). As it is observed in the following stanzas, the verbs collocating with the words 'azaa' (mourning) and 'doshnam' (swearword) are discoverable without damaging the meaning:

Halaa, yek, do, se, digar bar/ araghrizan, azaa [dar budim], doshnam [midadim], gaahi gerye ham kardim (Akhavan Sales, 12, 1)

Hey, one, two, three, again/ perspiring, mourning, beshrewing, sometimes we wept as well

In modern poetry, there are countless number of examples created with this kind of omission, but the most important use of clueless omissions are found at ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ of poems which have presented two different poetic structures.

3-3-1- Abrupt opening

One kind of ‘clueless omission’ in modern poetry is abrupt opening. In this technique, poems are started without introduction, so that readers are got to recreate the unwritten opening section. This technique not only has a deconstructive identity, but also abridges poem from the redundancy of expressing what is supposed to come in later stanzas. Abrupt opening of a poem is from among the innovations of modern poetry and Dr Muhammad Reza Shafi’ei Kadkani, one of the most famous contemporary researchers and poets, believes that this is what borrowed from European poetry and says: “for 1000 years, no Persian poets have started their poems abruptly without introduction, but today, poets start their poems without an introduction with ‘*va ...*’ (and), ‘*ziraa ke...*’ (because) or ‘*ammaa*’ (but).” Today we have examples of poems that begin with conjunctions such as ‘*but*’, ‘*because*’ and ‘*and*’, and this is the direct effect of western poetry upon Persian poetry. It is as clear as day (Shafi’ei Kadkani, 284, 2).

Abrupt openings are classified in a series of types:

- Abrupt opening with ‘*va*’ (and)

The stanzas of Persian poems usually do not start with ‘*va*’ (and), except where ‘*va*’ combines with another word and produces a whole unit (Natel Khanlari, 906), but in all classic prose books such as historical, literary, fictional and interpretational books, most chapters start with ‘*va*’ conjunction and almost all traditional writers start their later chapters with ‘*va ammaa ba’ad...*’ (But then), after introduction which is mostly about praising God and prophet. At last they can explain their purpose of authoring it (Akhavan Sales, 2, 534, 535). Examples of starting abruptly with ‘*va*’ in predecessors’ works are few, while in modern poetry using ‘*va*’ is common. In these cases, ‘*va*’ is the key to enter the poem, as if the poem is started in the middle of it, and the poet has omitted some of his thought and experience via ‘*va*’.

Va in manam/ zani tanhaa/ dar astaane-ye fasli sard (Farokhzad, 245)

And this is me/ a lonely woman/ at threshold of a cold season

*Va man/ be saaheli az maahtaab mimanam/ ke gaah khashm tamuj saboor
mimaanad (Saffar Zadeh, 92)*

And me/ I am like a beach of moonbeam/ that sometimes anger is the shimmer
of patience

Va ensaan har che iman daasht, paye aab va naan gom shod (Ghazveh, 29)

And whatever faith the man had, for sake of water and bread is lost

*Va ba'ad az in-ha/ dari ke nime-baz mande baashad/ taa chamedaan mara
negah daarad (Alipoor, 90)*

And after this/ whenever a door is left ajar/ to keep my suitcase

*Vaa ghadre aan parande-ye marmooz ra ke nadanesti/ hava-ye sangini daarad
in ketab (Baba Chahi, 159)*

And you did not know the importance of that mysterious bird/ it happens a bad
condition in this book

*Va naagahaan lahze-ey digar/ mesle ghazaali teshne ke samte roodkhane
davide/ pish to myaayad (khajat, 11)*

And all of a sudden, another moment/ like a thirsty gazelle, running to other
side of a river/ is coming to you

-Abrupt opening with 'ammaa' (but)

In recent years, as a result of the eloquence of western poetry, we can find non-standard openings that announces a new eloquence in the history of Persian literature. Using 'ammaa' as opening to a poem has not been common in Persian literature, but examples of such can be found in both classic and modern English literature (Shafi'ei Kadkani, 285, 2), the effects of which can be observed in modern poetry:

*Ammaa nemidaani che shab-ha-ey sahar kardam/ bi aanke yek dam mehrbaan
baashand baa ham pelk-haaye man (Akhavan Sales, 45, 1)*

But you don't know what nights, I have passed/ without their being kind to
each other their eyelids

*Ammaa/ tanhaa/ yeki khanjare kaj bar sofre-ye soor/ dar dise badale chini
(Shamloo, 98)*

But/ only/ the crooked Bowie on the banquet table/ on the false Chinese dish

*Ammaa/ ejaaz maa hamin ast:/ maa eshgh raa be madrese bordim (Amin poor,
10)*

But/ our miracle is this: / we took love to school

Vali javaani raa nemididam, faghat tasviri ghamgin bud (Alipoor, 122)

But I didn't see my youth; it was only a sad picture

-Abrupt opening with 'cheraa ke/ ziraa ke' (because)

In poems starting with 'cheraa ke, ziraa ke, ziraa, ...' meaning 'because' as an
answering to a 'why' question, it is omission of the question which defamiliarize and
foreground language:

*Cheraa ke labkhandat rooyeshe sepide-damaan/ va boose-ha-ye to raze
shekoftan ast (khooy, 56)*

Because your smile blossoms dawn/ and your kisses are the mysteries of
anthesis

*Ziraa dar aasmaan/ shiraa-ye safarnaame-am raa/ az aaftaab dookhtam
(Royaei, 23)*

Because at sky/ I sewed from sun/ the basis of my travelogue

-Abrupt opening with 'ke' (that)

It is, in this kind of abrupt opening, as if the introduction to these poems exist in poets' mind and that is where we can find a clue. In fact the first stanzas are the later sequences of an event, happened in their mind. For instance in the following poem:

*Ke zendane maraa baroo mabaad/ joz poosti ke bar ostokhanam/ barooey ari,
amma gerd bar gerde jahaan/ na faraagarde tanhaaeiye jaanam (Shamloo, 13)*

That prison is not a battlement for me/ but a skin covering my bones/ yes a battlement/ but around the world/ not around my soul's loneliness

'Ke' is a coordinating conjunction that joins the former sentence with the latter, but in the above poem there is not a former sentence to be joined to the latter, but the relation between the omitted sentence and the existing sentence is created in the poet's mind. Poet intends to express that sentence, but he cannot express it orally, so he clarify his intentions via paralinguistic signals to indicate that the political regime governing is so dangerous that do not allow expressing what is to be expressed, bringing what is in his mind to his tongue (Por Namdarian, 46). Poet has to omit parts of his message, and putting addressee in charge of its comprehension.

Essentially it is possible to classify abrupt opening style into some parts: omission of a section, line, question and concept. We can find a series of techniques to start poems abruptly:

*...goft raavi: raah az aayande va ravand aasood/ gard-ha khabid (Akhavan
Sales, 26, 1)*

...Narrator said: way lounged from future and process/ sleeping dogs laid...

Pas sharhe gerye-haman raa begozarim baraaye ba'ad (Alipoor, 120)

So, let the description of our tears for tomorrow

3-3-2- Open-endedness

'Open-endedness' which is an approach to the brevity of omission is another innovation of modern poetry. Perhaps this approach is to a high degree under the effects of both western poetry and the cinema, and especially under the effects of the latter in open ending films, in which director leaves the addressees with creating the end of the story himself/ herself. Furthermore, the effects of the American fictional

literature – especially in ‘minimalist style’ – such as the works by ‘Ernest Hemingway’ and ‘Robert Carver’ on poets and writers of recent decades are completely obvious. One of these effects have been the ‘open-ending’ style. The first examples of this technique in modern poetry were seen in poems of Sohrab Sepehri and Mehdi Akhavan Sales:

Daryaa, hame seda/ shab, gij dar talaatome amvaj/ baad harase peykar/ roo mikonad be sahel va ... (Sepehri, 59)

Sea, in all sound/ at night, confused in turbulence of waves/ the fearful wind/ looks at the coast and ...

Ghese bi-shak raast miguyad/ mitavanest ou, agar mikhast/ lik.... (Akhavan Sales, 77, 1)

The story is undoubtedly true/ she could, if she would/ but

As we are approaching the poems of more recent decades, poets are paying more attention to this kind of omissions, so that we are facing large number of poets, using this technique exaggeratingly.

Hame chiz khodash raa be ma tahmil mikonad va maa ham ke (Alipoor, 49)

He imposes on us everything, and we that

We can even find the footprints of this technique in classic-style poetry, sonnet, which has been a protected style for centuries:

negahe dokhtaraki ke sale sevome angoo

va halo ruze delam baz midahad khabar az... (Khonsari, 85)

A senior girl's sweet drunk looks

And this is my heart that looks...

Va marde bi-mored, miravad va mimirad

Va pishe az mordan mikhoraad ta'asof ke...(Mirzaei, 15)

And undue man, goes and dies

And before dying, they regret that.....

Open-ended poems often end in blank spaces or coordinating conjunctions such as 'and', 'that', 'but', 'for', 'till' and etc. and poets who use this technique have never tried to innovate new techniques of producing open-ended poems, so that their poems mostly finishes similarly:

Pas kabootaraane aan hame abie bi-enteha/ koja rafte-and/ke gonbade shekaste-ye masjede shomaa/ in hame khamoosh-o bi-azan ... (Salehi, 804)

So where have gone/ the doves of this eternal blue/ that the broken door of your mosque/ is this silent and without.....

Angosht-haye ertejalie khod raa dar ham tanide-and dar atraafe in heram/ va amah/baa gaazha ke man az ruyash..... (Barahani, 87)

Their spontaneous fingers are clinched against this pyramid/ and moon/ by my biting her face....

Man balad nistam bekhaabam, vali shomaa (Alipoor, 35)

I don't know how to sleep, but you

Man ham tamaame an-che raa ke nadide boodam/ va har che raa ke nemikhaastam bebinam va beshnavam/ in vaghte sobh raa..... (Baba Chahi, 138)

Me, whatever I hadn't seen/ and whatever I didn't want to see or hear/ this morning I.....

Va jome-ha, jome/ dar enteha-ye taghvime divar ast/ agar ke in-choninam man.../agar ke aanchonani to... (Najdi, 130)

And Sundays, Sunday/ is at the end of calendar/ if I am so.../ if you are such....

Ghorube ruze doshambe be vaghte ma'alum

Voghu-e ghatle zani ra be name khanom..... (Abbassloo, 29)

At the sunset of a manic Monday with the time set

Occurred the murder of a lady called ma'am get....

4- Conclusion

An abridged discourse, keeping transference and beauty, is the most important achievement of modern poetry. Contemporary poets were highly interested in brevity of discourse, and used different techniques to give extensive variety to poetic language. Approaches to brevity is composed of two parts: abridged constituents and omission. Investigations indicate that this variety, especially with regard to omission, have provided variety of poems with regard to both syntactic structures and poetic forms. 'Abrupt opening' and 'open-endedness' are from among the most important achievements of the techniques of omission, which we cannot find their footprints in modern poetry. The approaches conducted by contemporary poets have been successful – except for cases in which poets have overindulged themselves in something – in endowing the poems variety and foregrounding.

Appendix

1- A translation of Information theory in Persian language was first presented as a speech by Abol-Hassan Najafi, the Iranian translator, researcher and critic, in 1990. At 1998, the tape scripts of his speech was published in *Karname* (the literary journal). He stressed that how in a literary or artistic work, it is possible to attract the addressees' attention and transfer the maximum amount of information. According to this theory, the amount of information transferred does not depend upon the nature of words, but it depends on a series of factors. Najafi believes that hearers' expectations of what words stand for, and the use of unused words are effective in increasing the amount of information transferred. Abbreviation and brevity are important techniques in rising the

amount of information transferred. He stresses that the more meaning is expressed through fewer words, the more the amount of information would be (Najafi, 18-26). The name *information structure* was first adopted by Halliday (1967) and then was completed by Lambrecht (1994).

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