CHAPTER FOUR
THE PROPOSED STYLISTIC APPROACH: AN OUTLINE

If we fail to look specifically for something, we may find ourselves staring blankly at everything.
- Kenneth Burke

Introduction

This chapter proposes an approach to the analysis and teaching of poetic texts at the undergraduate level in Yemen and similar contexts of tertiary education. The approach is stylistic in nature. It starts from the language of the text and refers all interpretive judgments back to authorial textual preferences. The approach is also eclectic. It draws on theoretical and practical arguments garnered from literary stylistics, Iser’s theory of aesthetic response and practical stylistics. These combinations are proposed to meet the requirements of the two roles assumed by the researcher, namely, the role of the stylistician-analyst and the role of the stylistician-teacher. They are also proposed with specific reference to tertiary education contexts where poetry is learnt as a subject. The stylistician-teacher role is different from the stylistician-analyst role but presupposes it and builds on it. A necessary, and not unwelcome, consequence of this eclecticism is the compromising of a number of dichotomies which are popular in the field.

The chapter is divided into two main sections, one dealing with the stylistic approach and the other with the pedagogical approach. The stylistic analysis section details two theories of style: Style as Choice and Style as Deviation. It is along the lines of these theories that the poetic texts will be analyzed in the next chapter. The other section, the pedagogy section, proposes criteria for the selection of texts, classroom tasks and test tasks. Again, it is along these principles that the poetic texts are selected and ‘taught’ in the next chapter. It may be emphasized here that neither the analytic procedures nor the pedagogical suggestions are sacrosanct. They may be adjusted or added to in response to the nature of the poetic texts and/or the particularities of the classroom situation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the proposed approach is informed by the peculiar nature of language use in poetry and its concomitant demands for analysis and pedagogy as well as by the type of difficulties experienced by EFL learners and teachers of poetry as epitomized by the Yemeni context. These two factors are equally important in shaping the design of the approach. The first factor, the nature of poetic discourse and its implications for reading, has been discussed in considerable detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation, while the details of the second factor are set out in Chapter Three. For convenience and ease of reference, however, the essential points of the two factors will be recapitulated.

Poems offer an unconventional mode of communication in many respects. Although most poems are about familiar themes, poetry is far from being a mundane celebration of the familiar. Poets, like other artists, are not bound by the restrictions that regulate conventional discourse. They do not have to be true, do not have to be adequately informative, do not have to be relevant and do not have to be clear either. Indeed, they are expected to flout these conversational norms and only then do their creations acquire an ‘artistic’ character. The end product is a discourse that seemingly lacks cohesion. The artistic design of poems is equally unorthodox. A poem is a self-contained discourse cut off from any direct extra-textual context. It does not make an unproblematic reference to reality but instead makes an out-of-the-ordinary representation of familiar events and experiences. Poets are also often deliberately ambiguous, leaving gaps in their poems and making non-sequential arguments and descriptions. The end product is also a discourse that is seemingly incoherent. In teaching students to ‘read’ poetry, teachers need to draw students’ attention to this deviant nature of poetic discourse and to the need for adjusting customary reading habits. Self-contained and non-referential as they are, poems cannot be read as casually as students read conventional discourses like newspapers and textbooks. The reading of poetry calls for an unusually careful attention to language in order for (student) readers to establish the unstated cohesive links and to construct a context for the text. The students also need to activate their schematic knowledge of the world in order to fill in the gaps and render the poems coherent.

The other factor relates to the nature of the actual difficulties faced by EFL learners and teachers of poetry as exemplified by the Taiz University (TU) case, already detailed in the previous chapter. The dominant scenario at the poetry classes
of TU, as suggested by the findings of the pre-tests, is still a ‘traditional’ one. Most of the poetry teachers find the ‘classics’ irreplaceable because they contain the ‘best uses of language’. The ‘content’ of these poems is what matters and linguistics is treated as an unwelcome intruder. The teachers confuse the learning of poetry as a subject with the study of poetry as a discipline and are mainly concerned with imparting, and subsequently retrieving, information ‘about’ the prescribed texts and hope, obviously against hope, that their students’ literary sensibility is refined and language competence enhanced. The students’ opinions stand in stark contrast to their teachers’. According to 78.57% of the sampled students the current pedagogy has failed to satisfy their learning objective by choosing to sanctify poetry and guarding it against the ‘harmful’ influence of the ‘scientific study of language’. More than half the sample disapprove of the prescribed texts and struggle hard with the language of these texts. Instead of sensitizing their students to the nature of linguistic organization in poems, teachers, who evidently wish to emerge as the know-all authorities, opt to dominate the show by lecturing for long hours on the social and cultural history that might have led to the writing of the poem in question and on ‘the meaning’ of the poem. Neither attuned to the workings of language in poetic discourse nor given any practice in reading poetry on their own, 76.53% of the sample are put off English poetry and 79.61% demand pedagogical innovation.

The aim of this study is not merely to discount the current methodology but rather to suggest an approach that will ‘mind the gap’ and prevent it from widening. The need is for an approach which acknowledges, and explicates, the “poetentiality” of poetry (Widdowson, 1992, p. 164) and which has the potential to ameliorate the difficulties encountered by Yemeni and, by implication, other EFL learners and teachers of poetry. The approach suggested in this study is a stylistic approach. The benefits that can be obtained from incorporating a stylistic methodology into mainstream poetry pedagogy have been demonstrated in the second chapter of this dissertation. To recap briefly, a prominent feature of any stylistic approach is its focus on language. The starting point in a stylistic analysis is linguistic choices, or textual preferences, and the analytical procedures used in the process of explication are linguistic procedures. The detailed attention to language that a stylistic approach entails, coupled with the EFL learners’ interest in language and acquaintance with explicit discussion of its structure, serves to effect a long-overdue integration of the learning of language and the learning of poetry. This integration should be able to
achieve the target of relating the learning of poetry to the students’ learning objectives by way of extending the students’ formal knowledge of language into an awareness of language in use and the possible effects that may be achieved by the slightest of variations in linguistic choices. Another advantage of a stylistic analysis is that the detailed analysis of linguistic choice at the different levels of language organization helps students relate the seemingly disconnected parts of the text by providing the unstated cohesive links and therefore establishing the unity of the text. A third benefit of the adoption of a stylistic approach is that it is one way, an effectual way indeed, of enabling students to reach a stage of autonomy, a stage where they can read without help unseen poetic texts with adequate understanding. Besides starting from the familiar, i.e. knowledge of language, stylistics provides students with a metalanguage that gives them a sense of control and of direction by indicating what they should look for and how to look for it. It helps them articulate in explicit terms the meanings they arrive at and defend these meanings by externalizing the interpretive mechanisms they used in the process of meaning-making. It also helps them work out the validity or otherwise of the interpretive statements made by others. The question that remains is the choice of the stylistic approach from among the plethora of theories of style that has enriched the field of literary criticism.

One approach that seems to meet these demands is a literary stylistic approach. The choice of literary stylistics over more recent developments in the study of style, like critical stylistics and feminist stylistics, is justified by two reasons. Firstly, literary stylistics is less politically or ideologically committed. Its concern with the representation of reality in literary texts is more from the vantage point of the (reader) analyst than from that of the author. As such, it is not so much concerned with the unmasking of ideologies and denaturalization of common-sense assumptions as with the represented reality as mediated by the reader’s socially determined language. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the literary stylistician’s concern is more with the language of the text itself than with the ideological perceptions behind specific uses of language or with the ‘empowerment’ of readers. These two theoretical differences, and the consequent methodological differences, make literary stylistics the most appropriate approach for use in EFL classes of poetry where students are ‘learning’ to read poetry at the undergraduate level. Other recent developments in stylistics, viz. cognitive stylistics and pragmatic stylistics, are also discounted due to their highly technical metalanguages. Analyses along the lines
advocated by these stylistic theories are perhaps the least replicable by the students; the metalanguage is not accessible and the technicalities of analysis may indeed bar enjoyment and hamper the students’ interaction with the text. The preference for literary stylistics is therefore explainable by the pedagogical orientation of the study and the exclusion of possible alternatives is justified by their relative ineffectiveness as pedagogical tools in undergraduate EFL classes of poetry.

It should be pointed out here that the literary stylistic approach adopted in this study is not a single theoretical position propounded by a single stylistician. Instead, it is a composite of theoretically related threads of thought traceable back to the literary theory of Roman Jakobson. The common denominator about these theoretical and analytical publications is a concentration on language and a tendency to view style as constituted by a combination of choice from the available resources of language and of deviation from conventional linguistic choices. For this reason, the researcher chooses to discuss the proposed stylistic approach in this chapter under the two rubrics ‘Style as Choice’ and ‘Style as Deviation’. These two conceptions of style are shared by most literary stylisticians but receive different degrees of attention and different treatment. The nomenclature is not new but the researcher will attempt to track and piece together the theoretical claims of each conception of style in the pronouncements of different literary stylisticians. The aim is to give a more coherent shape to, and a more comprehensive treatment of, these two views of style which inform the approach and along whose terms the poetic texts in the next chapter are analyzed.

An obvious feature of this approach is its undivided attention to ‘literary’ texts. Like most ‘typical’ exercises in stylistic analysis, literary stylistic analyses are characterized by the “three Rs” (Simpson, 2004, p. 4). They are rigorous (the methods are based on an explicit framework of analysis), retrievable (the methods are carried out through criteria agreed upon by stylisticians and therefore capable of being retrieved) and replicable (the methods are transparent enough to be tested for validity of conclusions and to be applied to other texts). Literary stylistic analyses are also systematic and “multi-levelled” and the interpretations offered are said to result from “a simultaneous convergence of effects at a number of levels of language organization” (Carter and Simpson, 1989, p. 7). The rigorousness and systematicity of the analyses, the retrievability and replicability of the methods, and the explicitness and accessibility of the critical metalanguage make literary stylistics an approach
capable of meeting the pedagogical demands of poetic discourse. Despite its attractions, however, literary stylistics is not without its own problems and these have invited heavy, yet valid, criticisms.

The harshest and most explicit of these attacks come from Fish (1973, cited in Weber, p. 2), Gower (1986) and Lecercle (1993, cited in Simpsons, 2004, p. 4). Fish accuses ‘structural’ stylistic analyses of being heavily text-based and of assigning authority mainly to the text. The only relevant context for the analyst is the linguistic context, with other extra-textual contexts being beyond the remit of stylistics. Fish argues that by locating stylistic effects in textual structures, these stylisticians deny the individual response to the text. As a result of this detachment, analyses, according to Fish, are characterized by interpretive leaps from ‘syntactic preferences’ to ‘habits of meaning’. There is no rigorous basis to the selection of features that merit analytical attention. The claims of objectivity and scientificity are also shattered. Any act of description, Fish argues, is itself an act of interpretation mediated by the reader’s assumptions.

Contemporary practitioners of literary stylistics have not been insensitive to these charges and do not therefore claim to be objective, and least of all ‘scientific’. They acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations (e.g. Short, 1996) and show readiness to connect formal features to particular interpretations. They also acknowledge that meaning is created in the activity of reading not lifted magically from the text. What they are reluctant to do, however, is acknowledge overtly the role of the reader in the process of meaning-making. Whether the motivation is to maintain the ‘distinctive character’ of stylistics or to keep the theoretical debate going, the presence of the reader is not openly admitted. The presence of a reader figure, however, the analyst, is always lurking in the background but no where would its role be made explicit.

The charges against literary stylistics do not stop here. Gower accuses stylisticians of treating literature as an object, of equating ‘linguistic analysis’ with the poem and of giving analysis more importance than the activity of reading itself. Such ‘analytical’ approaches, according to Gower, can do little to help students read and enjoy literature. The fiercest of the attacks was unleashed by Lecercle, who characterized stylistic practices as ‘ailing’ and who sounded their death knell at the close of the twentieth century.
Although, much to the disappointment of Lecercle, literary stylistics is still alive and well today, Gower’s concern about subordinating reading to analysis in the poetry classroom and Fish’s concern for the reader and call for a more active reader role are still valid concerns. The need therefore is for an approach that is as comprehensive as literary stylistics but which also embraces these other concerns. For lack of such an approach, the researcher chooses to retain the rich literary stylistic approach and to build on it in order to remedy its ‘shortcomings’. Before proposing the supplementary approaches, it should be stated here that the researcher in this study would need to assume two roles, the role of the stylistician-analyst and the role of the stylistician-teacher. The distinction between these two roles is an important proposal of this study. The differences between the two roles are in terms of aim and method, involving systematicity and comprehensiveness of analysis, degree of technicality involved and degree of attention to linguistic detail. As a stylistician-analyst, the researcher would need to make a systematic and comprehensive analysis, taking heed of the three Rs and of the charges against literary stylistic analyses. A literary stylistic approach, as it has been suggested, is capable of making an in-depth analysis of literary-linguistic effects but, to answer the charges leveled against it, literary stylistics needs to be synthesized with a theory of reading that acknowledges in a more salient way the role of the reader in the construction of poetic meaning but which does not contradict literary stylistic assumptions. The most likely candidate is reader-oriented critical theories. But reader-response theory is not a single theoretical position either. The term is used to designate a variety of critical approaches which share an acknowledgement of the credibility of individual experience and its important role in the interpretation of literary texts. Different strands of reader-response criticism, however, take different perspectives as regards the role of the reader and assign the reader roles of varying authority. This study will select for the proposed synthesis only the strand which is seen to be most compatible with the theoretical assumptions of literary stylistics. The choice of the reader response approach, its assumptions and the ways in which it is compatible with literary stylistics will be discussed later in this chapter under ‘Theories of Reading’. A combination of these two theories, in the right proportion, should satisfy the aims and make more efficient the methods of the stylistician-analyst.

The other role to be assumed by the researcher, viz. the role of the stylistician-teacher, necessitates a change of aim and consequently of methodology. The aim of
the stylistician-teacher is to take students to a level where they can read and enjoy poetry on their own. The students would need to make use of their knowledge of language and language structure, and of their knowledge of poetry and the world at large. The aim is not to make stylisticians of the students but to make readers who are sensitive to the communicative potential of language and who take responsibility for their ideas. As the aim changes so will the methodology. The stylistician-teacher’s concern is clearly more pedagogical than theoretical and the methodology will correspondingly be less theoretical, less technical and less comprehensive. A stylistician-teacher tends to be selective, isolating only those linguistic choices and structures which serve to highlight the thematic concerns of the text and which serve to help the students find a way into the poem and make their own readings of it. This should not be taken to suggest that the roles of the stylistician-analyst and stylistician-teacher are in any way mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the two roles are complementary. The stylistician-teacher presupposes the work of the stylistician-analyst and takes up where the analyst left off. It is the difference of aim that makes the teacher pedagogically treat the analysis in order to tailor it to the needs of the students. For this reason, the combination of literary stylistics and reader response theory is necessarily retained but, to meet the demands of pedagogy, the combination needs to be synthesized with a pedagogically oriented approach to the study of language use in poetry. The approach has to be compatible with claims of literary stylistics and the selected strand of reader response. The approach has to be compatible with claims of literary stylistics and the selected strand of reader response. The best candidate to forge this synthesis is the ‘practical stylistics’ approach advanced by Widdowson (1992). Because this approach is more relevant to the pedagogical than to the stylistic component of the proposed approach, its relevant assumptions will be detailed separately under ‘The Pedagogical Component’.

**The Stylistic Analysis Component**

*Theories of Style*

The basic ingredient of the proposed stylistic approach is constituted by literary stylistics, the type of approach advocated and practised in Leech (1969, 1985), Levin (1965), Traugott and Pratt (1980), Cook (1994), Short (1996), Verdonk (2002), Simpson (2004), and van Peer & Hakemulder (2006). The approach has evidently been enriched over the years by the contribution of several theorists of style and practitioners of literary stylistics. Each, however, laid emphasis on specific
aspects of style in literature and no attempt has been made to bring together these different, albeit related, positions. This study presents an attempt to piece together the arguments of these stylisticians on the basis of their commonalities. The approach will accordingly be discussed under two headings, viz. ‘Style as Choice’ and ‘Style as Deviation’. Each of these theories of style will be discussed in terms of the ingredients of the conceptualization of style and in terms of their contribution to the analytical framework to be employed in the analysis of the poems in the next chapter.

It should be noted here that the discussion of the theories of style below, and the discussion of the theories of reading and of practical stylistics later in the chapter, is not intended as a review of the literature on these approaches. The intention is rather to highlight the arguments and theoretical claims that inform the stylistic analyses and pedagogical treatments of the selected texts.

**Style as choice.** The conceptualization of style as choice is perhaps the ‘older’ of the two theories. Style has always been regarded as a matter of choice. The style-as-choice theory views style as the result of “a tendency of a speaker or writer to consistently choose certain structures over others available in the language” (Traugott and Pratt, p. 29). This is perhaps one of the most accurate characterizations of this approach to the study of style. The three most important ingredients of this characterization which merit detailed discussion are choice, consistency and availability.

In this view of style, language is seen as a reservoir of lexical items and syntactic structures out of which writers, and of course speakers, make choices. Each writer will draw upon the same reservoir but what makes different styles distinctive is “the CHOICE of items, and their distribution and patterning” (Wales, 2001, p. 371 ([original uppercase]). Language is the superset and the different styles are the subsets which often intersect partially but seldom totally. Total intersection of styles is ruled out because every choice made is motivated. Writers make idiosyncratic selection of lexis and structures that best represent their version of reality. Besides, preferences of style are constituted by two categories of stylistic factors. Mukherjee (2005) speaks of user-bound factors and situation-bound factors. User-bound factors include the writer’s age, gender, regional background, social background and idiosyncratic choices. Situation-bound stylistic factors, on the other hand, include the components of a given communication situation such as medium, participation in discourse, attitude, purpose and field of discourse. Writers will ‘choose’ the style markers which
match up with their own individual characteristics and idiosyncratic preferences and which are consistent with the world views they wish to propagate. In other words, these user-bound and situation-bound stylistic factors will always work together and influence each other in the production of distinctive style markers. Stylistic choice, however, is not exclusively restricted to the form, or the dress of the thought, as the previous discussion might have implied. Writers choose their content too. It would be a mistake to believe that a writer has an “invariant or predetermined” content (Traugott and Pratt, p. 29) for which he or she sets out to choose an appropriate form. Content, like form, undergoes a process of refinement in the process of writing until the writer’s choice of semantic structures is ‘felt to be’ compatible with and appropriate to the choice of formal structures. In this perception of style, form and content are both a matter of deliberate choice and have a mutual effect on each other. Any discussion of one necessarily entails discussion of the other.

The second important ingredient of the conceptualization of style as choice is ‘consistency’. Not every textual feature is significant, nor does every authorial choice merit careful analysis. Writers will often, indeed they often do, make many ‘unconscious’ choices. Traugott and Pratt remark that

… if one had to make all phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic choices consciously, it would take a long time to write anything at all. In literature, as in all discourse, a sense of the “best way of putting something” can be intuitive or conscious; the result as far as the reader is concerned will be much the same. (p. 29)

The problem with this view is that the judgment on the intuitiveness or otherwise of the textual choices may rest entirely on the ‘intuition’ of the analyst. How do readers tell which choices are deliberate and which are incidental or perhaps induced by characteristics of the genre? It may be deducted from this conceptualization of style as choice that the notion of ‘consistency’ provides a way round the problem. By consistency is meant consistency of interpretation. That is, the choices which can be ‘shown’ to relate interpretively and operate cohesively in the world of the text to produce a consistent pattern of meaning, or interpretation, are ‘treated’ as conscious choices which are stylistically significant. The emphasis given here to the words ‘shown’ and ‘treated’ is meant to underline the role of the reader in the identification of conscious choices. If a choice is judged by the reader to be consistent with a particular interpretation of the text, it will be treated as a matter of deliberate design.
and its potential significance will be maximized. An important implication of this view is that one reader’s conscious choice may be another reader’s incidental choice. Individuals are different and so are individual interpretations. Readers will make significant the choices which are consistent with their interpretation and which serve to achieve the cohesion of the text. This is a natural, and not unwelcome, entailment of considering consistency as an ingredient of the concept of style as choice.

The last, but not least, important feature of the conceptualization of style as choice is ‘availability’. This is a very central and defining characteristic of this view of style. Stylistic choices are seen as a subset of choices available at a superset. In fact, this is a limiting view of style since it imposes constraints on the freedom of the writer. The range of possible choices is restricted by the range of permissible choices in the syntactic, semantic, phonological, and pragmatic components of the language system. According to Traugott and Pratt, “the first three systems (the syntactic, semantic and phonological) specify the range of structural possibilities” (p. 33). Any textual choice ultimately draws upon the lexical stock of the language and the structural stock available at these three sub-systems of language. The fourth sub-system, the pragmatic component, “specifies in part the contextual basis for choice, including such factors as intended audience, topic, genre, channel, degree of formality” (p. 33). In sum, stylistic choices, at all levels of linguistic organization, are viewed as a conscious selection from an already available set of choices and as a choice motivated by characteristic of the writer as well as of the context of writing.

Traugott and Pratt (pp. 33-34) remark that the view of style as consisting of choice from a “preexisting range of potentialities” is unacceptable to some people. On the one hand, it is “incompatible with our usual view of the artist as a creator”. The choices were ‘already there’ after all. On the other hand, it “undervalues the originality of the artist”. The choices a particular writer makes could well be, or have been, made by another writer. It is only a matter of ‘choice’ rather than ‘novelty’. But the authors were quick to the defense by emphatically emphasizing that “this is not the case”. The resources of the linguistic system at any given point of time are finite. These limited resources are exploited by speakers to produce a potentially infinite set of actual utterances. Despite their ‘infinity’, the utterances are all ‘familiar’ in one way or another. Little do they strike us as ‘new’ or ‘original’; and herein lies the originality, and creativity, of writers. They make choices out of the same language stock available to us to create structures that are “deeply meaningful, imaginatively
fulfilling, and expressive of our most fundamental concerns as human beings”. In a sense, writers attempt to extend our knowledge of who we are by extending our knowledge of what language is. In other words, they redefine the categories of human experience by refreshing the categories of human language. It is the linguistic choices they make that do all the magic.

Since the writers’ world-views are signposted by their linguistic choices, it is these linguistic choices (of course the ‘consistent’ choices) that should engage the attention of the stylistician-analyst. The linguistic expressions are used “for some purpose and to some effect” (Verdonk, 2002, p. 5). The choices become crucial in any act of reading and interpretation. The investigation into style as choice becomes an investigation not only into the mechanism of the choice but also into its purpose and possible effect(s). In the words of Verdonk, an analyst needs to consider “what makes an expression distinctive, why it has been devised, and what effect it has” (p. 3). Accounting for the textual choices is the business of the stylistician-analyst. Simpson (2004) offers a beautiful reformulation of this concern.

What is of interest to stylisticians is why one type of structure should be preferred to another, or why, from possibly several ways of representing the same ‘happening’, one particular type of depiction should be privileged over another. Choices in style are motivated, even if unconsciously, and these have a profound impact on the way texts are structured and interpreted. (p. 22)

**Style as deviation.** Whereas the theory of style as choice is associated with variation, the second theory of style is a theory of deviation, “the negative side, so to speak, of variation” (Leech, 1985, p. 40). The theory of style as deviation has been given comparatively much more attention in the literature (e.g. Levin, 1965; Leech, 1969; Traugott and Pratt, 1980; Leech, 1985; Short, 1996; Simpson, 2004; van Peer and Hakemulder, 2006). None of these attempts provides an exhaustive account of the theory but perhaps the most comprehensive of these accounts is found in Leech (1969, 1985).

The defining feature of the theory of style-as-deviation is the rejection of the available language resources. The artist makes linguistic choices but choices which are not ‘permissible’ in everyday parlance. In fact, it is this particular feature which sets the two theories of style apart. Choice is a common denominator about the two
Leech (1985) distinguishes three types of deviation on the basis of the type of ‘expected norms’ which are violated. Where the norms are the norms of language as a whole, the deviation is “primary”. Where the deviation is not from the norms of language in general but from the norms of the text or of the genre, the deviation is “secondary”. Primary deviation is expected. All art is expected to be deviant and to disrupt the normal communication process. Primary deviations become a ‘conventional’ feature of the genre. At some point the deviations become so ‘automatized’ or conventionalized that they cease to make an effect. Writers overcome this effect of predictability by violating their own violations, producing secondary deviations. For this reason, secondary deviation is also termed “conventional variation” (p. 48). Leech points out that the different levels of deviation that are recognized in poetry presuppose each other. Primary deviation presupposes a language system and secondary deviation presupposes primary deviation. Leech also remarks that in the same way that secondary deviation presupposes primary deviation, “so it is possible for a tertiary deviation to build upon the norms of secondary deviation” (p. 50). In tertiary deviation, the norms infringed are internal to the text. Tertiary deviation, therefore, presupposes both secondary and primary deviation. The poet first deviates from the norms of language and then develops a pattern of expectations specific to the text but in the end chooses to depart from these newly developed patterns. In effect, therefore, the infringement of text-internal norms may take us back to the norms of language from which the poet sought a departure in the first place. Levin finds it necessary, therefore, to remark on the “relative nature of norms and deviant expressions”. According to Levin,

A priori any given form occurring in a poem may either constitute a deviation or be part of a pattern making up the norm. Thus, if archaisms or foreign terms were used sparingly in a poem, they would be internally deviant. If, on the other hand, they saturated a poem, then they might very well serve to establish a norm against which it would be the standard terms that would be deviant. (p. 230)

It may be pointed out, as a last word on the deviation types, that the term ‘external’ deviation is sometimes used to refer to primary deviation (e.g. Levin, 1965; Short, 1996) and the term ‘internal’ deviation to denote both secondary and tertiary
deviation. There are two reasons for treating both these types as an instance of the same deviation operation. Firstly, the norms that are violated in both cases are ‘internal’, either to the genre or to the text. Secondly, tertiary deviation, as will be demonstrated in the discussion below, is not a frequent choice of writers and is rarely attested in the literature. Clearly, Leech’s three-way distinction recognizes minor ‘theoretical’ distinctions between deviation types which are elsewhere ‘lumped together’. The present study will, in the analysis of the texts, adopt Leech’s three-way distinction between types of deviation. It may be repeated here, however, that the difference between the two positions is more a question of nomenclature than of theoretical arguments.

Primary deviation is the most important of the three deviation types because it is deviations at this level that characterize poetry, and literature generally, and give it its ‘conventional’ character. Leech recognizes two main forms of primary deviation. The first is “abnormal irregularity” and the second is “abnormal regularity” (1985, p. 46 [original uppercase]). Both forms are marked by a rejection of the conventional resources of language. In the first, the language allows a choice but the poet “goes outside the normally occurring range of choice”; in the second, the language allows a choice but the poet “denies himself the freedom to choose, using the same item in successive positions” (p. 45). In the stylistics literature, the two forms are often given separate treatment, with the first form termed ‘deviation’ and the second form termed ‘repetition’ and/or ‘parallelism’ (e.g. Leech 1969; Short, 1996; Simpson, 2004). The present study favors Leech’s (1985) treatment of both forms as different manifestations of the same phenomenon, namely, deviation. In both forms, the writer deviates from conventional norms of communication by making ‘unconventional’ linguistic choices.

Abnormal regularity is marked by the repetition of structures wholly or partially. The language system offers choices at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes but the writer chooses to break away from the available options by opting for the same choice over and over again. At the lexical level, the writer could repeat single words either in successive or intermittent positions. At the syntactic level, the repetition could extend to complete phrases, clauses or even stanzas. These repeated chunks are called ‘refrains’ and could serve to intensify an emotion which is felt to be imprisoned by the inadequacies of the conventional resources of language. The deviation here, in the form of refusal of freedom, is triggered by the desire to express
something which is found to be inexpressible otherwise and the repetition is used to intensify this effect.

The other “more interesting” method of abnormal regularity is that of parallelism where “some features are held constant (usually structural features) while others (usually lexical items, e.g. words, idioms) are varied” (Short, 1996, p. 14). That is, parallelism differs from exact repetition in that structural parallels are repeated but lexical items are varied. Parallelism is most apparent at the levels of syntax and phonology. At the level of syntax, identical syntactic structures help to establish meaning connections between the parallel structures. Short calls this the “parallelism rule” (p.14). According to this rule, parallel meanings are prompted by parallel structures and the reader is invited to look for semantic relations (whether of identity or contrast) between the varied parts in the parallel structures. These parallel meaning structures, which are motivated syntactically, may be reinforced by parallelisms at the phonological level. Alliteration and assonance are two examples of phonological parallelisms. The first involves the repetition of the same, or similar, consonants while the second involves the repetition of vowel sounds. In both cases, the phonetic structure of two, or more, words is the same except for a slot, or two, at regular positions. While this phonological parallelism usually enforces a meaning connection between the lexical items, it also usually serves to enact the poem’s general concern. The other two, more significant, examples of phonological parallelisms are rhyme and meter. Rhyming words, whether they occur line-finally or line-internally, also share the same phonetic make-up except for a slot or two. But while the varying slot with alliteration is in the final position, the varying slot with rhyme is in the initial position, with the final position remaining constant and occupied by a vowel and a syllable-final consonant(s), if any. Meter, defined as an “extra layer of rhythmic structuring” (Short, 1996, p. 127 [original italics]) is also the product of parallelism at the level of phonology. A metered poem is marked by an ‘overregulated’ pattern of succession of stressed and unstressed syllables within lines. The lines may have the same length and same rhythmic structure but the sounds are of course varied and that is what makes meter an illustration of phonological parallelism rather than repetition. Like with other examples of sound parallelism, rhyme may be used to bind important concepts together and meter to mimetically enact the meaning or the flow of events.

Abnormal irregularity, on the other hand, is marked by the disruption of ‘expected norms’ of linguistic expression. The norm referred to here is the language
itself as a system composed of rules and categories at the different levels of linguistic organization, namely, graphology, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse. The irregularity takes the shape of a discrepancy between what is conventionally ‘allowed’ at these levels of the language system and what actually occurs in the text. Where the irregularity is one of word order, the deviation may be called ‘syntagmatic’; where the deviation is from selectional rules, the deviation is termed ‘paradigmatic’. The discrepancy is also measured either in “determinate” or “statistical” terms (Levin, p. 229). In determinate discrepancy, the deviation is established in ‘absolute’ terms by comparison with the relevant level of the language system. A particular linguistic feature of a text is examined against the background of the conventional language system in order to ‘determine’ whether or not that feature figures in the language system. In statistical discrepancy, on the other hand, it is difficult to establish any absolute norm for the language system in its totality. The deviation, therefore, is measured in terms of “atypical densities” (p. 229). In other words, the irregularity of a particular feature in a text is measured in terms of the frequency with which it occurs in ordinary discourse and the frequency with which it is employed by the author in the space of the text. Statistical deviation is a “quantitative measure of linguistic differences between the domain and the norm” whereas determinate deviation is a “non-quantitative” measure which is “significant in the study of literary style, and especially poetry” (Leech, 1985, pp. 40-41). The remainder of this section covers the different types of deviations at the different levels of the language system and the significance for interpretation of these deviations.

Contrary to Levin’s claim (p. 227), deviations of typography (or graphology) constitute a ‘significant’ aspect of poetic language. Poetry has its own set of typographic features which, besides giving it a ‘poetic shape’, invite the reader to confer a ‘poetic meaning’ on it and on any piece of discourse so arranged on the page. In poetry, generally, lines start with upper case letters regardless of whether or not the beginning of poetic lines corresponds with the beginning of sentences. Besides, the page margins are not defined by ordinary language typographical conventions but rather by the interplay of the poet’s thematic and rhythmic choices for each line. A poetic line would end wherever its thematic and rhythmic slots have been saturated and since the number of these slots is not uniform in all lines, the margins tend to be irregular. A third typographical feature of poetry is that thematic chunks are set off by spacing rather than by the conventional five indents. A thematically related group of
lines is called a stanza. Finer distinctions between stanzas (e.g., couplet, octave, sestet) are also made on the basis of the length of the stanza. These typographical features of poetry constitute examples of primary deviation since the norms violated are those of ordinary language typography. The deviations at this level are almost always statistical since ‘new’ typographical features are rarely introduced. Flouting these poem-internal typographical rules (e.g. by changing the line-initial uppercase after it has been established or by changing the line lengths after some pattern has been recognized) would constitute secondary deviation and a departure from these secondary deviations would constitute deviation at a tertiary level.

Deviations of phonology also characterize poetry. Determinate phonological deviation may be produced by “the presence in a poem of a phoneme which does not occur in the ordinary language, or by the occurrence of a phonological sequence which does not so occur” (Levin, p. 229). This type of deviation, remarks Levin, is “almost never” found in English poetry. Statistical phonological deviations, however, are quite frequent. The aforementioned examples of abnormal phonological regularity, namely, alliteration, assonance, rhyme and rhythm, are themselves instances of abnormal phonological irregularity of the statistical type. In these examples there is an abnormally high incidence of similar sounds at successive positions and of similar stress patterns in successive feet. Less regular atypical densities of sounds are also common in poetry. A writer might choose to produce an abnormally high percentage of a particular feature specification of sounds (e.g. [+consonantal, +continuant]) in order to enact a particular theme common to a group of lines or stanzas. The job for the reader is to try and “infer an appropriateness relationship between the meaning of poetic lines and their phonetic and metrical structure” (Short, 1996, p. 149). But Short warns against the tendency to “overmilk” the significance of phonetic patterns. Readers are warned against the temptation to see poetic significance in every phonetic pattern they uncover for two reasons. On the one hand, sounds do not have inherent meanings; on the other hand, the distribution possibilities of sounds in English are too many and as a consequence “there are bound to be a fair number of accidental alliterative and assonantal patterns in any text” (p. 116). At the other two levels of deviation, phonological irregularity is also significant interpretively. Secondary deviation may be achieved by, for example, a disruption of the metrical pattern set up by the poem or by a deviation from an alliterative pattern or a rhyme scheme. Tertiary deviation, the disruption of patterns set up at the secondary
level of deviation, is the least significant and least exploited of the three levels. Nonetheless, Leech (1969), a seminal book in the field, regards all phonological deviation as "superficial" (p. 45) and "of limited importance" for interpretation because they exist "on the surface" (p. 46).

At the level of words, there is even more dispute in the literature over terminology and significance for interpretation. Some practitioners (e.g. Levin, 1965; Short, 1996) would make a distinction between morphological and lexical deviation while others (e.g. Leech, 1965) talk only of lexical deviation. Short treats neologism, the coining of new words, as the "most obvious example" of lexical deviation and treats all other possible examples as deviations of morphology. Levin, in contrast, treats all such examples as lexical and treats morphological deviations, of which he provided no examples, as 'not especially interesting'. Leech, on the other hand, treats all violations at the level of words as examples of lexical deviation. The present study favors the term ‘morphological’ for deviations at the level of word for an obvious reason. All instances of deviation at this level, whether neologisms or others, are achieved via some ‘existing’ rule of word formation. In all attested examples of deviation at this level, the poets wish to express a concept which has not been yet encapsulated lexically in language and have managed to express it by ‘stretching’ some morphological rule of word formation. Whether the rule is of affixation, compounding, functional conversion, blending or some multiple word formation process, the resultant lexical item is a deviation from the conventional rules of morphology.

The deviation may be determinate or statistical. In determinate morphological deviation, the poet produces lexical items which are not encoded in the dictionary as attested examples of usage. The class of words produced by determinate deviation includes poetic diction (poetic spellings like *thou* and archaic words like *betwixt*) and poetic nonce-formations (words made up by the poet to encapsulate poem-specific ideas). In either case, the new lexical item has been created according to some existing morphological rule of word formation. The other type of abnormality at the morphological level is measured in statistical terms. A poet may produce an abnormally high density of words belonging to a particular domain of human experience. The frequency of such lexical choices may be appropriate to the poem’s thematic concerns but relatively high in comparison with conventional texts. All these are examples of deviation at the primary level. Deviation at the secondary level is insignificant.
possible determinately and statistically. The introduction of an archaic word into a poem written predominantly in modern English or the introduction of a word belonging to a particular domain of experience into a poem written in lexis belonging to a different domain are two examples of determinate and statistical secondary deviation, respectively. Tertiary deviation of both types is theoretically possible but it is hard to think of any illustrative ‘meaningful’ examples.

Departure from the rules that combine words into larger structures constitutes syntactic deviation. Short (1996) discusses deviations from the norms of sentence structure, and of structures intermediate between words and sentences, under the label ‘grammatical’ deviation while Leech (1969) discusses them under ‘syntactic’ deviation. The present study prefers the term ‘syntactic’ because it avoids the confusion created by the ‘traditional’ view of grammar as inclusive of both morphology and syntax.

Primary level deviations of syntax may be determinate or statistical. Determinate deviations are constituted by the imparting into a text of a syntactic structure which is not part of the conventional norms of usage. But this raises two problems. Firstly, some syntactic deviations (e.g. the re-ordering of constituents within syntactic units) are so frequently encountered in poetry that they are regarded as conventionalized features of ‘poetic’ language. Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, the concept of a ‘norm’ in syntax is rather ‘fuzzy’ compared to the norms at the levels of sounds and words whose members are finite and encoded in dictionaries. This should not suggest that determinate syntactic deviation is not possible. What it should suggest, however, is that in the identification of deviant structures at this level, the analyst has to bear in mind the relative nature of syntactic norms. A norm is specific to a group of speakers at a particular temporal and special context. This brings in the significance for interpretation of the reader’s language and text schemata. Generally, deviations at this level may be syntagmatic or paradigmatic. Both types are violations of selectional restriction rules. In the former, a word occurs in ‘abnormal’ company; in the latter, a word occurs in an ‘abnormal’ context. In syntactic parlance, the former are deviations from collocational restrictions or word order rules while the latter are deviations from rules of categorization or of word selection. The other type of primary deviation, namely, statistical deviation, is less problematic. This is constituted by the introduction of atypical densities of certain structures in a text at the expense of other potential structures. Preference for one
structure over another, whether determinately or statistically, is ‘treated’ as a motivated choice which is significant interpretively. Secondary level deviations of syntax are thinkable only in a statistical sense. In a poem dominated by active voice structures, for example, the introduction of a passive structure will disrupt the pattern and call attention to itself. The last type of abnormal irregularity at this level, i.e. tertiary deviation, is also theoretically possible but a little harder to instantiate.

Closely related to deviations of syntax are semantic deviations, or abnormal irregularities of content. Violations of selectional restrictions, be they syntagmatic or paradigmatic, are best described in terms of meaning rather than of syntactic rules of combination. Whether the deviation is from rules of collocation or of substitution, the deviant item stands out because it is at variance with its neighbors in terms of meaning. In analyzing the abnormality of meaning, the analyst breaks words down into their component semantic features in order to highlight the incompatibility of content. At this stage, the deviation overlaps, in fact graduates from being syntactic to being semantic (Levin, p. 236). The incompatibility of semantic features leads to a number of meaning relations in poetry notable among which are similes, symbols, and ambiguities. In all these cases, a poet violates co-occurrence conditions by introducing an item in a context in which it would not normally occur. The result of this semantic oddity is a paradoxical content in which apparently unrelated objects or ideas are yoked together. A major part of the interpretation of this irregularity of meaning “resides in our imagining a situation where these paradoxes can be resolved” (Short, 1996, p. 43). The interpretation, although always guided by the text, is seen as part of the reader’s response in the act of reading.

Leech (1969) proposes that ‘metaphor’ is the mode of interpretation appropriate to resolve such semantic oddities in poetry. The metaphorical frame of mind will reject the literal meaning and will attempt a figurative interpretation by analogizing the deviant structure to a well-formed expression (Levin, p. 234). The analogizing process serves to conflate the deviant expression with more normal potential slot fillers in order to work out possible poetic effects. This conflation may be syntagmatic or paradigmatic, depending on the type of semantic deviation involved. Leech recognizes three main types of metaphor, namely, simple (consisting of a single metaphor), compound (two or more overlapping metaphors) and extended metaphors (developed by a number of figurative expressions and extending over several lines). These three types may themselves belong to one of four notional
classes defined according to the relation between literal and figurative senses, namely, 
concretive, animistic, humanizing and synaesthetic metaphors. The first three, each in 
its own way, represent an abstraction as human while the fourth class transfers 
meaning from one domain of sensory perception to another. Leech also proposes a 
three-stage formula for the analysis of metaphorical meanings. The first stage 
separates the literal and figurative senses; the second constructs the tenor and vehicle 
by postulating semantic elements to fill in the gaps of the literal and figurative 
expressions; while the last stage states the ground of the metaphor. It may be noted as 
a concluding remark that the abnormality of meaning so far discussed is an example 
of primary determinate deviation, i.e. meanings which deviate from the normal 
significations of the items. Primary deviation of the statistical type is theoretically 
possible but hard to exemplify, and so are secondary and tertiary deviations of 
meaning.

The last type of deviation occurs within linguistic structures above the 
sentence, namely, at the level of discourse. Poetic discourses are of their nature 
disconnected from ordinary social contexts and as such they create their own 
discoursal norms. One obvious discoursal specificity of poetry, and of other literary 
discourse of course, relates to the identity of the interactants (Verdonk, 2002; Short, 
1996; Widdowson, 1975). Unlike conventional discourses, poetic discourse dissolves 
the conventional unity of sender and addresser on the one hand and of receiver and 
addressee on the other. What obtains in poetic discourses is different from what we 
find in conventional discourses. The thoughts or feelings communicated in poetry are 
not necessarily the poet’s; in many cases they belong to some ‘persona’ that 
objectifies the inner self of the poet. In such cases the poet is not the sender of the 
message but may be the addresser. The poet may be both of course but a split 
character has been created after all. Similarly, the addressee in the poem may be 
another character, human or non-human, but the message is intended to be received 
by a particular audience. In short, the conventional sender-message-receiver 
unidirectional feature of conventional discourses does not obtain in poetry.

A concomitant discoursal characteristic is the blurring of the distinction 
between the first, second and third person pronouns in poetry. The addresser, for 
example, takes on a second person character in the context of the poem besides the 
first person feature conferred by the language system. In much the same way, the 
addressee, who/which already has a second person character, takes on a context-
induced third person feature. Widdowson (1975, p. 52) refers to this discoursal feature of poetry as “compound reference” where one person is “a unique blend of what is normally distinguished as two persons” but which is “neither of them and both of them at the same time.” Short (1995, pp. 37-38) identifies another discoursal norm violated by some poetic texts. Discourses conventionally begin at the beginning of discourses and at the beginning of sentences. They also end at the end of sentences and of discourses. Poetic discourses which start in medias res (into the midst of things) and which end abruptly are discoursally deviant. These two examples of abnormal irregularity at the level of discourse, namely, the unconventional ‘blended’ character of the interactants and the unconventional beginnings and ends, are example of primary deviation of the determinate type. Other types of deviation at this level and at other levels are extremely unlikely.

**Final remarks on the theories of style.** The study of style is integral to the study of the communicative potential of poetry. Poets, like other artists, have their own outlook on life – an outlook ‘designed’ to clash with our life experiences which are formalized, and often routinized, by our subscription to communal dogmas and collective ideologies. In the expression of their unconventional outlooks, poets often resort to unconventional modes of style. At times the stylistic choices are more conventional while at other times they stretch the expressive potential of language to the limit; in either case, the choice of style is intended to be appropriate to, and expressive of, the perception communicated by the poem.

Every poem, however, has a number of concerns expressed on different, albeit related, planes of expression. Some issues are naturally more central and are accordingly given more prominence in the artistic design of the poems. The focalization of thematic concerns is often achieved by linguistic means. These are the marked and less marked stylistic choices discussed above under the two theories of style. The means are linguistic and reside in the text but the effect of prominence is psychological and perceived by the individual reader. The Prague structuralists of the 1930s, notably Jan Mukařovský and Viktor Shklovsky, postulated the theory of “foregrounding” to describe the effect of unconventional textual choices on the reader (van Peer, 2007; van Peer and Hakemulder, 2006; McIntyre, 2003). The theory of foregrounding does in fact form the basis of literary stylistics (Cook, 1994).

The central tenet of the theory of foregrounding is that everyday usage ‘automatizes’ language and neutralizes its expressive potential. In everyday
‘referential’ communication language receives minimal attention for what it is and maximal attention for what it says. In other words, it is only a ‘carrier’ of thoughts and feelings, and when these are communicated, language is ‘used up’. What poets do is that they breathe life into the ‘consumed’ expressive potential of language by thwarting the automatism which prevails outside poetry. Poetry ‘deautomatizes’ everyday language by violating its norms and frustrating routine expectations. The disruption of the routine structures of language serves to disrupt the reader’s routine structures of thought. The effect of this is that the deviant expressions, which are often thematically significant, call attention to themselves and slow the reading process. More importantly, the deviant structures are promoted into the foreground of the reader’s attention. The background, which consists of the more convergent stylistic choices of the text, is no less significant though. In fact, it is only against these ‘normal’ stylistic options, and those of the language as a whole, that the foregrounded structures become meaningful. The study of both these stylistic choices, covered by the two proposed theories of style, is indispensable for any meaningful approach to the learning of poetry. The two types of choices are important. Any act of interpretation will most likely take the foregrounded features as a point of departure but will also have to take into account “the plain backcloth of normality against which the brighter stitches of deviation stand out” (Cook, p. 129). If it does not, the interpretation runs the risk of being impressionistic and its validity is called into question.

According to Mukarovsky, however, it is the “consistency and systematicity of foregrounding” which characterizes poetic language (cited in Leech, 1985, p. 50). Deviant structures are also found outside poetry but what makes them particularly significant in poetry is that they are “functional” (van Peer and Hakemulder, 2006) and that they form “a meaningful pattern in themselves” (Leech, 1985). Leech recognizes two such patterns, namely, a pattern of cohesion between deviations occurring in different parts of the poem and a pattern of congruence between deviations occurring concurrently but at different linguistic levels. In selecting stylistic features for analysis, therefore, it must be borne in mind that the features, whether deviant or not, have to be systematic and consistent and that the foregrounding effect is observed along a two-dimensional pattern of significance, namely, a horizontal pattern of cohesion and a vertical pattern of congruence.
Theories of Reading

It has been suggested that a combination of literary stylistics and reader-oriented approaches would help answer the charges leveled against (literary) stylistic techniques of analysis and interpretive conclusions. The stylistic analytic process is essentially a bottom-up model of textual interpretation. The starting point in bottom-up text processing is the linguistic elements in the text. The stylistic mentality hunts for textual clues that are ‘interpretively significant’. These clues are processed one by one at the different levels of linguistic expressions and are linked together and developed into an interpretive hypothesis. Different hypotheses are eventually ‘integrated’ in order to construct a ‘coherent’ interpretation of the text. Stylistic analysis, therefore, is essentially concerned with establishing the cohesion of foregrounded regularities and irregularities.

Bottom-up text processing, however, cannot by itself account for the act of interpretation for two reasons. Firstly, a literary text is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, the significance of literary texts is not simply the sum total of the meanings of the words and structures that constitute its linguistic makeup. Secondly, bottom-up processing has not been able to offer criteria for the selection of ‘significant’ textual features or to explain why deviant expressions are attention-grabbing and central to interpretation. In order to remedy these shortcomings, which are reformulations of the charges leveled against stylistics by Fish (1973/1996), this study, as has been suggested earlier, proposes to supplement the bottom-up approach of literary stylistics with the top-down reader-oriented critical approaches.

Cook (1994) identifies two trends within theories of reader response. The first trend, exemplified by the work of Wolfgang Iser, incorporates reader variation but regards the response of the reader as delimited by the nature of the text. The second trend, represented by the work of Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish, is much less accommodating. Theorists of this second trend place all the emphasis on the reader. They reject the existence of an autonomous text and declare the author ‘dead’. Instead, they adopt a ‘monistic’ view in which everything is the creation of the reader. These two trends share the belief that a reader comes to a text imbued with perceptions and life experiences and acknowledge the role of these experiences in the ‘creation’ of meaning. But while Iser views meaning as a “dynamic interaction between text and reader” (Iser, 1978, p. 107), Fish, in an anti-formalist vein, denies the text as an object and views meaning as existing solely within the reader. Iser’s
unequivocal acknowledgement of the role of the text in shaping the reader’s response makes his trend of reader-oriented criticism the most compatible with the claims and practices of literary stylisticians.

**Iser’s theory of aesthetic response.** Iser views the text and the reader as “two partners in the communication process” (p. 163). The essence of this partnership is the “gaps” in the structure of the text. Iser argues that literature, and poetry by implication, is a non-referential mode of communication. A literary text may select for representation objects from the empirical world but these objects are not merely ‘referred to’ or denoted. The selected objects are ‘depragmatized’, i.e. disconnected from their pragmatic context and re-worked in a text-internal context. The two contexts are not entirely unconnected nevertheless. The new context has to be ‘constructed’ by the reader. In this way, the reader “is given no chance to detach himself” from the act of reading (p. 109). Instead, readers need to access their external ‘treasure-house’ of life experiences in order for them to create the internal context of the text. This activity is always “guided” by the ‘structured gaps’ in the text. Iser identifies these gaps as “breaks in connection” (p. 183) which stimulate the imaginary act of the reader to provide the missing links. This is a partnership between text and reader in which both have a role to play. This partnership and the role of the ‘external’ context in the creation of the ‘internal’ context is well expressed by Iser,

A reality that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader’s consciousness. The actual content of these mental images will be colored by the reader’s existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed. (p. 38)

This is a top-down model of text processing. Readers search their minds (the top) for stereotyped descriptions of experiences similar to those represented ‘down’ in the text. The nature of the existing background experiences to be activated is guided by the nature of the gaps in the structure of the text. Reading comprehension, in this sense, is a matter of successful accommodation of incoming information into the existing storehouse of previous experiences. The focus in this approach is on the reader and on the experience called upon in the act of reading. The text is not disregarded but plays second fiddle to the reader.
Iser clearly rejects the ‘traditional’ or “archeological” approach to text interpretation (p. 5). A literary work is not an object containing “the hidden meaning” to be dug out by the expert critic. If this was the case, Iser argues, a literary work would be “used up” through interpretation and literature turned into “an item for consumption” (p. 4). But just as textual structures do not suffice to describe the reading act, reading cannot be reduced to the subjectivity of the reader either. Iser observes that “subjectivist and objectivist theories both tend to distort or ignore aspects of the reading process” (p. 24). The reading process, for Iser, is a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. Because meaning arises out of the process of interaction, the interpreter should “perhaps pay more attention to the process than to the product” (p. 18). Iser is less concerned about the final product of the interpretation than about the negotiation of meaning. He is concerned to elucidate the “potential meanings of a text” (p. 22) and warns against falling into the trap of imposing a fixed meaning. After all, the essence of literature is to centralize “excluded possibilities” (p. 72) and the act of reading cannot marginalize, or exclude, interpretive possibilities.

Finally, the act of reading, according to Iser, is a two-way communication channel. Iser’s reader processes the text and gives it a meaning but is himself “affected by what he has processed” (p. 163). The change is two-way. Just as the text is changed by the reader, so is the reader changed in the course of the reading. Iser argues that the significance of a literary work does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text but in the fact that “meaning brings out what had been previously sealed within us” (p. 157). In interpreting the text, a reader’s consciousness is constantly transformed by entering into a dialogic interaction with the reality represented in the text. The effect of this interaction is that the reader, in constituting the meaning of a text, is himself constituted. The reader’s conceptual representations are refreshed and changed by the reality represented in the text. Iser makes an eloquent formulation of this reciprocal effect,

…the constitution of meaning not only implies the creation of a totality emerging from interacting textual perspectives …but also, through formulating this totality, it enables us to formulate ourselves and thus discover an inner world of which we had hitherto not been conscious. (p. 158)
Final Remarks on the Stylistic Analysis Component

The field of literary criticism has evidently been enriched over the years by the contribution of theorists from allied, and diverse, areas of enquiry. These thinkers, understandably enough, tend to focus on one aspect of the reading process to the exclusion of the others. ‘Traditional’ critics, for example, focused exclusively on the historical context of production; formalists and New Critics solely on textual structures; while reader-response critics, like Fish, shifted all the attention on to the reader. Dichotomous thinking of this type, although frowned upon by deconstructionists, is ‘healthy’ insofar as it helps maintain the intensity of theoretical debates which, in turn, helps enrich the field of critical theory and our own understanding of the nature and function of literary discourses.

In order to present a ‘balanced’ approach to analysis and pedagogy, the present study, in the shape of its eclectic approach, will attempt to deconstruct some dichotomies which are very popular with literary theorists. The attempt is not to belittle the importance of these dichotomies or find faults with them but rather, in a deconstructionist vein, to show their ‘necessary’ incompleteness.

The first of these dichotomies is that which holds between the author vs. the text or the text vs. the reader or even the author vs. the reader as being the source of authority in any literary critical exercise. The argument proposed here is that it is difficult to exclude any of these three elements in any act of interpretation. Exclusive concern with authorial meaning is hard to defend. Whatever meaning is ‘ascribed’ by the reader to the writer has after all come down to us in the shape of textual configurations and has been ‘uncovered’ by the reader himself. In this sense, the reader and the text cannot be sidelined. A text presupposes a reader and entails a creator or an author. In an ontological sense, at least, none of the three elements can be ruled out. But just as the author has not become totally irrelevant, the act of interpretation cannot be reduced to a recovery of authorial meaning. The fact that the author expressed a particular meaning in his or her own language makes it hard for anyone to assert that they have arrived at the ‘intended’ meaning. Any assertion to this effect would treat language as if it were a transparent mode of communication. On the contrary, any use of language, whether by the writer or by the reader, is always socially and historically determined. Readers can only process the text through their socially determined categories of meaning. In effect, therefore, the writer’s language can never be totally recovered by a reader who is located in a
different social and historical context. Neither can of course the writer’s meaning. 
Text and reader, therefore, can hardly be excluded.

Equally hard to defend is exclusive concern with the text. It is hard to see how 
a critic can claim to have interpreted a text without reference to anything outside of it. 
In most such cases, indeed in all of them, world and text schemata are “silently 
presupposed or smuggled in obliquely” (van Peer, 1987, p. 601). 

In their attempt to bring the reader back in action, reader-response theorists 
maintain that a text can only mean when it is read. Some of these theorists go as far as 
claiming that a text does not even exist prior to the act of reading. The general 
consensus is that it is the reader who is responsible for ‘making’ a text mean what it 
does. The reader cannot possibly be excluded. After all, whatever a text is said to 
mean, that meaning could not conceivably have been formulated by the text itself. 
Some entity outside of the text, whether it is the writer or the reader or both together, 
must be responsible for that meaning. In much the same way, however, exclusive 
concern with the reader is hardly tenable. If a text can only mean when it is read, a 
reader becomes a reader only in the presence of a text. The text cannot be excluded 
either. The approach proposed in this study stresses that the writer, text and reader all 
play a part to, albeit of unequal importance, in the act of interpretation. But in 
consistence with the nature of the stylistic approach proposed, the text is treated as 
the most important of the three elements. It is the text that mediates between author 
and reader and it is the text that guides inferences and sanctions interpretations. But 
just as the approach rejects the formalist dogma of banishing the author, it also rejects 
the New Critical dogma of excluding the reader. The presence, or absence, of an 
author is necessitated by the nature of the text itself. The gaps in the text structure are 
often filled in with details drawn from the reader’s own storehouse of experiences but 
there maybe gaps that can only be filled with reference to the biography of the author. 
Where the author is brought in, one should hasten to add, he is not used as an 
authority but only to help the reader fill in the gaps and give the text both cohesion 
and coherence. The reader and the writer, therefore, are involved but their roles are 
always dictated by the nature of the text. 

Relevant to these dichotomies is another set of dichotomies. First, there is the 
question of whether to focus on the form or the content of the poetic texts. Secondly, 
there is the choice between bottom-up and top-down approaches to text processing.
Thirdly, there is the question of the subjectivity vs. objectivity of analysis. These dichotomies will be addressed here one by one.

Although the adoption of a stylistic approach implies attention to the form of the texts, their content cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. In fact, the nature of poetic discourse, as has been discussed earlier in this study, is such that the form and content are seen to be inseparable. Whatever content the poems are said to have is expressed only through the form of the poems. But although the language of the text is the only clue to interpretation, analysis of structure cannot at all be divorced from categories of thought. It is hard to see how analysis can focus on one and exclude the other. In a similar vein, the focus on the process of reading cannot rule out the product of analysis. Much as stylisticians and reception theorists would like to focus on how readers negotiate meaning, it is only the final product that testifies to the success or otherwise of the negotiation process. The meaning-making process, very important as it is, is not an end in itself and becomes valuable only when readers can eventually come up with an interpretation which they can argue for and defend.

The second dichotomy has been addressed earlier in this chapter. Bottom-up and top-down processes have been shown to be complementary operations. Any encounter with a linguistic feature ‘down’ in the text is likely to trigger a life experience ‘up’ in the reader’s mind. The influence has been shown to be two-way. The text activates schemata, which are used to process the text and make a meaning out of it, but are themselves refreshed and changed in the process. Neither of the two models of text processing can by itself adequately describe the act of interpretation.

The third dichotomy is relevant to the first two. The choice of the ‘significant’ deviant expressions and accounting for these in terms of conceptual deviation make the analysis subjective. On the other hand, providing linguistic evidence to support both linguistic preferences and interpretation lends a sense of objectivity to the analysis. In this sense, stylistic analysis may be said to be neither subjective nor objective yet both at the same time. Iser makes an apt remark on this issue,

Objective evidence for subjective preferences does not make the value judgment itself objective, but merely objectifies the preference. This process brings to light those predilections that govern us. These can then be seen as an expression of personal norms – i.e, not objective value judgments – and in being exposed they open up an intersubjective means of access to our value judgments. (p. 25)
The Pedagogical Component

The second part of the proposed approach relates to the treatment of the stylistic analysis in order to ‘tailor’ it to the demands of pedagogy. As has been suggested earlier, this is the role assumed by the stylistician-teacher. It has also been suggested that the aim and methodology of the stylistician-teacher are different from, albeit not exclusive of, those of the stylistician-analyst. In fact, the two roles are complementary, with the teacher presupposing the work of the analyst. For this reason, the combination of literary stylistics and the Iserian trend of reader-response theory is necessarily retained but synthesized with the more pedagogically oriented ‘Practical Stylistics’ approach.

Practical stylistics, the approach advocated by Henry Widdowson (1992), has been selected for synthesis on two grounds. Firstly, it is an approach to pedagogy which is suitable for the learning of literature as a subject and which integrates the study of language and literature. Secondly, the theoretical claims and methodological procedures of the approach are very much compatible with those of both literary stylistics and Iser’s theory of aesthetic response.

Before highlighting the details of commonality and the additions practical stylistics can offer to pedagogy, it might be worthwhile to consider the issue of nomenclature. Although the approach of practical stylistics was first set down between the two covers of a single book in 1992, its arguments were first popularized with the publication of Widdowson’s seminal book Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature in 1975. The approach has been enriched ever since with the contributions of Widdowson himself, together with a number of other stylisticians. Another issue to consider is the “deliberate” fashioning of the approach, so says Widdowson himself, after I. A. Richards’ Practical Criticism. In both approaches “the poetic text is considered in dissociation from context and subjected to close scrutiny in search for its significance” (Widdowson, 1992, p. viii). But whereas the reader in practical criticism is cast in the “subservient and submissive” role of discovering meanings which are deemed to be in the text, the reader in practical stylistics is given an “author role”, providing not an “exegesis” of the text but an “interpretation” of it (p. x). The third issue to consider is the relationship between practical stylistics and pedagogical stylistics. Despite the too many similarities in principles and practices, there is a general reluctance to relate the two. Katie Wales (2001), however, equates...
the two on the basis of their attitude vis-à-vis stylistic analyses and the uses they can be put to. According to Wales,

The term **practical stylistics** can be used to describe the work of stylisticians like Widdowson (e.g. 1992) who are primarily interested in the stylistic analyses of texts as teaching aids for literature and language study by native and foreign speakers of English. (p. 313, [original emboldening])

Elsewhere (p. 373), Wales defines pedagogical stylistics in exactly the same terms and same words. Clark and Zyngier (2003) also delineate pedagogical stylistics along similar terms used by Henry Widdowson.

The account of practical stylistics outlined here is based on Widdowson (1975, 1984a, 1985, 1992). Like other orientations within stylistics, practical stylistics draws upon linguistic theory in its attempt to make explicit the linguistic patterning of texts and to account for the aesthetic effects stimulated by these patterns. But practical stylistics does not stop here; it converts the findings of stylistic analyses into materials for use in the literature classroom. Its purpose is to show the relevance of stylistic analysis to the teaching of literature as a subject. Like other stylistic approaches, it moves towards literature from a linguistics direction; but unlike many other approaches, it is less concerned with the patterns of language themselves and more concerned with the multiplicity of meanings generated by the patterns and the way in which “the learning of the language system is extended into the learning of language use” (Widdowson, 1975, p. 81).

Poetry, so argues Widdowson, provides a platform for the expression of individual, and socially unavailable, perceptions of reality. Conventional reality is experienced as coherent because it is realized through a coherent conventional language. In order for poets to express their individualized conceptions of reality, and therefore realign readers’ perception of it, they need to disturb the terms in which readers experience conventional reality. In other words, in my words, in order to diverge from socially accepted views of reality, poets need to diverge from linguistically accepted views of language. This is what Widdowson calls the “poetentiality” of poetry (Widdowson, 1992, p. 164). The value of teaching poetry, therefore, is that it allows for the restoration of individuality, so often subordinated to, and suppressed by, communal traditions and social conventions. But poetry, remarks Widdowson, will not have this effect by simply being included. Accordingly,
practical stylistics offers a pedagogy which aims to ‘bring out’ this educational value of poetry.

The pedagogy based on practical stylistics treats language and literature as “interdependent”. Widdowson (1992) emphasizes that “an awareness of linguistic potential is not distinct from a sense of literary effect” (p. 101). As such, the pedagogy is characterized by activities which “engage the students with poetic texts and draw their attention to the possible significance of particular linguistic features” (p. 90). Students are encouraged to “discern” the patterns in which the poem expresses its version of reality and to “infer” the aesthetic effects of these patterns. The linguistic patterns are not said to constitute the meanings themselves but only to act as “conditions on interpretation” which limit the range of possible readings. Practical stylistics does not deny the possibility of variable interpretation but at the same time does not entertain idiosyncratic interpretations which cannot be supported by textual evidence. The primacy given to the text, however, does not mean the elimination of the reader. Instead, it is the reader who is responsible for meaning, with the text providing guidance and direction. In fact, Widdowson gives the reader an “author role”, reading meanings into an otherwise “inert object”. Meaning, therefore, resides neither in the text nor in the reader but is created in the interaction between the two. Referential information, or background information about the poet, is not altogether disregarded either. Widdowson restricts the provision of referential information to the demands of the occasion but warns that an overdose of it may have the effect of “making a poem in some degree contextually dependent and so making it correspondingly referential” (p. 62).

Widdowson (1992) also remarks that when readers are confronted with a poem, they tend to read it referentially, looking for meanings which can be accommodated within their customary scheme of things. But since poetic discourse is cut off from the immediacy of social reality, and its language re-worked in patterns peculiar to the reality represented in the text, poetry cannot be read like referential forms of communication. Normal reading procedures are “baffled” by the “abnormality” of poetry and need to be extended in some way to be able to accommodate the peculiar nature of poetic discourse (p. 14). The only context available is text-internal and that context has to be created by the reader. The only clue to the creation of this context is the language of the text. The pedagogy offered by practical stylistics, therefore, calls for “a much closer attention to the actual
language than customarily be the case when reading” (Widdowson, 1985, p. 187). But
students need help and it is the responsibility of teachers to “provide guidance by the
careful selection and presentation of literary texts so that their potential as discourse
for developing learning can be realized” (Widdowson, 1984a, pp. 172-173). The
ultimate goal is to promote skills of analysis which help students become self-reliant
readers of poetry. The language benefits which naturally follow from a language-
based approach to text interpretation are a welcome bonus but do not constitute the
main teaching objective.

Practical stylistics is not claimed to be the only or the best approach to the
teaching of poetic texts but it certainly has its own advantages. Besides accounting for
the nature of poetic discourse, it is an appropriate approach for use in EFL
undergraduate classes where poetry is learned as a subject. It can sensitize students to
the ‘significant’ deviations of language across a poetic text (thus establishing the
cohesion of the text) and the ways in which linguistic deviation triggers conceptual
deviation (thus establishing the coherence of the text). In short, it has the potential to
ameliorate the difficulties experienced by non-native learners of English poetry. For
these reasons, the three basic ingredients of the proposed pedagogical approach,
namely, the selection of texts, the selection of activities and the selection of test tasks,
are informed by the theoretical arguments of practical stylistics.

The Selection of Poetic Texts

Given the complex nature of poetic discourse and the fact that a great deal of
poetry is not written for posterity, and least of all for classroom use with non-native
speaking learners, it becomes paramount that educators take extra care in making
their text selections. Poetry is not written according to a graded list of words and
structures and does not represent the reality which learners can unproblematically
identify with. Instead, it represents a world experience which is ‘designed’ to disrupt,
or at least problematize, our perception of it, and this experience is couched in a
language which is also ‘designed’ to break away from ordinary language. As a result,
poetry is disruptive of both language and world experiences. The inclusion of poetry
in the curriculum in non-native contexts, therefore, has to be accompanied by careful
text selection and presentation in order for the pedagogy to bring out whatever
educational values poetry is said to have. There is no sacredness about the classics,
nor is there any sanctity about established literary reputations. The ‘artistic value’ of a
text and/or its ‘time-honored’ place in the canon do not guarantee it free entry into the
curriculum of any institution. In tertiary contexts in particular, where poetry is learned as a subject, there should be a move towards a greater consideration of the learner not only as active participant in the classroom but also as a determiner of course aims and course content. This study suggests three criteria of text selection, ranked hierarchically in order of their importance. Although the criteria are proposed for the Yemeni tertiary context, they can, with minor changes, be carried over to similar non-native contexts where poetry is learned as a subject. These three criteria are 1) suitability of content 2), accessibility of language, and 3) adaptability of text. These criteria relate to schematic knowledge of the world, of language and of the genre of poetry, respectively.

The first criterion is suitability of content. What is meant by suitability of content is that for a text to be selected it has to represent experiences which learners can identify with and accept to explore. Identification is not the same thing as interest or relevance to the students’ life experiences. The interests of the students are not uniform, nor is homogeneity of interests ever possible. Besides, educators would not wish to limit their text selections to the interests of students. If they did, they might end up designing their curriculum around a handful of topics. Nor would they want their students to leave college with only those interests which they brought to it. After all, university education is about the expansion of one’s intellectual horizons and interests. On the other hand, a text may be selected even if it is not relevant to the student’s ‘day-to-day’ experiences. Learning poetry, indeed learning anything in general, is achieved when we learn more about what we already know and, equally importantly, when we learn about altogether new things. The experience represented in a poetic text need not be one that readers have already encountered in the actual world but one that readers may encounter in any possible world. All it has to contain is enough familiar clues to activate existing schemata and trigger identification. The students’ interest will then start to build. On the one hand, there is the delight of encountering a schema they already possess encapsulated in fairly new experience. On the other hand, there is the excitement to explore this new experience and add on to one’s existing store of schemata. For example, a Yemeni educator may well select a text on the aftermath of a nuclear war. Although the relevance of this experience to Yemeni students’ daily lives is minimal, it remains an experience which the students can identify with. This identification can then be exploited to build both interest and schemata.
The other aspect of suitability, as alluded to earlier, is acceptance. Before students can respond to a text and make individual readings into it, they should first of all be willing to accept it. Acceptance comes even before identification but it is a stage very often glossed over. Arab scholars who have considered the issue of text selection for use with Arab undergraduate students have had different views of suitability. While some (e.g. Obeidat, 1997) recommend that instructors try to avoid religious, moral and cultural barriers, others (e.g. Al Maleh, 2005) choose not to eclipse ‘controversial’ texts from the eyes of the students but to encourage an amoral stance towards them. Obeidat’s position is hard to uphold because any act of communication, literary or otherwise, is characterized by disparity of realities. The meanings we make are always approximations mediated by our own perceptions. Literary discourses are even more relaxed; no convergence on interpretation is ever expected. This disparity of realities, inevitable as it is, can well be turned to pedagogic advantage. Every cultural difference presents a chance to learn a new thing, provided there is not an excess of cultural disparities. While this sounds like an espousal of the Al Maleh’s position, it should be pointed out that Al Maleh’s argument is no less hard to uphold especially in the Arab-Muslim context, the very same context she makes her recommendations for. Al Maleh recommends an amoral stance towards literary texts. She is sceptical about teaching “only what has immediate relevance and bears reference to Arab and Moslem experiences” and is eager not to “cut students’ minds from the reservoir of Western, particularly English literature and culture in the name of compatibility of values” (p. 272). To the researcher, and for the Yemeni context, this is true about every cultural problem except when it relates to moral values. Al Maleh would select for use in her classes such texts as To his Coy Mistress, which she describes as making a ‘licentious’ invitation to the pleasures of love. What she suggests is that students be encouraged to read such texts “amorally” in order to perceive merit in the text without having to agree with its moral codes. What she fails to accept, however, is that students do not ‘accept’ texts which present ‘alien’ moral values, and this rules out any meaningful encounter with them in the classroom. The Yemeni culture, like most Arab cultures, is a ‘shame culture’ which is shaped by the teachings of Islam. Anything that infringes Islamic codes of morality is unacceptable. The researcher’s experience as a teacher of literature in the Yemeni tertiary context bears out this observation. Attempts to introduce texts like these have met with angry reactions which at times
went as far as students refusing to attend classes and demanding apology from the teacher. This is not a call to ‘eclipse’ such texts from the eyes of the students but rather a suggestion not to discuss ‘provocative’ texts in co-educational classes in which the majority of girl students are covered in black from head to toe. Neither approval nor even response could be expected. If these texts are ever to be introduced, they might instead be prescribed as reading assignments in which case the texts are not ‘obliterated’ altogether but also not used, or rather misused, to defeat the very purpose of the poetry class. The point to be made here is that the selected text has to have ‘suitable’ content in the sense that students are willing to accept it and able to identify with it. Only then can interest build and interaction take place.

The second criterion is accessibility of language. Although suitability of content is a necessary condition, it is by no means a sufficient condition for individual response. A text which appeals to the students but which is linguistically ‘too difficult’ can hardly be enjoyed or appreciated. Linguistic difficulty, however, is not a uni-dimensional problem. It has at least four dimensions to it, namely, density of unfamiliar, or culturally loaded, vocabulary, complexity of syntactic structures, organization of discourse structure, and length of the text. This should not imply that in order for a text to be selected it has to be linguistically ‘easy’. A text should present some challenge to the students and should also offer them something to learn. In other words, the selected text should be at the right level of difficulty for the students. It should be one that the students can manage to ‘log into’ and make ‘some’ sense of on their own. It should be linguistically ‘accessible’.

But the accessibility of the language of a text is not easy to define either. How many unfamiliar vocabularies and complex structures can be recognized? How many missing links between sentences can be provided by the students? And how long is a ‘long’ text? Accessibility is relative to the students’ level of linguistic competence, which in turn is hard to assess in any accurate measures. No class is entirely linguistically homogeneous. Teachers will have to rely on their familiarity with the class or can perhaps assess linguistic competence through an essay writing task to be completed under their own supervision. In any case, it is a process of trial and error and the teacher can only choose material that suits most of the class. But it should be pointed out that too long a text and a high proportion of difficult vocabulary may turn students off poetry or take their attention away from interpretation onto the difficulties of comprehension. Too many complicated linguistic structures and
missing inter-sentential connections, on the other hand, may demand considerable teacher intervention which could impede the flow of the student-text interaction. In short, a text should be accessible, i.e. easy enough to allow access to it and assist the development of initial, unmediated response but at the same time difficult enough to pose a challenge and present learning opportunities. In the end, this is a matter of local pedagogic decision for which no hard and fast formulae can be provided.

Last, but no least, is adaptability of text. In order for a text to qualify for selection, it should be capable of engaging the students’ attention and be accessible to them but should also be ‘adaptable’ to the teaching objectives of the instructor. A text which is adaptable is not one which exemplifies those linguistic patterns that instructors want their students to learn, although the likelihood of such a coincidence is not ruled out, but one which exemplifies some text or genre structure(s) the learning of which facilitates encounter with other poetic texts. A text which is adaptable, in other words, is one which can be used or exploited to design tasks that serve to facilitate the learning of some skill of interpretation. It may be argued that all texts are adaptable in some way or another in this sense of the word. Although there is some truth in this statement, it does not invalidate this criterion of text selection. Some texts are more adaptable in the sense that they better exemplify some genre structure and hence may be exploited more effectively in the development of poetic text-attack skills. The genre structures referred to here are such structures as the deviations at the different levels of language organization, the instances of abnormal regularity and the use of non-poetic registers. These structures feature more prominently and work more effectively in some poetic works and it is these works which are recommended for classroom use. It may again be argued that structural abnormality could mystify poetry, especially if the students have not fully mastered the normal structures on which the deviations are structured. But it is here that the role of the stylistician-teacher comes in. The pedagogical treatment of the analysis will only highlight the ‘significant’ structures and guide the students towards establishing their significance. In this way, the ‘mystery’ is minimized and the ‘poetic quality’ not compromised. Less ‘exemplifying’ texts may be introduced at a later stage when the students have had access to means of interpretation. The first encounters with texts may therefore require more hard work on the part of the students but will certainly instill confidence and make the students more independent in any subsequent encounters. In other words, in Widdowson’s words, this should
serve to sensitize students to the ‘poetentiality’ of poetry and give them practice in perceiving the poetic qualities that are often exploited to artistic effect.

To sum up, a selected text should be readable, suitable and adaptable, no matter its status in the canon or its time-honored position in the syllabus. These three qualities, it may be repeated, are relative to the students’ language, text and world schemata. Different students have different levels of language and the same students’ linguistic abilities mature with time. The text schemata of students also differ. Students whose native language is Arabic, for example, will have already read poetry in their native language before they encounter poetry written in English. They will bring to the act of reading a host of expectations about the genre derived from their experience with Arabic poetry, assuming that they have not read English poetry. In the classroom, this text schema needs to be activated if it is seen to be relevant or built upon in order to facilitate the transaction with the English texts. The world schemata are also reader-dependent. Different readers will bring different world experiences to the text, which itself presupposes knowledge of cultural and social allusions. Even though it is the reader who makes meaning, not the allusions to text-external knowledge, and even though cultural allusions help increase the poetentiality of the text (Widdowson, 1992), it is recommended that the selected text does not have an abundance of allusions. An excess of deviations is not recommended either. Instead of exemplifying poetic discourse and preparing the way for a more meaningful encounter with other texts, excess could hamper the reading and turn students off poetry. In short, the relativeness of these qualities denies the imposition of rigid criteria and makes the selection of texts a matter of local pedagogic decision. This study offers a bank of titles, selected in accordance with the proposed criteria, for use in the Yemeni undergraduate context of tertiary education (Appendix F).

The Selection of Classroom Tasks

If poetic texts cannot be graded, the students’ exposure to these texts can be. One way of grading students’ exposure to poetry is by building up the degree of demands on the students. After selecting an ‘appropriate’ text, the teacher needs to select classroom tasks which should give students gradual and systematic training into the way poetry should be read and interpretations made. The selection of the tasks is constrained by the aims of the pedagogy. The aim of the pedagogy proposed in this study, as has already been suggested, is not to make literary scholars of the students but to make readers who are alert to the intricacies of language and their
potential communicative effects in different contexts of use. The pedagogy should also give some access to the means of interpretations which can help students make their own individual readings of texts without the assistance of teachers or of ready-made critical notes. Accordingly, the classroom tasks should require the students to ‘read’ the texts, discern the ‘significant’ linguistic choices and patterns, and infer possible communicative effects of these choices. They should also be such that they could be carried over to other poetic texts.

The tasks that are recommended are stylistic in nature. What this means is that they always refer the students back to features of the text. They aim to account for the linguistic deviations (thus establishing the cohesion of the text) and for conceptual deviations (thus establishing the coherence of the text). They will therefore reposition the students from being inactive to being active or interactive with textual and background information. The choice of stylistic tasks is seen to be compatible with the nature of poetic discourse and suitable for use with non-native students, who have received some instruction in linguistic analysis and are thus better prepared to deal with stylistic descriptions. The tasks do not aim at homing in on a particular interpretation but only at setting up conditions where students can arrive at one of their own. The students are not treated as interchangeable but as individualists who “authenticate poetic texts as poems on their own authority” (Widdowson, 1992, p. 150). The teachers’ job is to provide assistance and their success at this is measured by how redundant this assistance becomes at the end of the course.

This study proposes three learning stages and the different classroom tasks will be discussed under the relevant learning stage. These three stages are 1) initiating a response, 2) developing an interpretation, and 3) authenticating the interpretation. Each stage will be discussed in terms of the aim of the stage, the skills that students should acquire at the stage, and the tasks that would be used to achieve the aim and to ensure the acquisition of the reading skills.

The first stage is ‘initiating a response’. The aim of this stage is to stimulate interest in the poem and get the students involved in the poem’s thematic concerns. The students are encouraged to brainstorm whatever associations they have or experiences of situations similar to those represented in the text. Besides breaking the ice, this stage should make the students feel that poetry is not irrelevant to their life experiences and prepares them to meet these experiences represented in a new light. The students’ existing schemata are activated and absent schemata built, where
necessary. At this stage, the students need to learn to read poetry aloud, read for general ideas (skimming) and read for specific details (scanning). The tasks that could be employed to achieve these goals include reading aloud, hypothesizing about the theme, predicting a title or choosing one from possible suggestions, asking direct questions about the students’ previous experiences of the poem’s concerns, and choosing a word or line that could be central to the poem. These tasks should help set up the students’ mental receptivity before they move on to the second stage. At this stage, like with the other two stages, learners bring something of their own to the reading but learn to reconcile subjective impressions with authorial uses of language.

The second stage is ‘developing an interpretation’. After the students have had an initial response to the text, they should be encouraged to develop their own interpretation of it. The aim of the second stage is to sensitize students to the representational, as opposed to referential, nature of poetic communication and to the ‘poetentiality’ of poetic discourse. The students should be made alert to the significance of lexical choices and structural patterning in the expression of shades of meaning. They should be encouraged to discern these lexical and structural choices and infer their possible significance by relating their conventional meanings and the significance they take on in the context of the poetic text. This context, it may be repeated, is not made available by the author but has to be constructed by the students by relating authorial choices of language and their own schemata of the world. What develops from these operations is an interpretation. One skill to promote at this stage is reading meaning into a text by learning to look at language and unlearning to read through it for a meaning which is ‘out there’. Another skill to learn is integrating the apparently disconnected lexical and structural choices into a cohesive and coherent discourse. Two types of tasks would be employed to this effect, namely, completion (or the cloze procedure) and comparison. The first one presents students with a text which contains explicit gaps and the students are invited to supply gap fillers which show cohesion with the form and content of the poem. The second one relates, again explicitly, textual choices with world schemata and presents the outcome in the form of possible interpretations. The students are invited to compare the alternatives and decide on the ‘best’ possible reading. Like with other tasks, the difficulty of the tasks and the degree of demand on the students can be regulated so as to suit the students’ language level and their progress in the classroom.
The last stage is ‘authenticating the interpretation’. At this stage, the ‘dismantled’ text is put back together and the ‘disjointed’ impressions of significance are assembled into a coherent interpretation. The aim of this stage is to help students account for subjective impressions of poetic significance in terms of language choices. The students learn to base their interpretations on textual evidence and this provides them with a method by which they can evaluate the comments of others and understand how these comments were arrived at. The students learn to take responsibility for their views and provide evidence to back them up. The tasks to achieve this aim could include guided re-writing, completing an interpretation started by the teacher, and comparing two possible interpretations. Tasks such as these would sensitize students to the importance of language choices in the expression of shades of meanings and the expectation is that this will rub off on the students’ own interpretations of texts and on their composition in general.

Although some measure of originality can be claimed for the proposed three-stage procedure, no originality whatsoever may be claimed for the teaching tasks. These are tasks that are familiar to language teachers and part of their everyday teaching kit. The interesting part comes when familiar tasks like these are used to make accessible such a ‘mysterious’ discourse as poetry. The tasks are not prescribed for classroom use but only suggested as possibilities which do not exclude others. They may be added to and enriched in accordance with the dictates of the selected text and of the classroom situation. Classroom interaction, however, should not be limited to answering questions and the students should be encouraged to generalize from the text to literary and personal issues. The tasks at the three stages are characterized by the requirement to refer any interpretive judgment back to features of the text and these judgments are always permeated by individual response. For these reasons, the three learning stages cannot be clearly delineated and can at times shade into each other in practice.

**The Selection of Test Tasks**

Conventional tests of poetry have traditionally tended to center on the ‘critical appreciation’ question. Such questions, as Chapter Three has illustrated, have also tended to be worded in such a way that the title of the poem to be appreciated is mentioned but the text left out. There is only one big task, the appreciation task, and no text. The expectation is that the students have either learnt the text or the
appreciation. In either case, these question types can only test the learning of a model answer but do little to test the mastery of skills and reading abilities.

Tests of poetry at tertiary education contexts are achievement tests. The purpose of these tests is to ascertain the extent to which the students have mastered specific course content and teaching objectives. In this present context, the tests should ascertain the acquisition of poetry reading abilities and of course the teaching/learning objectives. Accordingly, the selection of test tasks is constrained by the skills and abilities that teachers want their students to have acquired by the end of the course. These cannot differ any significantly from the skills and abilities that the classroom pedagogy has attempted to promote.

As a result, the three-stage procedure devised for the pedagogy will need to be replicated in the assessment but in a testing format. The tasks might not change but their purpose will change. Instead of being used as teaching techniques, they will be used as testing techniques. The tests should include tasks that ensure the acquisition of the three proposed stages of learning. The principles guiding the pedagogy are also observed here. Each task, at any of the three stages, requires personal response of one sort or another but personal response should always be guided and motivated by textual clues. The main purpose is to ascertain that the skills which have been promoted by the pedagogy have been acquired and can be carried over to the interpretation of ‘unseen’ texts. In other words, the tests should ascertain how independent the students have become as readers and how redundant the teacher has become as a guide. The criteria of text selection also repeat themselves. The text to be selected for a test need not be one that the students are familiar with but should definitely be one that observes the proposed criteria of text selection.

The selection of an ‘unseen’ text is bound to generate anxiety and unease among the students. After all, tests have always been predictable. In order to minimize fear, the students should be told what exactly is expected of them. They should be told what type of tasks will be included and what type of answers expected. They should also be told how their answers will be assessed. The teachers would be well-advised to ask the students to write a model test paper, exchange it among themselves and assess each other’s performance. Or, alternatively, the teacher might pick any of the answers sheets and assess it in class in order for the students to know what things to do and what to avoid. Another fear-minimizing tactic is to allocate 50% of the overall mark for classroom participation, classroom tests and take-home
essay-writing assignments. The students would be less nervous when they step into the examination hall already in possession of over half the passing mark.

The skills and abilities to be tested should also be made clear to the students. These are: the ability to comprehend the text by identifying the experiences it represents, the ability to activate relevant personal experiences, the ability to synthesize personal experiences with those represented in the text and develop a response to the text, the ability to discern the ‘poetic patterns’, the ability to generalize from these patterns to literary and personal concerns, the ability to reach interpretive conclusions, the ability to justify conclusions by textual evidence, the ability to employ stylistic terminology effectively, and of course the ability to use language correctly and succinctly. Like with the teaching tasks, there is nothing sacrosanct about the testing tasks or the abilities to test. They will differ when do teachers and students.

In order to bring these claims closer to practical considerations, the researcher proposes a sample poetry test paper. Poetry test papers may contain more than one short poem but, since space precludes extensive demonstration, the proposed paper contains one full poem and a number of tasks on the poem. This is only intended to provide a specimen of the kind of test papers promoted by this study. The poem selected is John Milton’s *On His Blindness*, a canonical and very popular text. This choice of this text is meant to validate the claim that stylistic analysis can reveal aspects of meaning which readers are very likely to miss, or have missed, because of their ‘amateurish’ knowledge of language organization in discourse. It may be pointed out here that this poem has been stylistically analyzed by the researcher (acting as a stylistician-analyst) as a necessary step before its pedagogical treatment (the role of the stylistician-teacher). The stylistic analysis has been carried out in accordance with the claims of the stylistic component but is not presented here because it is not relevant for this context. The full text of the poem is presented below for convenience and ease of reference.

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light deny’d?
I fondly ask; But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, ‘God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.

STAGE ONE
a) Close your eyes and describe in TWO ADJECTIVES the world you see.
b) What two words does the speaker in the poem use to describe the world?
c) Is the speaker angry with God? List a few words or expressions from the poem in support of your answer.
d) If you became blind, would you lose your purpose in life?
e) What does God expect from the blind?
f) Does God reward the blind? What does Islam say about this?
g) How many voices are speaking in the poem?
h) The poem consists of three long sentences. Which sentence is said by which voice?

STAGE TWO
  g) This poem is a sonnet. Does the poem provide a thematic break at the end of the octave? Does the thematic break correspond with a change of voice?
  h) The octave is one long sentence which contains a number of ‘adjuncts’. Attempt to rephrase the sentence without these adjuncts.
  i) The sestet is composed of two long sentences which also contain adjuncts. Rewrite the sentences leaving out the adjuncts.
  j) What can this abundance of unnecessary structures signify?
  k) List the words and pronouns that refer to God in the octave and the sestet. Which part of the poem contains more references to God? Does that signpost any attitude of the speaker toward God in the two parts of the poem?
The octave contains four active finite verbs and three passive verbs while the sestet contains ten active finite verbs and no passive verbs? Identify these verbs and suggest an implication of the concentration of active verbs in the sestet and passive verbs in the octave.

The following are four possible reformulations of the octave. Choose the one that you think is the closest.

- The speaker is despondent over the loss of his eyesight.
- The speaker feels helpless but is determined to use his poetic talent in order to render a satisfactory account to God.
- The speaker regrets that he cannot serve God due to his disability.
- The speaker argues that he should not be asked to do his duties toward God because God has denied him the gift of eyesight and the talent of writing poetry.

Defend your choice against the following authorial choices of language:

- consider (L 1)
- Ere half my days (L 2)
- …one talent …lodged with me useless (Lines 3-4)
- My soul more bent to serve therewith my Maker (Lines 4-5)
- Lest he returning chide (L 6)
- fondly (L 8)

The following are four possible reformulations of the sestet. Choose the one that you find the closest.

- The speaker remembers that God does not need Man’s work because He has thousands of angels to serve Him non-stop.
- The speaker’s dissatisfaction is dispelled by Patience’s assertion of the kingly state of God who should be served without murmur.
- The poet is interrupted by Patience and assured that God can be served not only by doing but also by the intention of doing.
- Patience stands up to the disrespectful poet and reminds him of the magnitude of the Deity he is defying.

Defend your choice against the following authorial choices:
- to prevent (L 8)
- murmur (L 9)
- soon replies (L 9)
- Bear his mild yoke (L 11)
- his state is Kingly (Lines 11-12)
- They also serve who only stand and wait (L 14)

o) Find an instance of the following in the poem and suggest its possible significance for interpretation
- Regularity of sound
- Lexical repetition
- Syntactic deviation
- Semantic deviation

p) Who does ‘They’ (Line 14) refer to:
- Gods
- People
- Angels

q) Who does ‘who’ (Line 14) refer to:
- Gods
- People
- Angels

STAGE THREE

r) Attempt a prose reformulation of the content of the poem. When you finish, grade your own paraphrase on a scale of 1 to 10 on the basis of the compromises and defects of the paraphrase in comparison with the original.

s) Below is biographical information about Milton. Does this information make you adjust your answer to task r) above in any way.
- Born in 1608; Christian.
- Educated at Christ’s college, Cambridge (BA and MA).
- Spoke English, French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.
- Worked as teacher and Latin secretary.
- Eyesight was always weak and deteriorating.
- Totally blind by 1652.
- Wrote his best known poems, including “On His Blindness”, “Paradise Lost” and “Paradise Regained” after he was blind.
- Died of kidney failure on November 1674.

**t)** Which of the following sentences can be said to describe the mood of the poem? Provide textual evidence in support of your choice.

- The poem opens with a mood of grief and closes with a mood of quiet joy.
- The poem opens with a mood of rejection and closes with a mood of acceptance of a passive life in blindness.
- The poem opens with a mood of disrespect and closes with a mood of apology.
- The poem opens with a mood of doubt and closes with a mood of assurance.
- The poem opens with a mood of defeat and closes with a mood of triumph.

**u)** If you are asked to nominate a line which is ‘the most important’ in the poem, which line would that be? Why?

**v)** Why is the poem entitled “On His Blindness” and not “On My Blindness”? Relate your answer to the dialogue between the voices in the poem.

**w)** What do you like about this poem?

**Final Remarks on the Pedagogical Component**

The pedagogical approach assumes the theoretical arguments of the analytical approach and also assumes the set of deconstructed dichotomies. Another set of dichotomies which is deconstructed by the pedagogical approach relates to the issue of whether the teaching should address affective, cognitive or linguistic goals. This set of dichotomies concerns the goals of the analysis when taken to the classroom. Foreign undergraduate students’ main aim is the improvement of their language skills and this, as has been suggested earlier, is a necessary, and welcome, bonus of the application of stylistic methodology. But linguistic goals are not in complementary distribution with the other goals. An important function of poetic discourse, and
literary discourse in general, is the change, or at least refreshment, of the reader’s world schemata. The reader is invited to think critically about what has customarily been taken only at face value. Cognitive goals are part of what poetry is all about. Affective goals, the third type of goals, are achieved by implication. Before schemata can be refreshed, readers would need to reach deep down within and they will eventually learn more about themselves as individuals and as members of the greater community to which they and the writer belong.

It may be pointed out, as a last word, that the deconstruction of all the aforementioned dichotomies is justified by the nature of poetic discourse and by the pedagogical orientation of the proposed approach. It also provides justification for the eclecticism which characterizes the proposed approach. But it should also be pointed out that the eclectic approach makes no claims to irrevocability and is itself subject to deconstruction along the same lines. It is this room for difference that has kept and will continue to keep the theory, and practice, of literary criticism alive.

**Summary**

This chapter has outlined the proposed stylistic approach in its two stages, the analysis and the pedagogy. These two stages correspond to two roles assumed by the researcher, the stylistician-analyst and the stylistician-teacher, respectively. These are the two roles that should be assumed by teachers who wish to adopt stylistic-based pedagogies in their poetry classroom. A combination of literary stylistics and the Iserian strand of reader response has been suggested to meet the demands of analysis and the same combination synthesized with practical stylistics to meet the demands of pedagogy. The chapter has also detailed the theoretical procedures of analysis and teaching. The next chapter demonstrates these theoretical claims in the detailed stylistic analysis and pedagogical treatment of two poetic texts.