

Applying Critical/Textual Stylistics to a poem in Sorani

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This paper applies the framework of Critical Stylistics (or as it was recently re-named 'Textual Stylistics') (Jeffries, 2010, 2022) to the poem 'Bloody Crown' written by Kurdish writer Sherko Bekas. The research presented here is a further development of our ongoing research collaboration about the language of poetic texts by Sherko Bekas. The first poem we analysed and published our research on was a poem entitled 'Sculpture' from the collection 'The Small Mirrors' (Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2021, 2022b), followed by a paper on a poem entitled 'The Martyrs' Wedding' (Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2022a). The research presented here is part of our co-authored monograph entitled 'Sherko Bekas: A Kurdish Voice under the Lens of Critical Stylistics' (Tabbert & Ibrahim, 2023).

1. Sherko Bekas and the Rwanga Movement

Before we present our analysis, we briefly introduce Sherko Bekas. He was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 1940 and is the son of Fayaq Bekas, a well-known Kurdish poet within traditional Kurdish poetry. Bekas lived in an era (from the inception of modern Iraq up until 1991) when the Kurds had been viewed as being second-class citizens. The discrimination increased during Saddam Hussein's regime. In the 1970s, Kurds were displaced in an attempt to demolish the Kurdish dream of having their own autonomous state. The situation further escalated in 1988 with the destructing of over 3,000 Kurdish villages and numerous chemical attacks, one even killed over 5,000 Kurds in Halabja. This political situation is important for the analysis of Bekas' poems.

Bekas published his first book when he was 17 years old. At a very young age, Bekas enlisted in the Peshmerga and worked as a 'party poet' for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. This is a major political party in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), a semi-autonomous region in Iraq. In seeking 'new aspects and dimensions' for the thus far heavily arabised Kurdish poetry, Bekas turned to international texts and, for example, translated Ernest Hemmingway's 'The Old Man and the Sea' into Kurdish.

Bekas had a huge influence on the development of Kurdish poetry. Whereas in the generation of poets including Bekas' father, major attention was being paid to rhyme and rhythm, Bekas together with other poets and writers founded the Rwanga movement in 1970. Rwanga¹ poetry was a reaction to the social and political situation. Poets from the Rwanga movement tried to adjust poetry to real life in that it breaks from the traditional rules of rhyme and rhythm to express many beautiful fantasies. Rwanga allows poets to express their vision accurately and to overcome the boundaries of language. This was a radical change in Kurdish poetry. From his experience of translating works from world literature into Kurdish, Bekas identified 'new elements in the world literature' and utilised them in his own poetry.

When reading poetry written by Bekas in Sorani, we are intrigued by the richness of expression and the many layers of meaning. Bekas held strong political views. Even after his death, he continues to be a Kurdish voice against oppression as well as a driving force in support of the Kurds' wish for an independent Kurdistan. It is fascinating for us to see how Bekas skilfully plays with different layers of meaning and the options the Sorani (a dialect of Kurdish) language structure offers. We found an abundance of implied messages in every line of his texts. For Bekas, however, it is not merely an application of his skills as a poet but his poetry is, in fact, a liberation from the boundaries of language as well as an issue of aesthetics.

2. A definition of Bekas' political poems

We arrive at discussing why Bekas' poems (at least the ones we analysed) are political poems and how we define the term. Many literary critics have talked about Bekas' poetry in terms of political poetry. Ibrahim (2018, p. 23) takes up the notion of topic and defines political poems as those 'that express attitudes towards those political issues'. Political poems 'can deepen consciousness or be implicit or explicit calls for action. Political poems are not restricted to one particular issue; rather they can be about anything related to conflict within a society as in Bekas' poetry'.

We extend this notion of topic and include the notion of purpose and function of political poetry. Bly [cited in (Dowdy, 2007, p. 11f)] holds that political poems merely raise our awareness, rather than call for action. Dowdy (2007, p. 11) goes as far as to assert that political poetry does not 'challenge dominant political groups or social principles', but 'implicitly or explicitly supports them'. After this rather pessimistic view of the power of poetry seen through the eyes of oppressed Kurds, we cite McGrath (1982, p. 28f), who distinguishes between strategic (to expand consciousness) and tactical (show causes for and diagnose political problems) poems and thereby states that poems can have an effect on the audience.

To arrive at our own definition of political poetry, we build on a core definition of poetry as a genre of literature (beside prose and drama) that makes use of rhyme and rhythm and has a visually distinct verse form. Furthermore, Bekas' political poems deal with historic events and convey an ideological meaning (as every text does), but in his case his value judgements or 'attitudes' (Burke, 1969, p. 41) follow from conscious stylistic choices he makes on all levels of language structure. He intends to persuade the reader and (implicitly) calls for action in his poetic texts.

3. A Synopsis of Critical Stylistics and Textual Stylistics

The framework we use for our analysis is Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b) which Jeffries recently renamed Textual Stylistics (2022) and calls a model rather than a framework.

For an introduction to the framework/model, we refer to Jeffries' texts as well as our own publications (see list of references). Due to space constraints, we highlight the differences between Critical and Textual Stylistics by showing a synopsis of both in Table 1 in the Appendix.

Jeffries in her recent monograph (2022) argues to pay attention to ideation ('the construction of a particular view of the world through textual choices' which is 'neutral', pp. 4, 9) as well as to ideology, both 'delivered by the same mechanisms, namely the TCF's' (p. 9) that are the textual-conceptual functions of texts. The emphasis on ideation allows Jeffries to apply her framework, or model as she now calls it, not only to non-literary, political texts but also to poetry. She argues that 'there is no theoretical reason why the same mechanisms that produce the ideation underlying this ideology shouldn't also underlie the aesthetic or literary effects of, for example, contemporary poetry' (p. 9). In her revised model, Jeffries acknowledges the importance of the 'soundscape of poems' (phonological choices, now a separate TCF called 'Evoking', p. 10ff) and of the use of figurative language (metaphor, p. 12). Furthermore, she distinguishes between 'core' and 'peripheral' TCF's due to different frequencies of their occurrences in analyses (p. 12f).

Our approach to decipher ideological meaning in (political) poems by Bekas sits comfortably between the original framework of Critical Stylistics and the revised model of Textual Stylistics. With her revisions, Jeffries paved the way for our argument that Critical/Textual Stylistics is applicable to poetry. We apply the model to poems in Sorani and thus show how it needs to be adapted when dealing with a language other than English. Jeffries holds that she developed her model based on texts in English and its applicability has yet to be tested when dealing with texts in languages different than English. This is the path we followed in our book (Tabbert & Ibrahim, 2023).

4. Sorani as a Kurdish dialect

Sorani is referred to as the Kurdish language although Kurmanji and Gorani are also Kurdish languages or rather dialects. Kurdish belongs to the Western Iranian group of Indo-Iranian languages. This group is a branch of the Indo-European language family. There are two main dialects in modern Kurdish. The first is Kurmanji, which is the native language of most of the Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, an area known among the Kurds as 'North Kurdistan'. This language is spoken by an estimate fifteen to seventeen million speakers. The second dialect is Sorani, the language of the vast majority of the Kurds in Iraq and Iran (about five million speakers each), in an area known as 'South Kurdistan'. Outside this area (in the south to Kermanshah and in the east as far as Bijar), the language is known as

Gorani or South Sorani, which has a language structure derived from Persian but with Kurdish vocabulary.

5. Poem 'Bloody Crown' by Sherko Bekas

Bekas wrote his poem 'Bloody Crown' for Karim Hashimi in 1985. Hashimi was a fighter, writer and intellectual from eastern Kurdistan (Iran) who worked for the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP). Bekas and his family lived in Iran for a short period of time before they moved to Sweden. The poem was published by the Kurdistan Union of Writers and was intended as a motivation for Hashimi not to surrender.

We present the opening lines of poem here. The lines were numbered for ease of reference. The poem in its entirety can be found in our book both in Sorani as well as our own translation of the poem into English (Tabbert & Ibrahim, 2023, p. 46f, 87ff).

Bloody Crown

- 1 For my friend Karim Hashimi
- 2 Oh right atrium of my heart
- 3 Oh the east window of my wounds
- 4 Oh my Kurdistan of Iran
- 5 In the country of gown of black
- 6 My poetry of Syamnd² (my poetry turned smart)
- 7 Searched for the eyes of Khaja³
- 8 The poetry of love with the height of Warmi⁴
- 9 Tried to hold a flower in (its) hand
- 10 And smile with freedom
- 11 Wanted to put mouth in its mouth
- 12 It was a clear fountain
- 13 Actively sprays
- 14 Asked a lot
- 15 Searched a lot and saw the smile of none

6.1 *izâfa* construction and the use of (in)definite articles

We began our analysis with an examination of the noun phrases in these opening lines of the poem. Jeffries groups this under the textual-conceptual function of 'Naming and Describing' strategies. One dominant pattern we found is an *izâfa* construction.

The *izâfa* vowel *i* links two parts of a possessive construction and can be compared to the use of the preposition of possession *of* in English. In Sorani, *i* is used as a modifier and can be combined with an adjective or a noun. This construction is different in Sorani compared to English in where the article is placed.

There are three uses of an article in Kurdish: definite, indefinite and a zero article. The use of a zero article in a noun phrase constructs a generic noun phrase (absolute) or, in other words, establishes a permanent relation between the head noun and the modifier. For example, in the noun phrase *gwêçkîleyi rastî dîlm* / 'right atrium of my heart' (line 2), the modifier *right* is a permanent and not a temporary property of *heart*, referring to the commonly known fact that human hearts have a right atrium. Bekas used 'right atrium' (compared to, for example, 'left atrium') because it refers to the part of the heart that receives deoxygenated blood from the veins/body and pumps it into the ventricles of the heart and out through the left atrium into the body again. During this process the blood is enriched with oxygen. The heart is metaphorically known as the place where pain is felt, and therefore the right atrium, in a metaphorical sense, is the place where the pain first hits the heart and is then transferred on to the deeper parts of the heart (the ventricles) which metaphorically deepens the pain felt. Furthermore, deoxygenated blood metaphorically refers to poverty and deprivation.

All Examples in Table 2 display an *izâfa* construction which links noun and modifier.

Line in poem	Example	Translation
2	1 . gwêçkîleyi rastî dîlm!	right atrium of my heart
3	2. epencereyi rojhellatî zamekanm	east window of my wounds
4	3. kurdistanî êranm!	my Kurdistan of Iran
5	4. wlatî cbeyi reşa	country of gown of black
6	5. şîrî tazem	my poetry of Syamnd
8	6. şîrî şeydayi	Poetry of love
9	7. destî gullê	Hand of flower

10	8. zerdexeneyi hîçî	Smile of freedom
12	9. kanîyeki rûn	Fountain of clear

Table 2: *izâfa* construction and translation in the opening lines of 'Bloody Crown'

Furthermore, we need to examine the use of the article in these examples as they carry different meanings for Sorani speakers.

In Example 2, because the definite article *-ka-* 'the' is part of the modifier ('wounds') and not the head noun ('window'), the canonical opposite of 'wounds' (which is 'safety/health') automatically comes to mind as a desirable condition⁵. Bekas uses this naturalised opposition between the state of being healthy or being wounded to call for an end of the bloodshed in a subtle way. Notice the difference in comparison to Example 9 where the indefinite article *-yek* ('a' or 'an') is part of the head noun ('fountain'). Here, the reader/hearer might imagine a clear fountain in opposition to a fountain with turbid water. The use of the definite article enables the creation of oppositional meaning in this line due to the grammatical structure of Sorani.

In Example 5, meaning is constructed by a combination of an enclitic possessive preposition and a generic noun (without an article). Therefore, *şîrî tazim* / 'my poetry of new' does not refer to poems as a literary genre but, we argue, rather to the feeling of the poet. In order to create a different meaning, the definite article could have been used as part of the noun, for example *şîrî tazakam*.

In Examples 4 through 6, the generic meaning of the nouns is expressed by the omission of any article (zero article). This indicates that the stated facts ('poetry of Syamnd', 'poetry of love' and 'country of gown of black') must not be questioned. This is an important addition at the intersection between 'Naming and Describing' and another of the ten textual-conceptual functions, namely 'Assuming and Implying' (new: Alluding). The effect is an explicit and categorical unification between *poetry* and *love* / *Syamnd* and between *country*, *gown* and *black*. By using these constructions, the relationship between 'Iran' and 'Kurdistan' (line 4), 'country' and 'black' and 'gown' (line 5), 'poetry' and 'love' (line 8), 'hand' and 'flower' (line 9) as well as between 'fountain' and 'clear' (line 12) is inseparable and treated as permanent.

In these noun phrases, the head nouns include the normal possessive preposition and unstressed enclitics are added to the noun. An enclitic possessive preposition may be added to the generic form (*dil* 'heart'), the definite (*dlakam*/my-DEF-heart) or indefinite (*dlekm*) forms of the noun. By adding a possessive pronoun ('my') to the generic form as in line 2 (Example 1), the noun ('heart') gets a figurative meaning. In order to achieve actual and concrete meaning, the definite form is being used. The noun 'heart' in its generic form as used in line 2 of the poem refers to emotions of fondness and love.

Based on the outlined grammatical differences in the use of an article in Sorani, we are able to distinguish different spheres of emotions in these opening lines of 'Bloody

Crown'. On the one hand, there is a sphere of romantic disposition (poetry of love, hand of flower in lines 8 and 9). On the other hand, there is a sphere of negative (sad/painful) emotions (east window of my wounds, country of gown of black, lines 3 and 5).

The use of the definite article is of importance with regard to another angle, namely parallelism.

6.2 Parallelism and the use of the article

Bekas uses parallelism to construct equivalence. Parallelism is the repetition of the same structures at phrase-, clause- or sentence-level. Parallelism has a foregrounding effect on specific words or concepts and often makes an oppositional meaning apparent. Jeffries in her framework of Critical/Textual Stylistics analyses parallelism under the textual-conceptual function of 'Equating and Contrasting'.

In the opening lines of the poem 'Bloody Crown', lines 2 to 4, we found instances of parallelism as shown in Table 3.

eyi gwêçkîleyi rastî dîlm!	Oh right atrium of my heart
eyi epencereyi rojhellatî zamekanm	Oh the east window of my wounds
eyi kurdistanî êranm!	Oh my Kurdistan of Iran

Table 3: Parallelism in the opening lines of 'Bloody Crown'

The parallel syntactic structure in all three lines foregrounds the head nouns ('atrium', 'window', 'Kurdistan') and the (post)modifiers ('heart', 'wounds', 'Iran') and sets them into a meaning relation with each other. We point out that 'right' refers to eastern Kurdistan (Iran, as opposed to western Kurdistan which is Iraq) and 'heart' is a metaphorical naming choice for the people of Iran.

The first and third line in Table 3 show the nouns used in their generic form whereas in the middle, a definite article is used. This alteration from generic to definite and back to generic constructs a continuity of emotion and in this trio of parallel syntactic structure sets the middle line apart from the other two in that it puts extra emphasis on it.

7. Conclusion

In this paper (which can be read in full in our book) we focused on the application of Critical/Textual Stylistics to a poem in Sorani and have shown that some adaptation to the model is in order due to the differences between Sorani and English. One

example is the *izâfa* construction and the use of the (in)definite article in Sorani which differ from English grammar. Nevertheless, we can confidently argue, that Critical/Textual Stylistics is applicable to Sorani texts if used in a flexible and adapted way. We put forward the argument that the textual-conceptual functions can guide the analysis in order to avoid bias but the interpretation of the findings requires to combine different textual-conceptual functions to explain more comprehensively how meaning making is achieved in the text. Although Sorani has a different language structure compared to English, particularly when it comes to the use of possessives and the addition of (in)definite articles, this does not hinder the application of Critical/Textual Stylistics when one bears these differences in mind. Sherko Bekas' poetry, for sure, is precious material for the testing and adapting of the model of Critical/Textual Stylistics to Sorani texts. Or, as we would rather frame it, Textual Stylistics helps to uncover the multiple layers of meaning in Bekas' poems and thus to fully appreciate Bekas' 'deep language' (a quote from our interview with Halo Sherko Bekas who is the son of Sherko Bekas, to be read in full in our book, pp. 71ff).

Appendix

Textual-conceptual function Critical Stylistics	Textual-conceptual function Textual Stylistics	Formal realisation/List of analytical tools Critical Stylistics	Form(s) in Textual Stylistics
Naming and Describing	Naming and Describing	The choice of a noun to indicate a referent; nominalisation; the construction of noun phrases with modifiers (in pre- and post-position) to further determine the nature of the referent	Noun phrases, adjectival modifications, adjectival phrases
Representing Actions/ Events/ States	Representing processes	The choice of a verb, transitivity Simpson 1993, p. 88ff)	Choice of main (lexical) verb transitivity type
Equating and Contrasting	Equating and Contrasting	Antonymy, equivalence (parallel structure) and the creation of oppositional meaning (Jeffries 2010)	Intensive relational structures and apposition (equating) Syntactic and semantic triggers including, for example, Not X but Y frame
Exemplifying and Enumerating	Listing	Three-part lists (implies completeness without being comprehensive, Jeffries 2010, p. 73), four-part-lists to indicate hyponymous and meronymous sense relation, apposition	Lists of words, phrases or clauses which perform the same function in the higher level structure

Textual-conceptual function Critical Stylistics	Textual-conceptual function Textual Stylistics	Formal realisation/List of analytical tools Critical Stylistics	Form(s) in Textual Stylistics
Prioritising	Prioritising	Relates to sentence structure: three ways in which the English language may prioritise elements of its structure: exploiting the information structure (clefting), transformational possibilities (active/passive voice) or subordination possibilities	Placement in syntactic structure (subordination or fronting)
Implying and Assuming	Alluding	Relates to Pragmatics (Levinson 1983): existential and logical presupposition, implicature according to the co-operative model of interaction by Grice (1975, 1978) (maxims of quality, quantity, relation, manner)	definite noun phrases and of logical presuppositions Triggers of conventional implicatures
Negation	Negating	The creation of unrealised worlds (Nahajec 2009)	core negators (no, not), pronouns (none), morphemes (de-), lexical items (deny)
Hypothesisin g	Hypothesisin g	Modaility (Simpson 1993)	Modality from modal verb through modal adverbs and adjectives to lexical verbs of opinion
Presenting Other's Speech and Thoughts	Presenting others' speech and thought	Speech and Thought Presentation (Semino & Short 2004, Short 1996)	Direct, indiret and free indirect reporting mechanisms
Representing Time, Space and Society	Representing time, space and society	Deixis, Text World Theory (Werth 1999), Possible World Theory (Ryan 1991), choice of verb tense, metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 2003)	Deixis

Textual-conceptual function Critical Stylistics	Textual-conceptual function Textual Stylistics	Formal realisation/List of analytical tools Critical Stylistics	Form(s) in Textual Stylistics
	Evoking		Onomatopoeia (sound) Layout Line-breaks and stanzas Long, delayed or extended clause elements minor sentences

Table 1: A synopsis of the tools of Critical Stylistics and Textual Stylistics and their conceptual categories (Tabbert & Ibrahim, 2023, p. 29f)

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Endnotes

¹ Rawanga means 'immediate observation' in Kurdish

² Khaja's lover

³ Name of a women that carries cultural connotations

⁴ A place in Iran

⁵ Another canonical opposition, one might argue, exists between the second level modifier 'east' which brings to mind the opposite 'west' and, in this context, is linked to eastern and western Kurdistan, one is Iran and the other Iraq.