

## Stylistic Analysis of the Poem “A Dream Within A Dream” by Edgar Allan Poe

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the text of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem, *A Dream Within A Dream*, on three different levels of stylistic analysis: Pragmatical, phonological, and morphological. The purpose is to unveil the literal and cryptic aspects of the poem to develop a systemic interpretation, which is to understand poetic expressions crafted artistically by employing devices of alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme scheme. As it emerges out, the understanding of different stylistic devices furnishes the explication of the poem for themes, views, images of the materialistic world, and lack of power of being human.

**Keywords:** Style and stylistics, Pragmatics, Morphology, Phonology, Linguistic features, literary elements

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### Preliminaries

#### *Style and Stylistics*

Style is the way in which something is written or said. Style varies from one writer to another even for a same writer’s style slightly varies in his/her two different pieces of writings. Pretorius and Swart define style as “Style is a way in which a writer utilizes the linguistic means at his disposal to produce a definite effect on the reader” (Pretorius, 1982). Leech and Short have also defined it as “the linguistic study of style”. According to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Style is used merely to refer to the selection and ordering of language (Warren, 1943: 605). Lucas (1955) argued, “The effective use of language, especially in prose, whether to make statements or to rouse emotions. It involves first of all the power to put fact with clarity and brevity.” Gleason defines style as 'Style as the patterning of choices made within the option presented by the conventions of the language (Gleason, 1965: 405). Hockett describes that style is two utterances in the same language which convey approximately the same information but

which are different in their linguistic structure can be said to differ in style (Hockett, 1958: 556). For instance two expressions of the same language which are giving same information but differ in structural phenomenon can be called style:

- a. He came to soon, and  
He arrived prematurely
- b. My parent is going to his heavenly home, and  
My father is dying

Above in the example 'a' the first expression is very simple while the second is concrete but both sentences representing the same idea. Similarly example 'b' proposes the same meaning in both sentences but the first sentence is constructed in an artistic ring and giving an aesthetic impression. Thus, style becomes the astonishing way of representing text with various packed linguistic features to convey messy, complex and abstract viewpoints.

Stylistic analysis in linguistics allows identifying the significant usage of patterns in speech or writing. It mainly focuses on to classify the intrinsic elements and features of language. These elements are inserted as an integral part of the text, that further Dada (2004) elaborates; *'in order to fully grasp the meaning of the work; it has sound patterns, semantic relations and syntactic organization. All these must be taken into account when reading a literary text.'* However, Hough's argument is pretty simple that refers stylistics as "the study of effective elements in language" (Hough, 1969). Effective elements assert the essential messages concealed in the expression of language. Thus, it seems very close to practical criticism. Then, stylistic analysis undertakes the explication of texts from literary point of view. Stylistic analysis in literary studies generally assumes to explain the layers of text by close reading than relying on the plot. It accomplishes internal thoughts and unfolds them with a logistic description such as point of view, setting, imagery, symbolism, tone, atmosphere, personification etc.

### ***A Dream Within A Dream: Summary***

*A Dream Within A Dream* is a fascinating poem by Edgar Allan Poe, published in 1849. The poem opens with a gloomy tone where the narrator is parting from his lady lover. It consists of two stanzas that convey two distinct spirits but associated sequences. It articulates three significant disparate themes slightly connected with each other. On surface level it deals with love, grief and isolation but on deeper level Poe's poem refers to frustration, failure and lack of power. The central part of the poem claims that life is not a mere dream but a dream within a dream. Throughout the poem goes above and beyond the linguistic features as well as concerning with concealed literary elements. Moreover, *A Dream within A Dream* is often an obscure poem which confers multiple meaning to its readers.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

Stylistic Analysis is practiced to identify linguistic features and put them into a specific classification as well as to interpret the possible literal meanings in the text. In this respect, Allan's poem enriched with aesthetic and complex linguistic expressions that

require a deeper look to be explored. The purpose of this study is to describe formal features of the text on three distinctive levels of stylistics analysis used in *A Dream Within A Dream*. This poem will be analysed on pragmatic level, morphological level and phonological level and its components. This paper also aimed to peep into poem's artistic and literary facets that deliberately furnished by the poet.

### **Stylistic Analysis: A Dream within a Dream**

#### **Pragmatical Level**

Pragmatic is a subfield of linguistics that deals with context to explain the meanings of the text according to its situation. It does not concern with directly language but interested in the particular aim of people in language. Thus, pragmatics is simply the study of language usage. The situational context has great importance to comprehend the actual meaning embedded by an artistic orbit of the text. (Yule, 2010). It gives less information about the static meaning of words but more about the situational context in which the words are particularly being used. For instance, if your friend says that "crack the window" while room is so stuffy and warm then you will open the window just a little. On the other hand if he locked in a room and says in the same way as "crack the window" then you will break that window pragmatically. In both examples actual meanings are completely different from their permanent linguistic meanings. So, according to situation comprehension of the invisible messages by their literal meanings within diverse situations is called pragmatics (Morini, 2016).

Then, pragmatics refers to the investigation of embedded information that manages effectiveness of text. It emphasizes on the gravity of text to proceed what actually being talked by the speaker. It also distinguishes literal view of other textual tendencies in order to get clear and quick messages (Hickey, 1993). The following discussion is fairly close to narrative poem *A dream within a Dream* by Edgar Allan Poe by its pragmatic components.

Usually setting of a literary work empathizes by its time and place where it has been established. Setting of this poem by place is so convenient that is different in both stanzas. In the first stanza, the narrator has not revealed much about the event, so the vague narration does not assert where actually incident takes place. But the situation insinuates the dreamy effect of what is happening in his mind. The second stanza is richly symbolic and more concrete. It is centred '*surf-tormented shore*', '*grains of the golden sand*', '*roar*' and '*pitiless wave*' representing an ocean where the narrator is wishing to God and surrounded with grief. The poem is narrated through the first person point of view, '*I stand amid the roar*', '*and I hold within my hand*'. The tone of the poem is experiencing and expressing sorrow and unhappiness '*And, in parting from you now*', '*While I weep-while I weep!*' Atmosphere is another aspect that elaborates the creativity of poet which can be understood by the situations and circumstances through the poem has been told. In this poem atmosphere is gloomy that causing and suggestive of hopelessness. The diction; '*weep, parting, hope has flown, pitiless wave*' concludes profoundly in making a harmful sentiment and makes narrator uncomfortable.

Symbolism is a unique art to make a work of literature aesthetic. When a writer wants to intend certain mood or hints, he uses an object that represents abstract ideas. It utilizes the perception of reader to comprehend the cryptic meaning through a particular object. There concrete use of symbols such as ‘surf-tormented shore’ and ‘pitiless wave’ symbolize the ruthless behaviour of the nature without mercy, furthermore ‘can I not grasp’ refers to power of deception or illusion. The use of personification in this poem is tremendously associated with birds and insects. Flying is commonly associated with birds but the poem steals this living attributes for hope as ‘hope has flown away’. Similarly, the narration of ‘grains of sand creep’ alsogrows odd characteristic but resembles at best. Moreover, the divergent graphological impression of two stanzas (the first stanza consisting of 11 lines while second 13), irregularities of couplets and triplets in both stanzas, difference of rhyme scheme, and length of stanzas reveal the *dreamy effect* of the poem. The poem also makes use of rhetorical questions, ‘can i not grasp’, ‘can I not save’. Emotional crisis is something which refers to destruction while the narrator’s dynamic behaviour that shifts from one situation to another immediately. In the first stanza ‘the narrator’ is frustrated and defeated that no matter if hope goes away ‘in a vision or in none’. In the second stanza his emotions changes towards expectations and wishes to God to clasp something while losing everything. It seems the narrator’s feelings are shaking between frustration and hope.

### **Phonological Level**

Phonology is a branch of linguistic which deals with patterns or combinations of sound in language (Coogan, 2017). It tells us how they do and can combine into words and explains why certain phonetic features are important to identifying a word. Precisely, how sounds are organized in particular language is called phonology. Phonology suggests two types of sounds; sound devices and literary devices (Aslam, 2014).

### **Sound Devices**

Sound devices are elements of poetry that emphasize a special form of art, also known as musical devices (Certo, 2007). Poets use these devices including alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme orrepetition to produce an aesthetic sense in the reader’s mind (Skinner, 1941). Sound devices which are used in *A Dream Within A Dream* given below:

*Table no. 1: Sound devices*

Alliteration	Consonance	Assonance	Repetition	Rhyme Scheme
<u>D</u> ays, <u>D</u> ream	<u>T</u> his, <u>K</u> iss	<u>B</u> row, <u>u</u> pon	A dream within a dream	AAA
<u>D</u> ays, <u>D</u> ream	<u>P</u> arting, <u>F</u> rom	<u>N</u> ow, <u>F</u> rom	O God! Can I not save	BB
<u>H</u> ope, <u>H</u> as My, <u>D</u> ay	<u>T</u> hus, <u>M</u> uch	<u>O</u> God! Can I not grasp	<u>C</u> C <u>S</u> eed, <u>S</u> ee	<u>V</u> ision, <u>N</u> one
<u>W</u> hile I weep–while I weep!	<u>D</u> D <u>D</u>	<u>D</u> ream, <u>D</u> ream	<u>H</u> old, <u>H</u> and	<u>Y</u> ou, <u>W</u> ho
<u>G</u> rain, <u>G</u> olden	<u>B</u> een, <u>D</u> ream		<u>E</u> E <u>G</u> rain, <u>G</u> olden	<u>H</u> ope, <u>F</u> lown
			<u>F</u> F	<u>T</u> herefore, <u>G</u> one
	<u>G</u> G <u>G</u>	<u>S</u> ee, <u>S</u> eed		<u>H</u> H

God, Not Can, Grasp Not, Wrong Can, Save	II BB
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**Consonant Cluster**

A consonant cluster in a word is a compound with no vowels between them, also called consonant blend (Treiman, 1990). There are three types of consonant cluster, occurs at the beginning of a word will be categorized in ‘initial cluster’, within a word as ‘medial cluster’ while at the end occurs ‘final cluster’ (Tahmasebi, 2019).

*Table no. 2: Consonant Clusters*

Initial Consonant Cluster	Cluster Media Consonant Cluster	Final Consonant Cluster
<u>D</u> ream	<u>G</u> olden	<u>D</u> ays
<u>W</u> hile	<u>P</u> arting	<u>H</u> old
<u>G</u> rasp	<u>N</u> ight	<u>H</u> and
<u>G</u> rain	<u>T</u> ormented	<u>G</u> rasp
<u>T</u> his	<u>F</u> inger	<u>G</u> rain
<u>F</u> rom	<u>P</u> arting	
<u>W</u> rong	<u>W</u> rong	
<u>T</u> hem	<u>F</u> low	
<u>T</u> herefore	<u>W</u> ith	
<u>B</u> row	<u>K</u> iss	
<u>S</u> tand	<u>S</u> tand	
<u>C</u> reep	<u>S</u> and	
<u>C</u> lasp	<u>C</u> lasp	

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**Morphological Level**

Morphology is the study of formation of word and its structure. The minimal units of meaning are known as morpheme (Andrea Krott, 2001). Morphemes are naturally divided into two types; those can stand alone are ‘free morphemes’ while morphemes that must attached to other morphemes are ‘bound morphemes’ (Baayen, 2005). Generally word formation concerns with two types of rules, ‘derivational morpheme’ changes the meaning (Lieber, 1991) and ‘inflectional morphemes’ have only grammatical functions and never change the root. Furthermore, lexical level deals with vocabulary items and use of words in a piece of text. Morphological level in sequence according to the text of the poem follows:

*Table No. 3: Morphological Level*

Free Morpheme	Bound Morpheme	Root	Suffix	Prefix
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Kiss Parting Parting Parting  
 Brow Gone Gone Gone  
 Take Days Days Days  
 Wrong Tormented Tormented Tormented  
 Deem Grains Grains Grains  
 Hope Golden Golden Golden  
 Dream Fingers Fingers Fingers  
 Night Tighter Lighter Tighter  
 Day Pitiless Pitiless Pitiless  
 See                      Surf-tormented                      Surf-tormented                      Surf-tormented  
 Stand  
 Hold  
 Hand  
 Sand  
 Creep  
 Deep  
 Weep  
 Grasp  
 Clasp  
 Wave

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### **Word Derivational Process**

Derivation is a procedure in which new words generated through the existing old words often by adding a prefix or a suffix is called word derivational process (Amenta, 2012). Derivational prefixes normally do not shake the class of base word but often by adding a prefix to form a new noun will give slightly different from the base word. On the other hand, derivational suffixes usually changes both word class and meaning, often by adding to a verb or adjective to form a new noun having different meaning. Word class, derivational category and affixes from the poem follow:

*Table No. 3: Word Derivational Process*

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Word class to which derivation applies	Derivational Category	Affix
Used	-ed	Tormented
	-en	Golden
Adjective	-er	Tighter
	-less	Pitiless

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### **Word Formational Process**

Inflection is a process of word formation in which by adding items to the base word we

form a new word that expresses grammatical components such as noun, verb or adjective in the inflectional category of present, past or perfect participle (Raja, 2014). The word inflection derives from the Latin “inflectere” and its meaning refers “to bend”. In English grammar, inflections form to express the variety of grammatical categories often by adding prefixes or suffixes. For instance, the inflection –s at the end of “cats” discloses the noun is plural while the same inflection –s (Cat runs) at the end of “runs” demonstrates the noun is singular.

Table No. 4: Word Formational Process

Word class (inflection applies) Used	Inflectional Category	Inflection	Affix
Noun	Number	-S	Days,fingers,grains
Continuous aspect	Present participle	-ing	Parting
Perfect aspect	Past participle	-own, -ne	Flown, gone
Adjectives	Degree of comparison	-er	Tighter

### Lexical Level

Lexical traditionally known as diction associated with a work of literature. It constitutes the sum of total vocabulary items used in a particular piece of text which proposes the study of individual word in the proper linguistics context (Bilal, 2012). In order to author’s intention it’s a complex phenomenon to understand the lexicon categorically. For instance, “trees flower” and “spring flower” may be referring to a noun phrase or independent phrase; it can be determined only by the uses of these phrases in the context provided by the text. A lexical poetic intention argues evaluation of its lexis employing parts of speech categories such as noun, verb or adjective. For this modern linguists have developed analytical method follows:

Table No. 5: Lexical Level

Noun	Pronoun	Adjective	Verb	Adverb
Brow	I	Deep	Take	Much
Night	My	Tormented	Let	Less
Day	Me	Golden	Dream	Now
Dream	We	Pitiless	Deem	Yet
Hope	You	This	Flown	Away
Vision	They	That	See	
None	Them	Wrong	Flown	
Roar	Who	Few	See	
Shore	It		Seem	
Hand	Hold			
Grain	Creep			
Sand	Weep			
Finger	Grasp			
God	Save			
Clasp	Avow			
Wave				

Kiss

Paring

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Preposition	Conjunction	Interjection	Article
Upon	And	O God!	The
In	Or	I Weep!	A
From	But	Few!	
Amid	Therefore	Brow!	
Of			
Within			
Through			
To			
With			

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### Conclusion

Stylistics is very close to linguistic and literary criticism that how language and the meanings of the text are transmitted. The stylistic analysis helps readers to enhance his/her understanding of the meanings of the poem by explicating the different levels of poem. In this poem poet has used symbols and personification to demonstrate the brutality of nature and tells how a man is helpless before it. This study may become a template for understanding of the poetry and to explicate the other great pieces of literature.

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## Appendix

### **A Dream Within A Dream**

#### **Edgar Allan Poe**

Take this kiss upon the brow!  
And, in parting from you now,  
Thus much let me avow—  
You are not wrong, who deem

That my days have been a dream;  
Yet if hope has flown away  
In a night, or in a day,  
In a vision, or in none,  
Is it therefore the less gone?  
All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar  
Of a surf-tormented shore,  
And I hold within my hand  
Grains of the golden sand—  
How few! yet how they creep  
Through my fingers to the deep,  
While I weep—while I weep!  
O God! can I not grasp  
Them with a tighter clasp?  
O God! can I not save  
One from the pitiless wave?  
Is all that we see or seem  
But a dream within a dream?