



## Comparative Formalistic Analysis of Daud Kamal and Emily Dickinson's Selected Poems

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### ABSTRACT

From the perspective of formalist critics, form is important and content is secondary. Unlike the traditional criticism of literature, formalism focuses on form of a given text and endeavours to dissect meanings and theme. The current research work is focused on comparative formalist analysis of Daud Kamal's poem Ode to Death and Emily Dickinson's poem I heard a fly Buzz-when I died. These poems are taken for formalistic analysis because these are one of the best poems written by poets in terms of their style, diction and themes. Furthermore, this study investigates literary devices that are used in the selected poems. The study utilizes qualitative approach by using a textual analysis.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism was started in 1920s in Russia. Formalist rejected many 19<sup>th</sup> century literary critics. They introduced scientific approach to literary studies. According to formalists form is superior to context and only text is enough to study it. There is no need to study a text in

reference to the context. A literary text should be studied by taking the linguistic and structural features of the text. Their chief focus was on the literariness of the text. By literariness they mean the language employed in the text. They study a text through structure, imagery, rhyme scheme and figurative language. The formalists endeavor to identify literariness in a given text which is achieved by the use of language. They believe that literary language is different from everyday speech. By the use of literary devices literary language deviates from everyday speech patterns and produces literariness and defamiliarization.

### **About the Poets**

Daud Kamal was born in 1935 in Abbottabad, now district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. He was an educationist and a poet. He wrote in English language. He got his early education from Burn Hall School and then Islamia College Peshawar. He went to University of Cambridge England for the completion of his tripos. He served as a professor and chairman of University of Peshawar and later he became vice chancellor of the same institution. He was influenced by modernist English writings. He liked the poetry of Ezra Pound, W.B Yeats and T.S Eliot. His poetic collections include *remote beginning*, *compass of love* and other poems, *recognitions*, *before the carnations wither*. He also translated some of the poems of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Mirza Ghalib into English Language. He was awarded with Faiz Ahmad Faiz award in 1987 and pride of performance award in 1990 after his death. He left this world on Dec 5, 1987 in United States.

His poetry is connected to past and present simultaneously. His works have the unique sense of history, culture, art and civilization. He beautifully uses the technique of imagery in his poetry and his poems create a clear insight of the things he portrays in his poems. Daud Kamal in his works conveys a sense of spirituality and loss. His writing style is very beautiful as his deep observations about small things can be seen in his poems. Sufism is one of the important parts in Daud's poetry. He elegantly portrays the images of nature as he talks about trees and sparkling waters. Through his writing Daud allows the reader to see the deep connection he has with the entire universe.

Emily Dickinson, in the American state of Massachusetts, in the town of Amherst, Emily Dickinson was born on December 10th, 1830. She was regarded as one of the greatest poets of America in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her poems are lyrical and the speaker in her poems is identified as the first person "I". Most of her poems are really short but they hold within them the beauty of an entire world. Emily Dickinson was a keen observer and in her poems she wrote about everything she observed. Her unique power was to write about imaginary world because of her strong imaginative strength which would lead her works to the high levels of uniqueness. Emily Dickinson didn't follow any poetic rules and made a distinct style of her own.

### **About the Poems:**

A person might express their strong love or admiration for someone or something in an ode, which is a lyric poetry with erratic metrical structure. This poem has discussed that life and death are the ultimate realities. It is about the journey of an individual's life from birth to death. The poem discusses that there is very small distance between an individual's life and death. A human's life comes to an end when death engulfs him and death occurs so quickly that even it

takes little time than lifting of a single eyebrow. Death is inevitable, no one can deny it and nobody can escape the occurrence of it. There is no doubt that every living being has to die one day but this death of an individual causes no effect on time as it stops for no one. Grief at the loss of a loved one cannot cause one to pass away, every individual comes to his normal routine at certain point. Although diamonds are comprised of carbon, it is not a given or required that each molecule of carbon dust transforms into a diamond. Same is the case with human beings, it is not necessary that they will accomplish all their dreams in such a short period of life. Human beings have huge dreams and goals in their lives but it is not possible for them to accomplish all of their goals in a really limited time. The combination of soul and body results in the existence of human beings and life and death have a certain link that is similar to the link between tear and eye. In the busy world human beings forget that death occurs as rapidly as a tear drop flows out from an eye. No one knows the exact timing of when death will occur but it will certainly happen. The poet further talks about the after-death situation of the grave. There is complete and utter silence in grave because after death there are no more hardships and chaos of life anymore. Grave is a place where there is no space for mourning because it is free from all sorrows and troubles of life. At the end of the poem Daud Kamal asks a question from life that either you left me or I was on the verge of passing out as it is the harsh reality of our life.

In *I heard a fly buzz- when I died*, the poet described the transition between life and death. The poet in this poem has tried to describe that what it feels like to actually die. The speaker of the poem is telling this after having actually died, as the speaker in on her deathbed. The room and the air was completely still in those final moments like the calm and tense air between storms. This seems to herald the silence of death and implies that the boundary between these two states is somewhat blurred, as if the transition between life and death was not a sharp jump, but a slow fading. The people around the speaker were crying so much that they couldn't shed their tears anymore. They all seem to hold their breath while waiting for speaker's last moments and looking forward to the arrival of God in the room. The speaker further tells that she signed a will and gave away all her property. The speaker divided all those parts of her life which were dividable. But then instead of God's arrival into the room, a fly suddenly interrupted the process. Fly suggests the arrival of death and the buzzing of fly prevents the speaker from reaching a state of spiritual contemplation or grace which seemed more appropriate for the occasion. The moment of death remains a hidden mystery as fly interrupts the final moments of the speaker and human beings can't know for sure that what comes after life. The poem ends with an unfinished note and the fading light of windows represents the speaker's inability to see beyond her last living moments. Death remains a mystery despite the fact that the speaker is talking from a life after death.

### **Research Question:**

1. What are the similarities and differences between the writing style of Daud Kamal and Emily Dickinson by applying formalism on selected poems?
2. How effectively Russian Formalism is truly applicable on both of the poems?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Andrew Bula in his research article *The Poetry of A.N Akwanya: A Formalist Evaluation of its Technique*, does the formalistic analysis of the A.N Akwanya's collection of poems. He analyzed that there is the existence of formalist techniques at large in the all the three poetic collections and they depict the true essence of literature. The three collections analyzed include, "Pilgrim Foot", "Moments", and "Visitant on Tiptoe and Other Poems". In this research article the researcher analyzed the poetic collection separately. In the very first poetic collection, namely 'pilgrim foot' the researcher pointed out that the poet used all the thematic and figurative devices aptly and accurately. There is an extensive use of themes, poetic diction, similes, metaphors, personification and rhetorical devices. Repetition is visible either in every line or every stanza of the poem. (Bule, 2018) The researcher explored many religious themes through the use of different words like 'judgment by fire', 'seesaw', and 'time for the military' in the poems. Bule analyzed that the use of these words depicts the religious as well as the ethnic nationalism attractions of the poets. Then the researcher analyzed second poetic collection which was published in 2007 with the name "Moments". In this poetic collection is also analyzed by Bule on the grounds of Russian Formalism. There is the use of assonance, consonance, alliteration in this poetic collection also this includes multiple themes of religious integrity.

*The Textual Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Poem: A Formalist Approach*, is the research article jointly written by Faniran, A. O. Adetuyi, C. A. In this research article, the researchers did the analysis of Abiku, a poem written by Wole Soyinka by applying Russian Formalism. The researchers firstly described what actually Russian Formalism is and how it is related to the concept of literature as 'art for art sake' and then analyzed one of the poems of Soyinka on the theoretical grounds of Russian Formalism. The researchers pointed out the use of literary devices and stylistic features such as diction, symbolism, imagery, graphology, rhythm and other observed literary styles in the selected poem (Adetuyi and Olatayo, 2015). The researchers evaluated the themes as centered on the interplay between the individual predicaments and social responsibilities. It is noted by the researchers that "Soyinka exploits literary stylistics to embark on syntactic modification of his poetic lines in "Abiku". This study only plays up lines or stanzas of the poem that either breaks existing linguistic rules to create new ones or those that modify and utilize conventional rules for specific stylistic effects." (Adetuyi and Olatayo, 2015).

Pervez (2018), in his research article, *The semantic analysis of Daud Kamal's Ode to Death*, has semantically analyzed the Pakistani poet Daud Kamal's poem *Ode to Death*. This article is interpreted with the help of semantics which explains the characteristics of poem, its meaning and poet's assumption towards it. The article further states that as Daud Kamal is Pakistani and a Muslim, his approach towards linguistics, his religious bent of mind, viewpoint about personal life and attitude towards death is visibly different from other regional poets.

According to Wahid Pervez, 'Death is the door from which every living being will pass. It is that drink which will be taken by everyone. Death is that flavor which every human will taste. Death is that tyrant who will put you into the stomach of Earth where human will live alone for an uncertain period of time. Death is that deceiver from whose deceive no one could escape' (Pervez, 2018).

Daghamin (2017), in his research article, *Reflection of Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson*, has discussed that how the topic of death is reflected in Emily Dickinson's poetry. Death arouses fear and curiosity because it suddenly approaches without preparation or expectation. Death is a pure and mysterious truth that no one likes; it is a natural phenomenon in the life cycle of human beings. Death seems insensitive and cruel to most of us, although we all know that it is inevitable and predetermined. We are afraid of death because it takes away those we love, our parents, siblings and friends. People have different opinions about death, some people think that death is a savior and it saves us from all pains, trials and sufferings of life. However some people think of death as a bad omen because it takes away all relatives and friends. Literary works and religious books have long portrayed the existence of death. The topic of death is not only reflected in novels, short stories and dramas, but also are present in in- depth discussions in poems. Poets use words to express their views on death, while the readers use personal perceptions and experiences to appreciate and understand death.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Writing Style used in Daud Kamal's *Ode to Death***

Ode to Death is one of the most amazing blank verse of Pakistani writer Daud Kamal. This poem talks about death as the ultimate fact, and it is written in an incredibly lovely manner. The poet has made use of symbolism and images in such a brilliant way that it catches the attention of many readers and leaves a great impact on them. The language of this poem is completely straightforward but the way poet has written it conveys a deep meaning. Three major topics are present in this poem; first is the ultimate fact of death, second major aspect is the vulnerability of worldly life and third is the unending life after death. One surprising fact about this poem is that the poet has quoted two different but modern American writers twice in the beginning, one after the other.

This line depicts that there is no huge separation between death and life. When death holds a man in its arms, the story of human ends and it all happens in few seconds that it will even require a small deal of time than raising an eyebrow. This much small distance is present between life and death.

Poet has quoted E.E Cummings in the next lines of poem;

Through Cumming's quotations, poet says that death is the extreme truth and nobody can deny or escape it. And just like clock, which keeps on ticking, humans keep on breathing even after the loss of their loved ones.

As diamond is one of the most precious gems, it is composed of carbon. But it is not necessary that each and every tiny particle of carbon will turn into precious diamond. Just like that there is no surety that each and every single dream of human beings will be fulfilled in this short period of life in world.

Humans all their lives have many wishes and dreams which they want to achieve in their lives but it is not possible to fulfil them all. Wishes are like the seeds of a pomegranate, and time is like one, due to which human can't satisfy all those dreams in such short life.

Poet compares a huge pine tree with a matchstick and says that pine tree was knocked down by thunder strike last year. The end of both pine tree and burned matchstick in ashtray is same. The last destiny of everything is tomb.

The poet in these lines is addressing to a man that he was present when the person was taking his final breaths, poet was holding his hand. Poet then asks from dying person that is it true that bones and hair takes long time in decaying as other body parts disintegrate quite quickly.

Poet is saying in these lines that humans exist because of the combination of body and soul. These two entwine together and submerge into the long forgotten stream of the world. The link between life and death is similar to the link between an eye and tear. Human in their daily life hassle forgets about the existence of death which comes as rapidly as a tear coming out from an eye.

Here Islamic point of view is presented that grave is a place of barrel rocks and silence and sleep roams there. It is a location devoid of all the problems and pains of life, leaving no room for grief.

The poet also wonders about death and then thinks about his past life from which he gets terrified as he has done nothing good in his life. The bad deeds are responsible for the darkness which consumes the poet when he thinks about his past life and makes him concerned.

In these lines poet says that life is moving very far away from him because death takes over life and nobody can fight against it. The poet further says that it is hard to figure out that which one between life and death are a deceiver and which one of them is being deceived. At the end of the poem Daud Kamal asks a question from life that either you left me or I was on the verge of passing out as it is the harsh reality of our life.

### **Writing Style used in Emily Dickinson's *I heard a Fly buzz – when I died***

*I heard a Fly buzz – when I died* is one of the popular poetries of American poet Emily Dickinson. In this poem, poet is explaining the dying experience. The poem shows poet's own experience of death, which is an unexplainable mystery as only those who die, knows how it feels to be dying. But the poet has tried to imagine it in her poem. The tone used here is very light and soothing which shows to the readers that narrator is accepting her fate. Fly is such a small meniscal creature but it interrupts the arrival of god in the room where narrator is taking her last breaths. An insignificant fly arrives into the room instead of god.

In the starting line of poem, narrator hears the buzzing of a fly in the last moment of her death. Dying is very grim and heavy moment as it is a very serious occasion but fly interrupts the moment. It can be understood from the first line that fly is the center focus of this poem. Next line shows the setting of poem, the narrator is taking her last breaths in a room where she is surrounded by her loved ones. The atmosphere in the room is completely still because the occasion is very gloomy but this stillness also awaits the stillness of being dead. There is a

moment of complete and utter stillness when a person dies. This stillness comes after the storm of life and before the storm of death.

In line 5, the narrator is hyper aware of her surrounding and states that her loved ones who are present in the room have cried for her so much that their eyes are unable to shed anymore tears because they have wrung them dry. The next line presents a fact that death is now awaited and the breathing of her loved ones is firm because now everyone is waiting for her last breath. In next line the moment of death is told as the last onset which means the last beginning, that speaker will begin a last journey after death. In Christianity, the word King is frequently used for God. Everyone gathered in the room is anticipating the arrival of God who will lead the last journey of narrator.

In these lines the narrator says that she signed away all her property/will. Speaker signs away only that stuff which was assignable because some things can't be assigned, such as human soul. And then fly makes its entrance into the room where narrator and people are waiting for god's arrival. Fly interrupts the moment which represents the doubt about what comes after death.

In last quatrain narrator tells that fly enters the room and comes between the narrator and the window, here window symbolizes life. These lines also suggest that the speaker's vision is narrowing as she takes her one last breath and leaves the world. Here the fly can be interpreted as the grim reaper. In the last line see is repeated which means that two types of seeing is mentioned. The narrator's literal vision has failed, as she is dead now and her ability to see beyond death has also failed. The narrator's line of sight goes blank and the poem ends, leaving the readers in the same state of blankness.

### **Technique used in *Ode to Death***

#### **Ode**

Ode is a lyric poetry with an erratic metrical structure in which the author conveys his or her passionate admiration and love for a person or thing. Ode to death is a lyrical poem about the ultimate fact of death and that it will occur in the life of every human being. The writing technique used in this poem is in the form of an ode.

#### **Tone**

Throughout the poem, the usage of tone is serious, dull and dark. It doesn't change the entire time. The gloominess of the poem can be seen from the use of words like thunderbolt, grave, dissolving of eyes, hair and bones.

#### **Metaphor**

Metaphor is a figurative device in which a certain word is used for something to refer it with another object in order to show the similarity between them. Daud Kamal has used metaphors throughout his poem. The words like diamond dreams and galaxies are used to refer to human goals and dreams which end with his demise. Poet compares the death of a man with

pine tree and matchstick that a thing strong and big like a pine tree will turn into ashes just like a small matchstick. The end of every living thing is death and everyone will taste the flavor of it.

### **Imagery**

Imagery is used to appear certain ideas, things and actions in such a way that it interests the physical senses. Poet has used imagery in this poem from line 11 to 15.

### **Religious Approach**

Daud Kamal is a Muslim writer and that's why the influence of religion can be seen in his poetries. In *Ode to Death* religious influence is present because he tells throughout his poem that death is the ultimate reality and it will come for everyone. Grave will be a last destination of all human beings and there is eternal life after death.

### **Style**

The style used in this poem is dramatic monologue which is a poem written in a form of speech narrated by a single person. A style in which no dialogue comes from any other person and only a single imaginary person narrates the whole poem.

Thus, the writing style and techniques used by Daud Kamal in his poem *Ode to Death* is simple and precise. The word usage and arrangement is very simple, effective and easily understandable. The poem is written in such a way that it forces readers to stick to it even after finishing the poem and leaves a great impact on one's mind.

### **Techniques used in I heard a Fly buzz – when I died**

#### **Imagery**

In the very first line of poem imagery is used. As the buzzing of a fly heard by narrator shows the sense of hearing in it. The sense of sight is present in the last stanza as fly comes between the narrator and window and blocks her vision.

#### **Simile**

Simile is used to compare two objects with each other in order to make the statement more clear. Simile is present in the second and third line of the poem where poet is comparing stillness of room with the stillness in air, as there is a moment of complete stillness when the storm of life ends with person's death and when person enters to the state that comes after death. In between these two storms stillness exists.

#### **Enjambment**

Enjambment means when a line is continued even after the end of line. The continuation of sentence without break is enjambment. In first quatrain it is used in lines two and three. Enjambment makes the sentence longer as there is no pause when one line finishes and the other starts. It is also present in lines six and seven and in the third quatrain.



### **Anaphora**

Anaphora is repetition of words in any poetic line or sentence. The word stillness is used two times, in line two and three. Stillness here is giving more stress to the atmosphere of the room in these two lines of the poem.

### **Synecdoche**

Synecdoche is used in the fifth line of poem. The eyes here represent the people who are present in the room.

### **Form**

This poem has a formal pattern written in quatrains and rhyming scheme used here is ABCB, a slant rhyme.

### **Meter**

Emily Dickinson has used her common pattern; iambic tetrameter and trimeter, which could be seen in her many poems. There are four stresses in first and third lines of every quatrain and three stresses in second and fourth lines.

### **Rhyming Scheme**

This poem follows the ballad stanza rhyming scheme, ABCB.

## **DISCUSSION**

By comparative formalist analysis of these two poems, it could be said that I heard a fly buzz-when I died has formal pattern written in quatrains and rhyming scheme used here is ABCB, a slant rhyme. There are four stresses in first and third lines of every quatrain and three stresses in second and fourth lines. This poem follows the ballad stanza rhyming scheme, ABCB. Ode to death is a lyrical poem about the ultimate truth of death and that it will occur in the life of every human being. The writing technique used in this poem in the form of an ode. Throughout the poem, the usage of tone is serious, dull and dark. It doesn't change the entire time. The style used in this poem is a dramatic one-liner which is a poem written in a form of speech narrated by a single person. Imagery is used in both poems and the theme focus of these two poems is death.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the nutshell, according to Russian Formalism the meaning, essence and beauty of any text lies within the text and only the text is enough to extract the exact meaning from it. There is no need to study the social, political, cultural or any sort of context to understand a text. The true literariness lies inside the text. Formalists study the form, use of literary devices, use of figurative language, plot, characters, rhythm and rhyme of the poem to analyze its true meaning. This research focuses on the comparative formalistic analysis of 'Ode to Death and I heard a fly buzz- when I died, written by Daud Kamal and Emily Dickinson respectively. Both the poets not only successfully used the poetic techniques like theme, imagery, symbolism, alliteration, assonance, consonance, simile, metaphor etc. but they also embellished the poem by the quality use of poetic diction.

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