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Analysis of “If” Poem Through Structuralist Lenses

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Abstract

The aim of this research study is to apply Structuralism (a Linguistic movement related to scientific study of words as signs) as theoretical framework on the Poem “If” by Rudyard Kipling. “If” poem has thoroughly been analyzed by various critics employing various literary theories. The researcher has analyzed it through the lens of structuralism (a literary theory) by analyzing its underlying principles and patterns embedded within the poem. The researcher has analyzed parallels, echoes, reflection, patterns, imagery, defamiliarization and contrasts so that to reveal a systematic structural approach which indeed has been adopted by Kipling in this particular poem. Furthermore, the close textual analysis, descriptive and interpretive methods as research techniques have been utilized in this study. This research study is likely to contribute to fields of Linguistics, Literary theory and Pakistani literature as a distinct genre.

Keywords: *Structuralism, Defamiliarization, Imagery, Thematic Elements, Didacticism, Dyads*

1. Introduction

Before going into the detail textual analysis of this poem, a brief introduction of the founder of structuralism in linguistics is pertinent. The term “structuralism” is a belted term that describes a particular philosophical/ literary movement. This is the environment in which structuralism describes language as a system of signals produced not by isolation but by interaction, convention, and relation. Four forms of structuralism in language were identified by Ferdinand de Saussure. The differences between signifier and signified, language and parole, syntagmatic and associative (paradigmatic), and synchronic and diachronic are a few examples. The idea of associative and syntagmatic linkages between words has also been covered by Saussure. According to him, language systems and units are likely to be the places **where** strong links form or operate. The most important relation between linguistic units according to him is Syntagmatic relation which deals with relations formed by words within a chain...linear relations between units and words. Hence, signifiers are understood in terms of their linear linkers. In brief, de Saussure's structural linguistics propounded three related concepts (Blackburn, S 2008).

- a. De Saussure argued for a distinction between langue (an idealized abstraction of language) and parole (language as actually used in daily life). He argued that the "sign" was composed of both a signified, an abstract concept or idea, and a "signifier", the perceived sound/visual image.

- b. Because different languages have different words to describe the same objects or concepts, there is no intrinsic reason why a specific sign is used to express a given signifier. It is thus "arbitrary".
- c. Signs thus gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. As he wrote, "in language, there are only differences 'without positive terms'" (Baskin. W 1959).

1.1 Why "If" Poem?

"If" poem is the magnum opus of Rudyard Kipling in terms of its didacticism. One of the reasons of the reign in the genre of poetry of British Poets is because of such like poetry. "If" poem of Rudyard Kipling written in 1895, is considered as is a masterpiece because of various reasons which includes its pure didactic nature, its structure containing conditional form and the use of various poetic devices. It was first published in 1910 in the chapter "Brother Square Toes" in the book "Rewards and Fairies" which is a collection of Rudyard Kipling's poetry and short-story fiction. The advices of father to his son are so simplistic and majestic that it affects directly one's heart. The advices in the poem have become the part and parcel of the daily life of the kids not only in England but also throughout the world. The poem is full of manly virtues which should be the part and parcel of one's life. This poem is also cherished because of its moral message. It consists of four stanzas, each one having eight lines. It is written in iambic pentameter.

The recurring conditional clause in the form of "If" makes it the best poem to be analyzed structurally. That's why this particular poem has been selected for analysis through structuralist lenses.

1.2 Objectives

- a) To find out the parallels, echoes, reflection, patterns, and dyads in the 'If' Poem
- b) To highlight the poetic devices used
- c) To uncover the working of defamiliarization in the "If" Poem

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) How do parallels, echoes, reflection, patterns, and dyads are embedded in the "If" poem?
- 2) What are the poetic devices used in this poem by the poet?
- 3) How does the element of defamiliarization as underlying tool worked in this particular poem?

1.4 Research Statement

The study is to investigate the structural patterns found in Rudyard Kipling's poem "If" using a structuralist perspective in order to reveal the fundamental ideas that guide the poem's creation and add to its lasting importance. This study aims to clarify how Kipling uses structural aspects to communicate the poem's moral imperatives and philosophical insights by examining the form, language, imagery, and theme elements. The research attempts to demonstrate the interdependence of the poem's elements and their interpretational consequences by closely examining each stanza. In the end, the study aims to offer fresh perspectives on the structural nuances of "If" and how they relate to our comprehension of Kipling's creative mastery and the poem's larger cultural significance.

1.5 Research Problem

Patterns, contrasts, structure, poetic devices in the "If" poem requires great attention as the recurring conditional clause throughout the poem "If" requires structural analysis although Memon, M., Tunio, F., & Awan, M. (2021) have analyzed "If" Poem by Rudyard Kiplings on stylistic basis ignoring again the structural aspects.

1.6 Delimitation

This research article has been framed to analyze the "If" Poem written by Rudyard Kiplings from structural perspective which entails structural elements i.e. echoes, reflection, patterns, and contrasts leaving its formal interpretations.

2. Review of Literature

"If" poem of Rudyard Kipling remained under the microscopic analysis of various critics around the globe because of various reasons. For this poem, Rudyard Kipling drew inspiration from Leander Starr Jameson's life. Jameson was a British colonist who went on to become Cape Colony's tenth prime minister. He gained notoriety for his "Jameson Raid" (December 1895–January 1896) on the Transvaal, where he assembled a private army with the

intention of toppling Paul Krauger's Boer Government, which was controlling vast swathes of South Africa that were rich in resources. The British Government initially approved of the raid, but after it backfired, it abandoned him. Jameson spent fifteen months incarcerated in Africa. In trying circumstances, he maintained his composure and accepted full responsibility. There are rumors that this poem is based on Jameson's life and the hardships he endured. Taking lessons from this particular instance, Kipling wrote this classic poem molding it into a didactic one and advised his son to take chances and risks in life if you want to be called a man. In the poem, Kipling advised his son to make the most of life. A person's life becomes meaningless and useless if he is afraid to take chances. Perseverance and endurance in front of the sordid realities of life is the quintessence of this poem. He asks his son to take chances and explore all possible avenues to attain his goals if he is to succeed in life and accomplish better things. The didacticism, the plain advice of father to his son, the prudent appeal of living a decent life is the core of the poem. The sagacious appeal by a father to his son has remained the subject of various interpretations, Memon, Tunio, and Awan (2021), but in this research article the researcher has tried to analyze the poem through a structuralist perspective as Munawar and Rafique (2016) attempt to interpret said like poem through structuralist lenses. On the other hand "if" poem being didactic, has been selected by the researcher from a structuralist point of view, though to understand it better the researcher had to review didactic poetry first as RØ stvig (1959), who has rigorously analyzed a didactic variety of poetic works. Didactic poetry often intends to educate the reader on certain subjects, such as science, philosophy, hunting, farming, love, art and craft etc. Although, neither Greek nor Roman theorists recognized didactic poetry as a distinct genre. Didactic poetry typically targets a specific person who serves as the reader's role model and is considered the main subject of instruction. Though there are certain examples that exist like Jones (1984) who very minutely analyzed, Perses in "Hesiod's Works and Days", who normally invites the reader to empathize with the addressee.

The researcher intends not only to have unveiled the underlying structures of the poem but also to place this poem in the center of the didactic poetry prevalent in Kipling's era to find some common pattern in it. Although determining the borders and internal evolution of a genre can be challenging at times Schiesaro (2003). As most of the structuralists not only try to analyze a poem to find abstract underlying principles but also try to see the genre in the larger perspective as well. Barthes and Levi Strauss started to see structuralism in other disciplines whether it is pure sciences or social sciences and by doing so giving structuralism a new dimension of its own. While exploring the relevant literature (poems) it has been revealed to the researcher that the existing analysis of poems has mainly focused on interpretation, and seen them from a thematically and historical perspective, or rather an intensive interpretive perspective while ignoring the underlying structural patterns that govern the poem's composition. Zehfuss (2009), while studying Barthes, Derrida and Levi-Strauss has provided valuable insights into the interplay between form and meaning in literature. By keeping these scholars' contribution and their approach, the research has tried to uncover the structural complexities of "If" and their implications for interpretation. Mainly the semantic aspect of the "If" Poem has been compromised rather to find the unveiled underlying principles of the "If" Poem. Patterns, contrasts, structure, poetic devices have been identified.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing close reading and textual analysis to examine the structural elements of the poem "If." Each stanza has been analyzed in terms of its form that include parallels, echoes, reflection, patterns, and contrasts, with particular attention paid to patterns of repetition, symmetry, and binary oppositions. The findings have been interpreted through the lens of structuralist theory, drawing connections between formal elements and underlying meaning.

4. Data Analysis

Finding binary oppositions, or contrasting pairings, in a text is a common structuralist task. The contrasts between traits like "Will and Wavering," "Truth and Lies," "Dreams and Reality," and "Triumph and Disaster" are readily apparent in "If." The poem's examination of virtue and maturity is emphasized by these dichotomies. Structuralism is concerned with recurrent themes and patterns. You may have noticed that the conditional phrase "If you can..." appears several times in "If," after which a list of qualities and features is given. The poem's main idea is emphasized by the structural rhythm its recurrence establishes. A hierarchy of virtues and actions is established by the poem's structure, ranging from the individual ("keep your head") to the collective ("meet with Triumph and Disaster / and treat those two impostors just the same"). This hierarchical structure. The rules and values of society are reflected in this hierarchical framework. A deeper meaning is conveyed by symbols, according to structuralism.

Within the larger framework of "If," symbols such as "dreams," "kings," "crowns," and "common touch" can be examined for their symbolic meaning. Literary works reflect cultural norms and ideals. In "If," the poem's structure incorporates Victorian and Edwardian ideals like stoicism, tenacity, and self-control. Conditional Clause Repetition: Throughout the poem, a structural echo is established by the conditional word "If you can..." being used repeatedly. The poem's main theme of conditional virtues and the obstacles one must overcome to completely embody them is emphasized by its recurrence. Throughout its stanzas, the poem reiterates a number of qualities and traits, including endurance, resilience, humility, and integrity. These echoes highlight how the traits needed to successfully overcome life's problems are interconnected. Superficially, the poem looked like an appeal to adopt manly manners which is the indication that Kipling himself believed that enduring hardships, hardworking, burning your skin to earn livelihood, to give respect to women and not to quit at any moment in life are the virtues one should have. These fancy appeals have made the poem a classic and one of the finest poems its times as well as the modern times. According to Cohen (2005), the poem reflects the stoic ideals of remaining calm in the face of difficulty and approaching success and failure with equal measure. Resilience and emotional strength are reoccurring themes, as evidenced by this stoic echo. The poem as a whole reflects Kipling's representation of social mores and conventions, especially in lines like "if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you" and "if you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue." These echoes show how societal ideals structurally impact people's behavior. Each line of the poem starts with "If," creating a conditional framework that contrasts with its universal themes of moral integrity and human growth. The poem offers a framework for obtaining virtue under certain conditions, but its concepts are universal and transcend particular circumstances.

The word "if" highlights the conflict between moral principles and social norms. The poem celebrates individual qualities like honesty and self-reliance, but it also recognizes the impact of social forces, as evidenced by phrases like "if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you." This contrast draws attention to the difficulty people have in striking a balance between their own ideals and those of others. In contrast to people's innate tendency toward emotional outpouring and vulnerability, the poem encourages stoic concepts of perseverance and emotional control. Although stoicism is praised as a virtue, the poem also recognizes how hard it can be to remain calm in the face of hardship. "If" establishes a hierarchical structure of virtues, contrasting qualities like humility and perseverance with traits such as arrogance and impatience. This hierarchy emphasizes the importance of certain virtues over others and suggests a moral framework for character development. The word "If," which opens each stanza in the poem, establishes a distinct structural pattern. The poem's rhythmic pattern is created by this recurrence, which also highlights how conditional the advice is. Every time the word "If" appears, a conditional clause that poses an imaginary problem or scenario follows. These clauses create a pattern by outlining particular requirements or difficulties that the reader must overcome. Each stanza of the poem follows a similar structure, presenting a condition followed by a set of instructions or virtues. This parallel structure reinforces the thematic coherence of the poem and contributes to its overall organization. The qualities in the poem are arranged in a hierarchical pattern, with each stanza building on the one before it. This pattern shows that there is an order of increasing significance or difficulty, leading to the ideal of the "Man." Although the conditions and qualities in the poem are presented in a linear fashion, there is also a sense of cyclical repeating because the difficulties and virtues discussed are likely to recur throughout life. The cyclical pattern illustrates how personal development is a continuous process. Moral teachings: Didactic poems frequently make clear moral precepts or teachings. To communicate moral concepts and compel the reader to consider their own actions and views, the poet may employ direct words, allegory, or narrative devices. Didactic poetry usually takes on a didactic tone, much like that of a mentor or instructor. The poet may counsel, direct, or chastise the reader; these are frequently expressed as imperatives or rhetorical inquiries. Didactic poems frequently adopt an instructional tone, akin to that of a teacher or mentor. The poet may offer advice, guidance, or admonition to the reader, often in the form of imperatives or rhetorical questions. In instructional poetry, allegorical devices and symbolic imagery are frequently used. Poets can more easily convey complex ideas or moral quandaries to audiences by using allegory to portray them in a relatable and realistic way. Didactic poetry frequently captures the moral and theological ideals of the period in which it was written. Poets might use philosophical ideas, religious literature, or cultural customs to support and express their message and uphold social norms. A call to action can be found in certain didactic poetry, imploring readers to take up particular actions or mindsets. These poems could promote justice or equality, spark social or political change, or foster personal development and advancement. Two didactic poems are "To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell, which makes a strong case for the necessity of love and passion, and "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot, which addresses issues of spiritual desolation and the search for meaning in the modern world. Though didactic poetry is frequently attacked

for its overt moralizing or didacticism, done well, it can elicit thoughtful responses, spark discussions, and encourage readers to consider their own values and lives. The literary term "defamiliarization" was first used by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky to describe the practice of presenting familiar objects in an unfamiliar way in order to elicit new perspectives and ideas. By using this idea to analyze Rudyard Kipling's "If" we may find multiple occasions in which he challenges readers to re-evaluate the meaning and relevance of well-known notions by presenting them in a fresh way. In the passage "If" you can dream—and not make dreams your master," for instance, Kipling transforms the common notion of dreaming into a metaphor for aim and ambition. Similarly, he presented victory and tragedy as abstract concepts rather than actual happenings in "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, And treat those two impostors just the same," urging readers to do the same. Rudyard Kipling uses juxtaposition as a rhetorical tactic in "If" to highlight the moral imperatives that are outlined in the poem. The deliberate arrangement of opposing components clarifies the contrast between the desired qualities and possible drawbacks. For example, the contrast between "Triumph and Disaster" highlights how important it is to remain calm in the face of changing situations. Kipling deliberately contrasts values like honesty vs dishonesty, endurance versus capitulation, and patience versus impatience throughout the poem to emphasize his didactic message. This method not only highlights the value of living a moral life, but it also highlights how important it is to navigate the intricacies of the human experience with courage and discernment. Rudyard Kipling uses dyads, or pairs of connected concepts or ideas, to powerful effect in "If" illustrating the poem's themes and meanings. These dyads Cohen, T. (2018) add to the poem's overall structure and impact by drawing comparisons, contrasts, and complementing links between different virtues and acts. "Triumph and Disaster," one of the poem's most well-known dyads, is contrasted to highlight how crucial it is to remain composed in the face of both success and disaster. This pair emphasizes the need to approach these opposing outcomes with equal detachment, so encapsulating the larger concept of resilience and emotional balance. In a similar vein, the pair "dreams" and "dreams your master" juxtapose the act of dreaming with the risk of letting one's dreams devour or rule one's actions. The reader is inspired to follow their aspirations by this dichotomy while also exercising restraint and perspective. Kipling uses a number of additional dyads in the poem, including "risk" and "reward," "truth" and "lies," "patience" and "impatience," "wait" and "hurry," and more. The poem's main idea—that moral values are important, judgment is important, and overcoming obstacles in life with integrity and wisdom—is highlighted in different ways by each pair.

4.1 Findings and Discussions

One of the obvious method of structuralist is analyzing a part in wholesome manner like placing a special genre of a poem and then seeing it through a whole cycle of chains or a greater structures. The researcher of this article placed "If" Poem in center of didactic poems and tried to see parallels and dyads in it. Following revelation are observed through this manner:

- a. "If" poem is also a didactic poem which show the do's and don't of society like all other didactic poetry.
- b. Binary opposition in structuralist

Didactic poetry illustrates social norms and dos and don'ts. This sense of right and wrong may be derived from political propaganda, historical and literary works, religious convictions, laws, ethics, and moral standards that are deemed "good" by society. A didactic poem's message is therefore influenced by the social and political environment in which it is set. Didactic poetry use eloquent language, imagery, metaphors, and other poetic tropes to make their point. Nevertheless, didactic poetry's aesthetic function serves a disciplinary purpose even though it might be written well and is enjoyable to read. Creative writing approaches are employed in didactic poetry to impart teachings to readers in an engaging and unforgettable manner that avoids academic jargon. Literary works were not even invented when didactic works were in use! Lessons learned from life experiences and information were transmitted orally from generation to generation in almost every civilization on the planet. Spoken myths, stories, fables, and even fairytales were examples of this. Written around 1300 BCE, the story 'The Smith and the Devil' is thought to be the first didactic work ever composed. Finding binary oppositions, or contrasting pairings, in a text is a common structuralist task. The contrasts between traits like "Will and Wavering," "Truth and Lies," "Dreams and Reality," and "Triumph and Disaster" are readily apparent in "If." The poem's examination of virtue and maturity is emphasized by these dichotomies. Structuralism is concerned with recurrent themes and patterns. The poet tells his son to remain calm and patient when people make mistakes and put the blame on him. He ought to trust himself when people doubt him. But he should also give them credit for their doubt and try to understand what caused it. In the fifth line, the poet offers advice on how to wait patiently for success and not get discouraged

because those who persevere and work hard will eventually achieve. The poet then cautions his child that he will often be duped by others. But he should never lie in his life; he should always be sincere. People are going to hate him. But he should show them love instead of feeding their hate. In the final line, the poet cautions him against seeming or sounding too knowledgeable or superior to others since, if he follows all the advice given above, his kid would appear and sound superior to others and appear too intelligent.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has illuminated the structural motifs present in Rudyard Kipling's "If," providing fresh insight into the work's timeless relevance. The same type of study has already been conducted by Taufeeq Rafat in which the only focused on Binary Opposition in the poem "The Stone Chat" have been uncovered. While this particular study have revealed that the structuralist framework organize, language, imagery, and thematic components. The researcher has also uncovered layers of meaning that add to the work's enduring appeal. This structuralist viewpoint helps the reader comprehend the poem's construction and interpretational consequences on a deeper level.

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