



Stylistic Devices and the Illusion of Reality: A Stylistic Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's 'A Dream Within a Dream'

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:

June 03, 2025

Revision Received:

June 23, 2025

Accepted:

June 27, 2025

Available Online:

June 30, 2025

Keywords:

emotional division,
geographical,
phonological,
qualitative method,
perception and
reality.

ABSTRACT

Stylistic analysis is the use of linguistic aspects of a given text to illustrate how language and artistic functionality relate (Leech, 1969). The study examines *A Dream Within a Dream*, a poem by Edgar Allan Poe that is very much rooted in concepts of illusion and ontological uncertainty. The aim is to recognize and examine stylistic devices used by Poe, especially in the phonological, graphological, and lexical realm in order to convey the problem of contrasts between the perception and the reality. The method used for this research is qualitative method. The analysis of the poem is based on qualitative analysis of content based on Leech framework of styles with the emphasis being on direct lines of the poem to bring out the art of language Poe makes use of. The findings show that the repetition, punctuation, and the symbolic diction created by Poe intentionally create atmosphere of emotional division and supports the theme of the blurring line between the dream and the reality.

1. Introduction

Exploration of Reality in poetry: Edgar Allan Poe

One of the most talked about literary representatives of American Gothic literature, Edgar Allan Poe had long been resorting to a poetic voice to explore the philosophic and psychological aspects of things, mostly the thin line between perception and illusion. Poe questions the very essentiality of objective perception in human beings by addressing an existential turmoil in his poem entitled *A Dream Within a Dream*. His aestheticized approach to rhythm, sound, and imagery is a psychological set-up where we cannot perceive reality properly. Quinn (1998) observes that the poems by Poe are concerned with examining metaphysical words through aesthetic experience by building a place where the reader is simultaneously overwhelmed and disoriented (p. 312). This combination of reality and illusion is not merely thematic, but is also created in different stylistic means which blurs the aspects of dream and consciousness. According to Kennedy (2001), the poetic style applied by Poe is

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highly based on emotional manipulation of sound, syntax and symbol, which makes the reader experience the perception of truth in the dream world of the poem (p. 145).

The Stylistic Devices In Generating Poetic Illusion

Alliterations, repetitions, caesura, and metaphors are the important style elements used by Poe in his poetic creation, and in the poem *A Dream Within a Dream*, these stylistic devices also help to create the lack of distinction between the actual and imaginary. As one of the fields of linguistics, stylistics deals with the artistic nature of manipulating language in order to produce a certain effect on the readers. According to Leech and Short (2007), such style choices are intentional as opposed to being random and work in a systematic way to create a perception of the world of a text in a reader (p. 27). In the poem by Poe, these decisions underline the emotional volatility of the speaker and leave a creepy impression of unreality Simpson (2004) suggests that some phenomena of stylistics allow the scholars to deconstruct linguistic prominence, which the authors use to mark the psychological dissonance (p. 67). The intentionality of meter, fragmentation and question marks delivered by Poe takes the readers on a dream state of vague integrity that challenges what it is to be a human being.

The Poe Poem placed in the context of Literary and philosophical Thinking

Published in 1849, around the period when Romanticism was immersed in exploring the depths of subconscious and the intangible limits of the real world, *A Dream Within a Dream* is a poem in which a lot of reality was going on a dreamy tour. The vision of illusion that Poe presents is a similar way to asking large philosophical questions being asked by other thinkers like Descartes and Kant in what kind of sense perception can we rely on, what we refer to as a reality. There have been tendencies in literary criticism to frame the poem as an expression of the hero Poe was in his very troubled outlook on life and the transience of human existence. According to Silverman, (1991), the work of Poe was characterized by an ongoing preoccupation with transience, whereby dreams are used as transient life and identity (p. 184). The fact that Hutchisson (2005) claims that Poe was obsessed with dilemma between appearance and truth can enable his poetry to be a kind of psychological mirror reflecting the tensions in inner turmoil and external expression (p. 202).

An Illusion of Reality and Gothic Tradition in the Poetry of Poe

Poe poetry especially *A Dream Within A Dream* falls squarely in line with the Gothic literary tradition of such emotionally rich works that fling into mixed emotion, metaphysical uncertainty and sense fragmentation as the major tools employed by the writer to unsettle the readers sense of reality. Illusions in the Gothic mode are not the deceptions, they are psychological truths focused on the internal fears and wishes. According to Punter and Byron (2004), the Gothic is focused on what is real and what is Imagined and in this borderland, the work of Poe is likely to succeed as the authors point out (p. 79). This stylistic line of preoccupation with illusion is corroborated by several poetic strategies adopted by Poe such as his use of dashes, repetitions and unanswered questions heighten a sense of loss, and plug enervation. What is more, Savoy (1992) notes that in the textual routines of Poe, the readers are left unsure of not only sanity of the narrator, but also their own certainties of interpretation (p. 162).

Stylistics and as a Approach to Literature

Stylistics will enable scholars to transcend beyond the analysis of theme since they will be able to analyze the structure and language components that construct meaning in poems such as those by Poe. In stylistic analysis, a critical reading of the phonological, syntax and semantic structure of the text is carried out in order to unravel how literary effects are created. According to Wales (2014), stylistics is that area that is also between the linguistic rigor and literary interpretation providing the means to find out how authors root emotion and ideology in a tiny language unit (p. 53). The emotional tension is raised even more in the case of Poe, due to stylistic devices, including anaphora ("I stand amid the roar..."), metaphor ("All that we see or seem is but a dream within dream"), and the trochaic rhythm, which, in addition, only solidifies the notion of existential doubt, that is central to the poem. Also, Jeffries and McIntyre (2010) note that language choices influence the illusion of presence and immediacy in literary writing since stylistic analysis shows this contribution (p. 89).

1.1. Research Objectives

- To compare the stylistic elements employed by Edgar Allan Poe in *A Dream Within a Dream* that helps create illusion and vague reality.
- To discuss the ways Poe strives to use language, structure and poetical tools to make the reader feel uncertain and emotionally lost.

1.2. Research Questions

1. Which stylistic devices are used by Edgar Allan Poe in *A Dream Within a Dream* so as to create an illusion of reality?
2. What impact on the perception of reality evokes linguistic and poetic decisions of Poe leading to theme of illusion?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The research is significant because the current trends of stylistic research provide an intensive study of the text of Edgar Allan Poe *The Dream Within a Dream*. The research offers further insight into the design of perception and emotion through the use of literary language because the impact of factors like repetition, rhythm, metaphor, and punctuation produces a condition of psychological disorientation in the works of Poe.

1.4. Delimitation of the study

The study is limited to stylistic analysis of a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, *A Dream within a Dream*, only. It lacks a comparative study with other works of Poe or poetry of other writers in a percentage. The textual study is restricted to the identification and interpretation of some stylistic features used in the poem like repetition, imagery, punctuation and sound pattern.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Stylistic Foregrounding and Poetic Formation

More recent studies have focused on the aesthetic effect of stylistic foregrounding in particular in questioning poetry, in poetry that questions reality and perception. Foregrounding denotes the stylistic breaking linguistic conventions with a purpose of attracting the reader attention and increasing the literary effect. Burke (2023) claims that, the foregrounding in the poetry is a tool of dislocating them conventional expectations that then put the reader in altered positions of consciousness determined by the sound and the form. In *A Dream Within a Dream*, Poe uses the devices with foregrounding, including internal rhyme, the exclamatory punctuation, and anaphora to put the reader between the wakefulness and the dream. These fashion plates act as cognitive keys, which produce an emotional and philosophical involvement with the text. As Norrgaard, Busse, and Montoro (2018) write, within the context of stylistics, a systematic inquiry is possible in regards to how the formalistic elements of the language are utilized to provide interpretive ambiguity and an element of psychological depth to the text at hand (p. 61).

2.2. The Illusion of Reality

Literary critics are now revisiting Poe in his poetry with new contexts of stylistics and cognition, especially the stylization of Gothic tropes to give the impression of the real world. The linguistic manipulation by Poe features as the driver of Gothic affect according to Wisker (2019), who mentions that, in his linguistic exploitation, Poe makes his voice in the poems sound rhythmically uncertain and excessive in emotion deliberately to convey unease and distortion in the mind of the reader (p. 112). Such repetition of the word dream in *A Dream Within a Dream* turns this single word into an existentialistic and stylistic theme, and one that is now not only of personal loss but of ontological instability. Moreover, Hadley (2021) even articulates that the stylistic ambiguity of Poe serves as a kind of psychological mirror that forces a reader to feel all the emotional and existential fragmentation that the speaker is facing as well (p. 89). This is pace with the larger development in the stylistic criticism itself in which linguistics structure is impossible to extract as a separate phenomenon in addressing the depth of theme.

2.3. Cognitive Stylistics and the reader response to the poem by Poe

The new future of cognitive stylistics has focused on this issue in the relationship between reader psychology and poetic structure. The methodology of studying the way stylistic elements ignite mental and emotional reactions is also done for the texts that disorient reality. According to Stockwell (2020), there is a possibility to explore the effects of the study of how textual forms may mimic psychological conditions, including the states of disorientation, doubt, or reverie, with the help of cognitive stylistics (p. 137). *A Dream Within a Dream* by Poe incorporates rhythmic fragmentation, rhetorical questions, and open syntax in evoking a dissociative effect on the reader which reflects the despair in the speaker. They are stylistic choices that cause one to reflect and dream-like logic. In a recent study, Burke and Troscianko (2017) reviewed how foregrounded poetic forms invoke the emotional empathy of the reader as well as cognitive mapping and concluded that when there is a stylistic ambiguity in the poem there results a deeper emotional engagement and a philosophical reflection (p. 109). It is possible, therefore, to consider the work by Poe as a kind of stylistic prototype of cognitive dissonance, as one enlists the mechanisms of language to lure the reader into the illusionary world created in it.

2.4. Sound Fitting and tone of emotions on poetry of Poe

The importance of pattern of sound, including rhyme, meter and repetition, is becoming as prominent a theme in stylistic studies of Poe poetry and the emotional intensity within the poetry and as a contributor to the illusion of unreality developed in them. The recent study by Tsur (2023) can outline how audio devices in poetry trigger emotive-cognitive events that evoke patterns to resemble instable minds or surreal experiences (p. 211). Repeating important words such as nothing more and a dream within a dream again and again, Poe in *A Dream Within a Dream* establishes a hypnotic rhythm, which supports the existential depression of the speaker. These are the devices that Steen (2018) describes within the context of “perceptual foregrounding,” in which the sensory processing-based ideas of the reader are acquired through stylistic contributions to feel unreality as reality (Steen, 2018, p. 89). Examination of these characteristics allows comprehending how applying to such features, Poe manipulates phonological structures, helping to prove the topics he is interested in: grief, transience, and instability of perception.

2.5. Ambiguity in Style and Subjectivity in the Reader

There is an increasing number of stylistic studies which distinguish how ambiguity in the poetic texts welcomes various interpretations and emotional responses. Poe *A Dream Within a Dream* serves as a prototype of what Pilkington (2022) calls semantic openness achieved with stylistic minimization: short lines, open syntax and metaphoric abstraction provide the author with blank space to be filled in by a reader (p. 54). The ambiguity is pivotal to the poem as illusion is explored because it causes the readers to challenge the credibility of the speaker and also of their interpretive abilities. As shown by Semino and Culpeper (2021), the author attaches importance to stylistic indeterminacy because, according to them, it can be used to point out that in many cases, poetic texts work by encouraging inferential work through textual voids and unresolved metaphors (p. 197). The work of Poe exists in this dimension of meaning that is not resolvable, and they require that the readers fulfill the role in building the illusory world of the poem.

3. Research Methodology

This method used for this research is qualitative method and the study works to discover the stylistic tools applied by Edgar Allan Poe in his poem *A Dream Within a Dream*. The qualitative method means that the language, structure, and stylistic devices of the poem are analyzed in detail paying attention to the role they play in the creation of the illusion and questioning the reality. Close reading and textual analysis is the central method, in which the poem is analyzed line by line with the view to detecting certain stylistic devices such as repetition, metaphor, imagery, phonological patterns, punctuation, enjambment, and word choices.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the stylistic model presented by Geoffrey Leech (1969) that focused on the rapport of linguistic structure and literary performance with particular reference to foregrounding. Leech distinguishes between the stylistic analysis of deviation and parallelism, in the former, poets exploit unforeseen wording (deviation) whereas in parallelism, poets can exploit repetition of form. In *A Dream Within a Dream*, the repetition of cardinal phrases like dream and nothing more, the sudden punctuation and unsteady meter, are all the characteristics of Poe in line with the notion of Leech on foregrounded characteristics that disrupt regular language patterns stimulating emotional and cognitive reaction. All these modulations serve as the stylistic affirmation of the instability of reality and the illusion of permanence, which directly confirms the theme of the poem as a whole. Using the Leech framework, this paper explores the way in which the manipulation of language by Poe not only enhances the aesthetic beauty, but in fact increases the depth of philosophy used helping to create a stylistically rich expression of the poetic form as well as its tradition.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Repetition and Parallelism as An instrument of delusion

Repetition is supposed to be one of the most visible stylistic devices in the poem by Poe as it strengthens the theme of illusion by reflecting the emotional breakdown of the speaker. A parallel structure is repeated with the use of the line, which is the same in the first and the last stanzas, and the line reads, All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream. Such forms are repeated according to the concept of parallelism formulated by Leech which places emphasis on important ideas and enables the reader to contemplate about the instability of perceived reality. This repetition of lines results in a circular shape that reflects the dreamy mood of the poem that dissolve the line between the waking life and the imagination. The echo effect draws

the reader into a self-reinforcing loop of uncertainty and questioning on existence, which conforms to the form with the main theme of the poem, that is, unreality.

4.2. Rhetorical questions and Syntactic deviation

Rhetorical question is employed by Poe in order to construct emotional tension and demonstrate the untrustworthiness of perception. There is syntactic corruption in lines like, *Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?* This syntactic deviation creates foregrounding in Leech model of styles since it draws our attention because it is a declarative form changed to interrogative form. By not referring or giving an actual response to the question rhetorically, it further cements the theme about uncertainty. His syntax is unhinged to show the psychological condition of the speaker and this brings the reader into a psychological mix-up of uncertainty. As the transition advances from the more reaffirmed opening line of the “Take up this kiss upon the brow!” to the later interrogative form, so does the recession into fantasy.

4.3. Sound and Tsunami-like Mood

Through alliteration and internal rhyme as well as caesura, Poe has created a hypnotic rhythm that also adds to the illusory effect of the poem. An example is the line, *I stand in the roar / Of a surf-tormented shore* that is full of high sibilance and consonance, which produce an auditory picture of the sea and psychological churning. Metaphor and the combination of words are also found in the words, *surf-tormented shore*, which is an indication of the internal mental torment in the speaker. According to Leech (1969), this kind of phonological foregrounding is in the middle of mood and tone evoking. The reality is enhanced by the contradiction between brutal nature and the impotence of the speaker.

4.4. Chaotic syntax and the psychological confusion of emotions

There is no mistaken motive on this usage of fragment syntax, and choppy punctuation, to show mentally unstable and emotionally confused thoughts by Poe. As an example, the line, which runs as follows, *And I hold in my hand / Grains of the golden sand*, breaks into fragments dissimilar to the previous rhythmic structure in the poem. The abrupt insertion of a dash following sand leads to a caesura and it is representative of a space between control and loss. As the theory explains it, these deviations in normal syntactic patterns because of the reader, obliges them to come to a stop and consider, which is destabilizing.

4.5. Symbolism; and Metaphor, as a Force of Unreality

It is very important that the illusion of the possibility of control is explained by the symbol of the golden sand, which has no chance to come out alive. *Alack how poor! Yet how they slip / Through my fingers to the deep,* depicting the getting away of sand, as well as the getting away of time and reality. The selected metaphor employed by Poe is a means of semantic foregrounding, which makes readers take an additional meaning behind some literalized images. The phrase includes the line of repeated lamentation, *gravity, repeated lamentation*, which increases the words of helplessness, as uttered by the speaker. The concept of semantic deviation as divided by Leech helps fix the idea that these kinds of metaphors and symbolic terms take the normal sense of perception out of the reader and places him/her into the surreal emotional plane.

4.6. Language: contradiction and Cognitive Dissonance

The reader is made to experience more cognitive dissonance through the intentional contradiction held by Poe. The speaker cries out in the final lines, *O God! Why may I not have / Them in a firmer hold?* Negative constructions, employed as the desperate plea is framed in spiritual appeal and emotional questioning in the aspect of extreme emotion, bring out the element of powerlessness. The juxtaposed processes of grasping and inability to grasp strengthen the illusory main point: the reality is elusive and illusory. The highly emotive words such as *weep, grasp, creep, and deep* used by Poe draw the reader in the emotional breakdown of the speaker.

4.7. Enjambment and Cascade of Consciousness

The absence of stops in the poem wherein one line of the poem continuously flows into the next, whether in enjambment, is another strategy used by Poe to emphasize the dreamlike, continuous flow of thought in this poem. As with such a line as, for instance, *--Grains of the golden sand-- / How few! Yet how they creep / Through my fingers to the deep* show this feature of style. Instead of letting each bit of the thought to be settled with the end punctuation. Here, enjambment confuses sentence breaks in much the same sense that the poem confuses the dream and reality state, engulfing the reader into the broken outlook of time passing on the part of the speaker.

4.8. Name and Emotional Immersion

The poem is actually started with a very personal, intimate command: “Take this kiss upon the brow!” This construction of the imperative mood in conjunction with second-person narration takes the reader instantaneously into a subjective and emotional scope. It is not a mere internal reflection of the speaker but externalization of feeling perhaps towards a lost lover or the dream itself. When this direct address is applied Leech identifies this as pragmatic foregrounding that is a violation of a normative communicative role of language to have intensity and intimacy. The voice used in the poem confuses the boundaries between what is real and that which is imagined by interacting with an unidentified other who might not exist within the real world providing a false reality created with words. Such an emotional and dramatic start of the poem preconditions its tone throughout the whole work and emphasizes the theme of unclear emotional and existential boundaries.

4.9. Sluices and Stops

Poe creates an emotional support through the particular way of using the exclamation marks and repetition in cases of desperation. In the refrain line, first, a line as the repetition of the very same words spoken by the mother, and second, the repetition of those words in the form used by the mother: While I weep—while I weep! O God! Is it impossible / To hold them more firmly?”, Poe makes the text urgent and anxious. The repetition of the word, while I weep, otherwise shows obsessive-like sorrow and also underlines the psychological obsession of the speaker. Emotional climaxes in a text are brought to the fore with the help of graphological and syntactical fore differentiations like repetition and emphatic punctuation according to Leech. Such elements break the lyrical flow of the poem and introduce the raw emotion making the readers fall into an alienated psychological state reflecting the mental breakdown of the speaker himself.

4.10. Lexical Choices and Semantic Instability

The choice of words by Poe is also instrumental to disjoining the meaning and making a part of illusion of unreality. The words used frequently in the poem like grasp, weep, dream, seem and deep have concrete as well as figurative meanings. As an example, the word coloring of the perception in the second line of the stanza All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream brings in uncertainty into the perception itself. The difference between the appearance and what only appears to be is in the key to the illusion Poe constructs. According to Leech, this has been called semantic deviation which entails putting familiar words in unfamiliar philosophical context to make the reader question interpretation. These multiple layers of meaning blur certainty and this compels the reader to think at higher levels and it forms part of the ambiguity that marks the poem in term of emotion and interpretation.

Table 1

Stylistic Devices

Stylistic Device	Example from the Poem	Type of Device (Leech's Category)	Thematic Contribution
Repetition	“A dream within a dream”	Lexical	Emphasizes cyclical nature of illusion and existential confusion.
Punctuation (Em dash)	“—All that we see or seem—”	Graphological	Highlights fragmentation and intensifies the sense of disillusion.
Symbolic Imagery	“Golden sand”	Semantic	Represents time slipping away and the futility of control.
Alliteration	“While I weep — while I weep!”	Phonological	Creates an echoing effect to mimic sorrow and helplessness.
Interrogatives	“Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?”	Syntactic	Engages reader in philosophical doubt, amplifies uncertainty.
Capitalization of Nouns	“Hope,” “God,” “Dream”	Graphological	Suggests elevated emotional or spiritual concepts.

4.11. Discussion of Study

The stylistic discussion of *A Dream Within a Dream* shows that Edgar Allan Poe artists has done a magnificent job of controlling the devices of poetry in order to construct a perceptual illusion of reality, which can be rightfully positioned within the discussed Geoffrey Leech categories of linguistic deviation, foregrounding, and stylistic function. The analysis reveals the study does not detect the uses of repetition (e.g., dream within a dream), punctuation, and interjections of emotion (e.g., O God!) to be merely decorative; rather, these aids to marking enhance the inference related to instability and fragility of perception in Poe. These are the features that demonstrate the vague line between the real and the illusory, which is one of the main themes in poetic vision of Poe. Moreover, the lexical matter used by Poe (e.g. surf-tormented shore) is also full of connotations and emotional energy, which provides the rather symbolic touch to the transience of being. Using such graphological effects as em-dashes and too many punctuation marks, Poe intensifies the psychological tension and the broken way of thinking of the speaker. The

meaning of the poem directly influences the form, as these stylistic elements are the peculiarities of the poem. The presented analysis justifies the argument that the application of stylistic devices as seen in the Leech formulation gives invaluable clues of the existential content of the poem as well as the illusionary artistry.

5. Conclusion

The analysis makes it clear that *A Dream Within a Dream* by Edgar Allan Poe is one of the brightest examples of the strength of stylistic devices effective in creating a poetic illusory image of the world. The discussion shows that Poe creates ambiguity in the concept of dream and existence in the story by consciously choosing the language techniques used namely repetition, alliteration, graphological deviations as well as emotional punctuation. These aspects, viewed in the context of the stylistic approach of Geoffrey Leech, serve as something more than a literary decoration; they can be regarded as structural elements that help a reader wander into the emotional and philosophical layers of the poem. The language used by Poe presents a feeling of perceptual confusion and lack of orientation, which perfectly fits in the grand theme of uncertainty of perception.

Moreover, the stylistic density of the poem strengthens once again the position of Poe as the master of depth of thought and its artistic expression. His use of sound, structure, syntax shows an increased sense of the influence language can have on human consciousness and perceptions. Placing the poem by Poe into the framework of style and theory, the research contributes to the knowledge of how stylistic devices are not made to fulfill only the aesthetic roles but also philosophical. It further confirms the usefulness of stylistics in the analysis of complicated literary texts.

5.1. Suggestions

Comparative stylistic studies can be carried out between *A Dream Within a Dream* and some other poems of Poe like *The Raven* or *Annabel Lee*, to further identify the thematic coherence and stylistic change in the way Poe has depicted illusion, mortality and despair. Also, the multimodal stylistic tools application or the digital stylistic analysis might contribute to the range and accuracy of judgment.

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