

GENDER METAPHOR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE POETS

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Abstract

This research conducts a comparative analysis of the metaphors used in Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Tears, Idle Tears" and Emily Dickinson's "After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes." Metaphor is a powerful literary device for conveying emotions and abstract meanings, often reflecting the social context and personal experiences of the poet. It explores how male and female poets confront themes of emotional pain, trauma, and loss, influenced by gender dynamics. Tennyson's work encapsulates nostalgia and loss through romantic imagery, subtly challenging Victorian gender norms by depicting male vulnerability. In contrast, Dickinson's poem portrays emotional numbness and self-defense following trauma, reflecting the rigid societal expectations on women to maintain composure despite inner turmoil. The research employs a descriptive-qualitative approach to examine how the poets use metaphors to express their emotional states, highlighting the perspective of gender. While Tennyson's metaphors emphasize existential longing and an introspective view of masculinity, Dickinson's metaphors focus on the suppression of pain and emotional distance, illustrating the social pressures on women to conceal their suffering.

Keywords: poetry, metaphor, male and female

Introduction

According to Frost, Robert in his book *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*, 1979, poetry defines as when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words. While metaphor, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), described as the process of comprehending and experiencing one type of thing through the lens of another. They contend that metaphors are essential to human cognition and shape our understanding of many aspects of life. The use of metaphor in writing poetry is crucial because it allows poets to convey deeper and more abstract meanings through analogy and comparison. However, the way metaphors are used is often influenced by gendered experiences and perspectives, reflecting differences in how

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men and women perceive the world around them. In this context, understanding gendered metaphor becomes essential for analyzing how male and female poets depict emotional and existential experiences.

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the use of metaphor in the poems *Tears, Idle Tears* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and *After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes* by Emily Dickinson. Both poems are excellent examples of male and female poets who, although coming from different social and cultural backgrounds, address profound emotional experiences—particularly pain and loss. However, the differences in how they use metaphor raise important questions about how gender influences their poetic expression.

Both "Tears, Idle Tears" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and "After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes" by Emily Dickinson are undeniably expressions of deep sadness, though they convey it in different ways especially in using metaphors. In Tennyson's poem, sorrow is manifested through nostalgia and a sense of irretrievable loss as the speaker reflects on "days that are no more", evoking feelings of regret and sadness through vivid the metaphor of "happy autumn fields" and "deep as first love" -symbols of beauty tied to transience and death. In contrast, Dickinson explores the aftermath of intense emotional pain by depicting the numbness and emotional paralysis that follows great suffering. The using of her metaphors in her poem like "Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs" and "stiff Heart" conveys the idea that overwhelming grief has rendered the speaker's emotions immobile, embodying a sorrow so profound that it causes detachment from feeling. Both poems ultimately explore different facets of sadness-Tennyson's through nostalgia and loss, and Dickinson's through the suffocating stillness of trauma.

According to Robin Lakoff's Gender and Language Theory (1975) in her, women prefer to speak in a more courteous, indirect manner and with characteristics like hedges and tag questions, which represent their inferior status in society. Her work focusses more on common language than it does on metaphors in poetry. Her 1975 book Language and Woman's Place is the primary source.

By comparing these two poems, this study seeks to identify both the differences and similarities in how these poets use metaphor to express emotional pain. Specifically, it will highlight how gender influences the choice of metaphors and imagery used, as well as the impact of social and cultural contexts on their works. Additionally, the analysis will explore how male and female poets define and respond to emotional experiences through metaphor, ultimately deepening our understanding of gendered expression in poetry.

By offering an in-depth comparison between the works of male and female poets, this study contributes to the literary discourse on **gendered metaphor**. Furthermore, it opens the door for further discussion on how poetic artistic expression is shaped by gender.

Methodology

The researchers used a descriptive-qualitative method to analyze the data. In this study, the author will compare two poems, namely *Tears, Idle Tears* by *Alfred Lord Tennyson* and *After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes* by *Emily Dickinson*. The main focus of this analysis is the use of metaphor to identify the differences that arise between male and female writers. This method aims to explore the meanings contained within the language of poetry, as well as how gender perspectives influence the choice of metaphors used. This analysis is expected to provide deeper insights into how each writer expresses themes and emotions through their works.

Finding

"Tears, Idle Tears by Alfred, Lord Tennyson"

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

Metaphors in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" convey profound feelings of existential longing, melancholy, and loss. We may observe how the metaphors discreetly subvert Victorian notions of masculinity and femininity, particularly with relation to

emotional expression, by examining them within the framework of gender ideas.

1. **"Tears as a Sign of Intense, "Idle" Feelings"** in the first line we are instantly introduced to tears as the embodiment of unfathomable, unfathomable grief in the first few lines of the poem, "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, / Tears from the depth of some divine despair." Tears are often connected to softness and femininity, qualities that Victorian society generally expected women to display more freely. But by emphasizing the speaker's experience with these tears, Tennyson implies that intense emotional vulnerability is not just a trait of women. This might be interpreted as a subdued subversion of the stereotype of men as being emotionless and stoic. The speaker's tears appear out of the blue, suggesting a deep, universal human experience of emotional complexity and sorrow that goes beyond gender norms.
2. **"Nature and Temporal Change Metaphors"**- The metaphors associated with beginnings and endings, such as "the first beam glittering on a sail" and "the last which reddens over one / That sinks with all we love below the verge," reflect the cyclical nature of life and death. These metaphors highlight how people of all genders deal with time passing and the loss that comes with it, drawing on a wider experience of human life. These lines, which contrast the demise of something cherished with something new and hopeful, have a sad beauty that emphasizes how fleeting life is. Regarding gender, the speaker's emotional sensitivity to this fragility and her acknowledgement of it imply that vulnerability and loss reflection are not exclusive to women. Instead, Tennyson's masculine narrator muses about these poignant encounters, suggesting that men are capable of introspective, emotional mourning as well.
3. **"Love and Regret"**- The phrase *"deep as first love, and wild with all regret"* alludes to the depth of emotional suffering and nostalgia by using the metaphor of first love. In literature, women are typically shown as being more impacted by feelings of love and sorrow, and love—especially first love—is frequently glorified and associated with feminine experiences. However, Tennyson's speaker—a male voice that is typically expected to put reason before emotion—is overcome by the intensity of his emotions in this passage. The expression *"wild with all regret"* undermines the Victorian notion of men as logical, self-sufficient beings by implying an unrestrained, almost primitive sorrow. The poem defies strict gender stereotypes that would restrict men's ability to express their deepest emotions by equating regret with first love and implying that males are also susceptible to the intense emotional upheaval of love.
4. **Existential Despair as "Death in Life"** The last line, *"O Death in Life, the days that are no more,"* is a potent allegory for the death of the soul that comes along with regret and longing. This quote captures the idea that even when a person is still physically alive, carrying the mental burden of the past can feel like a kind of

death. "Death in Life" conjures a deep existential melancholy that is not commonly connected to the notion of strength and resiliency that is associated with men. Rather, the speaker's self-reflection and his encounter with such an emotional paradox demonstrate that men too struggle with internal emotions in ways that contradict their seeming stability or control. Since it is usually considered more acceptable for women to speak such emotional depth, the intensity of this despair—where life is overwhelmed by an almost overwhelming sense of loss—further breaks the mold of gendered emotional expression.

Tennyson extends and challenges the restrictions placed by Victorian gender conventions, particularly with regard to emotional expression, through the use of these metaphors. The speaker defies the stereotype that men should be emotionally distant or stoic with his profound sense of loss and existential desire. Rather, the speaker discloses that feelings such as regret, melancholy, and nostalgia are gender-neutral and universal. Tennyson presents a rich emotional world where men are not only allowed, but expected, to feel intensely through the use of metaphors. The poem makes the argument that universal human emotions, such as love, grief, and regret, are not limited to any one gender or set of social norms.

"After great pain, a formal feeling comes by Emily Dickinson"

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –

Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –

Emily Dickinson's poem "After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes" uses vivid and symbolic metaphors to express the emotional state that follows immense sorrow. This poem expresses the insensitivity and emotional numbness that accompany trauma or pain. In the framework of gender ideology, an examination of these metaphors can illustrate how manifestations of pain, resilience, and trauma reactions are frequently framed by social expectations of gender, particularly during Dickinson's lifetime.

1. **"After great pain, a formal feeling comes"** - This first line quickly conveys the sense of the emotional distance that occurs after experiencing great grief. This air of formality implies a structured and controlled social reaction to a strong emotional event. In terms of gender, women were typically required to maintain composure and emotional control in public, even after feeling considerable pain. The social pressure to maintain this formality can be a strain for women, who are expected to repress their emotions in order to appear "respectable."
2. **"The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs"** - The nerves are compared to tombs in this context, symbolizing the numbness or emotional insensitivity that occurs after experiencing pain. The nerve, which represents sensitivity and emotional life, has stiffened and become nonfunctional, much like a cold and silent tomb. In terms of gender, this can reflect the assumption that women must "numb themselves" in the face of pain, whether through self-control or keeping a calm public front. Women are sometimes denied the opportunity to openly express their emotions, particularly in patriarchal countries.
3. **"The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,' / And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?"** - The metaphor of the hard heart depicts how the heart, which is the center of emotions, becomes unresponsive and confused." The heart wonders if the sorrow was genuinely experienced in the past, or if it appears to have occurred so long ago that it feels like "centuries" ago. This demonstrates how extreme sorrow can cause time to appear warped. In the context of gender, this metaphor might represent the self-doubt that many women experience when faced with adversity. Women are frequently persuaded to mistrust their own emotional experiences and wonder if their pain is justified or excessive, which can represent the marginalization of their emotional experiences.
4. **"The Feet, mechanical, go round – A Wooden way / Of Ground, or Air, or Ought"** - This metaphor represents the helplessness and automation felt after

pain. The mechanical legs and wood represent how a human moves without feeling or purpose, as if they had lost control of their body. This demonstrates that suffering has reduced them to nothing more than machines. In the context of gender, this metaphor can reflect how women are frequently expected to carry on with their chores, both home and social, regardless of the emotional distress they are experiencing. Traditional gender norms frequently ignore women's emotional and physical needs, compelling them to move forward without regard for their pain.

5. **"A quartz contentment, like a stone.** This instance of the metaphor of "contentment" being "like a stone" and composed of quartz denotes an emotional detachment and lack of sensation. In terms of gender, this is a reflection of cultural norms that require women to project strength and unwavering confidence even when on the inside they are feeling numb and frozen. Patriarchal society frequently idealizes an inhumane toughness, expecting a "good" woman to bear hardship without moaning or showing too much emotion.
6. **"This is the Hour of Lead"** - The overwhelming and unavoidable weight that falls upon someone after suffering is reflected in the metaphor Lead. This load is so immense that it is immobilizing. This metaphor can be used to illustrate how women are frequently expected to carry a disproportionate amount of emotional weight while discussing gender. Social, familial, and emotional obligations can all add up to this load, which is why it's usually expected to be handled calmly.
7. **"Remembered, if outlived, / As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow"**. The metaphor of the frozen people remembering the snow implies that agony and suffering might be so great that a person can only remember it if they survive. This procedure is comparable to someone experiencing extreme cold and nearly freezing to death. Gender-wise, this might represent how women will remember their pain in a detached and icy way if they survive emotional trauma. This resilience conveys the idea that intense emotional experiences must be "tamed" and controlled in order to prevent outbursts, even though it is frequently associated with a strong and tough feminine personality.
8. **"First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go"**- These phases explain the shift from an initial sensation of coldness to perplexity or drowsiness, and then to release or emotional death. In terms of gender, this stage can represent how women are frequently subjected to a lengthy emotional process following trauma, which involves feelings of shock and numbness at first, followed by passivity or indifference, and finally, the need to express their emotions. In keeping with the norms of composure and self-control, society frequently expects women to communicate their pain without going too far in terms of confrontation or

emotional disclosure.

| No. | Tears, Idle Tears <i>Alfred Lord Tennyson</i> (Male) | Meaning | After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes <i>Emily Dickinson</i> (female) | Meaning |
|-----|--|---|--|---|
| 1. | Tears | The word <i>tears</i> connotes intense regret and nostalgia for the past. This poem's tears come from feelings that are nebulous and difficult to pin down—a sign of an inexplicable sense of loss—rather than being triggered by a particular incident. This term reflects the Victorian era's male emotional perspective on loss in a soft and beautiful way. | Pain | In Dickinson's poetry, <i>pain</i> denotes extreme emotional agony that ends in numbness. In stark contrast to the gentle tears in Tennyson's poetry, this agony is unbearable and paralyzing. Dickinson's depiction of suffering reveals a distinctly feminine reaction to severe emotional turmoil and tragedy. |
| 2. | | The word <i>idle</i> (which means pointless or inert) implies that Tennyson's poem's tears are pointless | | In Dickinson's poetry, the word <i>formal</i> connotes the concept of emotions |

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|----|------|---|--------|--|
| | Idle | and result from a passive contemplation of the past. It denotes a gloomy nostalgia in which sentiments are felt but not understood or resolved. The term draws attention to the soft, aimless melancholy that permeates the entire poem. | Formal | become rigid and detached, but organised. The organised, yet icy, distant sense of numbness that follows excruciating agony illustrates how severe suffering can lead to emotional detachment. It draws attention to the paralysed emotional condition that follows severe trauma. |
| 3. | Day | Tennyson used <i>day</i> to denote the passing of time, a concept frequently connected to recollections of the past. Though the phrase conjures up ideas of brightness and liveliness, it symbolises something that can only be lamented in the context of nostalgia. | Hour | Dickinson's use of the word <i>hour</i> highlights the severity of the period that follows severe suffering. The "hour" represents the excruciating minutes of numbness following sorrow; in contrast to the lengthier, memory-filled |

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|----|-----|--|------|---|
| | | | | "day," it is more pressing and immediate. After trauma, time seems to move more slowly and slowly away from you. |
| 4. | Sad | <i>Sad</i> conjures up images of a gentle, depressing, nostalgia-infused sadness. It captures a subdued form of sadness and conveys a contemplative, nostalgic emotional state connected to the recollection of something lovely but gone. | Lead | Dickinson used the heavy metal "lead" as a metaphor to represent the mental and physical burden that comes with loss. As if the heart has turned to stone, it symbolises the weight of excruciating emotional suffering, which leaves the soul feeling unresponsive and unmoving. It alludes to a heaviness and numbness that come with extreme emotional distress. |
| 5. | | Tennyson employs | | Dickinson |

| | | | | |
|--|--------|--|--------|---|
| | Divine | the word <i>divine</i> to define the timeless beauty of memories from the past. Even while nostalgia can be depressing, remembering the past can be holy or beautiful since it offers an idealised or spiritual perspective on what has been lost. | Quartz | employs the word <i>quartz</i> to allude to coldness and emotional indifference. The hardness of quartz signifies the impenetrability of the heart or soul after enduring tremendous agony, implying that after significant trauma, emotions become cold and unfeeling. |
|--|--------|--|--------|---|

Reflection on Gender Ideology

This poem depicts reactions to suppressed and controlled trauma and represents gender ideology through the use of metaphors that convey agony, insensitivity, and emotional numbness. The idea of insensitivity and numbness is frequently linked to the expectation placed on women, particularly during Dickinson's era, to repress or control their feelings. Descriptions of mechanical bodies, hard hearts, and emotional freezes that denote the loss of a free inner life are examples of the gender stereotype regarding women's toughness, which holds that they must bear pain silently and without losing control. Through this poem, Dickinson not only depicts a profound emotional experience but also challenges the boundaries of gender in the expression of suffering, revealing that great suffering is often accompanied by social formalities that require individuals, especially women, to suppress their feelings within a cold and controlled formal framework.

Discussion

Idioms and Power Dynamics in Metaphor

In the discussion section of this research, the analysis of *Idiom* and *Power Dynamics* based on Robin Lakoff's theory sheds light on how gender influences metaphorical language. Using Lakoff's framework from *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), this analysis examines how idiom, social hierarchy, and gender roles are reflected in the metaphors of *Alfred, Lord Tennyson's Tears*, *Idle Tears* and Emily Dickinson's "*After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes*." Both poems offer a rich field for exploring the dynamics of gendered metaphor, revealing how social expectations of gender shape poetic expression.

- **Idiom and Metaphor**

Idioms and metaphors are two important elements that exist in language to enrich communication and literature, although they have different functions. Idioms are phrases with indirect meaning and depend on cultural context, while metaphors are direct comparisons between two different things. Both are capable of creating deeper meaning, as idioms give certain connotations and metaphors offer new explanations.

a. "Tears, Idle Tears By Alfred, Lord Tennyson"

"*Tears, idle tears*", this phrase refers to tears that are futile and have no purpose but there are very deep emotions there.

"*Days that are no more*", this phrase refers to memories of the past that will never be repeated.

"*Divine despair*", describes an overwhelming feeling of despair and sadness, as if striking the realization of life and death through lost time has passed.

"*O death in life*", this phrase describes the feeling of life being haunted by sadness and regret so that life feels like death.

"*Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail*", this phrase refers to past memories that are still fresh in the mind but cannot be repeated.

"*Sad as the last which reddens over one / That sinks with all we love below the verge*", refers to the overwhelming sadness of loss/death that causes what he has will not be able to return.

"*Dear as remembered kisses after death*", compares precious memories to a kiss after death.

"*Sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned*", refers to how sweet and painful it is to think of a kiss or love that can only be imagined.

b. "After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling Comes By Emily Dickinson"

"*A formal feeling comes*", the word formal feeling implies a rigid feeling (no longer able to express emotions normally) because it has often been hurt.

"*The nerves sit ceremonious, like tombs*", comparing the nerves to tombs, the phrase implies that he is no longer able to feel emotions because of numbness.

"The stiff heart questions 'was it He, that bore", the word stiff heart describes a heart that has become stiff and unable to process feelings.

"Mechanical, go round", refers to the automatic movements that illustrate that he lives life only physically and is not emotionally aware.

"Quartz contentment, like a stone", the word quartz contentment refers to the happiness he feels now is false.

"This is the Hour of Lead", the word hour of lead symbolizes the time that runs heavy and slow making it difficult to pass.

"As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow", implies that remembering the pain is the same as remembering people who are frozen in the snow.

"First Chill-then Stupor- then the letting go", describes the stages of response to the pain experienced from the beginning of how he was surprised, tried to understand and finally accepted everything.

- Power Dynamics in Metaphor

The poem's metaphorical framework has an undercurrent of power, even with its benign tone. Through metaphors that alternate between life and death, Tennyson deftly manipulates the reader's emotional response, reflecting power in his manipulation of memory and time. The metaphor *"death in life," for instance,* evokes the agony of dealing with loss and depicts a contradictory conflict. This metaphor has the ability to control the reader by provoking a strong emotional response.

Dickinson's analogies are quite powerful, even if her language is kind. "Formal feeling" and "lead" conjure up an image of emotional immobility in which the body and spirit are both overcome with an unavoidable weight. Through the use of metaphor, Dickinson manages the story even when it comes to manners, expressing the intensity of her feelings without defying social norms that determine what constitutes proper behaviour for women.

Dickinson's analogies have a subtle but potent power, in contrast to Tennyson's more passive approach to grief. She assumes control of the reader's experience by engulfing them in the paralysing weight of her loss and proving that metaphors may be effective means of communicating suffering even when used appropriately.

CONCLUSION

According to Lakoff's theory, women's language is frequently more courteous and subtle as a result of social pressures to avoid displaying authority publicly. The research demonstrates that Dickinson's poetry is consistent with this notion. She employs a metaphor that represents the emotional limits that women must maintain, but the metaphor is not weak. Indeed, Dickinson deliberately uses words to show that, beneath

the civility, there is a very great emotional strength, even if it is not articulated overtly. Tennyson, while being a man, used courteous language, however with a different power dynamic. Metaphors like "death in life" convey more direct emotional strength while remaining courteous through the use of natural imagery. This suggests that, while Lakoff focuses on female language, politeness and authority in metaphors can also be found in male language, but with distinct goals and intentions.

Tennyson's differences between words and metaphors include: "Tears indicate melancholy, yet employing the term 'idle' emphasizes a sense of impotence, consistent with a polite passive approach, "Autumn Fields" (uses nature to create a sad ambiance without employing strong emotional language) and "Death in Life" (a dramatic figurative paradox that portrays profound inner struggle while remaining kind in words). Meanwhile, Dickinson's words include "formal feeling" (which describes the limits of emotion in accordance with social norms governing how women should express sorrow), "lead" (which indicates the severity of anguish, despite the fact that the word itself is simple and courteous), and "stiff heart" (which depicts how emotions become muffled and inflexible, presenting a sense of inner strength limited by social rules). Tennyson and Dickinson's use of different words and metaphors demonstrates how gender determines how they transmit emotions, according to Lakoff's theory. Tennyson uses civility and strength in subtle ways, whereas Dickinson is more bound by social norms, yet nevertheless manages to express intense feelings through profound metaphors. This demonstrates that politeness does not always reduce the power of metaphor, but rather can be used to conceal or channel emotional strength based on gender and social situation.

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