

## Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

### A Critical Examination of Personification and Simile as Literary Devices in Muhammad Zaman's Poem "*Freedom Is in Chains*"



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**Abstract**

Figurative language refers to the use of words and expressions that convey meanings beyond their literal sense to enhance imagery, emotional depth, and interpretive richness in literary texts. Through devices such as simile and personification, poets articulate abstract ideas in concrete and relatable forms. The present study critically examines the use of personification and simile in Muhammad Zaman's poem "*Freedom is in Chains*." The study is guided by two research objectives: first, to identify and analyze instances of personification and simile in the poem; and second, to interpret the thematic significance conveyed through these figurative devices. The findings reveal that Zaman employs personification and simile to construct a powerful critique of freedom as an illusion constrained by religion, culture, language, geography, and sociopolitical structures. These figurative expressions reflect themes of moral conditioning, ideological confinement, identity formation, and existential tension. Ultimately, the poem presents freedom not as physical liberation but as a complex awareness of imposed boundaries, offering a nuanced reflection on individuality, control, and silent resistance.

**Keywords:** Personification, Similes, "*Freedom Is in Chains*"

**Introduction**

Baily (1994) argues that figurative language plays a central role in poetry as it enables poets to communicate complex ideas and emotions in a manner that is more expressive, imaginative, and impactful. In a similar vein, figurative language is considered essential to poetry because it allows poets to offer readers a more engaging, emotionally resonant, and lasting literary experience (Rahimi, 2019). Through the use of figurative expressions, poets are able to articulate abstract thoughts and emotions with greater vividness and creativity (Zaman et al., 2025). Shaheen (2019) emphasizes that figurative language helps poet's present subject matter in innovative and striking ways, thereby enhancing the aesthetic appeal of poetry. This stylistic approach allows poets to form strong mental images in the reader's mind, making poems more appealing and memorable (Huda, 2018).

Moreover, figurative language enables emotions to be communicated more forcefully and effectively (Halliday & Hasan, 2018), allowing readers to better grasp complex human feelings such as love, grief, and sorrow (Perrine & Arp, 2021). Arafat (2016) maintains that the use of figurative language enriches poetic meaning by adding layers of depth and interpretation, thus making poetry more intellectually stimulating. This stylistic feature allows poets to convey multiple meanings or ideas through a single image or metaphor (Cuddon, 2013).

Lewis (2010) suggests that figurative language contributes significantly to the development of a poet's unique voice. By expressing ideas and emotions in a distinctive manner, figurative language helps poets differentiate their work from others and enhances its recognition and memorability (Mulyadi, 2016). According to

Pradopo (2013), personification involves attributing human qualities to non-human entities and is widely used in literary works, particularly poetry (Wales, 2014). In essence, personification intensifies comparison by assigning human traits to non-human objects or concepts. Perrine and Arp (1963) define personification as a literary device that grants human attributes to animals, objects, or abstract ideas. This process replaces non-human characteristics with human ones (Endraswara, 2013), thereby animating inanimate objects and making them appear alive (Codon, 2018). Through this technique, objects are portrayed as capable of human actions such as movement or speech, functioning as an implied metaphor in which human qualities are central to the comparison (Dewi, 2020). Additionally, personification may involve attributing human qualities to abstract traits in order to sharpen perception and understanding (Werdiningsih, 2021). As noted by Abrams and Harpham (2014) and Hasanah (2018), personification refers specifically to the depiction of inanimate objects as possessing human characteristics.

Syarwani (2017) defines a simile as a rhetorical device that explicitly compares two unlike entities. Such comparisons are commonly introduced through words such as “resemble,” “similar,” “as,” “then,” and “like” (Saeed, 2011). Likewise, Rika (2021) explains that similes function as direct comparisons or analogies used to clarify meaning. In brief, a simile is both an explicit and implicit comparative device that employs terms like “as,” “like,” “as if,” and “seem” to establish a relationship between two dissimilar objects.

### **About the Poet**

Muhammad Zaman, a PhD scholar in English at Hamdard University, Karachi Campus, is a contemporary Pakistani poet and literary researcher. His work engages critically with themes of freedom, identity, societal and cultural constraints, and human resilience, employing figurative language such as personification and similes to articulate complex emotional and philosophical ideas. In his recent poem “*Freedom is in Chain*”, Zaman investigates the interaction between external forces such as societal norms, cultural expectations, religion, and political structures and the internal capacity of the human spirit to endure and aspire. His poetry reflects a methodical engagement with both personal and collective experiences, demonstrating how literary devices can be used to explore and represent nuanced social, psychological, and existential realities, making his work both analytically significant and creatively compelling.

### **Problem Statement**

Figurative language plays a crucial role in shaping meaning and thematic depth in poetry; however, many contemporary poems remain underexplored in terms of their stylistic and figurative construction. Despite the significance of personification and simile in conveying abstract ideas such as freedom, confinement, identity, and ideological control, limited scholarly attention has been given to examining how these devices function in modern Pakistani English poetry. Muhammad Zaman’s poem “*Freedom is in Chain*” presents a rich textual space where freedom is portrayed as an illusion constrained by sociocultural, religious, and political forces. Yet, there is a lack of systematic analysis focusing on how personification and simile contribute to the development of these themes. This gap necessitates a detailed investigation of the poem’s figurative language to better understand how literary devices shape meaning

and reader interpretation.

### **Research Objectives**

The present study aims to:

- Identify instances of personification and simile in Muhammad Zaman's poem "Freedom is in Chain".
- Analyze how personification and simile function as stylistic tools in the poem.
- Examine the thematic meanings conveyed through personification and simile in relation to freedom, confinement, and identity.
- Explore the role of figurative language in enhancing the aesthetic and interpretive depth of the poem.

### **Research Questions**

1. What instances of personification and simile are used in Muhammad Zaman's poem "Freedom is in Chain"?
2. How do personification and simile function stylistically within the poem?
3. What meanings and themes are expressed through the use of personification and simile in the poem?
4. How does figurative language contribute to the overall interpretation and impact of "Freedom is in Chain"?

### **Literature Review**

Language is regarded as one of the fundamental instruments through which humans interact and exchange meaning with one another (Hariyanto, 2017). More specifically, it functions as a widely adopted medium of communication within societies, allowing both speakers and listeners to transmit ideas, thoughts, and messages effectively (Siregar et al., 2021). Harmer (2016) further explains that language enables communication among individuals who may not share the same first or even second language, thereby serving as a bridge across linguistic boundaries. As a result, language plays a vital role in connecting diverse communities.

Figurative language refers to stylistic techniques used to express ideas or emotions by drawing comparisons between unrelated entities or by attributing life-like qualities to inanimate objects (Siahaan, n.d.). In simple terms, figurative language represents a creative means of expressing meaning, as noted by Webster (1988). Similarly, Erika Sweeney (1995) defines figurative language as a descriptive method used to create vivid imagery and evoke emotional responses in readers. Hatch (1995) categorizes figurative language into several types, including personification, simile, metaphor, allusion, and others.

Figurative language is considered more effective in conveying an author's intended meaning for several reasons. First, it allows readers to engage with literary texts imaginatively. Second, it enriches poetry by adding imagery that transforms abstract ideas into tangible experiences, making literary works more sensuous. Third, figurative language intensifies emotional expression, turning simple statements into powerful expressions of attitude and feeling rather than mere information. Finally, it enables writers to communicate complex ideas concisely (Perrine, 1991). In this regard, both written and spoken communication become more effective when

figurative language is used appropriately (Kreuzer, 1960).

Scholars differ in their classification of figurative language. Perrine (1983), for instance, identifies ten categories of figurative language, including metaphor, simile, synecdoche, personification, metonymy, allegory, hyperbole, irony, symbol, and paradox. In contrast, Rozakis (1995) presents a broader classification that encompasses personification, sarcasm, simile, symbolism, synecdoche, synesthesia, transferred epithet, understatement, contrast, metaphor, irony, hyperbole, litotes, metonymy, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, and allegory. These differing classifications demonstrate that while there is overlap among scholars, the scope of figurative language varies depending on theoretical perspective.

Keraf (2008) categorizes figurative language into four main groups: repetition, relationship, contrast, and comparison. Although numerous forms of figurative language exist, the present study concentrates specifically on **personification and simile** as they appear in the poem "*Postcards from God*." Personification, in particular, has attracted considerable scholarly interest, especially in poetic discourse. Paxson (1994) traces the origin of personification to the Greek term *prosopopeia*, meaning "to give face." Personification can be understood in two ways: first, as the act of assigning a personality to abstract ideas; and second, as the deliberate use of fictional language to represent abstract concepts.

Goatly (1997) views personification as a literary device commonly employed in poetry and fiction, often regarded as an elaborate and sometimes artificial convention. Likewise, Cuddon (2013) defines personification as the attribution of human qualities to non-living objects or abstract entities, effectively presenting them as human beings. He further emphasizes the frequent use of this device in literary works, particularly poetry (Cuddon, 2013). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that personification helps individuals conceptualize everyday experiences by treating non-human phenomena as human-like. For example, Romantic poets often personify natural elements such as rocks, rivers, or wind by attributing speech or emotion to them, a technique commonly known as poetic personification.

Kövecses (2010) describes personification as an essential rhetorical strategy frequently used by poets to produce meaningful effects on readers. Similarly, Lakoff and Turner (1989) extensively examine figures of speech such as metaphor and personification, focusing on how personified objects in poetry relate to common human experiences. As a result, Kövecses (2010) asserts that personification enables readers to better understand complex aspects of life, including death, time, natural forces, and abstract concepts.

Brinton (2000) defines personification as a figure of speech that assigns human attributes to non-human entities to convey meaning effectively. Hurford et al. (2007) further explain personification as a type of ontological metaphor in which abstract or physical objects are endowed with human traits. Cruse (2006) similarly considers personification a metaphorical process in which events with unclear causes are represented as actions performed by humans, thereby clarifying meaning. This understanding aligns with Murray and Moon (2006), who argue that personification is a form of metaphor where inanimate objects are treated as if they were human. For

instance, in the phrase “the trouble killed him,” the abstract noun *trouble* is given the human ability to kill.

Geeraerts (2010) confirms that personification functions as a conceptual metaphor by using human qualities to represent non-human phenomena. According to Al-Masud and Naif (2020), conceptual metaphors involve understanding one concept in terms of another. Ricoeur (2003) further strengthens this view by linking personification with metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, explaining that personification occurs through metaphorical transfer. In this process, both animate and inanimate abstract entities are endowed with human characteristics. For example, the expression “the daffodil is wandering in my garden smiling extremely” personifies the inanimate object *daffodil* by assigning it the human actions of wandering and smiling. Overall, these discussions establish personification as a powerful form of metaphor that humanizes animals, objects, and natural elements to enhance meaning.

A simile is defined as a comparative expression that employs function words such as *like*, *as*, *resemble*, *seem*, or *then* to relate one entity to another (Keraf, 2008: 138). Essentially, similes draw direct comparisons between concepts that are fundamentally different. A well-known example is Robert Burns’s line, “My love is like a red, red rose.” Similes are a frequently used figure of speech in English literature (Fengjie, Jia, and Yingying, 2016). Tilak (2019) describes a simile as an indirect comparison between two entities that share certain traits despite differing in nature, allowing for vivid imagery.

Dewi (2010) notes that similes have also been studied in political speeches, particularly regarding their structural features. In poetry, similes play a crucial role by creating strong mental images through comparisons using *like* or *as*, thereby making abstract or unfamiliar ideas more accessible (Varghese, 2012). Saputri (2014) adds that similes intensify sensory experience by linking descriptions to familiar memories. Expressions such as “as brave as a lion” immediately evoke courage and strengthen emotional response (Saputri, 2014). This emotional engagement enhances the poem’s overall impact and reinforces its message (Kennedy, 1979).

Moreover, similes help establish emotional bonds between poets and readers by drawing on shared experiences (Niazi, 2017). Sarfraz (2022) explains that similes simplify complex ideas by relating them to everyday objects, making abstract concepts easier to understand (Shafak, 2021). For example, describing life as “a rollercoaster” helps individuals comprehend and accept its unpredictability (Fitratunnas, 2017). The simplicity of similes thus contributes to the accessibility and relatability of poetry. Additionally, similes enhance linguistic elegance and aesthetic appeal, adding a lyrical quality that improves readability (Shakir, 2023). This stylistic beauty makes poetic language more memorable and enjoyable (Saputri, 2014).

Fitratunnas (2017) further argues that similes introduce creativity and intrigue into poetry by employing imaginative comparisons. Such originality can surprise or amuse readers, sustaining their interest (Hamdiana, 2015). For instance, describing the night as “black as coal” produces a striking visual image (Risdianto, 2018). Perrine (2010) concludes that similes help readers relate poetry to their own experiences by establishing familiar parallels. Expressions such as “busy as a bee” allow readers to

identify with poetic language, deepening personal engagement and enhancing the poem's relevance (Keraf, 2018).

### **Methodology**

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach for textual analysis. The analytical framework proposed by Leech and Short was selected as the guiding model for examining figurative language. This model offers a systematic method for stylistic analysis and is particularly suitable for the study of literary devices. In the current research, a single-level analytical technique was applied, focusing specifically on the figures of speech category. Within this category, the analysis is limited to personification and simile in order to interpret the meanings embedded in the selected poem "*Freedom is in Chain.*"

### **Research Design**

Research methodology refers to the set of systematic procedures and tools that guide a research investigation, including the methods used for data collection and analysis (Richards & Schmidt, 1999). Research design, on the other hand, represents the overall plan that connects abstract research questions with practical and feasible methods of inquiry. It provides clear guidelines regarding how a study should be conducted (Creswell, 2014). According to Kothari (2004), research design functions as a strategic framework for logically explaining a research problem. It outlines the various stages a researcher follows while investigating a problem, along with the rationale behind each stage.

### **Target Population and Sampling Technique**

Population refers to the entire group of individuals, texts, or items that share certain observable and common characteristics, from which a sample may be drawn (Richards & Schmidt, 1999). A sample represents a subset of the population that reflects its essential characteristics, while the procedure used to select this subset is known as the sampling technique.

### **Target Population**

The target population of the present study consists of Muhammad Zaman's poem "*Freedom is in Chain.*"

### **Sampling Technique**

Various sampling techniques are employed in research depending on the nature and objectives of a study. Considering the scope and suitability of the present research, a convenience sampling technique was employed. Accordingly, a single poem, "*Freedom is in Chain,*" was deliberately selected as the sample for detailed analysis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The stylistic framework developed by Leech and Short (2007) is employed in this study as the theoretical foundation for analysis. This framework provides a structured inventory of stylistic categories for systematic textual examination. The present study is restricted to analyzing personification and simile, along with their underlying meanings, as they appear in the poem "*Freedom is in Chain.*"

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data were analyzed qualitatively, with the analysis focusing exclusively on personification and simile at the level of figurative language. In simile, two dissimilar entities are explicitly compared using connectors such as “like” or “as” to highlight shared characteristics. Personification, on the other hand, involves attributing human qualities to non-human entities, including inanimate objects, animals, or abstract concepts. After identifying instances of these figurative devices, the relevant lines and expressions were examined contextually to interpret their contribution to the overall meaning of the poem.

### **Figures of Speech**

The poem “*Freedom is in Chain*” by Muhammad Zaman is rich in figures of speech, particularly personification and simile, which serve as crucial devices for conveying its central themes of freedom, confinement, and societal constraints. These stylistic devices allow abstract concepts such as oppression, moral restriction, and internal struggle to be represented in concrete and relatable imagery, thereby deepening readers’ understanding and engagement with the poem. This section analyzes the figures of speech in detail, highlighting how they function to develop meaning and align with the study’s objectives of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting figurative language.

#### **Freedom is in Chain**

*My soul once promised God above,  
To keep it pure, to keep His love.  
But trapped inside my mother’s well,  
My spirit learned a cage to dwell.  
Born in her lap, with clothes I’m tied,  
With moral lessons to guide and hide.  
Religion spoke: Obey My call,  
And holy chains were wrapped in all.  
Culture shaped me, customs near,  
Society drew its lines of fear.  
Language fenced the words I knew,  
Geography built its borders too.  
Nations rose with flags so high,  
And bound my wings against the sky.  
So I ask now, with heavy breath,  
Is freedom life, or just with death?  
Perhaps true freedom’s not unchained,  
But knowing walls and still remained,  
To let the soul in silence sing,  
A caged bird still with golden wing.  
By Muhammad Zaman*

### **Personification**

The poem extensively employs personification, attributing human qualities to abstract concepts, societal structures, and even intangible ideas, thereby making them active participants in the speaker’s lived experience.



## Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

The opening lines, “*My soul once promised God above, / To keep it pure, to keep His love*”, personify the soul as a conscious, morally aware entity capable of making promises and maintaining devotion. This gives the speaker’s inner self human agency, emphasizing the personal responsibility and spiritual struggle associated with maintaining purity and faith in the face of societal pressures.

The lines, “*But trapped inside my mother’s well, / My spirit learned a cage to dwell*”, extend personification to the spirit, describing it as capable of learning and adapting within confinement. The metaphor of a “cage” concretizes the psychological and emotional restrictions imposed by upbringing, suggesting that early life experiences create a framework of internalized limitations. Here, personification bridges the gap between abstract emotional states and tangible imagery, enabling readers to perceive the confinement as both physical and spiritual.

“*Religion spoke: Obey My call, / And holy chains were wrapped in all*” depicts religion as a sentient being capable of speech and action. The “holy chains” symbolize moral and spiritual constraints, highlighting how religious doctrine can enforce behavioral conformity. By attributing these qualities to religion, the poem emphasizes the tension between divine obedience and personal autonomy, making abstract spiritual obligations perceptible.

In “*Culture shaped me, customs near, / Society drew its lines of fear*”, culture and society are given human abilities: shaping, drawing, and enforcing. This personification conveys the pervasive influence of social norms and collective expectations, illustrating how the individual is molded and constrained by communal structures. These lines underscore the theme that freedom is not only externally restricted but also shaped by ingrained cultural practices and fear-based social constructs.

“*Language fenced the words I knew, / Geography built its borders too*” personifies language and geography as active agents capable of restricting thought and movement. Language, through its structures and limitations, fences in knowledge, while geography physically and symbolically demarcates boundaries. This anthropomorphizing of abstract and physical concepts enhances the reader’s perception of societal and environmental restrictions as active, controlling forces.

Finally, in “*Nations rose with flags so high, / And bound my wings against the sky*”, nations are personified as entities that can rise and exert authority, while the speaker’s wings—a metaphor for potential and freedom—are depicted as being physically restrained. The personification here emphasizes the political and national structures that limit individual freedom, illustrating the external imposition of control in a tangible, almost tactile manner.

The concluding line, “*A caged bird still with golden wing*”, is a complex combination of personification and metaphor. The bird represents the human soul, endowed with qualities of flight and hope, yet physically restricted by a cage. The *golden wing* symbolizes innate potential, beauty, and resilience. By personifying the soul as a caged yet capable entity, the poem conveys the paradoxical coexistence of constraint and latent freedom, highlighting the nuanced understanding of liberty developed

throughout the poem.

### **Similes**

While the poem primarily relies on metaphorical imagery, implicit similes function throughout to establish comparisons that make abstract experiences tangible.

The image of “*A caged bird still with golden wing*” functions as an implicit simile, comparing the constrained human spirit to a bird in a cage. This comparison enables readers to conceptualize the limitations imposed on freedom and simultaneously recognize the enduring vitality and potential of the soul. The simile humanizes the abstract concept of freedom by linking it to a familiar, vivid image of captivity and hope.

“*Perhaps true freedom’s not unchained, / But knowing walls and still remained*” is another implicit simile that contrasts physical liberation with internal awareness. Freedom is likened to a state of understanding limitations while retaining internal integrity. This comparison allows readers to perceive freedom not simply as the absence of external restraints but as the mindful acknowledgment and navigation of them.

Even earlier in the poem, lines like “*Born in her lap, with clothes I’m tied, / With moral lessons to guide and hide*” contain simile-like qualities. The ties of clothing and moral lessons serve as tangible representations of societal and familial expectations, allowing readers to conceptualize abstract obligations in concrete terms. The comparison between physical binding and moral guidance intensifies the reader’s understanding of early-life socialization as a form of subtle confinement.

### **Analysis of Figures of Speech**

The interplay of personification and simile in “Freedom is in Chain” serves multiple functions. First, it brings abstract concepts—such as freedom, oppression, morality, and societal influence—into the realm of human experience, making them perceptible and emotionally resonant. Second, the implicit similes provide accessible analogies that clarify complex philosophical ideas, such as the coexistence of internal autonomy and external restraint. Third, the combination of these devices emphasizes the poem’s central theme: that freedom is not simply physical liberty but involves navigating the structures—cultural, religious, linguistic, and political—that shape human life.

By giving agency to religion, culture, society, language, geography, and nations, the poem presents a multi-layered portrayal of constraint, highlighting both internal and external forces that affect human freedom. Similes, meanwhile, reinforce these themes by drawing vivid comparisons that help the reader internalize the emotional and philosophical dimensions of captivity and hope. Together, these figures of speech fulfill the study’s objectives by illustrating how stylistic choices in figurative language convey complex meanings, enhance reader engagement, and deepen interpretive understanding.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of Muhammad Zaman’s poem “*Freedom is in Chain*” reveals the poet’s deliberate use of personification and similes to express complex themes of freedom, confinement, societal control, and internal struggle. Personification emerges as the dominant figure of speech in the poem, allowing abstract entities such as religion,

society, culture, language, and geography to be depicted as active agents capable of restricting or shaping human experience. This technique aligns with the poet's intention to illustrate how both internal and external forces contribute to a sense of entrapment. By attributing human qualities to these forces, the poet bridges the gap between the abstract concept of freedom and tangible experiences of restriction, making the emotional and psychological dimensions of oppression more accessible to readers.

Similes, though largely implicit, function as critical tools for comparative imagery, enabling the reader to grasp the tension between aspiration and limitation. For instance, the depiction of the soul as a *"caged bird with golden wing"* encapsulates the paradox of inherent potential constrained by external structures. Similarly, comparisons such as *"Perhaps true freedom's not unchained, / But knowing walls and still remained"* highlight the nuanced understanding of freedom not as mere absence of restraint but as awareness and endurance of limitations. These figurative devices complement the poem's personifications by providing tangible analogies for otherwise abstract concepts, thereby enhancing interpretive depth and reader engagement.

The poem's stylistic choices reflect broader literary and psychological strategies in poetry, where personification and simile serve to evoke empathy, create vivid imagery, and facilitate meaning-making. Through these devices, the poet not only portrays societal, cultural, and religious constraints but also emphasizes the resilience and latent potential of the human spirit. This demonstrates that freedom, as conceptualized in the poem, is not an external state alone but an internalized awareness of limitations and the ability to find meaning within them. The analysis also confirms that figurative language is a powerful mechanism for exploring existential and socio-cultural themes, supporting the study's objective of illustrating how literary devices convey complex ideas in an accessible manner.

Moreover, the interplay between personification and simile in the poem highlights the interconnectedness of stylistic devices in poetry. While personification gives agency and life to abstract entities, similes draw explicit or implicit parallels that help readers visualize and emotionally connect with the themes. This dual strategy enriches the poem's narrative, reinforcing its philosophical reflection on the paradoxical nature of freedom in a constrained environment.

### **Conclusion**

The present study confirms that figurative language, specifically personification and simile, plays a pivotal role in Muhammad Zaman's *"Freedom is in Chain"*. Personification allows abstract forces such as society, culture, religion, language, geography, and nations to act as conscious agents, emphasizing the ways external and internal pressures shape individual experiences. Similes, both explicit and implicit, provide vivid analogies that enable readers to conceptualize the tensions between restriction and potential, captivity and aspiration. Together, these figures of speech render complex emotional and philosophical ideas comprehensible, relatable, and memorable.

The poem ultimately presents a multilayered understanding of freedom, portraying it as an interplay between external constraints and internal resilience. Freedom is depicted not merely as physical liberty but as the conscious acknowledgment of

limitations and the ability to cultivate inner autonomy despite them. By analyzing the personifications and similes in the poem, the study achieves its objectives of identifying figurative devices, interpreting their meanings, and elucidating their contribution to the poem's thematic and aesthetic depth.

The findings underscore the significance of figurative language in literary expression, particularly in conveying nuanced psychological and socio-cultural realities. Personification and simile not only enhance the poem's linguistic beauty and emotional resonance but also facilitate readers' engagement with abstract concepts, making poetry a powerful medium for exploring human experience and philosophical reflection. This study, therefore, highlights the enduring relevance of figurative language as an essential tool in literary analysis and comprehension.

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# Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

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**Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

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