



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

Revealing the Meanings behind the Words: A Study of Symbolism in ‘*The Grass Is Really Like Me*’ By Kishwar Naheed

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the symbols in Kishwar Naheed’s poem ‘*The grass is really like me*’ and analyzes the meaning of the symbols in the poem. Symbolism is the kind of shorthand that is used to express the deep meanings as they are employed in order to avoid direct statement. The author focuses on the symbolism in the poem. The researcher employs descriptive qualitative methods for analyzing the data in this study. The library research, content analysis, and techniques are employed to explore the problem. The study focuses on identifying and interpreting symbols found in the mentioned poem, explaining their significance within each piece. Consequently, the study’s findings reveal that Kishwar Naheed’s poem contains numerous symbols, such as ‘*grass*’, it symbolizes the speaker herself, representing women, particularly those who are oppressed and marginalized in society. The ‘*Lawn mower*’ depicts the oppressive forces in society that aim to suppress and conform women to certain standards. ‘*Footpath*’ symbolizes the societal structures and pathways that are imposed upon individuals, particularly women. ‘*Straw*’ is used as a symbol for the women who have lost their uniqueness and energy due to cultural pressures and unfair attitude. These symbols hold theoretical significance and reflect deeper meanings within the context of the poetry.

Key Words: Symbolism, Metaphor, Symbolic meanings, Leech and Short Model

Introduction

Poetry is undoubtedly filled with fantasies, but often the symbols are not clear enough, thus poetry is occasionally extremely symbolic to make it extra intriguing. Symbols, though essentially unique, connect a phrase or idea to a tangible object, scene, or action in traditional literary usage. According to Ogden and Richard (2007), a symbol is anything that is utilized to consult another document in accordance with the terms of the effective corporation that employs it. Symbolism was a common tool employed by poets to enhance their poetic forms.

In Verdonk’s (2002) perspective, stylistics focuses on examining the unique



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

manner of expression in language. It involves scrutinizing a particular linguistic expression and elucidating its intended function and impact. The methods for carrying out such analysis and description, as well as determining the connection between them, vary among scholars within the field of stylistics. The intersection between stylistics and linguistics lies in the utilization of language models, analytical methods, and linguistic approaches to enable the exploration of style in its widest context.

Spencer (2007) demonstrates that stylistics involves employing linguistics as a means of literary analysis, enabling the exploration of the aesthetic qualities of language. Both literary and linguistic inquiries revolve around the examination of language, particularly its style. However, linguistics typically treats a literary work merely as a source or artifact for documenting the evolution of a language. It transitions into a tool for literary criticism when it also scrutinizes the aesthetic impacts of language. For a style to be considered part of literary criticism, it must itself become the subject of reflection (Spencer, 2007).

Symbolism imparts hidden meanings to readers or listeners, offering deeper insights into artistic expression and representing abstract concepts. Writers use various elements such as individuals, locations, words, actions, and objects as symbols to convey their mood and emotions. Whether depicted through visual imagery or gestures, symbolism helps in crafting meanings and evoking emotions within writing. Typically, symbolism encompasses multiple layers of interpretation, enriching different facets and notions. It adds complexity to writing that cannot be straightforwardly articulated, enabling the writer to communicate thoughts on various levels. It is widely observed that nearly all authors incorporate symbols into their literary works to captivate the attention of their audience.

By employing such symbolic concepts, poets can develop deeper meanings and fill in gaps within their works. While some symbols can be quite apparent, others require careful consideration. In literature, water appears in various forms such as lakes, rivers, streams, waterfalls, and rain. There are numerous ways to interpret the water symbol in literature, with common associations including life, birth, purity, purification, and the washing away of sins. Water is mostly associated with birth and rebirth and is vital to life and growth. It is a part of the baptism ceremony, which marks the solemnity of spiritual births.

Biography of the Poetess

One of Pakistan's most well-known feminist poets, Kishwar Naheed was born in 1940 in India. Writing in Urdu, Naheed was a trailblazer of a new, distinctly feminine voice in a sector dominated by traditional male voices. Over the course of thirty years, she has built a body of work that is inventive, defiant, political, and self-aware. Her poetry ventured into hitherto unexplored areas of female sexuality, politics, and social issues in addition to the approved 'feminine' domains. Attempting to rethink the man-woman interaction, Kishwar Naheed discussed her writing in an interview with Rakhshanda Jalil for the Indian Daily, *The Hindu* (11/4/2001). She identified as "a realist" who rejected the labels of radical or bohemian. She has written Urdu poetry books too.

Naheed was raised in a traditional family and immigrated to Lahore, Pakistan, during the 1947 subcontinental divide. She had to struggle to further her



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

education in a society where women were discouraged from attending school and "were not allowed to speak to boys." The renowned Adamjee Prize of Literature was awarded to Naheed in 1968 for her debut collection of poetry, *Lab-i Goya*. A collection of nazms, translations of poetry from other languages, and several pieces in free verse came after this collection of conventional ghazals. Her autobiography was published in 1994 (it was published in India the following year), and in 2001, her collected poetry work was published in a 1312-page volume named *Dasht-i qais men Lail'a*. She also wrote for children and the daily Jang. Her poetry has been translated into Spanish and English. Her well-known poem 'We, sinful women', *The Salt*, 'The bad woman's story' and 'The grass is rally like me' served as the inspiration for a groundbreaking collection of recently translated and edited contemporary Urdu feminist poetry.

Kishwar Naheed has held the position of Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts before her retirement, has edited a prestigious literary magazine *Mah-i naw*, and has founded an organization named *Hawwa* (Eve) whose goal is to help homebound women become financially independent through cottage industries and the marketing of handicrafts.

Theme of the Poem

The theme of Kishwar Naheed's poem "The Grass Is Really Like Me" revolves around the resilience and enduring strength of women amidst systemic oppression. The poet employs grass as a profound symbol to represent personal struggles and triumphs, drawing parallels between the natural resilience of grass and the tenacity of women. Grass, which must unfurl and grow underfoot, symbolizes the constant struggle to thrive and fulfill one's potential despite being repeatedly mowed down. This act of mowing down the grass represents societal attempts to suppress and flatten women's identities and aspirations, much like a lawnmower obsessed with creating a uniform, controlled landscape.

Naheed's use of grass as a symbol extends to encapsulate feminine experiences and perspectives, illustrating how women, despite facing continual suppression, rise and flourish against the odds. The metaphor of grass being mowed down only to grow back stronger mirrors the cyclical nature of oppression and the unyielding spirit of women who persist in manifesting life and growth. The poem pragmatically criticizes patriarchal efforts to subdue women, suggesting that such attempts are ultimately futile, as neither the earth's nor a woman's desire to express life can be extinguished.

In addition to the central symbol of grass, Naheed skillfully integrates other literary devices to deepen the poem's meaning. The lawnmower's relentless action signifies societal forces that aim to diminish women's roles, while the grass's persistence symbolizes the enduring strength and defiance of women.

Through this rich symbolism and the interplay of literary devices, Naheed's poem offers a profound commentary on the indomitable spirit of women. It underscores the theme of resilience in the face of oppression and the unquenchable desire for self-expression and autonomy, making "*The Grass Is Really Like Me*" a powerful and evocative work.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does the poet employ the grass as a symbolic representation of



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

personal struggles and triumphs?

2. How does the grass serve as a metaphor for feminine experiences and perspectives in the poem?

3. How does the poet's use of grass as a symbol interact with other literary devices to create meaning?

Literature Review

Mitchell (2016) investigates how environment is used in Romantic poetry as a symbol. It examines the poetic works of writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, emphasizing the ways in which they employ natural elements as metaphors for feelings, mental processes, and philosophical ideas. According to the research, nature symbolism plays a significant role in Romantic poetry by bridging the gap between the heavenly and the human.

Clark (2017) explores T.S. Eliot's intricate use of symbolism in his poetry, focusing on pieces like "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In light of modernist concerns with disappointment and loss, the research explores how Eliot uses symbols to express themes of spiritual decay, hopelessness, and disintegration.

Williams (2018) investigates the use of symbolism in Sylvia Plath's poetry, focusing on themes of mental illness, identity, and femininity. The study analyzes poems from Plath's collection "Ariel" where the horse symbolizes freedom and escape. The ride on the horse represents a journey towards self-realization and liberation from constraints. It is both a literal and metaphorical ride towards a transformative experiences.

Thompson (2019) examines how Robert Frost uses symbols to reflect American rural life and its philosophical implications. The research focuses on symbols such as roads, walls, and natural landscapes in Frost's poetry, discussing how these elements represent choices, boundaries, and existential questions.

Green (2015) investigates the symbolism in Emily Dickinson's poetry, particularly her recurring use of symbols related to death and immortality. The study discusses how Dickinson's unique symbols like the fly, the carriage, and the narrow fellow convey her nuanced perspectives on life's transient nature and the afterlife.

Murphy (2017) delves into the symbolic elements in W.B. Yeats' poetry, exploring his use of symbols such as the gyre, the rose, and the tower. The study reveals how these symbols reflect Yeats' quest for spiritual unity and his response to the political and cultural upheavals of his time.

M (2020) examines the use of symbolism in Langston Hughes' poetry, focusing on how he uses symbols to address themes of racial identity, social injustice, and resilience. The study analyzes poems such as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "Harlem," highlighting Hughes' innovative use of symbolism to express the African American experience.

Garcia (2016) explores the rich symbolic landscape of Pablo Neruda's poetry, focusing on the uses of symbols to intertwine themes of love, politics, and nature. In *'Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair'*, the sea serves as a symbol for the depth and intensity of romantic love. Moreover, stars as symbols of hope and guidance, which connect the individual yearning for love and the collective aspiration for freedom and justice.



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

Baker (2018) analyzes the use of symbolism in Wilfred Owen's war poetry, he uses symbols to convey the horrors and futility of war. The study examines poems like "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth," highlighting Owen's use of symbolic imagery such as blood, gas, and the battlefield. Blood as symbol represented the physical and emotional toll of life. It is not merely a literal depiction of injury and death but a metaphor for the young lives lost and the innocence shattered by the brutality of combats.

O'Connor (2021) explores the use of symbolism in Seamus Heaney's poetry, focusing on themes of identity, history, and nature. The study analyzes symbols such as bogs, digging, and water in Heaney's work, illustrating how these symbols reflect his engagement with personal and collective memory.

Sandy (2022) analyzes the conclusion of Keats' poetry, focusing on how Keats reconciles death through his creative self-awareness. In his work 'Ode to a Nightingale' the 'Nightingale' symbolizes the desire for transcendence and escape from the pains of mortal life. The bird's immortal song contrasts with human suffering and mortality, representing a timeless, ideal beauty that Keats longs to join. However, this desire is tempered by the recognition of the inevitable return to reality and mortality.

Qaid & Kanouni (2022) examined Muhammad Ahmed Mansour's semiotic symbols using a semiotic approach. Their analysis revealed that the use of symbols in his poem addresses the semiotic approach that contributes to the growth of texts, the expansion of their meanings and functions, and the construction of poetic images, including mystical, historical, literary, and natural symbols. Its texts broaden implications, thrill readers, and promote reading.

Dash (2022) discovered that natural symbols in Yeats' works are unconscious mind manifestations and so indicate nuances of fundamental archetypes that have their origins in early literature and societies.

Nawaz & Rehman (2024) reveals 'Uncovering the Depths of A Short Long Trip 'from Stylistics Perspective'. The symbols in his poetry have positive implications because of his fascination with nature, and they frequently stand in for human thoughts and ideas, mystical and philosophical views, and poetic images. meanings that give them significance in people's minds.

Sri Imawati (2004) explored many symbols in the poem 'The Road Not Taken' with various symbols and their meanings in the poetry of Robert Frost's, employing a structuralism approach. He provides valuable insights for researchers on analyzing symbols in poems and outlines the initial steps for applying the theory in research.

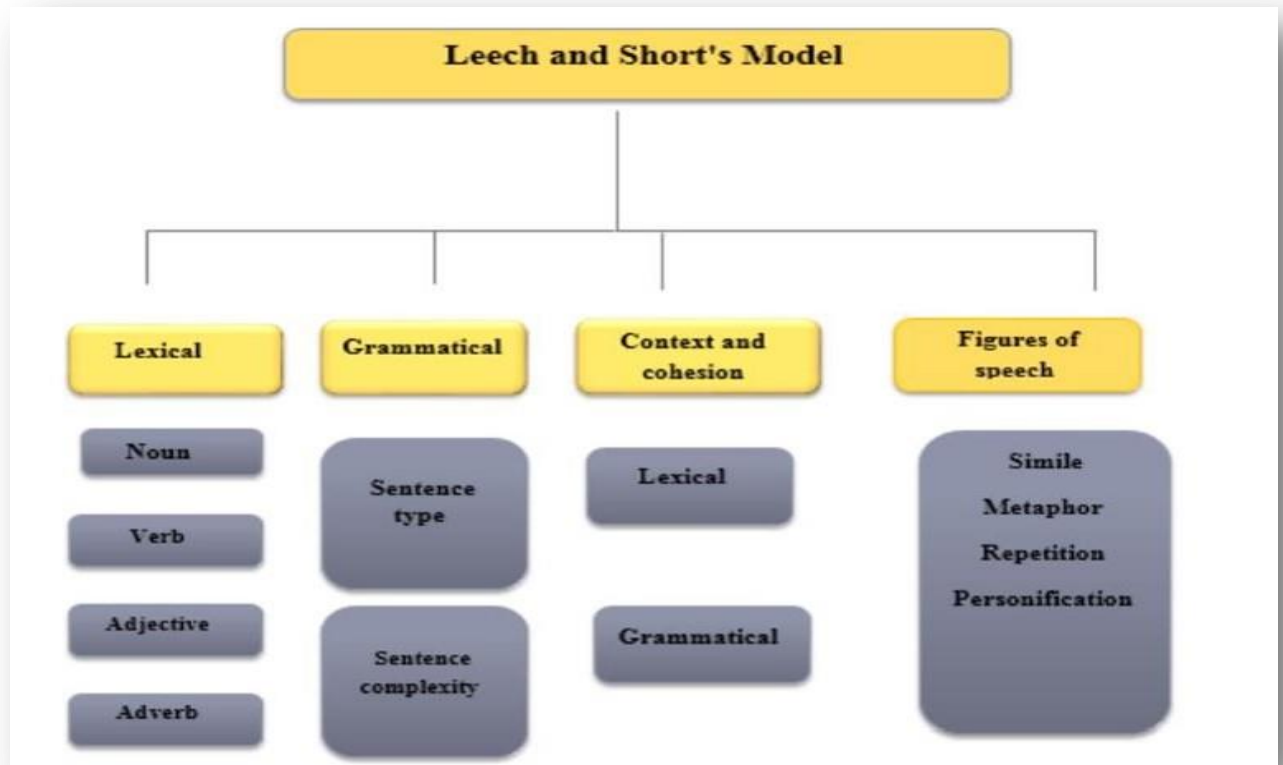
Rahayu (2004) explored the analysis of William Wordsworth's Ten Poems, which represented the connotative meanings present in these works. She employs a semantic approach to delve into the deeper layers of meaning within the poems. The selected poems, including "It is A Beauteous Evening," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," and "The Solitary Reaper," among others, which reflected the different symbols such as *clouds*, *Evening*.

Methodology

This study uses the theoretical framework proposed by G.N Leech and Mick Short. There are four general categories that are helpful in developing an understanding of the significance of style. Lexical, Grammatical, Context and



Cohesion and Figures of speech. The study utilizes the classification of figures of speech to identify Symbolism in context to the poem.



Stylistics

In Leech & Short's (2007) view, stylistics primarily involves examining style linguistically, focusing on describing how language is used. Typically, style is explored when one aims to clarify something, and literary stylistics, whether overtly or covertly, aims to elucidate the connection between language and artistic expression (Armstrong, 2002).

Symbolism in Poetry

"All sounds, all colors, all forms, either because of their preordained emerges or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions or as I prefer to think call down among us certain disembodied powers whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions" (W.B Yeats, 1900, p. 33). Poetry uses symbolism as a kind of shortcut to express deeper meanings than are spoken literally. The poet typically makes an effort to select a metrical verse from poetry that is derived from personal experience. Poetry uses symbols instead of direct statements, which would restrict its meaning (Perrine, 1978). Symbolism is something that stands for what is something else or to be representing (Wainwright, 2005). A symbol can carry a conventional interpretation; for example, the color red conventionally signifies danger and anger. Yet, it also holds additional layers of meaning that require a deeper understanding of the symbol.



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

Data Analysis

The data for the poem has been analyzed in respect to symbolism by implanting the Leech & Short Model. Different symbols have been used by the writer so as to convey the meaning to the readers and allow the audience that how women are suppressed and oppressed in the society by the hierarchy.

The poet uses the '*Grass*' to carve her feelings through symbolism. The speaker suggests a link between her experiences and the natural world by comparing herself to the grass. This analogy represents the challenges that women encounter in society as well as the resiliency and vigor of womanhood. The yearning of the grass, and therefore of female, to express life persists in spite of attempts to flatten and control it. This represents women's fortitude and power in the face of hardship.

The grass's wetness is a representation of sensitivity and fragility. One could read it as an expression of humiliation or as the speaker's strong feelings.

Furthermore, the grass symbolizes women's resilience and their ability to endure and resist oppression too. Despite being mowed down repeatedly, the grass continues to grow back. This mirrors women's capacity to withstand and rise above societal constraints. The grass's persistence embodies the poet's, and by extension, women's unyielding spirit and determination. This resilience is further emphasized in the line, "But neither the earth's nor woman's desire to manifest life dies." Here, Naheed underscores the innate strength and life force within women that cannot be extinguished by external forces.

The contrast between actual resilience and superficial passivity is emphasized by the comparison between grass and straw. Straw stands for people who give in to social pressure, whereas grass, like the speaker, perseveres in the face of hardship. The contrast between straw and grass further emphasizes that true resilience (the grass) cannot be completely subdued, whereas those who succumb to societal pressures (the straw) are effectively trampled upon.

Straw in the poem symbolizes defeat and the loss of individuality that comes from yielding to societal pressures. It represents those who, unlike the resilient grass, have been subdued and rendered lifeless. Straw, in its lifeless and dry state, symbolizes the loss of vitality and spirit. It represents those who have given up their struggle for self-expression and have been stripped of their life force. This symbol contrasts sharply with the vibrant, living grass, which continues to grow and strive despite being repeatedly cut down. The poet uses the art of symbolism to emphasize the consequences of giving in to societal pressures.

The writer explicitly used the symbol of footpath. The footpath represents the predetermined roles and expectations that society imposes. Those who cannot withstand the pressure (the scorching defeat of their courage) are metaphorically grafted onto the earth, making way for others but losing their individuality in the process. The researcher came up with the idea that how the poet uses this symbol in order to depict that women suffer in the society, tolerate the atrocities, ferociousness, barbarism and cruelty in their life but they make the ways to others. The footpath, in fact, is the clear depiction of women that they carve ways to others but no one is there for women to make their life cozy and comfortable.

The lawnmower represents social forces that aim to subjugate and dominate women. It stands for the constant pressure to live up to social standards and conventions, even at the price of uniqueness and self-expression.



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

The 'grass' as a clear depiction of feminine experiences, despite being constantly trampled upon, continues to grow and regenerate. This mirrors the resilience and enduring spirit of women who face continuous challenges and adversities in a patriarchal society. The grass's ability to survive and thrive despite being downtrodden symbolizes the strength and perseverance of women. They are unfortunately overlooked and taken for granted, women's contributions and experiences are frequently ignored or undervalued. The poem reflects on how women's voices and efforts are suppressed, much like grass that is cut down or ignored, yet persists in its existence.

Women, like the grass, strive to assert their presence and worth in a world that often seeks to diminish their importance. The metaphor highlights the constant struggle for acknowledgment and the right to exist and flourish. Grass is a fundamental part of the natural world, symbolizing growth, renewal, and the cycles of life. This connection underscores the natural and essential role of women in society, emphasizing that their experiences and perspectives are integral to the human experience.

At the end the grass's plight reflects the societal position of women who, despite being marginalized and ignored, continue to exist and push forward. The metaphor serves to emphasize the shared experiences of oppression and the unwavering strength that characterizes the feminine perspective. The poem uses the simple, ubiquitous image of grass to convey profound truths about the female experience, making the metaphor both accessible and deeply impactful.

Conclusion

There has been number of symbols in the poem and the writer explicitly uses the art of writing by using different symbols and metaphorical symbols so as to convey the hidden and pragmatic meanings through her poem 'The Grass is Really Like me'. Symbolism has always been used by the number of poets to depict their beliefs, feelings, adversities, hidden traits and preoccupation of the world by which they are surrounded of. "The grass is also like me" emphasizes resilience, resistance, and the enduring strength of women, making the poem a poignant reflection on personal and collective experiences of oppression and triumph. The poem uses the grass as a symbol to convey the speaker's defiance of social injustice, her fortitude in the face of misfortune, and her affirmation of her uniqueness and value. The poem provides a poignant remark on the challenges and resilience of womanhood through the use of this imagery.

In fact, the choice of the words chosen by the poet is clear and vivid. Despite societal pressures and expectations represented by the lawn mower, the speaker identifies with the grass, symbolizing their ability to stand firmly against all the atrocities of life and continue to grow. The speaker advises embracing the challenges of the journey, symbolized by the footpath, rather than succumbing to defeat. Ultimately, the poem celebrates the resilience of the human spirit and asserts the importance of individuality and self-expression.

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Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

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Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

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