

# Thematic Features of Epigrams in English and Karakalpak Poetry

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**Abstract.** This article examines the differences between epigrams in English and Karakalpak poetry, with a concentration on the writings of A. Pope, W. Blake, and I. Yusupov. The study analyzes how epigrams may be used to communicate moral judgement, expose hypocrisy, and criticize social behavior by examining a few chosen examples. In all literary traditions, particular focus is placed on the intellectual depth, stylistic methods, and subject breadth of epigrams. Satire, moral and ethical reflection, social critique, and philosophical reflection are the four primary themes identified by the research. The results show that epigrams in English and Karakalpak literature serve similar purposes, such as satire, didacticism, and philosophical reflection, despite variations in historical and cultural context.

**Keywords:** epigram, satire, comparative literature, English poetry, Karakalpak poetry, I. Yusupov, T. Jumamuratov, A. Pope, W. Blake, thematic analysis.

**Introduction.** The epigram is a short poetry form that is distinguished by its sharpness of expression, wit, and brevity. Despite its small size, it possesses substantial creative and intellectual power, enabling poets to succinctly express deep philosophical, moral, and social concepts. Pushkin compared the epigram to the pin of a naturalist that both kills and preserves a specimen – simultaneously destructive and immortalizing and expressed the following idea:

Опрятно за стеклом и в рамках  
Они, пронзенные насквозь,  
Рядком торчат на эпиграммах.

The needle mentioned here serves two purposes. First, it pierces the spider and kills it, and at the same time, it immortalizes it by turning it into a display specimen. In other words, it presents the enemy as a kind of exhibition piece unique to itself. Likewise, the poet likens the epigram to the muleta (the red cloth) of a torero that can enrage the bull:

Приятно дерзкой эпиграммой  
Взбесить оплошного врага...

The epigram also serves as a mirror, reflecting the true face of an enemy blinded by arrogance [6, 5]. English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined the epigram as:

“A dwarfish whole,  
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.”

This poetic formulation encapsulates the genre’s defining features: short length, pointedness, and clever insight [3, 242]. The epigram, which has traditionally been connected to irony and sarcasm, has been crucial to many literary traditions. The epigram reached a high degree of creative and intellectual complexity in English literature thanks to poets like William Blake and Alexander Pope. These poets expose the inconsistencies of human nature and the problems of society using brief yet strong language. The epigram initially showed up in Karakalpak literature in the 20th century, influenced by Western literary traditions. Ibrayim Yusupov is one of the major authors to the growth of this genre in Karakalpak poetry. His writings address a variety of topics, such as social concerns, moral principles, and philosophical concepts.

**Materials and methods.** The thematic characteristics of epigrams in English and Karakalpak poetry are examined in this study using a comparative literary analysis method. Satire, moral and ethical reflection, social criticism, and philosophical reflection are the four main topic themes around which the study is organized.

In a short, satirical form of the epigram, the poet attempts to convey philosophical ideas through words, praising or disparaging a person or social phenomenon. Many poets in English poetry have demonstrated their mastery by creating epigrams. One such poet, A. Pop, created several epigrams. The main idea in the following

lines belonging to the poet is the illusion of comparative wisdom between generations. Each generation considers itself smarter than its predecessor, but over time, the next generation also considers them “fool”:

We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow,  
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so. [5, 47]

Another epigram of the poet, dedicated to a contemporary poet, mocks authors who claim to be “poets” but whose poems are meaningless:

But there’s no meaning to be seen.  
Why that’s the very thing I mean. [4, 111]

William Blake elevated the epigram genre in English poetry not only to a satirical but also to a didactic and philosophical level. In his epigram titled “Public Address,” Blake emphasizes that society does not view itself critically; on the contrary, it does not see its flaws. “Public voice” (public opinion) refers to the notion that such a society is not based on truth, but on self-praise:

Call that the Public Voice which is their Error  
Like as a Monkey peeping in a Mirror  
Admires all his colours brown & warm  
And never once perceives his ugly form [2, 886]

In the epigram, social thought is likened to a monkey looking in the mirror and rejoicing in its brown colors, not seeing its own ugliness.

Blake’s other epigram exposes false humility and hypocrisy. The poet uses the concepts of “sweet reserve and modesty” ironically. These properties are presented here as a way of making a profit, which is not real:

The fox, the owl, the spider, and the mole,  
By sweet reserve and modesty get fat. [2, 885]

Blake’s epigram “Advice of the Popes who succeeded the Age of Raphael” criticizes the relationship between those in power and culture. The poet, by connecting the degradation of society and human consciousness with aesthetic degradation, criticizes, through sarcasm, the elevation of inferiority by leaders:

Degrade first the Arts if you’d Mankind Degrade.  
Hire Idiots to Paint with cold light & hot shade:  
Give high Price for the worst, leave the best in disgrace,  
And with Labours of Ignorance fill every place. [2, 883]

An epigram, though small in size, is a form with great ideological weight. Relying on satire and irony, it allows for the concise conveyance of profound philosophical thought. It can be seen that this genre in English poetry has not only satirical but also philosophical, moral, and social significance.

The epigram, one of the new genres that entered Karakalpak poetry in the 20th century, reflects the poet’s clear perspective on a particular person or society. The poet I. Yusupov, who tested his pen in almost all genres of Western literature, including poetry, created numerous epigrams. The poet’s epigrams cover various themes related to various spheres of life.

It turns out that talent is needed to write a noteworthy scientific work, just like in literature. It seems that not all the works of those who have written scientific papers are equally noteworthy. Regarding such scholarly works, the poet writes the following in his epigram “To an arrogant scholar” (“Bir dábdebeli ilimpazǵa”) [7, 149]:

Egerde men patsha bolsam,  
jazalı qulǵa,  
Kitabımdı oqıtar edim oǵan,  
satıp algızıp pulǵa. [8, 286]

In another epigram, the poet philosophically and satirically reflects on the role of poetry in human life. A viewpoint that considers poetry unnecessary is mocked by comparing it to animals. Thus, the poet presents poetry as a special value that makes a person human and elevates them spiritually. It is true that people can live without poetry, but it allegorically implies that life is spiritually meaningless, existing only at the biological level.

«Poeziya! Ol ne? Altın ba, dur me?  
Bolmayma olsız da ómir súrmege?» —

Der birewler. Duris ǵoy. Jasawǵa boladı...  
Máselen, haywanlar she? Jasamay júrme? [9, 35]

In I. Yusupov's epigram "Who is it?" ("Ol kim?") it is said that a person who diminishes the dignity of the woman will ultimately lose her and face spiritual and social isolation. In the epigram, satire, irony, and moral judgment are presented together, prompting the reader to reflect on humanity, gender respect, and family responsibility.

Onıń ózi hayaldan tuwdı,  
«Insan» emes oǵan hayallar.  
Hayalın qorlap úyinen quwdı.  
Endi ózi hayallarga zar. [8, 114]

I. Yusupov's epigrams are worthy of being considered outstanding examples of this genre in Karakalpak poetry. Through epigrams, the poet sharply criticizes negative traits among people and in society. In short lines, folk wisdom and deep philosophical thought are combined. Another notable poet is Tileubergen Jumamuratov, who added depth and nuance to the Karakalpak epigram through philosophical allegory:

Sen haq bolsań  
Men de haq bolǵım keledi,  
Túlki bolsań  
Men saq bolǵım keledi,  
Bayron bolsań qutlıqlayman ózińdi,  
Men tek mázi ...  
Berdaq bolǵım keledi.

This epigram juxtaposes the false image of greatness with the poet's own aspiration to follow in the path of Berdakh, the cultural hero of Karakalpak poetry [1,142].

**Results.** Several significant conclusions come from the analysis: both English and Karakalpak epigrams have didactic and sarcastic functions, frequently criticizing human weaknesses and social behavior. Beyond satire, epigrams in both traditions convey philosophical concepts like moral obligation, social hypocrisy, and generational change. Pope, Blake, I. Yusupov and T. Jumamuratov's epigrams frequently use sarcasm, metaphor, and contradiction to condense content into brief poetic forms. Every examined epigram exhibits a high degree of linguistic economy, with the greatest semantic load being carried by the fewest lexical elements.

**Discussion.** The results verify that the epigram is a universal literary form that can adapt to many language and cultural contexts. Epigrams serve as tools of intellectual satire in English poetry, especially in the poems of Alexander Pope. They frequently target literary criticism and generational wisdom. By incorporating intellectual and moral elements, William Blake broadens the genre and turns epigrams into instruments of social criticism. I. Yusupov and T. Jumamuratov carried on this heritage in Karakalpak poetry and localized it by addressing certain social and cultural themes. Their epigrams are a reflection of social observation, moral judgement, and national context-based philosophical contemplation.

The comparison reveals quantifiable parallels between the two traditions in terms of semantic compression, evaluative vocabulary, and lexical density. This implies that it is possible to study minor poetry forms like epigrams through combined literary and digital methods.

**Conclusion.** The study shows that epigrams serve as condensed yet conceptually rich poetic forms in both English and Karakalpak poetry. They share important characteristics like satire, irony, moral assessment, and philosophical contemplation despite cultural and historical variances. Additionally, the study demonstrates that the comparative linguistic method offers useful instruments for examining minor poetry genres. A more methodical comprehension of poetry form and meaning is made possible by such methods.

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