

2013

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Azam Esmaeili

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Recommended Citation

Esmaeili, Azam (2013) "Foregrounding in Two E. E. Cummings Poems: Its Implications for Teaching Poetry," *Spring: The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society*: Vol. 20, Article 18.
Available at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/spring_cummings/vol20/iss1/18

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Foregrounding in Two E. E. Cummings Poems: Its Implications for Teaching Poetry

Azam Esmaeili

Stylistics as a branch of discourse analysis bridges the gap between literary criticism and linguistic studies. Linguist Steve Buckledee criticizes the pedagogical system of language teaching in which undergraduate students encounter difficulty in studying great writers' masterpieces because of the frequent use of "archaic vocabulary" within such works. In some systems, he says, students may be able to criticize literary works even when their confidence and skills are not sufficient to do so. He believes that teachers should train students to be able to find their way to the world of literature and appreciate a literary work based on their own knowledge and skills and not those of others. To develop these skills in students, he introduces and suggests stylistics, a field of study which links literature and literary criticism to linguistics. He deems that language learning and teaching literature are not separate from each other, and teaching students to learn how to analyze the language of texts is the first step in helping them develop a "literary competence" (9).

Linguistic analysis opens a new gate for students to achieve sufficient confidence and skill to appreciate and interpret literary works and avoid plagiarism when criticizing a literary masterpiece or text. However, it is commonplace in English Language Departments for linguistics/stylistics and literary studies to occupy distinct domains, and their interactions tend to be limited. The aim of this paper is to close the gap between stylistics or linguistics and literary studies or teaching literature.

I. Foregrounding in Literature and Linguistics

One of the devices investigated by stylistics is *foregrounding*. This paper is primarily and fundamentally based on the notion of foregrounding initially formulated by Shklovsky and developed by Jan Mukarovsky. According to Mukarovsky, in poetic language, communication becomes secondary and foregrounding enables literature to present new meanings with an intricacy and complexity that ordinary language does not allow. Foregrounding is a language style that seems to be designed specifically for literary-aesthetic purposes.

Reviewing several studies that have appeared in recent years reveals how little attention has been paid to the effects of literary style, often known as foregrounding, on the comprehension of literary works in general and poetry in particular. Although some experimental studies have been designed for studying the effects of foregrounding on readers' perceptions, interpretations, morality, reading time, etc., nobody has discussed possible ways to integrate a stylistic study of foregrounding into our lesson plans and English Literature courses, as a technique of teaching.

According to Dan MacIntyre, foregrounding is a term that comes from the visual arts and refers to "those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way" (2). Foregrounding makes observers pay more attention to these elements. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Russian Formalists employed the term to denote a literary style and theory. McIntyre states that according to Russian Formalists, "the purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarise the familiar." Defamiliarizing a work of art or a text makes it "stand out from the norm," and as a consequence it becomes "foregrounded" (2). The term was used in linguistics for the first time by Prague School linguist Jan Mukarovsky to refer to "the range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at the phonetic level (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g. inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g. metaphor, irony)" (Miall and Kuiken 390). As defined by linguist Paul Simpson, foregrounding refers to "a form of textual patterning which is motivated specially for literary-aesthetic purposes. . . . FG typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or, alternatively, where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism" (*Stylistics* 50).

The *foreground* always gains its meaning in contrast to the *background*; it makes sense because of the presence of background. Foregrounding is inherently immanent, but nothing can be at the foreground without something else being at the background. Mick Short maintains that in language, the "background" consists of those parts of the text that follow the usual rules and norms of the language that are accepted by all, and those that are expected to apply in a specific situation. In contrast, the foreground consists of those parts that deviate from these norms, attracting attention by standing out in some way (12).

Linguists have adopted two perspectives toward this stylistic feature. Foregrounding has most often been regarded as a means for differentiating

the styles of poetic language from those of everyday languages (McIntyre 2). In addition, scholars like David S. Miall and Don Kuiken have shown that foregrounding is not specifically limited to literary works. According to them, it can occur in non-literary works and even in daily speech. The only difference lies in how systematic the foregrounding is. In non-literary works, it occurs at “random” and “with no systematic design,” while in literary texts it is “structured” and “tends to be both systematic and hierarchical,” where “hierarchical” indicates that some features “dominate” the others (389). Jonathan Webster agrees, stating that foregrounding is used in order to attract the “attention” of the readers or the hearers; therefore, it “occurs across functional dialects from humour to advertising to poetry.” He adds that foregrounding in poetry is the outcome of “the poet’s deliberate and systematic uses of linguistic devices.” He sums up:

A poem is created and a message is conveyed as a result of the complex interplay of functional semantic components that together comprise the poem as semiotic object. Juxtaposed against the backgrounds of the standard language and an often rich and diverse poetic canon, the poet asserts his individuality through the systematic foregrounding of relations between these components. (359-360)

Ronald Carter also emphasizes the deliberate changes made by the writers in order to “foreground” a point of view or idea. To him, foregrounding is “a type of highlighting” by which the writer aims at “drawing the attention to something and making the reader view it in a certain way” (174). According to Jemeljan Hakemulder, “foregrounding makes readers focus primarily on style, not content. This is not to say that literature does not have a communicative function,” but that foregrounding is the very feature that makes “this mode of communication, more powerful than daily language.” Briefly speaking, he assumes that there is “a relation between literary text qualities (deviations) and the effects on the reader (changes in perception)” (197). We may sum up by saying that foregrounding is common to both literary and non-literary works, but its degree of systematicity and significance differs in different types of texts.

In literary works, foregrounding is achieved through two means: *deviation* and *parallelism*. McIntyre defines linguistic parallelism as “unexpected regularity within a text” and deviation as an “unexpected irregularity” that produces a “foregrounding effect” (3-4). However, the effects will be on the whole of the text and its meaning, and everything that is fore-

grounded is highly interpretable and arguably memorable. Foregrounding, then, refers to a range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at the phonetic level (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g. inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g. metaphor, irony).

II. Foregrounding and E. E. Cummings' Poetry

Cummings' poems are known for their innovative style. Although he wrote in traditional forms such as the sonnet, he often adapted these forms to his own "unconventional forms of expressiveness" (Kennedy 851). He began by following "the Imagist principles for poetry laid down by Ezra Pound," but by 1918 had evolved "his own poetic style," developing "a unique form of literary cubism: he broke up his material on the page to present it in a new, visually directed way" (Kennedy 851). Foregrounding as a technique is observable in more or less all of Cummings' poems. As Mick Short observes, it is only one of the ways by which "he marks off his verse as "Modern"—i.e., "as breaking with the more traditional verse forms of the nineteenth century and before" (29). Paul Simpson suggests that, semantically speaking, Cummings' technique "is built on analogy: words are fragmented as if they were genuine morphological complexes." Moreover, "the distance which is placed between these fragments contributes further to the illusion that they can be interpreted as independent units" (*Exploring* 48). As Bethany Dumas notes, Cummings himself has said that some of his poems "are not meant to be read aloud; they are meant to be seen and not heard" (72). And Simpson concurs, writing that Cummings' poetry is to a great extent "a poetry of the eyes" and not a "poetry of the voice" (*Exploring* 52).

Following a framework suggested by Short and Geoffrey Leech, I will analyze two of Cummings' poems: "un" (CP 463) and "love is more thicker than forget" (CP 530), showing the close relation that exists between foregrounding as a literary style and the themes and contents of the poems. The first poem has a line / stanza pattern of 4-1-4-1-4-1-4:

un
der fog
's
touch

slo

ings
 fin
 gering
 s

 wli

 whichs
 turn
 in
 to whos

 est

 people
 be
 come
 un

(CP 463)

This poem, which is composed of two sentences, is full of foregrounded parts which, if found and analyzed, clarify greatly the meaning of the poem. One can normalize the visual arrangement of the words and morphemes to make the following sentence: “under fog’s slowliest touchings [and] fingerings whichs turn into whos, people become un.” Before discussing deviation and foregrounding in this poem, we will want to see the visual poem in linear form before reordering its parts: “un / der fog / ’s / touch // slo // ings / fin / gering / s // wli // whichs / turn / in / to whos // est // people / be / come / un.” Some words are guessable from our transcription, yet they are fragmented, breaking up the linear train of thought. However, stylistic analysis of the poem and its foregrounded parts helps us to discover quickly several implications of the poem’s deviant form.

Graphological Deviation in “un”

The most observable deviant graphological features of the poem are the use of lower-case letters, the splitting of words across lines, and the creation of large white spaces around the letters. Furthermore, Cummings not only splits words into syllables, but he also splits the word “slowliest” across the boundaries of several lines. The first three letters of “slowliest” (“slo”) appear after the first four lines, the second three letters (“wli”) after the second four lines, and the final three letters (“est”) after the last four lines. Splitting the word “slowliest” in this way divides the poem into a stanza pattern of 4-1-4-1-4-1-4; this structure iconically shows and

signifies the slow thickening of the fog, which results in all people becoming “un.” Creating large distances among the three “syllables” of the word “slowliest,” as well as the white spaces between and before them, also indicate and foreground the slowly moving fog as it gradually covers the city. These deviant graphological features force us to slow down when reading the poem, and this slowness is what Cummings intends to evoke: the gradual creeping progress of the fog over and within and throughout the city. Fog covers the city without anyone quite realizing it.

Looking further, we see that Cummings begins and ends the poem with the syllable “un,” enclosing the other 17 lines of the poem. This strange graphological form surely foregrounds something. We may interpret it in three ways.

It may show and signify that the “fog” starts from “nowhere” and ends “nowhere,” too. There is no special place to lay your finger and to show its beginning; the same is true for its ending point. Its origination can be anywhere and its ending can be anywhere.

Secondly, when fog appears and becomes visible in a place, it covers that entire place, and it is as if it has enclosed an area within itself like a fence, so that all things surrounded by the fog become invisible inside it. Within the form of the poem, the “un” at the beginning and the “un” at the end “surround” the other lines and letters between, fencing them off in a fog, making them “un” and invisible.

A third interpretation points to the nonce words formed by splitting up the words into vocables. Some French terms appear that are meaningful for the poem; for instance, *un* meaning “one,” *fin* meaning “finish, end,” *est* (derived from the verb *être*) meaning “is” and “to be.” Since Cummings knew French quite well, the occurrence of such nonce words can hardly be accidental. Beginning the poem with “un” and ending it with “un” (“one”) further foregrounds the theme of “oneness” in the poem. In addition, the fourth stanza makes the same point: when fog covers all, “objects and things” and “people,” both animate and inanimate, all become one and the same, turned invisible by the fog. Reading the French words down through the poem delivers a similar message: “un fin est un” (“one end is one”). The French term “fin” (“end,” “finished”) fits very well with the second and third interpretations. The border between animate and inanimate, between man and nature, is erased—all become one invisible and indivisible actuality.

Another merit of splitting words is the creation of a large number of [s]

phonemes, some with the /s/ sound and others with the /z/ sound. Both sounds (especially the latter) are produced softly, and according to Leech's classification of sound symbols, belong to the "soft" sounds. These alliterative sounds foreground even further the slow-moving soft and smooth nature of the fog as it touches the creatures. The softness of fog also foregrounds an even-handed kindness, since all are the same for the fog.

The absence of punctuation, another marked feature of the poem, emphasizes the gradual, unceasing progression of fog throughout the city. This absence also highlights the unknown origin and end of the fog (suggested by the two "un"s at the beginning and end of the poem).

Syntactic Deviation in "un"

The splitting and fragmentation of words across lines makes readers pause to some extent to puzzle out various meanings. Inversion is one of the devices that makes the structure of the first sentence of the poem deviant. Reordering words and putting them in their conventional position helps us to construct the sentence: "under fog's slowliest touchings fingerings whichs turn into whos people become un."

The adjective "slowliest," which modifies the fog's *touchings* and *fingerings*, is also an unusual formation of the superlative. Although adjectives like "happy" and "lovely" may take the superlative ("happiest" and "loveliest") in English, it is not usual for an adverb like "slowly" to function as a superlative adjective. Yet Cummings invents the word "slowliest," possibly because this unusual formation allows him to state his intended meaning as briefly as possible—as well as allowing him to form the nonce word "est."

Lexical Deviation in "un"

The only deviant lexis happen in lines 11 and 14, where "which" and "who" are used as nouns in the poem. This "functional conversion" foregrounds the theme of "oneness" in the poem. All creatures, both animate and inanimate, disappear in fog as if they had originally been one entity.

Metaphor in "un"

The only metaphor in the poem, according to the classification suggested by Lakoff and Johnson, is the "ontological metaphor or personification" (33). In the poem, characteristics of human beings are attributed to the "fog": "touchings" and "fingerings." "Fog" is like a person who touches all things, and for whom it makes no difference whether he fingers animate

beings (“whos”) or inanimate things (“whichs”): to him, all are one and equal. Cummings’ poem is akin to Carl Sandburg’s two-sentence poem “Fog.” Both of these modern poets treat the same aspect of nature, that is, fog. However, unlike Cummings’ language, which does not follow all the conventions of English, Sandburg’s language conforms to standard syntax and grammar, rendering it more easily comprehensible. Sandburg’s entire poem is a metaphor in which the silent movement of fog, unlike Cummings’ “un,” is compared to the soundless movement and actions of a cat. The fog enters the city as slowly and quietly as a cat’s movement, sits on its “silent haunches,” looks over the “harbor and city,” and then “moves on.” Again, the repetition of the /s/ sound in the poem connotes the silent and unnoticeable movement of the fog. Its entrance and progress in the city occur suddenly, but its disappearance takes time, as indicated by the different lengths of each sentence: the first sentence is only two lines, but the second sentence or stanza consists of four lines.

The second Cummings poem that I will discuss consists of four rhythmic and rhymed quatrains.

love is more thicker than forget
 more thinner than recall
 more seldom than a wave is wet
 more frequent than to fail

it is most mad and moonly
 and less it shall unbecome
 than all the sea which only
 is deeper than the sea

love is less always than to win
 less never than alive
 less bigger than the least begin
 less littler than forgive

it is most sane and sunly
 and more it cannot die
 than all the sky which only
 is higher than the sky (CP 530)

Except for the first lines of each stanza, this poem is mostly in iambic meter. Each of these first lines begins with a trochee, followed by a spondee. Otherwise, these lines, too, are iambic. In addition, lines 1 and 3 of the first and third stanzas are tetrameter, rather than the trimeter of the rest of the

poem.

Stanzas 1 and 3 are rhythmically, metrically, and structurally parallel, as are stanzas 2 and 4. The pattern of stanzas 1 and 3 on the one hand, and the pattern of stanzas 2 and 4 on the other, are the same and parallel: the rhyme scheme of the former is [a b a b], where the “b” rhymes as some form of half-rhyme or pararhyme. Stanzas 2 and 4 also rhyme [a b a b], but here it is the “a” rhymes that are the half-rhymes, and they are feminine rather than masculine. The alternating use of tetrameter and trimeter in quatrains 1 and 3 varies the sing-song effect of the meter, while reinforcing rhythmic and structural parallels.

Putting the rhythmical patterns aside, the poem is about love and its most outstanding features. The comparative statements about love in parallel stanzas 1 and 3 both begin with “love,” while the superlative statements about love that begin stanzas 2 and 4 start with the pronoun “it,” substituting for the noun “love.” Despite these parallel metrical and stanzaic structural features, the poem is full of syntactic deviations both in its deep and surface linguistic structures. Lexical deviation and parallelism help Cummings reinforce the effects of what he describes as “love.”

Graphological Deviation in “love is more thicker than forget”

The lack of punctuation and the use of only lowercase letters are two graphologically deviant features of the poem found in many Cummings poems. The poem completely lacks punctuation. However, white space and the absence of punctuation—together with the implicit message that love surpasses both human and natural limits—suggest that the true love is never-ending phenomenon; it never stops and never dies; it is infinite, so it cannot be inhibited by any obstacle and impediment.

Syntactic, Lexical, and Morphological Deviations in “love is more thicker than forget”

In the first line of the poem, the word “love” is directly followed by “is,” a “to be” verb. The next three lines may be construed as separate from the first, or, following the rule of elision, we may posit that the noun “love” has been omitted in all of them. The second option is more logical, since the omission of “love” follows the poetic convention of concise expression. Since repeating the noun “love” in each line would take more space and violate this convention, the word has been omitted in all but two lines.

The first stanza makes a comparison. In English there are generally two

options for constructing comparative forms: (1) one may use a modifier such as “more” to form the comparative structures of adjectives and adverbs with three or more syllables (e.g., “she is more intelligent than he is”); or, (2) one may add the suffix “-er” to short, usually one or two syllable adjectives or adverbs (e.g., “my ruler is longer than yours”).

Yet in lines 1 and 2, Cummings has gathered both rules in one place, which is not normal in Standard English grammar. Deviating from the norm, Cummings exaggerates and foregrounds the effect of comparisons between “love” and “forget” and “recall,” as well as between “wetness of a wave,” and “fail.” In lines 1 and 2, two abstract phenomena are compared while in line 3, one abstract concept is compared with a concrete phenomenon. However, in lines 1 and 2, the abstract concepts are compared using concrete adjectives. “Thick” and “thin,” or spatial comparatives (Jakobson and Waugh 228), which indicate the distance between two opposite sides and surfaces, are usually used for concrete objects that are solid, tangible, observable, and measurable. Accordingly, these lines (1-2) deviate in their deep structure; nevertheless, they are interpretable. In these lines, Cummings foregrounds the notion that if you are really in love, you cannot forget it easily, and you feel it in your “selves” as soon as you recall it since it is inside and part of you.

In addition, line one exhibits lexical deviation. The verb “forget” has been functionally converted into a noun. Using the verb as a noun reinforces the line’s meaning by giving to love the quality of “not forgetfulness.”

In the third line, the abstract concept “love” is judged against the concrete phenomenon “wave,” specifically, the wetness of the wave (“more seldom than a wave is wet”). There is another problem to be solved, the problem of paradox: since a wave is a raised line of water that moves across the surface of the sea and is always wet, how is it possible to describe its wetness as a rare occurrence? The paradox can be resolved if we consider two things: (1) it is always wet, so nothing else can cause it to become wet, and (2) it is itself that which wets whatever it touches and bestows freshness. The same is true for love: we all have the capacity to love intrinsically and innately within ourselves; and it is love itself that engenders more love in others and lends freshness to their lives. In the last line of the stanza, a noun is compared to a verb yet again, another deviation and again interpretable. Everyone experiences “failing” of some sort in their lives, but the experience of “love” is more frequent even than failure; Everyone possesses it, since it is innate and needs only be awakened.¹

In the second and fourth stanzas, “most” as an adverb may mean “very” (as in the British phrase, “most distressing”) and modifies the adjective and adverbs that come after it in each line. These stanzas shift from the comparison between love and all other feelings and phenomena to the introduction of further comparisons with “most,” the superlative form, in the first line of each stanza. In this case “most” would conventionally be preceded by the definite article. In addition, “most” is used to form the superlative of two one-syllable adjectives. So the first sentences of the stanzas 2 and 4 are deviant in two ways: (1) they lack the definite article “the” which usually precedes “most,” and (2) “mad” and “sane” are one-syllable adjectives, so to form their superlative forms we need only add the suffix “-est.” These deviant structures can be explained in two ways as well. In the former case, we can say that “the” has been omitted based on the rule of “elision” and is guessable by readers. In the latter case, it is not just “mad” and “sane” that have been made superlative with the modifier “most” rather than with the suffix “-est.” They have been followed by the two nonce adjectives “moonly” and “sunly” respectively, so that “most” in effect also modifies the multi-syllabic adjectives (as in “most importantly”).

By personifying love and using an ontological metaphor in the first lines of the second and fourth stanzas, Cummings foregrounds the idea that reason has no place in the world of love, which deals only with feeling (2/1). However, he also implies that love in itself guides people’s lives. When we are in love, we need nobody to direct us (4/1). By affixing “-ly” to the nouns “moon” and “sun,” Cummings has created the new adjectives “moonly” and “sunly” (lines 5 and 13 respectively). With these inventive morphological / lexical deviations, he creates two words that each convey a sentence’s worth of meaning. Similarly, by adding the prefix “un-” to “be,” Cummings has created the new verb “unbe.” This innovative formation of new terms helps to foreground and highlight the meanings of the sentences in a few words. The meaning of lines 6, 7, and 8 may be interpreted in this way: love occurs more frequently than the number of all seas, and it is much deeper than the deepest seas.

Structural Parallelism in “love is more thicker than forget”

Stanzas 1 and 2 are parallel with stanzas 3 and 4 respectively, both rhythmically and structurally. However, semantically they are contrary. While the words “more” and “less” perform the same grammatical function, they are opposite in meaning, and when alternately inserted in the

same structure they result in two semantically divergent and contrary meanings. For instance, in the first stanza, love is described as greater than certain entities, whereas in the third stanza, love is described as lesser than certain others:

Stanza 1: love is more *a* than *b*/ more *c* than *d*/ more *e* than *f*/ more *g* than *h*

Stanza 3: love is less *a'* than *b'*/ less *c'* than *d'*/ less *e'* than *f'*/ less *g'* than *h'*

The third stanza foregrounds the “less” of true love with all its structural and lexical deviations: “least,” the superlative form of “less,” is functionally converted into a noun in line 3, and the verb “forgive” is functionally converted into a noun in line 4. Although it is not as big as the “least begin,” love is never less than “being alive,” inspiring living in our lives, without which we would be spiritually dead. Though many become angry, few forgive because it is difficult for them to prevail over their anger; experiencing true love, however, is “less littler” (larger) than forgiveness. The line may be interpreted in another way, too. Forgiveness is a God-given phenomenon that bestows calmness on our lives; whoever experiences forgiveness may surpass the boundaries of “humanity” and attain “divinity.” [In one of his satires against war, Cummings repeats the saying “to err is human; to forgive / divine” (CP 636).] Like forgiveness, love is an innate and divinely gifted feeling, making life meaningful, soothing, and beautiful.

Like stanzas 1 and 3, stanzas 2 and 4 are parallel both rhythmically and structurally. However, like stanzas 1 and 3, their semantic parts are divergent.

Stanza 2: it is most *a* and *b*/ and more + it + modal verb + than + NP

Stanza 4: it is most *a'* and *b'*/ and less + it + modal verb + than + NP

Both stanzas foreground the eternity of “love” but in two dissimilar ways. Juxtaposing the first lines of these two stanzas, we see: “it is most mad and moonly” and “it is most sane and sunly.” Although the structures are the same, the opposing adjectives in the lines (sunly vs. moonly; sane vs. mad) point to two different features of love. Often in his poems, Cummings insists on the separation of love and mind, as when he declares that “lovers are mindless they / higher than fears are hopes / lovers are those who kneel / lovers are these whose lips / smash unimagined sky / deeper than heaven is hell” (CP 563). To him, love means saying “yes” to wishes

and “unknownness,” which keeps us alive; reason and mind, on the other hand, consider only “ifs,” “whys,” and “because,” which doesn’t let us overcome doubts and realities. He writes: “love’s function is to fabricate unknownness / (known being wishless;but love,all of wishing) / though life’s lived wrongsideout,sameness chokes oneness / truth is confused with facts, fish boast of fishing” (CP 446). In “yes is a pleasant country,” he contrasts “wintry” reason (“if”) with spring-like love (“yes”), stating in the last stanza that “love is a deeper season / than reason; / my sweet one / (and april’s where we’re)” (CP 578). Elsewhere he asserts:

nothing false and possible is love
 (who’s imagined,therefore limitless)
 love’s to give as to keeping’s give;
 as yes is to if,love is to yes

 (love’s a universe beyond obey
 or command,reality or un-) (CP 574)

But since in the first lines of stanzas 2 and 4 of “love is more thicker than forget,” we have two parallel structures, we should surely expect two parallel meanings. The parallel structures in these lines indicate that even though mind and love are not compatible, and the world of love rejects reason, love itself is nevertheless the sanest and truest guide to feelings and wishes. It knows no limitation. It is even higher than the sky, and when something is higher than the sky and deeper than the sea, it is clear that it is an infinite phenomenon; there is no limit or end to it. It is beyond reality and “un.”

These stanza pairings foreground and reinforce the effect and meanings of the poem. Love has all these features at once; it is complete and refreshes and gives meaning to people’s lives. It is an eternal phenomenon for which there is no limit and no end; it has been bestowed on us innately.

Metaphor in “love is more thicker than forget”

The chief metaphor in the poem is ontological: love is personified by attributing madness and sanity to it. It is mad, since reason has no place in the life of those who are in love. On the other hand, it is sane in that it alone suffices as a guide for those who are in love, helping them find the right way to be alive without reason’s assistance.

Phonological Parallelism in “love is more thicker than forget”

The first lines of the second and fourth stanzas also possess phonologi-

cal parallelism in their alliteration. In lines 5 and 13 respectively, alliteration relates the word “mad” to “moonly” and “sane” and “sunly.” In the third stanza, the alliteration of “wet” and “wave” ties them together as in the preceding examples. Alliteration relates the words not only phonetically but also semantically. When one falls in love and consequently behaves irrationally, we say that lovers are “moonstruck.” The word “moonly” semantically connotes and denotes the same thing, but even more effectively. (In many cultures, madness is intensified and aggravated when the moon is full.) Thus the alliteration of “mad” and “moonly” reinforces the words’ semantic connection. The opposite of “mad” is “sane,” which here is semantically related to the word “sunly.” Like the sun, those who are sane inspire warmth and light in their own and in other people’s lives; love can also have this effect.

Jakobson and Waugh have noted other alliterative sounds in the poem. For example, they maintain that the sonorants /m/ and /l/ “play the leading alliterative role in the poem” (230). The nasal /m/ occurs mainly “around the upward terms *more* and *most*,” while the liquid /l/ occurs mainly “around the downward *less* and *least* and moreover heads the principal noun of the whole work, *love*.” Jakobson and Waugh note further that the labiodental fricative /v/ at the end of “love,” “wave,” “alive,” and “forgive” appears only in stanzas one and three, and that the half-rhyme of “love” (at the beginning of stanza three) and “alive” (at the end of the next line) “form a paronomasia tangible both in sound and meaning” (230). One alliterative pattern in the poem moves from the three “grave nasals /m/” in the first stanza to the four “acute continuants /s/” in the last stanza. This shift “is semantically supported by the paronomastic contraposition of lines - II *it is most mad and moonly* as the close of the introductory motif and IV *it is most sane and sunly* as the start of the epilogue.” With this “parallel change in sounds,” the poem as a whole shifts from “mental and physical shadow into luminosity, with a concomitant semantic transition from II *deeper* to IV *higher*” (231).²

These analyses show convincing evidence for the confirmation and affirmation of the relation between the themes and content of the poems and their deviant / foregrounded parts. There is a bilateral and complementary relation between them. In fact, the linguistic and stylistic facts are in the service of the semantic and thematic facts; they are not separate, but rather reinforce each other. We cannot discuss the content of Cummings’ poems without noticing and remarking upon their style and deviant features. His

outstanding skill in playing with language shows that his deviant language is closely related to the thematic and semantic side of the poems. Sometimes even the graphological presentation of words and lines in his poems reflects his intended ideas. The linguistic and semantic parts of his works have been merged. If the theme or content of one poem changes, naturally the foregrounding devices, the structure, the pattern, and the language used by the poet to represent the theme will change, too.

Conclusion

The present paper shows that there is a relation between foregrounding as a literary style and the themes and content of Cummings' poems. The findings can be generalized to a large extent to other literary contexts, too; stylistics in general and the theory of foregrounding in particular can be of use in teaching poetry and literature in English language classrooms. Stylistics can be a helpful means in discourse analysis for better appreciating and criticizing literary works. As a teaching technique, this theory can be incorporated into teachers' and educators' curriculums.

Teachers can modify routine or overused techniques and methods that have been employed for years without giving consideration to stylistic methods. By using this technique, teachers can change the three steps of teaching: presentation, practice, and classroom interaction. This bottom-up approach can accompany and accomplish the routine top-down approaches toward teaching literary texts. Teachers may use this theory as a reliable first step for familiarizing their students with literature and teaching them to appreciate and criticize literary works, especially poems that present unusual difficulty. Students should be made aware that in university systems, linguistics and literary studies should be regarded as two complementary fields.

The second stage of teaching, practice, activates other strategies that students use to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate poetry. This theory can be added to their group of strategies; it can give them a rule- and discipline-based way to analyze poetry and provide a way for them to begin clarifying their responses to and interpretations of the text.

And finally in the third stage, classes will become more learner-oriented and less teacher-oriented; if the students become familiar with this theory and the devices used to foreground themes in poetry and prose, they will be equipped with a reliable means of analysis, will begin to trust their own knowledge, and will be encouraged enough to express their ideas. With

such theoretical confidence, learners will have less need to refer back to the bulk of already published critical articles. Oftentimes when students are asked to produce works of literary criticism, they manifestly lack the required knowledge to approach a difficult text containing innovative or archaic lexis, deviant grammatical constructions, and subtle literary and foregrounding devices, and thus lack the confidence to produce a personal interpretation of the work being discussed. In these situations, they inexorably turn to published criticisms as a crutch for their lack of confidence. Not trusting their own abilities to interpret or evaluate a literary classic, they are afraid to offer their own ideas. However, familiarizing learners with this stylistic means of analysis as a first step can be helpful in encouraging them to suggest interpretations of literary works based on their own knowledge, not that of others.

—Payame Noor University, Najafabad, Isfahan, Iran
Esmaeili58@yahoo.com

Notes

1. Michael Webster, for whose revision suggestions I am most grateful, believes that both “more seldom” and “more frequent” mean “often” since “a wave is always wet and people fail a lot as well.”
2. Jakobson and Waugh use Roman numerals to indicate stanza numbers and subscript numerals to indicate line numbers within the stanza. Thus “IV₁” means “stanza four, line one.”

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