

Deviation-type Foregrounding and Literary Interpretation: The Example of James Kirkup's "Thunder and Lightning"

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Abstract

The study examines the linguistic and literary cues used by James Kirkup in his poem "Thunder and Lightning". Based on the theory of foregrounding, some models of transitivity, and the rules of selectional restriction the study highlights some stylistic patterns in the poem and concludes that such patterns are motivated for meaning in the text; and that the overall meaning of the poem stems from the reversal of man and elements of nature.

Keywords: Foregrounding; transitivity; selectional restriction; stylistics; deviation

1. Introduction

The theory of foregrounding is fundamental to the stylistic analysis and interpretation of texts, whether literary or non-literary, in the sense that it underlies our efforts at interpretation. In other words, it is basic to the study of texts. Without engaging the insights that it affords us into the application of linguistic principles to the study of texts, one's interpretation efforts would not amount to much. For it is foregrounding that enables us to account for the textual functions of linguistics and literary patterns that we encounter in our reading in a meaningful manner. It is thus a theory that guides the steps the reader takes in making sense of the text, as stylistic analysis and interpretation is a process.

In this article, we illustrate the ways in which one type of foregrounding – deviation – can help us to identify and discuss the linguistic and literary cues that the author of "Thunder and Lightning" has dropped in the poem to guide us to the overall interpretation of the poem.

2. Foregrounding

A term borrowed from painting, foregrounding takes two main forms: the deviation-type and the non-deviation type. In other words, it "comes in two main guises: foregrounding as 'deviation from a norm' and foregrounding as 'more of the same'" (Simpson, 2004:50). The non-deviation type mainly manifests in the form of repetition (see Leech, 1969; Awonuga, 2005; Awonuga, 2017). But since it is the deviation-type that we are concerned with in this article, the discussion that follows is on deviation.

2.1 Deviation

According to McIntyre (2003:2), foregrounding

... refers to those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way. According to Russian formalist scholar at the beginning of the last Century, the purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarize the familiar, and by defamiliarizing a work of art or a text we make it stand out from the norm – it becomes foregrounded

A number of issues emerge clearly from this statement. First, it talks of "those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way". The reference here is to those features of the text that assume prominence or dominance in the text. According to Cluysenaar (1976:101), the notion of foregrounding has arisen from the linear structure of texts.

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Literary texts take place “in fictional time and build up through time a dominant structure” (Cluysenaar, 1976), which acquires its significance in the text as a result of its having the effect of forcing the reader to notice it. A dominant structure has this effect on the reader due to the persistently systematic manner in which it occurs in the text. An element that stands out in a text may be a manifestation of deviation or non-deviation.

The second issue that arises from McIntyre’s statement that was quoted at the beginning of this section is that of defamiliarizing the familiar; that is, using language in an unfamiliar or unusual way in the text. Third, there is reference to the term norm: when a linguistic or literary feature stands out, from the perspective of deviation, it “stands out from the norm”. The norm thus forms the background against which the unusual item or structure is foregrounded. By “norm” in linguistics, we mean “a standard practice in speech and writing” (Crystal, 2003:319). As hinted above, the deviation can be from a linguistic or literary norm. There are two main types of norm: general and local or internal. The general norm refers to the conventional ways in which a particular language is used or the literary style in question, while the local norm refers to a norm set up in a particular text by the author.

Now, the issue of defamiliarization was first raised by the Russian formalist critic, Viktor Shklovsky. For him, ...the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the purpose of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky, 1917, 1965:12)

The word “difficulty in this quotation should not be misunderstood. The sense is to make the text challenging in order to make the reader engage the text diligently so as to make sense of it. The stylistic study of literary texts cannot therefore be rushed if it is to produce the desired effect on the reader. The purpose of art, then, is to make the language of the text unfamiliar, thus making the reader exert greater mental effort in coming to terms with the author’s communicative intention. The reader that approaches a text with the expectation that the language used in it will be familiar to him is likely to find the text “difficult”. For the creative writer is always working at creating new forms of the language he is using so as to express his minority view of reality as clearly as possible (Awonuga, 2017: 46).

The concept of defamiliarization is further discussed by the Czech theorist, Jan Mukarovsky (1932; 1964; 1970). He uses the term de-automatization. According to him, deviation constitutes a de-automatization of familiar linguistic and literary patterns. From this point of view, foregrounding is the opposite of automatization: “...automatization shematizes an event; foregrounding [in this case the deviation-type] means the violation of the scheme” (Mukarovsky, 1970:43).

What Shklovsky and Mukarovsky are saying is that our use of language is familiar or automatic: we get so use to using it that we do not think of the grammatical peculiarities of the words that we are going to use before we start speaking or writing. But, as observed above, the creative writer does not use language this way.

Deviation itself is manifested in linguistics in two main ways, through: a) the violation of the rules of selectional restriction; and b) transitivity.

2.1.1 Rules of Selectional Restriction

The general norm in English is manifested through the rules of selectional restriction as described in transformational generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965). The rules “...describe the syntactic features of co-occurrence of linguistic items within, say, a particular frame” (Tomori, 1977:78). In other words, they highlight “restrictions on the co-occurrence of items within a sentence” (Palmer, 1996:132). Thus, according to these rules, our use of language is guided by certain constraints at both the grammatical and semantic levels of linguistic description. Tomori gives the following examples:

NP (Noun phrase or nominal group) + VP(Verb phrase or verbal group) + NP (Noun phrase or nominal group)

From which we can derive the following sentences:

1. The darkness may frighten the girl.
2. John loves Mary.

In the first sentence, the syntactic feature of the verb “frighten” is that it can take an abstract noun as subject. But it does not allow for the use of an abstract noun as object. That is why the two noun phrases in the sentence cannot be reversed. Thus, we cannot have:

3. #The girl may frighten the darkness.

This is because, at the semantic level, the darkness, being an abstract and non-living entity, cannot experience any kind of feeling. It is only living entities that have emotions. In sentence 2, however, the two noun phrases can be reversed, thus:

4. John loves Mary.
5. Mary loves John.

This means that the verb *love* can take an entity with the semantic features + Animate, + human as either subject or object, this makes *love* different from *frighten* from this perspective. But the verb *love* can also take an abstract object as in:

6. I love my work.

It does not, however, allow for abstract subjects. Thus, we cannot say,

7. #My work loves me.

But we can say:

8. My school/My country loves me.

For the words *school* and *country* connote groups of animate and human entities.

Furthermore, in discussing what they describe as “constraints on merger”, Radford, et al (1999:300) state that “all phrases and sentences are formed by a simple binary operation, [so] it’s clear that we can’t randomly combine any pair of categories...”. They give the following examples:

9. He has seen them
10. *I/*We/ *You/ *They has seen them.
11. *Him has seen them.

Sentence 9 is grammatical while sentence 10 and 11 are not. The reason for this is that, in the case of sentence 10, the auxiliary *has* requires a third person subject or specifier such as *he, she, Peter, the chairman*, and so on. As for sentence 11, *has* takes only a nominative pronoun such as *he* as its subject and not an objective specifier such as *him*. We can see from sentences 1-11 that, for a sentence to be acceptable in English, it must be both syntactically and semantically well-formed. It is this type of sentence that constitutes an aspect of the norm in the language. Thus, because sentences 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are well formed syntactically and semantically, they constitute an aspect of the general norm in English. But sentences 3, 7, 10 and 11 are deviations from this norm because they are either grammatically well-formed or semantically ill-formed or they are both grammatically and semantically ill-formed. For example, sentence 3 and 7 are grammatically well-formed but semantically ill-formed. That is why they have been marked #. But sentences 10 and 11 are grammatically ill-formed because they have not obeyed the rules of syntax. They have been marked with an asterisk. The use of these two signs is taken from Carnie (2002:11). He gives the following sentences as examples:

12. #The toothbrush is pregnant.
13. *Toothbrush the is blue.

Sentence 12 is grammatically well-formed but semantically ill-formed. It is well-formed because it conforms to the typical order of words in a sentence, as the following analysis shows:

S P C

14. The toothbrush / is / pregnant.
- (i.e. Subject + Predicate (Verb) + Complement (Object))

But it does not make sense in terms of meaning, as a toothbrush cannot normally be pregnant because it is a non-living entity.

Sentence 13 is, however, syntactically ill-formed, that is, from the structural point of view: it does not conform to the usual pattern of the sentence in English, especially at the level of the phrase or group. For instance, in a noun phrase or nominal group, the modifier typically occurs before the head word, thus:

m h
The toothbrush

And not

h m
Toothbrush the

It is the qualifier that comes after the head word: *hq*. So, the normal structure of the noun phrase is *mhq*. This is a norm in English.

Although sentence 12 is odd semantically, it would be quite normal in creative writing, as it is clearly an example of figurative language. Such use of language constitutes an instance of an occasion when “selectional restrictions are legitimately broken” (Palmer, 1996:133). This is one aspect of the use of language that we shall focus on in our stylistic analysis and interpretation of “Thunder and Lightning.” Even in the case of Sentence 13, we can still identify a meaning in spite of the fact that it is grammatically ill-formed: the sense is that the toothbrush is blue (see also Saeed, 2003).

Finally in this section, it needs to be pointed out, that the rules of selectional restriction are very many and it is therefore not practicable to account for all of them. The challenges involved are enunciated by Palmer (1996). One problem is “the limitless number of components required” (p.133). Another factor is that it is not always easy to determine the level of linguistic description at which deviation has occurred – whether at the lexical or grammatical level.

2.1.2 Transitivity

In Halliday’s functional linguistics, language is characterized by a multiplicity of function or “functional plurality” (Halliday, 1971:332). There are three basic functions: a) the ideational function; b) the interpersonal function; and c) the textual function. It is through the ideational function, or the expression of cognitive meaning, that the speaker expresses his experience of the real world, as well as “his reactions, cognitions, and perceptions, and also his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding” (Halliday, 1971). The interpersonal function has to do with the relationship that the speaker establishes between himself and the listener, and his communicative act of “informing, questioning, greeting and persuading” (Halliday, 1971:333). The third function, the textual, involves language and the situation in which it is used. What the speaker does is to produce a text and the listener recognizes the output as a text, thus coming to an understanding of the speaker’s communicative intention.

According to Halliday in his other writings, there are three elements that make the transitivity system, which is one of the “options available within the ideational function” (Kennedy, 1982:83) of language. The elements are: a) the process, which is represented by the verb; b) the participant roles of persons and objects; and c) circumstantial functions, in English typically manifested through adverbials of time, place and manner.

Halliday, has applied insights from the transitivity system to the stylistic study of William Golding’s acclaimed novel, *The Inheritors* (Halliday, 1971:330-365). In his analysis and interpretation of the text, he focuses on three extracts which he labels Passage A, Passage B and Passage C. Passage A is taken from the first part of the novel, which tells the story of the people (pp. 1-216 of text), and Passage C is from the latter part of the novel (pp. 216-238), while Passage B is transitional between Passage A and Passage C. In terms of transitivity, Halliday characterizes the language of each passage as Language A, Language B and Language C. He notes that the picture that emerges from Passage A is “one in which people act, but they do not act on things; they move, but they move only themselves, not other objects” (op. cit., p. 348). The agent is not, in most cases, a human being and, in the few cases where it is a human being, it is not one of the people. Linguistically, Passage B gives us some hints of the changes to come. For instance, it contains only four of the manifestations of a human agent, Lok, and the affected object is one of the tribe, Tanakil. This is the only clause out of fifty in Passages A and B where Lok as the agent acts on something external to himself: “Lok picked up Tanakil”.

In Passage C, however, the language is completely different from what we have in Passage A and the transitional Passage B, for example, unlike Passage A and B, there is no inanimate agent in Passage C. Also, all the eight clauses with parts of the body as subject are intransitive and none of them contains mental process. Halliday concludes his study of *The Inheritors* in the following words:

The theme of the entire novel, in a sense, is transitivity: man’s interpretation of his experience of the world, his understanding of its processes and of his own participation in them. This is the motivation for Golding’s syntactic originality; ... The particular transitivity patterns that stand out in the text contribute to the artistic whole through the functional significance, in the language system, of the semantic options which they express. (Halliday, 1971:359)

In his own work, Kennedy (1982) first discusses Halliday’s functions of language and the transitivity option and then applies the system to the stylistic study of two passages from Joseph Conrad’s novel, *The Secret Agent* and a short story by James Joyce entitled “Two Gallants” respectively. In the passage from the former text, Kennedy finds that of the thirteen verbs describing Mr. Verloc as actor, only eight describe mental process.

Of the remaining verbs describing Mr Verloc as actor, all but one are used intransitively, that is, without a goal. They are also used in the passive voice, showing that Mr Verloc is not the initiator of the processes. Rather, he is the affected participant and not the causer (Kennedy, 1982:87). The impression created here is that, although Mr Verloc can see that he is about to be killed by his wife, he is unable to do anything to prevent his own death.

In the case of Mrs Verloc, the verbs in a clause where she is actor are intransitive verbs of action. Her actions do not have a goal, the implication being that she appears to be driven by a force she cannot control. Even in clauses containing verbs of action, she is not explicitly referred to as actor and causer. Instead, parts of the body become the actor or an instrument replaces the actor (op. cit., p. 88). Thus, it is not Mrs Verloc that is actor but a part of her body: her hand; for example, "...her right hand skimmed lightly the end of the table" (Kennedy, 1982). The implication here is that she is not in control of her actions: her hand has taken over the role of actor. This line of interpretation is buttressed by the use of the passive voice. Instead of "she planted the knife" and "she delivered the blow", we have: "the knife was ... planted" and "the blow [was] delivered".

In the passage from "Two Gallants", the two "gallants" Corley and Lenehan are on their way to meet Corley's latest female admirer. Although most of the sentences in the story refer to Lenehan as participant, the role that he plays in the narrative is not an active one; rather, he is passive, simply observing the actions initiated by Corley. For instance, two thirds of the seventy-two verbs of action in clauses that have Lenehan as the participant are intransitive, used without a goal (op. cit., p. 92). By contrast, there are transitive and intransitive verbs of action in clauses in which Corley is a participant. Throughout the story, the language shows that Lenehan's position is subservient to Corley.

In conclusion, Kennedy has been able to demonstrate that

... the three functions, the ideational, inter-personal and the textual, combine to create a picture of two different personalities: the one, Corley, an active initiator with a strong physical presence, essentially an independent force tolerating the friendship of Lenehan; the other, Lenehan, a passive observer of the situation, lacking the confidence of Corley and skill in dealing with women as a means of obtaining money, and therefore needing Corley's friendship and support, which he can retain only by resort to flattery and servility. (Kennedy, 1982:96)

After reviewing the articles by Halliday and Kennedy, Simpson (2004) in his own treatment of the subject, provides an expanded form of transitivity. He also discusses its application to the stylistic analysis and interpretation of prose fictional texts. According to him, "Transitivity ... refers to the way meanings are encoded in the clause and to the way different types of *process* are represented in language" (Simpson, 2004:22). He identifies three key components of processes, namely: a) the process, typically realized in grammar by the verb phrase or verbal group; b) the participant(s), typically realized by noun phrases or nominal groups; and c) the circumstances, usually expressed by prepositional and adverb phrases or adverbial groups.

Simpson, with Montgomery (Simpson and Montgomery, 1995; see also Simpson, 2004:119-123), also applies transitivity to the stylistic analysis and interpretation of a novel by Bernard Maclaverty, *Cal*. In addition, he reviews Deirdre Burton's "feminist-stylistic application of the model of transitivity" (Simpson, 2004:185) to the study of a passage from Sylvia Path's novel, *The Bell Jar* (op. cit., pp. 185-194).

He then goes on to identify six types of process in transitivity, namely: material processes, mental processes, behavioural processes, processes of verbalization, relational processes and existential processes. Each of these processes is characterized by certain participant roles. For instance, material processes are characterized by the Actor and the Goal; the mental processes by Sensor; Process and Phenomenon; the behavioural processes by the Behavior; the processes of verbalisation by Sayer, Process, Verbiage and Receiver; relational processes by Identified, Process and Identifier; existential processes by the Existent; and also existential processes, *implicitly*, by Actor (Simpson, 2004).

It is clear from the preceding discussion that applications of transitivity to the stylistic study of literary texts has typically focused on prose fiction, where it has proved useful as a critical approach to the consideration of character portrayed. In this paper, however, transitivity is applied to the study of a poem in order to demonstrate that it is equally useful for the stylistic analysis and interpretation of poetry texts.

3. A Stylistic Analysis and Interpretation of “Thunder and Lightning”

Thunder and Lightning

Blood punches through every vein
As lightening strips the windowpane.

Under its fleshing whip, a white
Village leaps to light

On tubs of thunder, fists of rain
Slog it out of sight again.

Blood punches the heart with fright
As rain belts the village night.

James Kirkup

(McNab, L., I, Pilgrim and M. Slee (2002) *Skills in English: 3G*, skills in English Series, Heinemann, p. 152)

When analyzing and interpreting a text from the perspective of stylistics, one can start the process of interpretation from the linguistic or literary point of view. If one starts from the linguistic perspective, one has to select features of stylistic significance from the mass of data which might form part of a linguistic description. If one starts from the literary critical point of view, one begins with some conception of the work's literary significance, and seeks evidence for or against the significance in the linguistic details of the text.

It is important to explain the use of “or against” in the last sentence. What it indicates is simply this. Sometimes, one may have an initial reaction to a particular text, especially a literary text. In the course of analyzing and interpreting that text linguistically, however, the linguistic evidence provided by the text may, on scrutiny, be found to contradict that initial reaction. When this happens, the reader has to modify that initial reaction. This type of revision goes on all the time during the interpretation process.

The approach that one adopts depends largely on how easily accessible the meaning of the poem in question is. For instance, it is, in some cases, relatively easy to form a general intuitive judgment on what the poem is all about. But there are other poems that do not yield their meanings so easily. In the former type of poem, it is easier to form such a preliminary intuitive judgment than it is in the latter. The poem under study here, “Thunder and Lightning”, falls under the first type of poem. We therefore start our analysis and interpretation of it by making a statement about what we feel that the text is all about.

An initial reading of the poem shows clearly that it describes a rainy and stormy night at an undisclosed location. This deduction is reinforced by the title of the poem, “Thunder and Lightning”. Having made this initial observation, we can now go on to a detailed examination of the linguistic data supplied by the text so as to unravel the different devices employed by the speaker of the poem for the purpose of getting his intended message through to the reader.

We notice quickly that the poem is written in couplets. There are two clear features of the couplet manifested in the text. First, there are end-rhymes in each of the four stanzas of the poem. For example, in stanza I, “vein” in line 1 rhymes with “windowpane” in line 2. In stanza II, “white” (line 1) rhymes with “light” (line 2). In stanza III, “rain” (line 1) rhymes with “again” (line 2), and in stanza IV, “fright” (line 1) rhymes with “night” in line 2. Since it is the pronunciation of words that shows that two words rhyme, a transcription of the words listed above is in order. We can thus say that /vein/ rhymes with /windəupein/ in stanza I, /wait/ rhymes with /lait/ in stanza II, /rein/ rhymes with /əgein/ in stanza III, and /frait/ rhymes with /nait/ in stanza IV. We also notice that stanzas I and III have the same rhyme pattern: /vein/ rhymes with /windəupein/ in stanza I, while /rein/ rhymes with /əgein/ in stanza III. Furthermore, stanza II and IV, too, have the same rhyme scheme: /wait/ rhymes with /lait/ in stanza II, while /frait/ rhymes with /nait/ in stanza IV. We can represent the rhyme scheme in the poem as follows.

- a. i) /vein/ - /windəupein/ (stanza I)
 /rein/ - /əgein/ (stanza III)
- ii) /wait/ - /lait/ (stanza II)
 /frait/ - /nait/ (stanza IV)

- b. i) /vein/ and /windəupein/ in stanza I rhyme with each other and also with /rein/ and /əgein/ in stanza III and vice versa.
 ii) /wait/ and /lait/ in stanza II rhyme with each other and also with /frait/ and /nait/ in stanza IV and vice versa.

One implication of a and b above is that they point to the emergence of certain linguistic patterns in the poem. From the phonological level of linguistic description, then, stanzas I and III are cohesively related and so also are stanzas II and IV. This observation shows that a significant degree of unity is beginning to emerge in the poem. We shall see whether this degree of unity is manifested in the other parts of the text as we continue with our analysis and interpretation.

The second marker of the couplet that is manifested in the poem is that each stanza is made up of a complete thought. This observation is given credence by the fact that there is a full stop at the end of such stanza. The full stop is the linguistic marker of the end of a sentence. So, we can say that the full stop assumes prominence in the text.

As pointed out in the paragraph before the last one, we can now go through the poem to see whether other patterns of unity, in addition to the ones at the phonological level, are manifested in the poem. We notice that at the syntactic level of linguistic description, there are examples of syntactic parallelism in the text. A syntactic analyses of the poem presents the following picture:

α β

Blood punches through every vein | | As lightning strips the windowpane. (stanza I)
 Blood punches the heart with fright | | As rain belts the village night. (stanza IV)

At the primary degree of delicacy, we have, in each of stanza I and IV, a main clause (marked α , the first letter of the Greek alphabet, meaning *alpha*), followed by a subordinate clause (marked β , the second letter of the Greek alphabet, meaning *beta*). As a result, the two sentences in each stanza are syntactically parallel to each other. At the secondary degree of delicacy, however, it is only the subordinate clauses in the two sentences that are fully syntactically parallel to each other, as the following analysis shows:

A S P C
 As | lightning | strips | the windowpane. (line 2, stanza I)
 As | rain | belts | the village night. (line 2, stanza IV)

(A = Adjunct; S = Subject; P = Predicator; and C = Complement)

The two lines have the same syntactic structure: ASPC. We can thus conclude that stanzas I and IV are cohesively related from the syntactic perspective.

The main clauses in the two stanzas are only partially parallel to each other, thus:

S P C A
 Blood | punches | ----- | through every vein (line 1, stanza I)
 Blood | punches | the heart | with fright (line 1, stanza IV)

The two clauses are partially parallel in the sense that the second clause contains a complement while the first does not. This means that line 1 of stanza I has the structure: SPA, while the structure of the second one is SPCA.

A natural step is to turn our attention to the syntactic analysis of stanzas II and III. Here we find that, at the secondary degree of delicacy, each line begins with an adverbial, which typically functions in English as an Adjunct.

A
 Under its flashing whip | a white village leaps to light. (stanza II)
 On tubs of thunder | fists of rain slog it out of sight again. (stanza III)

Because line 1 of each stanza begins with an adverbial, “Under its flashing whip” and “On tubs of thunder” functioning as thematic adjuncts, thereby becoming prominent in the sense that the reader is forced to notice them. The first part of each sentence is thus fully syntactically parallel. But the same cannot be said for the second part of each sentence, as the following analysis shows.

S P C A A
 ... | a white village | leaps | ----- | to light | ----- (line 1, stanza II)
 ... | fists of rain | slog | it | out of sight | again (line 1, stanza III)

The first example has the SPA structure of the clause while the second line has the SPCAA structure, showing that the two lines are only partially parallel.

In syntactic terms, then, there is a link between stanzas II and III in the sense that the first part of each line in the stanza is fully parallel to the other. Thus, just as stanzas I and IV are connected phonologically, so also are the first part of line 1 of stanza II and line 2 of stanza III connected at the syntactic level of linguistic description.

In view of the preceding discussion, we can conclude that stanzas I and II on the one hand, and stanzas II and IV, on the other, are related phonologically. In addition, stanzas I and IV, on the one hand, and stanzas II and III, on the other, are connected from the perspective of syntax. This observation can be represented in tabular form as follows:

Table I: Linguistic Patterns of Unity in the Poem

Level of linguistic description	Stanza involved
Phonology	I and III II and IV
Syntax	I and IV II and III

Source: Authors

This table shows that all the stanzas are cohesively related to one another phonologically and syntactically. This phenomenon helps to establish the text as an indivisible entity, thus enhancing the communicative intention of the “I” or speaker of the poem.

We can now examine the words that occur in the parallel structures discussed above. Now, every instance of syntactic parallelism sets up a pattern of equivalence, either of similarity or contrast. The parallel structures are repeated here for ease of reference.

- A S P C
- a. As | lighting | stripes | the windowpane (line 2, stanza I)
As | rain | belts | the village night (line 2, stanza IV)
- A
- b. Under its flashing whip, | ... (line 1, stanza II)
On tubs of thunder, | ... (line 1, stanza III)

In example a), there is an equivalence of similarity established between “lightning” and “rain” at the subject position, in the sense that they are both elements of nature that are involved in an attack on a village. They also function together as elements of nature. At the complement position, there is also an equivalence of similarity between “stripes” and “belts”: they both constitute a lexical set whose members have to do with violence. It is also an equivalence of similarity that is set up at the complement position: both “windowpane” and “village night” have to do with human beings. This phenomenon, too, helps to enhance the unity of the poem.

In the second example, we are focusing on the thematic adjunct, as the other parts of the sentences in question are only partially parallel to each other. Here, we find that “Under” contrasts with “On”, showing that it is an equivalence of contrast that is set up. “Under its flashing whip” in stanza II refers back to “lightning” in stanza I. The phrase shows the effect of lightning: the village, as it were, is under a siege. “On tubs of thunder” refers to the activities of “fists of rain”. The contrast between “Under” and “On” lies in the fact that while the former item shows the effect of the activities of lightning, the latter portrays the raw aggression of rain: not only the village is at the mercy of rain, even lightning itself is at the receiving end from the activities of rain (“... fists of rain / Slog it [lightning out of sight again”. But it is interesting to note that, at another level, we have the equivalence of similarity between “Under its flashing whip” and “On tubs of thunder, in the sense that the two phrases describe acts of aggression by both lighting and rain.

At this stage of our analysis and interpretation of “Thunder and Lightning”, certain issues begin to emerge. For instance, we observe that the aggressors in the poem are “Blood” (line 1, stanza I and line 1, stanza IV), “lightning” (line 2, stanza I and stanza II) and “rain” (line 1, stanza III and line 2, stanza IV). In order to account for this phenomenon properly in linguistic terms, we need to discuss the ideas involved from the perspective of transitivity.

Earlier in this article, it was stated that Simpson (2004) provides an expanded version or model of transitivity. This does not mean that the model adopted by Halliday and Kennedy does not have its strong points. It is the model adopted in this study because it is the one best suited to it. But we also make use of Simpson's concept of material processes because it is relevant to our concerns in this work. Thus, we shall focus on the three elements of transitivity: the process, the participants and circumstantial functions.

In "Thunder and Lightning", then, we find that the Actors are: "Blood" (line 1, stanza 1 and line 1, stanza IV), "lightning" (line 2, stanza I and stanza II), "thunder" (line 1, stanza III) and "rain" (line 1, stanza III and line 2, stanza IV). The process is represented by the following verbs: "punches" (line 1, stanza I and line 1, stanza IV), "leaps" (line 2, stanza II), "slog" (line 2, stanza III) and "belts" (line 2, stanza IV). We also have the Goal of the actions of the Actors. The Goal can be represented as the Recipient, Beneficiary or Affected. The Goal in this poem is manifested mainly as the Affected. The Affected are: "vein" (line 1, stanza I), "windowpane" (line 2, stanza I), "a (white) village" (lines 1-2, stanza II), "the heart" (line 1, stanza IV) and "the village night" (line 2, stanza IV). This observation can be represented in the form of a table thus:

Table 2: Participant Roles in "Thunder and Lightning."

Actor	Process	Goal (Affected)
Blood	punches (through)	every vein (line 1, stanza I)
Blood	punches	the heart (line 1, stanza IV)
lightning	strips	the windowpane (line 2, stanza I)
(lightning)	-----	a white village (lines 1&2, stanza II)
(tubs of) thunder (fists of) rain)	slog	it (a white village) (lines 1&2, stanza III)
rain	belts	the village night (line 2, stanza IV)

Source: Authors

We notice from this table that the Actors in "Thunder and Lightning" are an element in the body: blood, and elements of nature: lightning, thunder and rain. The process is manifested through verbs that portray violence: "punches", "strips", "slog", and "belts". The affected entities are parts of the body: the vein and heart, part of a house, the windowpane and a village. All these entities have to do with human beings: the vein is to be found in the human body, the windowpane is part of a house and a house is inhabited by people, and a village is made up of people.

So, the picture that emerges from the poem is one of relentless attack by an element in the human body and elements of nature on the people living in a village. In line 1 of stanza I, we have an example of the violation of the rule of selectional restriction. The verb *punch* normally functions as a transitive verb in English, which means that it usually takes a direct object. But it has been used intransitively in the sentence, "Blood punches through the heart", thus yielding the SPA structure of the clause instead of the SPCA structure. This is deviation from a general norm in English. But in line 1 of stanza IV, the rule of selectional restriction is observed in "Blood punches the heart with fright", which has the syntactic structure, SPCA, with the direct object in place.

In addition to the use of the verb "punches" in the poem, we also have "strips", "slogs" and "belts", all of which describe violent acts. The word *strip* used as a verb reminds one of the expression "to strip (someone) naked", which means to remove another person's clothes by force, very often tearing the clothes in the process. Similarly, the verb *slog* means to fight, especially by hitting with the fists. The expression "to slog it out" is an informal expression in British English, and it means "to fight or compete in order to prove who is the strongest, the best, etc." (Turnbull, et al, 2010:1400). In the poem, the rain forces the village to be hidden in the darkness again. The word "again" connotes repeated onslaught by rain on the village: the "slogging" has been going on for some time. In addition, the verb *belt* is a modern colloquial expression which means to punch or hit someone hard.

As was pointed above, the actions of blood, lightning, thunder and rain are going on simultaneously, giving the impression of a well-planned and coordinated attack on a hapless village. "Blood punches through every vein / As lightning strips the windowpane", and "Blood punches the heart with fright / As rain belts the village night". At the same time, thunder and rain also conspire with each other to add to the attack.

One implication of the observation made in the last paragraph is that there are two types of aggressors in the poem: lightning, thunder and rain are the primary aggressors while blood is the secondary aggressor. *As* can be used as a preposition, adverb and conjunction. In this poem, it is its use as a conjunction that is relevant for the stylistic analysis and interpretation of “Thunder and Lightning”. From this perspective, it indicates simultaneity. The actions of blood, lightning and rain are going on at the same time. Specifically, it is the actions of lightning, thunder and rain that trigger the action of blood. In other words, “Blood punches through every vein” as a result of the action of lightning, and “Blood punches the heart with fright” as a result of the aggression of rain. Similarly, by extension, blood is forced to act by the activities of thunder.

In view of the preceding discussion, the atmosphere in the poem is one of extreme violence: lightning and rain, aided by thunder, have launched an attack on a village. This line of interpretation is enhanced by the description of their activities in human terms; in other words, these elements of nature have been characterized in terms of humanizing metaphors, that is, they have been personified. For instance, lightning “strips” and “whips”, rain has fists and “slogs” the village out of sight and also “belts” the village night. In addition, the word “fists” and the expression “slog it out (of sight)” also do remind us of “punches” in stanzas I and IV, “strips” (stanza I), “whips” and “leaps” in stanza II and “belts” in stanza IV. Also, the words “flashing” and “white” in line 1 of stanza II relate directly to “light” in line 2 of the same stanza. So, we can say that all these words belong to the same lexical set or that they collocate in the poem. This lexical set built up in the text also helps to enhance unity in the poem. Thus the high degree of cohesion in the poem has been achieved at the phonological, lexical and syntactic levels of linguistic description. Furthermore, the elements of nature in question are presented in terms of proper nouns: lightning, thunder, rain, thus giving them the appearance of people’s names. This phenomenon helps to buttress the description of their actions in human terms.

But it is interesting to note that even though the primary aggressors are portrayed in human terms and the Affected are blood on one level and a village on another level, there is no personal pronoun in the poem. All the references to human beings are to elements in the body and things usually associated with human beings: blood, rain, windowpane (relating to house in which people live) and a village (which is also habitation for people). So, the Affected entities in the poem are human beings, and they are at the mercy of lightning, thunder and rain on the one hand, and of blood on the other. As the attack is going on, the human beings living in the village are filled with fear: “Blood punches the heart with fright” as rain pounds the village (stanza IV). The noise is deafening and the people in the village are consumed with fear.

Furthermore, we also notice another instance of the violation of the rules of selectional restriction in the text. This violation occurs in line 2 of stanza IV: “As rain belts the village night”. The verb *belt* can only take an object with the semantic features +CONCRETE, +ANIMATE, +HUMAN. But here, the object is “night”, which is neither concrete nor animate. This example reminds us of Sentences 1 and 3 in 2.1.1 above, where it was pointed out that “The darkness may frighten the girl” is acceptable while “The girl may frighten the darkness” is not. The reason for this is that in English the verb *frighten* can take an abstract noun as subject. But it cannot take an abstract noun as object. It is for this reason that the two noun phrases or nominal groups in the sentence cannot be reversed.

In addition, there is the participant role of Instrument in transitivity. The instrument is usually inanimate (Kennedy, 1982). The instrument in this poem is a whip, by means of which “... a white/village leaps to light” (lines 1-2, stanza II). The word “whip” implies punitive aggression, and it is related to “leaps” in line 2 of the same stanza. The leaping is the direct result of the whipping referred to in line 1 of the stanza.

What we have in the poem, then, is that lightning and rain, aided by thunder have launched a relentless attack on a village in an undisclosed location, and that their activities trigger blood to also become antagonistic by flowing through the body with sadistic force. Ironically, it is human beings that are at the mercy of all these rampaging elements. The people living in the village are essentially passive, cowering under the sustained attack without being able to do anything to defend themselves. They are quite helpless while blood and elements of nature are very active. Instead of being in command, man has been reduced to the level of a victim. This is a reversal of roles and it indicates that man’s dominion over his surroundings is not absolute: it can be successfully challenged. This can be taken to be the overall meaning of the poem.

3. Highlighting the Foregrounded Patterns in “Thunder and Lightning”

Foregrounding presupposes some motivation on the part of the writer. In other words, foregrounding is motivated prominence (Halliday, 1971; Simpson, 2004). What this means is that before a linguistic or literary pattern can be said to be foregrounded, it must contribute to the writer’s overall meaning in a particular text. In “Thunder and Lightning”, the rhyme scheme aa bb aa bb, the items making up the lexical set identified in the poem – “Blood”, “punches”, “vein”, “flashing”, “whip”, “leaps”, “white”, “light”, “fists”, “slog” (it out of sight), “heart”, “fright”, “belts”, the primary aggressors – “lightning”, “rain”; the humanizing metaphors; and the syntactically parallel clauses and sentences are all foregrounded in the poem because they have helped us to make sense of the poem.

4. Conclusion

We have, in this article, carried out a stylistic analysis and interpretation of James Kirkup’s poem, “Thunder and Lightning”. We examined the theory of foregrounding, some models of transitivity, and the rules of selectional restriction so as to demonstrate some of the ways in which poetic language is different from normal, everyday uses of language. We also demonstrate that transitivity, which stylisticians usually apply to the study of character portrayal in prose fictional texts, can also be applied to the study of poetry texts as well. We also pointed out the high degree of cohesion in the poem, which has contributed to making it a fascinating piece of verbal art. Finally, we identified and discussed other stylistic patterns that are motivated for meaning in the text and concluded that the overall meaning of the poem is the reversal of man and elements of nature: man is presented as a victim while elements of nature are the ones in control.

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