

## A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF DEVIATION AND PARALLELISM IN E.E. CUMMINGS' TRADITIONAL AND KINETIC POETRY

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### Abstract

Creativity and innovation have increasingly shaped literary expression in the modern era, making unconventional thinking essential in a rapidly evolving world. This study examines the interplay between poetic structure and creative discourse through a stylistic lens, focusing on foregrounding features such as deviation and parallelism. Using Leech's (1969) Advanced Stylistics framework, a comparative analysis is conducted on E.E. Cummings' selected poems *l(a)* (1958) and *was* (1954), representing traditional and kinetic poetry, respectively. The findings reveal that deviation and parallelism are strategically employed to foreground thematic elements, capturing the reader's attention. While traditional poetry features occasional deviations, kinetic poetry consistently utilizes structural deviation to emphasize meaning, often with greater attention to visual representation. This study enriches the understanding of how stylistic devices shape interpretation and highlights thematic focus in Cummings' poetry.

### INTRODUCTION

There has been an increase in creativity and innovation throughout various fields of life and literature is not an exception in this regard. Stylistics is the study of style used by different authors in their works be it fiction or nonfiction, hence, Stylistics could be literary or non-literary. Literary Stylistics has a different way of conveying the message to the readers that produces an impact on readers' mind. It involves lexical choices, syntactical structure, intonation, and other tinges of language. The style is the relationship between the structure and creative discourse wherein the study of the style allows different interpretations. Poets foreground the message by deviating from standard language rules and using parallelism to transmit multilayered ideas uniquely and creatively. Along with the deviation within the text, deviation of the whole structure has also emerged as a practice with the poets to

create their own peculiar styles and also to create foregrounding for thematic purposes. Some poets draft their poems in shape like a woman to depict the theme of gender. This concept of kinetic poetry is traced back to 1897, explored more in the 1910s -1920s, and discovered after WW II, as concrete poetry. The idea was initiated by few poets like; Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Joyce, and E.E. Cummings, in the form of large spaces, and flowing words, in today's era, it is at its peak, every ordinary person is posting on social media as concrete or shape poetry, in shapes of butterflies, human faces, animals, shoes, hearts and more, popularly known as 'kinetic poetry'.

This study delves deep into the intricate details of stylistic (foregrounding) features using the lens of deviation and parallelism in order to compare the use of deviation and parallelism in the traditional and kinetic



poems, *l (a)* (1958), and *am was* (1954) by Cummings.

### **Significance and Delimitation**

This research is significant in that it highlights the contribution of form in meaning-making, it signifies the deliberate choices made to attract the reader's attention to a specific factor. It allows an understanding of nuances of Cummings's work that are difficult to understand at a first glance. This study is delimited to the stylistic tools of foregrounding (deviation and parallelism) to analyze the above mentioned poems.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review discusses different researches on Advanced Stylistics, foregrounding, and kinetic poetry that is further delimited to E.E. Cummings poems. According to Sharma (2022), Applied Stylistics supports students in understanding literature as a unique form of language by investigating how authors and poets deviate from standard forms to create meaning and draw the audience's attention. Also, Kabiljonovna (2024) states that Advanced Stylistics is being used more in language teaching to enhance student understanding and conception of literature by stretching beyond surface meaning. Further, Penny (2011) argues that examining the lexical and structural elements of literary writings can improve reader understanding and elucidation. Assessment is significant for teaching syntax, terminology, discourse, and for emerging effective literary text syllabi. In Addition, Vowel et al. (2017) explores the role of stylistics and linguistics in applied social methods. It suggests a novel method for elucidating challenges within group of people, emphasizing the value of maintaining basic notions alike success and study while contemplating social behavior and interaction.

The foundation of kinetic poetry was the Baroque period. Mallarmé's (1897) work *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* indicates a mission for the flow of words in space, making pauses and space in the unconventional poetic lines, which extended the reading area to double. Later, this idea

was investigated by Apollinaire (1918) in Calligrammes, in the form of calligraphic visuals. It was explored much in the 1910s-1920s, also in art and mixed media like films and sculptures. After 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, there has been a trend of creating poetry with flowing words following the practices introduced before World War 2. By the 1950s, it was also known as concrete poetry. Concrete poets explored creativity in different ways such as Joyce's and Cummings's work (Seiça, 2021). Also, Ikonen (2003) explores the historic development of movement in literature, from printed "analogies of movement" to digital inventions. It sorts types of textual movement and proposes conceptual divisions to well understand the unique characteristics of digitally controlled movement. Alike, Goudarzi (2014) explores the relationship between geometrical pattern poetry and John Hollander's work. It investigates how specific geometrical shapes transform meaning in his poems, which include *The Maze* and *The Labyrinth*. Hollander's use of geometry and mathematics in his poetry aligns with the characteristics of geometrical pattern poetry. Further, Dewi et al. (2024) explores the impact of project-based learning with shape poems on vocabulary mastery in fifth-grade students. Conclusions show significant improvements in vocabulary and positive teacher perceptions. The research features the efficacy of this approach in fostering meaningful and enjoyable language learning. Furthermore, Lang and Liu (2023), analyze the short story *Miss Brill* using functional stylistics to display how the author's language choices underline the main character's isolation and emotional state. Additionally, Khalil (2016) imparts E.E. Cummings' odd grammar is not mistakes, but selections that make his poems more compelling. It examines two poems; *anyone lived in a pretty how town* and *I have found what you are like*. Further, Amjad et al. (2020) investigates the effectiveness of a pedagogical stylistic approach for teaching poetry to private M.A. English students in Pakistan. Results show that this approach notably improves students' informative skills and implementation compared to traditional methods. Also,



Rajper and Mashori (2018) uses Leech's theory of stylistics and a qualitative research method to investigate Elsa Kazi's English poetry, focusing on her use of lexical and syntactic deviations, anaphora, and epistrophe. Conclusion shows her unique structural patterns create absurdity and oddness in her language. In addition, Şahin (2023) examines Samuel Beckett's short story Ping focusing on the foregrounded patterns used to highlight the character's state of mind and the story's themes. Findings depicts the use of various techniques, such as omitting punctuation, using non-finite verbs, and repeating words and phrases, to create a sense of limited consciousness and emphasize the character's struggle for meaning. The present research focuses on the comparative analysis of the traditional and kinetic poetry of E.E. Cummings which is unexplored and also the selected sample is unique from the prospect of the research.

### Research Methodology

#### Theoretical Framework

Leech's Stylistic Theory (1969) has been selected for this study. His work A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (1969) provides the theoretical framework for foregrounding features. This study focuses on the foregrounded features such as deviation and parallelism.

#### Traditional Poem: am was

am was. are leaves few this. is these a or  
scratchily over which of earth dragged once  
-ful leaf. & were who skies clutch an of poor  
how colding hereless. air theres what immense  
live without every dancing. singless on-  
ly a child's eyes float silently down  
more than two those that and that noing our  
gone snow gone  
yours mine  
. We're  
alive and shall be:cities may overflow(am  
was)assassinating whole grassblades,five  
ideas can swallow a man;three words im-  
-prison a woman for all her now:but we've  
such freedom such intense digestion so  
much greenness only dying makes us grow

### Sample

The sample for this research is selected by purposive sampling and is a literary work. Two poems, l(a (1958) and am was (1954), by E.E. Cummings are picked as a selected work; l(a, first appeared in Cummings' final volume, 95 Poems, in 1958, depicting the visual picture of a broken and falling leaf, and am was appeared in Poems, 1923-1954 published in 1954 depicting the theme of mortality, existence, and the distinguishing nature of life and death.

### Research design

This research uses both the qualitative and quantitative design for the analysis of the selected poems, l(a and am was.

### Research Questions

- 1.How different sub-categories of deviation and parallelism are used in the selected poems?
- 2.How do the different kinds of foregrounding techniques used in the selected traditional and kinetic poems project the comparative elements of analysis?

### Data Analysis

The selected poems are analysed as under according to the above-mentioned methodology

This poem by E.E. Cummings lacks a formal title and is called *am was*. It demonstrates many of the common stylistic imprints of its author, significant among which is the evident spelling and orthography developing from the elimination of standard punctuation for example spacing, commas, full stops, and capitalization. It also has several invented terminologies and neologisms. Perhaps even more noticeably, the poem discusses the English lexicon strikingly and colorfully. The poet foregrounded themes of mortality, existence, and the distinguishing nature of life and death, at different levels of style, i.e., phonological, lexical, syntactical, graphological, and semantic, by deviation and parallelism.

### Deviation

A deviation appears when there is a deviation from the accepted norms of language, disrupting the established standards. The writer uses unusual sentence compositions, unknown lexicon, or rare punctuation.

### Graphological level

"Graphological level in stylistics" refers to a topic in linguistics that explores the visual aspects of written language, such as handwriting, typography, punctuation, and layout.

### Capitalization

The poet thoughtfully violates the standard rules of capitalization. This is an attempt to establish a feeling of universality. The poet aimed to convey that the ideas and thoughts explored in the poem are for everyone, notwithstanding of their background or class. By overlooking the traditional capitalization rules, the poet fogged the divisions between words, indicating that everybody and everything is parallel, equal, and unified.

In the poem *We're* is capitalized in the 10<sup>th</sup> line, *your mine. We're*

The "W" of this word is capitalized to enhance the importance of humans in the face of demise and temporariness. There is no capitalization in the poem other than this, all the beginnings after full stops are not capitalized, i.e., "air" after full stop is not capitalized in the 4<sup>th</sup> line.

*-ful leaf. & were who skies clutch an of poor  
how colding hereless. air theres what  
immense*

### Punctuation

In this poem, the rules of punctuation are violated. There is no proper punctuation used in the poem, strange punctuation like dashes or ellipses are used to create pauses, uncertainty, or mystery.

**Table 1: Punctuation Deviation**

Punctuation Deviation	Example
.	Occurs six times in the poem and is used in a non-standard way. <i>am was. are leaves few this. is these a or (line 1) -ful leaf. &amp; were who skies clutch an of poor (line 3) how colding hereless. air theres what immense (line 4) live without every dancing. singless on- (line 5) . We're (line 10)</i>
-	Used three times, to create prominence or breaks in the rhythm. <i>-ful leaf. &amp; were who skies clutch an of poor (line 3) live without every dancing. singless on- (line 5) -prison a woman for all her now:but we've (line 14)</i>
( )	Used once, but not as a standard parenthesis. <i>alive and shall be:cities may overflow(am was)assassinating whole grassblades,five (lines 11,12)</i>
,	Used once but deviated from the use of a standard comma. <i>was)assassinating whole grassblades,five (line 12)</i>



;	Used once but not as a standard semicolon. ideas can swallow a man;three words im (line 13)
:	Used multiple times, but violated the standard use of colon. alive and shall be:cities may overflow(am (line 11) -prison a woman for all her now:but we've (line 14)

These punctuation deviations contribute to the unique style of the poem. This deviated punctuation reflects the emotional content such as the poet's sense of confusion. The use of dashes creates emphasis on connecting the unconnected ideas. The parenthesis is a way to set a comment. This use of punctuation in the poem creates a unique voice.

### Enjambment

Enjambment is when a sentence moves from one line to the next **without** any punctuation at the end of the first line. The poem is full of fragments and incomplete sentences: am was. are leaves few this. is these a or (line 1) livewithout every dancing. singless only a child's eyes float silently down (lines 5,6) gone snow gone yours mine . We're (lines 8,9,10)

This is a reproduction of the poet's fragmented state of mind.

### Contractions

In the poem there are two contractions used, We're and we've, i.e.,. We're (line 10)-prison a woman for all her now: but we've (line 14)

In the poem, the contractions are used with "we" both times, the possible interpretation is to emphasize the idea of human importance to create a comparison with the temporariness of the world.

### Syntactical Level

"Syntactical level in stylistics" refers to the study of sentence structure and word order. In this poem, there are dismantled lines and irregular distribution.

### Fumble Rule

It is the interplay between short and long sentences, this shows the disorientation of loss.

### Escher Sentences

These sentences are grammatically correct but do not make any sense of meaning.

are leaves few this. (line 1)

but we've such freedom such intense digestion so much greenness only dying makes us grow (lines 14,15,16)

In the above examples, the lines are grammatically correct but they do not give any meaning.

### Subject Verb Agreement Deviation

In the poem, there is an example of subject-verb agreement deviation.

am was. are leaves few this. is these a or (line 1) scratchily over which of earth dragged once -ful leaf. (lines 1,2,3)

In line 1, three verbs are used in the same line "am was are" which deviates from the SVO structure. In lines 2 and 3, again the SVO agreement deviates, i.e., "these" is a plural noun, the verb "is" is used with it then the misuse of the article "a". These lines lack a clear subject-verb relationship. The poet has created a sense of ambiguity and depicted the contrast between past and present, and between existence and non-existence.

### Lexical Level

Lexical Level refers to the lexical choices made by the poet.

### Neologism

Cumming used such words which were not existing in standard English. For instance, "colding", is no word in the English dictionary, the poet deviated from the rules and used colding from the noun cold to intensify the feeling of coldness. The second example is "hereless" There is no word in standard English, the poet combined two words here + less to emphasize emptiness or less connection to life. The poet uses "theres" by adding the suffix -s to the word "there" to stress the vastness of the air. "singless" is



another example of neologism in this poem, created from single + less, the word singless emphasizes the idea of being alone and loss of connection. The word “noing” is the combination of no + ing. According to the context, it can also be the deviation due to phonetical quality, removing “k” from “knowing” providing the same sound, suggests a childlike interpretation. These create a sense of anonymity and highlight the poet’s exceptional perspective.

**Semantic Level**

"Semantic deviation" refers to words used in a way that deviates from expected meaning.

-ful leaf

In the above, examples the “-ful leaf” creates deviation, the -ful is mostly used as the suffix. Here the poet uses it before leaf and creates ambiguity in meaning, that it is an invented adjective modifying leaf or fulness of what?

am was. are leaves few this.

In the second example, the use of “am was are” is more exceptional than standard use. This creates a deviated connotation and ambiguity about time and existence.

**Phonetical Level**

Phonetic deviation refers to the deviation of phonological aspects.

**Rhyming**

In this poem, there is no rhyming followed, which is a deviation from the standard poem.

In the poem, there is an example of internal rhyming to create a sense of musicality, for example,

colding hereless. air theres

**Parallelism**

Parallelism is more of the same. It refers to the repetition of parallel syntactic compositions in a sentence or a stanza for prominence.

**Synonyms**

In this poem, the poet uses synonymous ideas, and words to emphasize the meaning and intent of the message.

scratchily over which of earth dragged once (line 2)

In line 2, the words scratchily and dragged give the same sense of roughness or pulling

something. Scratchily is the noise that is created by the action of dragging and dragged is the action itself of pulling something.

how colding hereless. air theres what immense (line 4)

In line 4, words like colding and air are used with similar connotations, the air is associated with chill and cold effect, emphasizing the idea of coldness.

much greenness only dying makes us grow (line 16)

In line 16, “greenness” is similarly used with “grow”. Greenness is the state of being green and when the plants grow, there is more greenness. Here the intention is linked to the growth.

**Juxtaposition/ Antithesis**

Contrasting ideas are neighboured together.

am was. are leaves few this. is these a or (line 1)

In line 1, “am was” are placed together depicting two opposite states such as present and past, or highlighting the ideas of existing and non-existing.

yours mine (line 9)

In line 9, both words are juxtaposed to each other representing two completely different ideas. This emphasizes the duality, connection, and the competition.

alive and shall be: cities may overflow (am was) assassinating whole grassblades, five ideas can swallow a man; three words imprison a woman for all her now: but we've such freedom such intense digestion so (lines 11-15)

In line 11, the word “overflow” means spill or extra is taken out, this is the antithesis to the word swallow which means taking something in. In line 14, imprison is opposite to the word freedom in line 15, imprison means to be in prison or not to have freedom. The poet emphasized the idea by contrasting.

much greenness only dying makes us grow (line 16)

In line 16, the word dying is used which means the end, and “grow” is the opposite of dying which means to have growth. This juxtaposition emphasizes the idea of existence and non-existence or highlights the cycle of life and human experiences.



**Repetition**

In the poem am was, there is the technique of repetition, as, in line 8, the gone is repeated to emphasize the intent of the poet, the unavailability of change, and to create the effect of an echo.

gone snow gone (Line 8)

In line 1, am was is used and it is repeatedly used in lines 11 and 12. "am was" is used repeatedly in the following lines to emphasize the state of past and present and the change of existence to non-existence.

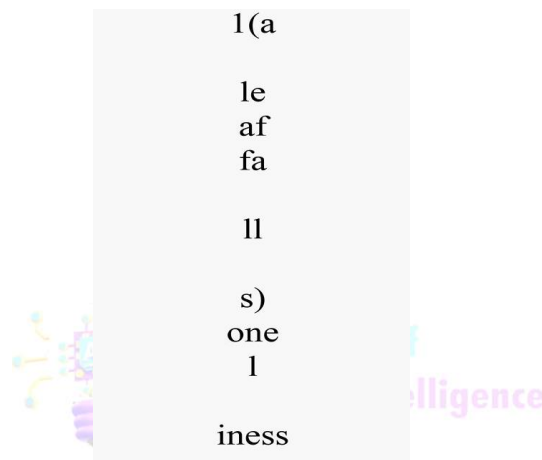
am was. are leaves few this. is these a or (line 1)

alive and shall be:cities may overflow(am was)assassinating whole grassblades,five (lines 11,12)

**Poem's Structure**

The poem am was is divided into two stanzas. The first stanza emphasizes the nature and loss of the natural world, on the other hand, the second stanza depicts the strength of humans and growth. This establishes a parallel connection between nature's temporariness and humankind's prevailing essence.

**Kinetic Poem: 1(a**



This poem does not have any formal title. The poem l(a is arranged upright in groups of one to five letters. When the text is arranged horizontally, it is read as loneliness (a leaf falls). The word loneliness without any other word gives the complete thought of being alone. Visually, the broken poem looks like a leaf falling from a tree. This separation of letters from the word shows the dismemberment and induces the theme of loneliness, detachment, emptiness, and falling from the leaf also symbolizes the theme of end or death. This poem also depicts the value, a piece has if it is separated from the collective, in this case, the value of letters when they are separated from the words and a leaf when it falls from the tree. This visual breakdown gives a feeling and raises emotions, it is not a meaningless poem with a dismantled structure.

**Deviation**

Deviation appears when there is deviancy from the accepted norms of language, disrupting the established standards. The writer uses unusual sentence compositions, unknown lexicon, or rare punctuation.

**Graphological level**

"Graphological level in stylistics" refers to a topic in linguistics that explores the visual aspects of written language, such as handwriting, typography, punctuation, and layout.

**Capitalization**

In this poem, no letter is capitalized by the poet, this is a deviation from the rule of capitalization. Capitalization symbolizes importance and lowercase use is more conversational, to connect the readers with



the feeling of loneliness the poet made this deviation.

**Punctuation**

In this poem, the punctuation rules are deviated, no punctuation is used. To create the effect of falling, to avoid disruption the poet deviated from the rule of punctuation.

**Parenthesis**

In this poem, the main theme of the poem is added in the brackets, which is a deviation from the poem as parenthesis is used to give extra information or additional information about the main information. In this poem, the central message “a leaf falls” is added to the parenthesis.

**Enjambment**

Enjambment is when a sentence moves from one line to the next without using any punctuation at the end of the first line. The whole poem flows from one line to another presenting the visuals of the falling state of a leaf from a tree.

**Syntactical Level**

“Syntactical level in stylistics” refers to the study of sentence structure and word order. In this poem, there are dismantled lines and irregular distribution. This poem does have syntactic deviation within the poem but the structure of the poem entirely deviates from

the standard structure of the poem. This is because the poet emphasizes the feeling and emotion by giving it the visual look as if the leaf is falling and is alienated from the tree.

**Phonological Level**

The poem breaks down a word (a leaf falls) and employs a vertical layout with short lines, making it knotty to follow a traditional rhyming. The rhyme is recognized by the last words of each line and their subsequent sounds. In this poem, there are no full lines, no ending sounds thus the poem deviates the rhyming rule as it is in traditional poetry.

There is no deviation found at the semantic and lexical levels, as this poem has only a few words, thus deviation at these levels is not possible. In addition, no parallelism is found in this poem, due to its short length there is no repetition, juxtaposition, or the use of synonyms.

**Findings and Discussion**

The given table shows the deviation and parallelism found in the selected sample. In the traditional poem am was (1954) the deviation is found at all levels and there is the use of parallelism, on the contrary, the kinetic poem l(a (1958) shows deviation at three levels and no parallelism is found in the second poem.

**Table 2: Deviation and Parallelism found in Cummings’ poems am was and l(a**

Foregrounding			
Deviation			
Levels	Subcategories	Traditional Poem am was (1954)	Kinetic Poem l(a (1958)
Graphological Level	Capitalization	Yes	Yes
	Punctuation	Yes	Yes
	Parenthesis	Yes	Yes
	Enjambment	Yes	Yes
	Contractions	Yes	No
Syntactical Level	Fumble Rule	Yes	No
	Escher Sentences	Yes	No
	Subject Verb Agreement	Yes	No
Lexical Level	Neologism	Yes	No
Semantic Level	-	Yes	No
Phonetical Level	Rhyming	Yes	Yes
Parallelism			
Parallelism	Synonyms	Yes	No



	Juxtaposition/ Antithesis	Yes	No
	Repetition	Yes	No
	Poem's Structure	Yes	No

At the graphological level, both poems are deviated by capitalization, punctuation, parenthesis, and enjambment, but the kinetic poem does not have the use of contractions. At the syntactic level, the first poem deviates into three sublevels but the kinetic poem does not have any syntactic level within the poem, however, it entirely deviates from the form and structure of standard poetry. The first poem deviates at lexical and semantic levels but the second poem does not deviate at these levels, due to the short length of the poem. Moreover, both the poems are deviated at the phonological level using the lens of rhyming scheme. No traditional rhyming is followed in both of the poems. Furthermore, the technique of Parallelism is there in traditional poetry through repetition, juxtapositions, and synonyms but no parallelism is found in kinetic poetry, due to its short length.

**Conclusion**

The above discussion and findings based on the research questions conclude that E.E. Cummings has used deviation and parallelism in his poems through capitalization, punctuation, parenthesis, enjambment, contractions, Fumble Rule, Escher Sentences, subject-verb agreement

deviation, neologism, rhyming, synonyms, juxtaposition, and repetition to foreground the theme and to break away from the traditional linguistics norms. Whereas the comparison between the two poems suggest; in the traditional poem Cummings retains foregrounding techniques more subtly. There is an occasional deviation and parallelism, such as omitting punctuation, unconventional capitalization, repetition, juxtaposition, structural deviation, and neologism to emphasize the words, themes, and emotions. On the contrary, Cummings employs spatial arrangement, typographical deviation, and distorted syntax to foreground the theme. In the kinetic poem, visual representation, as opposed to occasional deviation and parallelism, emphasizes

emotions and feelings. In conclusion, foregrounding techniques are used in contrast and Cummings successfully creates a unique voice in both poems.

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