

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF E. E CUMMINGS' POEM "BUFFALO BILL'S"

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ABSTRACT

Stylistics is the study of interpretation of the text and variation in language use. This study deals with stylistic analysis of E.E Cummings's poem "Buffalo Bill's". This study is dealt under the level of semantics, graphology and phonology pattern. The analysis of these features is helpful to understand the basic theme of the poem that is the dichotomy between death and life, heroic deeds and inflicting pagans of fate.

Keywords: Style, stylistics, semantics, graphology, phonology, innovator.

INTRODUCTION

Style is derived from the word 'stylus' which means "anything to write with". As time passed, its meanings were changed to "any pointed thing". The style is both individual and as a whole. The style is a distinct feature that follows and violates a rule. Following traditional rules and regulations in writing, it is a stylistic value and violating the rules it is a stylistic variation. It is the distinctive style of E.E Cummings that is being observed in his writing as he goes against conventional values and against the rules and regulations.

Research Questions

- How to analyze the poem at semantic level ?
- How does E.E Cummings violate the stylistic values?

Research Objectives

- To understand how stylistic devices work in the poem at semantic level.
- To examine the stylistic variation at graphological and phonological level.

Style

Leach (1969) has defined style as "something that is spoken, written or performed in a different way". The characteristic manner of expression in verse; how a particular poet says things. The analysis and assessment of style involves examination of a poet's choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices and the shape of his sentences indeed – of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. Style defies complete analysis or definition because it is the tone and "voice" of the writer himself; as peculiar to him as his laugh, his walk, his handwriting the expression on his face. The style, as Buffon puts it, *is the man*.

Stylistics

A branch of Applied Linguistics, that is concerned with the study of style and text especially in literary works. It is an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspect of language: phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicology.

According to Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, . (Pearson, 2001), "The goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant."

The preferred object of study in stylistics is literature. The traditional connection between stylistics and literature brings with it two important caveats, though. The first is that creativity and innovation in language use should not be seen as the exclusive preserve of literary writing. The second caveat is that the techniques of stylistic analysis are as much about deriving insights about linguistic structure and function as they are about understanding literary texts (Paul Simpson 2004).

Widdowson (1975) said that stylistics is the study of literary discourse which has a linguistic orientation. He differentiated stylistics from the literary criticism and argued that linguistics is its linking technique. He also suggests that stylistics lies between linguistics and literary criticism and it does the function of link between two.

E. E Cummings as an Innovator

Edward Estlin Cummings (October 14, 1894 – September 3, 1962), was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he was an American poet, painter, essayist, author, and playwright. He is an eminent voice of 20th century poetry. He wanted to be a poet from childhood and wrote poetry daily aged eight to 22, exploring assorted forms. He went to Harvard and developed an interest in modern poetry which ignored conventional grammar and syntax, aiming for a dynamic use of language. He is "Among the most innovative of twentieth-century poets," according to Jenny Penberthy in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. He has unique, idiosyncratic and peculiar style. His poems are precise and present key words and ideas.

3 Introduction to poem "Buffalo Bill's"

In 1920, *The Dial* published seven poems by Cummings, including "Buffalo Bill's". He adopted a cubist style in his work. This serves as debut to wider American audience. This poem deals with more than one theme and poet's attitude towards the 'dead hero' Buffalo Bill. On the one hand poem shows respect towards legendary celebrity, and on the other hand poet is criticizing the typical heroism of killing animals that are harmless.

Poem depicts multilayered meanings as it seems about Buffalo Bill's life or death, cruelty to animals and heroism, deeds or irony that he had to suffer the same fate. The modernist approach is apparent in the themes of the poem. The poem partly praises hero who killed the animals ruthlessly as well as the poem manifest "irony of fate", hero is helpless in front of death.

"Buffalo Bill's"

1. defunct
2. who used to
3. ride a watersmooth-silver

4. stallion
5. and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
6. Jesus
7. he was a handsome man
8. and what i want to know is
9. how do you like your blueeyed boy
10. Mister Death

METHODOLOGY

The present study presented stylistic analysis of the poem Buffalo Bill's analysis on graphology, syntax, lexical and phonological levels and express the main idea of the poem. The poem consisted of two stanzas with unusual paragraphing and spacing and capitalization.

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Application of levels in poem Buffalo Bill's

Following levels are being analysed in stylistic analysis of the poem:

- Graphological level
- Phonological level
- Lexical level

Lexical level

The first word in the first line is "defunct" means dead, it is an adjective. Defunct is used for machines which means "useless" but Cummings has implied it for the death of a "hero", shows the indifferent attitude towards Buffalo Bill's. It evinces that no one is mortal even for-ever famous person.

Cummings' laments are shown through the word "jesus" in line(6), that handsome man had passed away. Death is an inevitable phenomenon of nature, no one can escape from it. So it is addressed as "Mister Death" (line 10) in a formal way, that represents the power and overwhelming authority of the death. "Mister Death" is also a personification, the use of word 'Mister' shows that human attribute is given to a non-living thing.

Adjective "blueeyed" (line 9) describes physical attributes of a hero. The popularity, fame and power do not exist for a long. These are for a time being that is an irony. Compound adjectives "watersmooth-silver" (line 5) manifest the feeling of movement and creates effect of speed as bullet is fired from the gun.

Interjection is also depicted through lexical expression "jesus" (line9) , shows the expression of deep breath after imitating the quickness of the gun shoot. But on the other hand it can be an address to whom the complain is being made "jesus/ he was a handsome man".

Graphological level

The poem's typography is like gun and pistol. Typology is the notable feature of the poem. If we divide the poem in two halves, the upper half makes the shape of a gun. Breaks and gaps are indicators of pause. Typology is also a direction which tells how to read. The gun operating as ideogram that presents traditional feature of cowboy.

A long space indicates an extended pause and the word "jesus" is at the end of the line It creates ambiguity due to lack of punctuation. It is deviation of punctuation. Graphological deviation is used in line (5) "onetwothreefourfive" . The lack of space between words gives the effect of swiftness as the words uttered , it seems the speed of gunshoots. That is a striking feature of Cummings.

Intensity of capitalized noun "Death" has softened by using a formal pattern of address 'Mister'. It gives an effect of politeness to "Death" that has bitterness and harshness. Deviation of typology is shown through the gun, it is operating as an ideogram that presents traditional feature of a cowboy.

Cummings has used metaphorical statement to compare swiftness through 'stallion/ bullet'. He shoots pigeons or buffalo at a time in a series. It creates a concept of continuity in line(5) "and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat".

The structure of the poem is inconsistent and incoherent. The poem has neutral tone in the start as he used the word "defunct" but in the end poem turns into serious laments at the word "jesus".

He has also shown a great deal of " humility " towards his writing for example using the lower case " i " instead of capitalizing it.

Phonological level

The poem is written in unusual rhyme.Cummings has applied several sound devices, but alliteration is predominant. The phrase "watersmoothsilver stallion" repeats the consonant "s" sound. It emphasizes both the color and action of the horse; "blue-eyed boy" stresses the "b" sound. Rises consonant appears in "just like that" with the repetition of the "t". Assonance is found in "handsome man" in the repetition of the "a." The phrase "onetwothreefourfive," which describes then quick speed of his bullets, suggests a sound not unlike onomatopoeia. Since this is a free-verse poem, however, there is no rhyme.

CONCLUSION

Cummings' style of poetry breaks away from the conventional use of the English language. He uses his past experiences in this poem and makes it distinguished in such a way as to convey irony of fate and imagery in a space. He violates all the rules of English to convey his meanings with his disregard for punctuation and decapitalization. Cummings as a painter, understands the importance of presentation, and uses typography to "paint a picture" of his

poems. He has used unusual and impressionistic word order. Cummings uses grammar along with "typography " to isolate himself. He stresses the style of self created compound words, unusual form of punctuation and decapitalization.

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