

Since Feeling is First by E. E. Cummings: Literary and Stylistic AnalysesKhalil Abdullah Abdulghaffar Abdulqader¹, Mohammed Yassin Mohd Aba Sha'ar²¹Research Scholar, AMU Department of Linguistics, Uttar Pradesh, India²Research Scholar, AMU Department of English, Uttar Pradesh, India***Corresponding author**

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Abstract: Despite his typographical peculiarities, e. e. Cummings is the second most widely read American poet in the American society after Robert Frost. Meanwhile Cummings is the first cited poet for his puns, syntactical and grammatical distortions, word coinage, startling imagery and irregular typography. However, Cummings is considered as one of the most prolific American love poets and his best love poetry is that type which incorporates both his intense personal feelings with brilliance and linguistic felicity as he has depicted in *Since Feeling is First*. Thereby, this paper introduces Cummings as a genuine love poet who has distinguished wisely between love and lust in his poetry. Subsequently, this paper analyses literary Cummings' love poem *Since Feeling is First*, depicting how he combined both his personal feeling and verbal felicity in a precise and an iconoclastic composition. Besides, this paper presents extensive stylistic analysis of the poem throughout all the graphological, phonological, lexical and morphological, syntactic, semantic levels. Therefore the main contention of this paper is to present Cummings as a love poet, analyzing literary and stylistically *Since Feelings is First* one of his typical love poems.

Keywords: stylistics, deviation, love poetry, peculiarity.

INTRODUCTION

In fact, Cummings is one of the eminent American poets of the 20th century whose popularity was constructed by his unique poetic spirit and composition. He is regarded as one of the American modern love poets. He quiet often used to surprise the readers by his accuracy in description and delicacy in expression.

The poem *Since Feeling is First* is one of Cummings lyric love poems in which he expounds "intense personal feelings with intellectual and verbal felicity". Cummings in this poem juxtaposes logic and emotions, life and death, the beauty of nature and the beauty of his lady in a portrait of a lover who is afraid of the advent of the end cycle of life which he symbolically depicts as a parenthesis before enjoying much of their lives.

Similarly with most of his poems Cummings in *Since Feeling is First* allowed for some typographical peculiarities and grammatical and syntactical deviations. Hence, the paper introduces an extensive analysis throughout all the linguistic levels (graphological, phonological, lexical and morphological and semantic levels) in view of exposing and stylistically these unfamiliar and rebellious poetic expressions. In fact some writers like James Williams [1] categorized Cummings iconoclastic poetry as one of the nonsense literary productions as he accounts "it wounds and delight sooth and excite". Despite, as a modernist he was influenced by many contemporary artists and writers like T.S Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Poundetc. However the main argument of this paper

is to introduce Cummings s as a love poet, analyzing literary and stylistically *Since Feeling is Fist*, one of his brilliant love poems.

Cummings as a love poet

Despite the capricious criticism of the writers, Cummings is still having an outstanding position in the heritage of American literature and poetry. He obtained an eminent status among the celebrated American poets due to his highly unfamiliar, iconoclastic and innovative approach of poetic expression. In fact, since he returned from the war and till 1926 Cummings had written the greatest deal of his love poems or what Richard S. Kennedy [2] calls erotic poetry. However Cummings "love poems are sometimes sexually explicit but always marked by a gusto and humor that is lacking in the works of most of the American modernist poets [3]. He is a love poet as he has written many love poems about his love, sensuality and earthiness in most of his early poetry and some of his most famous love poems are: *I am so Glad and Very, Since Feeling is First, I Carry Your Heart, Love Is A Place, Nothing False And Possible Is Love, You Being In Love, My Love*etc. Paul Poplawski [4] elaborates that

Cummings is a love poet who insist that feeling is first whether the feeling is authentic or fabricated.

One of his poems was found untitled however he described love in this poem by saying “love is thicker than forget, more thinner than recall, more seldom than a wave is wet and more frequent than to fail” [5]. So as a love poet Cummings sometimes used to write love poems with images that challenge the readers’ expectation [6]. According to April D. Fallon considered Cummings as “one of the most prolific writers of love poetry, who constantly utilized natural and surreal images to describe his love and sensuality [7]. In a number of poems he depicted explicit interest and description of love as it was possibly impacted by his triple marriages and ongoing search for satisfaction. However, as a love poet, “he was a sensitive and supple writer who ferreted out distinguishing nuances in relation to love and its complements unlove and lust”. Despite, in his poems he distinguishes between the three types. In love poems he used to explore the conflict between the spirituality and emotions of love and the sexuality and sensuality of lust as in his poem *You Said Is* which is a great example of love poetry. Besides, in his love poems he usually utilizes natural images like those of spring, flowers, petals, loams, leaves, feathers, birds ...etc. as he described in *Since Feelings is First*.

Literary analysis of the poem

Despite, the small length of the poem though it has a very wide meaning. In the point of fact, the poem narrates the story of a man (most probably Cummings himself as he used explicit pronouns of I and my) who is persuading a lady (the lady here possibly refers to Anne Minnerly Barton, as he was widower sine the period of 1924 and he started developing a relation since then till they married in 1929. Wittingly, the poem was published in *Is 5* in 1926. Besides Cummings wrote a great deal of his love poetry between 1918 and 1928 before his marriage from Barton) to indulge in her passions. For this purpose the speaker or Cummings here was attempting to establish an argument that his desires will seduce her to accept him as a lover [8]. However, the poem has been repetitively discussed or categorized as “crape diem poem” whose lonely theme is temptation but this deduction or inference is not convincing because it summaries only the superficial outlook of the poem. Hence, the main theme of the poem is privileging the emotional response over the intellectual one in view of experiencing and living a fully moment of amusement. Accordingly, the poem solemnizes feelings and emotions more than the pretending use of logic and reasoning.

Minutely, the poem consists of sixteen lines in five stanzas, exposing in the first stanza the speaker’s serious attempt to seduce his lady for a kiss. In the first line the speaker begins with ‘since’ indicating that he wants to establish an argument but it was delayed. Then

combining the second line with the third in order to give and construct a sense of meaning comes out with the clue ‘the speaker’s clue’ that ‘the person who will pay attention to the “syntax of things” will never kiss somebody thoroughly. Syntax here means the discipline and system of the language. Why? because “since feeling is first”, as the speaker utters in the first line. Despite, the interpretation of the first stanza in such a statement brings about a logical syllogism, because the outcome of such feelings will come only from two premises (the seducer and his lady). Essentially, the word ‘syntax’ is perplexing a bit, though it has been used here by Cummings just to “mock the discipline (rules and regulations) of the language which he infringing. Additionally, in the fourth and fifth lines the speaker is consolidating his assumed facts that ‘the person who will “pay attention to the syntax of thins will not allow him to kiss the women he is addressing” [9, 10]. James Williams [1] adds the poem celebrates the sense of breaking its bound of syntax meaning and clear reference in order to strengthen the sensual side. Subsequently, the word ‘wholly’ in the fourth line means completely while the word ‘wholly in the fifth line is used for the purpose of pun. Thereby, the word ‘fool’ in the fifth line and in accordance with the poem’s frame of reference it means “the fool is more blessed than the wise man because he does not see the matters from the logical point of view. Briefly, Cummings here intends to say that the person who pays attention to the syntax of things is a wholly fool because he will not be able to kiss his mistress. Relatively, he concluded the stanza by saying that the person who will waste the springtime (time of birthing, laughter and love) because of the syntax of things is utterly fool.

In the second stanza the things become clearer, as Cummings begins taking about his own personal feelings and emotions as he uses the possessive pronouns ‘I and my’. In this stanza the speaker or Cummings reiterates his attempts to persuade his lady to indulge in her passions with him as he convincingly and successively states “my blood approves” of his desires and “I swear by all flowers” that “kisses is better fate than wisdom”. More tellingly, the speaker till here is attempting seriously to convince his lady to indulge and promote feelings over syntax, kisses over wisdom and life over paragraph. His oath in the last line by flowers suggests the immediacy and urgency of his desires which will be accounted more clearly in the following stanzas.

In the third stanza stressing in his persuasion for his lady that it is time for love and emotions rather than for ideas and thoughts. Gale [8] explains that Cummings in this particular stanza is like Herrick in his insistence on his lady to have sexual love. Because the best image in his mind is “fluttering her eyelids”. In the second stanza Cummings utilizes the image of flowers which coherently connected the first second and third stanzas in three interrelated symbols of beauty spring,

nature beauty and the beauty of his lady which seems to him like the beauty of flowers. Besides, the speaker throughout the poem wanted to convince his lady that their life is like the cycle of the flowers life as he referred in the first stanza to “spring”-time of birth of the buds, then in the second stanza indicated the second phase that is blossoming-flowers-in the mature period (like the age of both himself and his lady) and in the last stanza “death” which is the last phase. Purposefully, the speaker is trying to convince his lady through using the cycle of flowers’ life that it is time for them to enjoy their passions and emotions before the time will elapse.

In the fourth stanza the speaker is reassuring his lady that they will be in a causal relationship. Thereby, they will be laughing and enjoying together in a sensual relation and love. Minutely, he explained his imagination of the moment that she will lean happily on his arms and enjoy the life delightfully. The stanza expresses the experience and perception of love. In the last line the speakers reminds his lady that “life is not a paragraph”. By using the word “paragraph, he means that life is not long as the paragraph. Undeniably, life has beginning and end like a paragraph but it is shorter and therefore they must take a chance in enjoying the most part of it.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker utters the ultimate end of their life if they would not make the most part of it, that “death is no a parenthesis”. This particular sentence was given my interpretations but the most relevant point is that death is like a parenthesis which followed by nothing except full-stop. Symbolically, the speaker used the word paragraph to indicate the shortness of human life and parenthesis which refers to the final end that has nothing after. Therefore, once the parenthesis is passed so there is no going back. Here the speaker is insisting on his lady that they have to take the best of their time by enjoying their passion before the advent of death [3]. The end of the poem has a similarity with the saying that he sang his didn’t he danced his did. The last line the speaker reminds his lady about the urgency of gratifying their passion before the advent of the final end.

Stylistic Analysis of the Poem

The present section undertakes a stylistic analysis of the poem. The stylistic analysis tends to be objective because it is based on the linguistic levels in the poem, such as graphological, phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic and semantic. Hence these linguistic levels and patterns will be analyzed extensively to understand the meaning of the poem and how these patterns are a reason for the meaning expressed in the poem.

Graphological Level

Graphology is the way of putting linguistic elements on the actual pages of a poem. To be precise, it is related to the analysis of written aspects of a

literary text, writers and poets sometimes arrange words and sentences in the form of an image in order to visualize the message. In fact, graphology is one of the easiest ways that poets use to express the meaning skillfully. It refers to the whole writing system, punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing [11].

In the poem *Since Feeling is First*, Cummings employs many graphological stylistic devices and shows foregrounding in many places through the poem. This poem consists of four stanzas and a separate single line located at the end of the poem. The first stanza consists of four lines, the second stanza consists of two lines, the third stanza consists of six lines and the fourth stanza consists of three lines. All these stanzas contain lines beginning with lower case letters, except the last line starts with upper case letter. This line looks like deviant graphologically on comparing with the previous lines that start with lower case letters.

Cummings violates the graphological rules such as punctuations, capitalization, decapitalization etc. He neglects full stops, commas, colons, question marks, capitalization etc.

He employs the capitalization only for three words in the whole poem. These words are (Spring) in line 16, (Don’t) in line 10, and (And) in line 16. The capitalization for the two words (Don’t) and (And) is not a deviation on the part of writer. It is the norm of language as these two words located at the beginning of sentence and line respectively. The capitalization of the first letter of the word (Spring) is a deviation and foregrounding on the part of writer.

Even the Pronoun (I) in line 10 is shown in lower case letter (i). The poet uses a dash in the beginning of the eleventh line. This mark emphasizes the pause and thinking deeply about the event intended in the heart of the poet.

One contracted form occurs in the poem in line 15. The verb to be (is) contracted as (’s), similar to the possessive marker (’s). This represents as a graphological deviation in the poem because Cummings foregrounds the verb to be (is) and uses contracted forms as (’s).

Phonological Level

Phonology as a branch of linguistics identifies distinctive sound group in a language and establishes how these sounds are grouped together to make meaningful sequences. Chatman 1967 introduces the term “Phonostylistics. He defines it as a subject the purpose of which is “the study of the ways in which an author elects to constrain the phonology of language beyond the normal requirements of phonetic system” [12]. The phonological stylistic devices are alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, repetition, meter, rhythm, etc. In *Since the Feeling is first*,

Cummings has employed the following phonological devices:

• **Alliteration**

Alliteration is one of the phonological stylistic devices that aims at imparting a melodic effect to the utterances. In Latin, alliteration had the meaning of 'repeating and playing upon the same letter' [13]. It is recognized by the repetition of the same sounds, particularly consonants sounds, in close succession at the beginning of successive words. In this poem, Cummings has used four alliterated sounds, /f/, /w/, /b/ and /l/.

They are shown in the following lines as follows:

- Since feeling is first Line 1
- While spring is in the world Line 6
- The best gesture of my brain is less than Line 11
- Laugh , learning back in my arms Line 14

In line 1, the fricative /f/ of feeling alliterates with the fricative consonant /f/ of first. The consonant /f/ is a voiceless labiodental fricative sound. In line 6, the approximant consonant /w/ of the word (while) alliterates with the other approximant /w/ of the word (the world). The consonant /w/ is a voiced bilabial approximant sound. In line 11, the consonant sound /b/ is repeated at the beginning of the words (best) and (brain). The consonant /b/ is a voiced bilabial plosive sound.

In line 14, the consonant sound /l/ takes place in the beginning of the words laugh and learning. This sound /l/ is phonologically characterized as a voiced alveolar lateral consonant. From the above alliterated sounds, we discover that three alliterated sounds are voiced and one sound is voiceless. They are /w/, /b/, /l/ and /f/ respectively.

• **Assonance**

Assonance is a sound pattern related to the repetition of vowel sounds in words occurring nearby one another. It is the occurrence of homogenous vowels in adjacent words in a poetic line [14]. In fact, vowel sounds are considered to be very melodious to pronounce and effective in creating musical notes in a poem.

In this poem, the poet has used the assonance in many places. The vowel sound /i/ occurs as assonance in seven lines whereas the vowel sound /e/ occurs only in one line. The vowel sound /l/ is phonologically characterized as short high front unrounded monophthong whereas the vowel sound /e/ is phonologically characterized as short mid front unrounded monophthong. The following lines show how the assonance occurs in the whole poem:

- Since feeling is first Lines 1

- To the syntax of things Line 3
- Will never wholly kiss you Line 4
- While spring is in the world Line 6
- The best gesture of my brain is less than Line 11
- Your eyelids flutter which says Line 12
- Laugh, leaning back in my arms Line 14
- And death I think is no parenthesis Line 16

• **Consonance**

Consonance is the repetition of a consonant in two or more words in a poetic verse. Consonants are known as part of this sound pattern when they repeat at the end of two or more words, unlike alliteration, in which the initial consonants repeat. According to Abrams 2008, consonance is the repetition of two or more consonants with changing overlapping vowels. Also, the final consonants are repeated with different former consonants. Wales 1989 defines consonance as end-alliteration or consonantal assonance. In this poem, Cummings has employed this phonological effect in three lines with different consonant sounds /n/ , /z/ and /f/ respectively. These following lines show how the consonance occurs in this poem on some lines.

- The best gesture of my brainn is less thann Line 11 /n/
- Your eyelidz flutter which sayz Line 12 /z/
- For life's not a paragraph Line 15 /f/

From the above lines, we find out that two consonants /n/ and /z/ are voiced and one consonant /f/ is voiceless. The consonant /n/ is phonologically characterized as voiced alveolar nasal sound, the consonant /z/ also as voiced alveolar nasal sound but the consonant /f/ as voiceless labiodental fricative sound.

• **Semi Consonance**

Semi consonance is one kind of phonological effect. It is similar to consonance, just the different is that some sounds belong to the same manner of articulation but they are sometimes different in place of articulation. Cummings has employed this effect in four lines.

- Since feeling is first Line 1 /s/, /z/
- To the syntax of thingsz Line 3/s/, /z/
- Than wisdomn Line 9 /n/, /m/
- And death I think is no parenthesis Line 16 /z/, /s/

From the above lines, we can say that the consonants /s/ and /z/ are both alveolar fricative but the /s/ is voiceless and /z/ is voiced. The sound /n/ and /m/ are both voiced nasal but the /n/ is voiced alveolar nasal whereas the /m/ is voiced bilabial nasal

Lexical and morphological levels:

The poem exhibits an interesting account of lexical and morphological patterns. This analysis too helps the readers anticipate the theme and subject

matter of the poem. These linguistic items are considered of primary importance in the discourse of poetry. In fact, lexical patterns contribute to the unity and cohesion in poetry. These stylistic devices will be discussed as follows:

• Repetition of the same word but with a different grammatical function

In this poem, Cummings has employed the linguistic item (kiss) in line 4 as a verb and in line 8 as a plural noun (kisses).

Will never wholly kiss you Line 4
 And kisses are better fate Line 8

• Features of antonyms

Life # death
 Cry # laugh

• Varied semantic fields and collocations (Lexical sets)

- Semantic field of language represents the following linguistic items : (syntax, paragraph, parenthesis)
- Semantic field of love and emotions represents the following emotional items. (kiss, lady, feeling, flowers)
- Semantic field of body represents the following items (blood, arms, eyelids, brain) related with each other or share some meaning similarity in the context of the poem. In fact, they add to the coherence of the poem. They play important roles for the clarity of the specific context.

• Function words in the poem

Lines	Function words
1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4	Is, to is ,to ,the, of, you, never
5, 6, 5, 6	to, b to, be, a, is, in, the
7, 8, 7,8,9, 10, 11, 12	My, my, and, are, don't, the , of, my, is, your, s',
13. 1 13, 14,15, 16	We, we , are, for, in , my, for, isn't, a, and, I, is no

• Content words in the poem

Lines	Content words
1, 2, 1,2,3,4,	Since, feeling, first, who, pays, any, attention, syntax, things, will, will ,wholly, kiss
5, 6, 5 , 6	Whol wholly, fool, while, spring, world
7, 8, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	Blood , approves, kisses, better, fate, than, wisdom, lady, swear, all, flowers, cry, best, gesture, brain, less, than, eyelids, flutter, says
14 14	Which
13, 1 13, 14,15, 16	Each each, other, then, laugh, learning back, arms, life, paragraph

• Morphological process: Inflection

This poem employs inflectional process and neglects the derivation, affixation little bit and compounding totally. The words seem to be very simple. The inflectional morphemes appear at the end of the following words as bound morphemes:

Pays, things, approves, kisses, flowers eyelids, says, arms

Line 11

Syntactic Level

The syntactic structures in a poem are of utmost importance as they hold the primary position in analyzing it after the lexicons. Sentences are more important carriers of meaning than phonological, lexical or morphological features in a poem.

• Repetition of the same lexicon

Gargesth 1990 mentions that the repetition of the same lexicon, generally, functions to depict a state of great emotional excitement or stress and emphasis. Cummings has used this technique in lines 4 and 5 by repeating the item (wholly) and also in lines 9 and 11 by repeating the item (than).

• Subordinating Conjunction

The poem begins with the subordination conjunction (since) to contribute in forming a complex sentence. Another subordination conjunction occurs in line 6 (while) to form another complex sentence. The last subordination conjunction (for) occurs in line (15).

- Will never wholly kiss you;
Line 4

- Wholly to be a fool
Line 5

- Than wisdom
Line 9

- The best gesture of my brain is less than

• Coordinating Conjunction

This coordinating conjunction (and) occurs twice throughout the poem to contribute in forming a compound sentence. Once occurs in line 8 and another time occurs in the last line of the poem. In fact, the conjunction (and) has been used to carry meaning from one line to another.

human being who can speak and express many things. Here, eyelids flutter is compared metaphorically to a human being who has the ability to express and say utterances and respond to all movements in this life.

- **Symbolism**

According to Abrams [14], all words are symbols. So, symbol is applied to a word or set of words that refer to something which has additional range of unspecified reference. Cummings has employed the symbolism in line 6. The word (spring) is symbolized to the (youth) and in the period of age when a human being is very young.

- **Irony and Ambiguity**

Ironically, the first word in the poem endorsing passion is a word (since) that implies a rational argument. This word begins by taking for granted that (feeling) is somehow (first), First in what ways? First in importance? First in time? Either of these possibilities would fit the context, and perhaps both meanings are relevant? Another Irony occurs in Line 5 on the word (wholly).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, e. e Cummings is one of the famous modern American poets who is really known for his innovative and unfamiliar poetic composition and expression. Thereby, despite of what the writers say; Cummings was and will continue to have a very large audience in the United States and all over the world as he introduced literature through unfamiliar styles and innovative forms. Therefore, he is one of the prolific American love poets who subtly differentiated between his love and lust poetic composition. *Since Feeling is First* is one of love poems which were similarly composed with innovative style and unfamiliar grammatical and syntactical structures. Hence, the paper presented Cummings as a love poet who uniquely combined logic and personal experience in explaining his love. *Since Feeling is First* is one of his best love poems that were literary discussed and stylistically analyzed. The poem was examined throughout all the linguistic levels graph logical, phonological, lexical and morphological and semantic levels.

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