

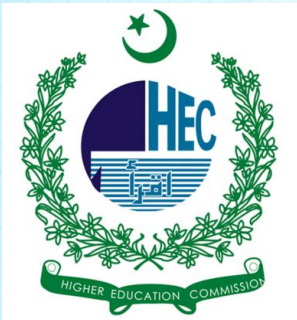
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**Everyday Language and Power Structures: A Critical Discourse
Analysis of Selected Poems by Billy Collins and Wendy Cope**



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Abstract

This research examines the hidden ideologies in accessible, humor-tinged contemporary poetry by applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Billy Collins' *Forgetfulness* and *Introduction to Poetry* and Wendy Cope's *The Orange*. Using a qualitative design, the research incorporates (1) textual analysis — close readings of diction, metaphor, tone, and narrative voice — with (2) discursive practice — examination of production and reception contexts, including poetic conventions, authorial intent, and reader interpretation — and (3) social practice, which positions poems within wider institutional and ideological formations. Focusing on representative poems by Billy Collins and Wendy Cope, the findings demonstrate that ostensibly apolitical, user-friendly verse both reproduces and destabilizes prevailing power relations, reflecting the subtle ideological work performed by accessible lyric forms. The study therefore exhibits CDA's adaptability as a literary-analytic tool and highlights modern poetry's capacity to reflect and contest social discourse

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Fairclough's three-dimensional model; Textual Analysis; Contemporary poetry; Ideology; Billy Collins; Wendy Cope; Social practice

Intrudction

In contemporary society, the choices the authors make in everyday language—though they may seem innocuous—often conceal intricate power structure that oversee social interaction. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as Norman Fairclough explains, empowers scholars to uncover the obscured hierarchies and ideologies secured in ordinary speech (Fairclough 12). By examining the underlying assumptions of colloquial expressions, CDA exposes how linguistic practices both reveal and reinforce structures of power and resistance in our mundane lives.

Scholars have refined Fairclough's views by highlighting distinct dimensions of discourse. Teun A. van Dijk underscores the role of mental models, arguing that discourse both forms and is formed by social cognition (van Dijk 47), whereas Ruth Wodak's Discourse–Historical Approach maintains that only by tracing the

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genealogies of discursive formations can uncover the strategic purposes of language in reproducing power (Wodak 29). James Paul Gee lengthens CDA into education, defining discourse as a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, acting, and interacting that together create “Discourses” with a capital D (Gee 134). Mary Louise Pratt, in turn, conceptualizes discourse as “contact zones” where power is negotiated through collective or coercive encounters across cultural borders (Pratt 7). Together, these views—cognitive, historical, pedagogical, and intercultural—establish a manifold toolkit for analyzing how language both supports and overthrows power.

Against this theoretical backdrop, this research uses the Critical Discourse Analysis to study how two modern lyric poets—Billy Collins and Wendy Cope—employs deceptively simple diction to negotiate power structures. In Collins’s *Introduction to Poetry*, the final image mocks academic authority by portraying interpretation as a forced act rather than an invitation (Collins ll. 17–18). Likewise, Cope’s *The Orange* harnesses everyday language and humor to both mirror and challenge prevailing social values. Through a systematic analysis of lexico-grammatical structures, metaphorical patterns, and narrative voice in these poems, the study touches how ostensibly everyday language functions as a site of ideological complicity and critique.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to apply Critical Discourse Analysis to selected poems by Billy Collins and Wendy Cope, finding hidden ideologies in their accessible, humor-tinged verses. It intends to reveal how textual, discursive practice, and social practice, underlining contemporary poetry’s role in reflecting and challenging societal norms and power structures.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, which integrates three interrelated levels of analysis: (1) Textual Analysis examines the poems’ linguistic features—such as lexical choices, metaphors, and rhetorical devices—to uncover how meaning is constructed; (2) Discursive Practice explores how the poems are produced and interpreted within social contexts, focusing on poetic conventions, audience reception, and cultural intertextuality ; and (3) Sociocultural Practice

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investigates the broader social, ideological, and cultural contexts, revealing how the poems reflect or challenge societal norms and power structures, including attitudes toward memory, aging, and the significance of everyday experiences. This model provides a comprehensive understanding of how language, discourse, and social structures interrelate in contemporary poetry, revealing underline ideologies and power dynamics embedded in seemingly simple texts.

Literature Review

This review examines the existing scholarship that employs Fairclough's model in poetic contexts—highlighting both the insights gained into ideological negotiation through form and everyday diction and the methodological challenges encountered—and reveals a significant gap: despite the apparent simplicity of poets like Billy Collins and Wendy Cope. By focusing on Collins's *Introduction to Poetry* and *Forgetfulness* alongside Cope's *The Orange*, this review demonstrates how CDA can lighten the subtle ways in which straightforward language practices mediate power and resistance, thereby laying the groundwork for a more nuanced application of Fairclough's model to contemporary lyric poetry.

Sabir and Kanwal (2018) applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model to Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice," demonstrating that the poem's seemingly elemental imagery is imbued with competing moral imperatives. Their textual analysis shows how Frost's choice of words like "desire" and "hatred" functions to align the reader with particular value systems, while the poem's metaphorical structure reinforces a dichotomy between creation and destruction (Sabir and Kanwal 90). Moreover, Bezar et al. (2023) examined William Blake's "Ah Sun-flower," revealing through discursive practice how the sunflower's "weary" upward gaze encodes eighteenth-century tensions between individual aspiration and institutional constraint. Their study further illustrates how the poem's repetitive phrasing normalizes subordination even as its imagery subtly gestures toward emancipation (Bezar et al. 53).

Hassan et al. (2019) utilized Fairclough's framework to analyze Fraser Anning's Senate speech, showing that political rhetoric—through features such as nominalization and passive constructions—can obscure agency and legitimize exclusionary ideologies (Hassan et al. 34). In a literary context, Faiz ul Hassan et al. (2022) conducted a CDA of Mr. Gohar's poetry collection *Metaphors*, uncovering

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how recurring lexical fields of “void,” “drift,” and “hollow” reflect and resist prevailing narratives of loss, escapism, and vulnerability in contemporary life (Faiz ul Hassan et al. 728). Finally, Bezar et al. (2023) also analyzed Blake’s “The Sick Rose” alongside Rashid’s “Mery Bhi Hai Kuch Khaab,” illustrating how the clandestine wound of the sick rose evokes repression, while Rashid’s dream-scapes challenge readers to recognize the latent potential for social transformation (Bezar et al. 78). These studies underscore the versatility of Fairclough’s model in dissecting the intricate relationship between language and societal structures within poetic texts.

Despite the demonstrated applicability of Fairclough’s model to poetry, there is a conspicuous absence of studies focusing on contemporary poets like Billy Collins and Wendy Cope. Collins’s *Introduction to Poetry* and *Forgetfulness* employ accessible language and humor to delve into complex themes such as the nature of poetic engagement and memory loss. Similarly, Cope’s *The Orange* captures the profundity of everyday experiences. Applying CDA to these poems could reveal underlying ideologies and societal commentaries that are not immediately apparent.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative design using Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA to examine how Collins’s *Introduction to Poetry* and *Forgetfulness* and Cope’s *The Orange* negotiate ideology through simple language. Poems were chosen for their thematic resonance with everyday experience, stylistic accessibility, and critical visibility. First, a close, line-by-line textual analysis identifies lexico-grammatical structures (diction, metaphor, and syntax), tonal shifts, and narrative voice. Next, discursive practice analysis traces each poem’s production contexts (publication history, authorial commentary) and reception across reviews and reader responses, revealing how conventions and cultural norms outline interpretation. Finally, social practice analysis situates the poems within broader Anglophone discourses of art, memory, and the ordinary to assess how they reinforce or subvert leading ideologies of value, accessibility, and emotional expression in contemporary poetry.

Objectives

1. To examine the linguistic structures and stylistic choices in contemporary poetry, exploring how language and structure contribute to the construction of meaning.
2. To analyze how these poems reflect, support, or challenge societal norms,

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ideologies, and power relations, particularly regarding memory, engagement with poetry, and the significance of everyday experiences.

Research Questions

1. How do the lexical choices, metaphors, and syntactic structures in these poems outline their themes and meanings?
2. How do these poems mirror or challenge prevailing social ideologies, such as attitudes toward poetry, memory, and the significance of the mundane?

Analysis

This segment critically investigates the three selected poems to expose the deeper societal meanings rooted in everyday poetic language. Through this analysis, readers gain a nuanced understanding of how these ostensibly simple texts engage with complex cultural issues such as memory, education, identity, and emotional well-being. This is achieved by examining their textual features, the discursive milieus in which the poems are produced and received, and the wider social ideologies they reflect or challenge.

Textual Analysis

Billy Collins' *Forgetfulness*

Collins applies a conversational tone to reveal creeping memory loss. The lexical resources of the poem blend the mundane with poetic: words including “author,” “title,” “quadratic equation,” and “capital of Paraguay” contrast with mythic descriptions such as a “southern hemisphere of the brain,” a “little fishing village where there are no phones,” and a “dark mythological river whose name begins with an L” [4][5]. The river metaphor refers to Lethe (forgetfulness) in Greek mythology, subtly appealing the unconsciousness. Collins employs second-person narration “you” to create an intimate, confiding voice. Grammatical structure is mainly simple, with enjambment and no strict rhyme, mirroring the disorienting drift of memory. The first line – “The name of the author is the first to go” – sets a theme of identity loss [4]. The series (“author... title... plot... conclusion... entire novel”) employs polysyndeton without conjunctions, underlining how one memory after another disappears. The poem forms imagery through a series of examples: mathematical concepts and state symbols “kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye” [6], yet the casual, humorous tone e.g. “oblivion where you will join those who have even

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forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle” [7] emphasizes human fragility. Structurally, Collins breaks lines mid-thought (enjambment), for example splitting “No wonder you rise in the middle of the night / to look up the date of a famous battle” [8]. This reflects the impatient searching mind of someone forgetful. Hence, Collins’s lexical contrasts (ordinary life vs. myth), metaphors of retirement and drift, and loose syntax mutually create a poignant yet cynical portrayal of aging memory loss.

Billy Collins’ *Introduction to Poetry*

Collins crafted this poem as a speaker (likely a teacher) lecturing students. The dictation is clear and metaphorical. The speaker exhorts the readers to treat a poem as physical and playful entities. The poem opens with imperative verbs: “take a poem and hold it up to the light like a color slide” or “press an ear against its hive” [9]. These imageries of sensory exploration (light, hearing) and immersion (dropping “a mouse into a poem” to “watch him probe his way out”) boost open-ended discovery. The tone of speaker is enduring and inquisitive at first. The language is mostly conversant and concrete e.g. “color slide,” “hive,” “waterski,” “light switch”. Collins compares this with a unexpected shift in the final lines: the same situation turns vicious when the students “tie the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it... beating it with a hose” [10]. The dingy action words -“tie,” “torture,” “beat”- blatantly contrast with the earlier playful imperatives. This structural pivot – marked by “But all they want to do” – and the short, brutal imagery satirize analytical dissection. Grammatically, the poem is free verse with no rhyme, but it employs strong line breaks for effect e.g. “But all they want to do / is tie the poem to a chair” splits student impulse onto its own lines. The alternating pronouns (“I” vs “they”) also define roles: “I ask them to...” versus “they begin beating it with a hose”. Generally, the textual structures (metaphors of exploration, ordinary verbs, and sudden violent imagery) dramatize a clash between an ideal of poetic play and a more violent interpretation approach.

Wendy Cope’s *The Orange*

Cope’s short poem in first person narration celebrates simple pleasure. The language is plain and conversational: words like “huge orange,” “laugh,” “quarters,” “half,” “shopping,” “walk in the park,” “peace,” “contentment,” “jobs,” “list”[11][12]. This ordinary, even routine, vocabulary underlines the theme of everyday life.

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Grammatically, the lyric is free verse, essentially declarative sentences, with one sudden short sentence at the end: “I love you. I’m glad I exist.”[12]. This last line break and the two simple clauses intensify emotional impact. The lack of overt metaphor (an orange is not metaphorically described, but its physical existence “made us all laugh” [13]) emphasizes sincerity. The structure flows chronologically through lunch-time: the speaker purchases an orange, share it, feels delight; then notes “the rest of the day was quite easy” as she finishes tasks, ending with the heartfelt declaration. Notably, Cope uses an em dash (“huge orange—the size of it made us all laugh” [13]) and commas to maintain a spoken feel. The sound of poem is gentle – light enjambments and no heavy punctuation except at the end. Cope’s simple syntax, concrete details, and straightforward diction (accentuated by the emotional punch of the closing statements) mirror the theme of finding deep gratitude in mundane experience.

Discursive Practice

Production and Distribution: Each lyric’s origin and circulation create its meaning Billy Collins (a former U.S. Poet Laureate and long-time poetry instructor) pens down from an educator’s assessment. The speaker openly mirrors classroom pedagogy in his poem “*Introduction to Poetry*” (first published in 1988). Since then, it has been extensively dispersed anthologies and teacher resources. In fact, Collins’s instructions (“I say drop a mouse... hold it up to the light” [9]) are frequently cited in teaching. For instance, an educational study explicitly leveraged Collins’s imagery: teachers encouraged students to “drop a mouse” into their writing projects and *not* to “tie their research in a chair and torture the truth out of it,” directly quoting Collins’s metaphors [15]. This shows how “*Introduction to Poetry*” is referenced in pedagogical discourse to promote creative learning. Similarly, “*Forgetfulness*” (from *Questions About Angels*, 1999) appeared originally in *Poetry Magazine* and subsequently in Collin’s collections and poetry anthologies. It has likely been read aloud at literary events (e.g. Poetry Everywhere on PBS) and in context of discussions on aging and memory (the Academy of American Poets lists “*Aging*” as a theme). Wendy Cope’s *The Orange*, published ca. 1989, has seen renewed attention: Cope describes writing it in 1989, and it is now often shared in collections (e.g. *The Orange and Other Poems*, 2023) and online. Faber & Faber reports that *The Orange* has gone viral on social media, with

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TikTok and other users posting it widely [19]. Its polite language has made it popular in English classrooms and literary forums. Thus, all three poems circulate beyond print: Collins's poems influence pedagogy, and Cope's poem resounds in contemporary digital culture [15][19].

Reception and Interpretation: Readers bring expectation framed by contexts. In educational settings *Introduction to Poetry* often shapes discussions about teaching approaches. The narrator of poem positions readers as students ("I ask them to..." [9]) and casts others as the resistant classroom. This poet-as-teacher voice invites the viewers (often actual students or teachers) to review their own approach. In cultural settings, the poem is interpreted as a critique of formalistic literary analysis. The WAC study demonstrates that readers recognize Collins's metaphors as arguments for exploratory learning [15]. on the other hand, *Forgetfulness* addresses a general audience (indicated by its tone and second-person address) that may comprise older readers or those visualizing aging. Collins's understated humor in *Forgetfulness* prompts readers to mirror on their own memories. Workshops and study guides (e.g. Super summary [20]) note how the poem provokes sympathy for memory's decay and encourages self-reflection. Cope's *The Orange* famously addresses the speaker's partner (she later revealed), but it invites any reader to share in the joy of small choices. The direct line "I love you. I'm glad I exist" [12] has been read both as a romantic confession and as an affirmation of life itself. Faber's analysis notes that its "simplicity and directness" speak to readers, many of whom find comfort and inspiration in the poem [19]. In classrooms and online, readers often react emotionally, discussing personal anecdotes of similar moments. Thus, discursively, each poem is produced for a specific context (classroom for *Intro*; general readership for *Forgetfulness*; personal yet universal for *The Orange*) and is consumed through those lenses. The poets place readers through voice: Collins's use of "you" in "*Forgetfulness*" creates empathy, while his "I" vs. *they* in "*Introduction*" frames a dialogue. Cope's first-person narrative in "*The Orange*" invites readers into an intimate scene. These discursive choices guide interpretation: whether one sees the poem as original or didactic, personal or universal.

Social Practice

Fairclough's model social practice invites readers to relate these poems to larger

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ideologies and social themes. Collins' "*Forgetfulness*" engages the social phenomenon of aging memory decline. Through wry acceptance, the poem normalizes the process and challenges any belief that a person's value depends on how much they remember. The metaphor of memories retiring "to a fishing village where there are no phones"[21] wittily suggests a gentle, private departure of the mind. In society, there is often distress or stigma around losing memory; Collins's treatment, however, shapes it as a natural, almost peaceful voyage "down a dark mythological river" (Lethe)[5]. This poem can be read as challenging a youth-centered culture by validating old age's subtle poetry. The poem also contrasts formal knowledge (equations, battle dates) with human connection (love poem by heart), perhaps criticizing an ideology that values factual memory over emotional memory. In this way, "*Forgetfulness*" aligns with more humanistic or existential perspectives, implying that identity e.g. "author", "I" ultimately survives even as trivial facts disappear.

Collins' *Introduction to Poetry* employs educational ideology. It resists a dominant approach to literary study like treating text as an object to be dissected for a single "correct" meaning. The violent image of "tortur[ing] a confession" from the poem metaphorically reveals a power dynamic in classrooms (or literary discourse) where teachers or critics demand conformity to their interpretation [10]. Collins's poem, therefore, resists the hegemonic educational practice of reductive analysis. As Badenhorst et al. claims, the poem's metaphors have even been re-employed to encourage creative pedagogy in research writing [15]. This shows that *Introduction to Poetry* mirrors broader discourses about authority and creativity in knowledge production. By celebrating playful, sensory engagement with poetry, Collins's text supports an ideology that values subjective experience and creative freedom over rigid power. In doing so, it aligns with liberal educational theories and critiques top-down, objective-centric ideologies.

The Orange by Wendy Cope discusses cultural values of mindfulness and gratitude. In an age often controlled by consumerism or the search for grand experiences, the poem's celebration of a shared orange as a moment of "peace and contentment" emphasizes a counter-ideology: that fulfillment often lies in simple, communal acts [22]. Faber's analysis notes the poem's "emotional resonance" in

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ordinary gestures and calls it “deeply grateful about the importance of friendship, of sharing, of appreciating what you have” [23]. This reveals and reinforces a social practice of valuing mental well-being and interpersonal connection, resonating with movements that prioritize self-care and authenticity. The closing affirmation “I love you. I’m glad I exist”[12] can be seen as embracing a life-affirming ideology (perhaps echoing humanistic or post-romantic values). It subtly challenges cynicism or alienation by affirming relationships and existence itself. In a society where everyday moments may be overlooked, “*The Orange*” defies the ideology that happiness must be extraordinary; instead it locates joy in the mundane, thus aligning with contemporary discourses on finding meaning in everyday life.

These poems together explore how alienation prompts a renegotiation of identity, exploring the fragile boundaries of selfhood. For example, *Forgetfulness* charts a subtle alienation from one’s former identity, with familiar names and facts becoming unreachable. However, it aligns the readers to a shared human experience of change. In *Introduction to Poetry*, Collins stages how academic constraints estrange students from the poetic experience. He thereby champions reclamation of poetry as blissful rather than opaque. Cope’s *The Orange* counters alienation by underlining communal bonds (sharing fruit with friends) and a personal affirmation. In ideological terms, the poems each negotiate tensions between individual experience and social structures: aging versus society’s neglect of the elderly, creative freedom versus institutional demands, simple love versus cultural complexity. By this means, the language in each poem both exemplifies and gently subverts the prevailing ideologies that form notions of memory, education, and happiness

Finding and Discussion

Billy Collins and Wendy Cope demonstrate how language can both uphold and undermine dominant discourses. Collins’s playful metaphors including waterskiing across a poem’s surface, pressing an ear to its hive and his personification of memory’s slipping, names drifting, addresses fading, invite sensory engagement and reveal our shared vulnerability, quietly subverting rigid analysis and cultural fears of aging. Cope’s simple diction and domestic imagery in *The Orange* celebrate the simple joyfulness of peeling a fruit as a quiet rebuke to material ambition, while tonal shifts, spare structure and intertextual nods across these poems alter cultural symbols

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into friendly, reflective moments.

Beneath their divergent surfaces, all three poems employ a deeper ideological project: they question whose voices and ways of knowing are sanctioned in society. Collins's *Introduction to Poetry* critiques educational standards that treat poems as fixed puzzles rather than living experiences, and *Forgetfulness* centers around personal and collective histories slipping into oblivion as a commentary on how societies sideline the aging or those who "forget." In *The Orange*, Cope's focus on mindfulness and gratitude for everyday moments becomes a quiet but potent form of resistance to consumerist, goal-driven ideologies that commodify happiness. Together, these works lighten how poetic discourse can expose and reshape the social practices that govern interpretation, memory, and value, urging us to reconsider not only what we read and remember, but how we live and find meaning in the routine.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the linguistic structures and discursive strategies employed in Billy Collins's *Introduction to Poetry* and *Forgetfulness*, and Wendy Cope's *The Orange* through the lens of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). By analyzing the lexical choices, syntactic structures, and metaphorical language in these poems, the research demonstrates how accessible and everyday expressions can carry deep ideological significance. These poetic texts utilize humor, simplicity, and everyday scenarios not merely for aesthetic value but as tools for interrogating social norms, challenging dominant perceptions of poetry, memory, and daily life, and foregrounding themes often marginalized in literary discourse. The study reveals how poetic form becomes a site of both personal reflection and subtle social critique.

Moreover, this research underscores the capacity of contemporary poetry to participate in broader cultural and ideological conversations, making literary texts relevant and resonant in modern contexts. The poems analyzed show that democratized language and ordinary experiences do not dilute poetic depth but, instead, offer new ways to engage with complex issues such as the devaluation of art, cognitive decline, and emotional wellbeing in everyday life. Through a CDA approach, this article has demonstrated how contemporary poets like Collins and Cope craft verse that is both linguistically straightforward and ideologically rich,

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fostering reader engagement while subtly negotiating power relations and societal expectations. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary research that bridges literary criticism with discourse analysis, affirming the role of poetry as a reflective and transformative medium within cultural discourse

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