

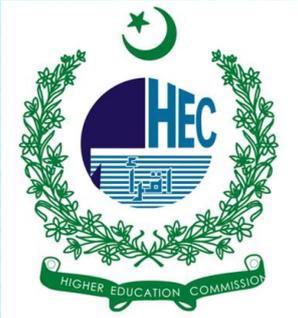
**Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

**<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>**

**Foregrounding and Identity Conflict in Derek Walcott's *A Far Cry from Africa***



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**Abstract**

This study examines Derek Walcott's poem *A Far Cry from Africa* as a representation of colonial violence and the psychological conflict of diasporic identity. The main argument of the study is that Walcott uses stylistic foregrounding to highlight the brutality of colonial conflict and the poet's inner division between African heritage and European cultural influence. The main objective is to explore how linguistic and stylistic features reveal themes of racial ideology, colonial oppression, and identity crisis. The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis method and applies foregrounding theory as the theoretical framework (Leech, 1969). The analytical tools include the examination of semantic deviation, metaphor, imagery, syntactic deviation, and parallelism in the poem. The findings show that Walcott deliberately foregrounds violent imagery, contrasting metaphors, and syntactic patterns to intensify the emotional and ideological impact of colonial conflict and divided identity. The study contributes to stylistic and postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how poetic language functions as a powerful medium to critique colonial ideology and represent the fragmented consciousness of the postcolonial subject. The novelty of the study lies in integrating stylistic foregrounding with postcolonial interpretation to provide a clearer understanding of how Walcott's language constructs the experience of cultural and psychological conflict.

**Keywords:** Foregrounding, stylistics, diaspora, colonialism, Derek Walcott, identity conflict

**Background of the Study**

Postcolonial poetry frequently explores the historical trauma caused by colonialism and the displacement of cultures and identities. Derek Walcott, a Caribbean poet of mixed African and European heritage, often writes about the complex realities of colonial history and diasporic identity. His poem *A Far Cry from Africa* reflects the violence of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya and the moral dilemma experienced by the poet who feels emotionally connected to both Africa and Europe (Walcott, 1996). Stylistically, literary texts often achieve their aesthetic and ideological effects through foregrounding. Foregrounding is a concept introduced by the Prague School linguists,

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particularly Jan Mukarovsky, who argued that literary language differs from ordinary language because it draws attention to itself through deviation and stylistic patterns (Mukarovsky, 1964). Geoffrey Leech further developed this concept by explaining that foregrounding occurs mainly through deviation and parallelism, which make certain elements of the text more prominent and meaningful (Leech, 1969).

Several critics have applied stylistic analysis to literary texts in order to understand how language constructs meaning. Leech and Short (2007) argue that stylistics helps reveal how linguistic choices contribute to the interpretation of literature. In the context of postcolonial poetry, stylistic devices often highlight themes such as cultural conflict, racial discrimination, and political violence. Walcott's poem is a strong example where stylistic features foreground the brutality of colonial history and the psychological conflict of hybrid identity.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Although *A Far Cry from Africa* has been widely studied as a postcolonial poem, less attention has been given to its linguistic structure and stylistic techniques. Many interpretations focus primarily on historical and political themes, while the role of language in shaping these meanings remains underexplored. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is how foregrounding techniques such as deviation and parallelism contribute to the representation of colonial violence and identity conflict in the poem.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on foregrounding theory, which is a central concept in stylistics. Foregrounding occurs when language becomes striking or prominent because it deviates from normal linguistic patterns or uses repetition to emphasize certain ideas (Leech, 1969).

According to Leech (1969), foregrounding mainly occurs through deviation and parallelism. Deviation refers to the breaking of normal linguistic rules or expectations. This may include semantic deviation, lexical deviation, syntactic deviation, graphological deviation, and phonological deviation. Such deviations attract the reader's attention and highlight the artistic function of language. Parallelism, on the other hand, involves repetition of structures, sounds, or patterns which creates rhythm and emphasis in a literary text.

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Foregrounding theory was originally developed by Mukarovsky (1964), who argued that poetic language differs from ordinary language because it disrupts normal communication patterns. These disruptions make the language more expressive and meaningful. In Walcott's poem, foregrounding techniques emphasize themes of colonial violence and identity conflict.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative stylistic analysis of Derek Walcott's poem *A Far Cry from Africa*. The analysis focuses on identifying foregrounding techniques within the poem and interpreting their significance in relation to the themes of colonialism and diasporic identity. Selected lines from the poem are examined in order to identify semantic deviation, metaphorical language, imagery, syntactic structures, and parallel patterns. The analysis is guided by the theoretical framework of foregrounding proposed by Leech (1969) and Mukarovsky (1964).

## Analysis and Discussion

Foregrounding in *A Far Cry from Africa* can be observed through several stylistic techniques that highlight the violence of colonial conflict and the poet's psychological division.

One example of **semantic deviation** appears in the line:

"Corpses are scattered through a paradise" (Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

The word "paradise" normally represents peace, beauty, and harmony. However, Walcott juxtaposes it with "corpses," creating a shocking contrast. This semantic deviation foregrounds the irony that Africa, which is often imagined as a natural paradise, has become a site of violence due to colonial conflict.

Another example of semantic deviation appears in the line:

"Waste no compassion on these separate dead" (Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

The phrase "separate dead" is unusual because death normally eliminates social differences. Walcott uses this expression to highlight the racial and political divisions created by colonialism.

**Metaphorical foregrounding** is also prominent in the poem. Walcott writes:

"The gorilla wrestles with the superman" (Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

This metaphor compares the colonial conflict to a struggle between a gorilla and a superman. The metaphor reflects the racist colonial ideology that portrayed Africans

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as primitive animals and Europeans as superior beings. At the same time, the metaphor criticizes and exposes the absurdity of such racial hierarchies.

Walcott also employs powerful imagery to foreground the brutality of colonial violence. Expressions such as “bloodstreams of the veldt,” “corpses are scattered,” and “white child hacked in bed” create vivid and disturbing images of violence (Walcott, 1996). These images emphasize the destructive consequences of colonial conflict and intensify the emotional impact of the poem.

Another important stylistic feature is syntactic deviation, which highlights the speaker’s personal conflict. For example:

“I who am poisoned with the blood of both” (Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

The unusual structure places strong emphasis on the word “I,” indicating the speaker’s internal struggle. The phrase “blood of both” symbolizes Walcott’s mixed heritage African and European which causes his sense of divided identity.

Parallelism is also used to reinforce the recurring theme of violence. Walcott writes:

“Again brutish necessity wipes its hands / Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again”

(Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

The repetition of the word “again” emphasizes that colonial violence is not a single event but a repeated historical pattern.

The poem reaches its emotional climax in the line:

“Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?” (Walcott, 1996, p. 1820).

The phrase “divided to the vein” strongly foregrounds the idea of internal division. This line reflects Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, which describes the psychological tension experienced by individuals who belong to two cultural identities simultaneously (Du Bois, 1903).

### **Findings**

The analysis reveals several important findings. First, semantic deviation in the poem highlights the irony of violence occurring within a land described as “paradise.” Second, metaphorical language exposes the racial ideology underlying colonial discourse. Third, violent imagery intensifies the emotional and moral impact of the poem. Fourth, syntactic deviation emphasizes the poet’s personal struggle with hybrid identity. Finally, parallelism reinforces the recurring nature of colonial violence.

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## **Conclusion**

Foregrounding plays a crucial role in Derek Walcott's *A Far Cry from Africa*. Through stylistic devices such as semantic deviation, metaphor, imagery, syntactic variation, and parallelism, the poet highlights the brutality of colonial conflict and the psychological tension of diasporic identity. These linguistic techniques make the poem emotionally powerful and ideologically significant. The stylistic features therefore reinforce the central theme of cultural and moral conflict within the context of colonial history. By foregrounding the language of violence and division, Walcott successfully exposes the tragic consequences of colonialism and the complex identity of the postcolonial subject.

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