

A grayscale photograph of a field of tulips. In the center foreground, a single tulip is highlighted in a vibrant blue color, contrasting with the grayscale background of other tulips. The blue tulip is in sharp focus, while the others are slightly blurred.

# Foregrounding & Interpretation

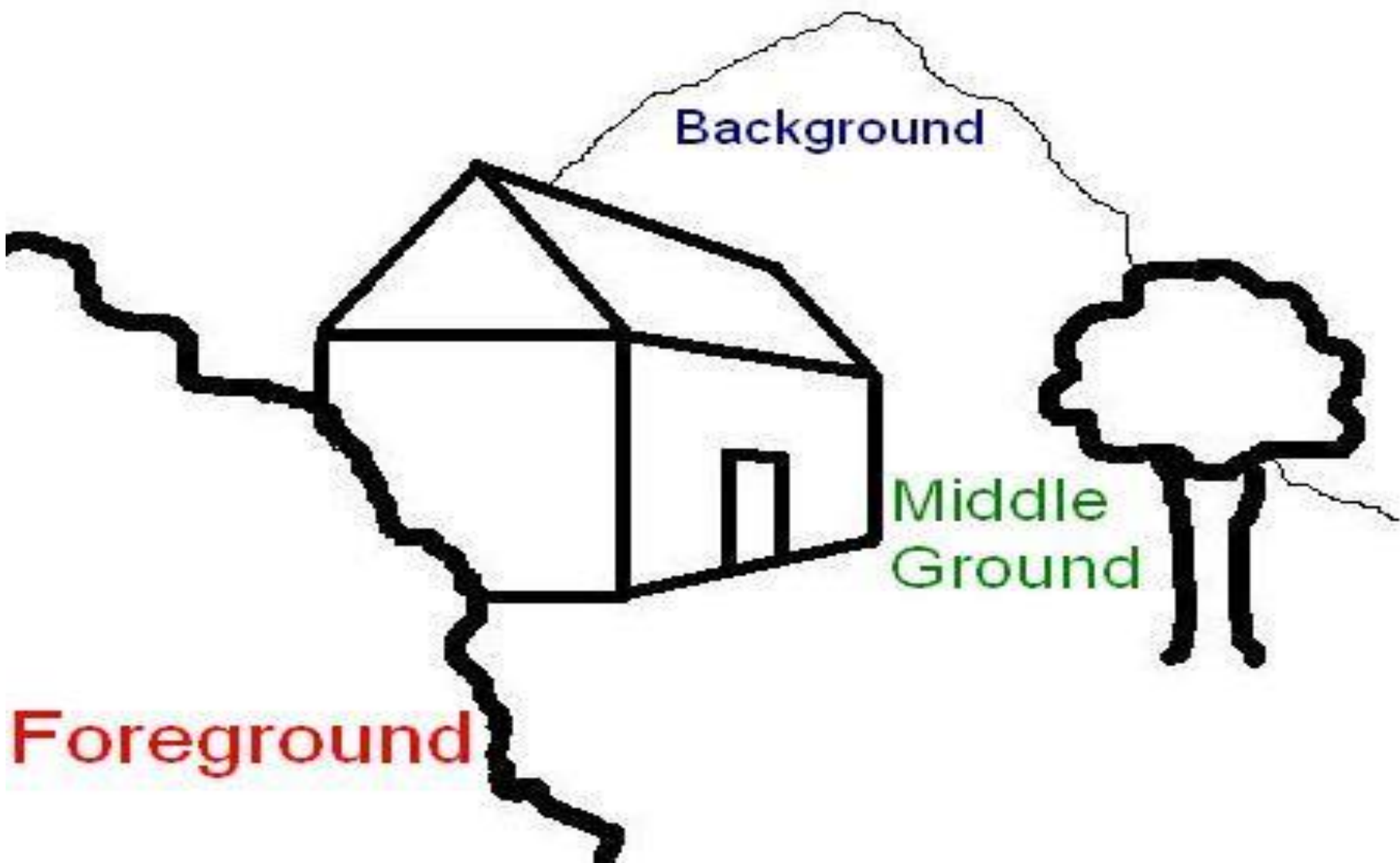
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# Overview

1. Concept of foregrounding in art.
- 2: Poetic licence and foregrounding.
- 3: Interpretation of foregrounding deviation – Three answers - conclusion is Interpretation of foregrounding is subjective
- 4: Process of foregrounded deviation; interpretation.
- 5: Parallelism – foregrounded ir-regulation or extra-regulation.
- 6: Sources of parallelism, metre, alliteration, syntax.
- 7: Parallelism and mechanical repetition.
- 8: Interpretation of parallelism similarity & contrast.
- 9: Immediate and wider interpretation.
- 10: conclusion

# Foreground & Background

- Foregrounding is a concept much used in stylistics. Actually, this term is borrowed from art criticism which distinguished between foreground and background. In painting, normally, we expect the central aspects of a painting to be in the foreground and less central aspects to be in the background. Norms make background and foreground contains deviation from norms.



- Leech explains a painting ceases to be interesting if it is photographic copy of nature. What makes it artistically interesting is how it deviates from photographic accuracy, then he generalizes from the rule of artistic communication to music and poetry.

# Surprise and interest

- He argues that just as painting acts against a background of norms, so in music and poetry there are expected patterns of melody, rhythm, harmonic progression, meter, etc and a composer's or a poet's skill lies not in mechanically reproducing these, but in introducing unexpected departures from them. This is how we investigate the significance and value of a work of art by concentrating on the elements of surprise and interest, rather than on the automatic pattern. Surprise and interest are created through deviation or de-automization. Such deviation, Leech argues, from linguistics or other socially accepted norms have been given the special name of foregrounding.

- Foregrounding or the artistic deviation “sticks out” from its background, the automatic system, like a figure in foreground of a unusual field. Having explained the concept of foregrounding, he applies it to poetry.

- In poetry foregrounding is effected through linguistic deviation and background is the language. Just as the eye picks out the figure as the important and meaningful element in the field of vision, so the reader of poetry picks out the linguistic deviation such a phrase as “a grief ago”, as the most arresting and significant part of the message and interprets it by measuring it against the background of the expected pattern. After defining foregrounding with reference to poetry, he tries to explain the exact focus of foreground in poetry.



Poet combines



Expected  
Patterns



Unexpected  
Patterns

# SOURCES OF FOREGROUNDING IN POETRY

- He explains that in poetry deviations are of two types:
- routine deviation and
- unique creative innovation.
- It is the latter, which, Leech locates as the source of foregrounding in the poetry, Routine licenses which are odd in the context of English language as whole are not foregrounding, but rather when they occur in a poem because they form the norms of English poetry. He explains that linguistic foregrounding is not spasmodic or random ---- it follows a certain rationale of its own. There is some method in the poet's madness.

# Foregrounding

Interpretation



- Explaining this need for interpreting foregrounding, Leech argues, a question-mark accompanies each foregrounded feature, consciously or unconsciously, we as “what is the print”.

# Question Mark

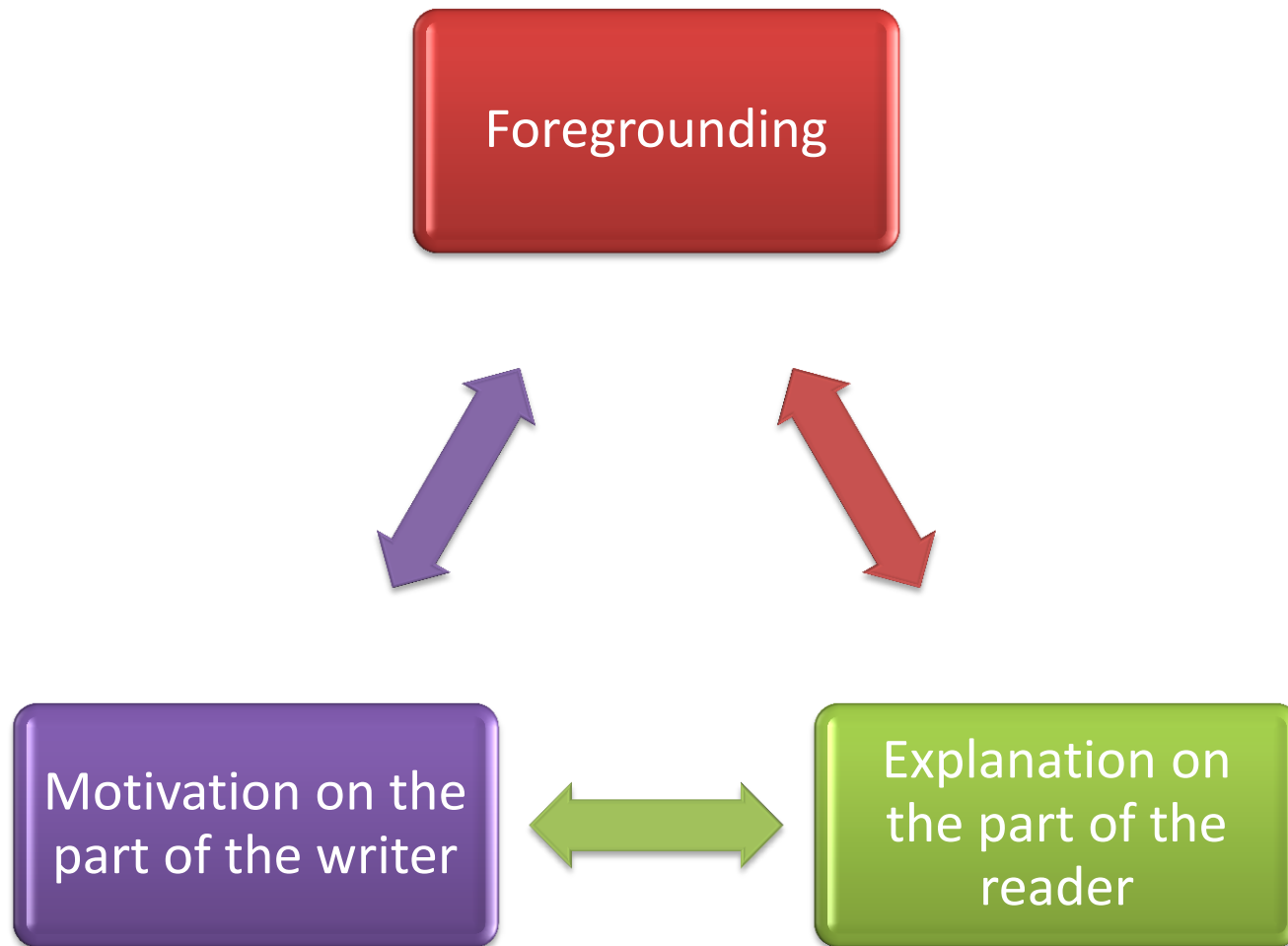
- This is so with every appreciative reader. So, this makes Leech raise a question 'when is a linguistic deviation artistically significant ?



when is a linguistic deviation  
artistically significant ?

*Sometime, linguistic deviation may be  
without significance but when it is  
significant ? Leech offers three answers  
to the foregrounding question.*

# Foregrounding





# Interpretation of Foregrounding is Subjective affair

- He concludes that not only whether a deviation has a sensible interpretation, but what interpretation is to be given, is a subjective matter.

# Conclusion is Subjectivity

- He explains that he does not advocate the critical anarchy of value judgemental and that he does not mean that all readers judgement have equal weight.
- Certain critics opinions have bigger voice and voice of the poet, if heard, is the most authoritative of all.
- This conclusion of subjectivity of interpretation teaches us the difference between the objectivity of linguistic analysis and the subjectivity of critical interpretation. These two activities are complementary and not competing activities. Having arrived at the conclusion of subjectivity, he, then explains precisely how a particular interpretation is arrived at.

# **A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESSES INVOLVED IN THE FOREGROUNDING INTERPRETATION**

- He explains the process of interpretation of foregrounding in this way.
- A linguistic deviation is a disruption of normal processes of communication; it leaves a gap, as it were, in one's comprehension of the text, that can be filled, and the deviation rendered significant, but only if by an effort of his imagination the reader perceives some deeper connection which compensates for the superficial oddity. For example, in the case of metaphor, this compensation is in the form of analogy. Donne's line, "Then thy sick taper will begin to wink" contains two violations of literal meaning fullness; the idea of a taper being "sick" and the of a taper being capable of winking.

- The analogy is between someone who is ill and a candle which is burning out, and between the flickering of a candle and the batting of an eyelid. So far, Leech, described only one type of foregrounding which comes from deviation. There is another kind of deviation which is the opposite of deviation, it consists in the introduction of extra regularities, not regularities, into language. This type of foreground, Leech terms as parallelism.

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graph TD; A[Foregrounding] --> B[Parallelism]; A --> C[Deviation]
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Foregrounding

Parallelism

Deviation

# Three Sources of Parallelism or Extra regularities

1. Alliteration
2. Metre
3. Syntax

# Deviation & Extra Regularities

- The word “extra regularities” is a key word in parallelism. To explain the concept of extra regularities in parallelism, Leech compares parallelism with deviation. In deviation, there is a certain range of selections available in the language but the poet makes a selection beyond this range. For example, in “a grief ago” the poet had to possibility of saying “an hour ago”. The poet had possibility of saying “an hour ago” but he went beyond this available norm to effect foregrounding. But in parallelism, where the language allows him a choice, he consistently limits himself to the same option to effect foregrounding through this kind of extra regularity.
- Extra regularity can be introduced through alliterative structure, metrical pattern of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. For example the alliterative pattern of repeated “fs” in Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner”; “ the furrow followed free”.



# Extra Regularity

- Another way of extra regularity in syntax, as in the following line of Goldsmith;
- “Ill fares the land , to hastening ills prey
- Where wealth accumulates and man decay”

These parts have identical syntactic structures: each consists of a single—word subject followed by a single predicate. Where the language allows for a choice from a variety of structures, the poet insists on an exact repetition.

# Parallelism

The term parallelism is associated with this sort of syntactic repetition. Another example of syntactic repetition is:

- “No news is good news”
- The same syntactic pattern modifier+Noun is here accompanied by the same lexical choice of “news”. Thus having discussed three sources of extra regularities, namely, alliteration, metre and syntax, Leech goes to clarify the idea of parallelism by comparing it with mechanical repetition.

# Parallelism

- Parallelism is different from mechanical repetition in having the elements of contrast and identity. The mechanical repetition found in the chanting of crowds “ we want Alf!” is not counted as parallelism, because parallelism requires some variable feature of the pattern—some contradicting elements which Leech gives an example of similarity by parodying Goldsmith’s line,
  - “Where wealth diminishes and man decay”
- Here the connection is not of contrast but of similarity. The two states of affairs go together. Another possibility is
- “Where wealth accumulates and men obey” again an example of similarity. Here one seems to follow from the other.

- Parallelism and deviation can further be described in terms of qualitative foregrounding and quantitative foregrounding.
- Qualitative Foregrounding
- Deviation from the language code itself—a breach of some rule or convention of English.
- Quantitative Foregrounding
- This is deviation from some expected frequency.

# Questions

1. What is foregrounding ? When is a foregrounding significant ?
2. How is foregrounding effected through Deviation and Parallelism ?

Thank you very much