# CRITICAL STYLISTIC STUDY OF MERISM IN EDNA'S "INTERIM" POEM

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| Article history: | | Abstract: |
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| | | This study examines the use of merism in relation to the analytical tools that influence Jeffries' framework (2010) of critical stylistic analysis in "interim" poem . The poem was authored by Edna St. Vincent Millay and selected as an example for the present study. Several experts investigate merism as a prominent technique in literary scripts. Nevertheless, there is no work that addresses this issue from a critical stylistic standpoint. Critical Stylistics (CS) has emerged as a response to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) due to the latter's lack of adequate analytical tools. While CDA provides overarching frameworks for identifying the impact that texts might have, stylistics offers specific tools for uncovering the aesthetic influence and pleasurable techniques that texts create. The study aims to address the following inquiries: 1. How does the use of merism in the interim poem align with the linguistic tools that influence Jeffries's framework (2010)? 2. Which toolbox does Edna St. Vincent Millay mostly apply to create merism? 3. How much do the language realizations in the chosen poem represent the toolkits available? 4. What are the poet's ideologies towards merism?. Hence, the objective of the present investigation is to identify the language strategies deployed by the poet to depict merism and determine the toolkit that is most and least frequently employed. The additional objective is to recognize the verbal cues that indicate the toolkits and concealed ideologies associated with merism. |

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION
**Stylistics** aims to verify intuitions through comprehensive study. However, it also serves as a conversation between a literary reader and a linguistic observer, with the purpose of gaining insight rather than mere objectivity. Stylistics is based on linguistics and, in turn, it questions our linguistic frameworks, exposes their shortcomings, and motivates us to improve them. Stylistics can be regarded as an enjoyable journey or revelation for both the critic and the linguist Leech and Short (2007, pp. 4-5).

**Critical stylistics** (CS) is a recently established approach to language analysis that combines stylistic analysis (SA) with critical discourse analysis (CDA). It was created by Jeffries. Therefore, critical stylistics (CS) has emerged as a response to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) due to the latter's lack of adequate analytical tools. While CDA provides overarching frameworks for identifying the influence that texts might have, stylistics offers specific tools for uncovering the aesthetic impact and pleasurable techniques that texts employ. Critical stylistics (CS) utilizes these two approaches to reveal the underlying ideologies of texts and demonstrates how specific artistic values are used to normalize ideological biases within the text. According to Jeffries (2010), all types of texts, such as articles, novels, and poems, possess meaning and ideology (Jeffries, 2010, p.7). Therefore, CS is seen as a conventional form of stylistics that focuses on analyzing text using a certain critical objective (Jeffries, 2010).

**Ideology** refers to a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that shape and guide an individual or group's behavior and actions. Ideology, which is ingrained in discursive practices, is a fundamental element in any critical study, such as CDA and CS. Hence, it is the responsibility of the analyst to ascertain the connections between ideology and language (Asensio, 2016, p.126).

**Merism**, derived from the Greek word meaning "divided," is a rhetorical device that involves using a contrasting pair of words or phrases (such as close and far, body and soul, life and death) to convey a sense of completeness or

wholeness. Merism can be considered a form of synecdoche when the constituent elements of a subject are employed to describe the entirety.

John Lyons, a linguist from Britain, employed the term "complementary" to refer to a verbal technique that consists of a pair of opposing elements that together express the idea of a whole entity.

A merism is a rhetorical device in which an object or concept is described using a commonly used term that highlights specific characteristics or attributes. Merisms frequently denote entirety and are commonly employed and recycled by the majority of language users.  A merism is a linguistic device that defines a complete entity by enumerating some or all of its constituent elements. It is employed in two distinct manners.   One approach is to employ opposing extremes, while another approach involves utilizing some, but not necessarily all, of its components to depict an object. The term "merism" originates from the Greek word "merismos," which signifies "dividing" or "partitioning" (web source1).

**Edna St. Vincent Millay**, the New England poet had remarkable success during her lifetime and was regarded as a sort of celebrity.   At the tender age of 19, she achieved the publication of her inaugural poem, "Renascence," in The Lyric Year, which continues to be one of her most renowned creations to this day.   She was perceived as a feminist and activist during her era, which attracted considerable attention to her. Regrettably, she endured significant affliction due to addiction for more than ten years towards the end of her life, following an automobile accident, and unfortunately passed away at the age of 58 due to a heart attack.   Her turbulent experiences may illuminate the melancholic themes evident in her art.  Edna St. Vincent Millay extensively explores themes of sadness and loss, expressing her personal experiences and evoking a profound sense of anguish for others she never personally encountered(Web Source 2).

**The theme of the poem** is loss and sadness. The tone of Millay's "Interim" conveys her sadness in a manner that feels intimate and immediate, rather than distant.   The author expresses her inability to come to terms with the loss she has endured, yet she manages to vividly convey the profound impact it has had on her and articulates the aspects that she finds difficult to accept.   Her poetry serves as a personal keep a diary, where she expresses her deepest feelings, while also maintaining a level of universality that allows the audience to connect with her words(Web source 3).

## 1.2 Methodology

The current study utilizes Jeffries' 2010 model as an analytical framework. The poem suggests that only five concepts from the model are relevant.

### 1.2.1. Naming and Describing

According to Jeffries (2010, p.17), various methods are employed in texts to designate the world. During the process of naming, the text producer has the ability to select one specific name and disregard any other names when referring to the same thing.

### 1.2.2. Depicting Actions, States, Events

According to Jeffries (2010, p.37), a speaker has the ability to express a problem as an ongoing event using the present progressive tense, as a completed action using the present perfect tense, or as a general condition of affairs using the present simple tense. Jeffries (2010) chooses to use Simpson's (1993) model of transitivity instead of Halliday's model, as she believes that the former is more transparent and practical compared to the latter (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

### 1.2.3.Comparing and Contrasting

By employing the techniques of equating and contrasting, which involve the use of synonyms and opposites, writings have the ability to convey or elucidate comparable concepts. The understanding of these two comparable concepts is achieved by establishing semantic correlations between two words, phrases, and even entire paragraphs.

### 1.2.4. Negating

According to Jeffries (2010, pp. 106-8), negating is a textual practise that might hold ideological and/or narrative significance. A tale can be enhanced by incorporating missing elements, persuading someone ideologically, or envisioning a desired reality. Negation causes the recipient's imagination to conceive a situation that is completely contrary to the one described in the delivered text.

### 1.2.5. Exploring the Concepts of Time, Space, and Society.

Deixis, as stated by Burke (2014, P. 417), is crucial in determining the structure of a text. The primary purpose of deixis is to establish interpersonal connections rather than being associated with the ideational level. This is achieved by the use of expressions that refer to individuals, time, location, and social entities.

### 1.3Data of Analysis

### 1.3.1. Naming and Describing:

> The **room** is as you left it; your last **touch**—
> A thoughtless **pressure**, knowing not itself
> As saintly—**hallows** now each simple **thing**;
> **Hallows and glorifies**, and **glows** between
> The **dust's** grey **fingers** like a shielded **light**.

The poet employs terms such as room, touch, pressure, hallows, objects, Hallows, glorifies, dust, finger, and light to depict her experience of loss. The use of the words "touch" in the first sentence and "finger" in the last line serves as

merism, indicating his previous visit to the now vacant room. Fingers are mostly employed for tactile exploration. Fingers not the whole hands are involved in the act of physical contact. The poet uses the adjective grey to indicate an old touch. The utilization of the merism part-whole in this context pertains to her solitude. The use of merism is evident in these lines through the act of naming and describing. The poet uses the ideology of loss.

### 1.3.2. Representing Actions/Events/States:

> That book, outspread, just as you ***laid*** it down!
> Perhaps you ***thought***, "I wonder what ***comes*** next,
> And whether this or this will be the end";
> **So rose, and left it**, ***thinking*** to ***return***.

The presence of merism in these lines is evident through the depiction of contrasting actions or situations " *So rose, and left it".* The poet uses material actions such as laid, come, rose, left, and return to signify that his book remains in the exact location, *outspread*, where he initially placed it, thereby preserving the essence of his final contact. The poet used mental verbs such as "*thought*" and "*think*" to convey her current disbelief in the finality of the situation. She implores him to come back and once again grasp the book. The poet uses the ideology of wish.

### 1.3.3. Presenting Time and Demonstratives:

> In **this**, "I picked the first sweet-pea **to-day**."
> **To-day**! Was **there** an opening bud beside it
> You left until **to-morrow**?—O my love,
> The things that withered,—and you came not back!
> **That day** you filled **this** circle of my arms
> **That now** is empty. (O my empty life!)
> **That day**—**that day** you picked the first sweet-pea,—
> And brought it in to show me! I recall

Merism is evident in this context by the use of temporal expressions such as *"today and tomorrow," "that day and that now,"* and *"this and that."* The poet used temporal deixis and demonstratives to draw an ideological parallel between a former moment when his sweetheart was present in the room, picking sweets for him, and the current state of emptiness, where no one is present(comparisons). She recalls the moment when he approached and rested his head in the embrace of her arms, but now her arms are empty of his presence. She employs certain deixis to denote the progression of time.

### 1.3.4 Presenting Time:

> Save that it was the **first**. I did not know,
> **Then**, that it was the **last**. **If I had known**—
> But **then**, it does not matter. Strange how few,
> After **all's said** and **done**, the things that are
> Of moment.

Merism, as demonstrated above, is depicted using various adverbs of sequence like as *"first"* 'then" and *"last".* Merism is also manifested through the utilization of if-then construction. All of them ideologically encompass the entirety of what is said and done. She strongly emphasizes the importance of certain matters. Once something has vanished, it can never be restored. The poet uses the ideology of passing time.

### 1.3.5 Presenting Space:

> "I **had** you and I **have** you **now** no more."
> **There**, **there** it dangles,—**where's** the little truth
> That can for long keep footing under that
> When its slack syllables tighten to a thought?
> **Here**, let me write it down! I wish to see
> *"I had you and I have you now no more."*

The poet uses the merism "here and there" in conjunction with "place deixis" to suggest that her beloved was present everywhere in the past; thus, she employs the past tense "I had you." She says "I no more have you" because he is completely absent at this time. She expresses her desire to meet him through the repetition of the same first line. *"I had you and I have you now no more."* .The poet uses the ideology of wish to see him again.

### 1.3.6 Contrasting:

> Dark, Dark, is all I find for metaphor;
> All else were contrast,—save that contrast's wall
> Is down, and **all opposed things flow together**
> Into a vast monotony, where **night**
> And **day**, and **frost** and **thaw**, and **death** and **life**,
> Are synonyms. What now—what now to me

The previous lines demonstrate merism through the use of contrasting forms to encompass the entirety. According to the poet's perspective, these contrasting shapes are seen synonymous rather than opposing. The poet perceives no distinction between day and night, as both are enveloped in darkness due to the absence of her lover. Life and death are contrasting concepts that serve as merisms, which are utilized conceptually to symbolize the entirety of the creative process. The poet uses the ideology of loss, no difference for her.

### 1.3.7. Contrasting and Negating :

I cannot call you back; and I desire
No *utterance* of my immaterial *voice*.
I cannot even turn my *face* this way
Or that, and say, "My *face* is turned to you";
I know not where you are, I do not know
If **heaven** hold you or if **earth** transmute,
**Body** and **soul**, you into **earth** again;

The poet used words like "utterance" and "voice" as merism, encompassing the entirety of the speech process. The poet employs a negative form in her speech, expressing her inability to contact him any longer.

I cannot call you back; and I desire
No *utterance* of my immaterial *voice*.

This signifies her need for his return. She is unable to direct her gaze towards him. Her knowledge of his whereabouts is lacking.

I cannot even turn my *face* this way
Or that, and say, "My *face* is turned to you";
I know not where you are, I do not know

A different form of merism is represented by the poet's inquiry as to whether the lover is in heaven or on earth. In order to denote his position, Merism manifests in contrasting physical and spiritual manifestations. The poet uses the ideology of knowing nothing about his exact place.

**Body** and **soul**, you into **earth** again;

### 1.3.8. Representing Actions and Contrasting:

Ah, I am **worn** out—I am **wearied** out—
It is too much—I am but **flesh** and **blood**,
And I must **sleep**. Though you were dead again,
I am but **flesh** and **blood**, and I must **sleep**

The poet uses different verbs *worn out, wearied out, must sleep*. After a long journey inside the room and she remembers her lover everywhere, she is exhausted and needs to sleep. The use of such verbs indicates her near death because now she is tired and her lover will never come again. Merism is represented through the use of contrasted forms of flesh and blood twice through the last lines. Thus, she feels out of breath and must take a rest. The poet uses the ideology of suffering, loss, and death.

### 1.4 Result and Findings

Merism as a stylistic device is represented critically through interm poem through naming, negating, contrasting, material and mental verbs, and using space and time dixises as it is shown in table 1:

**Table 1: The Frequency of Merism in Interm**

| Naming | Actions | Negating | Contrasting | Space | Time | Demonstrative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Touch Finger | Rose /Left Think/thought | Can not Do not Not know No utterance | Flesh /blood | Here/there | First/then/last | This/that |
| | Worn-out Wearied out Sleep | | Day/night Life/death | | Today/tomorrow Now /then That day/ that now | |
| | | | Earth/heaven Body/soul | | | |

### CONCLUSION

Critical stylistics (CS) is a newly developed method of examining language that merges stylistic analysis (SA) with critical discourse analysis (CDA). Jeffries(2010) is the founder of it. A merism is a linguistic tool that defines a whole entity by listing some or all of its individual components. The paper addresses the previously highlighted problems through analysis. The representation of merism in the Interm poem is dependent on various elements such as

identifying, contrasting, negating, adverbs, and demonstratives. The conflicting forms of day/night, life/death, heaven/earth, soul/body, and flesh/blood are prominently depicted. Furthermore, it is shown by employing verbs such as come, sleep, back, return, think, and know. The poet has an ideology behind using such contrasting forms to show that her lover is not gone; he is alive inside everything in the room, here and there, today and tomorrow. The poet uses different types of ideology, most of them are of loss, wish to return back, sadness, loneliness, and her nearest death.

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