

What is foregrounding?

It is a key concept in Stylistics. Mick Short in *Exploring the language of Poems, Plays and Prose* illustrates this stylistic feature by referring to a painting since the term is borrowed from art criticism. The foreground is that part which is in the centre and the items in the foreground will appear more important than the rest.

M.A.K Halliday (as cited in *Text and Discourse*, 2002) defines it as *patterns of prominence in a poem or prose text, regularities in the sounds or words or structures that stand out or maybe brought out by careful reading; and one may often be led in this way towards a new insight, through finding that such prominence contributes to the writer's total meaning(p.98)*

Katie Wales (as cited in her *Dictionary of Stylistics*, 2001) explains that foregrounding is thus *the throwing into relief of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language. But within the literary text itself, linguistic features can themselves be foregrounded or 'highlighted', made prominent 'for specific effect against the background of the rest of the text. It is on this internal foregrounding that critical attention is largely focused (p.157).*

To come back to Mick Short's notion of foreground and background in a painting, the foreground is that part of a painting which is in the centre and towards the bottom of the canvas and will appear large as opposed to the rest of the painting and will represent the subject matter of the painting. Mick Short highlights that *in language, the background is what is linguistically normal- the rules, norms and expectations which we associate with a particular kind of speaking or writing; the foreground is in large part, the portions of text which do not conform to these expectations. Foregrounding is thus produced as a result of deviation from linguistic (and non linguistic) norms of various kinds.* Foregrounded elements include **deviations** but also **repetitions** and **parallelisms** which authors will use for specific effect and communicative purposes.