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FOREGROUNDING OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE A STYLISTICS ANALYSIS OF ADA LIMÓN'S "INSTRUCTIONS ON NOT GIVING UP

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Abstract

This research focuses on the way Ada Limón builds hope and resilience in "Instructions on Not Giving Up" (The Carrying, 2018) through the device of foregrounding. Utilizing Mukarovsky's (1964) foregrounding theory, Leech and Short's (2007) multi-level stylistic model, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor model, as well as the reader-response research of Miall and Kuiken (1994), the paper offers a qualitative close reading of the entire composition. While Limón has garnered a great deal of critical attention, formal, peer-reviewed stylistic analyses of her poetry are few. They indicate that emotional force of the poem is linguistically enacted rather than thematically declared: register contrast, biological conceptual metaphor, accumulative syntax, and a colloquial volta collectively disintegrate romanticized models of hope and articulate a more hushed, prolonged representation of resilience.

Keywords: foregrounding, stylistics, Ada Limón, hope, resilience, lexical deviation, figurative language, syntactic accumulation, enjambment, affective meaning

1. Introduction

Ada Limón's "Instructions on Not Giving Up," from The Carrying (2018), depicts a speaker grappling with spring's relentless resurgence after experiencing hardship. The poem talks about crabapple flowers, bumble Beelzebub and the burden of leaf.. If you look deeper the poem is really about the psychology of persistence. It is about the choice to keep going in a world that has become tough. What is interesting about this poem is not what it says. How it says it. The poem uses a lot of language to show a different kind of hope. This hope is not about ideas but about the simple things in life. The poem does things differently than poems and that is what makes it special. The way the poem uses language highlights a kind of hope that is connected to nature and living things. The poem is, about the psychology of persistence. It shows this in a very quiet and personal way. It is this system, its formation, processes, and emotional results—that the current research examines. Limón is a major voice in contemporary American poetry. The Carrying was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a National Book Award finalist. She later took the oath of office as the twenty-fourth United States Poet Laureate (2022–2023), and the first Latina to hold the position. The book consorts with loss again and again, open to mortality, trying to keep joy alive in the face of loss. It doesn't erase grief, but through its verbal moves it carves out a way of living on that is honest to pain and defiant of maternal consolation.

Although Limón's work is culturally important, the commentary of his work has been largely conceptualized through thematic and cultural concerns. Chiasson (2018) notes the collection's movement away from transcendentalist nature poetry but does not attribute this movement to a specific choice of language. Rankine (2019) places the book in conversation

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with discussions of the lyric address, but does not consider form. Ecocritical interpretations of Chicana identity and ecological subjectivity take precedence, but not formal strategies. The particular lexical choices, syntactic constructions, and figurative devices through which Limón constructs his distinctive emotional registers have so far not been the subject of an extended peer-reviewed stylistic discussion — a lacuna which this paper seeks to fill.

This research is based on literary stylistics, interpreting literary works through linguistic methods to demonstrate the role language plays in the construction of meaning and affect (Leech & Short, 2007). The theoretic backbone is foregrounding theory as originally formulated by Mukarovsky (1964) and subsequently systematised for English-language application by Leech and Short (2007). Foregrounding is the use of deviation (breaking linguistic norms of what is expected) and parallelism (patterned repetition that creates and undermines secondary norms) in literature. Both processes are at work in Limón's poem at every level of language, and the interplay of the two is what generates the poem's quintessential emotional quality.

The wider theoretical context involves Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor that explains how abstract states are understood in terms of concrete experiential domains, and Miall and Kuiken's (1994) empirical research showing measurable increases in affective engagement and interpretive depth resulting from foregrounded features. All three frameworks enable the study to move from formal description to affective explanation, from describing what is foregrounded to explaining why it appears to feel the way it does to readers.

The poem has fourteen lines, written in free verse, continuous without any stanza, without any regular metre, and without any rhyme scheme. Actually it's more like stacking lines of natural images in a string of "more than" phrases that go nowhere syntactically. At line 9 the pivot comes all of a sudden: "Fine then, / I'll take it" - colloquial, minimal and completely unlike the elevated tone that precedes it. This formal and lexical contrast seems to be the structural embodiment of the poem's emotional core, and its analysis sits within the heart of this study.

Limón's narrative is organized around a negative — "not giving up" — recognizing the pull of despair before silently rebuffing it. This linguistic straightforwardness in relation to difficulty, which permeates all formal aspects of the poem, is the main analytic focus of the present study.

3. Research Objectives And Questions

3.1 Research Objectives

Objective 1: To find out and illustrate the foregrounding mechanisms — register contrast and figurative language — differentiating the poem from traditional lyric expectations when building up processing of hope and healing.

Objective 2 : To examine the syntactic and structural mechanisms — accumulative syntax, enjambment, and the colloquial Volta — of the poem that formally performs the mental process of opting for survival

Objective 3: In order to account for the joint foregrounding effect of these strategies at different linguistic levels on the reader's affective response toward resilience as a muted, commonplace and within-human-reach state

3.2 Research Questions

Three research questions organize the analysis, each corresponding directly to one objective:

RQ1: How do contrasting lexical registers and figurative language deviate from conventional poetic expectations to reframe hope and recovery as biological rather than spiritual or romantic processes?

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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RQ2: In what ways do accumulative syntactic structures, enjambment, and the colloquial volta structurally enact the psychological process of choosing to survive?

RQ3: How do these combined foregrounding strategies cumulatively affect the reader's affective sense of resilience as an understated, ordinary and truly accessible human state?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foregrounding Theory And Literary Meaning

Foregrounding Theory Derives From The Prague School Of Linguistics And Is Generally Linked To Mukarovsky (1964), Who Maintained That The Language Of Literature Is Differentiated From The Language Of Everyday Life By Means Of Deviation And Parallelism. From This Point Of View, Some Linguistic Elements Become Obvious Because They Are Different From The Norm, Or Because They Are Repeated So Many Times . Because Of This Prominence, Readers' Attention Is Drawn To These Elements And They Tend To Interact More With The Text. Later Researchers Further Extended This Concept To Non-Literary Rhetoric. Van Peer (1986) Found Foregrounded Language To Affect Readers' Focus And Interpretation, And Miall And Kuiken (1994) Maintained That Foregrounding Plays A Major Role In Emotional Involvement And Aesthetic Response. Their Findings Indicate That Literary Effects Occur Not Just In What A Text Says But Also In The Way Language Is Structured. Although Foregrounding Theory Has Been Broadly Applied To Canonical Literary Works, I Would Argue That Much Of The Research Is Concentrated Around Modernist Poetry And More Traditional Literary Works. To A Lesser Extent, I Have Also Focused On The Place Of The Contemporary American Lyric Poem. Hence, The Question Of How Foregrounding Operates Within The Realm Of Contemporary Poetry, Which Concerns/D With Daily Emotional Themes Such As Hope, Persistence And Resilience, Is Still Awaiting More In-Depth Investigations.

2.2 Stylistics And Poetic Analysis

Stylistics as a metalinguistic discipline provides tools for investigating language and meaning. Leech and Short (2007) maintain that our literary reading should be guided by close examination of linguistic components (diction, syntax, figures of speech, and the organization of the text). Their Model has been one of the most influential models in stylistics because it binds textual evidence to literary interpretation. Previous work in stylistics has shown how language choices shape the way characters are portrayed, how tone is created and how emotion is conveyed. Nonetheless, on a stylistic level, much work is still devoted to describing types of linguistic features in isolation rather than considering how clusters of style features may interact and shape larger emotive effects. In poetry studies, thematic interpretation often enjoys a more high-profile role than analyses of the linguistic means by which such themes are constructed. This article, therefore, develops the analysis of pace and low-frequency style by showing how different types of foregrounding work together on different levels (lexical, figurative, syntactic, and structural) to generate specific hopes of hope and resilience in a contemporary poem.

2.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In Lakoff and Johnson (1980), we are introduced to a metaphor as not just a confusing archaic expression, or perhaps what is better described as a 'poetic' expression. They claimed that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive apparatus that enables us to know abstract concepts through the sense of more concrete concepts. Their theory shows that much of our thought is

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metaphorical. Studies of prose representations of emotion, identity, trauma and healing in literary texts have employed CMT. These results support the claim that metaphor has a considerable influence on how readers conceptualize emotional related experiences. Yet numerous studies concentrate primarily on discovering metaphorical patterns and surprisingly less on the interrelation between metaphors and other linguistic features of the texts. The present study contributes to remedy this drawback by examining metaphor in the larger context of foregrounding. Instead of analyzing metaphor as a singular entity, the book examines figurative language in concert with diction, syntax, and structure in relation to resilience.

2.4 Syntax, Enjambment, And Free Verse

Studies on free verse emphasize the relevance of the syntax and lineation for the construction of meaning. Longenbach (2008) contends that line breaks shape the speed, focus of attention, and meaning of a poem, Hollander (1975) and Fabb (1997) argue that enjambment may produce suspense, continuity, and reader expectancy-changes. Previous work has demonstrated that readers' experience of poems is indeed facilitated by syntactic organization. Still, much of this work focuses on formal description, rather than on how emotion-laden themes like resilience and endurance are shaped by syntactic patterns of expression. Thus, the relationship between form and mood expression is an open question. Based on accumulative syntax, enjambment and structural turning points, the article analyzes how immunity is constructed in a contemporary poetic context.

2.5 The Research Gap

To date, critical attention to Ada Limón's poetry has most frequently been directed at thematic issues of grief, identity, embodiment, eco-consciousness, and emotional survival. Although these analyses offer important interpretations of the meanings and cultural values of her texts, they tend to focus on the thematic rather than the linguistic. Thus, not much consideration has been given to the emotional cues through which the feeling of emotion is constructed in her poetry. Likewise, resilience has been thoroughly studied in psychology and literature; yet, literary responses primarily address resilience as a thematic category without inquiring into the processes involved in its linguistic and formal production. While much has been written on foregrounding theory with respect to the reading of some canonical literary works, foregrounding in contemporary American lyric poetry is yet to receive such a wide-ranging treatment. Besides that, previous studies have yet to adequately discuss how elements such as lexical choices, figurative language, syntactic patterns, enjambment, and discourse structures, as foregrounding phenomena, work in unison to influence readers' feelings of hope and resilience. In order to fill the above-mentioned gaps, this paper presents a multi-layered stylistic analysis of the poem Instructions on Not Giving Up by Ada Limón applying foregrounding theory, conceptual metaphor theory and stylistic analysis. By focusing on the lexical, figurative, syntactic and structural levels, the research aims to show the contribution of linguistic choices in the depiction of hope and determination (in) modern poetry.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design And Justification

. This study is a qualitative research design following the tradition of literary stylistics (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004). A qualitative methodology is appropriate because none of the key questions—about how linguistic elements conceptualize conceptual categories, enact psychological operations, or affect affective experience—are quantitatively resolvable in any meaningful sense without sacrificing the contextualized close reading required for the interpretive claims. This study is descriptive and explanatory: it tells what is seen on foregrounded features at different levels, explains how this significance is related to the poem's

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

thematic and emotional structure, and accounts for its emotive effects in respect to each research question. We used a stylistics approach rather than an impressionistic reader-response approach for literary criticism due to its ability to offer a systematic and verifiable means of analysing literature through established theoretical models. Although writers sometimes use intuition in their analysis of literature, stylistics requires that the analyst identifies and describes the specific formal elements of the text analysed, relates these elements to an established theory, and validates all claims with evidence, which establishes that the analysis can be used to replicate the analysis on future occasions. The theoretical integration created by Mukarovsky's (1964) Theory of Foregrounding; Leech and Short's (2007) Four-Level Model; Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) The Conceptual Metaphor Model; and Miall and Kuiken's (1994) Empirical Reader-Response Study provides a comprehensive tool for the analysis of the three questions being explored in this study.

4.2 Text Selection

The source text is the entire poem "Instructions on Not Giving Up" as appeared in The Carrying (Limón, 2018, p. 54): a single stanza of fourteen lines in free verse, neither rhyme nor regular metre. The selection of the poem was based on four criteria: (1) the thematic relevance: its clear orientation towards endurance is consistent with the TEC focus on the linguistic construction of resilience; (2) the stylistic complexity: at several linguistic levels multiple foregrounding mechanisms are at work; (3) the literary importance: it is included in an award winning collection authored by a former United States Poet Laureate; and (4) the limited exposure to formal stylistic analysis in the available peer-reviewed research. The shortness and formal density of the poem means that all features can be considered in relation to all other features and this allows for the integrated analysis required by the research questions.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

Analysis is conducted through five stages. Step 1 is ‘holistic reading’: the poem is skimmed through for the first time step into its overall movement (emotional and progression and its ‘structural’ Gestalt formation) - the contextual background against which the foregrounded objects of Step 3 are identified. Step 2 is lexical analysis (RQ1): we investigate all vocabulary choices for register; we identify any instances of register contrast, deviation and shift vis-à-vis the expected norms of lyric nature poetry. Step 3 is figurative language analysis (RQ1): metaphor, simile, and personification are analyzed, conceptual domains are mapped using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework, and thematic as well as affective implications are drawn. Step 4 is syntactic and structural analysis (RQ2): syntactic structures, capsular patterns, enjambment and the Volta are analyzed with regard to the mimetic relationship of syntactic shape and experiential matter. Step 5 is functional synthesis (RQ3): results from Steps 2-4 are combined to formulate an explanation of how the co-occurring foregrounding strategies influence the reader's affective experience.

5. Analysis

5.1 Rq1 — Lexical Register Contrast And Figurative Language

5.1.1 Register Deviation: Defamiliarising The Vocabulary Of Hope.

The first line of this poem, "More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out," creates a context for a complex multidimensional lexical visual scene. As a decorative, chromatic reference, "fuchsia" exists within the aesthetic pleasures of our visual individuals and has been referenced through the romantic lyrical tradition. Conversely, however, "funnels" also has a different context immediately: it becomes almost a quasi-scientific reference, morphological in nature, due to the fact that funnels are tools and not just accessories. First comparison where two opposing contexts contrast – seeming like they are a part of the norm for referring to trees — and to represent something contrary. The author continues the use of the formal reference

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

of fuchsias contrasted by the common use of crabapple trees. Crabapple trees do not fit the romantic tradition. They evoke the feeling of sourness, provoking imagery of poverty and modest living. "Overloaded" has a more practical heavy context in that the crabs are too much for the trees they are growing on to support. The most significant difference is found when the reader reaches line 9 of the poem: "Fine then, / I'll take it." "Fine then," reflects the speaker or the reader's voice, using the symbolism of lost hope and expressing emotion; it represents someone who realizes that many of his or her choices have changed over time but who is still unsure if they are willing to make that change at the time of the speaking of that line. The highest point of its emotional, expressive depth, its position may produce a significant foregrounding effect: to accept life is not a true spiritual awakening, but rather a somewhat reluctant and commonplace choice.

5.1.2 Conceptual Metaphor: Biological Recovery Over Spiritual Transcendence

The study examines Lakoff and Johnson 's analysis of metaphor with respect to the categories they develop for critique. In essence, the poem's lyric metaphor model supports the central metaphor of the poem's metaphor system through a singular mapping from the concept of PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY to the concept of BIOLOGICAL PROCESS - in contrast to the traditional and typical lyric or poetical metaphor of hope, which is usually represented by metaphorical frames of LIGHT, ASCENT, and SPIRITUAL REVELATION. The more the process of psychological recovery can be experienced as a biological process, the more it will be felt by individuals as part of the way we are all "biological beings," or as just one part of our "normal" life rather than as something requiring company as the basis for action. And while the simile natural growth is like a fist unclenching to palm grounds the poem's figurative language in the bodily and gestural rather than the transcendent. Throughout personification — trees and branches that "reach" and "break out" — these are rendered as biological process rather than conscious intent, and this may be a way of indicating that the speaker's own potential for resilience is equally natural: not a moral act of willpower but a living body's default in continuation.

5.2 Rq2 — Syntax, Enjambment, And The Structural Enactment Of Survival

5.2.1 Accumulative Syntax And The Colloquial Volta

The opening movement of the poem (lines 1–9a) escalates through a series of "more than" comparisons: "More than the fuchsia funnels . . more than the bumble bee . . more than the weight of the blooming." Every clause magnifies the syntactic crux without any satisfaction; the completion of the comparison is suspended on across several lines. Utilizing Halliday's (1985) notion of experiential density, this layering may enable the reader to relate to the speaker—to be exposed to the weight of the argument of the world prior to any counter-exposure. When syntactic closure comes, it is startlingly pared down: "Fine then, / I'll take it" is short, declarative and bare. The contrast in density of syntax and ease of being reveals a parallel contrasting structure that, ironically, displays the most conclusive word choice — 'moment of decision' sounds really like a moment when a grave decision has been made. The Volta at "Fine then" also marks the structural and emotional Volta of the poem. The usual lyric Volta appears to be moving toward enlightenment or transcendence, to a resolution of a more considerable magnitude than the difficulty it comes from. Limón's Volta appears as a movement in the opposite direction: it collapses and drops down a scale of formality, accedes to reality as opposed to transcend. The phrase "Fine then" is not a moment of revelation, nor a moment of reflection, but merely a reluctant acquiescence to the urgency of the world to be how it ought and how it should. This foregrounding creates an apparent strength that is intentionally lesser, more modest, and, I believe, more lasting than the romantically lyric replacements--because it does not assert a grand narrative for itself.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

5.2.2 Enjambment As Formal Mimesis

All through the poem, enjambment functions deliberately. The pause after the phrase "breaking out" sets it up as an isolated gesture: it acts out a kind of phenomenology of sudden awareness—that is, of having identified a sign before we knew where it came from. More dramatically, the break at "Fine then,/I'll take it" separates the reluctant concession from the statement itself; both reader and speaker seem to pause on the verge of agreement, as the speaker hesitates on acceptance and the reader hesitates to look beyond it. The enjambment in "the heavy / weight of the blooming" has an added semantic purpose: The reader moves the word "heavy" over the line and does not yet know what the word modifies and then learns that the weight is not that of grief, but the weight of fecundity - she realizes what seemed like burden is, actually, birth.

5.3 Rq3 — The Combined Affective Architecture Of Understated Resilience

The foreground features, in isolation, are not functional. The register clash of "fuchsia funnels," the biological conceptual metaphor, the accumulative syntax, and the colloquial volta, each of them informing a similar trajectory, where across multiple linguistic levels the poem establishes and intensifies its preferred emotional register. Drawing on the predictions of Miall and Kuiken's (1994) study, we expect that the complexity of foregrounding in such a poem may lead to prolonged affective engagement, and that the uniformity of foregrounding within such a poem may result in a build-up of affect where the vision of being resilient offered by the poem is experienced as evolving rather than as being presented in an instant. The affective argument seems to work through a surefire substitution trick: Before the reader can be said to anticipate traditional lyric emotion—transcendence, consolation, elevation—the poem substitutes plainness, biological naturalness, and reluctant acceptance. Drawing on Mukarovsky's (1964) analysis of defamiliarisation, this substitution, rather than producing disenchantment, could lead to intensified recognition. The phrase "Fine then" resonates with us so forcibly because it challenges our preconceived notions of a frail idea of survival. The poem's organization contributes to this resonance as well; it is written in one uninterrupted, single-stanza poem that flows as a whole with no formal breaks in the text that could indicate a development from a problem to a solution. The authors appear to be using this organizational technique to reinforce the idea that survival is not an achievable goal but rather an action we partake in as we go through our normal lives.

6. Discussion

6.1 Finding 1 (Rq1: Lexical And Figurative Foregrounding)

According to the study, Ada Limón's poem embodies hope and strength through dominant semantic constructs (words) and employed metaphors; however, in addition to utilizing widely accepted poetic images related to spiritual elevation (rise) or heroic renewal (redeem), the poem uses organic (flora, fauna) and earthly (natural) representational symbols like "fuchsia funnels," "bumble bee," and "the heavy weight of the blooming" to illustrate resiliency as typical and continual occurrences in everyday life. Thematic metaphorical foundations reflected within the poem support this interpretation as emotional survival is compared to growth, movement and biological survival. As a result, the resiliency described in the poem is acquired through 'being human' rather than through an extraordinary act of being human. Thus, the present article expands the current conversation regarding Limón's poetry by demonstrating how the thematic outcome for Limón's poem is accomplished through language as opposed to content.

6.2 Finding 2 (Rq2: Syntax, Enjambment, And Structure)

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

In the poem, syntactic patterning/lineation/enjambment, as well as the structural framework, have a very large impact on meaning-making. The cumulative syntax of the initial lines produces emotional and visual confinement; enjambment creates movement and flow within those lines. A structural pivot is introduced in "Fine then", signifying a transition from observation to acceptance. The contrast between the dense syntax of the initial lines and relatively plain final lines emphasizes the transition from confusion to resolution leading to action. Therefore, the formal features are considered to be working together with animacy in relation to what the poem is "doing" versus "being".

6.3 Finding 3 (Rq3: Combined Effect Of Foregrounding Devices)

Findings from the report state that the way a poem depicts hopefulness and perseverance is a result of several different mechanisms (foregrounding) working together, rather than any one mechanism working alone. Various lexical choices, metaphors, and similes (language style) used, as well as syntax (sentence structure/styles), and text organization (use of page space) make up a cohesive, meaningful entity. The way the poem engages with readers generates a view of resilience as being both ongoing and ordinary experiences. The idea of survival is not treated as a major change from one moment to the next; instead, we may have an understanding that just 'saying yes' on an ongoing basis can allow us to live. This will happen when our feelings are expressed through the combined use, at different levels of the text, of poetic language or formal means of expression. In summary, these findings imply that foregrounding theory offers us a valuable means of gaining insights into how modern poetry develops emotional resonance with its intended theme(s) of hopefulness and/or resilience through their various stylistic elements.

7. Conclusion

"Instructions On Not to Give Up" does not offer the reassurance and comfort that we might expect from a book with the title "Instructions." The book does not provide a sense of transcendence or a sense of revelation, nor does it provide a sense of heroic endurance. Instead, it provides a small, casual, and somewhat reluctant "Okay then." Through the strategic elevation of the mundane, the biological and structurally ambiguous materials, Limón is able to create a vision of resilience that is often much more grounded in reality than any romanticized object would be due to its refusal to make broad claims about itself. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the construction of this object can be performed through a systematic and multi-tiered process of stylistic analysis. At the lexical level, the dichotomous registers and the use of the biological D in each register seem to reorient hope as a physical ability, rather than a spiritual gift. At the metaphorical level, it appears that the use of conceptual metaphors based on biological processes serves to direct our understanding of recovery to the body as a living entity. At the level of syntax and structure, cumulative syntax, strategic enjambment, and the colloquial Volta seem to narratively enact the psychological state of becoming overpowered and then, somewhat imperceptibly, deciding to proceed. The cumulative effect of these contrasting devices at all levels of discourse may help to construct an emotional framework wherein resilience is not extraordinary but commonplace, not magnificent but mortal, not attained but sustained.

First, the article offers a formal stylistic analysis once removed – a poem from Limón's The Carrying – and fills a gap in the peer-reviewed literature on a poet of significant cultural import. Second, it points to the potential fruitfulness of using Mukarovsky's concept of foregrounding, together with Leech and Short's model of "levels", in the analysis of current American lyric poetry, thereby extending these models beyond their "typical" canon. Third, it advances theoretical insights into how emotional salience in poetry is facilitated by the intentional and integrated deployment of foregrounding strategies at multiple linguistic strata. Future study could take this analysis of The Carrying as a whole, situate it by periphrastic

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

contrast within the frame scripts of other contemporary American women poets — Rankine, Diaz, Smith — who engage in like concerns with grief, resilience, and the lyric tradition.

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