READING, ANALYSING & TEACHING LITERATURE
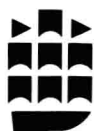
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Mick Short

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The Contributors

Sylvia Adamson is a lecturer in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge, where she teaches stylistics and the history of the English language. She has recently moved back to Cambridge after a period at the University of Strathclyde, where she helped to found the Programme in Literary Linguistics.

Charles Alderson is senior teaching fellow in the Institute for English Language Education at the University of Lancaster. His main interests and publications are in the fields of language testing and reading in a second or foreign language. He has edited *Issues in Language Testing* (1981) with Arthur Hughes and *Reading in a Foreign Language* (1984) with Sandy Urquhart.

Christopher Candlin is Professor of Linguistics in the School of English and Linguistics at Macquarie University, Australia, a post which he has recently taken up after being at the University of Lancaster for many years. He is best known for his work in sociolinguistics and linguistics in relation to language teaching. He has published extensively in these areas, and has edited *The Communicative Teaching of English* (1981) and (with Geoffrey Leech) *Computers in English Language Teaching and Research* (1986). He is general editor of two series of books for Longman (*Applied Linguistics and Language Study* and *Language in Social Life*) and one for Prentice Hall (*Language Teaching Methodology Series*).

Ronald Carter is a lecturer in the Department of English Studies at the University of Nottingham, where he teaches English and linguistics. He is well-known for his work in the fields of stylistics and language teaching. His best-known publications to date are *Language and Literature* (1982), and *Literature and Language Teaching* (1986) which he edited jointly with Chris Brumfit.

Tom Hutchinson is a teaching fellow in the Institute for English Language Education at the University of Lancaster. His main interests are in the teaching of English as a foreign language. He has twice been awarded prizes by the English Speaking Union for his publications in this area. One of these prizes was for *Project English* (1985). Jointly with Alan Waters, he has written *Interface* (1984) and *English for Specific Purposes* (1987).

Mick Short is senior lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language at the University of Lancaster. His main interests are in stylistics and textlinguistics, and he is best known for *Style in Fiction* (1981) which he wrote jointly with Professor Geoffrey Leech. He and Geoffrey Leech also co-edit two series of linguistics books for Longman: *Learning About Language* and *Studies in Language and Linguistics*.

Graham Trengove is a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, where he teaches English and is particularly involved with the teaching of English literature overseas. He has run a well-respected series of British Council seminars in this field at Aberdeen for some years.

Willie Van Peer is a lecturer in the Department of Language and Literature in the University of Brabant, Holland. His main interests are in stylistics, textlinguistics and literature pedagogy. He has published extensively in Dutch as well as English, and is the author of *Stylistics and Psychology* (1986).

Peter Verdonk is a senior lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Amsterdam, Holland. His major field of interest is in stylistics and its use in foreign language teaching, areas in which he is well-respected for the numerous articles which he has published.

Contents

Introduction

Mick Short

Although the common focus of this collection of papers is the stylistic analysis of literary texts, the relevant interests of the contributors are wide-ranging: stylistics and linguistic approaches to literary texts, literary theory, textlinguistics, psycholinguistics, reading theory, language testing, and language and literature teaching, both to non-native and mother-tongue speakers. The fact that academics and educators with such a broad span of interests have been willing to contribute to this volume is symptomatic of an interesting stage in the development of stylistic analysis and its relations with connected areas of study.

1.1 STYLISTICS

In many ways, stylistic analysis has come of age. In spite of the fact that literary critics are still wary about its role in the study of literature, stylistics has proved to be increasingly popular with *students* of English, both in the UK and overseas. Undergraduates find it genuinely useful as a tool for analysing literary texts. It helps them to understand what they read, and explain explicitly to others their intuitive responses, responses which they had before been unable to characterize and explain except in the most general and impressionistic of terms. The mere fact that they are provided with a descriptive analytical vocabulary enables them to see and appreciate features of literary texts which they would otherwise have overlooked.

Exactly how this process works is by no means clear, but Peter Verdonk's report (Ch. 10) of the enthusiastic response of his students to the work which he did with them is characteristic of what I and other stylisticians have experienced. As Ron Carter suggests in 'Directions in the teaching and study of English

stylistics' (Ch. 2), stylistics is becoming increasingly confident and mature. It has been forced by its students to make itself less daunting and more relevant to their immediate concerns; it makes less grandiose claims than it used to; and many of the issues that it has raised in literary studies (e.g. literariness, and the objectivity or subjectivity of literary response) have been seen to be of increasing importance by literary critics.

Another symptom of stylistics' development is the burgeoning amount of work being done in the field. This can be seen in Carter's overviews in this volume and elsewhere (Carter 1985, 1986b). Yet one of the things which literary critics complain of is that stylisticians tend to be long on theory but short on practice. Amongst other things, this volume helps to increase the amount of published stylistic practice. It has plenty to say about theoretical matters, as we shall see below; and because stylisticians are in general more interested in *how* interpretations are arrived at than producing a new interpretation of some text, it will probably always be the case that stylistics articles will discuss theoretical matters alongside whatever practical analyses they provide; but in the eleven papers in this volume the reader will find nine fairly full descriptions of poetic and prose texts as well as a number of more limited, suggestive accounts of some others.

1.2 READING LITERATURE

In literary theory at present there is a large amount of interest in the notion of the reader and the reader's process of understanding (see, for example Iser 1978; Kintgen 1977, 1983). Often the literary critic wishes to focus on the reader in order to point to the essentially subjective nature of literary response. And it is true that each reader will to some extent interpret a text differently from others, merely as a consequence of the fact that we are all different from one another, have had different experiences, and so on. But it should be obvious that such a subjectivist view of literary understanding runs counter to the presuppositions of stylistic analysis, whose proponents assume that our shared knowledge of the structure of our language and the processes for interpreting utterances in our community imply a relatively large

degree of common understanding in spite of some differences in individual response. For the stylistician, the major fact to be explained is that, though we are all different, we agree to a remarkable extent over the interpretation of texts. Indeed, if this were not the case, it would be difficult to see how communication could ever take place. Critics argue with one another over the interpretation of particular literary works, but I would suggest that the range of interpretations which have been produced for even the most discussed of texts is remarkably small compared with the theoretically infinite set of 'possible' readings.

The most extreme versions of reader-response accounts of literary texts are to be found in deconstructionist criticism, where it is often claimed that it is reasonable for the reader to take along to the text a set of attitudes totally at odds with the presumptions of the author. Thus deconstructionist readings on well-known literary works often 'explode' the text from within, producing readings radically different from those which critics have traditionally provided. Not all critics want to take such a radical view of course. Leavisite criticism, for example, tended to assume a relatively narrow range of appropriate response, probably too narrow for the taste of most critics in the 1980s. And critics defending all points between these two extremes can be found.

It should be clear that not all of these views of reading and reading outcomes can be correct. It is thus rather surprising to find how few attempts there have been within literary studies to establish the true facts. Honourable exceptions to date are the two works by Kintgen (1977, 1983) referred to above and Van Peer (1986a). These two scholars arrive at very different findings, and it is clear that much careful work in this field remains to be done. The contributions by Short and Van Peer (Ch. 3) and Alderson and Short (Ch. 4) provide interesting information for this debate. Short and Van Peer compare two written protocols obtained from independent readings of a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. The two authors, working independently, were given the text one line at a time and wrote down their immediate reactions as they struggled to interpret the text. This comparison of written protocols in reaction to a poem is matched by a similar experiment by Alderson and Short, this time on the first page of a piece of fictional prose. In this case the protocols are transcriptions of tape

recordings; the experimenters spoke their thoughts out loud as they read the text. There are of course limitations and difficulties with experimental techniques such as these, but the two papers provide initial support for the idea of a large degree of common understanding with a peripheral amount of differing interpretation. These results are, of course, encouraging for the stylistician. But much more work of a similar kind needs to be done before we can be sure of the facts.

The three readers involved in the experiments reported in this volume are all highly educated, for example, and the database is narrow. An essential next step is to widen that database, and to determine whether readers from different educational and social backgrounds respond in similar ways to the same texts. But at least empirical work is now being done, and if they achieve nothing else, experiments like those reported here will give us a surer foundation on which to continue investigation. The discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 also point to what is likely to become a stronger connection between stylistics and psychology, a trend already begun in Van Peer (1986a). And, as Alderson and Short point out through some of their references, there is an interesting connection to be explored with English as a foreign language, where a number of people have been working on the reading processes of second-language learners. Comparative work on the reading outcomes of native and non-native speakers, with their different linguistic knowledge and reading purposes will put theories of commonality of interpretation to their severest test. Moreover, cooperation between empirical literary studies and second-language reading research should provide a fascinating complement to the current critical interest in literature written in English by writers whose culture and first language are usually considered 'exotic' by those in Britain, North America and Australasia.

An interesting by-product of the experiment by Short and Van Peer is the fact that in their protocols they produced, unbidden, explicit evaluative comments on the poem they worked with. As a result, they propose a rough-and-ready account of evaluative as well as interpretative procedures. Hopefully, their observations will act as a stimulus for more work in this area, and help to cast some light on a topic which many mention, few discuss and none understand.

1.3 ANALYSING LITERATURE

This volume contains a large number of extensive analyses of literary texts. Short and Van Peer provide a full stylistic analysis of Hopkins' 'Inversnaid' to compare with their protocol analysis, and the Chapters (7–11) which concern themselves primarily with the *teaching* of English literature also contain a number of analyses of poems. Ronald Carter (Ch. 7) examines Edwin Morgan's 'Off Course', Short and Candlin (Ch. 8) discuss 'All There is to Know about Adolf Eichmann' by Leonard Cohen, and the description of Mr Bounderby in Dickens's *Hard Times*. Peter Verdonk (Ch. 10) examines three poems: 'Going' by Philip Larkin; Jon Silkin's 'Death of a Son'; and 'Ariel' by Sylvia Plath. The analyses by Carter, Short and Candlin and Verdonk, and the shorter discussions of a number of texts by Willie Van Peer (Ch. 11) are all linked to particular teaching proposals; but the Chapters by Hutchinson and Trengove concentrate exclusively on particular texts. Tom Hutchinson (Ch. 5) examines *The Tiger Moth* by H. E. Bates from the point of view of speech and thought presentation. He argues that the work which has gone into establishing criteria for the various categories of speech and thought presentation needs to be supplemented by a concentration on the functions which the various categories are used for. He demonstrates the uses to which Bates puts the presentation categories in his story.

Bates uses free indirect speech to *summarize* conversations of varying lengths and even a whole series of conversations. In *blending* he uses FIS to 'fade' from one scene, or aspect of a scene, to another. Under the heading of *contrast* Hutchinson examines the way in which Bates uses contrasting patterns of speech presentation in relation to character. The use of free indirect speech as opposed to direct speech for a particular character's speech is often used for *distancing*. These four functions are combined strategically in *The Tiger Moth* in order to manipulate the reader's view of the two main characters, so that we identify with the man, Williamson, but feel distanced from the woman, understanding her no more than Williamson himself.

Graham Trengove (Ch. 6) analyses Philip Larkin's 'Vers de Société'. He begins with the assumption that advanced foreign learners of English will need to be able to respond to linguistic variation in English. The text exhibits frequent shifts in style from

one variety of English to another, and in order to make sense of the poem we have to ascribe an appropriate value to each style and style change. Larkin often makes use of style variation in his poetry, but nowhere so extensively as in 'Vers de Société'. Trengove shows that to understand the poem we need to establish a coherent character for its persona, and that this in turn depends crucially on our identifying the language varieties he uses and relating them together to form a consistent interpretative viewpoint.

1.4 TEACHING LITERATURE

Over the last few years there has been a resurgence of interest in the use of literature in language teaching, and a number of the contributions to this volume reflect this. Stylistic analysis has been of particular concern to the foreign-language learner as it has been seen as a device by which the understanding of relatively complex texts can be achieved. This, coupled with a general interest in English literature, has led to the stylistic approach becoming more and more popular in the EFL context.

Graham Trengove's approach to the use of literature in language teaching and understanding is relatively traditional in stylistic terms in that he uses linguistic and stylistic analysis as an analytical tool to help him to see textual pattern and its significance. In turn, these insights can be used to help others come to terms with the text and discuss it in detail. In that sense, his approach for foreign-language learners is not far removed from what one might see in an elementary stylistics class in a British university, and indeed, it falls within the description of stylistics in English departments in some British universities outlined in section 1.1. above. The same can be said of Peter Verdonk's contribution (Ch. 10). Working with his undergraduates at the University of Amsterdam, he explored different stylistic approaches and then encouraged them to try out the methodologies in detail on particular poems. Language understanding was achieved, as a by-product of this activity. Verdonk's chapter thus has three different kinds of interest: (i) the texts which he and his students analysed and the interpretations they arrived at; (ii) the relative merits of the different approaches

which they explored (Leech on cohesion of foregrounding, Widdowson's notion of a literary text as a 'secondary language system' and Cluysenaar's lexical approach); and (iii) the efficacy of using the study of literature and stylistics as a strategy for communicative language learning.

Sylvia Adamson's contribution (Ch. 9), has obvious connections with Trengove's approach. She argues that English literature is of particular interest in English language teaching because of its special status with respect to one facet of language variation, lexical diglossia. She first discusses the traditional literary distinction between High and Low style in terms of the work on diglossia by Ferguson (1959), and others, and then goes on to show how Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Dickens use lexical diglossia in interesting ways in their works. She points out that examples can easily be found where a small text-portion contains synonyms or near-synonyms, one from the High and one from the Low style vocabulary set. The two words thus gloss one another, but at the same time have different connotative values and so can be used for expressing textual contrasts related to characterization, viewpoint, etc. This diglossic juxtaposition in literature constitutes a simplification of the language varieties that abound in English and that Trengove explores in his analysis of Larkin's poem. Adamson suggests that the study of texts with this simple form of style variation is of particular use to the language learner.

The chapters discussed so far under the heading 'teaching literature' have been general and/or traditionally stylistic in approach. The other 'teaching' contributions to this volume concern themselves more closely with pedagogy. Ronald Carter's second contribution (Ch. 7), 'What is stylistics and why can we teach it in different ways?' takes Edwin Morgan's poem 'Off Course' and suggests how it can be used for eight different kinds of teaching. The poem is unusual in that it consists of twenty-one lines, each of which contain two noun phrases consisting of a determiner, an adjective and a noun. Moreover, the lexis is restricted and repetitive. It is thus an interesting vehicle for, amongst other things, exploring the structure of the English noun phrase, looking at lexical relations and lexical patterns related to the text's interpretation, and studying the nature of 'literariness' through a discussion of whether or not 'Off Course' constitutes a 'proper'

poem. Carter thus shows how we can view literary texts not just as aesthetic objects, but as vehicles for teaching all manner of things *about* English language and literature.

Short and Candlin's Chapter (8) describes a course for teachers at the University of Lancaster which explored ways of integrating language and literature teaching in the EFL context. The course covered a large number of areas, but the approach made central use of the stylistic approach to literature, and also of a suggestion in Widdowson (1975) that the comparison of similar text-types from literary and non-literary sources can be used to advantage. Like Widdowson (and indeed Trengove and Adamson in this volume), they make use of the fact that literary texts often contain a number of varieties of English. But unlike Widdowson, they do not see literature and the rest of language as being distinct from one another. Rather, they suggest that students can profit by comparing the linguistic similarities and differences between texts in terms of similarities and differences of communicative function. For example, the poem by Leonard Cohen which they examine displays interesting similarities with a passport description, similarities which are intrinsically connected with communicative purpose. But in turn, there are differences between the poem and the passport which help to highlight the special use that Cohen makes of the text-type that he borrows.

Perhaps the most radical chapter in this volume in terms of its pedagogical proposals is the last one (11), 'How to do things with texts: towards a pragmatic foundation for the teaching of texts', by Willie Van Peer. Van Peer first suggests that the definition of text with which we operate is inadequate in various respects, and in particular because not enough emphasis is laid on pragmatic function. This narrowness of definition has led teachers to see texts almost entirely as sources of *information* about which to ask questions. Van Peer outlines a more adequate, multi-faceted definition, from which he develops various strategies for teaching texts. So, for example, it is possible to adapt the cloze-test into an instrument for teaching students about textual cohesion and what Van Peer calls the 'openness' of texts. By presenting students with doctored versions, with words missing, the class can explore the various alternatives which students propose for particular slots and then compare them with the original choices made by the author. This and the other activities he suggests

encourage the development of inferencing skills, which have increasingly been seen to be important in foreign language learning and textual understanding.

The approaches of Carter, Short and Candlin, and Van Peer might well cause the raising of some eyebrows in traditional literary circles in that literary texts are being used for purposes for which they were not intended, and, indeed, in Van Peer's chapter, the literary text itself is interfered with. But such pedagogical devices appear to be popular with the students who have been exposed to them, and help to promote literary understanding and general linguistic awareness. For teacher and pupil what counts is what works; and it is in this sense that reading, analysing and teaching literature go so interestingly together. After a period when English literature all but disappeared from the EFL curriculum in many countries, it now appears to be making something of a comeback. But this new use of literature for language teaching purposes involves an approach which is unlike traditional literary study, and is instead inextricably linked with the stylistic approach and empirical theories concerning how people read and understand. The use to which the literary texts are being put in these EFL classrooms is, in tenor, not unlike the deconstructionist approach which is being hotly debated within literary criticism itself.

Directions in the teaching and study of English stylistics

Ronald Carter

An essentially interdisciplinary activity, like many areas of applied linguistics, the most immediately contingent area to stylistics remains that of literary studies, although recent years have witnessed extension into other domains such as lexicography (see Hartmann 1981) and teaching English as a Foreign Language. This short survey is divided into five main sections but, given the interrelatedness of the areas, there will be inevitable overlaps as well as potential cases for sub-categorization. The sections are: (i) Linguistic stylistics; (ii) Literary stylistics; (iii) Style and discourse; (iv) Pedagogical stylistics; (v) Stylistics and the foreign language learner. The survey draws on a previous review (Carter 1985) but considerably expands material in sections (iv) and (v) in order to meet the overall aims of this volume more adequately.

2.1 LINGUISTIC STYLISTICS

In several respects, linguistic stylistics is the purest form of stylistics in that its practitioners attempt to derive from the study of style and language variation some refinement of models for the analysis of language and thus contribute to the development of linguistic theory. Work in linguistic stylistics is generally less accommodating to the aims of non-linguistic disciplines and is thus, when applied, most likely to provoke reservations about its relevance. Linguistic stylisticians believe that in the analysis of language there are dangers in compromising the rigour and systematicity of analysis of stylistic effects and that practitioners in related disciplines are unwilling to accept the kind of standards of principled language description necessary to a genuinely mutual integration of interests. In literary criticism such debate