essays in modern stylistics

Edited by

Donald C. Freeman

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I

Foreword

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Ten years ago, I brought out a collection of essays, *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1970), in what was then the new and emerging field of stylistics: the application of linguistics to the study of literature. This volume was, perhaps correctly, criticized by one reviewer as 'old hat', for its aims were modest: to assemble what then seemed to be the major theoretical documents in the field; to represent significant approaches and subject matters, and to include essays indicating promising new directions for further work.

Now, a decade later, the field of stylistics may fairly be said to have come of age. An increasing number of colleges and universities in the United States, Great Britain, and Europe offer courses in stylistics at the undergraduate and graduate levels on a regular basis both in literature and in linguistics departments. Several new journals in the field have been founded, and those which had just been started when *Linguistics and Literary Style* was published have become firmly established. Articles on the relationship of linguistics and literature have begun to appear with some regularity in scholarly journals formerly devoted nearly exclusively to one of the two fields. Professional conferences in both areas hold regular discussion groups and paper sections in stylistics. And the entire question of linguistic approaches to literature has recently become a subject of considerable controversy, a fact reflected in one of the essays reprinted here, and elsewhere in several essays and replies.

The field of stylistics has become so large and diffuse as to defy easy

summary, and I shall make no attempt at one here. For my assessment of the state of the art as of 1973, see my 'Literature', in *A Survey of Applied Linguistics*, ed. H. Douglas Brown and Ronald Wardhaugh (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), pp. 229–49. See also the annual stylistics bibliography in *Style*.

In what follows I have made no attempt to represent this diversity, but have rather reprinted those essays which seem to me to indicate the most promising directions for further practical work, and are of the greatest potential use for students in the field. The linguistic approaches in these essays center for the most part, with one exception, on modern transformational-generative grammar and its ramifications. Except for the section on prose style (an area of the field in which there has, in recent years, been less practical work and more in the way of programmatic and theoretical statement), these essays offer various theoretical frameworks for further practical work in stylistics. What I see as the field's four major divisions – general theory, poetics, metrics, and prose style – is reflected in the organization and selection of the book's table of contents. I have included only the barest minimum of editorial apparatus, being content to let the essays speak for themselves. I have included for convenience a brief summary of the essays in each section. The essays include statements both by major figures in the discipline and by younger scholars; the sole criterion for selection has been what I see as a particular essay's significance for future work in stylistics.

For advice and encouragement, both in the compilation of this book and more generally over the years since the publication of *Linguistics and Literary Style*, to which *Essays in Modern Stylistics* should be viewed as a companion volume, I should like to express my thanks to Margaret H. Freeman, John Robert Ross, Muffy E. A. Siegel, Timothy Austin, Roger Fowler, J. P. Thorne, E. L. Epstein, Terence Hawkes, Bruce Fraser, Samuel Jay Keyser, Roland Posner, Herbert E. Brekle, Francis J. Sullivan, George R. Deaux, and Janice Price of Methuen & Co. Ltd. Special thanks are due to the helpful library staffs of the University of Nottingham and the University of Leicester, and to Timothy Costello of the Department of English at Temple University. I am particularly grateful to Donald and Ann Kanter for providing a haven of English peace in which I could complete the final editing of the manuscript.

D. C. F.
Woodland View
Belton, Rutland
January, 1980

II

General theory

Introduction

The essays in Part II of *Essays in Modern Stylistics* all are concerned with various aspects of general theory in stylistics. Of the essays in this section, the most general and far-reaching is Paul Kiparsky's 'The role of linguistics in a theory of poetry'. Kiparsky argues that the essence of poetic expression is the patterned repetition of linguistic sames, and holds that the key questions for a theory of poetic form are: (1) what patterns are relevant in poetry, and (2) what linguistic sames are relevant in poetry. Modern transformational-generative linguistics has, Kiparsky shows, a key role to play in providing answers to the second of these questions in the areas of syntax and phonology, and provides a rich range of examples in support of his hypothesis.

For Jonathan Culler, in 'Literary competence' (a chapter of his *Structuralist Poetics*), the mind cannot be a *tabula rasa* in approaching a literary work. To the task of literary interpretation we bring a 'literary competence', analogous to what Noam Chomsky calls linguistic competence, an array of linguistic knowledge structured along highly predetermined lines. Without literary competence, Culler argues, the act of interpretation would be meaningless, and for him literary competence consists of a set of interpretive conventions such as significance, metaphorical coherence, poetic tradition, or thematic unity, all of which have been assimilated by the reader before he begins the act of reading. These interpretive conventions create certain effects in the reader for particular poems, and it is the task of structuralist poetics, on Culler's account, to

make explicit the system which creates such effects. Reading literature thus becomes a 'rule-governed process of producing meanings', and poetics the process of discovering those rules.

In 'Generative grammar and stylistic analysis', J. P. Thorne argues that modern generative grammar has importance for modern stylistics because both are mentalistic; both are concerned with the same kind of phenomena. Aspects of literary style are related to the structural properties of sentences as they are described by transformational-generative grammar. Most predominantly stylistic judgments, Thorne claims, are related to properties of syntactic deep structure. Thus the task of generative grammar in stylistics in the construction of grammars which formally account for literary interpretation.

Stanley E. Fish's 'What is stylistics and why are they saying such terrible things about it?' is the most trenchant and best argued of the many recent attacks on the enterprise of stylistics. While not all researchers in the field, including the present writer, would agree with many of the claims Fish imputes to stylistics (see Section VI, 'Selections for further reading'), Fish's essay points up several controversial aspects in recent work. Readers may assess the validity of Fish's attacks by reading the essays he discusses, several of which are reprinted in this volume. The reader-independent neutral facts which Fish argues stylistics describes are, for him, only the deposits of a specifically human activity, reading, and it is that activity – and only that activity – which can confer meaning on the data of stylistics.

1

The role of linguistics in a theory of poetry

Paul Kiparsky

Of all art forms, literature, and especially poetry, has the greatest continuity of form in the Western tradition.[1] Since classical antiquity, the visual arts and music have been changed profoundly through the introduction of entirely new forms of expression and organization. Consider, for example, how painting was changed in the Renaissance by the discovery of perspective, or how music was changed by the development of chordal harmony. It is impossible, however, to point to any such spectacular enrichments of technique in poetry. Styles and conventions have shifted, but no truly new forms have emerged. Both of the fundamental stylistic elements of poetry – figurative expression, using, for example, metaphor and metonymy, and schemes of formal organization such as those of parallelism, meter, rhyme, and alliteration – have existed from the beginning.

It is true that their relative importance changes all the time. In particular, the rules governing what must, may, and cannot be obligatory in a piece of verse vary from one age to the next. For example, alliteration was obligatory in Old English poetry a thousand years ago, but cannot be obligatory today, and rhyme, which was never an obligatory formal element in Old English, can and in certain forms of verse must be used now. Many such seemingly radical changes in poetic form are actually more or less automatic responses to linguistic change. Alliteration, for example, seems to be found as an obligatory formal element only in languages where the stress regularly falls on the same syllable in the word, which then must be the alliterating syllable. Old English was such a language, for the stress

fell predictably on the root syllable. In modern English, on the other hand, words with the same root can be stressed in many different places (take, for example, *ób li gate*, *ob líg a tor y*, and *ob li gá tion*). When this kind of stress system was established in English, verse forms with fixed alliteration were abandoned. The rhymed verse forms which took their place were made possible, or at least more natural, by the evolution of English, specifically by the fact that English lost most of its inflectional endings. Most richly inflected languages do not use rhyme, and those that do, like Russian, tend to avoid rhymes that depend on grammatical endings.

When a particular element ceases to be obligatory, it remains as an optional element in the poetic repertoire of a language. In fact, optional elements of form in a poem are more significant than obligatory elements, precisely because the poet has chosen to use them. In plain rhymed verse, a pair of rhyming words may or may not be related in meaning.[2] Where rhyme is not obligatory, on the other hand, those words which do rhyme are almost always significantly related, as they are, for example, in the internal rhyme in Hopkins's line,

> And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil....

Similarly, compare the obligatory and therefore only potentially meaningful repetition of lines in refrains or blues verses, with the free and therefore necessarily significant repetition of the line, in Frost's 'Stopping by Woods',

> And miles to go before I sleep.

In obligatory formulaic parallelism, like that found in the Finnish *Kalevala*, the parallel lines may contrast with or complement each other, but they may also be little more than paraphrases. But where parallelism is used as a free feature, it is always essential to the meaning, as in George Starbuck's 'Of Late',

> 'Stephen Smith, University of Iowa sophomore, burned what he said was his draft card'
> and Norman Morrison, Quaker, of Baltimore Maryland, burned what he said was himself.
> You, Robert McNamara, burned what you said was a concentration of the Enemy Aggressor.
> No news medium troubled to put it in quotes.

As a further example, consider Starbuck's use of rhythm. Because he has not tied himself down to a fixed meter, he can use rhythmic variation to reinforce his meaning. The slow regular dactylic rhythm of the second line breaks down completely when McNamara's lies are cited in the third and fourth lines. The changed rhythm also contributes to the sense by directing