

AN DOG

What is there to make a fuss about? Only a very beautiful thing has happened to me, which is enough to make it surprising, is surely in itself a very commonplace, but I find it quite new, new to both mind and body. I don't know what has happened to this. I have met a man, so far as this to me because he understands my thoughts. He likes me for what is human in me, not for what is animal, and he does not look at me with the eyes of a cowardly beast or prey. At first, indeed, he did not care to look at me at all, but even that is better than the ways of other men, though I confess that there have been times—months, I think—perhaps two whole years, when I allowed my vanity to be hurtled by those men's admiration. I thought any sort of attention was better than none, then. Again—as to this man, I thought at first that he looked at me—perhaps looked at me. I knew he thought nothing of me, and I'm sure he thinks so now. But of that I am glad, for someone to notice the change in him seem kinder and more sincere. I have learned to care; for my eyes—and then it seemed that I had—has he paid me a simple compliment, except that my admiration of understanding me.

To be understood! The sensation has seemed to me that it made me a new creature, my mind, my feelings, my feelings have all become new things. Bobby, my dog, and Bobby, my sailor brother—once I was in the water when in some strange place in the water, I heard the sound of his own language. For the first time in my life I have heard some one else talk mine. I have heard him talk mine. He not only talks my language, but enlarges on mine, in addition to saying what I have said. My brother, Bobby, he says other things I have only tried to say, and in other words which I have never even thought of. I have heard him the moment he has said them. I have heard him say them in me a host of thoughts that were in prison. I have heard the fairy prince who has entered the story of my life.

"What have I written? Perhaps I have written the truth; that; and yet I am reassured, so that as regards him, by seeing that I have written it so naturally. It is a reassurance to the fact that he has never tried to make love to me. He might easily have tried to do so, and so have destroyed everything. But I noticed this, that when ever matters of sentiment were talked about, everything personal or even emotional was

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ROGER FOWLER

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An OPUS book

Linguistic Criticism

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OPUS books provide concise, original, and authoritative introductions to a wide range of subjects in the humanities and sciences. They are written by experts for the general reader as well as students.

Preface to the Second Edition

Linguistic Criticism is an introduction to the critical study of discourse; the chief emphasis is on those works of language hailed as 'literary', but I have tried to make it clear that all texts merit this sort of analysis, and that belief in an exclusive category 'literature' or 'literary language' is liable to prove a hindrance rather than a help. I hope this book will be used as a text in courses whose aim is to enrich the whole of students' experience of language in all its modes.

'Linguistic criticism' is not simply criticism of language, but criticism using linguistics. What is entailed in applying a technical model of linguistics is explained in Chapter 1. As for the specific model of analysis deployed, I have used the version of linguistics commonly known as 'functional' rather than 'structural' linguistics: this is based on the theory that the forms of language in texts reflect—and in turn shape—the purposes of communication, and the social dynamics of cultural interaction and cultural knowledge. I have drawn heavily on the functional grammar of M. A. K. Halliday, but adapted it and simplified its terminology as necessary. In addition to the categories of functional grammar, many terms and analyses from traditional English grammar are used. I hope readers will find the linguistics accessible; certainly the model is easier and more familiar than that of Chomskyan generative grammar, which I consider quite unsuitable for the present purpose.

Modern critical ideas form the intellectual background to the argument: the basic concept of *defamiliarization* from Russian Formalism, *foregrounding* from the Linguistic School of Prague (and its powerful linguistic version in the theory and analysis of Roman Jakobson), *polyphony*, *heteroglossia*, and related ideas from Bakhtin, *point of view* incorporating ideas from

Anglo-American studies of narrative, as well as from Russian and French studies by Uspensky and by Genette. The 'poststructuralist' phase of French structuralism is a rich source of ideas about the dynamic nature of texts, particularly the writings of the late Roland Barthes. Finally, I have attempted to connect my critical linguistic theory with modern literary-critical and psycholinguistic accounts of the role of the reader in reacting to and interpreting texts. The scope and approach of this book are, then, truly interdisciplinary.

Since the first edition of this work was published in 1986, the approach has become well established, developed by myself in other critical works, and, more important, practised and improved by colleagues. When a revised edition came into prospect, I consulted colleagues who had used the book in teaching as to what changes would be desirable. The advice I received was to preserve the existing argument of the book (basically, the exposition of defamiliarization and its techniques) while modernizing it in other ways. The main change of emphasis has been to develop aspects of the argument which relate to sociolinguistic structure and to pragmatics: this being the fruitful direction which linguistic criticism has taken in the last decade. I have made much more use of Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, connecting it with Halliday's 'social semiotic' and with 'register': a new chapter (10) on these topics has been provided, and relevant sections elsewhere have been expanded. Sections dealing with the role of the reader have also been clarified and expanded. New, twentieth century, textual examples have been added for analysis and discussion, and a fairly thorough stylistic revision has been carried out throughout the book, aiming to clarify, lighten, and modernize the style.

Finally, in the course of bringing references to sources and other discussions up to date, I have made a substantial change to the way such information is presented. All footnotes have been removed, making reading more straightforward. At the end of each chapter I have provided a section of 'References and Suggestions for Further Reading', annotated as appropriate, consolidating the bibliographical information and locating all references in their proper places. Guidance on reading is thus more explicit and more readily accessed than in the form of a plain list at the end of the book.

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Introduction

Some of the best twentieth-century literary criticism has been that which has focused on the language of the works being discussed: in Great Britain, William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and the Cambridge tradition of 'practical criticism' which Empson's work and that of I. A. Richards inspired and sustained; in the United States, the 'New Criticism' of the 1940s and 1950s (e.g. Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn*, 1947); in France, the earlier work of the 'Structuralists' such as that of Roland Barthes in the 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Barthes's brilliant book *S/Z*, 1970). The values and the terminologies employed by the critics in those movements might today seem somewhat quaint, but a general principle of attentiveness to language seemed to be tacitly agreed. These critics routinely anchored their interpretative and evaluative commentaries to specific linguistic constructions within the texts: to distinctive word-orders, choices of vocabulary, patterns of sound and rhythm, complexities and idiosyncracies of meaning, and so on. One might disagree with their views on the texts, but, thanks to the fact that these critics do refer to real structures of language, it is at least possible to query and discuss the claims being made in relation to the evidence being offered.

Informed appeal to the language used in literary texts, and the way it was patterned, much improved the quality of debate between established academic literary critics; they became less inclined to discuss literature in terms of such qualities as their own feelings, or the author's presumed intentions, or abstract aesthetic properties, or simple moral judgements. Even more important, though, was acceptance of the lesson of language within literary education. At a very early stage, I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929), though linguistically unsophisticated,

firmly advocated close attention to the evidence which the text itself had to offer; and his polemical discussion of the practice of criticism was concerned directly with the impressionism and wrong-headedness he found among students reading English at Cambridge, who in their practical commentaries on texts were just not looking at the texts themselves, but rather producing stock responses from their own earlier personal experiences. From the end of the 1930s, a succession of very influential university textbooks was published which brought home to teachers and students the need to make language the focus of literary commentary: the enormously popular *Understanding Poetry* (1938) by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren began this tradition of critical textbooks which encouraged the bringing of language into the centre of the literary classroom. By the 1950s and 1960s, it was well accepted that commentary on language was a normal and essential practice within literary criticism: essential for coaxing out the complexity of literary texts, and for validating the claims one wished to make about them. These assumptions were the guiding principles of such brilliant books as Donald Davie's *Articulate Energy: An inquiry into the syntax of English poetry* (1955) and Winifred Nowottny's *The Language Poets Use* (1962). Confirming how the linguistic movement in criticism was being passed on through higher education, one of Nowottny's pupils at University College, London, the novelist David Lodge, published in 1966 a book in a similar mould, *Language of Fiction*. I was also a student of Nowottny's in those years, and had absorbed the message that criticism was improved by the close study of language. But I wished to go further, to incorporate the methods of *linguistics* into the critical practice devoted to literature. My own *Essays on Style and Language* appeared in the same year as Lodge's book. I do not claim that the proposal was original; a number of linguists, British and American, were advocating what was called a 'linguistic stylistics' at that time.

A distinction must be made—it is emerging already—between two ways of studying literature 'linguistically'. On the one hand there is the activity I have just been referring to: granting priority to language and taking a good deal of notice of it. Lodge's first

sentence (which surely can be applied to genres other than the novel) sums up the basic assumption: 'The novelist's medium is language: whatever he does, *qua* novelist, he does in and through language' (Lodge, *Language of Fiction*, p. ix). It follows that whatever the writer 'does' can be shown by analysis of the language. But such analysis might not be attached to any particular methodology, and, characteristically, critics like Lodge are methodologically eclectic and untechnical. The alternative position, as advocated by the proponents of 'linguistic stylistics' in the 1960s, is methodologically much less casual. Here, the linguistic study of literary texts means, not just study of the language, but study of the language utilizing the concepts and methods of modern linguistics; the linguist M. A. K. Halliday expresses the position very clearly:

In talking therefore of the linguistic study of literary texts we mean not merely the study of the language, but rather the study of such texts by the methods of linguistics. There is a difference between *ad hoc*, personal and arbitrarily selective statements such as are sometimes offered, perhaps in support of a preformulated literary thesis, as textual or linguistic statements about literature, and a description of a text based on general linguistic theory. (M. A. K. Halliday, 'The linguistic study of literary texts', p. 217.)

In fact, Halliday here implies two differences between the traditional critical study of language in literature, and the newly proposed linguistic study of language in literature. First, he implies, linguistic description is technically superior because it is explicit, systematic, and comprehensive. Second, the literary criticism of language may be prejudiced if the critic makes up his mind in advance and then supports his claims by citing selected aspects of the text as 'evidence'. There are problems in the way Halliday conceives of this second aspect of the comparison—it implies, falsely, that linguistic analysis is an empirical technique for discovering general properties on the basis of scrutiny of verbal details, without an initial hypothesis—but I will return to these problems later, in a more positive context.

The first part of Halliday's contrast is the basic claim that any linguistic critic would make: if we acknowledge that language is the essence of literature, and that verbal analysis is the basis of

informed and plausible criticism, it makes sense to deploy the best available methods of analysis. What is best is *not* the critic's imperfect recollections of scraps of school grammar ('participle', 'past historic', 'gerund') eked out with old rhetorical terms ('zeugma', 'oxymoron') and modern value terms used as if descriptively ('complex', 'cohesive', 'polyvalent'). Such random descriptive jargon, when used by critics who practise verbal analysis, will communicate with readers only fortuitously. There may be communication if the critic and the reader of criticism, through coincidence of education, were once schooled into using a grammar term such as 'gerund' in a similar way; or if, by brilliance of exposition, the critic somehow succeeds in conveying to the reader just what a term like 'cohesive' means in his critical discourse.

A linguistic terminology has many advantages over this rather haphazard apparatus. (I am assuming that my readers have, or are acquiring, some knowledge of linguistics: this book is not meant to teach the subject from scratch.) Linguistics is an independent discipline, quite distinct, in its modern development, from literary criticism, and has its own goals and criteria: this independence ensures that linguistic terms, when brought to criticism, have their own established meanings, and are not chameleon adaptations to the needs of the critical discourse. Students can work through a course on linguistics and emerge knowing a set of concepts which are agreed, standardized, at least within one of the major 'schools' which have theorized the subject. (There are, it must be admitted, some differences of terminology between schools.) Terms like 'nominalization', 'parataxis', 'paradigm', 'agent', 'morpheme', 'embedding', and so on all denote stable, well-understood concepts which are readily learned, and readily applied in objective description of texts.

A terminology derived from linguistics has at least two other beneficial properties, which are interconnected; it aims to be *comprehensive*; and to be *systematic*.

First, a linguistic theory aims to be *comprehensive* in offering the methods to provide a complete account of language structure—but note that the linguist or stylistician chooses what

aspects of a text to describe for his or her particular purpose: individual descriptions are selective, not exhaustive. Completeness is achieved with orderliness by distinguishing different types of linguistic facts to be accounted for, and assigning them to different *levels of description*. The three 'core' levels are traditional, and are concerned with meaning, word-order and related phenomena, and sound. The *semantic* level of linguistic description deals with meanings: the meanings of words and other expressions, the relationships between them (e.g. the inclusion of the specific meaning of 'cow' within the more general term 'animal', the antonymy of 'wet' and 'dry'), and the combining rules which unite a selection of word-meanings into a properly formed statement (i.e. not a contradiction, not nonsensical, etc.). *Syntax*, traditionally known as 'grammar', deals with the conventional sequencing of words in the phrases, clauses, and sentences of a language; with word-classes; with inflectional matters such as the endings on words which indicate number, possession, tense, etc. (the internal structure of words is treated as a sub-part of syntax called *morphology*). The study of the sounds of language needs to be divided into two sub-levels, *phonetics* and *phonology*, respectively the study of the actual pronunciation of the sounds of speech, the raw data as it were, and the classification and ordering of sounds as they are conventionally used and perceived in a language. In addition to these 'core' levels, further principles of organization are usually proposed. One of these is structure 'above' the sentence (the sentence being the 'highest' unit of syntax). This is the domain of *text-grammar*, which is concerned with the linking of sentences to one another, with the sequencing of sentences in coherent extended discourse, with the distribution of information, themes, argument, story, etc., through a whole text. Another major level of language is *pragmatics*. Pragmatics takes the study of linguistic structure into the realm of the users and uses of language. It is the study of—in one branch—how people make reference to their knowledge of the non-linguistic world in order to make sense of communication; and—in another branch—what actions people perform through their use of language (stating, promising, requesting, etc.).

Two further branches of linguistics, both of them exciting and prolific in research activity, are *sociolinguistics* and *psycholinguistics*. Sociolinguistics is the study of the use of language within society and culture, and treats such subjects as language variation (dialect, sociolect, register, see Chapter 10), communicative competence, speech community, social markers in speech, language and gender, ethnicity, etc. Psycholinguistics is the study of topics in the field of language and mind: the acquisition of language, how the mind works in producing and understanding utterances, the organization of language and knowledge in memory, and language breakdown. Aspects of cognitive psycholinguistics inform important parts of the argument of the present book, for instance the discussion of language and categorization, and the deployment of 'schemes' in the reading process (Chapters 2-3 and 12).

The model of linguistics sketched above is very inclusive, perhaps surprisingly so to those outside the field, and its comprehensiveness means that it allows us to talk about far more interesting topics than the nuts and bolts of syntax. One of the facilities for someone who is confident in the whole set of levels is the ability to switch from one level to another (without being committed to description at all levels.) Suppose a critic has prepared himself or herself linguistically in all of these departments of language. Finding, say, a syntactic feature of interest in a text—perhaps an unusual word-order, an exceptional frequency of adjectives, or whatever—the critic will also be equipped to look for and account for associated features of semantic structure, let us say, or rhythm; and that ability to go from one level to others is important, because the textual features which interest critics very often embrace structure at several different levels of language.

Next, linguistic terminology is *systematic*. It is a first principle of modern linguistics, definitively formulated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in 1913, that language itself is a system of units and processes (i.e. not simply a list of words and sentences). In recognition of this, the concepts denoted by descriptive linguistic terms are designed to be systematically related; for instance, the syntactic unit 'clause' is a member of