Style Literary and Non-Literary

Essays in Cultural Stylistics

edited by Wolfgang Grosser, James Hogg, and Karl Hubmayer

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Contemporary Trends in Cultural Stylistics

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Preface

Style is a field of special interest both for literary scholars and linguistics, though analytical research involves the utilisation of diverse approaches.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'style' first appears in the *Cursor Mundi* around 1300. Thereafter its utilisation became increasingly frequent, but, as a cursory glance at literary handbooks will reveal, no definition of the word has found universal acceptance, owing to the diversity of the phenomena that can be observed, for style can be dissected into many subdivisions: "literary style", including 'high style' (elevated language), 'euphuistic style', 'florid style', 'rhetorical style', 'bombastic style', 'baroque style', all involving a certain element of artificiality or even exaggeration, descending to "non-literary style" such as 'journalistic style', 'scientific style', 'colloquial style', 'everyday style', and maybe even 'pop style' and 'pornographic style'. 'Good style' or 'fine style', implying aesthetical pleasure, is generally held to convey intellectual delight, and was aptly defined by Dean Swift as the use of proper words in the proper places, whereby the author displays a characteristic manner of expression, effective for his/her purpose.

The ten contributions on style considered from the literary point of view could hardly be more varied:

K. Bachinger (*Contingent Chaos and CanaDADA Cinema*) ranges from Oscar Wilde and James Joyce to Tom Stoppard, from film to theatre, with many other authors, old and new, thrown in *en route*.

S. Coelsch-Foisner (*A Case for Pure Poetry: Symbolist Tendencies in E.J. Scovell's Poetry*) deals with the poetry of E.J. Scovell, whose first two collections appeared in the mid-forties, when she was labelled a 'pure poet'. The potential meanings of 'pure poetry' are examined, as well as the mechanisms of symbolist thought. By investigating the semantic, syntactic, and morphological means, - what Riffaterre termed the "ungrammaticalities" -, the transformation of the concrete into a vehicle for the mysterious is laid bare.

W. Görtschacher's article (*Style Is What Gets Lost in Translation? Five Translations of Dylan Thomas' Fern Hill*) analyses and compares in terms of stylistic congruence Dylan Thomas' poem "Fern Hill", which was first published in Cyril Connolly's famous little magazine 'Horizon' in

1945, with five versions of the German translators Reinhard Paul Becker, Kurt Heinrich Hansen, Heinz Piontek, Erich Fried, and Klaus Martens.

J. Hogg (*The Style of* Þe Doctrine of the Hert) examines the technical skills of the Middle English translator of 'Þe Doctrine of the Hert' and finds them indeed modest.

In his analysis (*Intensive Writing - The Style of Sue Roe's* Estella) H. Klein places most emphasis on quantitative factors, investigating the threshold at which they assume qualitative dimensions, and attempts to link stylistic features to overall narrative structure and thematic import.

M. Schubert (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman.* The Yellow Wallpaper - *A Personal Document?*), after analysing two decades of Gilman criticism, argues that 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is a personal rather than a political document, an experiential rather than an ideological one. Basing her argument on a stylistic examination of the autobiographical story within the context of Gilman's personal biography, she demonstrates that the roots of the narrator's (and Gilman's) depression and distress cannot be merely seen in gender-specific terms, but are to be sought in psychology, the experience of the maternal (rather than male) authority and childhood deprivation constituting both a motive force and a focus of the story.

D. Steiner (*Styles of Criticism and the Woman of Letters*) assesses the American poet-critic Amy Clampitt as "Woman of Letters" in the vein of Marianne Moore. Her style of criticism challenges the convention of normative, judgmental criticism, asserting instead the personal voice of the 'letter writer' as combined with a dialog interaction with predecessors and contemporaries. Hers is a literary criticism qua cultural criticism.

E.A. Stürzl (*Robert Graves' sprachstilistische Prinzipien*) examines Robert Graves' stylistic principles, drawing on both his prose and poetry as well as his reading, and analysing his use of various figures of speech.

L. Truchlar (*Die Polyphonie des Textes: Einige Anmerkungen zu William Gass'* Habitations of the Word) concentrates on William Gass 1985 volume of essays, demonstrating the acoustic mastery of rhythmical texts and examining his theory of literature that promotes a symphonic effect in his writing, making his work comparable to a musical score, whereby the borderline between rhythmical prose and lyric is virtually obliterated.

H. Wallinger (*Speech Patterns in Dorothy Parker*) focuses on a number of short stories by Dorothy Parker, a writer whose wit, sophistication, irony and pungent criticism are aimed at everyday

problems of communication between men and women, the desperation of the jilted or lonely young woman, and above all at the emotionally cruelty, vanity, and shallowness of the fashionable socialite. An analysis of dialogue, soliloquy and monologue in some of her stories reveals how fundamentally Parker plays with the boundaries of speech types and how consciously she manipulates narrative tone and character in order to reveal a woman's own self in relation to a male dominated universe.

Stylistics in the linguistic sphere involves primarily the descriptive analysis of concrete language material (*style analysis*) and the resulting didactic normative rules for stylistic usage (*style prescription*), or evaluation of theoretical aspects (*theory of style*). In addition hermeneutical process, the effects of stylistic characteristics in texts, are clarified (*interpretations of style*).

The linguistic point of departure thus concentrates on the code and employs linguistically defined categories and methods for stylistic analysis. The selection and combination of language units stand in the foreground. *Style as choice* is the basic concept, for which the theoretical foundation lies in the heterogeneity of natural languages.

In the present volume six essays are offered in the linguistic section that differ widely as regards subject-matter and methodological approach.

E. Brewster and W. Wieden (*What's so specific about ESP?*) consider English for Specific Purposes to be a functional variety, however with indistinct defining characteristics. First of all, selected stylistic evidence is offered, revealing to which degree and how stylistic peculiarities of ESP relate to the general purpose variety. Secondly, particular reference is made to extra-linguistic factors like pragmatic constraints and domain-specific knowledge and the aspects of acquisition and teaching of ESP.

The article by W. Grosser (*Style in Advertising*) investigates the immense stylistic variability of the genre which is said to be primarily due to its parasitic character. It is suggested that advertising is best described by a number of functional constraints and the sometimes conflicting tendencies associated with the principle of relevance.

Based on the analysis of advertisement headlines K. Hubmayer (*Intertextualität in Werbeanzeigen*) observes a predominant technique present in copywriting: established phraseological entities such as proverbs, idioms, and quotations stemming from an entire cultural history are used and transformed according to contemporary context. In this way advertise-

ments transfer cultural values and draw attention to the emotional as well as the aesthetic function of language, in comparison to the informative and appellative aspects.

In his contribution (*Concordancing in stylistics teaching*) on the use of concordancing in the teaching of a linguistic approach to literary analysis B. Kettemann argues for the benefits of the new technology. Especially in regard to frequential and collocational information new insights, for instance in the description of literary characters, are offered to the stylistic analyst.

U. Schmitz (*Intellektuelles Geschwätz*) examines critically the specific style of intellectual texts, which is characterized on the one hand by the use of words that are seldom if ever employed in everyday speech, and on the other by such complex syntactical constructions that the reader is more preoccupied with the analysis of the sentence than its contents. Such an intellectual style, where the linguistic difficulties involved in comprehension exceed the value of the thoughts expressed, is rejected as a mixture of pretentious expertise and total social isolation.

D. Ufert's article (*How do Style Checkers Check Style?*) provides an analysis of three widely used style checker programs. He points out that the measures of readability and grammatical correctness on which these are based may result in an undesirable uniformity of style and sometimes even in grammatically inadequate realisations.

Our aim as editors has been to offer every reader at least something from which he/she may profit. Hence the broadness of scope within the volume.

Finally it is a pleasant duty to thank all those involved in the actual production of the book, ranging from the advertisers, who contributed necessary linguistic material, over the contributors, who produced their manuscripts punctually and in accordance with the editors' prescriptions, to Anja Kranawendter and her colleague Martin Kaltenbacher, who, as our computer experts, provided the handsome printing copy.

Salzburg, May 1995 The Editors

I. Style Literary

Contingent Chaos and CanaDADA Cinema: With Jürgen Habermas, Will Shakespeare, Ingmar Bergmann, Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, and Uncle Tom Stoppard and all at Travesties *and* Strange Brew

Katrina Bachinger

Tom Stoppard had a bright idea when for *Travesties* he turned the near-miss between the high-flying revolutionaries James Joyce, Lenin, and Tristan Tzara at Zurich during World War I into a dramatic collision at the city's Public Library. Bright too was the idea of using Oscar Wilde's turn-of-the-century comedy of contemporary manners *The Importance of Being Earnest* as the coordinates of the "cultivated Victorian-Edwardian world of gentlemanly leisure" (Brassell 140) that the three revolutionaries occupy for their evening at the theatre as the guests of memory in the mind of one Henry Carr, a consular official at Zurich, whom Alan Rich (creating a good Joycean pun) calls the "touching centre" (409) of *Travesties.* Nine years after that play was premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre in London on June 10, 1974, and six thousand miles away at the MGM studios in Hollywood, Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis had another bright idea. They chose to write, direct and star in *Strange Brew*, a film about two amiable Canadian social security beneficiaries (Dave and Rick themselves) on a collision course with a madly ambitious industrialist whose brewing and bottling plant borders on, is tantamount to an extension of the Royal Canadian Institute for the Mentally Insane. Bright too was their idea of using *Hamlet*--much in the way Stoppard uses Wilde's comedy for *Travesties*--as their model for the power struggle between generations depicted in their film. However, to my knowledge nothing has been made of the function shared by the subtexts in *Travesties* and *Strange Brew*; nor has it been noted that the play and the film have a great deal more in common--even to the extent of being virtually the same Dada joke about the founding of Dada, told in two different versions, one

for British audiences, the other for American. Descriptions of those jokes will be here my prolegomena to a consideration especially of how, as performances with distinctive styles, the play and the film may be said to be, in terms of Jürgen Habermas, "the performative attitude of participants in interaction who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world" (112). Out of that free communicative interaction will emerge the question: Do the performative attitudes of *Travesties* and *Strange Brew* indicate that the normative end of the project of modernity will in *praxis* be neither enlightened emergent communal rationality (Habermas) nor simply chaos, but rather enlarged communal, multiple chaoses or the contingent multichaotic society?

In order to utilize his bright idea, Stoppard had first to educate his audience about three of his four main characters. Henry Carr, the fourth, is a type that the English theatre-goer knows well enough. About James Joyce too they could be assumed to know something, though not what he was actually doing in Zurich in 1916. As for Lenin, he is or was one of those foreign political cranks whom one firmly rejects but knows very little about; and Tristan Tzara was not even a name for most. History being dull, the best solution was to take the dust-covers off it, turn it into the bright shiney present, and offer it to the public in docudrama fashion. Carr's memory serves that purpose. With its aid the play begins as it would if it were representing events that were contemporary. Soon however through the use of time slips that momentary turn the present into the past the audience is informed of the real date of the action. But even so only Carr and his wife Cecily appear as old people. Tzara, Lenin and Joyce are talked about as historic characters, but they actually appear in view of the audience only as they did in their heyday. The effect is what the tourist would experience if Rome could still be visited as it was when Caesar was alive, but with the Coliseum in ruins. Not being seen to fade as Carr (the Coliseum) fades, Tzara, Joyce and Lenin (the Caesars), along with their aesthetic and social theories, remain modern and in fact have a future. This trick of making differentiated use of Carr's failing memory achieves performatively what is said explicitly in the final words of the play: "I was here. They were here. They went on. I went on. We all went on," Old Carr asserts. But Old Cecily knows better: "No, we didn't. We stayed . . . They all went on." (98)

The second way in which Stoppard gives *Travesties* an open ending is by introducing an apparently insignificant fifth figure, who functions in

both acts. This fifth figure is only sketched in briefly, so that critics have often ignored his presence and significance altogether. Thus he is not discussed at all by Tim Brassell in his booklength study, *Tom Stoppard: An Assessment*, even though the chapter on *Travesties* treats the characters extensively and serially as Stoppard does in the course of the play. Moreover, Brassell singles out Carr as the key figure by giving his chapter on *Travesties* the Wildean title "The Importance of Being Carr". But to focus on Carr's importance is to fail to explain why he becomes senile at the end of the play. When we attach importance to Bennett however, Carr's senility falls into place. Like all of the main characters, he then represents one of the four principal vectors pulling on the course of social history in 1916: enlightened industrial capitalism, as exemplified by Carr: "Legislation, unions, share capital, consumer power" (77); destructive disillusion with capitalism as represented by Dada and exemplified by Tzara: "Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men" (62); indifference to capitalist politics as represented by high modernism and exemplified by Joyce: "I attach no importance to the swings and roundabouts of political history" (50); and the communist alternative to capitalism as represented by Lenin and presented by the left-wing librarian Cecily: "The only way is the way of Marx, and of Lenin" (78). Carr's approaching senility at the end of the play now becomes a metaphor for the fate of the type of capitalism he represents, and Carr's manservant Bennett as a metaphor for the new order that was to replace Carr's capitalism. If that is the case, it is Bennett to whom Stoppard gives the dubious privilege of representing the outcome of twentieth century history. He would be late capitalism personified, the servant who is becoming master, and if *Travesties* is to be retitled to take account of the character who really represents the final social-economic thrust of the play, then it needs to be called "The Importance of Being Bennett".

Like late capitalism, Bennett is well informed, well organized, communicative, and efficient. He is, one might say, an early information highway. In addition to that positive qualification for being late capitalism he is not disqualified by being an artist. When Carr tells him that he is not much interested in his views, he agrees apologetically: "They're *not* particularly interesting, sir." (31) But he does not give the impression that they *could* not be interesting. He just does not *want* to be interesting, to be an activist. He seems more likely to agree with his master, who contradicts Tzara by asserting: "The idea of the artist as a special kind of human being

is art's greatest achievement, and it's a fake!" (46f) But his style is not dull in the proto-Marx way that makes Cecily's style dull: "Marx warned us against the liberals, the philanthropists, the piecemeal reformers--change won't come from *them* but from a head-on collision, *that's* how history works!" (77) Stylistically, he is not a Bolshie.

True, Bennett is first presented as though he might be a communist mole in the British embassy in Zurich. He is willing to bet a pound, at a million to one against, that it will be Lenin who succeeds; and Carr detects "alarming signs of irony" in his talk. It is, Carr suspects, a "sign of an awakening social conscience" that will either "grow into an armed seizure of the means of production, distribution, and exchange or spend itself in liberal journalism" (32). But we must allow for Carr's thinking being polarized by his upper-class conservatism. He sees communism everywhere, calls a dissident of any shade an "absolute" Bolshie (76), as he does later with Ramsay MacDonald because of his opposing Word War I. We must not forget either that Stoppard has said somewhere: "I am hooked on style", confessing the obvious. And style seems the best guide to what Bennett is. He defines it himself: "A consensus of the most recent London dailies and political and humorous weeklies, and general rumour put about Zurich by the crowds of spies, counter-spies, radicals, artists and riff-raff of all kinds" (30). That gives Bennett a stylistic push away from Marxism and towards the other future that Carr predicts for him: liberal journalism. But liberal journalism is not quite the right word for Bennett's synthetic style either. It would be more correct to call it pastiche and, if we agree with Walter Benjamin in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, pastiche is *the* style of late capitalism. Bennett therefore may be a mole in the British embassy, but not exactly a Russian one. He is the mole of late capitalism in a citadel of industrial capitalism, and as such he brings Stoppard's play up to date and hands it over to the future.

Looking at the list of characters in the playbook, we find Stoppard has put against Bennett's name the intriguing remark: "Quite a weighty presence" (9). Is that a very thinly disguised and slightly awkward pun on 'weighty *present*'? Certainly, hardly anything could be more 'weighty' than the low-keyed ironic exit that he finally makes. It is in keeping with his inexorable triumph over Carr, of late capitalism over industrial capitalism. Carr and Tzara are sitting alone in the drawing-room, actually talking about Bennett, when he enters carrying champagne for them. They are