

Stylistics and Literary Criticism¹

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Abstract

This paper argues that the fullest and most convincing analysis of literary texts is informed by bottom up stylistics. Stylistics is a way to begin to tackle the large issues literary texts raise but without jumping to premature or incomplete conclusions. It is also argued after Short (1996) and others that stylistics offers valuable apprenticeship and access to otherwise difficult areas of literary criticism for those new to the field. Stylistics and literary criticism are seen not as exclusive or necessarily contradictory approaches but rather as benefiting each other. Stylistics for example needs to be unafraid of the large and genuinely interesting questions as well as to read with more of a sense of the history of the texts it reads. At the same time literary critics need to avoid repetitive generalisations about gender, power and the rest. Examples of best practice in bringing literary criticism into dialogue with stylistics are offered from the work of Sotirova (2011) and Gavins (2012).

Keywords: literary criticism, literary stylistics, Terry Eagleton, close reading

1. Introduction

There is a well-established history of hostility or at best indifference in the western academic world between stylistics and literary criticism. Literary critics, while usually clearly unaware of any more recent work in stylistics, routinely object to what they see as the naivety of textual formalism that they claim is practised by stylisticians as if (these imagined stylisticians believe) purely scrutinising a text could be a sufficient approach to literary interpretation or understanding. I leave aside here for present purposes stylistics as a route to better understanding of language and language use since that would be of little if any interest to the literary critic though we should bear in mind that a contribution to literary studies is only one of the two major claims to significance that stylistics would want to make.

At the same time as they denigrate stylisticians' supposedly trivial concerns with language and form, paradoxically, the literary critics advocate what they call 'close reading', a close examination of the language and forms of any literary text under examination. Unfortunately it is impossible to find any explicit and fully systematic exposition of how to do this 'close reading', but one thing is made clear, that it is not the techniques of stylistics which are wanted, which are dismissed as 'reductive', simplistic, mechanical or insensitive to aesthetic qualities and to literary history of the words and forms used (there may be at least some mileage in this last charge only as I discuss below under 'Limitations of Stylistics'). The mystery of this paradox is only deepened when we read in countless critics (Barry, Eagleton and others) that students need training in close reading nowadays, that they no longer realise they need to do it or know how to do it. It is odd that stylistics is not seen as a possible contributor to this need but I will explore the paradox more deeply in what follows. I note however in passing that the unsystematic but very close readings of Derrida or de Man, what came to be known as 'deconstruction' in literary theory, are apparently to be admired, while stylistics is not. Unsystematic close reading with no explicit principles, then, however undoubtedly ingenious at times, is to be preferred within the literary institution, to more transparent methodology which also offers a more obvious apprenticeship route to the student of literary studies.

In this paper I both accept that close reading informs the most convincing and most enlightening critical readings, but also submit and attempt to show with some examples, that some of the most interesting work at present on literary text combines the strengths of stylistic, linguistically informed attention to the language of literary texts with readings informed by the insights and issues of literary criticism thus bringing literary studies and stylistics into a powerful combination not seen before in this field, and which promises much for future study in this area as younger scholars overcome these unnecessary divisions and hostilities which weakened both stylistics and literary criticism through the last century at least in Anglo-American but also European literary studies, which also dominated comparative literature and even world literature study through that period. The best literary scholarship needs the techniques and insights of stylistic research just as stylistic investigation of literary texts is demonstrably all the poorer when it neglects the insights intelligent and informed literary research can bring to the investigation.

2. Limitations of Current Literary Criticism

Literary criticism today is marked for many by obscurity, selectivity, impressionistic uses of texts discussed and in general a lack of replicability which for many, including our students, is intimidating or at least off-putting. For those of us who value literary texts this is unfortunate. Uses of language which could prompt thought and understanding and were meant to communicate are made subordinate often to the written performances of the critics, another common criticism of the field. A reservation sometimes expressed about discourse analysis too, interestingly, is often expressed as critics setting out to prove

what they already knew by drawing on literary texts rather than extending or deepening their own and their students' understandings through new readings. Ingenuity is offered rather than insight. We are told how society or language 'works' and then this is shown in the text at hand. It sometimes hardly seems to matter what the particular text is; it seems almost any would do to prove the general point, whereas traditionally (and for the stylistician too I would say) the specificity and uniqueness of a text is what matters rather than how it participates in the workings of power, gender or the other concerns of critics in many cases today. Not that these big issues are not important. They are extremely important. But that is exactly why loose generalisations are of limited interest. We know the idea of (for example) gender inequality. What does this particular text at hand have to teach us about its workings for these people at this time? The final irony of such approaches is that students are then increasingly blamed for weak versions of such literary critical performances as they attempt to mimic their professors. But what else can they do when they have been taught no alternative and certainly have not even been taught how to do the impressionistic 'close reading' their professors chivvy them for not using! Predictable readings are then generated which bring the field into disrepute. What is the point of reading yet another text to establish again what is already known? This hardly seems to meet the fundamental demand of worthwhile research, that we keep learning new things. A further criticism generated for example by Hasan (2007) in her account of mainstream literary studies, is that students simply reproduce the evaluations of their professors for whom literary criticism is primarily an evaluative endeavour (what is worth reading and why?) This seems to spell a stalemate for the discipline, when one's elders' judgments cannot safely be revised or questioned, and could if we are not careful spell the end for literature study at least as a dynamic and developing field of enquiry.

3. Limitations of Current Stylistics

What I have written so far may tend to suggest those literary people have got it all wrong whereas the stylisticians have got it all right on their virtuous side. This is far from the position I wish to take. It is clear to me that there are many weaknesses in the current practice of stylistics and this indeed is where we could learn something from colleagues in the literature sections who have spent many years considering issues in literary studies and whose eyes have weakened through intensive study of literary print. Let us take for example the charge I represented above, that the stylistician's work is of limited interest because of a general reluctance to move outside the text at hand to larger historical, social or cultural issues. Literary critics have been criticised and at times criticised themselves for perhaps being too quick to flatter themselves that they can write as historians or move to insights in social and cultural studies without having formally trained and practised in those areas. At the same time it is quite correct (I would say) that meanings are made in contexts and the context must be a part of the analysis even if 'context' is a vexed issue. This was the thrust of early 'discourse stylistics' (Carter & Simpson, 1989; Simpson &

Hall, 2002; also Bex et al., 2000) and must now be returned to in all seriousness.

Defensively, as if in conscious or unconscious recognition of the demands of context, including historical contexts of literary works, the stylistician typically works on contemporary or at least modern literary texts, apparently uncertain or lacking in confidence to deal with older texts. The only partial exception to this apparent rule of stylistic procedure is to restrict oneself to the classic canonical texts, effectively deferring to, even while decrying, the literary establishment's most highly evaluated texts. The stylistician is then in the handmaid position of 'proving' or explaining existing interpretations by reference to the language use, rather than any more ambitious readings of even classic texts, never mind the less canonical. This timidity, despite protestations of stylistics as extending well beyond the literary, does stylistics no good in the eyes of serious literary researchers (cf. Stubbs, 2004). The stylistician typically privileges the language use or at best the processing of language (as in the speculations of cognitive linguistics) rather than study real readers, readings and actual or historical co-texts and contexts as the literary critic does, however inexpertly or partially at times. The literary critic who suggests stylistics is a formalist reduction of textual meanings partly misses the point (what a close and systematic and linguistically informed reading of literary texts offers by way of new and deeper insights to meaning generation) and undoubtedly (e.g. Barry, 2007, 2009) is usually not up to date with stylistics as practised today rather than twenty years ago or more. But at the same time the criticism is not completely misguided. A scientific reserve about what can be written about with any authority or certainty has disabled and continues to disable stylistics in so far as it has refused or shied away from larger and more ambitious connections to be made with understandings of meanings as discourse, made between situated readers with their own agendas and investments in specific contexts where all the stakeholders in literary reading (apart perhaps from the stylistician) are looking for more than insights into language use per se. In fact, no academic endeavour can ever stand outside such engagement with larger issues and those who think they can are in most danger of self-deception. There is no escape from theory or interpretations of interpretations, however we devoutly might wish there were. The stylistician too brings his or her own predispositions and biases to their work. Any scientificity of stylistics consists in a methodology designed precisely to foreground such matters rather than turning a blind eye or shrugging them away fatalistically.

4. Value of Literary Criticism

More positively then, what has a hundred years or more of academic literary criticism by some very capable and highly educated readers to offer to the analyst of literary text? What at its best does literary criticism do, and I invite the reader here to examine their own memories of illuminating adventures (I hope you have had some at least!) in literary critical readings. I would propose that at its best literary criticism can provide striking insights into the thoughts and feelings of other times and spaces as mediated by the texts

they left us. Through and beyond this, great literary critics (Empson, Ricks, Raymond Williams, Fred Jameson, George Steiner, there are many) can provoke greater reflexivity and a deep comparative understanding of our selves and the societies in which we live. In this way they extend and prolong the effects of the texts they write about. For those of us trained in language studies or applied linguistics, too, the insightful literary critic also stimulates deeper understandings of the workings of language and communication. Greenblatt (2001) memorably writes on his attraction to literary studies as ‘resonance and wonder’, and the wish to speak with the dead (impossible but at the same time irresistible and—a motto for literature studies—we do the best we can, which can be pretty good.) Literature and literary criticism too prompts enquiry, reflection and discussion around issues like ethics and morality, aesthetics and pleasure; above all (to my mind) it teaches criticality, the key academic skill to learn at any university, the restless questioning of doxa: precisely because they are established and widely accepted positions they are particularly suspect to the trained reader of literature. At its best too, not unlike stylistics itself, literary criticism takes us back to the text again, to notice features previously unnoticed or undervalued. A literary critic at minimum should be another voice to help us develop our response to the text which very often will first have been read in isolation (private silent reading as the modern norm of reading).

5. Value of Stylistics

The claims of pedagogical stylistics, widely confirmed by students of such practitioners (Short, 1996; Hall, 2014) is that it offers accessibility, practicality, systematicity and replicability, what Short calls a student-friendly ‘toolkit’, a set of concepts, questions and procedures to look for and apply when approaching a text stylistically. The stylistics approach, it is claimed, will then allow the deeper or more wide-ranging questions of literary critics to be asked with more confidence that good answers can be provided with reference to the text at hand, but also, at its best (Stubbs, 2004) the procedures of stylistics will have prompted unsuspected and innovatory questions by its close, systematic and linguistically informed analysis of the text. The approach is accessible in the sense that an immediate start can be made by a relatively inexpert reader. It is practical because it can be widely applied to all kinds of texts and will yield worthwhile findings. The systematicity claimed is probably the key difference to what is imagined as ‘close reading’ in a more literary approach. The literary critic will sample for convenience and break off as soon as there is enough to write about, where the stylistician wants to be clear that the observations being made are indeed representative and fully grounded by reference to the language of the text discussed, not purely serendipitous or impressionistic. A single instance of an unusual word use is of relatively little interest to the stylistician who is looking more for extended or repeated patterns of usage, characteristic habits of language use which it is claimed will be more likely to construct or prompt a certain response than one-off instances, though certainly any foregrounding (unusual use) is of potential

interest. The difference is not so much in what is looked for or noticed as in the more sustained attention to the text, and from a more linguistically informed point of view, on the part of the stylistician. Stylistics looks to language to help develop an understanding, whereas literary criticism looks to language to help support an interpretation already more or less formed. Again, having a precise and differentiated vocabulary beyond everyday commonsense terms picked up by hazard through an education that offered no linguistics training offers clear advantages to a more sophisticated discussion of language use to the trained stylistician but also, as they develop, to the students as well. Finally the advantage of a replicable approach is that if an analysis seems not to correspond with our own readings we can retrace its explicit and reasoned steps with reference to the evidence available to all, and become convinced or look to modify that reading. This contrasts with the literary critical essay where the student apprentice just has to throw up their hands and admit that they don't fully follow and this must be their relative inexperience and lack of expertise at the recondite mysteries of such (apparently) sophisticated reading which are produced out of nowhere it often seems, rabbits from a magician's hat.

For the stylistician the specificity of the text, and the uniqueness of its language use as a primary reality are where any worthwhile analysis must begin. In principle many critics repeat this idea. Attridge (2004), for example, considers the 'singularity of the text' to be the point of literary reading. And again, writers like Barry or Eagleton bemoan the tendency of students to move too quickly to rather banal generalities from too cursory an inspection of the actual text at hand, but sadly (as we shall see) the students cannot be blamed for what they have not learned from their professors. The argument of this essay (as of most stylisticians) is that it is precisely because rhetoric of 'close reading' but no readily accessible, practical, systematic and replicable approach is taught to most literature students that they struggle not to do anything much with the language of the text and so turn more readily to their primers of Foucault, feminism and knowing winks to postmodernism.

6. Unacknowledged Synergies

Stylistics and literary criticism have not always in all places been so far apart. At the beginning of the 20th century as vernacular literature first came to be studied and taught seriously in western universities and more widely too (Viswanathan, 1998), literary scholars in Russia argued for and tried to develop a more scientific approach to the study of literature. Those impressive early essays of the 'Russian Formalists'—Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, Tynjanov, Propp and the rest (see Ehrlich, 1980; Lemon & Reis, 1996) are still widely reprinted in primers of literary theory and literary studies by Lodge and other literary scholars much influenced in their own practice by those Formalists. For many, indeed, via the Prague School, it was Jakobson who went on to found or at least give an important new impetus to the discipline of stylistics as linguistically informed approaches to literary language and texts as it revived and developed from the 1960s. I. A. Richards in 1920s Cambridge and through his career took linguistics and the philosophy of language

and rhetoric very seriously. Practical criticism and then the ‘new criticism’ as it developed in the US academy, later passed down to schools in the UK and USA (cf. also e.g. French ‘*explication de texte*’) understood the importance of close reading, though already there we can see the seeds of a less informed, more impressionistic and selective approach to the language of a literary text. Empson (e.g. 1930) is often an exemplary close reader, as later are Davie or Ricks. But soon the argument that the text is not self-sufficient (the critique of practical and new criticism which any stylistician today would happily endorse) was to degenerate into an argument or at least a *de facto* practice that suggested that in fact close reading was a rather unimportant and even self-deluding practice best quickly skipped over after a ritual genuflection if practised at all.

Yet even as modern critical practices developed we notice the close and sophisticated textual work of editors and bibliographers, textual criticism, which at its best is both precise and informed but also fully textually informed (e.g. see Greetham, 1994). Similarly, the most theoretical of the theorists in some ways, the Yale deconstructionist group including Derrida, de Man and Hartman, paid obsessive attention to linguistic detail. Indeed that was, again, the real weakness, not to lift their heads from following up unsystematic linguistic leads to ask how it could be shown that such lexical items were in any sense central to the meaning of the text except by intuition and assertion. They often were, but the words had been identified intuitively by accomplished expert readers, and so even at its best, such work could not offer any clues to the less experienced student reader in search of a methodology. In this sense much theory as is now recognised was profoundly inegalitarian, undemocratic and against the best spirit of what education (perhaps as opposed for such writers to research) should do. Elsewhere, for example, in the UK, Raymond Williams, arguably the founder of the ‘cultural studies’ now taking over in many departments from literary studies, developed an early interest in cultural ‘keywords’ to be fully developed from those intuitive beginnings by corpus stylisticians like Stubbs (1996).

7. How to Read a Poem—Literary Critical Approach

Writers like Eagleton and Barry complain that students today cannot read specific texts or discuss specific features but only generalise about them. ‘Students today are not taught how to be sensitive to language’ (Eagleton, 2007, back cover blurb). To their credit, such writers have therefore offered textbooks in which they will teach those students how to do a close reading of a poem. In what follows I attempt to illustrate and explore further through examples some of the more abstract and purely argumentative points made above with reference to a supposedly pedagogical text from a literary critic.

Eagleton is undoubtedly an experienced and in many ways perceptive critic. His book *How to Read a Poem* (2007) includes many telling points and he makes a worthwhile effort to study what he calls ‘rhetoric’ (never explained or defined but clearly a concern in general terms with uses of language and their effects). Rhetoric is again usefully linked to writings on discourse of leading western critics like Jameson or Belsey. Eagleton’s characteristic

flippancy and ‘cleverness’ alienate many and often distract and detract from genuinely interesting and substantive points, but will probably appeal to the target audience of students, and so perhaps is appropriate to his primer on ‘how to read’ a literary text. ‘How to read a poem’ is in fact the subject of Chapter 5 of a total of six chapters. It is telling that it takes the literary critic four chapters of background before he can begin his topic. Chapter 6 then offers close readings according to the method proposed in twenty pages of a hundred and sixty five. Again, we note that the actual readings represent about 12% of the total book therefore. We have to hope these two chapters will be very useful if the book’s title is not to be found misleading.

Chapter 5 lists the features a reader of a poem should pay attention to in no particular order and with no obvious principles generating them in sections 3-11, with each heading given a mere page or two, where it is exemplified rather than explained or explored. (Again, sections one and two concern themselves with background issues): Tone, Mood and Pitch; Intensity and Pace; Texture; Syntax, Grammar and Punctuation; Ambiguity; Punctuation (again?); Rhyme; Rhythm and Metre; Imagery. It is instructive, to say the least, to compare this random and unargued listing against classics of stylistics such as Leech (1969) or Short (1996). I would propose that the stylistics texts are going to be of much greater help to the student who feels intimidated or lost when trying to read poetry. Stranger still, when the concepts are invoked over a paragraph or two, they are assumed already known (e.g. ‘syntax’). Writing on Imagery, Eagleton quickly slips into a literary historical digression and again a rather random scattering of examples. He corrects himself at the end of this supposedly practical chapter: ‘But enough of theory for the moment. It is time now to turn back [sic] to the poems themselves’ (Eagleton, 2007, p. 142). So the effort to be practical is acknowledged as failed, and it is suggested we turn ‘back’ to poems not so far mentioned or discussed though presumably well known to the critic himself. Perhaps Chapter 6 with its illustrative readings will prove more helpful? You are right to suspect the worst!

6.3 offers a reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘God’s Grandeur’. Hopkins is always a favourite of the stylisticians, from Jakobson (1960) on (see e.g. Milroy, 1977, but also Empson, 1930, who gives a good example of what the best literary criticism can do with Hopkins, very stimulating but very incomplete, too). The complex uses of language require many pages to explain and explore and are perhaps the most foregrounded aspect of these poems, their linguistic strangeness and difficulty. What is surprising about literary critics reading Hopkins, even his best editors (Hopkins, 2009) is the way they regularly begin by acknowledging the difficulty of the language and then leap straight over it to explain to students and colleagues what the poem is all about (White, 1995, for example). Eagleton, sadly, does much the same thing here. First the poem.

God’s Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod; 5
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; 10
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

A stylistic analysis, following e.g. Short's (1986) protocols, would look at foregrounding, deviation and parallelism, phonetic structure, metrical structure, thoroughly and systematically to develop a fuller understanding of what Hopkins is doing here. Space prevents a full analysis here but it can quickly be suggested that sounds are important to the meaning of this poem (alliterations and assonance), including rhythm and metre, ambiguous lexemes, vague terms like anaphoric 'this' or 'things' need explication, as do capitalisations in orthographic terms. Indeed, even Eagleton's own odd checklist of items from his Chapter 5 mentioned above, would be of some help as a way into a complex use of language. Eagleton begins, however, by announcing the theme of the poem that he has already (we are not told how) deduced. It is a tension between Roman Catholicism and 'Nature' the material and phenomenal world, which requires a quick explanation of literary and intellectual history. The obvious question arises. Where is the close reading we were promised as readers in this section? Selective and impressionistic observations then follow, mostly probably acceptable, but there is no systematicity, no obvious reason why one feature rather than another is seized upon in this sequence—or rather, very significantly, the reason the observations are offered is to support the pre-existing reading of a tension between Catholicism and nature. This is the reading that has to be proved, rather than try a more bottom up approach of looking at the features and seeing what they seem to add up to, or at least as a compromise, moving between possible interpretations and a systematic account of the language of the text to develop or modify those impressions which exceed the precise specificity of this poem. It is furthermore ironic, that the pre-established interpretation sometimes closes down linguistic meanings which could open up a richer reading of the poem. Thus " 'for' here means 'despite' " (Eagleton, 2007, p. 155) Really? Why not pursue the ambiguity I would contend Hopkins' language opens up of both 'despite' and 'because'? And to reduce references to 'trade' and dirt to a critique of the industrial revolution is surely almost a caricature of Marxist criticism. 'Bent' it is claimed, has a meaning of 'corrupt'. No reference is given, but my own search of the

Oxford historical dictionary of English leaves the suggestion at best undecided (earliest occurrence recorded of this meaning in *OED* is 1914). The lack of empirical curiosity is again symptomatic and revealing. Eagleton perhaps does well to remind undergraduates of Hopkins' experience in Victorian industrial towns like Sheffield or Liverpool, but this is a poem, not a piece of mid-century journalism. If the industrial revolution and 'commercialism' originated many of the problems we have with the environment today, the problem is very much a pressing contemporary one now, not of purely historical interest, as Hopkins' writings (indeed Victorian literature generally) have so much contemporary purchase. Eagleton's Hopkins is a conservative (undoubtedly he was) who misses the dignity and worth of 'labour' in transforming the environment. Where Eagleton could have been thrown back on the inadequacies of Marxist analysis until recently with regard to 'nature', he instead lectures his students on Hopkins's failings. Interestingly Eagleton misses the sympathy with which Hopkins writes of the generations who have 'trod' repetitively. The temptation is simply to counter Eagleton's contentious readings, but that is the game the literary critic wants us to play. Better, I would argue that a careful reading of the poem, as of Hopkins's work generally, opens up a much more complex and thoughtful body of writing than Eagleton's simplicities veiled in complex language games wish to allow for. As I said at the outset of this piece, this specificity and complexity is the value of the literary text, and taking an outsider view before reading has even begun reduces the complexity and the value of literary reading which needs to be careful, slow and principled, not assimilated to an already established world view. (A philosophy which already has the answer to everything has the answer to nothing, as Popper suggested when reflecting on Marx and Freud in the mid-twentieth century). We need historical perspectives, Eagleton is right about that, but not reductive schematic history like this. More subtle understandings of people and history are available to a stylistic reading of literary texts as we shall see in my next and final section below. The point I am making here about a characteristic example of literary analysis is that a top down interpretation has driven attention to a few linguistic details which fit that interpretation (if read in the right way) where stylistics would want a more patient and systematic bottom up reading.

I close this section by quoting Eagleton's own strictures on his literature students' writings:

[S]aying what the poem means, and then tagging on a couple of sentences about its metre or rhyme scheme, is not exactly engaging with questions of form ... the language of a poem is constitutive of its ideas ... It would be hard to figure out, just by reading most of these content analyses, that they were supposed to be about poems or novels, rather than about some real-life happening. What gets left out is the literariness of the work ... they treat the poem as though its author chose for some eccentric reason to write out his or her views on warfare or sexuality in lines which do not reach to the end of the page. Maybe the computer got stuck. (Eagleton, 2007, pp. 2-3)

Just so.

8. Two Examples of Best Practice in Literary Stylistics

I wish to move toward a more positive conclusion, however, by offering examples of where the best practices of carefully detailed linguistic analysis in stylistics are brought into dialogue with the important big questions and concerns of literary criticism in more rewarding recent publications. I instance here some recent work by Sotirova (2011 and 2013) and Gavins (2012) to show that these two different worlds I have identified, of stylistics and of literary criticism, can indeed speak to each other in a particular study, and how insightful such work can be.

Violeta Sotirova is well known for subtle writing on modernism including the fiction of D. H. Lawrence. Her greatest insights to date have been generated by carefully describing and analysing the workings of free indirect discourse in Lawrence's work in particular, using frameworks from linguistics as well as findings from editorial work on Lawrence's published texts but to address urgent and real questions from literary critics in the area. In this way a more empirical basis for claims about modernist fiction is being carefully and systematically developed where large claims are linked empirically to study of the language of Lawrence's writing (and later Woolf, Joyce, in Sotirova, 2013).

How far is free indirect style a strictly linguistically identifiable and explicable phenomenon, and how far does it exceed the reach of any purely formalist linguistics? Is free indirect style a purely literary phenomenon or does it have its roots in everyday spoken interaction? This is discourse stylistics in the sense that a close linguistically informed reading of extracts from a single novel is taken in Sotirova (2011) as the key method to approach such large questions, where more theoretical writings on the phenomenon have ranged across a variety of texts and writers to make their theoretical points or to offer evidence in support of a proposed top down speculative model. Note again that 'discourse' here is not a vague and trendy label, but a precise indication that Sotirova will show how free indirect discourse exceeds and transgresses not only sentence boundaries, but the lines between individual speakers. Language is an inescapably social medium for communication: individual characters in an engaging novel exist in relation to each other not as monads. Indeed with Lawrence and modernism, even the narrator becomes dialogised rather than the privileged omniscient narrator of the more hierarchical classic nineteenth century realist novel. This is a precise and stimulating take on literary history.

The really outstanding chapters are Chapters 4 and 5. Engaging with the research literature on sentence connectives in free indirect style, Sotirova's key point is that in *Sons and Lovers* these connectives actually show sentence initial connectives being used by Lawrence for shifts from one character consciousness to another, and even more subtly, to show the dialogic interconnection of consciousnesses. Consciousness, as Bakhtin held, is here shown to be consciousness in response to another's consciousness. Reviewing

linguistic, stylistic and literary writings on the topic against examples from Lawrence's writing, Sotirova shows us how Lawrence's connectives ('And... But...' and others) effect new moves of perception and reflection, often ambiguous, even undecidable, between narrators and between characters and yet also point back to what the utterances are in response to. Paragraphing and punctuation are meticulously analysed as successive manuscripts emerge. One use of a connective is shown to be continually haunted by previous uses and to anticipate new responses. The 'self', as in Lawrence's letters and essays of the time, is not to be viewed in isolation as in classic liberal individualism. Lawrence's characters are multiply connected to each other in fine written detail. Minds and viewpoints are shown to exist in this writing in complex dialogic interrelatedness.

In Chapter 5 the repetition already noted with the sentence connectives of Chapter 4 is examined as a phenomenon in its own right. Again, the point, easy to make but complex in realisation as traced in more examples, is that Lawrence's repetitions offer new points of view not more of the same: cohesion and coherence with a continual difference (if not 'différance'). Repetition in Lawrence's narrative, then, appears in the transcription of characters' thoughts, particularly in response to the other's state. Whether polarizing or uniting, the repetition of lexical items links the perspectives of two characters and situates them in a responsive relationship. Even when reacting to external objects, characters respond to each other simultaneously and non-verbally (Sotirova, 2011, p. 143)

Drawing fluently on linguistics, discourse analysis, stylistics, literary criticism and bibliographical scholarship as too few of us can or do, Sotirova demonstrates beyond doubt here the existence of 'free indirect style beyond the sentence as a discourse determined by more than a single voice' (Sotirova, 2011, p. 155). And in doing so, and by the rigour and resources she applies, I have suggested, Sotirova has done much more too in this very important study which no serious student of narrative, point of view, discourse analysis, stylistics, Lawrence, modernism and many other topics besides can afford to ignore (Huo, 2013). Style studied as discourse seems to hold the key to the most valuable work in literary stylistic research. Sotirova (2013) rightly points to the limitations of literary critical work purporting to deal with the language of modernism much as we saw Eagleton floundering in his attempts to describe and analyse the language of Victorian poetry (Malamud, 1989; Korg, 1979, etc.).

One final brief example comes to mind of what I see as exemplary work in stylistics and literary studies and this is Gavins's (2012) study of W. B. Yeats's famous poem, 'Leda and the Swan'. Again, far from ignoring the vast amount of previous work on the poem, Gavins seeks to incorporate it into a more empirically based and convincing account which both explains and extends previous understandings of a classic work. Of particular interest in this case is the sketching of a history of stylistics which could usefully be considered by those critics such as Barry who do not seem to be aware of any developments in the field since the 1960s. Most important, however, is a reading of the poem developed in response to literary critical concerns with history and politics, as well as the aesthetics of 'ekphrasis' (a comment or reflection in artistic form on another

artwork in another form, roughly speaking) which shows again that language—indeed discourse—is where the workings of history, and of art, are to be studied.

A reading of ‘Leda and the Swan’ without any reference either to classical mythology, art history, or Irish politics is perfectly possible, and for many non-academic readers may be the preferred response. However, for as long as stylisticians aim to engage with literary critics ... to better their techniques and formulate an improved analytical approach to literary texts ... failing to recognise a wealth of critical opinion or to address established readings within this community of practice is at best eccentric and at worst isolationist. (Gavins, 2012, p. 360)

Because many literary critics—even while often lamenting the lack of linguistic analysis in much literary criticism—choose to go on as if stylistics does not exist and has nothing to offer, does not mean that it is useful to return the insult. Stylisticians have much to learn from literary criticism, and if literary critics cannot learn from stylisticians their analyses will be the poorer and less convincing for this neglect of the best approaches to language study available elaborated over at least as long a period as literary criticism has been.

Note

- 1 A complementary but different version of ‘Stylistics and literary criticism’ has appeared as: “Stylistics as literary criticism”. Ch 7 of *Handbook of Stylistics*. P. Stockwell and S. Whiteley eds. pp. 87-100. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

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