

○ P. SIMPSON, *STYLISTICS*

(LONDON: ROUTLEDGE 2004. PP. VI, 247.)

Readers may want to know what stylistics is before they decide to read a book about it. There is the first problem. A clear, simple description of the field is hard to find.

The mystery unfurls when Simpson's colleague, Short (2006), unashamedly issues a challenge for renaming stylistics, admitting that the field's label is misleading. At the time the name was adopted, critics were searching for insights about authorial style through a mixture of linguistic analysis and statistics. Short confesses that as this style quest gave way to the broader study of how meanings and effects are produced by literary texts, the old name lingered.

Clark (2005) sees the current concerns of stylistics as a set of complementary and mutually dependent strands of interpretive practice:

that which is concerned with the formal and linguistic properties of the text as an isolated item in the word; that which refers to the points of contact between a text, other texts and their readers/listeners; that which positions the text and the consideration of its formal and psychological elements within a socio-cultural and historical context.
(Clark 2005, 1)

Short charts the emergence of stylistics as an extension of the move from the nineteenth century's author-centred literary criticism, through the 1930s text-centred New Critics, Richards and Empson, with the Practical Criticism of Brooks, Wellek and Warren. Roman Jakobson brought together a range of approaches in the Prague Structuralist circle, which formed the basis of stylistics in the 1960s, applying a mixture of psychology and linguistics to literary texts.

But now, in an era where the canon is under attack, the author is dead and the idea of the book is embroiled in revolution, are people still demanding linguistic methods to investigate literature? This is where Simpson opens *Stylistics*. In answer to Lecercle's (1993) challenge that stylistics was on the wane, Simpson wheels out 'bracket' stylistics to account for how meanings and effects are produced, under labels such as feminist stylistics, discourse stylistics and cognitive stylistics.

This brings us to the most welcome aspect of the book, which is Simpson's cognitive stylistics section. His warning that the field is constantly expanding is an encouragement to revel in such expansion. Indeed, cognitive stylistics may be the major current contri-

bution of contemporary stylisticians such as Steen, Cronquist and Culpeper, as they digest cognition research through applying it to literature.

By what means can stylistics claim a special relation with brain research? One unexpected way is that brain research addresses an old problem in stylistics, the subject of the 1970s debate between Fowler and Bateson which Simpson chooses for the opening of his extracts collection (p. 149). The snippets replay a gruesome fight over whether or not there was something special about the language of literature. Bateson said there was. Fowler said there wasn't. A sociolinguist might compose an argument for the negative, using a standard notion of variation. However after the allocation of variants is done, is there still something extra to be identified? Something creative? The debate rages on with stylisticians. We glimpse a recent re-ignition in Pope's review (2005) of Attridge and Carter. Attridge says there is. Carter says there isn't. Readers will recognise Carter's position about the creativity of all speakers as being not far away from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1985), where every choice is recognised as affording creative potential.

How can brain studies contribute to this old question? Tucker (2001) sets out a position on the current state of brain research which would delight a gathering of Bateson-Attridge adherents. Where the interest centres on whether or not there is such a thing as embodied meaning, an argument stretching back to Lackoff, cognitive researchers plot brain development and evolution, prising out the relationship between language and body. Comprehending lexical items appears to involve pathways which link to actual physical experience. This has implications for another cognitive-stylistic question about possible worlds. When you go into your possible world, do you bring something out? And if you do, what does that mean for children with violent videos? And for that matter, what about university students with violent stylistics examples?

It is startling for a sheltered linguist, who long ago stopped John from hitting Mary in syntax workshops, to confront the examples which stylisticians expose their students to. If you set out to demonstrate foregrounding, it is convenient to have something shocking – Hemingway, *Trainspotting*, C-words, F-words, without even the cloak of the IPA to hide their shame. Speaking of which, why do stylisticians not require phonetic transcription for their representation of speech sounds? A phoneme list would enhance *Stylistics*.

Stylistics is another in the Routledge English Language Introductions series. There is little to grumble about, but a few aspects are worth tweaking. The layout is good, with the theme recycled over four sections. A skeleton of essentials is followed by a more detailed treatment. Next the theory is applied and finally come the reprints of significant

discussions in the professional literature. What about having the top of the page indicate which level of section the reader is in? We know we are in section D, but it would be nice to know we are in D8.

Readers look for definitions, and there are plenty of them in the text, but the 'Glossarial index' is a disappointment. It works neither as a gloss, nor as an index. It is very skimpy, so that even though 'conceptual metaphor' is dealt with in the text, it does not appear in the index. You have to know your way around the book to guess where to find things. Similarly, a literary works index and an author index would both be helpful.

It is handy to contrast and compare Short's (2006) website with Simpson's book, although the verdict is naturally that they are complementary and the smart student will use both. Short's approach based on analytical tools signals practicality. Simpson is more discursive, but he comes up with clear points which could be highlighted more in the format. Short's online practice in describing grammar is not matched by Simpson, who embeds grammar information in general sections.

Short uses pleasant sample texts from the classic canon, but one saving grace with Simpson's challenging and complex example texts is that they include new canon works with available film versions. Nevertheless, it is disappointing to see both writers drag out the passages which everyone else uses, the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*, the fog patch from *Bleak House*. Does stylistics exist to prop up the old canon and to canonise new things? Stockwell (2005) confronts this in his analysis of Kipling's 'If':

It is clear that there is an increasing divergence between the concerns and discourse of professional readers of literature and the experience engaged in by natural readers. In particular, natural readers foreground emotional and motivational aspects of literary works, areas which are neglected or poorly handled in the academy. (Stockwell 2005, 143)

If the above account of the cognitive stylistics agenda does not accord with your own experience of the Simpson book, then that is to be expected. Cronquist (2006) criticises Lackoff and Johnson, Fauconnier and Turner for not having elaborated their theory much over the last 20 years. He disapproves of stylisticians who do little more than the old 'quote and claim' (Short 2006) criticism and then point vaguely to cognitive models. He sees a need for cognitive stylisticians to keep a continuing relationship with the cognition literature. Now *Stylistics* does deal mainly in the older models, but with these backwards glances, Simpson provides a gradient of skills and terms which sets us up to

understand the vocabulary. Then he supplies forward glances to prime reading in current language and cognition research.

So far Simpson's position has been identified as 'bracket stylistics', with the emphasis on cognitive stylistics. But stylisticians are continually discussing what the discipline involves, and in her 2005 review of the year's work in stylistics, Gavins (2005, 405) terms Simpson, a leading figure in language and literature, a 'steam stylistician'. She is referring here to the elegant, classical nature of his work, in contrast to that of his colleagues who use technically sophisticated online methods and approaches; the stylistics of the 'corpus, cognitive, cultural and critical'.

This genial characterisation implies that there is more to stylistics than chasing trends. The PALA conference abstracts (2006) indicate a growing body of 'steam' interests, such as translation and pragmatics, politeness and relevance, which enhance the field by leaving other, older concerns behind, echoing Clark's (2005) vision of the increasing amalgamation of the various fields in:

an integrated, indissoluble package, both as interpretative strategies and pedagogic practices. Anything less than this, is not quite stylistics (Clark 2005, p.1)

Simpson's book provides a sound entrée into these exciting areas and can be recommended for undergraduate students.

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