Études de stylistique anglaise

Celebrating *Style in Fiction*

Dan McIntyre

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Style in Fiction was probably the most important book I read as an undergraduate student. I bought a copy at the end of the first term of my first year, with the hope that it might help me to write a coursework assignment that was due on the stylistics of prose fiction. I have to say that I wasn't optimistic about this, since most of the academic books I had read up to that point seemed dry, arcane and designed primarily to ensure that upstart undergraduates were left in no doubt about where they stood in the intellectual pecking order. It was a pleasant surprise, then, to find that *Style in Fiction* was different. For a start, it was easy to read. The argument was clear and the style (naturally) was engaging. It was also genuinely useful. Not only did it *tell* you about the stylistic tendencies of fictional prose, it *showed* you how to analyse style yourself. I remember particularly reading Chapter 3 ('A method of analysis and some examples') and being astounded. Here was what I had unwittingly been looking for throughout the two years I had spent studying A-level English Literature. It was a revelation to me that literary criticism didn't have to involve making pretentious proclamations that seemed to be grounded in nothing but elaborate rhetoric. Instead, you simply had to look at what was in the text and think logically about what interpretative consequences that might have. Like all good ideas it was simple in theory. It was also very much in line with John Sinclair's (2004) famous exhortation to linguists to 'trust the text'. Of course, in practice there was more to it than this and the book did (and still does) an excellent job of guiding the reader through the variety of analytical tools and techniques that enable the analysis and interpretation of style. But at heart, the message was clear: lay your analytical and interpretative cards on the table and make sure you have evidence for the claims that you make.

What made *Style in Fiction* all the more interesting to me was that it had been written by two of the people who were, at the time, attempting to teach me linguistics. Admittedly, it had taken me a while to realise this. My excuse is that not having had family members who had been to university, I was not familiar with what academics did besides give lectures. In truth, I suspect it was more a case of me simply being a bit dim. Whatever the reason, I found it

a surprising coincidence that we were regularly asked to read articles and books by two authors called Leech and Short, who just happened to have the same names as nice Geoff and Mick from the Department of Linguistics. I can't remember when the penny finally dropped but when it did I was suitably impressed.

Both authors are, of course, leading names in stylistics and have contributed much to its development as a discipline. Since the publication of *Style in Fiction*, for instance, Mick Short has invested considerable efforts in developing the model of speech and thought presentation originally outlined in Chapter 10 of the book. Short's work in this area has involved large-scale corpus-based projects designed to test the categories in a wide variety of text-types, including literary and popular fiction, tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, and serious and popular biography. This has led to both a refinement of the original categories and the introduction of an entirely new scale to explain writing presentation. The outcomes of Short's corpus work have led to new insights into the forms and associated effects of the speech, writing and thought presentation categories. For instance, the notion of discourse report is replaced in later work by the notion of discourse presentation, in order to avoid running together the concepts of presenting and reporting/representing. The formal structures of the NRS/T/WA (now NPS/T/WA) and IS categories are now more clearly defined, meaning that two-clause NRSA examples in the first edition of *Style in Fiction* are now reanalysed as indirect speech. What is particularly interesting about Short's contribution to this special issue is that it offers explanations for why some of these earlier decisions might have been made in the first place. For example, Short (this volume) explains that his reason for having described (in the first edition of *Style in Fiction*) a two-clause structure as NRSA rather than IS arose from the fact that the speech presentation in the example summarised more than one proposition; and since NRSA was the category most associated with summary, that was how the example was categorised. Summary, then, appears to be a slightly different issue from the kind of discourse presentation that was dealt with in the first edition of *Style in Fiction*, and it is an issue that is taken up by Short in this volume, in what is an intriguing development in discourse presentation studies.

Unlike Short, after the publication of *Style in Fiction* Geoff Leech moved away from the core business of stylistics, becoming increasingly involved in computational and corpus linguistics. He led the Lancaster part of the team that built the British National Corpus and his pioneering research in corpus linguistics led to such landmark publications as *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al.1999) and, more recently, *Change in*

Contemporary English (Leech et al. 2009). However, through his corpus work he continued to pursue an interest in style, even if indirectly. For example, his work on grammatical change over time affords clear insights into stylistic developments. In addition to this work, he continued to write occasionally on stylistics, and in 2008 some of his best work in this area was published as *Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding* (2008). Geoff Leech's contribution to this special issue draws on his expertise in corpus-based language studies by using the Wmatrix software package to analyse Virginia Woolf's story 'The Mark on the Wall'. Leech assesses Wmatrix's capacity for contributing to stylistic analysis and marks himself as a pioneer once more, this time in the burgeoning field of corpus stylistics.

In 2007 the second edition of *Style in Fiction* was published, including a new chapter assessing the state of stylistics 25 years on from the book's original publication. A further new chapter demonstrated some of the analytical techniques that have been developed since then. I still frequently read *Style in Fiction*, both the first and second editions, because Leech and Short's now classic work continues to inform the development of stylistics today. The articles in this special issue demonstrate the extent of its influence.

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