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*Recommended Prices*
Style and Meaning

BY
DAVID LAKE

FACULTY OF ARTS
Volume I Number 9

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0. This paper is an attempt to clarify principles and terminology used in stylistics. I shall start from the current usages of common terms, and try to develop a more precise vocabulary, without departing more than is absolutely necessary from traditional language.

1. STYLISTICS

Stylistics has always been a "subject" or activity hopelessly bedevilled by vagueness. On hearing the word, few people have any clear idea about:
   i) what is being proposed as the object to be studied,
   ii) what methods are to be used,
   iii) what is the purpose of the activity,
   or iv) what relation it bears to such recognized "subjects" as Linguistics or Literature.
   To take up question i), we may say, obviously, that stylistics is the study of style.
   If it is then asked, "What is the meaning of 'style'?", we are in trouble at once; for the words meaning and style are among the vaguest in our vocabulary. To discuss the meaning of "style" is difficult until we have clarified the meaning(s) of "meaning".

2. MEANINGS OF "MEANING"

Whole books have been written on this subject; I shall, to start with, merely isolate two common uses of the noun meaning and its related verb to mean. Let us call these uses "M1" and "M2".
2.1 M1. This is the sense "logical or cognitive equivalent"; the "meaning" (M1)
of any term is what is given by a definition. The verb form means, in this sense, is abbreviated “==”, and has for synonym one use of the copula is. M1 is the basic tool of analysis, as used in this paper, e.g. in the sentences:

The meaning (M1) of Stylistics is “the study of style”. Stylistics means (M1) “the study of style”.

2.2 M2. In this sense, meaning == the total of what is conveyed. This usage is very common in literary discussions; for example:

. . . the Total Meaning we are engaged with is, almost always, a blend, a combination. . . .

Meaning (M2)—I. A. Richards’ “Total Meaning”—includes Meaning 1 (logical equivalent) as one of its components.

2.3 Both M1 and M2 may be used with reference to i) a single word, ii) any longer text. This may be clarified by the schema below:

For M1 is given by a M2 == M1 combined with

a single word definition “connotation” or “style (S4) flavour”

a longer text paraphrase style (in sense S4—see 3.4, below)

3. MEANINGS (M1) OF “STYLE”

There are four common uses of style applied to speaking or writing. Let us label these S1, S2, S3, S4.

3.1 S1 occurs in the expression “He writes with style”; it has been defined as “saying the right thing”, or “ingratiation”.

This is an extremely vague usage, as it does not clearly distinguish between logical and non-logical aspects of “saying the right thing”, i.e. between the problems (of M1) dealt with by ancient Rhetoric under the head of “Invention”, and those other problems dealt with under that of “Style” (elocutio). I have seen school textbooks which classify logical faults as faults of “style”; for example, the sentence:

Napoleon was more brilliant than any of the generals of his time.

But the fault here is a contradiction between M1 meanings, implying the absurdity “Napoleon was more brilliant than Napoleon”.

S1 can be divided immediately into two sub-types—the “good” and the “neutral” senses. We might label these “S1g” and “S1n”. For example:

i) He writes with style. (S1g)

ii) He writes with good style. (S1n)

iii) A fault of style (S1n) implies saying the wrong thing. Clearly, S1g == good (S1n).

It is better to replace “style” by other words in both S1 senses, since these clash badly with more important and fundamental uses of “style”. I suggest that “with style” (S1g) be replaced by the single word well, or by appropriately; and “style” (S1n) by appropriateness, effectiveness, or congruity.

A concept related to S1n may be of some use in stylistic analysis. This is: a particular way of treating a given situation, including both what is said and how it is said; but without, necessarily, reference to effectiveness. I suggest that we call this treatment, label it “S1t”, and define it as “rhetorical choice in all categories”. Comparison of treatment is a common activity in literary studies; thus we compare the treatments of Johnson and Boswell by examining parallel passages of their narratives of the Hebrides journey; or Boswell’s differing treatments in parallel passages of his London Journal and his Life of Johnson.
Clearly, treatment (Stt) is merely M2 ("total meaning") in a given or restricted situation. (The word style has sometimes been employed in this sense, because in general style is used to refer to some variable revealed by comparison, when other features are regarded as given or constant. But in this case, what is regarded as constant is only the context of situation, so that "style" comes to stand for the whole utterance.)

3.2 S2 = the type of language normally used in a given situation; e.g. spoken style, written style, sermon style, formal letter style, etc. In common with most British linguists, I use for this meaning the term register.

3.3 S3 = the characteristic manner of an author; e.g. "Shakespeare's style". If it is necessary to invent a term for this meaning, I suggest idiostyle, on the model of the current linguistic term idiolect (individual dialect).

3.4 S4 = the "manner" of a text, contrasted with its "matter" or "logical content". This is the most important meaning of style for our purposes, since it is the meaning underlying S2 and S3.

Thus the register (S2) of a given situation is a generalization from the styles (S4) of the texts which have been uttered in that situation; and Shakespeare's style (S3) is a generalization from the styles (S4) of all his works.

Henceforth I shall use the word "style", unqualified, only in the sense S4.

4. STYLE AND MEANING

Many recent investigators have tried to define style without reference to meaning; presumably because they have a background of linguistic science, in which meaning has been notoriously difficult to handle rigorously.

4.1 The most valiant effort of this kind known to me is that of Nils E. Enkvist:

The style of a text is a function of the aggregate of the ratios between the frequencies of its phonological, grammatical and lexical items, and the frequencies of the corresponding items in a contextually related norm. This seems to avoid the painful difficulty of meaning, by substituting a rigorous statistical comparison of texts.

4.2 But the appearance is deceptive: meaning rears its ugly head in the word "contextually". Context here includes social situation or extra-textual circumstances, which in turn may involve "field of discourse"—what is being talked or written about. A "contextually related norm" is, in practice, another text (or corpus of texts) which does not differ too greatly in meaning (M1) to afford a useful comparison. If the two texts differ not at all in meaning (M1), the whole difference between the texts is stylistic. E.g.:

Text a) This is the house that Jack built.
Text b) This is the residence constructed by Mr. John Adamson.
(Mr. John Adamson is "Jack" to his friends.)

Unless the criterion of meaning (M1) is used in the selection of comparison texts, one might easily prefer, in a stylistic exercise, to place beside Text a) some such utterance as:

Text c) This is the road that Dick built.

It is clear that c) differs from a) much less than b) does in respect of lexical and phonological items, and not at all in grammatical items; there is (presumably) much less difference in one aspect of context, the social relation implied between the author (speaker or writer) and the reader. But c) differs markedly from both
the other texts in meaning (M1). The contrast a): b) shows a clear difference in style; the contrast a): c) shows a clear difference in meaning (M1), but minimal difference in style.

4.3 All three texts differ markedly from each other in meaning (M2), since each "conveys" something notably different. This implies:

i) The Total Meaning (M2) of an utterance is a function of the logical content (M1) and the style (S4).

ii) Style is a kind of meaning; we can label it "M3", not forgetting that 

Hence we can state the formulae:

\[ M_2 = f(M_1, M_3) \text{ or } M_2 = f(M_1, S_4) \]

This is by no means a revolutionary conclusion; on the contrary, it is a platitude implied by the traditional division between "style" and "content", and in Rhetoric between Invention and Style. There is no escaping some such division: if the term "style" is to be of any service at all, it cannot mean the whole of writing, or therefore of meaning; hence there must be something in writing and meaning which is not style. The traditional twofold division is probably the best, since it is widely accepted, and corresponds to some obvious aspects of the communication situation (see 5.2 below.)

What may be objectionable in the old rhetorical view is the sharp cleavage made between the two components of Total Meaning (whereas they are seldom easily separated); also, the failure to recognize that style is a kind of meaning; and the common assumption that the relation between content and style is one of simple addition (M2 = M1 + S4)—whereas M2 = M1 \times S4 is probably a better metaphor of the truth. To draw an analogy from Chemistry, Total Meaning is more like a compound than a mixture.

4.4 A lot of ink has been spilt in arguments for and against the existence of synonyms. Can words (and therefore longer texts) "mean the same"? Some of these debates have been rendered futile by the failure of the antagonists to notice that each party was using "mean" in a different sense—the champions of synonymy intended M1, their opponents M2.

M1 synonyms certainly occur: but they may be synonyms in either a partial or a total sense. Partial synonyms are alternatives in some contexts, but not in others; total synonyms (rare) are alternatives in all their possible contexts.

*House* and *residence*, *built* and *constructed* are examples of M1 partial synonyms. They would not be alternatives in the following sentences:

Mr. Adamson has returned from a year’s *residence* abroad. (Not “house”.)

The Stuarts were an ill-fated *house*. (Not “residence”.)

Jack *constructed* a triangle with ruler and compass. (Not “built”.)

The contexts in which only one of the words can occur account for a large part of the “stylistic” difference between the alternatives.

*Typhlitis* and *caecitis* are examples of M1 total synonyms: both mean “inflammation of the blind gut”. Possibly *among* and *amongst* are another pair.

Nevertheless, even twins like these are not absolute M2 synonyms: they do not “convey” altogether the same feeling. No two words which differ in phonological shape can be identical in stylistic effect: this is clearly seen in poetry. A pair of “absolute M2 synonyms” is in fact an impossibility, for they would have to be i) M1 total synonyms, and ii) of the same phonological shape—so that, occurring in all the same contexts and always with the same sound, they would of course be tokens of the same word.
Some linguists declare that words like *cat* and *dog*, or *salt* and *pepper* have "the same style", or that the choice between them is "non-stylistic". But let us not be confused: such people are using *style* in sense S2 (register).

### 5. STYLE AND CONTENT

The division of Total Meaning into M1 and S4 corresponds to two essential aspects of the context in which language operates: the objective aspect, or "field of discourse", and the subjective aspect of the author’s mind and personality.

5.1 I am in general agreement with W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, who distinguish between "explicit meaning" (= M1) and "implicit meaning" (= S4). Utterances may be compared to rays of light illuminating a landscape: the objects revealed stand out clearly, and attract our attention like explicit meaning; but the light itself implicitly conveys the character of its source, while contributing essentially to the total effect. Consider the difference between a garden in the midday sun and the same garden in the light of the moon!

5.2 Briefly,
   1) logical content (M1) regards the object;
   2) style (S4) implies qualities or temporary states (feelings, attitudes, intentions, purposes, etc.) in the author confronting the object and the reader.

5.3 Of course, human conditions and temporary states may themselves be the object of the discourse. Then the style may, or may not, convey the same message as the logical content. For example, we may compare:

Text *d)* I hate you, I loathe you, I detest you!

Text *e)* The present writer experiences a considerable degree of negative affect with respect to the reader.

Both *d)* and *e)* have the same logical content: their object is the author’s hostility to the recipient of his message. But they differ very greatly in style. The grammar, lexis and phonology of *d)* may suggest that the author is in a speech situation, and certainly they imply strong emotion; the corresponding features of *e)* conform to the written register, and imply that the writer is 1) a social scientist, 2) insincere, ironical, or facetious. In both texts the style is at least as important as the logical content in conveying the Total Meaning.

### 6. PUBLIC MEANING

I have defined M2 as "the total of what is conveyed". But this form of words will not stand up to close analysis. "Conveyed" implies that an entity (meaning) is transported intact from author to reader; and this is not true.

6.1 What the author intends the text to "convey", or believes that it will convey, is not identical with what the reader receives. In rhetorically effective communication, the *author’s meaning*—which we may label "M2a"—does not differ greatly from the *reader’s meaning* ("M2r"); but in many cases the difference will be considerable.

6.2 What do we mean by "*the meaning*" of a text? I think this must be the public meaning, i.e. the meaning understood by an *ideal*, intelligent reader. We can label this "M2ri".

Of course, in real life readers vary in intelligence, education, and other background factors. If we are to dispute meaningfully about "*the meaning*" of the text, we must postulate an ideal reader who is intelligent, educated, and of much the same background as the author—or at least, of a background familiar to the author, and taken into account by him.
It is well to remember that this ideal reader is a fiction; consequently a text has, strictly speaking, no objective, public meaning. (The contrary belief is clearly metaphysical, like a belief in “absolute” Newtonian space or time: how could any stated meaning be verified as being the absolute, objective one?)

6.3 It sometimes happens that the author’s meaning differs greatly from the public meaning, not through the author’s carelessness, but because of his determination to use language in ways different from those currently accepted. Extreme examples are Humpty Dumpty (in *Through the Looking Glass*, chapter 6) and several modern poets and prose writers. In these situations, the author’s meaning can change the public meaning if the author explicates his usages, or impresses some of his readers sufficiently to induce them to do the explicating for him. (“There’s glory for you!”)

It is important to notice that even the author’s meaning is a reader’s meaning: for the author is a reader of his own text. It is useless to talk of the meaning of an utterance before the utterance has been made: this is a matter of logic, not psychology. I cannot ask even myself the meaning of the sentence which I have not yet formulated. Until the words are composed in a grammatical structure (at least mentally—which probably means “sub-vocally”) all I have are intentions—though popular language employs the words “mean” and “meaning” here too—we can label this “M4”.

6.4 M4, intention, must be taken to include what C. S. Lewis has called “speaker’s meaning”—a particular reference to an object or situation which the author had in mind when he made his utterance, but which could not certainly be inferred from the text alone. There is a clear example of M4 in *Alice in Wonderland*, chapter 3; the Mouse uses the expression “found it advisable”, and is at once interrupted:

“Found what?” said the Duck.
“Found it”, the Mouse replied rather crossly: “of course you know what ‘it’ means”.
“I know what ‘it’ means well enough, when I find a thing”, said the Duck: “it’s generally a frog, or a worm...”

Nevertheless, even the Duck knows that “frog” or “worm” is not the meaning of the word “it”. His text does not imply that sense, nor would he hope to establish that sense as a public meaning of it. Thus M4—the particular object intended or thought of by the author—differs essentially from the most perverse M2a perpetrated by Humpty Dumpty. In cases of inadequate effectiveness (Sln), the author has had something in mind (perhaps as an image), and thinks that his publicly uttered text bears this sense—but it does not: it remains an M4 when it should have become an M2ri and an M2a.

6.5 The author, then, in relation to his own work is merely a specially privileged reader, close to our imaginary ideal; and all meanings of a text (excluding therefore, M4) are produced in a mind contemplating that text. The public meaning (M2ri) is the total of what is produced in the mind of an ideal reader.

7. TEXT AND MEANING: S4 AND S5

The text usually (perhaps always) inheres in a physical substratum of speech or of written material; it is publicly available in most cases as a pattern of sound-waves, or of marks on a surface. Those physical qualities of the utterance which are not part of the textual pattern (e.g. voice or calligraphic qualities) may also
have some stylistic (non-logical) effect, but these obscure symbolisms are non-linguistic, and in any case of little importance.

The text, then, is an objectively existing linguistic pattern. We must now examine the relation between this objective pattern and the meaning which it produces.

7.1 The two main components of meaning (M2) are, as we have seen, the logical content and the style. The logical content can be broken down into a series of assertions, questions, requests, etc., which follow one another in a time sequence. The style may also vary in time.

The text, of course, consists of phonological, grammatical and lexical units which march along the time dimension like soldiers in column—some abreast (i.e. simultaneous), but typically one after another.

7.2 Besides time, there is another “dimension” which characterizes both the text and the meaning: choice, or possibility of occurrence. The author, as he utters the text, must choose his sounds, words, and grammatical forms to occupy the actual time dimension, or the lines on the paper which stand for it; at nearly every point he selects one linguistic item and rejects others. These choices between features of text produce selections between alternatives in the components of meaning: indeed, it is textual choice which makes meaning possible.

7.3 The primary components (M1 and S4) of the meaning of any stretch of text may be analysed into elements: in the case of M1 the elements will be logical categories, and in the case of S4 they will be a set of aspects or vectors, in terms of which the style is rated by the reader. I will not attempt to specify an exhaustive list of these; but I have found especially useful three such vectors, the scales of tenor (formal-informal), feeling (warm-cool), and ornamentation (ornate-simple).

7.4 There is no simple one-to-one relation between textual features and elements of meaning. We may call this relationship one of exponence. All descriptions that we may give of the style (in terms of vectors) or of logical content (in terms of logical categories) must be justified, or justifiable, by reference to linguistic items in the text; but one linguistic item may be the exponent of more than one element of style or logical content, and a single element of these may be expounded by several linguistic items. Thus in Text b) (see 4.2, above), the entire sentence expounds a logical assertion of a type of discourse sometimes called Representation (= Narration-Description), dealing with relations in space-time; the lexical items residence, constructed and Mr. John Adamson, and the grammatical item “passive participle + agent” expound the style-type “formal” in the tenor vector.

7.5 At this point we might notice a further distinction in the use of the word “style”. Compare the sentences:

i) The style of the text was formal.

ii) The style of the text was characterized by polysyllables (33%) and passive-participle + agent phrases (11 per 100 words).

In i), “style” has the meaning S4; in ii) it has another meaning which we had better call S5, “contrastive linguistic features”. S5 is the sense of “style” in Enkvist’s definition (4.1, above)—the objective sense. For any text, a description of its S5 will enumerate those linguistic features which produce its S4 in the mind of an ideal reader.

Unlike S4, S5 is not a component of meaning, and therefore not at the mercy of subjectivity. All descriptions of the style (S4) of any text, literary or otherwise, should be justified (or at least justifiable) by corresponding descriptions of its S5—preferably with exact frequency statistics of all significant features.
“Significant”: that is the point at which subjectivity cannot be altogether avoided; it takes a human mind to decide which features deserve to be counted; otherwise we could hand over stylistics entirely to computers.

8. STYLE AND SCALE: MICRO- AND MACROSTYLE

8.1 If a text is of any considerable length—noticeably when it exceeds a paragraph or so, and obviously when it stretches to a whole book—there arises another complication in the use of the word “style”. What, for example, do we mean by “Milton’s style in Paradise Lost”, or “Fielding’s style in Tom Jones”? Do these terms include the narrative arrangement of the various passages, chapters, or epic “books”? Usually not; we tend to think of style as local texture rather than large-scale patterning—the aspect of discourse called by ancient Rhetoric “Style” (elocutio) as opposed to “Arrangement” (dispositio). And yet large-scale patterning may have a decided stylistic effect: how revealing of the author’s attitudes, intentions and personality are the implications of the narrative patterns in, e.g., Conrad’s novels, especially in contrast with those of (e.g.) Hemingway; or the contrasting large-scale patterns of Pamela, Tom Jones, and Tristram Shandy.

8.2 It may be objected that such large-scale patterns belong to the logical content of a work rather than to its style. But the truth is that both S4 and M1 meanings are produced by large-scale patterning.

Sometimes the large-scale pattern is itself partly a pattern of styles, as in James Joyce’s Ulysses, where the pattern has an implied meaning not reducible to the local texture of any one passage or chapter. Moreover, there is no difference in principle between small and large-scale stylistic effects. Both are produced by textual features defined by the dimensions of choice and time-sequence; and so are small and large-scale patterns of logical content—for example, particular assertions and entire arguments.

8.3 In practice, however, there is a difference between S5 features which are immediately perceptible and those which strike the reader only after a longer period. In the writing-reading situation, small-scale features produce an impression metaphorically describable as “tone”—the illusion of a human voice of a particular quality. Large-scale features hardly affect this impression; they belong to a writer’s manner of going about his task, but not to his tone. We might call these two aspects of the style of a text microstyle (S5mi) and macrostyle (S5ma), and the features that produce them micro-features (S5mi) and macro-features (S5ma).

8.4 Since there is no fundamental difference between micro- and macrostyle, we can draw no sharp dividing line between them. Where does the “human voice” effect cease? I feel that a long paragraph—say 300 words—is about the practical limit; but this may vary with different readers. Certainly, paragraph length itself has a micro-stylistic effect: very short paragraphs increase emphasis, and in most contexts lower the tenor (formality) of the writer’s “voice”, while very long paragraphs have the opposite effect.

8.5 A macrostyle must be describable without reference to any particular M1 content. Thus we may say that the Iliad and the Odyssey, which are very similar in microstyle, nevertheless differ considerably in macrostyle, since the narrative sequence of the Iliad follows, with only minor deviations, normal chronological order, while that of the Odyssey is considerably more complex, and therefore produces a more sophisticated, less “primitive” effect. This result is independent of the nature of Odysseus’ or Achilles’ adventures.
9. DEEP INFERENCE: ENDO- AND EXOSTYLE; IRONY; PERSONA

Even an "immediate stylistic impression", like all perception of meaning, is the result of a complex process of inference from the reader's past experiences of words in a range of human contexts. In any reader who approaches at all closely to our imaginary "ideal", the perception of microstyle is extremely rapid, and probably mainly unconscious. Nevertheless, we can distinguish more than one step in the process.

9.1 An immediate noting of S5 features is followed by a classification—the text is assigned to a certain convention. Thus, one kind of pattern of words leads to a classification "verse", another to the classification "prose". Sub-classifications follow—before long the reader is aware of verse-form (if the text is in verse), and of genre to various degrees of delicacy—e.g. fiction, novel, third person narrative, "stream of consciousness method"; or whatever other recognized devices the author may be employing. If the reader is unfamiliar with any of these devices, he will tend to attribute them to the author's style, as peculiarities; if he is familiar with them, he will not. In either case he "factorizes" the style of the text, attributing some features to what we may call exostyle (traditional devices or conventions) and the rest to endostyle (peculiarities). Exostyle tends to be taken for granted in stylistic discussions: we do not expect an essay on "Milton's style" to be concerned primarily with his choice of blank verse for his major works. Nevertheless, the conventions of a text belong to its S4, not to its paraphrasable content (M1), even though some of them may be recognized partly by inference from that content—for the inference is also, in every case, a comparison with previous human traditions of using language in particular ways for particular purposes.

The division between endostyle and exostyle is certainly not a hard and fast one. For one thing, devices which were originally peculiarities tend to become conventional; at any period, one may well dispute whether a device is a recognized convention or not.

The distinction between S4 and S5 applies equally to endostyle and to exostyle; though normally the S4 effects of exostyle are to a large extent discounted by the experienced reader. Each factor may, however, be characterized in terms of all S4 vectors: thus the classical epic exostyle may be described as formal, warm, and ornate.

Clearly, the distinction between micro- and macrostyle applies within both exostyle and endostyle. Both the genre and the individual text have their small and large-scale characteristics.

9.2 Another complication remains to be considered—that of multiple meanings. The commonest case of this is irony. If an irony is at all sustained, the effect is almost as if there were two texts present—an apparent, and a hidden one. The irony is perceived by incongruities, internal and external—between meanings (and hence sometimes styles) within the work itself, and between the work and the context of human situation. Each meaning, the apparent and the hidden, is a complete M2, and may be analysed into M1, S4 and all the vectors and factors of S4—but the hidden meaning is rather the reverse of the apparent one, so that we might label them +M2 and —M2. The Total Meaning, presumably, is the product of both, or —(M2)^2. Since both +M2 and —M2 contain endostyles, each gives rise to an image of the author: an apparent, and a hidden persona. These phenomena are all clearly visible in such works as The Rape of the Lock and Swift's Modest Proposal. And deep inferences of this kind are no different in principle from those which establish the immediate perception of microstyle.
9.3 The author’s *persona* is a necessary and constantly produced aspect of his style. It too contains conventional and individual factors—those generated by the exostyle and the endostyle respectively. Of course, the style is not the only component of meaning from which the author’s attitudes and personality can be inferred: his whole treatment is significant, M2 to whatever power the complexity of the text requires. But the great importance and usefulness of stylistic study in the narrowest sense—study of micro-endostyle—is that it “factorizes out” and delivers for our appreciation that component of the Total Meaning which gives us most quickly a vivid impression of the mind and intentions of the author.

10. STYLISTICS: REQUIREMENTS, METHODS, FUNCTIONS

We are now in a position to attempt answers to some of the questions raised in section 1.

10.1 The relationship between linguistics and stylistics is an instrumental one: the student of style must have a sound knowledge of descriptive linguistics.

10.2 He needs linguistics in applying the basic method of stylistics: description of objective S5 features in justification of subjective ratings of S4.

10.3 The purposes of stylistics, as of any other descriptive discipline, are various; but one very important one is to be instrumental to the study of literature, by revealing and analysing that component of the Total Meaning of texts which is most directly related to personality and human attitudes, the great foci of literary interest.

Stylistics, therefore, is not a specialized branch of literary studies; it is a basic requirement for pursuing them.

APPENDIX

*Levels and factors of reader’s meaning: the theory exemplified*

*Text*: Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, I, 7-12 (1714 version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A well-bred Lord t’assault a gentle Belle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Oh say what stranger cause, yet unexplor’d,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>In tasks so bold, can little men engage,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty Rage?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Comment*: Quite short samples of text may be enough to establish three main levels of inference:—

(1) "*Inexperienced reader*" level: paraphrasable content (M1) and apparent style qualities may be distinguished, but without recognition of conventions.

M1. *Paraphrase*: Goddess, reveal what unusual motive could induce a well-bred nobleman to commit an act of violence against a beautiful lady, or what more unusual, still unknown cause could impel her to reject him. Can mere men attempt such audacious undertakings, and do the tender feelings and soft breasts of ladies contain such powerful anger?

Note: Style is said to be “what gets lost in paraphrase”. But the paraphrase is not yet definitive: *soft bosoms* remains ambiguous even in M1 until interpreted on Level III.

S4. *Style*: —— Tenor: formal. Produced by:
S5 features: (i) grammar—interrogative *dwell* (archaic); initial prepositional phrases *in... bold*, *in... bosoms*; (ii) grammar and phonology patterning—antithesis, lines 7-8 against lines 9-10; parallelism, line 11 against line 12.

———Feeling: warm (surprise, dismay, etc.). Produced by:
S5 features: (i) grammar and phonology—antithesis and parallelism (see above); triple question pattern 7-8, 9-10, 11-12 (producing strong emphasis); lexis—*strange*, *gentle*, *Oh*, *bold*, *little*, *soft*, *mighty*, *Rage*; (ii) phonology—regular iambic rhythm and phonemic echoes (at line ends), reinforcing the emphasis.

(II) "Superficial reader" level: factorization of endo- and exostyle may occur, but without perception of irony.

S4 exo: *Conventions a*) "Harmony": Verse (interpretation of rhythm and phonemic echoes at line-ends, i.e. rhyme).

b) Verse-form: Heroic Couplets.

c) Genre (apparent): Epic. This is established by features of M1 and style, compared with previous tradition. Thus the invocations *Say... Goddess, Oh... say*, the question phrases *what strange motive*, *what stranger cause*, and the whole of line 12 are definite echoes of the beginnings of the *Iliad*, *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*. The tenor and feeling so far perceived are compatible with the Epic genre.

S4 endo: *Persona* seems typical of the serious Epic poet invoking the Muse. Up to this point the Total Meaning may still be symbolized as +M2r.

(III) Ironic level: the Apparent Total Meaning (+M2) developed through Levels I-II seems inadequate in the light of (a) internal, (b) external incongruities.

a) Lines 9-10, and the ambiguity of *soft bosoms*, suggest a cynical attitude to ladies, incompatible with the apparent warm feeling.

b) Bathos is suggested by the modern connotations of *well-bred Lord* and *Belle* (contemporary life is an unsuitable Field for serious Epic). It is proved by *parody* in line 12: contrast *soft bosoms* with *animis caelestibus* ("heavenly minds"), referring to the wrath of Juno, in *Aeneid* I, line 11.

M2ri

M1. The conviction that irony is present forces a re-interpretation of levels I-II. E.g.: *soft* (bosoms) now means (M1)—a) fleshy (implying "lustful"); b) yielding, e.g. to amorous advances.

S4. The style of the passage is now reinterpreted:


(I do *not* suggest that these three levels are necessary chronological stages in reading. For classically educated readers the conventions at Level II will be obvious at first glance; and the comic irony is strongly suggested as soon as one reaches line 8.)

NOTES

3*Linguistics and Style*, p. 28.
Unavoidably, Text b) contains extra information in the surname, so that a) and b) are exact M1 equivalents only if we read “Adamson” as standing for “any surname”.

Throughout this paper, “reader” = recipient of a text in writing or speech, unless the narrower meaning is specified.


Compare the effects of whilst and while in *Lycidas* 154, 187:

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas (154);
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray (187).

Though whilst and while are not total synonyms, the difference here is largely due to phonology — /st/ reinforcing the crash of “shores, and sounding seas”, /l/ lulling along with “still morn”.

See Enkvist, *Linguistics and Style*, p. 32.


I do not mean to imply that passive structures always produce a formal effect.

Cf. Enkvist, *Linguistics and Style*, p. 46; but my distinction is different from his, and much less rigid.