

CHAPTER 4

Levels of style

At the conclusion to Chapter 1 we provisionally adopted a multilevel concept of style, whereby more or less equivalent choices at a particular linguistic level could be seen as *STYLISTIC VARIANTS*, and in which these variants could be associated with *STYLISTIC VALUES*, or special significances associated with one variant rather than another. We shall now take this conception of style further, in order to lay the groundwork for examining communicative effects of style in more detail in Part Two. But to do this, it will be necessary to take a closer look at language as a system of communication, and at the way in which it operates in non-fictional as well as fictional contexts.

4.1 Language as a cognitive code

Language is often compared to a code, and we have also used this analogy in earlier chapters. The analogy has its limitations, but is a valuable starting point. The first observation to make is that as a code, language is multilevelled. The dualist position, as we saw in Chapter 1, distinguishes only between the two levels of 'expression' and 'content'. But even if we restrict ourselves to the ideational or cognitive function of language (see pp. 24–7), it is necessary to distinguish three levels of organisation in language. In addition to the level of *SEMANTICS* (meaning), there are the levels of *SYNTAX* (also called 'lexigrammar') and *PHONOLOGY*, which together form the expression plane of language. These two levels constitute what is often referred to as the 'double articulation' of linguistic form: phonology being the 'sound pattern' of the language (phonemes, stress, rhythm, intonation), and syntax being, roughly speaking, the more abstract grammatical and lexical form of language.

The distinction between grammar and lexis which we used in the last chapter cuts across this distinction between levels. Syntax (in the broad sense in which it is commonly used today) is the level of lexico-grammatical form that mediates between the levels of sound and meaning. Thus it includes both lexical choice – choice of words and multi-word expressions from the vocabulary of the language – and the grammatical choices involved in combining these into sentences.

Considered primarily as a means of spoken communication, language has been regarded, both traditionally and in modern linguistics,¹ as a system for translating meanings in the speaker's mind into sounds or, conversely, for translating sounds into meanings in the hearer's mind. Whether we think of the ENCODING (meaning-to-sound) or the DECODING (sound-to-meaning) process, syntax is the formal code which mediates between structures of meaning and structures of sound.

Since literature is normally encountered in the written medium, a fourth level of organisation and analysis must be given its place: that of GRAPHOLOGY, the writing system. The syntactic form of a sentence must be rendered either in speech or in writing, so graphology is an alternative system of realisation to phonology. But it would be a mistake to suppose that a written sentence has no phonology. When we read a poem silently, we are still aware of its phonological structure of rhythm, rhyme, etc. In prose reading, this unvoiced realisation is normally less obvious, and no doubt varies in strength from writer to writer, from reader to reader, and from one situation to another. But the phonological potential is always there, and the exploitation of rhythmic, onomatopoeic and other auditory effects in prose bears witness to it. Some people, when they read a novel, claim to 'hear' it as well. Whether or not this is true of all of us, it is clear that we have the ability to react, when the situation demands it, to the unspoken sound of a written text.

Thus a very simple view of the operation of language as a coding system can be represented as follows:

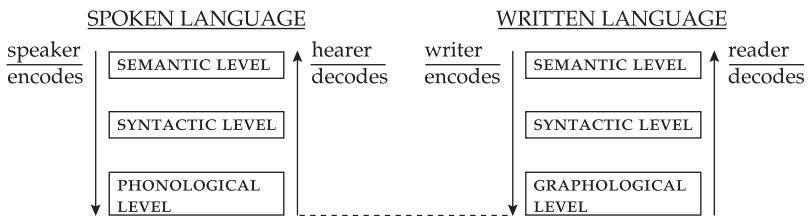


Figure 4.1

The broken line in this diagram indicates that although phonology is not actually realised in a written text, it is there 'by implication'. In English, in fact, graphology is largely derived from phonology: our alphabetic writing system represents, however imperfectly, the sounds of speech; and

punctuation, at least in part, duplicates the roles of stress and intonation in spoken discourse.

Before we go on to illustrate and extend this model, there are one or two disclaimers to be made. First, the description of language as a code is too limiting if it conjures up analogies with signalling systems such as Morse code, or more widely with such systems of rules as the highway code or a legal code. Such comparisons suggest a fixed set of symbols or rules which operate in a fixed way, whereas this is only partially true of language. Language is open-ended in that it permits the generation of new meanings and new forms (for example, metaphorical meanings and neologisms). And it also has no clearly defined boundaries as to what is in the code and what is an infringement of it. There is no clear boundary, for instance, between a metaphorical meaning which is an institutionalised part of language, such as 'to steal a kiss', and one which is not, such as 'a euphemistic shingle' (John Updike). It is this creative extendability of the linguistic code that we had in mind in the earlier discussion of deviation and foregrounding (see section 1.4) and to which we shall return in section 4.6; but it is now time to recognise that these are relative, not absolute, concepts. If language is a code, it is a complexly variable code, adaptable to the innovative skill of its users.

We must also avoid taking too simple a view of the encoding and decoding processes. Both writing and reading are enormously complex skills, involving the coordination of sensory and cognitive processes; and although psycholinguistic research supports the structuring of these activities in terms of multilevel coding,² the coding takes place simultaneously on different levels, and many other factors, such as memory span and general extralinguistic knowledge, play a part. We cannot entertain the simplistic notion of reading as a process which proceeds by decoding the message, in real time, from one level to another. If reading is complex, so also is writing; and when we come to the mystery of literary composition, we can scarcely begin to explain the operations of the creative mind which result in a sequence of words on the written page.³

There is a further limitation of the view of language as a code. The meanings, in this view, are part of the code, for each language organises its view of reality, in terms of contrasts and structures, in its own way. It is well known in linguistics, for example, that languages vary in the way they encode perceptual phenomena such as colour; and this variation is probably greater still in the conceptualisation of abstract and cultural phenomena.⁴ Speakers of English, as of any other language, are constrained to interpret the realities of their experience – whether perceptual, physical, mental, emotive or social – in ways that their language permits. At the semantic level, as at other levels, a writer exercises choice in terms of 'a grammar of possibilities'. But this codification, or structuration of meaning, applies only to meaning narrowly, though centrally, defined as

conceptual or logical meaning – what we earlier called *SENSE*. There is a whole range of language communication, particularly that which involves the interrelation between speaker and hearer, which cannot be fitted into this conceptual view of semantics (see sections 9.1–9.1.2). The distinction we made in section 1.3.2 between *SENSE* (meaning in the narrow sense) and *SIGNIFICANCE* (meaning in the broad sense) still stands, and if two sentences are equivalent in terms of the message encoded, this certainly does not mean that they are equivalent in terms of their significance. In studying stylistic values, we are precisely trying to determine the significances which are not part of the code itself, but are generated in its use of the code. The aim of Part Two is to explain and illustrate the main aspects of stylistic significance.

Although these considerations make us wary of interpreting Figure 4.1 too literally, they do not undermine its value as a representation of the essential core of language, and as a starting point for stylistics. For if we can identify what features of language are equivalent in terms of the code, we shall be in a better position to study the effects of stylistic choice.

‘Equivalent in terms of the code’: this needs explanation. Linguistic phenomena may be equivalent in the sense that at one level of coding they may be different, but at another level they may be the same. It is the possibility of such many–one codings that justifies a multilevel model of language in the first place. To take some simple lexical examples: *judgment* and *judgement* are two orthographic encodings, or variants, of the same (syntactic-level) word; *often* and *frequently* are two syntactic-level encodings of the same meaning (which is what we mean when we say they are ‘synonyms’). In the decoding direction, *hard* has at least two senses: one which is the opposite of ‘easy’, and another which is the opposite of ‘soft’ – in other words, *hard* is ambiguous or polysemous. Again, the sequence of letters *s*, *a* and *w* represents two different words, one a noun and the other a verb which is the past tense form of *see*. Although stylistics is chiefly interested in encoding variants, it is in the nature of language, as a multicoding system, that the many–one mappings go in both directions:

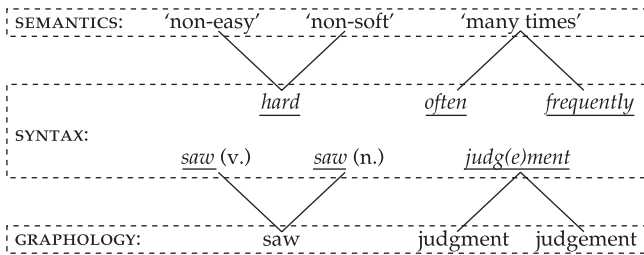


Figure 4.2⁵

4.2 Messages and models of reality

To complete the analogy between language and a code, we must talk about MESSAGES. A code is a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication. How shall we understand the term 'message' as applied to language? It is necessary, first, to go back to the distinction between SENSE and REFERENCE. The need for this distinction is traditionally argued, by philosophers, through examples such as 'the morning star' and 'the evening star'. Although these two expressions have the same referent (they both refer to the same celestial object, Venus), they differ in sense, as *the evening star* means 'the star which appears in the evening', and *the morning star* means 'the star which appears in the morning'. Here again, there are many-one mappings in both directions: just as there are expressions which are different in sense, but equivalent in reference, so there are expressions which are equivalent in sense, but can differ in reference. *Yesterday*, for example, means 'the day before today' on every occasion of its use. However, if uttered on 25th June, it refers to 24th June, but if uttered on 30th June, it refers to 29th June. It belongs to the class of items (deictics, see section 10.1.1) which vary systematically, in their reference, according to the situation in which they are uttered. Consider the two sentences:

- [1] John Smith's birthday was on the twenty-fourth of June.
 [2] Yesterday was my birthday.

Although these sentences differ in sense, it is quite possible for them to have the same reference, and the same truth value. This would be the case if [2] were uttered on 25th June by the John Smith referred to in [1]. On the basis of this identity of reference, they can be said to convey the SAME MESSAGE. That is, we may take the 'message' of an utterance to be what it conveys about 'the real world'.

In prose writing, the discrepancy between identity of meaning and identity of sense is well exemplified in the device of so-called elegant variation: we have already noted, for instance (see p. 85), Henry James's use of non-synonymous expressions: 'the poor young man', 'this personage', etc., as ways of referring to the same person. But by bringing in such literary examples, we are confronted with the question of whether the notions of 'truth value' and 'reference' can be applied to the mock realities of fiction. From the linguistic point of view (and this is one way in which linguistics differs from philosophy) it is more profitable to apply terms like 'truth' and 'reference' to psychological realities: one is not interested in what is really the case, but what particular individuals *know* or *believe* to be the case. Communication, in these terms, has to do with some general UNIVERSE OF REFERENCE OR MODEL OF REALITY which we as human beings carry inside our heads, and which consists of all the things we know, believe, judge or

understand to be the case in the world in which we live. How we have acquired this model of reality need not concern us, nor need the complexities of its structure. It will be sufficient to regard it as the starting point and finishing point of communication in an informational sense. That is, when we inform someone by means of language we retrieve a message from our model of reality and by means of the encoding and decoding of language transfer it to the addressee, who then fits it into his own model of reality. From this it is easy to go one step further and to say that the same thing happens in fictional discourse, except that it is a postulated or imagined model of reality – in short, a fiction – that is transferred to the addressee.

A crucial difference, of course, between the ‘real’ model of reality and the ‘mock reality’ of fiction is that the mock reality does not exist apart from the message by which it is conveyed: this is the case, at least, if we regard a fictional work in its entirety as constituting a single message. But we shall later (in sections 4.3 and 5.2.3) have occasion to develop the view that the mock reality depends a great deal, for its understanding, on our knowledge of the real world. Now, however, we elaborate the left-hand part of Figure 4.1, in order to include this more complete picture of the communication process (restricting the diagram to written language), and to illustrate how Figure 4.3 can be applied to the study of style, concentrating on stylistic variation as choice of equivalent encodings at each of the three linguistic levels:

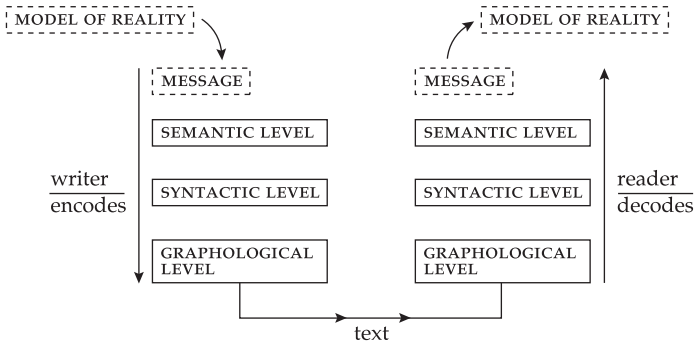


Figure 4.3

4.3 An example: Katherine Mansfield

As an illustration, we shall take a simple seven-word sentence from Katherine Mansfield's story *A Cup of Tea*:

[3] The discreet door shut with a click.

It fits into the following part of the story, where the author describes her rich and rather spoilt heroine's exit from a high-class antique shop in London's West End:

[4] 'Charming!' Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. 'Twenty-eight guineas, madam.'

'Twenty-eight guineas.' Rosemary gave no sign. She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich . . . She looked vague. She stared at a plump tea-kettle like a plump hen above the shopman's head, and her voice was dreamy as she answered: 'Well, keep it for me – will you? I'll. . .'

But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon.

As a means of placing this sentence stylistically, let us consider what other sentences, in some sense equivalent to this one, the author could have used in its place. In a general sense, of course, she could have chosen any other sentence from the English language:

[5] The discreet door shut with a bang.

[6] She rushed from the shop, hat in hand.

or even:

[7] As the clock struck twelve, Cinderella remembered what her fairy god-mother had told her.

But the vast majority of such sentences would either not fit into the story (message) meaningfully, or would alter the story to a greater or lesser degree. It would no longer be, in this particular, the same 'mock reality'. *Opened* is not a stylistic alternative to *shut*, nor *bang* to *click*, because they describe a different event from that which the author chose to describe.

4.3.1 The semantic level

But she could also have written one of the following, which can more readily be considered variants of the original:

[8] The discreet door closed with a click.

[9] There was a click as the discreet door shut.

[10] The discreet door was shut with a click.

[11] The door discreetly shut with a click.

The difference between these sentences and [5] and [6] is that they can be interpreted as descriptions of the event portrayed in [3]. This is not to say that they convey the same sense, nor that they *necessarily* refer to the same event; but, given what we know, both about the real world and the fictional world, it is reasonable to *infer* from each the same event.

Inference has an important role in comprehension. From the statement 'It has been raining for an hour in Chicago', for example, we are able to infer, using our knowledge of the real world, that the streets of Chicago are wet. Such inferences are also available to the reader of fiction. The mock reality of fiction has its points of overlap with our model of the real world, and indeed it can be argued that readers will assume isomorphism between the two unless given indications to the contrary. The overlap is great in the case of realistic fiction, and smaller in the case of fantasy. But in general, the things which furnish the mock reality belong to classes of things which do exist. The door referred to in Katherine Mansfield's sentence may not have existed, but plenty of other doors, of which we have real experience, do. So from our knowledge of entities and goings-on in the real world, as well as from our knowledge, acquired from the text, of the fictional world, we are able to postulate the nature of the fictional world, drawing inferences about matters not directly communicated by the text. Katherine Mansfield describes the noise made by the door as a *click*. From the fact that a *click* (as opposed to a *bang*, for example) is a soft, unresonant (though abrupt) noise, we are able to conclude that the door was shut without great force. From this again, if we read with an eye to the preceding context, we can draw further conclusions of a social nature. We are not told so, but surely we must surmise that the door was shut unobtrusively, and therefore gently, by the shopkeeper. In this shrine of opulence, deference to one's customer requires that a shopkeeper should not appear to talk of price ('a murmur reached her'), nor treat his goods as merchandise ('He would be willing . . . to keep it . . . for ever'), nor should he appear to shut the door on his customer. The adjective *discreet* (which, notice, is applied to the door rather than to the man) strengthens this inference from the 'click'.

Although [8]–[11] are broadly referentially equivalent, in the sense that they 'tell the same story', there are subtle differences which invest them with different stylistic values. In [8], *closed* is used instead of *shut*. These verbs are very similar in sense, but it can be maintained that they are not quite synonyms, because *shut* focuses on the completion of the event, and so suggests an abrupt momentariness which chimes with *click*.⁶ In [9], the separation of the 'shutting' and 'clicking' into two clauses means that they are conceived of as separate, though simultaneous, events. It would be possible to interpret this sentence as referring to causally unconnected events

– say, a gunman clicking the safety-catch of his gun at the moment when the door shut. But inference from context would rule out such an interpretation in this story. Nevertheless, this sentence has the effect of making the click come before the shutting, thus reversing the normal precedence of cause to effect. Because of this, and because of its greater length, it would be more obtrusive in the context than Katherine Mansfield's sentence, and would attach greater importance to the door-shutting than seems to be required.

In [10], the intransitive verb *shut* is replaced by the passive *was shut*, which tells us that there is an implicit agent, a doer of the action. This sentence is therefore more specific than [3], and cannot be regarded as entirely equivalent in sense. It excludes the interpretation that the door shut of its own accord, and so leads more explicitly to the conclusion that the door was shut by the shopman. But in any case, this is a likely inference from [3], so again the sentences are referentially virtually equivalent. It seems that the author has deliberately left things vague by choosing the intransitive verb construction; that she wants us to have the delicately ironic impression of a deferential, high-class shop in which doors, as it were, open and shut almost of their own accord. This is the world of self-effacing service in which the heroine moves with assurance: even if servitors are visible, it is not for her to notice them. That this is a likely interpretation is supported by the negative evidence of another variant:

[11] The door discreetly shut with a click.

By changing the adjective *discreet* into an adverb, this would have lost some of the force of the original, which attributes the behavioural quality of discretion metonymically to the door, an inanimate object which cannot, in literal actuality, possess it. The author makes it seem as if in this euphemistic world, tradesmen, dealers – men of the flesh – have refined themselves out of existence, and have imparted their qualities to the shop itself, its furniture and fittings, in a general ambience of discretion.

The equivalences we have noted in these examples are not absolute, since the inferences the reader draws are a matter of high likelihood, rather than necessity. It is often part of an author's technique to leave us in some doubt as to what precisely is going on in the fictional world, as Katherine Mansfield does here. At the same time, the identification of such equivalence or near-equivalence is a tool of analysis which sharpens one's awareness of the consequences of the author's choice of language.

4.3.2 The syntactic level

The above examples are termed 'semantic variants' or 'variant conceptualisations' because they involve differences of meaning, however slight. It goes

without saying that semantic variants also involve differences of expression – of syntax and graphology/phonology – since codings at the more abstract level of meaning have consequences of expression. But now we turn to sentences which, though differing in syntactic form, are equivalent in sense; that is, they are paraphrases, or syntactic variants of [3]:

- [3] The discreet door shut with a click.
- [12] With a click the discreet door shut.
- [13] The discreet door clicked shut.

Unlike [9], these sentences do not treat the two events of shutting and clicking as separate things: in this respect, as in other respects, [12] and [13] are just different ways of expressing the same sense as [3]. But again there are differences of effect. In [12], the adverbial *with a click* is placed before the rest of the sentence, perversely making us aware of the ‘click’ before the ‘shutting’ which caused it (see section 7.7.1). In [13], the change of syntactic form, although it makes the sentence more concise, has phonological consequences which appear to be undesirable. To see this, we first have to note that the original sentence [3] has a phonological aptness to its meaning. The word *click* is onomatopoeic in itself, and the neat, abrupt quality of the sound it signifies is echoed in the final /t/ consonance of *discreet* and *shut*, and by the initial /d/ alliteration of *discreet* and *door*. In [13] this effect is accentuated because of the succession of stressed syllables (‘-créet dóor clickeed shút’), and because of the accompanying clattering of consonants, especially the stops /k/, /t/ and /d/. We may say, in fact, that the onomatopoeic effect is here overdone, resulting in a sentence which is so cluttered with consonants that it is difficult to say aloud. This awkwardness, which might be successfully exploited by a writer in a different context, forces itself on the reader’s attention, detracting from the force of *discreet*.

4.3.3 The graphological level

The lowest level of style in Figure 4.3 is the choice of graphological realisations of a given syntactic form. For example, [3] might have been divided into two separate units of information by punctuation:

- [14] The discreet door shut – with a click.

Or a similar division might have been made by a comma in [12]:

- [15] With a click, the discreet door shut.

This punctuation would have made some difference to the reader's processing of the sentence; [14] in particular would have made the 'click' seem a matter of importance and surprise in its own right, dividing the reader's attention between the two events, instead of making him see them as integral parts of a whole.

Graphological variation is a relatively minor and superficial part of style (see sections 7.4–7.4.1), concerning such matters as spelling, capitalisation, hyphenation, italicisation and paragraphing. Such matters are to a great extent determined conventionally by syntax, and become noticeably expressive only when a writer makes a graphological choice which is to some degree marked or unconventional, such as a deliberate misspelling. This is why graphology was not given a separate heading in our checklist of stylistic features in section 3.1; it was understood that such features, where of stylistic interest, would be noted under the heading of foregrounding. Examples of unconventional graphology are found in the work of writers such as Sterne, Dickens and Joyce, who, although widely separated in age and style, share an interest in the expressive power of the written symbol. We may mention Joyce's habit of running words together in unbroken compounds (*coffinlid*, *petticoatbodice*), and Dickens's talking clock in *Dombey and Son* (Chapter 11), which overawes young Paul by its repetition of: 'How, is, my, lit, tle, friend? How, is, my, lit, tle, friend?'

4.3.4 Phonological effects

Although a written text has no phonological level of style as such, we cannot ignore, in a treatment of levels of language, the phonological potentials of the written word. Phonological choices form a distinct level of style in oral literature, and in written literature the implicit sound pattern can always be made explicit in reading aloud. To a large extent, this implicit phonology is determined by choices of words and structures at the syntactic level, where it can be regarded as an important ingredient of stylistic value (see section 7.6). This has already been seen in the discussion of example [13] above.

However, since the writing system is in many respects a system for representing the sound pattern of speech, a further source of phonological effects is graphology, particularly in the evocation of a character's style of speech in dialogue. Dickens is a rich source of examples:⁷

[16] Mlud, no – variety of points – feel it my duty tsubmit – ludship . . .
Begludship's pardon – boy . . .

So speaks the perfunctory lawyer in *Bleak House* (Chapter 1). Mr Podsnap, in *Our Mutual Friend*, speaks in capital letters when addressing foreigners:

'How Do You Like London?' Such mimicry, of course, often extends to the use of unorthodox spelling to suggest a character's accent, as when in *Bleak House* the debilitated cousin's favourite word *fellow* gets reduced to the monosyllable *fler*: "normously rich fler", 'Far better hang wrong fler than no fler'. There is apparently no graphological device, whether of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, etc. that cannot be exploited for such purposes. But because the correspondence between graphological and phonological features is far from precise, it cannot be said that a writer has actually represented the speech style of a character. Graphological conventions are exploited impressionistically, in a way which suggests what sort of pronunciation a reader should adopt in reading aloud. For example, the capital letters of 'How Do You Like London?' might suggest a number of phonetic factors – abnormal loudness, slow-motion delivery, stressing of every syllable – all expressive of the proverbial Englishman's assumption that those who cannot speak his language as a native are deaf, or stupid, or both. The significant point is that an initial capital is a form of emphasis or highlighting in writing, and therefore can be used as a visual correlative of emphasis in speech (see also section 5.4.2).

4.4 A justification for studying stylistic variants

Our examination of one unremarkable sentence from Katherine Mansfield's *A Cup of Tea* shows how it is possible to focus on the stylistic value of a piece of language by comparing with unwritten alternatives: 'what might have been written, but wasn't'. The comparison was only partial, since we considered only a selection of possible stylistic variants. Even so, this kind of exercise probably goes against the grain for a large number of readers, who will ask 'What is the point?' In considering variant realisations of the same message, we pointed out what seemed to be the stylistic values of the original and of the alternatives, and in passing gave reasons why none of the variants were quite so satisfactory as the original. This gives some substance, then, to the intuition (which we hope other readers share with us) that those seven words 'The discreet door shut with a click' are 'just right' for their purpose. No one would claim, of course, that they constitute a literary *tour de force*. This, if anything, strengthens the claim for the analysis; for one of the problems of prose style (as contrasted with poetry) is that the ingredients of effective writing frequently seem invisible even to an attentive reader. It is a common experience to feel that an author writes well, without being able to lay one's finger on the reasons. Looking at the might-have-beens of stylistic variation is a way of laying the elusive quality of good writing open to inspection.

Against this, two voices of protest may be heard. The first asks: 'Is it not artistic sacrilege to disturb the text? What is written is written, and no might-have-beens enter into it.' In reply to this we may claim that only by considering unrealised possibilities can we define the nature of a writer's achievement. Definitions have both a positive and a negative element: what occurs is only meaningful against the background of what does not occur. And by limiting ourselves specifically to stylistic alternatives, we can pinpoint the inferences from the text which are the basis of literary appreciation. Naturally, when we think of unwritten possibilities, we mean those realisations which 'could have been' purely in terms of the language: we do not presume to delve into the psychology of the author, or to tamper with the text itself.

A second, perhaps more plaintive, voice says: 'Is this not too much of a laboratory experiment? What hope is there of saying anything about a whole work, if each small sentence deserves to be scrutinised in this way?' The rejoinder must be: although we may generally have neither the time nor the inclination to look at literary language under the microscope in this way, the fact that it can be done is important, and the doing of it cannot fail to sharpen observation, by making us aware of how larger effects are built up from smaller ones. In Chapter 3 we looked at the general interrelation of stylistic effects over a passage of some extent; in Chapter 2 we considered the 'macro-effects' of style as manifested in whole texts; and now, in this chapter, we have examined the 'micro-effects' which are ultimately presupposed by these more extended approaches to style.

If a reader feels that such minutiae are unimportant, writers, at least, do not. One way in which we can look over a writer's shoulder, and observe the process of composition, is by examining alterations made both in manuscript, and in revised editions of a work. A study of these emendations reveals countless examples of the replacement of one stylistic variant by another. Passages [17] and [18] are respectively the unemended and emended versions of a short extract from Chapter 17 of Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (changes of wording have been italicised).⁸ The extract concerns the birth of the book's hero, to the younger son of George Pontifex:

[17] *Now, therefore, that the good news [viz of the birth of Theobald Pontifex's son] came it was doubly welcome and caused as much delight at Elmhurst as in Woburn Square [it caused dismay], where the John Pontifexes were now living.*

Here, indeed, this freak of fortune was felt to be all the more cruel on account of the impossibility of resenting it openly; but *this was nothing to the delighted grandfather. He had wanted a male grandchild and he had got a male grandchild; that should be enough for everybody . . .*

[18] *The good news therefore* was doubly welcome and caused as much delight at Elmhurst as *dismay in Woburn Square*, where the John Pontifexes were *then* living.

Here, indeed, this freak of fortune was felt to be all the more cruel on account of the impossibility of resenting it openly; but the delighted grandfather *cared nothing for what the John Pontifexes might feel or might not feel*; he had wanted a *grandson* and he had got a *grandson*; *this* should be enough for everybody . . .

Butler's changes tend towards economy and tightness of expression; even the replacement of *male grandchild* by *grandson* is a slight gain in conciseness. But in one instance, he makes the text longer: this is where he replaces 'this was nothing to the delighted grandfather' by 'the delighted grandfather cared nothing for what the John Pontifexes might feel or might not feel'. The revised clause is not exactly a paraphrase of the original one, since it implies something more: the old man was not just insensitive to his elder son's feelings, but was so insensitive as to be possibly unaware of them. The egotism of the patriarch in search of an heir is intensified; and the repetitive, parallelistic form of the new clause ('... might feel or might not feel . . .') matches the parallelism in the following clause ('he had wanted a grandson and he had got a grandson') in suggesting the grandfather's own emphatic and headstrong style of speech. On another occasion, too, the emendation strengthens the force of parallelism: 'as much *delight at Elmhurst* as *dismay in Woburn Square*'. Here, reinforced by the phonological similarity of *delight* and *dismay*, is the full ironic flavour of family greed and discord between father and son: a burden which Ernest, the innocent cause of this disharmony, will carry in his future life.

Some of the revisions are relatively trivial, but collectively, they show that the principle of stylistic variation – that there can be alternative ways of saying 'the same thing' – can explain much that goes into the process of literary composition, as well as much that is involved in the reader's interpretation of the text.

4.5 Levels and functions

We have travelled a long way from the traditional 'dualist' and 'monist' views of style outlined in Chapter 1. The model of style proposed here is 'pluralist' in that it allows for three distinct levels (semantic, syntactic, graphological) at which stylistic choices can be made. This simply follows an orthodox linguist's view of language: style, like language itself, is multilevelled.

There is, however, another sense in which style is complex: not just in the levels of choice, but in the values or significances which are associated with

choice. It will be remembered that when the pluralist view of style was first introduced in section 1.5, it was associated with a plurality of language functions, as in the three-fold functional scheme of Halliday, who distinguishes between ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. That is, we have two rather different kinds of plurality to deal with:

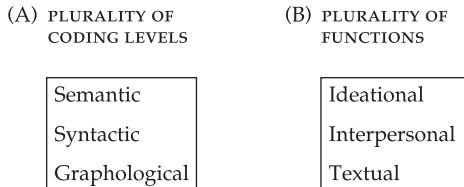


Figure 4.4

Now, there is no one-to-one correspondence between levels and functions (although we shall find, in Chapters 6 and 7, some strong associations between them). The two things are really quite separate. The levels belong to language as a cognitive coding system. The functions are concerned with how this system is *used* for communicative ends. The term 'function', as applied to language, relates the system to the ends which the system serves, or (to put it less teleologically) to the way it is adaptable to the needs of its users. This distinction between the system and its use, between *langue* and *parole*, is what is reflected in the separate triads (A) and (B) in Figure 4.4.

We shall accept Halliday's three functions, although not his precise interpretation of them. The way we shall understand them is this. In ordinary language use, the three functions represent three coexisting ways in which language has to be adapted to its users' communicative needs. First, it has an ideational function: it has to convey a message (in the sense of section 4.2) about 'reality', about the world of experience, from the speaker to the hearer. (Not only propositional language has a message: for example, questions and commands, as well as statements, invoke some extralinguistic reality.) Second, it has an interpersonal function: it must fit appropriately into a speech situation, fulfilling the particular social designs that the speaker has upon the hearer. Third, it has a textual function: it must be well constructed as an utterance or text, so as to serve the decoding needs of the hearer.

We shall have more to say about these functions in later chapters, but will meanwhile point out that these functions and the needs they serve are interrelated: success in interpersonal communication depends in part on success in transmitting a message, which in turn depends in part on

success in terms of text production. There is a strong connection between the concept of 'function' and the concept of 'meaning': when we talk of meaning in the broad sense of 'overall significance', we include the implications which an utterance has regarding the intention of the speaker and the effect on the hearer. Thus when we refer to stylistic variation, we are concerned with the three coding levels, and when we refer to stylistic value, we are concerned with the three functions.

'Functional significance' and 'stylistic significance' are equivalent concepts, except that the former tends to be associated with non-literary, and the latter with literary, language. If we speak of the stylistic values of a non-literary text, we are interested in the way in which linguistic choices are adapted to communicative function – to such functions as newspaper reporting, advertising or scientific exposition. The chief difference between this and literature is that the stylistic values of literature cannot be adequately explained in terms of a need-oriented view of language. The function of literature being primarily aesthetic, we must search for explanations of stylistic value – of why this linguistic choice is made rather than that – in terms of considerations internal to the work itself. But the same three macro-functions are the governing principles of stylistic choice in both literary and non-literary language. And hence, to understand stylistic values in literature, we have to pay attention to the functional principles that apply to ordinary language.

4.6 Style and qualitative foregrounding

Our aim so far has been to show that the 'stylistic variant' view of style, which supports the dualist's conviction that style can be distinguished from message, can lead to a more precise understanding of what it means for a writer to choose *this* rather than *that* way of putting things. If we define style in terms of stylistic variants, we assume that language specifies a repertoire or code or possibilities, and that a writer's style consists of preferences exercised within the limits of that code. But we have noted (section 4.1) that creative users of language often overstep these limits to produce original meanings and effects; and that the limits of the code are uncertain, even in grammar, where we might expect to find them determined by clear-cut rules. Does Dickens, for example, overstep the limits of grammar in beginning *Bleak House* with a series of sentences without main verbs?

London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather.

If this telegraphic style goes beyond our standard expectations, it is certainly not such a radical deviation as the opening 'sentence' of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which is the completion of its last:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay,
brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle
and Environs.

So deviation is a matter of degree, and at some indefinite point it becomes significant not that a writer has chosen *x* rather than *y* or *z*, but that he has chosen *x* at all. To put it another way, the quantitative foregrounding (section 2.3) of a prominent pattern of choices within the code shades into the qualitative foregrounding (section 3.1c) which changes the code itself.

It is therefore necessary to bring in another model of style, that of foregrounding, to supplement that of stylistic variants. Our discussion of opacity in section 1.4 has already made this clear. The two views of style are mutually supporting, the one applying to the level of *parole*, and the other to the level of *langue* (section 1.1). Whereas the 'stylistic variants' model locates stylistic effect against a background of other equivalent variants, the foregrounding model locates stylistic effect against a background of more normal or expected expressions which could have occurred. Each model, in its own way, provides a standard for comparing choices, so that the *differentness* of a writer's style can be registered.

To balance section 4.3, therefore, we shall give an illustrative analysis of a passage which is markedly foregrounded. Having quoted the opening of *Gormenghast* in section 1.4 as an example of an opaque style, we shall now return to another passage which occurs shortly after it in the same novel. In the foregrounding model, stylistic value has a slightly different meaning from that which it has in the 'stylistic variants' model: it refers to the special act of interpretation which we make in order to make sense of what would otherwise appear strange and unmotivated. Each qualitative foregrounding implicitly begs a question: what should have led the author to express himself in this exceptional way? For this purpose, the exceptional includes not only the sense deviations we earlier called tropes (section 3.1c), but also the patterns or exceptional regularities of structure that we earlier called schemes. Like stylistic variants, foregrounded features can be observed on different levels of the code: tropes, such as metaphor, being chiefly associated with category violations (on the levels of syntax and semantics), and schemes being chiefly associated with structural patterns (on the levels of syntax and phonology). Tropes are therefore matters of content, and schemes matters of expression.

Our passage continues a description of Titus Groan's childhood as heir to the phantasmagorical mansion of Gormenghast:

[19] Who are the characters? (1) And what has he [Titus] learned of them and of his home since that far day when he was born to the Countess of Groan in a room alive with birds? (2).

He has learned an alphabet of arch and aisle: the language of dim stairs and moth-hung rafters (3). Great halls are his dim playgrounds: his fields are quadrangles: his trees are pillars (4).

And he has learned that there are always eyes (5). Eyes that watch (6). Feet that follow, and hands to hold him when he struggles, to lift him when he falls (7). Upon his feet again he stares unsmiling (8). Tall figures elbow (9). Some in jewellery; some in rags (10).

The characters (11).

The quick and the dead (12). The shapes, the voices that throng his mind, for there are days when the living have no substance and the dead are active (13).

[Mervyn Peake, *Gormenghast*, Chapter 1]

Peake, like Mansfield, presents to his readers a 'mock reality'. But his fictional world defies common sense, and frustrates any attempt to separate linguistic means from fictional ends. A difficulty of paraphrase arises even in the first sentence 'Who are the characters?' *Characters* can mean either 'letters, ciphers', or 'people in the fiction', and in spite of the *Who?* which begins the passage, it is not clear which sense is intended here. The second paragraph, with its mention of *alphabet*, answers the question in the former sense, whereas the fifth paragraph, with its liturgical reference to 'the quick and the dead', answers it in the latter. In this way, the two meanings which are logical alternatives are illogically combined.

What is the point of this play on meaning? A pun can act in a similar way to metaphor, pointing to a coalescence of concepts normally distinct. The people who inhabit Gormenghast, ambivalently described as 'figures' and 'shapes', are poised between the two meanings. They are as mysteriously alien to the child as the 'alphabet of arch and aisle', a literal nonsense which he has, nevertheless, learned to make sense of. Disconcertingly, the human world appears to have less reality for him, if anything, than the world of buildings and objects.

Already this illogicality has led us to focus not on a 'mock-reality' but on a mode of experience. It is not how things are that matters, but how they seem. The effect is very different, however, from the beginning of Joyce's *Portrait* (see p. 23), which also presents a child's version of reality, but in the artless style of the child itself. Peake's style is highly *artificial* in a sense that applies to the style of Lyly's *Euphues* (section 1.3.1). It is full of syntactic parallelisms and other kinds of schematic patterning, as the display in Figure 4.5 shows:

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------------|---------------|
| He has learned | [an | <i>alphabet</i> | of | [<i>arch</i> | and | | | |
| | the | <i>language</i> | of | <i>aisle</i> | | | | |
| | | | | <i>dim</i> | <i>stairs</i> | and | | |
| | | | | <i>moth-hung</i> | <i>rafters.</i> | (3) | | |
| | [Great halls | are | X | his | <i>dim playgrounds:</i> | | | |
| | his | <i>fields</i> | are | <i>quadrangles:</i> | | | | |
| | his | <i>trees</i> | are | <i>pillars.</i> | (4) | And | | |
| he has learned | that there are always eyes. (5) | | | | | | | |
| | [Eyes | that | <i>watch.</i> | (6) | and | | | |
| | Feet | that | <i>follow,</i> | | | | | |
| | <i>hands</i> | | [to | <i>hold</i> | him | when | <i>struggles,</i> | |
| | | | to | <i>lift</i> | him | when | he | <i>falls.</i> |
| | | | | | | | (7) | |
| | | | Upon his feet again he stares unsmiling. (8) | | | | | |
| Tall | <i>figures</i> | | <i>elbow.</i> | (9) | [Some | in | <i>jewellery;</i> | |
| | | | | | some | in | <i>rags.</i> | |
| | | | | | | | (10) | |
| The | <i>characters.</i> | (11) | | | | | | |
| The | <i>quick</i> | | and | | | | | |
| the | <i>dead.</i> | (12) | | | | | | |
| The | <i>shapes,</i> | | | | | | | |
| the | <i>voices</i> | that throng his mind, for there are days then | | | | | | |
| | [the | <i>living</i> | <i>have no substance</i> | and | | | | |
| | the | <i>dead</i> | <i>are active.</i> | | (13) | | | |

Figure 4.5

[Note: The large 'X' in sentence (4) indicates a chiasmus, or pattern in which the order of elements is reversed; the letters in bold type are used to draw attention to patterns of alliteration and assonance.]

The parallelisms are identified as structural repetitions in which variable elements occur. The simplest examples in the passages are the pattern in (11)–(13) which consists of *the* + N₁, *the* + N₂, *the* + N₃, *the* + N₄, *the* + N₅, and the pattern in (10) consisting of *some in* + N₁, *some in* + N₂; in both of these the noun (N) is the only variable element. More complex is the pattern in (1), where the sequence Determiner + N (singular) + *of* + Noun Phrase + *and* + Noun Phrase is repeated. But whatever form a parallelism takes, its effect is to foreground the relation between parallel words and phrases which fill the variable positions. These expressions have been italicised in Figure 4.5.

The relations of meaning foregrounded in this way are in general relationships of similarity or of contrast; they are reinforced, here and there, by alliteration and assonance. We notice that the words tend to fall into natural sets:

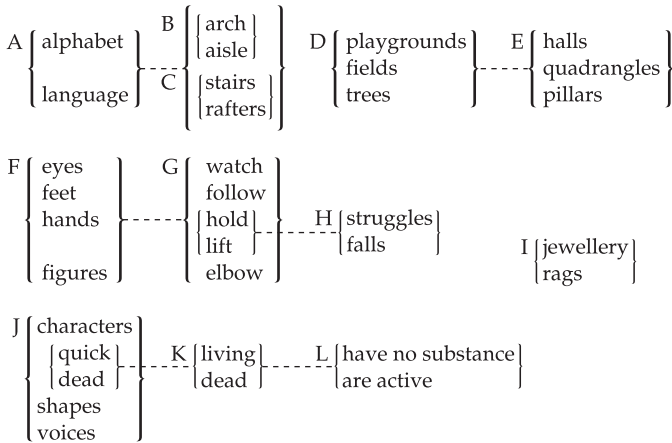


Figure 4.6

It is we, however, who have to work out the connections of similarity and contrast between the expressions in the groups A to L, which thereby become representative of something more general, which could not be expressed by simply adding together the literal senses of the words. Paraphrases can only capture part of what these significances represent: A – represents something like ‘things which children have to learn in order to communicate’; B – ‘features of buildings (grand and ecclesiastical)’; C – ‘features of buildings (plain and domestic)’; D – ‘outdoor terrain for boys’ amusements’; E – ‘grand architectural features’, and so on. Within the groups we also find oppositions, for example between *living* and *dead*, and (more subtly) between hostile actions (*elbow*) and protective actions (*lift*), with *watch*, *hold* and *follow* keeping the balance between them. The relationships are not always clear, and we must feel the puzzlement of the young child’s attempt to find his bearings in a world of hidden meanings.

More interesting than the vertical connections are the horizontal connections (indicated by dotted lines). These are collocational ties which in many cases defy literal interpretation, and have to be understood metaphorically. For example, the equation through the verb *to be* of groups D and E associates the animate with the inanimate, the natural with the manmade. This direct juxtaposition of incompatibles suggests that in Titus’s world such basic categories of experience are not distinct.

The dissolution of common-sense bonds of meaning is taken further when, in (13), we learn that ‘there are days when the living have no substance and the dead are active’. This is paradox, rather than metaphor: two directly opposed concepts, life and death, change places with each other. We conclude that, for Titus, not only place but also time fails to recognise the customary separation of the living from the lifeless.

We turn now to foregroundings which are less easy to recognise, because they are less absolute, and do not fit into the traditional rhetorical categories. That 'the living have no substance' has already been implied in the third paragraph, where the nouns *eye*, *feet*, *hands* and *figures* are introduced as subjects of verbs which would more appropriately have human subjects such as *men*, *servants*, etc. The lack of a determiner before these nouns makes them generic, and so makes us feel that the human forces that impinge on Titus's life are vague and insubstantial. They appear to be no different from the 'shapes, the voices that throng the mind'. Further, the transitive verbs *watch*, *follow* and (more particularly) *elbow* are used intransitively, so that these rather threatening actions not only have a disembodied source, but can be interpreted as having either Titus or his whole surroundings as their target. It is as if Titus lacks the sense of his own identity, as well as that of those around him; and so another conceptual boundary is blurred – that between self and others.

There is also something grammatically unusual (comparable to the opening of *Bleak House*) in the occurrence of a series of parallel graphological sentences which are 'defective' in that they consist of noun phrases alone: these are (10), (11) and (12), and the same construction is continued in (13). The absence of grammatical articulation contributes a further unclarity: it is not clear, for example, how the sentences 'The characters' (11) and 'The quick and the dead' (12) connect both with each other and what has gone before. The links are not logical, but associative, and the clue to them lies in the already noted ambivalence of the word *character*. There is an implied progression from the inanimate world of 'alphabet' and 'language' in (3) to the ambivalently human 'figures' in (9), and thence to the 'quick and the dead' (12) who are clearly human, but poised on the uncertain ground between reality and unreality. The polysemous 'characters' in (11) provides a link in the chain. But it is the gradualness of the progression which requires comment: here is another instance of the author's refusal to acknowledge familiar distinctions taken for granted in the literal use of language.

We hope to have shown, without further analysis, how the burden of interpretation in this passage falls principally on the reader's response to foregrounding. The significance we attach to schemes and tropes is part of an integral process of imaginatively making sense of a strange linguistic experience. Cumulatively, the features we have examined represent the world of a child surrounded and overawed by dimly grasped presences, a world in which the meanings which shape our own response to life are dissolved and reconstituted. We shall return to the way in which linguistic choice determines the nature of mental experience in Chapter 6. At present, however, it is worth observing that the degree of foregrounding in this passage, and the interpretative process it elicits, are of a kind more readily associated with poetry than with prose.

To emphasise the 'poetic' style of the passage, let us also observe that the schematic patterning is extensive on the phonological as well as on the syntactic level, for example in the alliterations and assonances of 'feet . . . follow', 'hands . . . hold', 'alphabet . . . arch . . . aisle', 'lift . . . fall'. More to the point, the passage has a rhythmic regularity which enables it to be written out and scanned as poetry in a quasi-blank-verse metre:

He has learned an alphabet of arch and aisle:
The language of dim stairs and moth-hung rafters.
Great halls are his dim playgrounds: his fields
Are quadrangles: his trees are pillars.
And he has learned that there are always eyes.
Eyes that watch. Feet that follow,
And hands to hold him when he struggles,
To lift him when he falls.
Upon his feet again he stares unsmiling.
Tall figures elbow. Some in jewellery; some in rags.
The characters. The quick and the dead. The shapes,
The voices that throng his mind, for there are days
When the living have no substance and the dead
Are active.

This regularity is obviously not fortuitous. But what stylistic value shall we attach to the metricality of prose? Metre raises prose to the level of a musical experience, and it also adds an element of ritual inevitability to the formal patterning of words and structure we have already noted. 'Things are so because they are so', it seems to say. Unlike the infant Stephen in Joyce's *Portrait*, Titus does not appear to us through his own childish language, but through a 'web of ritual' (a phrase which occurs in the paragraph preceding our extract). The formalistic nature of the language helps to express the mystery of unexplained tradition that governs the boy's upbringing.

4.7 The remainder of this book

The *Gormenghast* passage [19] represents a fairly extreme position on the scale of opacity, and when we turn, in the following chapters, to a more detailed study of stylistic values, we shall have little occasion to insist on the distinction we have made between the study of style in terms of foregrounding, and that in terms of stylistic variants. In practice, both models enter into a comprehensive explanation of style and its effects.

In Part Two, we shall aim to give an account of the relation between stylistic choice and significance within a functional framework. For

this purpose, it will be useful to divide our attention between three different aspects of a literary work of fiction, corresponding to the three functions:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Chapter 6: Work as MESSAGE | (ideational function) |
| Chapter 7: Work as TEXT | (textual function) |
| Chapter 8: Work as DISCOURSE | (interpersonal function) |

These three chapters form the nucleus of our investigation of aspects of style. But when we come to the interpersonal function, we not only have to account for the literary work itself as a discourse between author and reader, but we have to reckon with the phenomenon of 'embedded discourse': the occurrence of discourse within discourse, as when the author reports dialogue between fictional characters. In this light, a novel is not a single discourse, but a complex of many discourses. To deal with this extra dimension, we add Chapter 9 on conversation, and Chapter 10 on speech and thought presentation.

Apart from the additional Chapters 11 and 12 (explained in the Preface, pp. xi–xii), the only other chapter to be explained is Chapter 5, 'Language and the fictional world'. This serves as an introduction to Part II, and more particularly as a prelude to Chapter 6, because it deals with the subject of fiction itself: something which is strictly not a matter of style, but which is presupposed by the study of style in fiction writing.

Notes

1. A clear expression of this view is given in W. CHAFE (1970), Chapter 2. Linguists have differed considerably about the precise relation between the various components of the meaning–sound relationship, especially about the relation between semantics and syntax. For a comparison of such views, see J. LYONS (1977), Chapter 10.
2. See H.H. CLARK and E.V. CLARK (1977), Chapters 1–7, especially pp. 85 and 292.
3. This does not mean, however, that accounts of the process of literary composition are irrelevant to stylistics. Many insights into style are provided by writers' own introspective reports on their work: see B. GHISELIN (1952). On the processes of artistic creation in general, see A. KOESTLER (1964).
4. The classical statement of the view that languages determine the way in which their speakers interpret and categorise experience is that of B.L. WHORF (1956). Recent thinking has suggested that there is a great deal more in common between languages in this respect than Whorf acknowledges; but whatever stand one takes on the issue, the fact remains that we conceptualise in terms of the categories our language provides for us. See LEECH (1981), Chapter 12, and CLARK and CLARK (1977), Chapter 14.
5. There is a problem of how to represent in writing the codings at different levels of abstraction. In Figure 4.2 we adopt these conventions: a word in quotation marks is a semantic abstraction (a sense); a word in italics is a syntactic abstraction