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# EXTRALINGUISTIC DETERMINANTS OF STYLE IN DRAMA

## 1

Stylistic research is a discipline both difficult and controversial. Although the problems of style are as old as literature itself, until today there has been no agreement either about the definition of style or about the method of stylistic research. In our own day the literary critics and linguists have done much to advance the study of style in literature, but it is very difficult to say with any degree of confidence that they have reached common grounds. However, more and more scholars believe in the necessity of a joint effort.

To illustrate two different attitudes and methods of investigation I have chosen John Middleton Murry's *The Problems of Style* [1] and Dolores Burton's *Shakespeare's Grammatical Style.*[2] They exemplify two extremes in style research, and, at the same time, they share similar interests, since in both of them *Antony and Cleopatra* is to a large extent their basic material.

Murry begins his essays with an attempt at defining style, or at least at describing the meanings ascribed to the term 'style'. He finds three basic meanings: style as personal idiosyncrasy, belonging to the psychological school of criticism which looks for the key to literature in the author himself, has long been discarded as dealing with areas not essential to literature proper. Style as a technique of exposition is close to the Medieval and Renaissance ideal: clear exposition and logical argumentation; Murry himself finds this meaning of style as non-literary. Style as the highest achievement of literature is understood by Murry as a "commanding use of metaphor", which in turn is defined

[1] Oxford University Press 1967 (1922).
[2] University of Texas Press, Austin and London 1973.

as a "mode of apprehension" of the universe and not an ornament made of a comparison. If we accept this definition, Murry suggests, we can then account for the inexpressible impression of art of the highest rank, for example, Shakespeare's. Finally, Murry states that each work that defies time is not so much the victory of language as the victory over language.[3] An artist achieves this victory due to his own, unique vision of the world, and neither logic nor sciences can describe or measure such process. How can we then think at all about a question of style? Murry sees in style an act of creation. He says,

> Style is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author[4],

and the kernel of this statement is for him the precision of communication. This in turn results in the necessity of penetrating the author's idiosyncrasy as well as his intentions which we can achieve by a contemplation of the text. Murry demonstrates this method of stylistic examination on Cleopatra's great speech of V.ii. 282—322, which he finds to be an example of Shakespeare's top achievement in style. The speech is, according to Murry, that victory over language because in this passage Shakespeare "achieves the miracle: he makes the language completely adequate to the emotion and yet keeps it simple"[5]. The victory over language is achieved by the gradual change from the heightened language of the first lines, from the language of the Queen, to the simplicity and directness of the last lines which are spoken by the lover, not by the Queen. In this great scene Cleopatra "is making this swift and breathless passage from the dignity of a queen to the perfect intimacy of the lover".[6] The language of the passage reflects the process faultlessly, especially in the key metaphor, "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast / That sucks the nurse asleep?". Here, Murry finds, "the emotion is, to the last drop, expressed".[7]

Now, both the definition and the method Murry proposes are unsatisfactory. Criticism has long divorced psychologising, while intuitions are accepted only if they are more or less objectively proved to be right. I do not think that Murry succeeds in proving anything but his own, subjective feelings. If we try to press for a better understanding of the term 'quality of language' we can only be disappointed. Murry gets lost in the magic circle of his own subjective judgement. Moreover, the circle is built of generalizations which allow the critic 'creative' free-

[3] J. M. Murry, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 34—35.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

dom. I am not criticising Murry here specifically; he has only the misfortune of serving me as an example of that school of critical thinking the assumption of which is that a real work of art can never be measured, explained and defined; the critics of this school find this assumption a perfect excuse from any attempt at objective statements and/or logic of argument.

Linguists take an opposite stand. They are very careful not to introduce any subjective judgements. They are interested in language only, they investigate only the language of a literary work and not the work; therefore, they, ideally, do not pass any judgements on the value of the text. They try to do what Murry thought impossible: to measure and to define. Not that they work without difficulties. One such fundamental obstacle for them is the definition of literary language, and, consequently, of style.

Linguists, therefore, investigate, or profess to do so, only one level of the fictional world: its language. All other levels are left for literary critics. Is such division right? is there a place where their efforts could meet?

Burton [8] keenly notices the division. If we follow punctilliously Ingarden's theory, or that of the structuralists, we may end with an absurd statement that there is no language at the level of fictional world. This, of course, is in direct opposition to the formalists theories where the main assumption is that literary (poetic) language is foregrounded at the level of fictional world, and therefore any investigation of language at lower levels is unnecessary.

It is now time to look closely at our next example of stylistic examination. Dolores Burton accepts the model of mathematical-logical function and speaks of style only in the sense of the function of style. In distincion to Murry, she stays away from elegantly phrased generalizations. Her logical model of the function of style is wide enough to include both language and fictional world, or, to use the traditional expressions, form and content. The function of style takes the shape of S(A), where A, the domain of style, contains a set of well-defined objects. Like any other set, it may contain sub-sets, which enter logically defined relations. It is imperative that the set is well-defined, which is achieved by scales of value. For Burton in the set 'literature' the values on the scales can be determined only by language. Thus, a set of well-defined linguistic data should yield, in effect, a well-defined literary work. The function of style can then ascribe the style to the work.

Burton examines grammatical styles of *Richard II* and *Antony and Cleopatra* according to the theory that I have sketched above in order

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

to establish two different styles of Shakespeare. To determine the defining values Burton introduces three constrictions, namely,

> to begin with a formal feature of the language, to determine by some formal criterion whether that feature of the language behaves in a way that is peculiar to the text, and, if so, to suggest what it contributes to the dramatic character of the text[9].

Here, of course, we may ask for the definition of the 'dramatic quality of the text'; also we can ask here a more general question, that of whether we can judge non-formal values if we examine strictly formal categories. In other words, can we say that the right to move from the linguistic into literary field has been marked out by a sufficiently clear philosophical statement about literature, so that we do not get into a vicious circle similar to that into which Murry got?

Burton sees a literary work as a structure of $n$ elements. The first step towards the definition of the whole structure is defining the sub-set of the linguistic variables. When the relations between variables are defined, the fictional world is generated.[10] It follows from the model that Burton sees the essential unity of the language and fictional world. The description of a grammatical style, i.e. the definition of the relations between the linguistic variables, is the first step towards the description of the function of style understood in its widest sense.

To illustrate this theoretical discussion I would like to present here Burton's discussion of only one formal category, that of imperatives.[11] Burton examined five kinds of imperatives in *Richard II* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The quantitative results are given in a table from which we can easily deduce that *Antony and Cleopatra* contains twice as many imperatives as *Richard II*. Here is how Burton comments on the results:

> *Antony and Cleopatra* has three major characters who throughout the action have absolute power to command others [...] *Antony* is play with more physical activity, such as battles and the frequent dispatch of messengers and ambassadors between Rome and Egypt[12].

If, as Burton suggests, the fictional world is generated from language, then the linguistic features of the play cannot be excused by the elements of the fictional world, as is evidently done by Burton. One could then draw a conclusion that the lack of the unity of place in *Antony and Cleopatra* dictates those formal categories of the language that are stylistically marked in the play, e.g. imperatives.

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[11] *Ibid.*, chapter II: "Locating style in literature: sentence Mood: interrogatives and imperatives".

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

What I have said so far should not in any way put in doubt Burton's achievement in Shakespearian stylistics. As will be seen below, I am very much interested in her concept of the function of style. The problem is something else. Examination of formal features of language yields a description of formal features of language whether in a literary or a non-literary text. If the domain of the function of style contains a set of formal linguistic categories, the function can determine only 'grammatical style'. If, however, we admit that a literary work is a structure of $n$ elements, then to define its style we should use the following model: $S(A_1+A_2+A_3+A_n)$. $A_1$ would then be treated as the set of language data, while other sets would contain other elements of the structure. The problem of paramount importance would be to define the other elements so that the respective sets would meet the requirement of being well-defined.

At this point it seems necessary to reflect once again on the nature of a literary work and its language. Cameron's [13] conception may be of some help here. His proposition is to accept a definition of a poetic (in the sense of 'literary') language which considers the aim of language not the way in which it is used. The aim of the poetic language it the "making of fiction", thus the unity of language and fictional world is achieved. The result is that the language of a literary work must be treated as one that cannot be paraphrased, because a paraphrase would create a different fictional world.

G. W. Turner [14] makes a similar statement: "Literary language is language in context, words in relation to other words. Each detail of a literary work takes its quality from the whole work". We conclude, then, that literary language creates its own context for its meanings. There is no outside context for a literary work.

Cameron proves by his definition that a literary work of art is unique: it cannot be paraphrased. It also means that literary language of a given work exists as a unique and integrated whole. This is an important statement for stylistic research: it means that we deal with a concrete researchable object. If it exists in order to create fiction, it means we cannot ignore that fiction. And, conversely, we cannot examine fiction ignoring the language which created that fiction.

At this point we might think that at last we have defined clearly enough the common ground on which the literary critics and linguists may shake hands. But is it true?

If one gives another thought to Cameron's "making of the fiction" some doubts inevitably occur. Cameron states that language creates its own context in a literary work. There is no 'outside' situation.

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[13] *The Night Battle*, London 1962.

[14] *Stylistics*, Penguin Books 1975 (1973), p. 20.

Therefore, not every question will be valid in relation to the fictional world. Cameron illustrates his point with the famous question "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" He certainly is right here. But it is difficult to agree that only the language of the literary work, unique and individual as it is, marks out the limits of the context of that work. There must exist extralinguistic determinants of the literary context, therefore of the literary language. Part of that context must be built of the mutual experience of the author and the reader. If there were none, there would be no, or very little, communication which no matter how we approach literature is its basic function. In other words, the context of the fictional world cannot be left or created in a vacuum, it must always find its place in the larger context of the general experience of man. Literary language makes the fiction and only in that context are its meanings full, but the context is conditioned also by extralinguistic determinants. They can also influence the shape and the working of the language. The result is a kind of feed-back which must not be ignored.

I do not as yet know what these determinants are. They have to be carefully defined. At present I propose to investigate literary kinds as possible determinants, and within the kind, a convention. It does not of course mean that I postulate purity of kind and strict adherence to convention: any mixing or departures from the norm would function as determinants as well. My hope is, that in future it will be possible to find well-defined elements of respective sets in the function of style.

The present paper will now present a search of such extralinguistic determinants of style in Medieval English drama.

## 2

Theatre determines specific physical and aesthetic conventions of which a playwright is fully conscious and either follows them or breaks them. In both cases they may be examined as possible determinants of style.

One of such important, 'physical' conventions of the Medieval theathe is a very close, if not intimate relationship of actors and audiences. Wickham [15] stresses this fact when discussing theatrical techniques in Medieval England. Intimacy determined the shaping of the material and the form of the characters' lines. I may repeat here well known facts which have many times been discussed in connection with the history of theatre, history of drama, history of literature or even aesthetics. But it has not been so far noticed that theatrical conditions may have influenced what we are ready to call the style of drama.

[15] G. Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300—1660*, vol. I.: 1200—1576, London 1980.

The consciousness of the actor's direct addressing the audience seems to have been equally important in determining the style both in pageants and miracles; it was also responsible for the shaping of procession pageants and street theatres in the ceremonies of, e.g., a king's visit to a town. This is how Wickham sees such occasions:

> Actors and authors alike, however, derived a corresponding advantage from this unusual disposition of scenes on independent and isolated stages: for, what was said verbally and visually in each tableau in turn was addressed directly at the person thus honoured and his retinue. [...] actors of the street pageant theatres performed to two distinct audiences simultaneously. On the one hand there was the distinguished visitor and his retinue who processed from one stage to the next and thus saw the whole. [...] On the other hand there was the much larger audience who could not hope to see more than the tableau nearest to the position where they were themselves stationed. Yet this second audience reaped a compensatory reward which must not be overlooked: the spectacle of what, to the actors, was the primary audience, but which, to the stationary audience, was an integral part of the show [16].

The king and his retinue were for the crowd as much a part of the spectacle as the actors of the tableau. All this is an excellent illustration how close and exchangeable was the actor:audience relationship in the Medieval theatrical consciousness.

In moralities and miracle addressing the audience directly, as an audience, is a common practice. Thus, for example, most extant miracles open with a monologue of the main character. The monologue is used to present descriptively, and often retrospectively, the situation which has led to the event which is dramatised. *The Fall of Man* of the York Cycle is opened by Satan's speech in which he tells his own history. In *Noah's Flood* of the Chester Cycle it is God who speaks first and summarises the Biblical history until the time of the Flood. In both cases this 'epic' part is meant for the information of the audience. In both, the moment of action proper is marked by calling another character by name.

The summary as an introduction to the dramatized event is dictated by the reality of the productions: Biblical history was produced in a series of pageants, i.e. different stages and on different days. The author had to ensure that the audience had a continuum rather than fragments in front of them; so, treating the audience as a group of listeners rather than viewers he began the spectacle in an undramatic way: it is really a transmission of an epic situation to a theatre, a narration told, not acted. Also the subject matter treated in those introductory monologues points to an epic technique: after all the Bible offered events of The History.

In *The Fall of Man* the action proper begins when Satan calls Eve,

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

who only then appears on the stage. In *Noah's Flood* the original stage directions suggest that Noah and his Wife are present and visible from the very beginning, but not on the stage, only standing below and in front of the Ark, while God speaks from "some high place, or in the clouds if it may be".[17] In this way the characters are treated like the audience, as in the street pageant theatre described by Wickham. Only with the words,

> Therefore, Noah, my servant free,
> That righteous man art, as I see,

God calls on the actors to join him in the performance, and the story, so far told, will now be acted out.

Another effect of the close relationship of actors and audience in the consciousness of the playwright (and indeed, in that of all the participants of the dramatic occasion) is the convention of homiletic speeches. I do not want, at the moment, to examine the religious and didactic character of Medieval theatre. I am now interested in the fact that sermons were a specific use of language which demanded a semi-dramatic situation: the speaker and his audience. It is again an epic product rather than dramatic: a sermon assumes the audience to be listeners rather than viewers. *Everyman* is such a homiletic play. Each dramatic incident means here not much more than an appearance of the successive characters who give their opinions concerning the main problem of the allegory. The action on the stage is determined by the technique of allegory in which abstractions are personified. In case of *Everyman* the action is used by the author only to a very small extent, whereas the emphasis falls on explanation and exhortation directed to the audience.

We may assume, then, that the physical and psychological proximity of actors and audiences resulted in Medieval theatre in the adaptation of two conventions, both of which require the same situation: the speaker and the listeners; they are epic and homiletic conventions. They determine the style of most monologues, the number, length and quality of which determines in turn the form of the whole play.

This by no means exhausts the problem of style in drama. Medieval theatre was, after all, theatre and not an epic narration or a sermon. The action shown on the stage is always present in a more or less developed form. We must try now to see if the intimacy of Medieval theatre influenced the structure of the spectacle and the functioning of the language.

One of the function of language in dialogue is meticulous infor-

[17] All quotations from *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, ed. A. C. Cowley, London 1977.

mation concerning who is present on the stage, where he is going, very often what he (she) is doing. It seems that this informative function of the language results from the allegorical technique: care must have been taken that all the meanings were correctly understood. This time, however, the playwright does not make the characters address the audience directly, as in the monologues; the characters talk between themselves or shout to other characters off stage. But the result is that the audience is guided most carefully. Let us look at some examples from *Everyman*.

Each new entrance is signalized by the character who is already on the stage. Thus the Messenger who opens the play, having done away with his monologue says:

> For ye shall hear how our Heaven King
> Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning:
> Give audience, and hear what he does say.

The Messenger finishes his monologue to the audience, but he is still speaking directly to them when he announces the entrance of God. When God has finished his sermon, he announces the entrance of Death:

> Where art thou Death, thou mighty messenger?

Death in return introduces the main character of the play:

> Lo, yonder I see Everyman walking.

And Everyman looking for a companion for his last journey will announce each new character to appear:

> Well met, Good Fellowship, and good morrow!
> Where be ye now, my friends and kinsmen?
> Where art thou, my Goods and Riches?
> My Good Deeds, where be you?
> My friends, come hither and be present,
> Discretion, Strength, my Five Wits, and Beauty.

Some of the introductions are also made by Everyman's interlocutors. For instance, Good Deeds call for Knowledge:

> I have a sister that shall with you also
> Called Knowledge, which shall with you abide,
> To help you to make that dreadful reckoning.

And at this moment Knowledge appears on the stage and begins his speech. In turn Knowledge will introduce Confession:

> Lo, this is Confession.

In the last scene, when Everyman disappears in the grave, Knowledge says:

> Methinketh that I hear angels sing
> And make great joy and melody
> Where Everyman's soul received be.

And indeed, an angel appears and sings.

The quoted examples can be easily divided into two groups. On the one hand, there are interrogatives, exclamatives and imperatives (7), on the other hand, affirmatives (4). The two groups of sentences function in two different ways in the play. The seven sentences of group I create a dramatic situation (i.e. action). All interrogatives may be interpreted as imperatives, e.g. "Where are you! Come here" rather than pure questions "where by ye now?" or "Where art thou?", because their effect is the appearance of the character who is called for: it is the reaction that determines the function of these sentences. The audience is no more the addressee in the direct sense, although the sentences are designed with the audience in mind: this puts Everyman and audience at the same level: both parties are to be educated.

The four sentences of group II do not work for a dramatic effect. They do not result in action, but describe the situation of the stage. Their function is similar to that of a script for radio theatre. Such sentences are indispensable in order to keep the listener informed in a way that allows for full understanding of the broadcast play. It seems that a Medieval playwright did not fully trust the integration of the visual and oral transmission in his theatre, so the latter was used in both a dramatic and descriptive function.

The descriptive function of language is also obvious in the dialogues. The characters explain what they are doing, where they are going, what they are feeling. Here is a short passage from the dialogue between Knowledge and Everyman:

> *Kno.* Now go we together lovingly
> To Confession, that cleansing river.
> *Eve.* For joy I weep; I would I were there!
> But, I pray you, give me cognition
> Where dwelleth that holy man, Confession.
> *Kno.* In the house of salvation:
> We shall find him in that place,
> That shall us comfort, by God's grace.

Here the editor adds a stage direction, "Knowledge takes Everyman to Confession". Then, Knowledge continues:

> Lo, this is Confession.

It is characteristic that no stage direction was included in the original text. It was redundant. Knowledge's words, "We shall find him in that

place", are a commentary upon the gesture Knowledge makes showing Everyman the place they are approaching on the stage, and which is the goal of their 'journey'. The dialogue is designed in such a way that it functions as a stage direction.

Similarly, other characters employ explanation and offer description in their utterances. Thus Riches inform Everyman (and audience), "I lie here in corners"; Good Deeds exclaim, "Here I lie, cold in the ground"; and Everyman himself is careful to explain what he is doing:

> For into this Cave must I creep
> And turn to earth, and there to sleep.

At this moment Beauty makes absolutely sure that the meaning of 'cave' is quite clear:

> What, into this grave?

There are, of course, many more examples of this kind. I have tried to illustrate the specific treatment of language in Medieval theatre. Apart from making the drama, language functions additionally, and importantly, as description and information; the function that in later theatre, and especially in modern, has been taken over by stage directions. Such function of language does not necessarily imply primitivism of Medieval theatre (in fact recent critical opinion presents Medieval theatre as quite sophisticated). I believe that it is much more a result of the lack of confidence on the part of the playwright in the efficiency of the visual signs. Although Wickham successfully proves the high technical level and sophistication of scenic techniques in Medieval England, the conditions in which the audience watched the spectacle was far from comfortable: a crowded yard, or a dark awkward nook in a hall or an inn did not allow to see everything that happened on the stage. Hence, perhaps, more trust in words.

It is now time to look closer at the religious and didactic character of moralities. This too seems to determine their style. Allegory is the main technique of the Medieval religious literature. Debates were a popular form of allegory: all abstract terms and moral values were realised in debates through language. Such debates have certainly influenced Medieval drama, which very often constructs its dialogues around the question-answer pattern. The pattern was moreover used to expose two different points of view, while only one of them was right, and the energy of persuasion and argumentation was obviously centred around it. The problem can only be signalized here, but it certainly is worth research.

Here I would like to compare miracles and moralities as shaped by their religious and didactic contents. Moralities have a recurrent

pattern in their dialogues which serves didactis ends, while miracles take as their goal re-enactment of Biblical scenes. The very idea of re-enactment is more dramatic than the idea of moral didacticism. Also, in a miracle the need to explain who is who is far less emphatic. So the spectacle could be designed in a lesser dependance on the audience, that is to say, when the play proper begins, actors get a language which is integrated with action much better and does not carry so much of the informative and descriptive load. A good example here is *Secunda Pastorum*. Its fame is due to its exceptionally clever dramatic narrative, and not epic or homiletic. Actors talk mostly between themselves instead speaking at and to the audience.

All that has been said so far is no more than a preliminary exploration in the problems of style in drama. Summing up we can only say that in Medieval theatre a close relationship of actors and audience should be taken into account, because the relationship has a bearing on the essential elements of form and uses of language in plays. It is not a theatre which tries to create a fictional world independently of the audience, a world which is (pretends to be) unaware of people eavesdropping on their conversations and watching their gestures and movements. It is not a theatre that *pretends reality*. Medieval theatre is busy *to show people the truth*. A spectator is the one to whom everything that happens on the stage is directed. A playwright who creates such a fictional world calculates the spectator as one of the play's elements, and this leads to specific use of dramatic expression, especially of language.

## POZAJĘZYKOWE WYZNACZNIKI STYLU W DRAMACIE


### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł postuluje uściślenie definicji stylu i metody jego badania w tekście literackim. Model funkcji stylu oparty na funkcji matematyczno-logicznej i wprowadzony przez Dolores Burton do badania stylu gramatycznego dzieła literackiego zostaje rozszerzony: za domenę funkcji stylu dzieła literackiego uważa autorka artykułu nie tylko język, ale także inne wartości, np. rodzaj literacki i konwencje, które może on zawierać. Rozszerzenie domeny funkcji stylu oparte jest na przekonaniu, że nie tylko język generuje świat przedstawiony. Poszukiwania pozajęzykowych wyznaczników stylu rozpoczyna autorka od angielskich misteriów i moralitetów średniowiecznych, w których znajduje wyraźne wpływy kształtujące styl tych utworów w samej średniowiecznej koncepcji teatru, w teatralnych realiach tego okresu, jak również w religijnej treści i dydaktycznym celu wpisanym w omawiane utwory.