

# Stylistics

## *My mistress' eyes*

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red,  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow upon her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,  
And in some perfumes is there more delight,  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak: yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound,  
I grant I never saw a goddess go,  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground,  
And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,  
As any she belied with false compare.

**William Shakespeare**

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# Roots of stylistics



- The term 'style' goes back to classical rhetoric and poetics
- Stylistics as an academic pursuit originated in the formalist school of literary criticism which emerged in Russia in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- The prime exponents of Russian formalism were Roman Jakobson, Victor Shklovskii, and Boris Tomashevskii
- The aims of their movement were:
  - To isolate the properties and characteristics of literary language
  - To explore how 'defamiliarization' in art and literature was at the root of intrinsic aesthetic value of works in question.
- At the heart of Russian formalism was the belief that the purpose of art was to **defamiliarize the familiar** in order to generate for the viewer or reader a new perspective on the topic of the piece of work.
- Alternative names for stylistics (concerned with literary texts) include: literary linguistics, critical linguistics, literary semantics, literary pragmatics, and poetics.

# What is stylistics?

- It is a sub-discipline of linguistics
- It is concerned with the systematic analysis of **style** in language
- It is concerned with **how style can vary** according to factors like genre, context, historical period, author, etc.
  - Genre: E.g., ‘newspaper language’ or gothic novel.
  - Author: Style distinguishes one writer from another.
- It systematically looks at the **formal features** of a text and determines **their functional significance** for the **interpretation** of the text in question.

# What is the connection between stylistics and linguistics?

- Stylistics uses **models of language**, **analytical techniques** and **methodologies** from linguistics to facilitate the study of style
- Stylistics has tended to concentrate on the analysis of **literary texts**

# Conventional definition of a stylistician

- Halliday defines a stylistician as *someone who can comprehend literary texts through a comprehension of their language structures.*
- Basically, this means that Halliday defines *stylistics* as “*the linguistic analysis of literary texts.*”

# Doing stylistics

In doing *stylistics*

- A literary text is looked at as made of language
- A literary text is seen to consist of patterns and properties which are part of language

Those patterns of language can be at the level of

- A. The arrangement of graphic and phonic symbols
- B. The lexico-grammatical patterns
- C. The semantic and pragmatic patterns

# Phases of Stylistic Analysis

What is  
involved in  
stylistic  
analysis?

## Two phases

A. The analytic phase

B. The interpretive phase



## The Analytic phase

- The task of stylistician is to select from the thousands of linguistic **features** in the literary text those **which are worthy of studying** in a particular literary text.

## The Interpretive phase

The stylistician

1. brings together various features to show how they form coherent, integrated **patterns**
2. makes judgments about the **significance** of such patterns in relation to the context of the work as a whole.

# Goals of stylistic analysis

- To show *why* and *how* the text means what it means (*linguistically*). (This is shared between D.A. and stylistics)
- To show why the literary text is *valued* as it is. In other words, it is interested in showing how the text is *unique* in itself. (Only stylistics)

# D. A. & Stylistics

## Stylistics

- In stylistics, we are interested in showing the uniqueness of the text we are analyzing.
- The text is the center of concern

## Discourse Analysis

- Is mostly concerned with showing how the text analyzed is **not** unique: It is **typical of its kind**.
- E.g. Studies of class-room interaction, patient-doctor interaction which aim to arrive at generalizations that characterize such discourses.
- Spoken language is the center of concern