

# *Pleating Stylistic Functions,* Or When Literature and Linguistics Collide

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Daniela Șorcaru  
**Ways of Pleating Stylistic  
Functions**

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Many philological study programmes fall under two categories that should intertwine, but which often end up being worlds apart from each other: language and literature. It's in the name; and yet, sometimes, coordination fails, and polarisation makes room for barely disguised disdain for *the other*. Fortunately, they reunite when stylistics 'takes the floor': when literature cannot be construed in the absence of a sound linguistic analysis of its features, and when linguistics cannot find its most complex application without resorting to the most elaborate expressions of the written language, i.e., to fiction. Due to its linguistic and ideational complexity, the Modernist novel is clearly in desperate need of such togetherness when it comes to looking into its intricacies, and Daniela Șorcaru's study, *Ways of Pleating Stylistic Functions* (2021), proves successful in this compulsory endeavour.

Whether it is defined as "depth", a "deviation" or a "choice", whether it is "culturally inherited" (Barthes) or just "contextually restricted" (Enkvist) (in Galperin 1977: 11), style ends up, in Șorcaru's designation (following Riffaterre's), a structuralist crossroads of the encoding and decoding of a message (2021: 14). Will this

characterisation suffice? Hardly, as it leaves out a plethora of in-between elements and focuses only on the poles of communication. Bringing them together is what is sought for, which is why the first chapter sets on a quest for an inclusive definition, resorting to a rich literature, then goes back to deviation/deviance and peculiarity, as well as to their rather antagonist relation to norm, and thenceforth to stylistic features, in an attempt at defining stylistics as an either linguistic or literary academic enterprise. Şorcaru soon reaches the obvious conclusion “that the two branches of stylistics are engaged in a highly interdependent relationship” (28), and it is from this point onwards that her survey of the stylistic functions in the Modernist novel could have already set off on the right grounds. However, Şorcaru looks further for validation and for finding the perfect formula for her subsequent stylistic investigations, in two additional theoretical chapters. The former, *A Different Approach: Stephen Ullman*, focuses on the influential collection of papers gathered under the title *Meaning and Style* (1973), from where the author of the study under the lens here will borrow some of the contextual, psychological and, especially, semantic dimensions required, in her view, in decoding James Joyce and William Faulkner’s insane displays of the stream of consciousness. The latter, *Contemporary Insights on Style and Stylistics*, reviews the groundbreaking *Style in Fiction. A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (1981), with a view to tackling aspects pertaining to the rhetoric of the literary text, to its imitation games (writing-as-speech or, as is the case here, writing-as-thought) and (re)presentational functions.

A fourth chapter has been deemed necessary to introduce the texts from a more literary-oriented perspective: *The Modern Novel*. I would have said *Modernist* to avoid the terminological confusion, as English Literature historians and theorists place this modernity as early as in the Renaissance, and it is the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century High Modernism and Experimentalism that waits for Şorcaru to dissect its ways. The chapter, still heavily indebted to linguistics, focuses on the manifestations of the stream of consciousness as a free use of “unexpected combinations of words and word inventions... unique collocations, usually displaying a high metaphorical dimension” (77), on the features of the interior monologue, “a sustained free direct thought with no overt sign of a narrator” (Wales 432, qtd. in Şorcaru 2021: 76) and on those of the free indirect speech (“a blending of a

variation of reported speech where the reporting verbs are very often omitted, and of direct speech remarks", Şorcaru *ibid*).

The applicative part of the study of the ways in which stylistic functions are combined to create the complex forms and meanings of the Experimentalists is divided into three chapters, each dedicated to a Modernist giant, namely Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner. The distinction that Şorcaru makes between the *styles* of the three authors places Woolf in a category of her own, an artful one that seeks to free the novel discourse from its traditional 'breakdown' into time, setting, characters, etc. Arguing that the discontinuity, fragmentation, and disintegration that characterise the Woolfian universe are consequences of the *means of pleating stylistic functions*, Şorcaru asserts that Woolf's "poetic monologue" is not only metafictional, but also concerned with a linguistic preoccupation with form (82). To prove this point, Şorcaru resorts to a series of close stylistic readings of excerpts from *To the Lighthouse*, taking into consideration lexical, morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects of discourse that combine two, sometimes three or more stylistic functions at once. Though less explicitly so, Şorcaru identifies patterns of gendered language, as she claims that Mr Ramsey's discourse is less burdened with symbolic language and more logical syntactically than Mrs Ramsey's. In fact, all excerpts seem to have been (perhaps unconsciously) selected with a view to pinpointing these man/woman differences at the discursive level, and maybe Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics*, could have been a useful piece of theoretical background too. The thorough examination of the nine excerpts under Daniela Şorcaru's lens converges towards the conclusion that Virginia Woolf acquired the purpose of "altering, bending, twisting so as to match the natural and intricate flow of human thought and to convey the inner mechanisms of the complex human mind" (117).

If Woolf is the 'artful', then Joyce is the 'technical' one. I felt, just by looking at these attributes, a need for clarification, perhaps owing to a subjective inclination towards the latter, while having a strong feminist connection with the former. Was this book going to try to make a distinction between feminine art and masculine craft? I wondered. Are we in that domain where the male head/intelligible/logos is opposed to the female heart/sensitive/pathos (Cixous in Lodge 1988: 287)? In fact, Joyce is tackled in all his superb complexity that has been puzzling critics since the publication of *Ulysses*, in all his hyper- and hypotextual

network, in all his vacillation between stark realism, high allusiveness and obscure symbolism. Doctrine is left aside, and focus is laid on the linguistic craft at work in *Ulysses*. Şorcaru quotes Jennifer Levine's statement (1993: 137) that the novel in question may be approached as a poem, as a novel proper or *as a text*. She takes the third path, with a view to proving an intention of "highly encoding the message and making the reader's task all the more difficult" (2021: 131) by means of constantly hindering cohesion and coherence. I confess that I have missed, among the sixteen excerpts, one from the most obvious "violation of the linguistic codes" (161), i.e., from Molly's soliloquy, but somehow Şorcaru manages to make her point without it. I would recommend her comments to any puzzled reader of *Ulysses*, as she cuts her path through the thicket of allusions, ellipses, erudisms, foreign language insertions, meaningless words (and so on) that make the Joycean universe apparently inapproachable.

The next pitstop, and the most 'climactic' one, according to Şorcaru, is in Yoknapatawpha Country, for a thorough vivisection of Faulkner's burdening prose, in which "the dislocation of all rules is the most obvious, whereas the connection among elements is the most obscure" (171). Şorcaru focuses on *The Sound and the Fury*, that "tale told by an idiot [among others, of course] ... signifying nothing". This time, the excerpts have been judiciously selected so as to display the stylistic idiosyncrasies imprinted on the discourse of all four narrators, and the study is highly successful at pinpointing the differences that make *The Sound and the Fury* such a nightmare for many readers and such a rewarding enterprise for many others. As was the case with Joyce too, the stylistic analysis covers all areas, from the phonetic to the semantic, that 'collaborate' and blend styles and registers to "convey thought and speech as authentically and accurately as possible" (212), which is Şorcaru's main argument for the assertion that Faulkner is the author who took the stream of consciousness to its climax.

To conclude, by demonstrating how stylistic functions work towards creating novel forms and complicated, unexpected meanings in the fictional worlds of the three great Modernist novelists, Daniela Şorcaru successfully 'pleats' linguistics and literature, giving the philologists from both 'camps' a valuable research tool and enough ground to believe that reconciliation is not only possible, but also extremely desirable.