Levels of Style in Narrative Fiction: 
An Aspect of the Interpersonal Metafunction

ABSTRACT

It is an accepted proposition that literary texts differ greatly in their degree of stylistic interest. In their landmark study, Style in Fiction (1981/2007), Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short attempt to account for this phenomenon by putting forward the concept of the relative transparency or opacity of the literary text, by means of an approach that utilizes the ideational metafunction. In this way, Leech and Short attempt to deal with the fact that literary texts contain “many degrees of translucency of style”. In my opinion, however, this concept is insufficiently flexible to handle the full range of stylistic markedness in literary language. As an alternative, I draw on the concept of the three levels of style identified in the tradition of classical rhetoric—the simple, the middle and the grand style. Building on this foundation, I approach the issue of stylistic markedness through the interpersonal metafunction, outlining a model of style that utilizes four separate levels, with two approximate end-points that can be identified with select literary texts. The model allows for a richer explanation of the literary text’s stylistic virtuosity, which results from the author’s ability to shift among the different levels for aesthetic effect.

Keywords: classical rhetoric, dualism, ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, literary language, monism, tenor.
There are, then, three kinds of style, called types, to which discourse, if faultless, confines itself: the first we call the Grand; the second, the Middle; the third, the Simple. The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial, class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.

Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*

**INTRODUCTION**

In the second edition of their landmark study, *Style in Fiction* (2007), Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short devote a portion of the first chapter to a consideration of the monist and dualist perspectives on fictional style. They state: “The dualist holds that there can be different ways of conveying the same content. The monist holds that this is a mistake, and that any alteration of form entails a change of content” (17). As the authors suggest, the dualist assumes that any text can be paraphrased. “This possibility is not likely to be challenged in workaday uses of language. But in literature, particularly in poetry, paraphrase becomes problematic” (20). In order to mediate this dispute, Leech and Short argue for the need to analyze literary language in terms of its functions or metafunctions, including that of the “poetic” function of foregrounding. For Leech and Short, the concept of the relative opacity of the literary text is useful because it allows for the recognition that narrative fiction contains “many degrees of translucency of style” (24). Following Michael Halliday’s own example, Leech and Short then make an ideational analysis of William Golding’s novel *The Inheritors* the test case for this functional view of literary language. This decision is curious because it inevitably closes off the argument that can be made in terms of the interpersonal metafunction. Indeed, in the diagram that accompanies his essay “Linguistic Function and Literary Style”, Michael Halliday himself connects the interpersonal metafunction of language with “the stylistic organization of lexis” (335). In order to draw out the full implication of this alternative suggestion, however, it is important to connect up Halliday’s concept of register, or the stylistic organization of lexis, with the three levels of style identified in the tradition of classical rhetoric—that of the simple, the middle or elegant and the grand style. Building on this foundation, it then becomes possible to offer an account of literary language that truly transcends the antinomy of the monist and dualist positions.
THE MONIST AND DUALIST POSITIONS

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short begin the first chapter of *Style in Fiction* by considering in some detail the claims of two rival stylistic viewpoints, that of the monist and the dualist perspectives on the nature of literary language. In the words of the two authors: “The dualist holds that there can be different ways of conveying the same content. The monist holds that this is a mistake, and that any alteration of form entails a change of content” (17). As a representative of the dualist position, the writers call on the work of Richard Ohmann to explore the basic monist idea that “there are different ways of saying the same thing” (17):

1. When dinner was over, the senator made a speech.
2. A speech was made by the senator after dinner.
3. The senator made a postprandial oration.

For Leech and Short, the central problem in these sample sentences is that “the differences . . . are chiefly grammatical rather than lexical” (18). Nonetheless, the authors maintain that the dualist is right to stress that “the basic logical content of a sentence can be represented as a (set of) elementary propositions, which, together with their inter-relations, constitute its ‘deep structure’ or ‘semantic representation’” (19). In contrast, the monist position asserts that paraphrase is not possible: “the dualist’s notion of paraphrase rests on the assumption that there is some basic sense that can be preserved in different renderings. This possibility is not likely to be challenged in workaday uses of language. But in literature, particularly in poetry, paraphrase becomes problematic” (20). The example that Leech and Short offer in evidence of this position comes from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*:

> Come, seeling night,  
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day.

*Macbeth*, III.ii, 46

In a passage like this, the use of poetic metaphor tends to undermine the dualist position that there is an underlying literal meaning that can be clearly separated from the metaphorical meaning. Nonetheless, what the *Macbeth* passage does indicate is that texts tend to fall at one or other end of a spectrum of literary language. As Leech and Short argue, “one can reasonably envisage a spectrum extending between two extremes of ‘language use’ and ‘language exploitation’; that is, between prose which conforms to the code (Saussure’s
langue) and normal expectations of communication, and prose which deviates from the code in exploring new frontiers of communication” (23). Prose that conforms to the normal expectations of language is transparent; prose that deviates is opaque. The concept of relative opacity “correctly suggests there are many degrees of translucency of style between the extremes of (let us say) The Forsyte Saga and Finnegans Wake” (24).

STYLE IN FICTION: IDEATIONAL OR INTERPERSONAL?

In an attempt to move beyond the antinomies of the monist and dualist perspective, Leech and Short suggest that the stylistician needs to adopt a pluralist position that analyzes literary language in terms of its functions or metafunctions. They cite three literary theorists who have outlined similar positions: I.A. Richards, Roman Jakobson and M.A.K. Halliday. In his study Practical Criticism (1929), Richards analyzed language in terms of its sense, feeling, tone and intention. In a more extended survey, Roman Jakobson examined its referential, emotive, conative, phatic, poetic, and metalinguistic functions. For their part, Halliday and Christian Matthiessen outlined three functions or metafunctions: the ideational, the textual, and the interpersonal. As Leech and Short contend: “What choices a writer makes can be seen against the background of relations of contrast and dependence between one choice and another; for example, (to take a simple case) the choice between transitive and intransitive verbs” (33-4).

Leech and Short then follow Halliday’s own practice by making William Golding’s novel The Inheritors the test case for a functional or metafunctional view of literary language. This is a surprising decision because it closes off a much more interesting argument. For while “[Halliday] does recognize that different kinds of literary writing may foreground different functions”, the choice of The Inheritors ensures that the discussion of literary language remains within the terms of the ideational metafunction (25). This is curious because Halliday himself recognizes that the lexical register of literary language is more strongly associated with the interpersonal, rather than with the ideational, metafunction. The reason that this is important is this: while the theme of The Inheritors may be said to be transitivity, it is perhaps the only novel in English fiction of which this statement is true. In contrast, it is the
interpersonal metafunction that takes centre stage in the majority of other literary texts. This is because it is by means of the interpersonal metafunction that the author establishes the specific literary register in which the text world is construed (cf. Nørgaard 18).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STYLE IN FICTION

The concepts of field, tenor and mode may be used to delineate the manner in which a novel’s literary register is established. As Halliday and Hasan suggest:

The FIELD is the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the subject-matter as one element in it. The MODE is the function of the text in the event, including therefore both the channel taken by the language—spoken or written, extemore or prepared—and its genre, or rhetorical mode, as narrative, didactic, persuasive, ‘phatic communication’ and so on. The TENOR refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved. (22)

The purposeful activity of the author creates a text world consisting of a suitably rich and interesting subject matter so as to elicit the sustained interest of the reader for the duration of the reading experience. The channel of communication is that of the written medium; the genre, that of narrative fiction. For this reason, it is only at the level of tenor that the major distinctions among the varieties of narrative fiction become possible. In choosing a particular literary register, the writer takes up an interactive role and a relevant set of social relations. It is thus the concept of tenor that explains the relative flexibility inherent in the concept of stylistic register. Literary register refers to “the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns, that are typically drawn upon under the given conditions”; it involves “some degree of coherence in the actual meanings expressed: not only, or even mainly, in the CONTENT, but in the TOTAL selection from the semantic resources of the language” (23).

The concept of stylistic register can be neatly aligned with the concept of the three levels of style inherited from the tradition of classical rhetoric. As the anonymous author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium suggests:

There are, then, three kinds of style, called types, to which discourse, if faultless, confines
itself: the first we call the Grand; the second, the Middle; the third, the Simple. The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial, class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech. (253)

In contrast with the polar distinction between texts that are relatively more transparent and those that are relatively more opaque, the notion of distinct levels of style allows for a more nuanced differentiation of the possible varieties of literary language.

**THE SIMPLE STYLE**

In the twentieth century, the work of Ernest Hemingway represents perhaps the most noteworthy instance of a sustained use of the simple style. The opening two paragraphs of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) are representative of the qualities of this literary language:

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.

The plain was rich with crops; there were many orchards of fruit trees and beyond the plain the mountains were brown and bare. There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming. (7)

The passage employs a remarkably consistent standard word order, with only the occasional recourse to a fronted adjunct of space or time. The passage parcels out information in a parsimonious manner, using a repeated pattern of parataxis, perhaps to mask the lack of stylistic complexity. The only notable morphological constructions are the use of −*ing* and −*ed*, both of which are used as naturalizing devices to make the effects of the war at one with the naturalness of seasonal change. The passage utilizes a simple vocabulary of description, drained of almost all emotive associations. The nouns are virtually all concrete, drawing on the elementary semantic fields of the military and the natural landscape. In this respect, the
language is strictly referential, with little or no use of phonological or poetic lexical associations. Indeed, reference seems to work within what has been termed a restricted code in not being fully independent of the picture it constructs and the narrator’s use of such deixical pointers as “another mountain” and “this side of the river” implies that the narrator naively assumes the reader to see the identical landscape the narrator sees (cf. Halliday and Hasan 34; Beaugrande, Text 153-4). On occasion, the passage observes so extraordinarily little conscious stylistic effort that it seems deliberately clumsy: “The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves”. The repeated invocation of “leaves” in an end-focused prepositional phrase is a mark of the literary naïf.

In this respect, a major aspect of Hemingway’s plain style is its relative textual inefficiency. For example, the passage is noticeable for the absence of ellipsis and pro-forms in places where they might be effectively utilized. The textual inefficiency is also revealed by the absence of concern for sentence balance and climax, for subordination and logical dependency, and for end-focused and end-weighted sentences (cf. Leech and Short 169-204). If, as Halliday and Hasan have suggested, it is by means of the interpersonal function that the writer “embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world,” Hemingway’s choice of the plain style sets definite limits to the reader’s immersion in that textual world. The “fundamental logical relations” of this opening passage of A Farewell to Arms are the ordinary ones of co-ordination and parataxis; the text abjures the use of subordination and elaborate explanation. Hemingway’s plain style thus runs the risk of causing a sense of dullness or even boredom in the reader: the average clausal length frequently falls below the SPOCA minimum (Thompson 19). What is more, at the level of both sentence and paragraph, the plain style seeks to avoid what it appears to regard as the pretensions of pleasing aesthetic effect. As such, the plain style, as a type of literary language, is somewhat marked.

THE MIDDLE STYLE

The opening section of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925) may be said to be
representative of the middle or elegant style:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since. “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.”

He didn’t say any more, but we’ve always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I’m inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. Most of the confidences were unsought — frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions. Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth. (7)

The style here is formal and yet intimate; its vocabulary choices, more elevated. The passage employs abstract nouns frequently to describe personal states of mind: judgment, nature, mind, grief, confidence, preoccupation, levy, revelation, suppression, hope, decencies. The content is secrets and revelations, performance and pretence. The adjectives of successful performance—extraordinary, gorgeous, successful—are played off against those that negatively evaluate unfitness—curious, flabby, abnormal. Adjectives describing a lack of fullness or over-ripeness are euphoniously matched off with definite descriptions or general class words that avoid a direct naming: curious natures; a few veteran bores; abnormal mind; wild, unknown men. Adverbs noting an excessive frequency of performance are phonologically paired off with verbs of speech or its imitation: unusually communicative, usually plagiaristic, unjustly accused, snobbishly suggested, snobbishly repeat. The logical relations among the clauses are complex but not overwhelming so: . . . but . . . and . . . in consequence; when . . . and so . . . because. The semi-frequent use of the sententious utterance helps create the air of a self-assured narrator who is comfortable passing judgment on others: The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality; reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope; a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.
Fitzgerald’s middle or elegant style approximates best to the ideal of efficient textuality. In contrast with Hemingway, the text avoids the use of an uneconomical parataxis in laying out its propositions. Its consistent matching of adjectives with nouns and adverbs with verbs contributes to the reader’s ability to process “the largest amounts with the smallest expenditure of recourses” (Beaugrande, Text 132). Since the text “assigns a high priority to strategies for co-ordinating surface expressions that share common or contiguous conceptual content,” the text is relatively compact and stable (134). A central explanation for this textual compactness is Fitzgerald’s consistent choice of adjectival attribution over predication. The “fundamental logical relations” encoded by The Great Gatsby are both emotionally richer and more highly organized than those in A Farewell to Arms. In this way, the middle or elegant style reveals itself as the unmarked style of literary language; it represents the ideal of a cultured, well-adjusted, educated English. It is the choice of the middle style that provides the linguistic grounds for accepting Nick Carroway as a truth-telling individual who speaks in a way that achieves consistently pleasing, but not over-elaborate, aesthetic effects.

THE GRAND STYLE

The style of Titus Groan (1946) by Mervyn Peake may be said to be representative of the grand style:

Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality were it possible to have ignored the circumfusion of those mean dwellings that swarmed like an epidemic around its outer walls. They sprawled over the sloping arch, each one half way over its neighbour until, held back by the castle ramparts, the innermost of these hovels laid hold on the great walls, clamping themselves thereto like limpets to a rock. These dwellings, by ancient law, were granted this chill intimacy with the stronghold that loomed above them. Over their irregular roofs would fall throughout the seasons, the shadows of time-eaten buttresses, of broken and lofty turrets, and, most enormous of all, the shadow of the Tower of Flints. This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven. At night the owls made of it an echoing throat; by day it stood voiceless and cast its long shadow. (9)

Peake’s grand style is both esoteric and over-elaborate, with many of its vocabulary choices drawn from the relatively obscure field of medieval architecture: massing, arch, ramparts, stronghold, buttresses, turrets, tower, masonry. The extended metaphorical comparison
between Gormenghast and a human body is estranging, particularly because of its focus on images of swarming and suffocation, voice and voicelessness, sickness and death. The text seems to prefer the poetic use of elegant variation to a more simple scheme of descriptive reference: *Gormenghast, the main massing of the original stone, its outer walls, the sloping arch, the castle ramparts, the great walls, the stronghold, the fists of knuckled masonry, time-eaten buttresses, broken and lofty turrets, the Tower of Flints, mean dwellings, these hovels, their irregular roofs*. Certain grammatical oddities—such as the first sentence choice of the perfect subjunctive or the ostentatious revivification of the archaic preposition *thereto*—contribute to creating a Gothic literary atmosphere of present decay amidst the faded memories of ancient splendor. Most noticeable of all perhaps is the manner in which the text flouts the principle of natural hierarchy, the principle that suggests the main grammatical categories should be used to carry the most important textual information. The choice of the first word “Gormenghast,” for example, leads the reader to believe that this will be the subject of the opening paragraph; in the event, however, “Gormenghast” is set aside in favour of a detailed description of what lies beyond its outer walls. The effect is one of momentary readerly confusion and ultimate aesthetic estrangement, a literary response perhaps in keeping with the mysterious setting of the novel in a place that seems to move in a realm beyond the effects of time and place, reason and logic.

**THE ISSUE OF THE COLLOQUIAL STYLE**

The colloquial style has no precedent within the traditions of classical rhetoric. For this reason alone, the colloquial style presents the stylistician with a problem of categorization. But the major issue of colloquialism as literary language is its sheer range of stylistic possibilities. Nonetheless, the default option for a colloquial style is the use of a non-standard contemporary idiolect. In this case, the chief difficulty is simply the extra linguistic demands that the unusual idiolect places on the reader. These demands will naturally vary, depending on the prior exposure to the idiolect in question. A non-standard contemporary idiolect is famously used in the opening passage of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951):

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and
all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like
going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in
the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything
pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my
father. They're nice and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell. Besides,
I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you
about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got
pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B.
about, and he's my brother and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crummy
place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end. He's going to drive
me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those little
English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four
thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't use to. He used to be just a
regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, The Secret
Goldfish, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It
was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought
it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute.
If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me. (1-2)

The passage is noticeable for its excessive use of hedging strategies, which indicates the
speaker's ultimate lack of genuine confidence. The hedging devices occur in both adjectival
and end-focused form, offering unnecessary concessions to the reader: pretty personal, quite
touchy, pretty run-down, how my parents were occupied and all, nice and all, my whole
goddam autobiography or anything, when I go home next month maybe, my brother and all,
in case you never heard of him. This idiomatic style is representative of a Northeastern
American teenager in the early 1950s: my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece,
they're quite touchy, touchy as hell, this madman stuff, I got pretty run-down, take it easy, one
of those little English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour, he's got a lot of
dough, it killed me, being a prostitute. The passage is also marked by an informal use of
logical organization, representative of spoken rather than written English.

This brief analysis of the language of The Catcher in the Rye demonstrates that the colloquial
style is marked. If this is accepted, two minor variants of the colloquial style as literary
language seem intuitively possible. The first is a non-standard spoken variant of the middle or
elegant style: a writer may invent a character who employs an idiomatic variant on “words of
a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial, class of words”. This possibility rests on
the assumption that the lexical range of the spoken register of standard English is
considerably wider than the literary register corresponding to it. The second is the use of a
non-standard spoken variant of the grand style: a character may employ an idiomatic variant on “a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words.” The possibility of such a style follows from the same idea: the spoken register of the grand style is considerably wider than its standard literary representation.

LEVELS OF STYLE AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

The reorientation of the study of stylistic effects in narrative fiction from the ideational to the interpersonal metafunction has some obvious advantages. The first is the stylistician’s enhanced repertoire for analyzing stylistic variety. In place of the concepts of relative transparency or opacity, the stylistician may discriminate upwards of six different levels: the grand style, the middle style, the plain style and the colloquial style represent the four central literary registers. But above the level of the grand style lie such polyglotted, multi-lingual artifacts as James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Here, the novel’s stylistic effects require from the reader the kind of sustained attention to the principle of linguistic alternativity normally only associated with formal experimentation in poetry (cf. Beaugrande, *Critical Discourse* 9). And below the level of the plain style is the literary language discovered in William Golding’s *The Inheritors* (1955). Here, the systematic restrictions on the utilization of one or other of the linguistic resources of English (such as the transitivity metafunction) result in a text world impoverished in its construal of the “flow of events or ‘goings-on’” (Halliday and Matthiessen 170). If the extreme of Joyce reveals to the hidden potentiality of English as a phonological, serendipitous medium of multilingual communication, the extreme of Golding throw into relief the startling effects attendant upon the systematic diminishment of language as a central evolutionary adaptation (Buss 393-6).

A second advantage of highlighting the interpersonal metafunction is the light it sheds on the writer’s selection of a dominant novelistic style. As Graham Hough was among the first to notice, the dominant novelistic style is registered by the reader as the literary language employed by the narrator: “The problem in the novel is partly that of different voices, but far more acutely that different parts of the work occupy different ontological and epistemological levels, one for which the narrator makes himself directly responsible, and the other in which
he disappears and the words of the characters are simply reproduced” (Hough 201). The more important twentieth-century writers have mostly chosen to use the middle or elegant style, eschewing both the deliberate simplicities associated with Hemingway and the Gothic poetics associated with Peake. As a literary choice, the elegant style reflects an acceptance of the dominant middle class ethos of British society, one that carries strong associations of elite education and social refinement, while yet being free of the pretentions of more aristocratic forms of language. In this way, an author who chooses not to use the elegant style is making an aesthetic, and perhaps even a political, statement.

The third advantage of highlighting the interpersonal metafunction is the light it sheds on the issue of stylistic differentiation within the novel. One mark of an author’s stylistic virtuosity, for example, is his or her ability to shift among the levels of literary language for dramatic or aesthetic effect. The principal way that an author does this is by means of the conventional shifts among the major novelistic speech forms. For example, if it is accepted that the Dickensian narrator typically utilizes the elegant style, some major aesthetic effects may be achieved by shifting into directly quoted speech. In Dickens’s character speech, the stylistic level ranges more widely, from the colloquial grand style of the aristocratic figures to the plain style of the ordinary folk to the colloquial styles of the criminals and ne’er-do-wells. Dickens’s Bleak House provides a useful example. In Chapter 16, “Tom-All-Alone’s”, the narrator first makes use of the colloquial grand style in describing Sir Leicester and his gout:

Sir Leicester receives the gout as a troublesome demon, but still a demon of the patrician order. All the Dedlocks, in the direct male line, through a course of time during, and beyond which the memory of man goeth not to the contrary, have had the gout. It can be proved, sir. Other men’s fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar; but, the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying, by dying of their own family gout. It has come down, through the illustrious line, like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire. It is among their dignities. (234)

The narrator then shifts back into the plain style in order to begin the description of the encounter between the disguised Lady Dedlock and the illiterate Jo:

She never turns her head. Lady or servant, she has a purpose in her, and can follow it. She never turns her head, until she comes to the crossing where Jo plies with his broom. He crosses with her, and begs. Still, she does not turn her head until she has landed on the other side. Then, she slightly beckons to him, and says, “Come here!”
Jo follows her, a pace or two, into a quiet court.

“Are you the boy I’ve read of in the papers?” she asked behind her veil.

“I don’t know,” says Jo, staring moodily at the veil, “nothink about no papers. I don’t know nothink about nothink at all.”

“Were you examined at an inquest?”

“I don’t know nothink about no—where I was took by the beadle, do you mean?” says Jo. “Was the boy’s name at the inkwhich Jo?”

“Yes.” (239)

In this passage, there are three different stylistic levels: there is the plain style of the narrator; there is the colloquial middle style of the directly quoted speech of the disguised Lady Dedlock; and there is the colloquial style of the directly quoted speech of the illiterate Jo. This makes four separate styles in the chapter as a whole, two of them adopted by the narrator, two of them within the directly quoted speech. Dickens is particularly noteworthy for the frequency of his stylistic shifts, but such aesthetic possibilities occur whenever a writer creates a sufficiently varied set of character idioms.

The fourth advantage is the light the interpersonal metafunction sheds on the more subtle shifts in novelistic style, particularly those that set apart the major writers of the twentieth-century literary tradition. Katherine Mansfield’s “A Cup of Tea”, for example, utilizes three distinct levels of literary language:

“Come and sit down,” she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, “in this comfy chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold.”

“I daren’t, madam,” said the girl, and she edged backwards.

“Oh, please,” —Rosemary ran forward—“you mustn’t be frightened, you mustn’t, really. Sit down, when I’ve taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cozy. Why are you afraid?” And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle. (335)

In this passage, there is the elegant style of the narrator; there is the colloquial elegant style of Rosemary; and there is the plain colloquial style of Miss Smith, the homeless girl whom Rosemary on a whim decides to bring home with her. But although these three levels serve to describe the manifest speech forms in the short story, they do not represent a complete description of the total stylistic variation:

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn’t acknowledge it. (335-6)
The comic effect here is achieved by means of a subtle confusion between two of the three manifest stylistic levels. Ostensibly, the first italicized sentence belongs to the narrator, while the second is Rosemary’s directly quoted thought. However, the sentimental outburst actually belongs to Rosemary; the idiolect, her upper class English. The net effect is that the narrator becomes the one who expresses Rosemary’s most hidden thoughts, even as the character tries desperately to distance herself from them. In this passage, a localized aesthetic effect turns on an unexpected but motivated downgrading of the literary language.

The focus on the interpersonal metafunction also provides for a more satisfactory critique of the strengths and limitations of both the monist and dualist positions. For example, it becomes apparent that the three sentences presented by Richard Ohmann to explore the basic monist idea that “there are different ways of saying the same thing” (17) are actually different at the level of style:

1. When dinner was over, the senator made a speech.
2. A speech was made by the senator after dinner.
3. The senator made a postprandial oration.

While the first and second sentences differ only in their separate choice of textual theme, the third sentence utilizes a different level of literary language. The choice of the phrase “postprandial oration” is indicative of the grand style, in spite of the overlap of the three sentences’ “basic logical content” (19). In this way, the interpersonal metafunction can be made to shed valuable light on the intuitive plausibility of both the monist and the dualist positions. When considering the possibility of paraphrase, the monist is drawn to literary texts composed in the plain style; the dualist, to texts composed in the grand style. Because poetic texts aim at an enriched experience of the syntactical, phonological and metaphorical aspects of language, poetry more frequently utilizes these higher stylistic levels. This is a central reason why Shakespearean poetic drama proves so resistant to paraphrase; it is also why Shakespearean drama is useful evidence for the dualist position. Nonetheless, even a literary text composed in the grand style may yet prove susceptible to paraphrase. It is only with texts such as *Finnegans Wake* that the full implications of the monist position become clear.
THE CONCEPT OF DEFECTIVE STYLE

In the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, the writer also notes the possibility of authors employing defective stylistic forms. The nameless Roman writer states:

But in striving to attain these styles, we must avoid falling into faulty styles closely akin to them. For instance, bordering on the Grand style, which is in itself praiseworthy, there is a style to be avoided. To call this the Swollen style will prove correct. For just as a swelling often resembles a healthy condition of the body, so, to those who are inexperienced, turgid and inflated language either in new or in archaic words, or in clumsy metaphors, or in diction more impressive than the theme demands. . . . (263-5)

A number of literary critics have suggested that the later novels of Henry James present some major difficulties of style (cf. Van Doren; Harvitt; Short; Watt). Some light may be shed on these difficulties by approaching the opening passage of *The Ambassadors* (1903) in terms of its defective achievement of the elegant style:

Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. A telegram from him bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," reply paid, was produced for the enquirer at the office, so that the understanding they should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool remained to that extent sound. The same secret principle, however, that had prompted Strether not absolutely to desire Waymarsh's presence at the dock, that had led him thus to postpone for a few hours his enjoyment of it, now operated to make him feel he could still wait without disappointment. They would dine together at the worst, and, with all respect to dear old Waymarsh—if not even, for that matter, to himself—there was little fear that in the sequel they shouldn't see enough of each other. The principle I have just mentioned as operating had been, with the most newly disembarked of the two men, wholly instinctive—the fruit of a sharp sense that, delightful as it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation, into his comrade's face, his business would be a trifle bungled should he simply arrange for this countenance to present itself to the nearing steamer as the first "note," of Europe. Mixed with everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that it would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite a sufficient degree. (17)

The passage employs two groups of nouns, which offer a curious mixture of the concrete and the abstract. The first group consists of proper names and nouns: *the hotel, his friend, a telegram, dear old Waymarsh, the enquirer at the office, the most newly disembarked of the two men, his comrade's face, this countenance;* the second group details abstract thought processes: *first question, his learning, the understanding, the same secret principle, his*
enjoyment of it, the principle I have just mentioned as operating, the fruit of a sharp sense, the apprehension, Waymarsh's presence. The primary source of the passage’s dense and somewhat dull semantic web, however, are the many negative grammatical forms: bespeaking a room "only if not noisy"; apparently not to arrive; not wholly disconcerted; not absolutely to desire; if not even, for that matter, to himself; without disappointment; should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool; there was little fear that in the sequel they shouldn't see enough of each other; would dine together at the worst. To this list can be added a number of other forms that describe duration without action: thus to postpone for a few hours; now operated to make him feel he could still wait; delightful as it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation.

The thickening of James’s later prose style into a gelatinous description of mental contemplation and unfulfilled action would appear to be the upshot of his consciously cultivated belief that the opposition between description and dialogue was unreal (James 384). But the attempt by the narrator to avoid directly quoted speech results in the discordant mixing of different stylistic levels. There are two ways in which the reader can register this unusual aspect of James’s later style (cf. Chatman, Later Style). The first is in the narrator’s excessive use of quotation marks to enclose non-standard vocabulary. A good example is the faintly comic juxtaposition of the archaic “bespeaking” next to the directly quoted "only if not noisy". As the Roman manual suggests, the choice of a particular level of literary style ought to be dependent on the subject being described. Interestingly, this aspect of the speech situation is covered by the Hallidayean concept of field rather than that of tenor. Part of what makes the passage ungainly is the use of the narrative voice in a situation that does not truly require it. The literary text is describing Lambert Strether arriving at a hotel and asking the concierge if his friend Waymarsh has already checked in. When he learns that Waymarsh will not arrive until the evening, Strether is secretly pleased. The obvious method for dealing with the exchange between Strether and the concierge would be to present it in the form of directly quoted speech. Instead, James’s narrator uses a swollen elegant style, flouting the principle that lowly things should not be described in a lofty manner.

As the passage continues, the directed quoted speech of some of the ship's passengers is followed by a more fastidious distancing of the narrative voice from non-standard colloquial
speech:

There were people on the ship with whom he had easily consorted—so far as ease could up to now be imputed to him—and who for the most part plunged straight into the current that set from the landing-stage to London; there were others who had invited him to a tryst at the inn and had even invoked his aid for a "look round" at the beauties of Liverpool; but he had stolen away from every one alike, had kept no appointment and renewed no acquaintance, had been indifferently aware of the number of persons who esteemed themselves fortunate in being, unlike himself, "met," and had even independently, unsociably, alone, without encounter or relapse and by mere quiet evasion, given his afternoon and evening to the immediate and the sensible. [. . . ] He winced a little, truly, at the thought that Waymarsh might be already at Chester; he reflected that, should he have to describe himself there as having "got in" so early, it would be difficult to make the interval look particularly eager; but he was like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending. (18)

The net effect of these stylistic choices, however, is the obliteration of the distinction between the voice of the narrator and that of Lambert Strether. Ultimately, it represents a style that is less, rather than more, flexible. Perhaps this explains why on occasion Strether’s monitored thought takes on some of the linguistic characteristics of poetry: it would appear to be the only linguistic means for reasserting a distinct character identity:

Chad had done exactly what he had promised him a fortnight previous—had accepted without another question his plea for delay. He was waiting cheerfully and handsomely, but also inscrutably and with a slight increase perhaps of the hardness originally involved in his acquired high polish. He was neither excited nor depressed; was easy and acute and deliberate—unhurried unflurried unworried, only at most a little less amused than usual. (205-206 my emphasis)

The second way in which the reader registers the discordant mixing of different stylistic levels is in the narrator’s excessive use of italics. Italics indicate a narrative voice attempting to move in the direction of an elegant style more reminiscent of speech:

The young lady they had left in the glass cage watched as if she had come to await them on the threshold. At her side stood a person equally interested, by his attitude, in their return, and the effect of the sight of whom was instantly to determine for Strether another of those responsive arrests that we have had so repeatedly to note. He left it to Miss Gostrey to name, with the fine full bravado as it almost struck him, of her "Mr. Waymarsh!" what was to have been, what—he more than ever felt as his short stare of suspended welcome took things in—would have been, but for herself, his doom. It was already upon him even at that distance—Mr. Waymarsh was for his part joyless. (27)
The use of italics here appears to be a means of compensating for the excessive fluidity of the passage’s pattern of character co-reference (cf. Murphy). As R.W. Short once suggested, “The finality, the crystallization, that ordinary sentence order and signs defining relationship bestow upon prose has been skillfully foregone in favor of other values. In these peculiar sentences, facts remain tentative, intentions fluid, and conclusions evanescent” (Short 73-74).

CONCLUSION

Reorienting the study of style in the direction of the interpersonal function offers a significantly enhanced repertoire for describing stylistic variation within the novel. The stylistician may discriminate six distinct levels of stylistic effect, ranging through the polyglotted, multi-lingualism of *Finnegans Wake*, through the grandness of *Titus Groan*, on to the unmarked elegance of *The Great Gatsby*, the plainness of *A Farewell to Arms*, the colloquialism of *The Catcher in the Rye*, to culminate in the systematically restricted language associated with *The Inheritors*. By approaching style in this way, the stylistician is better able to explain the multi-level effects associated with the use of character idiolect in Dickens. The approach also sheds valuable light on some of the more subtle shifts in a writer like Katherine Mansfield, and it helps elucidate certain defective aspects of the literary language of the later Henry James.
WORKS CITED


