

## BOOK REVIEW

S. Zyngier (Ed.). (2016) *Language, Discourse, Style: Selected works of John McH. Sinclair*, Vol. 22 [Linguistic Approaches to Literature]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

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Edited by Sonia Zyngier, *Language, Discourse, Style: Selected Works of John McH. Sinclair* represents an important contribution to English studies, particularly for those professionals, researchers, and teachers working on interfaces of language and literature. While John McH. Sinclair is widely known as a linguist and discourse analyst, this book gives overdue credit to Sinclair as a stylistician and as a language and literature education specialist who, in his study of verbal art in all its forms, composed trailblazing work on interfaces of language and literature. This book organizes previously published chapters, articles, and talks together in one long-overdue book. In organizing Sinclair's works on language, discourse, and style both thematically and chronologically, this collection achieves its aim of filling in perhaps lesser recognized aspects of Sinclair the scholar while also foregrounding Sinclair's clear and vibrant voice.

Divided into three parts and fifteen chapters, *Language, Discourse, Style* begins with issues of language pedagogy and language curriculum. Beginning Part 1: Education, Language Teaching and Stylistics is Chapter 1, "Linguistics and the Teaching of English," in which Sinclair exhorts teachers to remain observant to how language is used and describes the boundaries of the kind of linguistic theory that would best suit the English teacher. For Sinclair, such a theory must (a) explain how mother-tongue speakers of a language develop language in relation to multilingual users of a language, (b) be comprehensive in its ability to describe and make distinctions within a language corpus, and, among other aspects, (c) be pragmatically able to facilitate discussion of "style, correctness, and acceptability" (p. 10). Next, in Chapter 2, "The Integration of Language and Literature in the English Curriculum," Sinclair details a curriculum that integrates both language and literature, foregrounding his position that both were involved in and crucial for language learning. The curriculum that Sinclair envisions involves language play for its own sake, followed by "the formal exercise" in which "the pupil can start trying to write in different styles. Maybe just rhyme at first, or regular rhythm, or description without verbs" (p. 21). The point of such exercises is twofold for Sinclair: to playfully enjoy language and to exercise a need to express oneself. Next, in a short but impactful Chapter 3, "Language Awareness in Six

Easy Lessons,” Sinclair defines linguistic awareness as involving six characteristics – namely, (a) productivity, (b) creativity, (c) stability and change, (d) social variation, (e) language know-how, and (f) two-layered code. Sinclair’s aim here is to define a term he deems vague, and the result is a description of aspects of this educational “movement” to make it less abstract and more readily implementable (p. 27). As the last chapter in this part, Chapter 4, “Large Corpus Research and Foreign Language Teaching,” Sinclair is shown here drawing later in his work on corpus linguistics and illustrating how corpus data from his Bank of English (the Birmingham corpus) reveals previously only intuited patterns lost to many traditional grammars. Sinclair’s work here harmonizes with other concerns and methodologies among researchers of literary analysis. Sinclair offers support, for instance, of analyzing literary texts not selectively but comprehensively (e.g., Biber, 2011; Pennebaker & Ireland, 2011). Sinclair provides tools and empirical support for textual literary analysis that makes reference to patterns already recognized in corpuses of similar texts.

Part 2: Linguistic Stylistics contains five chapters describing guidelines for analyzing specific texts from a stylistics point of view. The contribution that the works in this section make to the field includes their offering support for literary education that goes beyond literal analysis of aspects of literary texts to education that appreciates “the rhetoric of literature” and the “fullness of the experience of literature” that result from style (Lee, 2011, p. 51). Sinclair, in Chapter 5, “When Is a Poem Like a Sunset?” reports on an experiment carried out with his students using Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” to illustrate the qualities of poetry composed in an oral tradition. One point discussed here is what Sinclair refers to as “*revision*” or “the influence of the modern speaker’s habits of language” (p. 55), in which the understanding of archaic language in the Keat’s poem was achieved in part when participants “replaced words and phrases which were not very familiar to them by approximately equivalent words and phrases in their everyday idiom” (p. 52). In Chapter 6, “Taking a Poem to Pieces,” Sinclair uses the structure of sentences and clauses, the boundaries of lines and stanzas, and parts of speech (nominals, verbals, and adverbials) as units of analysis for Larkin’s poem “First Sight.” Meant to “carry the reader of literature to the brink of linguistics,” such an analysis would appear to be effective in raising readers’ awareness of how linguistic structures support and make up a particular literary genre’s conventions (p. 57). Next, Chapter 7, “A Technique of Stylistic Description,” shows Sinclair zeroing in on meaning-carrying mechanisms in Graves’s “The Legs” to show how linguistic techniques could help shed light on how a poem communicates. As another example of Sinclair providing an “exercise in stylistics,” this chapter displays Sinclair plainly discussing linguistic units from the largest (the entire poem) to smaller “meaning-carrying” and “metrical units” – an analytic approach that

would appear to be effective in identifying those stylistic categories that serve to bridge the meaning of a poem and the poem's unique patterns of linguistic units (pp. 69–70). Similarly, Chapter 8, "Lines about 'Lines,'" introduces Sinclair's concept of "focats" or focusing categories in order to devise a theory of literary communication while looking at Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (p. 95). Further offering categories and units for literary/linguistic analysis, and concluding this part, Chapter 9, "The Linguistic Basis of Style," describes six properties for literary style that also share roots with natural languages, including arbitrariness between sign and referent, arbitrariness between proposition and exponence, structural superfluity, derivational hierarchy, idiom, and reference. Overall, Part 2 of this collection succeeds in offering practical foundations for stylistic analyses of literary texts.

Part 3: Style and Discourse includes five chapters on how analysis of literary texts at the discourse level yields reliable and evidence-based explanations. Starting off the discussion here, Chapter 10, "Mirror for a Text," shows Sinclair conceptualizing poetic discourse as containing interactional qualities, which allows for analysis of poetry based on methodologies for studying spoken language. In providing further development of the discussion of how to integrate language and literature, in Chapter 11, "Poetic Discourse: A Sample Exercise," Sinclair links poetry with spoken discourse while looking at discursive patterns in Thumboo's poem "Krishna." The result of the discussion of this sample exercise is a clear example of the discursive patterns of one poem, which can be developed and applied to other literary texts. In a slight change of direction to allow Sinclair to reflect on his academic trajectory and concern with methods of literary analysis, Chapter 12, "The Exploitation of Meaning: Literary Text and Local Grammars," presents a Poetics and Linguistics Association keynote address in which Sinclair traces his research trajectory toward more personally satisfying and seemingly valid descriptive methods of texts. Here we find Sinclair arguing, for instance, for seeing a poet's finished poem as having probably come about through a process of "several local grammars jostling together, barely under control," a view that rejects seeing a poem as being developed necessarily coherently "from a single point of origin" (p. 200). What is needed, Sinclair argues, is an adaptive analytical approach not married to predetermined linguistic categories. In Chapter 13, "Fictional Worlds Revisited," Sinclair defines fiction in relation to nonfiction in order to illustrate "a tendency for fiction and non-fiction to be confused" (p. 209). A noteworthy point Sinclair develops is that readers of fiction develop "critical appreciation" when exposed to an author's ultimately arbitrary powers to create fictional worlds, highlighting the co-constructed nature of literary meaning. Finally, concluding Sinclair's writing is Chapter 14, entitled "'Passion speechless lies,'" in which Sinclair highlights how spoken discourse can be seen in the Elizabethan

sonnet and how, therefore, such analysis can “place it in its possible context as a communication – possibly its original context” (p. 248). As a final contribution of Sinclair’s work, we see the common thread of Sinclair exhorting that we consider literary texts as communication, with emphasis on remembering the importance of valuing language in use as an entryway into stylistic analysis. In this section are concerns of importance to researchers and teachers in creative writing studies, who may encourage students of creative writing to be aware of how style communicates and even how, for instance, the externalization of a literary work “allows the writer to critically evaluate positions and understandings as if they came from someone else” (Hanauer, 2011, p. 82). Such critical evaluation, drawing support from Sinclair’s work, can include systematic analysis of style to complement traditional creative-writing praxis that may focus mainly on how literary texts make readers feel.

The single greatest strength of this book may be its presentation of Sinclair’s always clear writing style, capable of conveying involved analyses and making theoretical intersections through what Bill Louw in the coda describes as Sinclair’s “simple but powerful terminology” (p. 268). It is this cogent writing that allows Sinclair’s overall message that literary texts represent language in use to shine. While the book may have benefited from additional self-commentary from Sinclair himself on his research development over his years of contributions, in order to put earlier contributions in context with his later positions, the book valuably depicts thematic and chronological development in Sinclair’s career in the area of intersections of language, linguistics, and literature. The book’s coda by Bill Louw, Chapter 15, entitled “Coda: Unlearning the Intuitive Analogue as Sinclairian Digital Proofs Transcend Stylistics,” also does much to describe Sinclair’s work and how that work impacted corpus stylistics.

Overall, the book achieves its aim of filling in a gap related to maybe lesser recognized contributions of Sinclair’s work by putting together in one place the many powerful chapters, articles, and talks that Sinclair produced on the topic of interfaces of language and literature. The range of audiences that would be most appreciative of this collection includes stylisticians, language and literature scholars and teachers, syllabus and curriculum designers, as well as undergraduate, graduate, and college faculty members in English studies working particularly with literary reading, creative writing, and literary education.

## References

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