

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY CRITICISM AND LINGUISTICS – 'NATURAL ALLIES' OR 'STRANGE BEDFELLOWS'?

In the last few decades a considerable number of linguists and literary critics have explored diverse ways in which the insights provided by linguistics can be profitably integrated into the study of literary texts. Drawing upon different theoretical frameworks these scholars have contributed to the development of innovative approaches to the study of literature, which, however, have also raised a certain amount of controversy about the usefulness of interdisciplinary approaches involving linguistics and literary criticism. Given the fact that language, the object of study in linguistics, is also the fabric all literary texts are made of, linguistics and literary criticism should be almost natural allies in the endeavour to develop approaches to literary texts which do justice to the multifaceted nature of literary texts and to their dependence on language as a medium.¹ One can assume that many of the insights gained in the various branches of linguistics should prove to be directly relevant to literary criticism and provide the literary critic with a more complex picture of literary language. A (selective) integration of the theories and methods pursued in linguistics should enable literary critics to see literary texts from new angles. It can also remind them of the importance of paying close attention to the medium used in literature.

Although the task of integrating the insights provided by linguistics into literary criticism has so far attracted a large share of the critical attention, linguistics is not necessarily confined to the role of the donor in this interdisciplinary exchange, but may also profit very much from interdisciplinary approaches. Linguists have always relied on literary texts as data, for instance. For the historical linguist literary texts are frequently an indispensable source of information, but even synchronic linguistics (e.g. the study of the varieties of English) often makes use of literary texts as data. This use of literary texts, however, is far from being an entirely unproblematic one, since the relationship between the language of a given speech community, which is usually considered to be the linguist's prime object of study, and the language of literary texts cannot be conceived of as a one-to-one correspondence. Literary authors may potentially employ language in very specific and idiosyncratic ways, creating a literary language which at times may differ considerably from the usage in the speech community, as Chapman (1973: 3-4) points out: "Literature [...] seems to offer language which is different from what may be loosely termed the 'normal' or 'everyday' usage of a speech-community [...]. Literary language has been chosen and manipulated by its user with greater care and complexity than the average language-user either can or

1 Cf. e.g. Chapman (1973: 4), who argues that "[...] literature is created from the basic material of linguistic study and is allied to it in a way that the other arts like music and painting are not."

wishes to exercise." An exploration of the relationship between literary language and the language used in a particular speech community may benefit enormously from an alliance between linguistics and literary criticism, as the article by Manfred Görlach in this volume suggests. Moreover, as for example Jürgen Lenz's article demonstrates, the analysis of the linguistic forms one observes in literary texts, which may at times be highly innovative, can constitute a valuable contribution to (mainline) linguistics. Innovative linguistic forms in literary texts may support, but also challenge existing theories of how linguistic constructions are formed and interpreted.

In the past the apparently 'natural' link between linguistics and literary criticism which is provided by their shared interest in language gave rise to attempts to define the very 'literariness' of literary texts on the basis of linguistic criteria. Structuralists like Jan Mukařovský held that a description of the linguistic features of literary texts, of the specific ways in which these texts deviate linguistically from 'ordinary' language should enable linguists and literary critics to identify the defining characteristics of literary texts.² This interdisciplinary approach, which has yielded interesting insights into the linguistic nature of literary texts, but has failed to achieve the ultimate goal of identifying what constitutes the literariness of a literary text, clearly deserves further attention by both linguists and literary critics, as Charles T. Scott shows in his article; he argues for an interdisciplinary approach that is a modified version of the original attempts to identify 'literariness'.

A wide range of approaches which engage in a dialogue between linguistics and literary criticism has emerged in the last few decades. Some of the proponents of an integration of a linguistic methodology into literary criticism hailed this project as an opportunity to define a more 'objective' approach to the study of literary texts. This can, for example, be seen in the area of literary stylistics, which is perhaps the most extensive field among the interdisciplinary projects involving linguistics and literary criticism. In contradistinction to traditional stylistics, literary stylistics uses a linguistic terminology, which is held to have a better selectivity than the traditional stylistic terminology, and, thus, to allow a precise description and exploration of the manifold linguistic/stylistic phenomena one can observe in literary texts.³

In spite of the widespread enthusiasm approaches involving linguistics and literary criticism have met with right from the start, such interdisciplinary pursuits have not gone unchallenged. It has in fact at times been argued that linguistics and literary criticism appear to be largely incompatible, because – apart from their shared interest in language – they appear to have very little in common as far as their general theoretical orientation and their methods are concerned. The critics of interdisciplinary approaches drawing upon linguistics and literary criticism have in particular held that

2 On the the history of the concept of a stylistics of deviation cf. Nieragden (2001).

3 For an overview of literary stylistics cf. Chapman (1973), Cluysenaar (1976), Fowler (1977), Carter (1982), and Toolan (1990).

linguistics is "too scientific"; its mathematical diagrams and terminology, its development of theory from empirical observation, its refusal to be prescriptive about 'good' or 'bad' usage, all serve to alienate the more traditional literary scholar" (Chapman 1973: 5).⁴ One of the crucial differences between the two disciplines is to be found in their underlying concepts of language. Linguists tend to conceptualize language as a rule-governed phenomenon, whereas literary criticism is typically more interested in linguistic phenomena which are exceptional (cf. Fludernik 1995: 119). But although linguists tend to privilege a view of language as a rule-governed phenomenon, they also hold that creativity is one of the defining characteristics of human language – an aspect of language that often makes itself felt very clearly in literary texts. Differences between linguistics and literary criticism, as far as their general outlook is concerned, may also be seen as a challenge, since they may induce a critical reconsideration of cherished concepts and of the methods which have traditionally been favoured by linguistics and literary criticism.

Notwithstanding the doubts some scholars have had about the usefulness of combining the theories and methods pursued by linguists and literary critics, the various attempts to establish interdisciplinary approaches have brought forth a substantial body of criticism, which has amply demonstrated that the alliance between linguistics and literary criticism can be an enormously fruitful endeavour. Although this alliance has already given rise to diverse approaches, the possibilities of integrating the two disciplines are far from exhausted. Especially in the context of the recent tendency towards integrating literary criticism in the more general field of Cultural Studies new possibilities of combining the insights offered by linguistics and literary criticism are beginning to emerge, as Ursula K. Heise's and Ansgar Nünning's contributions to this volume indicate.

The articles in this collection, written by literary critics and by linguists, represent a considerable number of different approaches to the ongoing project of combining linguistics and literary criticism in a profitable way. Thus, they engage in a critical dialogue between the two disciplines, reconsidering different strands of tradition, charting new ways of benefiting from this dialogue, but also drawing attention to the potential pitfalls of this project.

The articles in the first part of this volume outline several theoretical interfaces between linguistics and literary criticism. The topics chosen by the contributors range from textlinguistics (Heinz Vater), a well established branch of linguistics, via a critical examination of the possibilities of applying Chomskyan linguistics to literary texts (Christiane Bongartz/Tony E. Jackson and Manfred Jahn) to a discussion of the interface between linguistics and postcolonial narratology (Marion Gymnich) and an explo-

4 For a more extensive discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of attempts integrating linguistic theories and methods into literary criticism cf. Fowler (1967, 1968) and Fludernik (1995, 1998). A concise overview of the history of linguistic approaches in literary criticism can be found in Barsch (2001).

ration of the possibilities of utilizing linguistics and cognitive metaphor theory in two specific projects which situate the analysis of texts in the framework of Cultural Studies (Ursula K. Heise and Ansgar Nünning). The articles in the second part of the present volume look more closely at the medium of literary texts, reconsidering the relationship between language and 'literariness' (Charles T. Scott), exploring the materiality of language in literary texts (Helmut Bonheim), focusing on the areas of morphology (Jürgen Lernerz and Susan Olsen) and lexicology (Wolf-Dietrich Bald), or looking at historical aspects of language usage in literary texts (Phillip Herring and Manfred Görlach). The contributions in the last part of this volume apply linguistic approaches to specific literary texts, providing exemplary linguistic readings of texts belonging to different genres and different periods in the history of English and American literature – John Donne's *Satires* (Selwyn Jackson), T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (Inge Molitor-Nehl), Amy Clampitt's poem "The Cove" (Frank J. Kearful), Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*, and Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (J. Lawrence Guntner), and Simon Gray's *The Rear Column* (Gottfried Krieger).

The editors and the contributors dedicate this volume to Jon Erickson, who throughout his academic career has shown both in his publications and in his teaching that for him linguistics and literary criticism are certainly not 'strange bedfellows'. One of his main fields of interest is clearly syntax, but he has also taught numerous classes in areas like morphology, writing systems, semantics, first language acquisition, and historical linguistics. In addition, he from time to time offered courses focusing on the interfaces between linguistics and literary criticism, even team-teaching a legendary course with Helmut Bonheim, which has already gone down into the individual and collective memories of both a great number of students and colleagues. In these classes he drew upon his extensive knowledge of structuralism and his no less intense enthusiasm for and expertise in narratology. One of the products of Jon Erickson's long-standing interest in literary criticism is his translation of Max Lüthi's classic study *Das Volksmärchen als Dichtung: Ästhetik und Anthropologie* (1975) – *The Fairytale as Art form and Portrait of Man* (1987, Bloomington: Indiana University Press). The most recent proof of Jon Erickson's interest in combining linguistics and literary criticism is his article "Strict Adjacency and the Prose of Joseph Conrad" (2002), in which he demonstrates that drawing upon current syntactic theories is a useful starting point for an exploration of Conrad's complex prose style. Being enormously well-read in both linguistics and literature (and literary theory, one might add), Jon Erickson has been an enormously popular university teacher, whose classes, in which he has always tried to make sure that his audience could follow by the by now legendary question 'Is everybody happy with that?', have often been attended by more than 100 students – a fact that testifies to his great dedication to teaching. At the English Department of the University of Cologne, where he started teaching in 1973, he is famous among students and colleagues

for his helpfulness and his wry sense of humour. For many years he has been the mainstay of the correction team responsible for the reading of the essays written in the general obligatory intermediate examination (*Zwischenprüfung*) in English. He has taken it upon himself to organize the reading of the essays and quite often in the meetings of the correction team it was Jon Erickson who suggested both the literary set texts and the essay questions too – a fact that also indicates how knowledgeable about literary texts he is. When he goes into retirement after Summer Semester 2002, Jon Erickson will be sorely missed both by many of his colleagues and by his students, many of whom have expressed the hope that he will continue to teach after his (official) retirement.

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