TS4213 Stylistics of Drama
Week 1

What is stylistics?

Stylistics can generally be considered to be the study of literary texts with a sharp concern for how the language element works in these texts. It is therefore *one* of many different approaches to literary texts, in our case dramatic texts. There are, for example, approaches that focus on sociological, psychological or historical aspects of dramatic texts. Stylistics is different from 'practical criticism' in that there is a belief that some rigour (in terms of description, terminology, explicitness, etc.) is necessary — partly in the interest of scholarship, but also because this will help the reader in *reproducing* some of the procedures to other texts. The approach, therefore, contrasts with the Leavisite approach.

Charles Bally published a two-volume treatise on French stylistics (entitled *Traité de Stylistique Française*) in 1909. His concern was to describe the 'affective' aspects of language: 'subjective but private feelings, attitudes, motives, perspectives, etc.'. Interest spread across continental Europe, but stylistics as we know it did not catch on until the 1960s. This was when the **developments in descriptive linguistics**, especially in grammar, allowed stylistics to flourish in Britain and the United States.

The rise of stylistics is also related to the **practical criticism** method in literary criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley's essays, 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Affective Fallacy' (1946) questioned the widespread reference to influences and biographical details when criticising literary works. They felt that dwelling on influences and biographical details allowed the critic to almost totally ignore the text itself, and so the push was for there to be more 'close readings' (or *explication de texte* or 'practical criticism'). The critical movement advocated (as stylistics did) a **formalist approach**. A strong distinction was made between what was **textual** and what was **extra-textual**. Extra-textual matters include biographical details, the author's intention, or socio-historical and cultural influences. What was textual was what was found on the page itself. In fact, this kind of stylistics, known as **pedagogical stylistics**, is often useful in teaching literature to foreign- and second-language learners, in that it allows pupils to tease out meaning from the text itself without making the pupil feel threatened by lack of 'background' information.

However, stylistics is, by definition **inter-disciplinary**. In that it purports to deal with literary texts, it has links with literary criticism and critical theory. In that it believes that there needs to be some theoretical framework and fairly rigorous methodology, it has links with linguistics and possibly sociology. This means that stylistics has to take into account of developments in linguistics. As linguistic descriptions take into account notions of context, and move beyond the level of the sentence, more tools are made available for stylistic analyses.

Preliminary task

Imagine you've been given the following passage (you probably know it), and you're asked to answer the question: *what does it mean?*

Alternatively, imagine you're the English teacher to a class of 15-year-olds. What would you tell your pupils?

In both scenarios, what additional information would you like to know?

> *Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying*   SD1
> *to take off his boot. He pulls at it with*
> *both hands, panting. He gives up,*

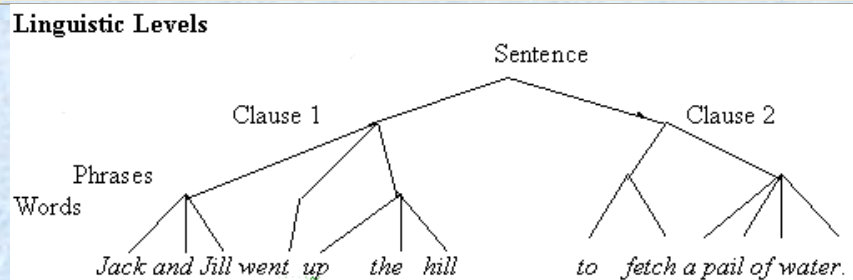|		
	exhausted, rests, tries again.	
	As before.	SD2
	Enter Vladimir.	SD3
ESTRAGON:	(*giving up again*). Nothing to be done.	T1
VLADIMIR:	(*advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart*). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All of my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (*He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.*) So there you are again.	T2
ESTRAGON:	Am I?	T3
VLADIMIR:	I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone for ever.	T4
ESTRAGON:	Me too.	T5
VLADIMIR:	Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how? (*He reflects.*) Get up till I embrace you.	T6
ESTRAGON:	(*irritably*). Not now, not now.	T7
VLADIMIR:	(*hurt, coldly*). May one enquire where His Highness spent the night?	T8
ESTRAGON:	In a ditch.	T9
VLADIMIR:	(*admiringly*). A ditch! Where?	T10
ESTRAGON:	(*without gesture*). Over there.	T11
VLADIMIR:	And they didn't beat you?	T12
ESTRAGON:	Beat me? Certainly they beat me.	T13
VLADIMIR:	The same lot as usual?	T14
ESTRAGON:	The same? I don't know.	T15
VLADIMIR:	When I think of it ... all these years ... but for me ... where would you be ...? (*Decisively.*) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.	T16
ESTRAGON:	And what of it?	T17
VLADIMIR:	(*gloomily*). It's too much for one man. (*Pause. Cheerfully.*) On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.	T18
ESTRAGON:	Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.	T19

Linguistics

* *Phonology* is the study of how pronunciation operates in particular languages.

- *Graphology* is the study of the writing system, also known as orthography — it includes spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, handwriting style, etc.
- *Grammar* is the study of the form of the language (as opposed to the sound, writing, or meaning system of the language). Grammar itself can be subdivided in *syntax* (sentence structure) and *morphology* (word structure).
- *Morphology* is the study about the structure or organisation of words into morphemes — the 'roots' ('stems') and affixes. A morpheme is the smallest distinctive unit of grammatical analysis. The word *gleeful* contains two morphemes: *glee* (the 'root'), and *ful* (the affix); the word *advantage* contains one morpheme only.
- *Syntax* is the study of the structure or organisation of sentences into clauses, phrases and words. There is concern, for example, on how the information is focused in a sentence, or on how the words are ordered.
- *Discourse Analysis* is a term that is not very clearly defined — some use it to refer to the organisation above the sentence level (e.g., how sentences are organised into paragraphs); some focus on spoken discourse (as opposed to written text). In TS4213, we shall use the term *discourse* to refer to bits or stretches of language including the context to which the language is used (who said/wrote what to whom, when, why?). We can therefore restrict the term text for the 'written record' of spoken or written discourse.
- *Semantics* is that aspect of linguistics that formally studies the meaning aspects of language — specifically of words and sentences, without necessarily taking into account the context in which they are used.
- *Pragmatics* is the study of utterances as opposed to sentences. Each single instantiation of a sentence constitutes a different utterance. For example, I can say, 'It's late' when my friend suggests that we go out for a drink. The next day, I can say 'It's late' to my wife after being at a dinner party for several hours. I have said the same sentence, but I have made two utterances. The first utterance might mean 'No, I can't go out with you now'; whereas the second might mean 'My dear, I think it's time we considered going home'. Pragmatics is therefore concerned with utterance meaning, and attempts to relate the form and sentence meaning systematically to the context.

This can be summarised as follows. Given that we are interested in *dramatic discourse*, our reliance on linguistics will be mainly from **pragmatics** and **discourse analysis**.

Linguistics

	SUBSTANCE	FORM	MEANING	SITUATION
Spoken Language	*phonology*	*grammar (morphology* and *syntax)*	*semantics*	*pragmatics (discourse analysis)*
Written Language	*graphology, orthography*			

Linguistic Levels

Sentence

Clause 1   Clause 2

Phrases

Words

Jack and Jill went up   the hill   to   fetch a pail of water.

(All the words have one morpheme each except for *went*: go + [PAST TENSE].)

Semiology/Semiotics

I make no distinction between *semiology* and *semiotics*. The former is favoured especially in France (as this was the term used by Ferdinand de Saussure, the 'father of linguistics'; the latter is favoured especially in North America (as this was the term used by Peirce). Semiology or semiotics is the theory (science) and analysis of signs and sign systems and their meanings. The focus is normally on communication between human beings in different societies and cultures (as opposed to communication between other animals).

Human language is one example of a sign system; but it is not the only method of communication. Apart from language, people can also communicate by facial expressions and gestures (body language), or through their accents (normally considered paralanguage because although it is not a linguistic element, it accompanies language), or through the kinds of clothes they wear (obvious examples would be the wearing of school ties, football club colours, or wearing 'mourning colours', or a man not wearing a tie at a formal function), or the style or colour of ones hair. The study of visual communication is normally known as kinesics.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) introduced a terminological distinction which has exercised a major influence on subsequent linguistic discussion: *signifiant* (or 'signifier', or 'significans') was contrasted with *signifié* (or 'concept signified', 'significatum').
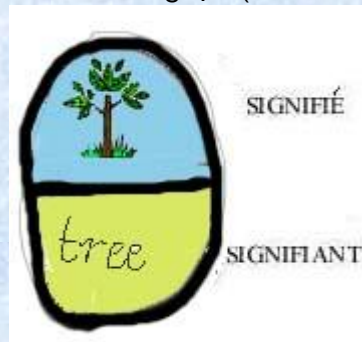
For the most part (in language), the relationship between the *signifiant* and the *signifié* is arbitrary. Exceptions would be onomatopoeic words (like *ring* or *mew*).

Other kinds of symbols might be less arbitrary. In the work of Charles Peirce (1931–58), there are three major types of signs: an **icon** is a *signifiant* which resembles in its form the *signifié*; an **index** is a *signifiant* which is related to the *signifié* in terms of contiguity or proximity or causality; a **symbol** is a *signifiant* which is arbitrarily related to its *signifié*.

Examples of icons would include photographs, certain map and road signs (e.g. the cross-roads symbol, or T-junction symbol). Examples of indices include thunder and lightning (indicating storm), smoke (indicating fire), spots (indicating measles, chicken pox, etc.), a person staggering (indicating drunkenness or exhaustion), a person stuttering (indicating nervousness). Stage performances therefore rely partly on indexical signs for communicating to the audience information about the characters, etc.

Compare the 1930s British traffic sign for a school and a contemporary one. How are they different?

The stylistics of drama is therefore a *semiotic* approach to dramatic texts, which focuses on the *linguistic* elements of the text (but should also be cognisant of *other* elements in the text). It is *one* of several possible approaches. It is closely related to 'practical criticism', but prefers an explicit analysis, with clear and unambiguous terminology, supported by some theoretical framework.

Also, consider the following poem by George Herbert (1583–1633):

> A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,
> Made of a heart and cemented with tears;
> Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
> No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.
> A HEART alone
> Is such a stone,
> As nothing but
> Thy pow'r doth cut.
> Wherefore each part
> Of my hard heart
> Meets in this frame
> To praise thy name.
> That if I chance to hold my peace,
> These stones to praise thee may not cease.
> Oh, let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
> And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.

The Altar.

A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant rear
Made of a heart, and cemented with tean
    Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
    No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.
        A H E A R T alone
        Is such a stone,
        As nothing but
        Thy pow'r doth cut.
        Wherefore each part
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        Meets in this frame,
        To praise thy name.
    That if I chance to hold my peace,
    These stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be m
And sanctifie this A L T A R to be th

DISCUSSION 1
How many levels of semiosis can you discern in George Herbert's (1593–1633) poem below?

Easter Wings
by George Herbert

⊰———◈———◈———◈———⊱

Lord, Who createdst man in wealth and store,	1
Though foolishly he lost the same,	2
Decaying more and more,	3
Till he became	4
Most poore:	5
With Thee	6
O let me rise,	7
As larks, harmoniously,	8
And sing this day Thy victories:	9
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.	10
My tender age in sorrow did beginne;	11
And still with sicknesses and shame	12
Thou didst so punish sinne,	13
That I became	14
Most thinne.	15
With Thee	16
Let me combine,	17
And feel this day Thy victorie;	18
For, if I imp my wing on Thine,	19
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.	20

⊰———◈———◈———⊱

We can examine Widdowson's analysis of Frost's poem.1[1]

DISCUSSION 2
Let us discuss the poem first. Here is the poem in full.

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING2[2]

1[1]Henry Widdowson, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (London: Longman, 1985), pp. 28-33.

2[2]Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 130.

Whose woods these are I think I know.	1
His house is in the village, though;	2
He will not see me stopping here	3
To watch his woods fill up with snow.	4
My little horse must think it queer	5
To stop without a farmhouse near	6
Between the woods and frozen lake	7
The darkest evening of the year.	8
He gives his harness bells a shake	9
To ask if there is some mistake.	10
The only other sound's the sweep	11
Of easy wind and downy flake.	12
The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,	13
But I have promises to keep,	14
And miles to go before I sleep,	15
And miles to go before I sleep.	16

We can possibly focus on many kinds of linguistic patterning in this poem — for example, the rhyme scheme; the alliteration in *dark, and deep*; the contrast between the words relating to the man-made elements (*house, village, farmhouse*) and the natural elements (*woods, snow*). Widdowson, among other things, focuses on the pronoun system (*Whose* woods, *his* house, *my* little horse, etc.). He suggests that some of the usage is unusual, and therefore catches his attention, and that this requires interpretation. He suggests that the poem has as its theme 'the reality of social constraints, of rights and obligations, in opposition to that of natural freedom [symbolised by the wood, wind and snow]' (p. 121).

We can trace the steps, rough, as follows.
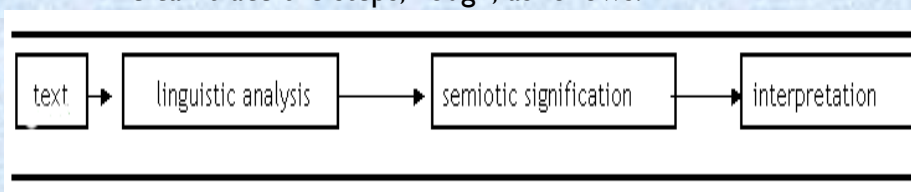
And this is fairly typical of most stylistic analyses. We examine the text, look out for linguistic patterns, and then try to work out the relevance or significance of the discovered pattern. This then should lead to some sort of interpretation of the text. The assumption is that the author is trying to *communicate* something *through the patterns* we have discovered. In other words, the patterns function as a **sign** — we have to decide *how* to interpret the sign (is it iconic, or indexical, or symbolic in Peirce's sense?).

When Widdowson's article appeared, Sydney Bolt objected to what he felt to the 'obvious' Death Wish interpretation of the poem:

When the reader thinks twice about what the last line means ['And miles to go before I sleep'], he realises there must be a latent meaning beneath the manifest one. This reveals itself as a metaphor — 'a long way to go before I die'. On re-reading, one now registers the attractive woods as the Forest of Death, and additional meaning attaches to every line.3[3]

3[3]Sydney Bolt, in *The Use of English*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1972), cited in Widdowson, p. 121.

Widdowson's own comment was that this was 'altogether too weighty a construction to place on this single repetition, and [he] saw no warrant in the actual text for [this] interpretation'. How then do we explain the prevalence of this interpretation? It would seem that *literary texts*, in particular *poetic texts* encourage symbolic readings (and I am using 'symbolic' in the general sense now). We can make the jump from *sleep* to *death* through the similarity between them (an **index**), and perhaps also through conventional usage ('he's gone to sleep' = 'he has died'). But all this is probably reinforced by the conventions of poetry. My point is that the language element and the contextual element both figure in the way we come to a conclusion about the text we are reading, and we can therefore expand our model.
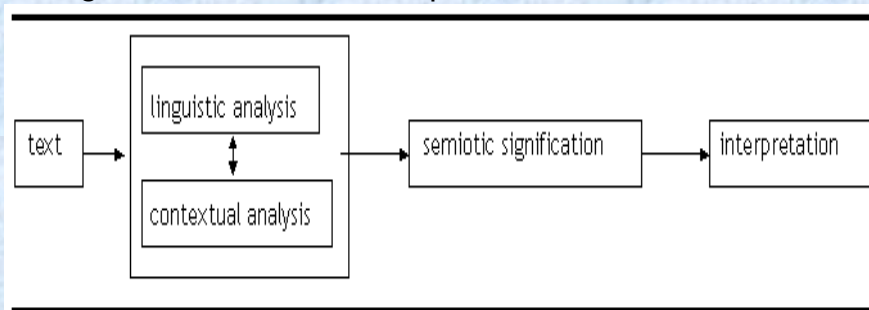
The *context* of the words (being found in a poem) therefore allows for this kind of reading, and the word *sleep* takes on additional semiotic significance. Our model of stylistics then should therefore encompass *contextual analysis* together with *linguistic analysis*.

I propose also another extension to the model. If we bear in mind the Frost poem again, we might also want to say that the theme or notion of *sleep* harks back to **previous usages** and **previous significations** of the word *sleep*. In other words, words (or even structures) can have histories. The way we use particular words (or structures) depend on our past, historical experience of the words (or structures). In general, we can say that if a particular word (or structure) has a history of being given a particular semiotic signification, it will subsequently be easier to give that particular semiotic signification.

We might therefore say, for example, that the Frost poem makes us think of, say, Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale':

Darkling I listen [to the nightingale]; and, for many a time
    I have been half in love with easeful **Death**,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
    To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to **die**,
    To **cease** upon the midnight with no pain,
       While thou art pouring forth thy **soul** abroad
        In such ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain —
    To thy high **requiem** become a **sod**.
...
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
    Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
       Up the hill-side; and now 'tis **buried** deep
        In the next valley-glades:
    Was it a vision, or a waking **dream**?
       Fled is that music: — Do I wake or **sleep**?

Keats makes uses many lexical items to do with, or closely related to, the notion of death — *Death, die, cease, soul, requiem, sod, buried*. He also uses lexical items to do with sleep — *dream, sleep*. The reader is thus encouraged to make the connexion between sleep and death. A reader may therefore allow this other text (Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale') colour his/her interpretation of Frost's poem. Or, to put it another way, Frost might have been (consciously or sub-consciously) recalling Keats's ode whilst writing his poem. We can say that the text **harks back to** another text, or that there is **intertextuality** — some sort of a connexion between these two texts. Writers and readers are generally not like, say, computers and have **experience** of other texts, and they frequently make use of their experience of other texts to interpret new texts. Whether the reader recalls Keats's ode or perhaps even just the Bible:

As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and said aloud, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And with these words he **fell asleep**. [Acts 7.59–60, The New Jerusalem Bible]

this is a resource that is available for interpreting texts. We can therefore again extend our model of stylistics to incorporate this.
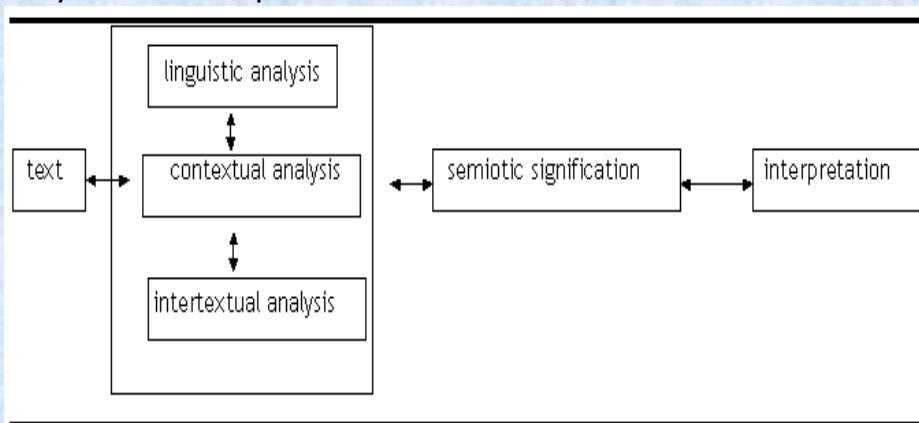
It could well be argued that intertextuality is just another element of the context; I prefer to keep another box for intertextual analysis merely to emphasise that this is another important resource for semiotic signification. I therefore make a three-fold distinction between:
the linguistic elements — the actual words and structures;
the contextual elements — the surrounding text (or 'co-text'), who is writing/speaking to whom, when, where, on what occasion/for what purpose (or the 'addresser', 'addressee', 'time', 'place', 'function/purpose'); and
intertextual elements — the 'histories' of words or structures, or how a text can 'recall' another text.
        I have used double-headed vertical arrows to indicate that each element can inform on the other elements. I have also used double-headed horizontal arrows to indicate that the path to interpretation is not necessarily uni-directional. One may, for example, be already predisposed to particular lines of interpretation, and therefore seek out particular elements for semiotic signification; and in the process of analysing the text one may also modify one's original interpretation.

DISCUSSION 3
Examine the following extract from a contemporary British play.

HENRY: Hallo, Henry Bell.
KAREN: Henry's from our accountants. And this is Anthony and Imogen Staxton-Billing.
        (*She immediately moves away to the other group.*)
HENRY: Ah, hallo.

ANTHONY: (*Cursorily*) 'Llo.
     (*They shake hands.*)
HENRY: (*Turning to* IMOGEN) Hallo, Henry Bell.
     (IMOGEN *scarcely looks at him but gives him the most peremptory of greetings and handshakes.*)
IMOGEN: (*Glacially*) Hallo.
DAPHNE: Did she say you were an accountant?
HENRY: (*Defensively*) Yes.
DAPHNE: Oh. (*She looks him up and down.*) Not local, are you?
HENRY: No. London.
DAPHNE: Yes, I thought as much. Excuse me, I just want a word with ...
     (*She drifts away to the other group.*)
HENRY: (*Charmingly*) Of course. (*Turning to the* STAXTON-BILLINGS) Well. A lot of people to meet all of a sudden.
IMOGEN: (*Ignoring him, to her husband*) Did you know she was going to be here?
ANTHONY: Who?
IMOGEN: I'm talking about that little toad, Karen Knightly. Who do you think I'm talking about?
ANTHONY: Oh, Karen. That's who you're talking about.
     (*Slight pause.*)
HENRY: Did you have far to come?
IMOGEN: (*Ignoring him still*) God, you bastard. You let me come to this house and walk straight in to her. And you never even warned me she'd be here.
ANTHONY: Oh, do put a cork in it ...
IMOGEN: I mean it's so cruel, Anthony. Don't you realise how cruel it is? Don't you honestly realise?
ANTHONY: Oh, God. It's one of those afternoons, is it?
     (*He starts to move away.*)
IMOGEN: Anthony ...
ANTHONY: Goodbye.
     (*He goes to talk to* DAPHNE *who has joined up with* PERCY. *Pause.*)
HENRY: (*Trying again*) What's this committee in aid of then? Is it for some charity?
IMOGEN: What? Are you talking to me?
HENRY: Er ... yes. I was ... I was just ...
IMOGEN: Listen, I don't think we have a thing in common, do we? I'm sure you have nothing to say that would be of the slightest interest to me. And there's nothing whatever that I want to talk to you about. So why don't you just run away and practise your small talk with somebody else?
     (HENRY *is totally staggered by her rudeness. Before he can even begin to think of a retort,* IMOGEN *moves away from him.*)

What do we make of this extract? I shall fill you in on the contextual elements later. Try to relate our impressions or interpretations of the extract to the linguistic elements. If there are divergent impressions or interpretations, so much the better.

- Note down the style ('feel') of this particular passage.
- Relate the 'style' or 'feel' to elements in the language.
- Discuss the significance of this.
- Now try to distinguish between the characters' speech styles. It might be possible to note developments in the speech styles of individual characters.

Carter and Stockwell (2008) include this **Stylistics Manifesto** at the end of their book. At the end of the module, we might want to evaluate the degree to which we have lived up to this!

1. Be theoretically aware. As stylisticians we should be alive to the theoretical foundations of the different interdisciplinary foundations domains on which we draw, as well as of linguistic theory.
2. Be reception-oriented. The literary 'work' only exists as a text in the mind of a reader; this fact should be at the forefront of stylistic practice. Interpretation is not an 'add-on' feature but is a foundational principle with texture at its analytical centre.
3. Be sociolinguistic. We should not neglect the broad sense of language study, taking account of the social, cultural and ideological dimensions of reading.
4. Be eclectic. Stylisticians should be eclectic as a matter of principle, in terms of analytical tools and analytical projects.
5. Be holistic. We should be aware that classification, categorisation and the focus on features are analytical conveniences, and we should always re-contextualise the products of our analyses.
6. Be populist. Stylisticians should continue to challenge the literary canon, promote new configurations of literariness, appreciate and demonstrate their value.
7. Be difficult. Being populist does not exclude the courage to demystify obscurity and wilful inarticulacy in theory, nor avoid challenging works of literary. The difficult edges of literature are where we should stretch and test our frameworks rather than simply illustrate and demonstrate their effectiveness.
8. Be precise. Stylistics should continue to uphold the highest standards of analytical precision and transparency of practice. We must be rational, rigorous, systematic, thorough and open.
9. Be progressive. We should aim for a better account of things. Where an approach is shown to be faulty, it should be repaired or discarded. In other words, we should aim for a stylistics of falsifiability.
10. Be evangelical. Stylistics is the best approach to literary study. We should be unapologetic about this, and should deploy all our rhetorical resources to continue to draw in enthusiastic and committed researchers, teachers and students, and continue the development of the field.