

ESSAY TITLES: *GENERAL*

1. In a paper devoted to exposing the “futility” of stylistics as an academic discipline, Ray Mackay argues along the following lines:

Two basic myths underlie the position defined by Carter and held by many of his fellow stylisticians, including Simpson, Short and Leech, among others. The first of these may be called the “myth of objectivity” and manifests itself in the basic assumptions that a practical stylistic approach is more objective than any other approach and that it is possible to approach the stylistic analysis of a text in a “scientific” manner. The second myth may be called “the common-sense myth of language” and is responsible for the assumption that all speakers of a language such as English share a common core of knowledge that can be appealed to such that a procedure can be evolved that will demystify literary texts.

Write an essay detailing the aims, theory and practice of modern stylistics. In the context of your essay, assess how accurate is Mackay’s description of stylistics. And is Mackay’s criticism justified?

(This debate was played out across two journals and in various instalments. Mackay’s initial broadside is: Mackay, R. (1996) ‘Mything the point: A critique of objective stylistics.’ *Language and Communication*, 16, (1), 81-93, to which a reply is offered by: Short, M., Freeman, D. van Peer, W. ad Simpson, P. (1998) ‘Stylistics, criticism and mythrepresentation again: squaring the circle with Ray Mackay’s subjective solution to all problems.’ *Language and Literature*, 7, 1, 39-50.

2. The following poem is by William Carlos Williams.

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

Using this text as a basis for your discussion, explore and evaluate the concept of a “literary language” as it relates to modern stylistics.

3. Devise a workshop programme on stylistics. Your programme should include:
- (a) an appropriate extract or text(s) for analysis;
 - (b) at least one suitable stylistic model of analysis [eg. metaphor, semantics, transitivity, graphology and so on];
 - (c) a set of practical activities which can be developed around the text you have selected.

You should also state clearly the intended outcomes of your workshop, indicating which sorts of analytic skills (linguistic, literary or stylistic) you hope to introduce and develop.

In collaboration with your tutor, choose a topic, text or aspect of stylistic theory as a basis for your essay.