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Soundscapes and Narrative Silence

A phonostylistic approach to Kate Chopin's “The ‘Cadian Ball” and “The Storm”

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Introduction

The term “phonostylistics” (*Lautstylistik*) was coined by Troubetzkoy who, along with Jakobson and Hjelmev, belonged to the Prague school of phonology. His purpose was to set up a phonological theory that would exclude expressivity from the phonological equation, separating the chaff from the grain, as it were. The chaff is what phonostylistics is all about. In a few pages, Troubetzkoy (1967, 16-29) presents the expressive dimension of spoken discourse and suggests ways of keeping phonostylistics well apart from phonology proper. It is somewhat ironical that the birth certificate of phonostylistics should be found in a book whose purpose was precisely to keep it contained and that the name of its author should forever be closely associated to it.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how phonostylistics – concerned with spoken discourse – is used in fictional texts. This, in itself, may seem paradoxical (see Jobert 2014). Yet, to paraphrase Léon (1993), written language always retains traces of its oral origin. Besides, authors sometimes encode the “phonostylistics features” of their characters. In this paper, I shall consider that the two main categories of phonostylistic features are i) *lectal features* that include dialectal, sociolectal and idiolectal features and ii) *paralinguistic vocal features* also known as attitudinal features. In the written text, these features are represented

graphically and I use the term “markers” to distinguish them from the actual oral features.

	<i>Phonostylistic features</i>	
spoken language	Lectal features	Paralinguistic vocal features
written language	Lectal markers	Paralinguistic vocal markers

Phonostylistics: the textual turn

Some authors, like Henry James or Edith Wharton, are quite good at encoding their characters’ emotions and attitudes through a minute description of their “tone of voice”. Others, like Charles Dickens or Thomas Hardy, manage to offer an accurate description of their characters’ accents or dialects. Kate Chopin does both.

Chopin has often been dubbed a “local colourist”. By that, critics mean that her characters present features of a particular locality including their dialects and the folklore associated to them. The term is usually used for *fin de siècle* American literature and although it was not originally meant to be derogatory, it is now often used as a way of suggesting that the scope of such fictional pieces is rather limited, providing, at best, an *effet de réel* of some sort (Gibert 2003). The local colour movement, though, was not merely a cosmetic issue as Jones (1999, 39) explains:

The postbellum “cult of the vernacular” differed from earlier manifestations of American dialect in several crucial ways: it was part of mainstream literature; it avowed realism, not humor; its political content sunk to a deeper, less overt level. [...] While the burgeoning “local color” movement sought the soul of America in the rugged, racy vernaculars of a rustic past, there was a contrary sense in which dialect frustrated the ideology of national unity by demonstrating the growing distances and differences within English itself.

Like George Washington Cable and Grace Elizabeth King, Kate Chopin, born in St. Louis to a Creole mother, depicts French Creole and Cajun dialects in her stories (see Burkett 1978). “At the ‘Cadian Ball” (1892) and “The Storm” (1898) are realistic, if not naturalistic, short-stories and the various characters’ phonostyles are detailed. The argument put forward here is that the phonostylistic features encoded play a central role in our understanding of the stories. Still, in spite of the author’s preoccupation with expressivity, the characters’ motivations remain somewhat unclear and the narrative evaluation rather ambiguous.

The first part of this paper deals with the way phonostyles are used in Chopin's short-stories and briefly presents the Louisiana linguistic picture. The second part highlights the importance of voices and conversations in the stories while the third part focuses on the clues left by the author in "At the Cadian Ball" and offers a re-evaluation of Chopin's story from the perspective of its sequel, "The Storm".

Chopin's phonostyles: context and practice

In "At the 'Cadian Ball" and "The Storm", as in many of her short-stories, Chopin presents a detailed rendition of her characters' accents and attitudinal vocal inflections.

Lectal features are probably the most striking features as they are instantly visible¹. Chopin's stories are peopled by French Creoles, Cajuns (or Acadians) and former slaves. Cajuns descend from French settlers expelled from Nova Scotia by the British and the Creoles are descendants of the colonists from France and Spain who went to Louisiana before the Louisiana Purchase (1803). They represent the aristocracy. In the two stories, Alcée and Clarisse clearly belong to this category. The term *Creole* also came to refer to all the inhabitants of Louisiana, including quadroons and mulattoes, which complicates the situation. Jones (1999, 116) explains:

During the post-Civil War years, the white Creoles of Louisiana became unnerved by this double meaning for the name of their racial group – the fact that, instead of signifying only a line of pure Latin descent, the word *Creole* had somehow come to signify a person of mixed blood.

This linguistic picture would not be complete if it did not mention the African-Creole Dialect. The slaves being in constant contact with their masters, another variety of Creole emerged. Bruce, the black slave, is a loquacious exponent of this linguistic group. Interestingly, this Creole influenced the structure and the pronunciation of the French Creole

¹ This corresponds to what is known as "dialect literature" although, in the case of Chopin, the term "literary dialect" seems more appropriate. On this distinction, see Hodson (2014, 116).

spoken and became a “lingua franca” (Jones 1999, 118) between the blacks and French Creoles.

French Creole is present in “At the ‘Cadian Ball” with expressions like “*Tiens cocotte, va*” (183), or “*Ces maudits gens du raiderode*” (187) (meaning from the “railroad”). The first conversation between Miss Clarisse and Bruce, the old Negro, shows the two varieties in action and underscores the social contrasts, some might say the “social stratification” of the linguistic group in Labovian terms:

“Bruce, w’ere has Monsieur Alcée gone?” she asked.
 “W’y, he gone ‘bout he business, I reckon,” replied Bruce [...]
 “W’ere has Monsieur Alcée gone?” she reiterated, stamping her foot. “I won’t stan’ any nonsense or any lies; mine, Bruce.”
 “I don’ reiclic ez I eva tole you lie *yit*, Miss Clarisse. Mista Alcée, he all broke up, sho.”
 “W’ere – has—he gone? *Ah Sainte Vierge! Il faut de la patience! Butor, va!*” (186)

Code-switching, typical of Chopin’s Cajun and Creole characters, appears at a moment of exasperation for Clarisse. The rest of the time, she speaks a variety of English which is only slightly non-standard compared with Bruce’s. The presence of h-elision in *where*, suggests Glide Cluster Reduction where the pronunciation of the /h/ may have been standard at the time. The only other feature encoded is the dropping of <d> and the end of *stand*, which, more than a dialectal feature, is probably a marker of connected speech. Apart from that, her grammar is immaculate and her vocabulary accurate. In comparison, Bruce’s speech is more marked. He shares with Clarisse h-elision in wh- words (*w’y*) but also exhibits other types of elision as in the first syllable of *about*. Some phoneme-switches are present in *reckin*, although this could be put down to a case of eye-dialect as the last syllable of the word is realised as a schwa. The same is true of the last syllable of *ever* written *eva*, the south being a traditionally non-rhotic area. Another phoneme-switch is to be found for the word *yet*, written *yit*. The case of *reiclic* for *recollect* is interesting as it may be perplexing. Only reading aloud enables the reader to recognise the word (see Jobert 2018a). The major difference concerns the grammar: Bruce’s is markedly faulty (*ever tole*, *all broke up*). Still, in Bruce’s last answer, the word *yit* is written in italics, suggesting an emphasis of sorts which may very well be interpreted as ironical in context. This clearly signals that Bruce’s idiolect is not meant to present him as a dumb character but simply indicates his origins and his status in the community.

The character's attitudes and emotions are also conveyed vocally. There is a wide range of possibilities in the use of paralinguistic vocal markers (PVMs) (see Jobert 2008). They can be purely phonetic as in "she *exclaimed*" (184), attitudinal as in "she repeated *contemptuously*" (186) or weld the two together "*cried* Alcée *impatiently*" (189) (my emphases). Syntactically speaking, PVMs are mainly conveyed by reporting verbs and adverbial clauses but the only limit is the writer's talent and imagination. Although there is no direct mapping between a given phonetic PVM and a given emotion, there is a clear connection between speech and attitudes as Brown (1990, 114) explains:

An author who wishes to show that a character is speaking in a certain manner assumes that it is possible to describe the manner of speaking so that the reader has a good idea of how it should sound. The fact that authors do this, that readers habitually cope with it, and that readers-aloud often adopt the same sorts of paralinguistic features to express a given emotion or attitude, suggests that there are regular, conventional, relationships between descriptive terms and the paralinguistic features which they evoke.

There are three major categories of paralinguistic encoding. The author may encode a phonetic feature, like "he shouted". For readers, the feature 'loudness' is conveyed by the verb and they have to recover the emotion or attitude that triggered this phonetic realisation. Depending on the context, it may be anger, happiness, surprise, etc. The author may encode an attitude "he said impatiently" and readers will adjust their "tone of voice" accordingly. They may adjust their voice when reading aloud (Brown 1990) or they will attune their "inner ear" (Chapman 1994) if they are reading silently. Lastly, the author may encode both the phonetic feature and the attitude. In such cases the reader has less effort to make as both the acoustic signal and the interpretation are provided. This can be summarised as follows:

PVM	<i>He shouted</i>	<i>He said angrily</i>	<i>He shoute angrily</i>
Semantically given	'loudness'	'anger'	'loudness' 'anger'
Contextually recovered	Eg. 'anger'	Eg. 'loudness'	~

Processing paralinguistic vocal markers

The linguistic hotchpotch presented by Chopin provides an accurate picture of Louisiana at the turn of the century and various Creoles and speaking styles are presented. Besides, she also precisely indicates how the different characters express themselves. Although all these features contribute to the overall orality of the stories, there is a major difference between them. Lectoral features constitute the speakers' norms and are indicative of their origins, background and so on. Conversely, PVMs represent deviation from the speaker's norm in terms of attitudes and, as a consequence, fluctuate more as the plot unfolds. However, it has been noted that "regional speech pointers are often increased when the speaker is under emotional pressure" (Chapman 1994, 61). The same could be said of code-switching as was the case in the conversation between Miss Clarisse and Bruce quoted earlier. This shows that only a minute analysis of the various utterances in context can reveal the added value of phonostylistic analysis. Put differently, although it is important to acknowledge the faithfulness of Chopin's rendering of the extra-linguistic situation in Louisiana, what matters is the way this representation works within the stories, what Ferguson (1998, 3) calls "ficto-linguistics" and that she defines as follows:

By ficto-linguistics I mean the systems of language that appear in novels and *both* deviate from the accepted or expected socio-linguistic patterns *and* indicate identifiable patterns congruent to other aspects of the fictional world.

These features constitute what Culpeper (2001, 172) calls "implicit cues" that readers have to take on board and interpret in order to process texts efficiently.

Vocal foregrounding

"At the 'Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm', its sequel, are about two parallel love-stories between Alcée, a rich planter and Clarisse on the one hand, and Bobinôt and Calixta on the other. During the Acadian ball, Alcée flirts with Calixta with whom he allegedly had a love affair in the past but is fetched from the ball by Clarisse. Calixta is left alone and Bobinôt, who has been hopelessly in love with her, walks her home. Calixta promises to marry him and Clarisse declares her love for Alcée. 'The Storm' takes up the story five years later and the two couples seem

happily married. During a storm, Alcée arrives at Calixta's and makes passionate love to her. This extremely brief outline of the two stories hardly does justice to Chopin's craft which is based, precisely, on the accumulation of significant and meaningful details.

In "At the 'Cadian Ball", rumours and hearsay play a crucial role. From the start, Bobinôt does not want to go to the ball, precisely because he knows Calixta will be there and he does not want to suffer. It is only when he hears men talking about Alcée's possible presence at the ball that he decides to go. He sees her as his main rival because of some rumours ("a breath of scandal whispered about her" [183]) concerning Alcée and Calixta. Some people put this behaviour down to Calixta's Spanish origin: "'C'est Espagnol, ça' most of them said" (183) or again "'Bon chien tient de race,' the old men mumbled" (183), the Creole version of the French proverb, 'bon chien chasse de race'. Similarly, old women criticise Calixta's behaviour during the ball, suggesting they would not allow their daughters to behave like her. Calixta is not only the belle of the ball, she is also the talk of the town.

Her characterisation, presented from Bobinôt's perspective also focuses on her voice:

That voice like a rich contralto song, with cadences in it that must have been taught by Satan. (183)

She is therefore both bewitching and threatening. In Chopin's stories, mixed-raced characters are systematically associated with Satan. This vocal characterisation is followed by an example of Calixta's verbal dexterity when arguing with another girl:

The two quarrelled and fought on the church steps after mass one Sunday, about a lover. Calixta swore roundly in fine 'Cadian French and with true Spanish spirit, and slapped Fronie's face. Fronie had slapped her back: "*Tiens, cocotte, va!*" "*Espèce de lionèse, prends ça, et ça!*" till the curé himself was obliged to hasten and make peace between them. (183)

The Narrative Reports of Speech Acts are followed by Direct Speech (DS) and the progression in the report of speech duplicates the aggravation of the situation, culminating in blows being exchanged. An element of farce nevertheless predominates and Calixta is presented as a

spirited quick-tongued girl. Bobinôt himself falls victim to her “flashes of wit” (188):

“Né, Bobinôt! *Mais* w’ats the matta? W’at you standin’ *planté là* like ole Ma’ame Tina’s cow in the bog, you?”

That was good. That was an excellent thrust at Bobinôt who had forgotten the figure of the dance, with his mind bent on other things, and it started a clamor of laughter at his expense. He joined in good-naturedly. It was better to receive even such notice as that from Calixta than none at all. (188)

Calixta appears as a very clever code-switcher although we learn, when she interacts with Alcée, that the two “belonged to the younger generation, so preferred to speak English” (188). Here again, despite the potential face-threat, the characterisation of Calixta is sympathetic as good-humour, including Bobinôt’s, predominates.

As the title indicates, the ball is the focal point of the story and Alcée’s decision to attend is presented in detail by Bruce who provides a vivid oral narrative of his conversation with his master. Two narrative comments frame this oral tale: “[...] the darkey began” and “[...] while hearing the darkey’s recital” (186). The expression ‘the darkey’ is clearly a racial and social marker underscoring the difference between the teller and his addressee, Clarisse. The word ‘recital’, which echoes the musical metaphor used to describe Calixta’s voice, suggests a certain amount of vocal and narrative virtuosity on Bruce’s part. It also indicates that the conversation is temporarily interrupted as a recital implies only one vocal source as opposed to a conversation in which the different participants contribute in turn. Bruce re-enacts the scene.

Bruce’s tale is pretty straightforward and he faithfully reports Alcée’s desire to find solace in women: the words ‘fling’ and ‘capering’ uttered by Alcée leave Clarisse with no doubt as to Alcée’s intentions. Alcée, through Bruce’s voice, puts it concisely: “But w’en God A’mighty an’ ‘oman jines fo’ces agin me, dats one too many for me” (186). The loss of his crops clearly accounts for his reference to God’s wrath but the “woman reference” is unclear as it could equally apply to Calixta and to Clarisse, whose names are very close, one being the more lively, exotic and erotic version of the other.

Class distinctions are abolished in Bruce's report as he provides a *verbatim* repetition of Alcée's words but *in* his own accent². The contrast between Alcée's actual speech (unmarked) and Bruce's rendition (marked) of it is striking:

"I wouldn't go out to the road to see Angel Gabriel. And if you come back here with any more talk, I'll have to break your neck." (189)

"On, I wants li'le fling; dats w'at I wants; an I gwine git it." (186)

Alcée – Clarisse is told – has decided to go to the ball. Bruce's 'recital' sheds light on Alcée's state of mind and on his future plans. Bruce is quick to realise, but too late, that some things are better left unsaid:

"You done talk too much wid yo' mouf a'ready, you ole fool nigga, you" muttered Bruce to himself as he walked away. (187)

The world depicted by Chopin is very vocal and the image of a vocalscape, with all its varieties of accents and inflections, quite accurately captures the impression given by the narrative. In this world, silence is regarded as disturbing if not ominous. When Alcée Laballière's crops are suddenly destroyed by a cyclone, he walls himself in stubborn silence while his mother and his future wife Clarisse weep endlessly:

But Alcée took the misfortune differently. He looked ill and gray, after it, and said nothing. His speechlessness was frightful. Clarisse's heart grew as tender as a kitten's; but when she offered her soft, purring words of condolence, he accepted them with mute indifference. (185)

Silence plays a central role both within the dialogues and in terms of narrative evaluation. It is as if Bruce's untimely awareness were proven right by the narrative: certain things are better left unsaid. Because of the sensual nature of the stories, explicitness was of course not an option for Chopin and indirectness is used instead. As Gibert (2003, 71) explains:

Her Louisiana short stories have been reinterpreted as subversive pieces that use the conventions of the genre in order to undermine and dismantle the conservative ideology that local-color fiction generally helped to support.

² For a more detailed presentation of Black speech in Louisiana, see Jobert (2008).

Interestingly, although Chopin wrote "The Storm" in 1898, she never submitted it for publication as she was probably aware that explicit eroticism and unpunished adultery would not go down very well with publishers. Still, "The Storm" retrospectively sheds light on what remains implicit in "At the 'Cadian Ball".

Deviant proposals and a non-committal narrative voice

All the ingredients of a tragic ending are present when Bobinôt and Alcée meet at the ball. Bobinôt is in love with Calixta and jealous of Alcée; Alcée is in a state of extreme irritation and wants to enjoy the pleasures of women, starting with Calixta:

But what [Alcée] did not show outwardly was that he was in a mood for ugly things to-night. Poor Bobinôt alone felt it, vaguely. He discerned a gleam of it in Alcée's handsome eyes as the young planter stood in the doorway looking with rather feverish glance upon the assembly. (187)

Instead, contrary to their expectations, readers are presented with two betrothal scenes of a special kind. Alcée and Calixta are sitting "in the shadow" (188). He holds Calixta's hand and talks softly to her "as lovers do" (189). Alcée offers to take her to Assumption where they were together the previous year. After a few token words of refusal, Calixta is about to yield:

Calixta's senses were reeling; and they well-nigh left her when she felt Alcée's lips brush her ear like the touch of a rose. (189)

This highly erotic moment is brutally interrupted by the "thick voice of a negro" and then by Clarisse's:

It was not the negro's voice this time; but one that went through Alcée's body like an electric shock, bringing him to his feet. (189)

Clarisse's voice seems to be endowed with supernatural powers. Voices have in fact the power to bring the various characters back to reality. When she asks him to go with her, he obeys instantly and he is quick to forget about Calixta:

“But you mus’ come. Come with me, Alcée.”

There was no need for the imploring note. He would have followed the voice anywhere. (190)

Interestingly, no PVM is used after Clarisse’s DS but the tone she uses (“the imploring note”) is provided retrospectively, highlighting the fact that this marker of expressivity is unnecessary and that Alcée is utterly under her power. When she admits to him that she had no real reason to fetch him, Alcée’s mind is in turmoil:

He began to wonder if this meant love. But she had to tell him so, before he believed it. And when she told him, he thought the face of the universe was changed. (191)

No paralinguistic phenomena were provided in the previous example. Now, the reader is also deprived of the DS with its actualising power. Clarisse’s “declaration of love” is presented through Narrative Report of Speech Acts, as if to prevent the reader from having access to Clarisse’s true feelings. The juxtaposition of Alcée’s fooling around with Calixta and his sudden acceptance of Clarisse’s love is all the more unsettling as it is underscored:

It was he, then, who, an hour ago was kissing little Calixta’s ear and whispering nonsense into it. Calixta was like a myth, now. The one, only, great reality in the world was Clarisse standing before him, telling him that she loved him. (191)

Alcée wakes up from a dream, leaving the dream-girl behind and trying to regain his senses, the erratic rhythm of the sentences duplicating his state of exaltation. Perceptive readers may be disturbed by the fact that myths can be adored whereas reality is, more mundanely, simply to be put up with.

The second betrothal scene is no less problematic. Bobinôt finds Calixta alone after Alcée’s sudden departure and decides to walk her back home. As Bobinôt advises her to take care of her dress, she answers:

“I don’t care; it’s got to go in the tub, anyway. You been sayin’ all along you want to marry me, Bobinôt. Well, if you want, yet, I don’ care, me.” (190)

The swift and unexpected topic-shift (from laundry issues to marriage) takes the reader and Bobinôt by surprise. He does not verbalise his proposal. Instead, he “could not speak for very joy. It choked him” (190). Calixta’s phrasing, “I don’ care”, though it can be explained by dialectal usage is ambiguous enough. Calixta is not overwhelmed by passion as, after Bobinôt’s positive answer, “she held out her hand in a business-like manner of a man who clinches a bargain with a hand-clasp” (191) and refuses to kiss him. Throughout the process, the reader learns that the beautiful Calixta “looked ghastly” (190) after she was left alone by Alcée and had turned “almost ugly” after proposing to Bobinôt as if love had not worked its magic on the lovers. For different reasons, the two betrothal scenes are tainted and it seems that in both cases it is reason, not passion, which is at work.

The final words of the story, ‘*Le bal est fini*’ marks the end of the Acadian ball and offers a neat resolution to the story: the two couples get married and the world order is maintained. The rich planter marries someone of his caste and poor Bobinôt and loose Calixta end up together. The oddities of the two “proposals”, Alcée’s sudden change of heart, Calixta’s unexpected yet tepid deal with Bobinôt as well as the uncertainty surrounding what really happened in Assumption, are elements that could be overlooked for the benefit of formal literary perfection. Still, the final words may also sound like an ironical warning: the party, and not only the ball, is over and everyday life, devoid of passion, will take its toll. Chopin is well known for her ambiguous endings as in “Beyond the Bayou” or “*Désirée’s Baby*”. Gibert (2003) analyses in detail how Chopin’s apparently simple early stories may contain more than meets the eye and stresses the importance of the implicit. In the case of “At the ‘Cadian Ball’”, the existence of its sequel, “The Storm”, removes all ambiguity and requires that the prequel be entirely re-evaluated. A storm, like the cyclone in “At the ‘Cadian Ball’” precipitates the meeting between Alcée and Calixta:

His voice and her own startled her as if from a trance [...]. (343)

Here again, voices seem to be endowed with special powers. The two lovers are drawn to each other and they end up making love. The love-making, explicit and sensual as it may be, is not the most important aspect of the story. “The Storm” fills some of the narrative blanks: the reader discovers that Calixta’s virginity prevented Alcée from making love to her

in Assumption. By contrast, it suggests that marriage makes their physical union possible, or as Beer (1997, 62) puts it, “marriage here is the enabling principle of the spectacular sex they have”. In “At the ‘Cadian Ball”, the rumours surrounding their possible love-affair suggest social condemnation. In “The Storm”, their extra-marital union merges the erotic and the religious³:

When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life’s mystery. (345)

The scene, far from implying a criticism, suggests a form of transcendence. Negatively, it suggests the two married couples do not reach such ecstasy within the bond of marriage. This is clearly signalled by the narrator when Alcée writes to his wife, suggesting her to prolong her stay away from home. It is also stated that this holiday from home will be a welcome break from married life for Clarisse:

Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while. (347)

In the case of Bobinôt and Calixta, it is simply stated that on the very evening of the adultery, the entire family enjoy a fine evening together, implying that the episode was beneficial to all the parties involved. The excipit of the story: “So the storm passed and every one was happy” (347) suggests an absence of moral stance and some ironical distance from the narrator. Although “The Storm” describes the facts objectively, no moral voice is heard at the end of the story, just as was the case at the end of “At the ‘Cadian Ball”. Chopin, it seems, refrains from condemning or condoning her characters’ actions. This form of modernity begs for a reappraisal of Chopin’s early short-stories.

³ The parallel with Edith Wharton’s erotic story, “Beatrice Palmato”, is here obvious.

Conclusion

“At the ‘Cadian Ball” is typical of Kate Chopin’s writing in the sense that it can be read as a simple love-story in an exotic location or as a subversive text that only yields its hidden meaning to readers paying close attention to the textual clues left by the author. The interpretation process is easier in the case of “At the ‘Cadian Ball” because of the existence of a sequel that, to some extent, clarifies the meaning of the story retrospectively. It clearly transpires that Chopin was a staunch critic of her milieu: race and gender issues are the main targets of her writing. It took a great deal of literary finesse to write – and publish – such stories, as well as *The Awakening*, at the time.

The local colour movement – to which she adhered to some extent – seems to be a clever cover-up for subversive texts precisely because it is the most obvious feature of her style. This is the entry-point that was chosen for this analysis. Phonostylistic features turned out to be pretty effective tools to analyse Chopin’s character’s various phonostyles. Because of Louisiana’s linguistic context, lectal features took pride of place but paralinguistic vocal markers were relevant to address the different verbal interactions in the two stories. These two sets of features were instrumental in describing the dense vocalscape constructed by Chopin. The analysis then shifted from the omnipresence of vocal features to the relative absence of a steady narrative voice, leaving readers to work out meaning on their own.

As is often the case in stylistic analysis, the analytical tools that give readers access to a text do not necessarily take them the whole interpretative way. What matters is that, beyond the accurate stylistic description, some degree of interpretation should be reached in order to enhance the pleasure we take in reading.

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