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AUG 13 2015

**CERTIFIED MAIL – RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

John Greenewald, Jr.  
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Greenewald, Jr.:

This letter is the final response to your May 21, 2015, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for:

A copy of records, electronic or otherwise, of the following document: Using Stylistic Analysis to Assess Threat Messages, DE-AC08-81NV10190, DOENV 101905, J.E. Peterson, Rand Corporation.

We contacted the Nevada Field Office (NFO) about your request. The NFO searched and located the following responsive records “Using Stylistic Analysis to Assess Threat Messages, DE-AC08-81NV10190, DOENV 101905, J.E. Peterson, Rand Corporation”, dated October 1985. A review has been completed and it has been determined that the enclosed documents are fully releasable to you in their entirety.

There are no fees chargeable to you for processing this request. If you have questions please contact Mr. Roberto Marquez by e-mail at [Roberto.Marquez@nnsa.doe.gov](mailto:Roberto.Marquez@nnsa.doe.gov), or write to the address above. Please reference Control Number FOIA 15-00208-R.

Sincerely,

Jane R. Summerson  
Authorizing Official

Enclosure

## A RAND NOTE

## USING STYLISTIC ANALYSIS TO ASSESS THREAT MESSAGES

Joyce E. Peterson

October 1985

N-2377-DOE

Prepared for

The U.S. Department of Energy and  
 The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
 Contract Number DE-AC08-81NV10190

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 Date: August 10, 2015

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## PREFACE

Faced with a growing number of nuclear threat messages, the U.S. Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 1974 initiated a research project to develop capabilities and mechanisms for assessing nuclear threat situations. This project brought together specialists in various disciplines from four research institutions: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, Syracuse Research Corporation, and The Rand Corporation. The first two institutions are responsible for technical and operational assessment of the messages, Syracuse and Rand for behavioral assessment.

The Rand team has used various techniques in developing a behavioral assessment capability. This Note explores the possible usefulness of stylistic analysis in characterizing the threat writer and assessing his credibility. Stylistic analysis is a basic critical methodology often used to study the nature of literary characters. However, its tools and techniques are well defined and might fruitfully be applied to threat assessment. This study is intended only to test that hypothesis. Considerable empirical research would be needed to establish that stylistic analysis is a valid assessment tool.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this Note, I have tried to make the case that stylistic analysis can tell us something about the character, motivations, and credibility of threat writers. Because stylistic analysis is a methodology that evolved primarily to study literary works, one must pay close attention to the logical limits of applying it to the nonfictional productions of nonprofessional writers. One must also resist the temptation to draw hard-and-fast conclusions about them. I am very grateful to several Rand colleagues for reading earlier drafts of the Note and showing me where my enthusiasm for the methodology had gotten the better of my discretion. Mary Anderson, Tora Bikson, Joe Krofcheck, Malcolm Palmatier, and Robert Perry provided rigorous and constructive criticism. My greatest debt is to Mary Vaiana. She not only pointed out the problems with my rationale but generously helped me argue my way through to the solutions. The final product is, of course, solely my responsibility.

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Since 1970, various corporations and public agencies in the United States have received extortion messages involving nuclear devices, materials, and facilities. Further, although the United States has enjoyed relative freedom from terrorism, internally, other countries have had to cope with increasing terrorist activities, including attacks on nuclear facilities. In 1974, the Energy Research and Development Administration established the Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST) to help deal with peacetime nuclear accidents and address the technical, behavioral, and operational problems generated by nuclear extortion threats. NEST is now under the jurisdiction of the Department of Energy (DOE).

Among the thorniest problems is deciding if a threat is credible and, thus, merits deployment of NEST. Then, once the decision to deploy is made, NEST must assist FBI efforts to locate the threatening substance or device and the extortionists, and possibly negotiate with them. In 1977, DOE and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) funded a project that brought together specialists from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, Syracuse Research Corporation, and The Rand Corporation. Under the technical direction of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, this project has developed an operational capability to assess the credibility of nuclear threat messages. This assessment provides the basis for deployment decisions and the initial operational guidance for the NEST team after deployment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This capability could be used in extortion situations other than nuclear threats. Because it addresses elements basic to many extortion schemes, it can be applied with slight adjustment to the full range of such schemes. For example, the Rand team was called on to assess the credibility of the threat message sent to Harvey's Resort Hotel Casino at Stateline, Nevada, in August 1980. After analysis of that message, the team concluded that the threat should be considered credible, and they arrived at a profile of the writer that turned out to be quite close. Nevertheless, the project's mission is to consider only nuclear threats. Consequently, the materials used in this study all pertain to such threats.

Usually, the threat message supplies the only information, before the fact, for evaluating the threat's credibility, developing a strategy to deal with it, and generating investigative leads. Consequently, it becomes vital to find methods for extracting everything possible from that message about the technical and operational capabilities and the nature, dedication, and identity of the threatener.

To develop and refine these methods, the project is divided into working groups that make three distinct but related assessments addressing particular questions:

- **Technical assessment.** Would the nuclear device described in the threat message do what the extortionist claims it can do? Does the extortionist actually have the device or radioactive materials he claims to have?
- **Operational assessment.** Is the extortionist's plan for carrying out the threat feasible, coherent, and likely to be effective?
- **Behavioral assessment.** What are the extortionist's motives for making the threat? Assuming that he has the capability, is he likely to carry out the threat if his demands are not met?

Before discussing the methodologies used by the behavioral groups and the purpose of this Note, I should make the primary objectives of the project somewhat more specific. The DOE and NRC funded this project to establish a network of experts who can bring the knowledge, tools, and methodologies of their diverse disciplines to bear in specific threat situations. The project's purpose is not to conduct empirical studies or to develop an academic body of knowledge about threat messages, threat writers, or threat situations in general. In particular, the *behavioral* teams do not assume and have not tried to establish that certain psychological, emotional, or intellectual characteristics are necessarily relevant to the credibility of any or all threat messages. Nor have they attempted to compare the implied psychological characteristics of nuclear extortionists with those of control groups.

The teams are trying to assess the credibility of given messages. To establish what psychological, emotional, or intellectual characteristics were most likely to be associated with credible threat messages in general, the teams would need a sizeable group of messages whose threats had been carried out--or would have been if law enforcement agencies had not intervened. They could then compare the psychological characteristics implied by features of those messages with those implied by features of threats that were not carried out. In this most ideal research world, they would also have the opportunity to compare each adversary with their assessments of him.<sup>2</sup> Given this, they could posit the psychological traits that characterize credible and noncredible threateners.

Fortunately for public safety, but unfortunately for research, no nuclear threats have been carried out in the United States. Moreover, very few threateners have been apprehended. Consequently, it is impossible to establish a body of characteristics that distinguish credible extortionists from "hoaxers." By credible extortionists, I mean those who have the technical, operational, and behavioral capability to carry out their threats and would do so unless their demands were met or they were caught.

The problem is complicated by the fact that threat writers may have motivations and intentions other than those they give in the message. They may simply want to cause trouble; throw a community, company, or agency into chaos; cheat their targets out of money; get revenge, etc. Although they may not be truthful about their technical capabilities or their motivations, they may still be quite earnest about their real intentions. Consequently, it would be very hard to isolate psychological characteristics *necessarily* associated with credible threats--because both fakers and lethal threateners must convince their target audiences that they are in earnest.

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<sup>2</sup>To avoid the awkwardness of him/her, he/she, and ungrammatical "they" constructions, "he" is used throughout this Note to refer to an individual who may be of either sex.

Some threats do, of course, imply pathological or delusional states. For example, suppose a writer threatens to destroy Washington, D.C., with an atomic device unless the President forces the Israelis to disband their nation and resettle in Arizona. That request would certainly imply a person who has a very slender grasp of world politics, diplomatic and military possibilities, sovereignty of states, ethics, etc. Given the *gestalt* implied, few people would argue against an assessment that the writer is unbalanced, delusional, and probably quite mad. However, that does not necessarily rule out the possibility that he has the nuclear device and could set it off. Moreover, his real purpose could be to discredit, say, pro-Palestinian groups. By making a demand he knows could not be met, he could be establishing the "justification" for exploding the device--regardless of his stated reasons. In a world of disinformation and double agents, such things are not so farfetched as they immediately seem.

In sum, little is known about nuclear extortionists and nuclear threats but the potential danger is great. Consequently, the project's primary concern is to develop a functional capability to assess the credibility of given nuclear threats--as they arise--and provide investigational leads to the FBI.

The Rand and Syracuse teams have been responsible for behavioral assessment in the project. The Syracuse team primarily uses psycholinguistic analysis. The Rand team has used various methodologies in developing its assessment capability--e.g., psychiatric assessment, psycho-logic analysis, pattern recognition, propaganda analysis, and graphological analysis. The first three have proven most fruitful and currently form the basis of the Rand capability. However, this capability is still evolving as the Rand team investigates other approaches and techniques for analyzing the behavioral implications of threat messages. It might also be useful to consider the relevance of analytical methods developed in speech act theory, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, rhetoric, or any other disciplines that address the psychological, social, and intentional implications of verbal behavior.



This Note considers how useful stylistic analysis might be for that purpose. *Style* and *stylistic analysis* have many definitions, especially in the disciplines that deal with them most. For purposes of this Note, I am defining style roughly as:

the manner of linguistic expression in prose...*how* a speaker or writer says whatever he says. The characteristic style of a work or a writer may be analyzed in terms of its *diction*, or characteristic choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language;...and its rhetorical aims and devices.<sup>3</sup>

Because the psycho-logic technique mentioned above analyzes "rhetorical aims and devices," the stylistic analysis does not address that aspect of style.

In literary and rhetorical criticism, stylistic analysis examines the patterns of linguistic features in a prose work or in the verbal behavior (speech or writing) of fictional characters. This analysis may simply intend to define the type of style. However, it is also used to examine what style suggests about the personality of writers and speakers.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it seems like an appropriate technique to use in behavioral assessment of threat messages.

The primary purpose of this Note is to illustrate how stylistic analysis might be used by the behavioral team and its potential for providing clues about the personality, resolve, stability, and possible demographic characteristics of the adversary.<sup>5</sup> Using a sample of threat

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<sup>3</sup>M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 165-166. As I hope Sec. II makes clear, the kind of literary criticism that employs stylistic analysis is generically different from the subjective and somewhat impressionistic analysis that is appropriate to book reviews. The former is less familiar to most people and thus, I believe, requires some theoretical explanation.

<sup>4</sup>Whether or not style does "reveal the man" remains to be settled as does the question of whether it is legitimate to infer personality and character from the style of real, as opposed to fictional, people. These problems are discussed in Sec. II.

<sup>5</sup>This study makes no empirical attempts to establish necessary correlations between stylistic features and psychological or cognitive states. Consequently, in discussing the implications of style, terms with less scientific and more generally accepted meanings are used. By

messages, I have been able to establish that stylistic analysis does provide such clues and, depending on the message itself, does produce fairly comprehensive character sketches of the threat writers. However, that is not to say these sketches are necessarily accurate. Testing accuracy requires actual knowledge of the writers, and, as I said, very few of them have ever been caught. Fortunately, circumstances allowed me to test the accuracy in one case.

In 1979, a temporary employee at the G.E. nuclear fuel fabrication plant in Wilmington, North Carolina, stole almost 70 kilograms of low-enriched, uranium oxide from the plant. He left a letter for the plant manager on January 29th outlining his plan to use the material unless his demands for money were met. He did not threaten to harm any person or damage any property. Rather, his strategy was to discredit the security of nuclear facilities--and thus imply that nuclear energy is a threat--by mailing samples to the NRC, antinuclear groups, etc. Since he sent a sample of the uranium oxide with the message, the threat seemed serious enough to warrant the FBI's immediate investigation. He was subsequently caught and is currently serving a prison sentence. Although other members of the Rand team were familiar with the case and the prisoner's actual personality, I was not. Thus, I could analyze the original message as though it described an immediate threat. Then, other members of the Rand team evaluated the profile I derived from the stylistic analysis. The profile proved accurate enough to suggest that this methodology can contribute substantially to behavioral assessment.

Section II of this Note presents the rationale for using stylistic analysis in behavioral assessment, describes the sample of threat messages analyzed, and briefly discusses the methodology. Section III demonstrates how the methodology can be used to analyze various attributes of style and their implications for characterizing the extortionist. Section IV presents the exercise described above. Finally, Sec. V makes some general conclusions about further uses and refinements of the methodology.

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*personality or character*, I am trying to suggest the complex of mental and ethical traits, behavioral and emotional tendencies that distinguish an individual.

## II. RATIONALE, SAMPLE, AND METHODOLOGY

Since antiquity, philosophers and critics have argued about the relationship between style and the writer's essential nature. Does style express "the man himself" or is it an overlay, an affectation that conceals the man? Summing up the modern attitude toward style, L. D. Lerner says:

The idea that deeper levels of a man's mind are revealed, sometimes even despite himself, in his style is a comparatively modern one; and its most sophisticated versions...are likely to use the insights of Freud. The traditional view of style as "l'homme même" was a moral view...the modern version, if not actually psychoanalytic, will certainly emphasize the individual creative act. Style as personality is now a truth universally acknowledged....[in Alex Preminger (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 815].

While many would still argue that subject matter, historical period, culture, group membership, age, etc. also affect style considerably, virtually everyone would agree that style does differ from individual to individual. For some writers, it becomes as distinctive as a fingerprint.

This study makes four basic assumptions:

1. Verbal behavior (writing and speech), like other kinds of behavior, reflects the personality and motivation of the individual.
2. Style is a constituent of verbal behavior.
3. Stylistic patterns (especially those created under stress) reveal much about the writer's state of mind and his basic character.
4. It is appropriate to use the concepts and methodologies developed for stylistic analysis of fictional characters in analyzing those patterns.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It would be impossible to list all the theoretical works that

## THE RATIONALE FOR USING STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Literary and rhetorical criticism has developed systematic methodologies and techniques for analyzing style, whether in the speech of literary characters or the essays of master writers. These techniques are particularly useful for analyzing threat messages because they provide well-defined categories and definitions of stylistic features and have repeatedly demonstrated their power to uncover what verbal behavior implies about fictional characters. Moreover, their use promises high inter-analyst agreement: the definitions and analytical tools of literary and rhetorical criticism have been mastered and used by thousands of researchers.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, academic literary theorists have generally rejected the use of stylistic analysis to characterize an author himself. This reluctance springs from their sense that biography is not a legitimate pursuit of literary criticism. Moreover, modern theorists generally insist that a literary work should be analyzed and interpreted primarily on the basis of its own content and structure. They consider even established biographical facts about the author irrelevant, and probably inimical, to rigorous analysis and interpretation. Consequently, as literary critics, they hold no brief for speculations about the author's personality based on stylistic analysis.

However, this is not to say that the tools of stylistic analysis would not be useful for that purpose. When their objective is literary biography, literary scholars do note, for example, differences in a writer's style between two periods as witnessing known or suggesting previously unsuspected changes in his attitudes, etc. Moreover, literary analysis itself provides a strong analogical rationale for using stylistic analysis in behavioral assessment. Paraphrasing a Renaissance critic, Lerner notes: "...since it is accepted that the personages of a play should speak in character, the extension of this to

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debate or seek to validate these assumptions. Moreover, relatively little empirical work has been done, to date, with stylistic behavior of real people--other than authors. Finally, these are working assumptions. My basic purpose is to test them in the pages that follow.

<sup>2</sup>This is not to imply that they always agree on interpretations, only that they generally agree on the definitions and methods.

the poet speaking in his own person needs only a simple analogy" [p. 815]. While that analogy is fundamentally simple, it takes some explaining.

Characterization is one of the key elements in drama, prose fiction, and some kinds of poetry. By characterization, I mean the impression authors create of a fictional person's identity, personality, attitudes, and motivations. In short, it gives fictional creatures an appearance of individuality and makes readers experience these creatures as they experience people encountered in life.

To create that illusion, authors use the character's actions, his interactions with other characters, his mannerisms, his relation to values expressed thematically or otherwise, his motivations, the attitudes of other characters toward him, etc. Much of this is revealed through speech. What a character says reveals his attitudes, perceptions, intentions, and so forth. However, how he speaks--his style--can also contribute powerfully to characterization. This is especially true in first person narrations, epistolary novels, and dramatic monologues.

In first person narrations, one of the characters in the fiction tells the story. In epistolary novels, the story unfolds through letters written by the characters. And most dramatic monologues take the form of poems that function rather like soliloquies in drama: They create the illusion that the reader is overhearing a dramatic character's inner thoughts on some subject. In all three forms, the character seems to be "speaking for himself." The reader sees any action, subjects, and other characters through the filter of the narrator's, writer's, or monologist's consciousness and implied personality. Consequently, the content and style of their remarks are the only apparent means a reader has of judging what they are like.

The analogy for threat messages becomes most apparent with these "voices" because, like them, a threat writer characterizes himself only through the style and content of the message. However, the author "puts words into" a character's mouth, whereas the extortionist composes the message himself. The extortionist's choices reflect his personality and purposes, whereas the author makes his choices to create a sense of the character's personality--but to suit his own literary purposes. Given

that, how can we justify using a methodology designed to assess literary characters to make assumptions about the personalities of real people?

The first, and most compelling, justification is this: In judging literary characters, readers use the same (or similar) associations, assumptions, and mechanisms that they have acquired for judging real people. Otherwise, authors could not count on particular actions, appearances, and styles to create the impression that fictional characters have certain traits, motivations, or emotional tendencies.

In using style to create that impression, authors can rely on native speakers' stylistic competence. For example, when people consistently use four-syllable words and the subjunctive mood, we often label them pedantic, snobbish, or pretentious. And they can make that impression even on those who cannot describe the language in those terms. Authors can also rely on native speakers to catch the socioeconomic implications of different styles and to judge their appropriateness in different situations. (And these by no means exhaust the possibilities.) In short, the stylistic devices authors use to create the illusion of personality reflect pervasive assumptions about actual links between verbal style and personality traits.

The second justification is that writers of threat messages 'cast' themselves in a role. However they may justify their actions and whatever their real purposes or capabilities, most of them cast themselves as extortionists. In that role, the threat writer must characterize himself in a manner that convinces the reader to take him and the threat seriously and to comply with his demands. He has to project an image, much as an author projects the image of character, that will make him a credible extortionist. However, unless threat writers are all trained rhetoricians, I would argue that most of them do not consciously consider how style affects that image. In most threat messages, style becomes most interesting when it implies things about the writer that undercut that image. In other words, the writer's style makes him unconsciously reveal personality traits.

This brings me to the third justification. The fullest literary characters seem to have an interior life that controls their verbal behavior and sometimes makes them reveal things inadvertently. Indeed, that helps explain why people speculate about them as though they were



real people, with real histories, and full-blown psychological problems.<sup>3</sup> This sense of unconscious revelation is most striking in the "voice" characters I discussed above. There, the character seems to control what the reader can know about him. Yet, twentieth century criticism has identified many ways that authors can supplement or subvert the character's self-presentation.<sup>4</sup> Substantively, the speaker may contradict himself, may admire things that are patently unadmirable (or the reverse), may express attitudes toward other characters that his own descriptions of them cannot support, etc. Stylistically, the speaker may use language that is absolutely at odds with the social, educational, or (even) moral status he claims. He may use diction that suggests a very different attitude toward something than his assertions suggest. The possibilities are legion.

Stylistic analysis has been particularly useful in explaining how authors create the illusion that these "voice" characters unconsciously reveal things that work against their explicit self-presentation. Threat writers also seem to control what the reader can know about them. Consequently, stylistic analysis seems especially promising for evaluating their credibility and understanding what their styles imply about their personalities.

These analogies form the working basis for my attempt to analyze the style in a sample of threat messages and to discover whether such analysis can produce consistent pictures of the threat writers. If this study shows that stylistic analysis can derive consistent personality sketches, it would justify empirical studies to establish whether certain stylistic patterns do correlate consistently with various psychological or emotional traits. Such empirical evidence would make stylistic analysis more efficient and effective for behavioral

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<sup>3</sup>The debate over Lady Macbeth's children has turned into a parody of this reaction. In trying to explain Lady Macbeth's character, critics have seized on a line of hers that suggests she once had children. Since these children do not appear in the play and are never mentioned again, her supposed reaction to their supposed fate has generated all sorts of psychological explanations for her initial ferocity and final madness.

<sup>4</sup>Wayne Booth has written what is probably still the most comprehensive treatment of this question. See *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, University of Chicago Press, 1961.

assessment and might provide stronger evidence for or against credibility--assuming that other studies could establish the traits associated with behavioral credibility.

## THE SAMPLE

To test the potential of stylistic analysis, I studied 30 nuclear threat messages that have been received by various individuals, corporations, local, state, and federal government officials, and government agencies across the country.

These messages vary considerably in length (from less than 50 to over 1000 words); in stylistic, grammatic, and syntactic sophistication; and in tone. They present a range of motivations for the threat, of purported capabilities, and of demands. Some writers claim to be working alone, but more claim to have accomplices, and many claim to be affiliated with some underground organization. Many of the messages contain considerable detail about their nuclear or other destructive capabilities, their operations, and the actions their target audiences must take to avoid the destructive consequences. Others remain very general about some or all of these points.

In sum, one can make very few generalizations about the sample, other than that all the messages have the same "hook": that is, "do what I (we) demand, or I (we) will destroy something." The next section suggests something of the diversity of these messages.

## THE METHODOLOGY

Literary and rhetorical criticism attempts to interpret (and sometimes to evaluate) literary works. The principal tool is explication, often called formal, structural, or textual analysis. Through explication, the critic examines the various elements of the literary work (e.g., character, plot, themes, imagery, and language) and the effect of their interaction. As an example of the latter, the critic may look at the way plot (the unfolding action) seems justified by characterization or, more to my purpose, the way language characterizes the actors in the plot.



Stylistic analysis may simply attempt to describe the use of language in a work. This is the usual proceeding in analyzing the prose style of individual writers. Such analysis usually serves the purposes of establishing authorship, charting an author's stylistic development, dating a work, comparing different authors' use of a particular stylistic feature, etc. In literary criticism, stylistic analysis most often serves the purposes of analyzing personality or describing *tone*. Most literary analysts would agree that tone reveals a speaker's attitude toward his listeners and a character's (or author's) real (or assumed) attitudes toward his subject, intentions, and himself. I intend to focus on what style implies about personality and tone.

If the analyst is trying to establish the nature of a person's style, he begins by examining the elements of that style. This entails identifying the kinds of sentence construction, diction, syntactic structure, and figurative language that predominate in the text. It is largely an inductive, categorizing activity, resulting in a characterization of the style. However, if the analyst is trying to explain the impression of tone and personality generated by the text, he usually begins by describing that impression. Then, he attempts to explain how the style creates that impression. This entails identifying sentence-level features and noting their relative frequency in the text. However, it goes beyond these activities to examine the effects of interaction between different features and to analyze larger stylistic attributes of the text--e.g., levels, kinds, and consistency of diction; shifts in construction; and incongruities.

The next section provides working examples of the methodology.

### III. ASSESSING TONE AND PERSONALITY THROUGH STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

For behavioral assessment, stylistic analysis works deductively: It begins with the impression of tone and personality that emerges from the text and then addresses the style itself to understand the effects generating that impression. On the most basic level, the analysis identifies sentence-level stylistic features, categorizes them, and notes the relative incidence of different features.<sup>1</sup> (One cannot characterize a style or derive any behavioral significance from a single or limited use of a feature.) Then, the analysis examines how different kinds of features interact and how the larger attributes of style emerge from such interaction. Among these attributes are:

- levels, kinds, and consistency of diction
- shifts in construction
- imitation
- incongruities
- verbal control

For behavioral assessment, these attributes are especially important because they contribute significantly to tone. As I said in Sec. II, tone is the general tenor of the message and the linguistic manifestation of the writer's attitude toward his audience, his intentions, his subject, and himself. Depending on the nature of the message, tone may also reveal his attitude toward the political, economic, and social status quo. Consequently, tone may give analysts further insight into the writer's personality and stability, perseverance, and demographic characteristics. These insights could

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<sup>1</sup>Because this study is more concerned with the behavioral implications of style than with describing the styles of threat messages, I have not included definitions and examples of most sentence-level features in the text. However, since the analysis repeatedly refers to these features in explaining effects, the appendix contains definitions and examples of the stylistic features that appear often enough in the sample to merit discussion or have particular significance in the messages discussed in the Note.

prove significant for assessing his credibility and generating investigative leads.

These aspects of style can also provide clues about the writer's values, habits, imagination, and educational level. To illustrate how these stylistic attributes create tone and provide these insights, I first define them and then show their effects in various threat messages.

## LEVELS, KINDS, AND CONSISTENCY OF DICTION

English is rich in synonyms, and writers can choose their words to create various levels of diction.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, they gear that level (and their style generally) to audience and purpose--for example, using Latinate, polysyllabic diction to tell an academic audience about a scientific discovery and Anglo-Saxon monosyllabic diction to discuss everyday matters with the family.

Generally, we form an impression about the education and intelligence of a writer from the range of his diction and its appropriateness to the audience and purpose. However, recent research indicates that many readers (including academics) tend to be more impressed by writers who use "big words" than by those who use a simple vocabulary, regardless of occasion or subject. When such readers become writers, they project this response onto their readers and--presumably unconsciously--try to dignify their own prose through "high" diction.<sup>3</sup>

This tendency has important implications for tone. By using Latinate diction in a threat message, the writer may be exhibiting what I call the Oz syndrome--that is, use of verbal pyrotechnics to hide the little man behind the screen. In other words, he may be revealing an unconscious doubt that the reader will take him seriously. That doubt may spring from a feeling of general inferiority, a sense of inferiority relative to the target audience, or the fact that he has neither the

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<sup>2</sup>By diction, I mean the general consistency or inconsistency of language created by the writer's choice of words.

<sup>3</sup>See Rosemary L. Hake and Joseph M. Williams, "Style and Its Consequences: Do As I Do, Not As I Say," *College English*, Vol. 43, No. 5, pp. 433-451; David McNeill, "Speaking of Space," *Science*, Vol. 152, pp. 875-880; Joseph M. Williams, "Nominal and Verbal Style," unpublished address given at UCLA, May 25, 1978.

technological or operational capability to carry out his threat. These attitudes toward self, audience, and capabilities create a general tone of insecurity, if not impotence. That tone is intensified if high diction is not part of the writer's normal written vocabulary and, as often happens, he finally misuses words or uses them in ungrammatical constructions. The LIGHTFORCE message analyzed later in this section illustrates this phenomenon.

This is not to say that all use of high diction necessarily reveals the Oz syndrome. If the writer is thoroughly in command of this vocabulary and it is matched by the complexity of his thoughts and control of the other conventions and resources of language, the resulting tone may be quite different and have quite different implications. He is not trying to overcome feelings of inferiority about himself, his relation to the reader, or his capabilities. Indeed, he may feel distinctly superior in all three areas, or he may simply be self assured, certain that he can carry out the threat, and unconcerned about the appropriateness of his style.<sup>4</sup>

The kind of diction a writer uses also helps to create tone. By "kind," I mean one (or more) of the various categories, other than level, under which a writer's word choices consistently fall. Diction may be categorized as abstract, concrete, specific, general, or metaphorical. It can also be categorized as relating to specific occupations, disciplines, professions, sports, or other areas of human interest and activities. Finally (but not exhaustively), it can be categorized by the cultural, emotional, or psychological traits it suggests in the writer.

Effective writers change kinds of diction, just as they change levels of diction, to suit particular audiences and purposes. However, most writers tend to settle at a point on the spectra between abstract and concrete, general and specific, and literal and metaphorical diction. Although few nonprofessional writers consciously use one or more of the other kinds of diction throughout a single document, they

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<sup>4</sup>What I have said about stylistic levels implies that although people are self-conscious about writing itself, their style reflects more or less unconscious choices. I do assume that self-consciousness about style usually results only from the kind of training and writing experience that relatively few people have.

often do so unconsciously. Consequently, the resulting tone reveals a lot about the writer, the pressures he is under, and his response to those pressures.

Consider the tone in this excerpt:

A Committee of Five...is now assembling, in quiet dwelling in Manhattan, a nuclear device....If the Amchitka [test] blast takes place, the Manhattan device will be exploded....I have been instructed by a member of the Committee...that I can reveal this to you because there is no chance at all that the device could be found....The Committee feels that these successively larger test blasts must stop now, and the only way to stop them is to let New Yorkers know that when the Amchitka blast goes off, several square miles of expensive Manhattan real estate will go up in a beautiful mushroom cloud....The Committee regrets the loss of life but accepts no responsibility once this warning is published....we urge the underground press...to warn people to leave Manhattan at least twenty-four hours before the Amchitka blast.

Contrast that with the following excerpt:

Do not try to find the bombs I have planted. They are rigged to explode if they are disturbed in any way. This is no Orson Welles publicity stunt. This is for real. If you think this is a joke then we can all laugh together while Brussels and Chicago burn. You may evacuate Chicago and Brussels if you wish, but evacuated or not I will blow them both up on March 30 if my conditions are not met. You cannot stop people like me...

At first glance, the tone in these examples might seem different more because of differences in substance than differences in diction. Indeed, that perception would have a certain validity if we assume that both messages represent real threats rather than hoaxes. If someone really is assembling a device as the first threat claims and bombs really have been planted and rigged to explode as the second states, the second message is substantively more aggressive and hostile than the first. However, even if we assume their veracity, the writers' choices of diction (and other features) reflect quite different attitudes toward their readers, their relation to possible victims, and themselves.

The first writer creates a tone that is almost apologetic and that suggests passivity, tentativeness, and protective concern. He speaks of "assembling" a "device" rather than "rigging" the "bombs" to explode. He can reveal the existence of the device because "there is no chance that it could be found." This contrasts sharply with the second writer's threatening stance toward the reader expressed in his imperative "Do not try to find the bombs" because, implicitly, they have been rigged to blow you up. The first writer wants to let the potential victims "know that...several square miles of expensive Manhattan real estate will go up in a beautiful mushroom cloud," while the second speaks of laughing "while Brussels and Chicago burn."

Those differences in diction also imply a different attitude toward the destructive effect of the devices. Although both threaten explosions if their demands are not met, the first writer avoids "violent" diction, even where the events he describes are quite violent, and limits the extent of the destruction. He threatens the real estate, not the population and cannot bring himself to make even it "burn." Instead, it goes up in a deceptively "beautiful mushroom cloud." Finally, he wants the people "warned to leave," whereas the second writer chooses "evacuate," a wartime term, and threatens to blow up the cities whether or not the government tries the option of evacuation.

So far, I have been looking at the tonal effect of consistent diction, making judgments based on the similarity of word choices. However, inconsistency can be equally revealing, especially if the writer suddenly shifts from one dictional mode to another. The two messages above provide examples of this.

After all his bellicose diction and imperative constructions, the second writer suddenly interjects a quotation mark, and the message continues as follows:

You cannot stop people like me because "we are willing to give our lives if necessary in order to save our planet. For thirty years we have watched the arms race spiral out of control. We have marched and rallied, waited and hoped, pleaded and begged, all to no avail. We have filled books with reasonable discussion and rational argument, and still piles of bombs grow higher. Reason has failed, so now we must

resort to force. We are sorry it had to come to this. Have courage and good luck."

This passage represents a 180-degree turn in tone. Suddenly, instead of the violent language and tough-guy irony<sup>5</sup> of "laughing while Brussels and Chicago burn," the writer begins using figurative language to create an argument from cause.<sup>6</sup> Rigging bombs to explode gives place to watching the arms race spiral out of control. His claim of long and patient action is expressed through the repeated rhythms of the isocolon.<sup>7</sup> Instead of dwelling on the destructive power of atomic weapons, he shifts attention, through synecdoche,<sup>8</sup> to the inert piles of bombs. The use of chiasmus<sup>9</sup> to condense and summarize the argument from cause brings this passage to a sophisticated stylistic climax: The sentence begins with "reason" and ends with "force." The form of the utterance matches its substance perfectly. Finally, he moves to an apology we might expect from the first writer.

This shift in tone raises vital questions about the writer. The quotation marks suggest that he may be quoting from some source. That seems likely given the difference in style between the two passages. Nevertheless, he has chosen these words as representing his meanings, regardless of their real authorship. Moreover, the tone here, though not the verbal skill, recalls the tone of the message's opening lines (which, for economy's sake, are not reproduced here). Coupled with the

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<sup>5</sup>Again, definitions of terms used to describe stylistic features are contained in the appendix.

<sup>6</sup>His argument implicitly states that the superpowers have caused this resort to force by not responding to all the peace efforts of "people like me."

<sup>7</sup>A rhetorical figure in which the writer uses phrases of equal length and corresponding structure.

<sup>8</sup>A figure in which the writer uses a part of something to stand for the whole or vice versa. Here, the piles of bombs stand for the escalating arms race.

<sup>9</sup>In this classical figure, the two parts of a sentence (or a pair of sentences) have parallel but reversed structure and sense. The most famous example of this in our time is John F. Kennedy's "...ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."



substance and other stylistic effects, the inconsistency of tone suggests that the writer is uncomfortable with his tough-guy stance.

That interpretation seems reinforced by the allusion to the "Orson Welles publicity stunt." On the one hand, the allusion recalls the power that a skillful fiction can have on people's beliefs and actions, but, on the other, it recalls the terror, upheaval, and damage Welles's radio drama caused. It is also possible that the writer unconsciously feels uncomfortable about reminding the reader that a terrible threat can be a fiction. In either case, the last passage looks like an attempt to suggest that, although tough, the writer is sincere and ultimately altruistic. Despite this effort, the radical shifts in tone suggest a basically unstable and insecure person.

The first writer also has a moment of inconsistency, but it tends only to reinforce his image as a tentative, passive, and concerned person. Having threatened that the device will send some Manhattan real estate up in that beautiful mushroom cloud, he suddenly takes up the question of credibility:

This is not crackpot stuff. I have been asked to write to you because the straight press would never publish this warning. Whether it is taken seriously does not matter. The point is, it sure as hell will be taken seriously after the New York blast goes off.

Immediately after, he returns to his apologetic tone and asks the press to warn the people to leave.

This brief lapse looks like an attempt to show that he really is a tough guy and, thus, that his message should be taken seriously. But the performance is unconvincing. He does not have even fleeting control over the diction and constructions that suggest a violent and hostile attitude toward the reader or the potential victims: "crackpot," "hell," and "blast" are as violent as his diction gets. Moreover, he cannot overcome the habit of palliating and explaining his motivations. Recovering from a momentary confusion about whether he cares if the reader takes him seriously, he asserts that the message "sure as hell" will be credible after the fact. He evidently hopes that this "strong" language will show that he is not the quiet, unassuming person that the



rest of the message reflects. But this mild flare-up only fleshes out the portrait of a timid person trying to make himself important through association with a great menace. Yet, he never even intimates that he is more than a messenger until the final sentence when he refers to the Committee as "we."

## CONSISTENCY OF CONSTRUCTIONS

Sentence construction is probably the most readily recognized attribute of style. Certain authors and certain periods are characterized, for example, by the long periodic sentence, which qualifies and modifies its substance, only getting to the point at the very end. Others characteristically use simple sentences.<sup>10</sup> By consistently using one kind of construction, the writer creates a certain tone and impression of his thought patterns. However, he may also reveal things through lapses from dominant patterns or certain combinations of constructions. As with diction, different linguistic contexts can change the implications of similar constructions.

Consider simple sentences. Their consistent use has traditionally been associated with linguistic immaturity and simple thought. Nevertheless, skilled writers know the power that simple sentences can have for emphasis and for varying the texture of their prose. While few threat messages are created by skilled writers, it would be a mistake to automatically assume that the presence of simple sentences necessarily indicates that the writer is immature or unintelligent. The following excerpt suggests something else:

Immediately contact United Airlines, American Airlines, TWA Airlines, and Delta Airlines. There will be bombs placed on each of these airlines this day if all demands are not met. One bomb is placed now and set. Detonation at approximately 16:30 hours. Each airline is to place in a strong canvas bag one million dollars. This bag is to be marked as to the airline's name. Each bag will be checked and if there is any radio transmitters, dusting powder, tear gas, or any other device a plane will be blown whether the airlines pays or not. Any following aircraft, we call off the deal and start blowing planes. The pick-up man will call the observer after the pickup, he will then call the airlines and give the all clear.

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<sup>10</sup>The classic contrast is between Henry James highly qualifying style and Ernest Hemingway's basic subject-verb-object patterns.

If the pick-up man does not call the observer, one plane will be destroyed by 20:00 hours. The money will be in tens, twenties and fifties (no more than one-half in new bills). The individual bags will be opened in the middle of the departure terminal of TWA and British Airlines. Several bundles of money from each bag will be held up and fanned. The money will then be placed back in the bag and sealed [there follow several more simple sentences of instructions for delivering the money]....If the demands are not met and instructions followed to the letter we will load a bomb onto the passenger baggage, shoot a tire at take-off, or shoot a cockpit on final and it may be anywhere in the country. At that time you will be contacted again and the demand will be doubled....

The grammatical and punctuation errors in this passage create the impression of an uneducated person, which might be equated with low intelligence and inability to carry out a complicated extortion threat. However, the pattern of constructions suggests a different problem than low I.Q. Most of the sentences are simple, although some have compound verbs. Many of them are imperatives or functional imperatives ("Each airline is to place..."). And many of them contain functional ellipses.<sup>11</sup> The effect is extremely telegraphic--almost uncommunicative.

We could interpret this as a conscious attempt to assume a mode of command, to convince the reader that the writer will brook no refusal, and to prevail by verbal force. However, the moments when this command mode breaks down suggest another interpretation. With two exceptions, whenever the writer breaks his pattern and creates a complex or compound/complex sentence, he is talking about the consequences of failing to meet his demands. Moreover, these sentences pile construction on construction, are mispunctuated, and usually contain grammatical errors. This could merely indicate that he loses control when he tries sentence constructions he is not comfortable writing. However, the consistent coincidence of form and substance suggests to me that (1) his usually tight-lipped style reflects a fear of exposing himself through words, and (2) he loses control when he considers the possibility that the airlines might not meet his demands. These

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<sup>11</sup>This kind of ellipsis differs from rhetorical ellipsis: The latter leaves propositions or assumption unspoken; functional ellipsis omits idiomatic or grammatical elements in constructions.

characteristics would have important implications for handling an episode.

## IMITATION

By "imitation," I mean the writer's conscious or unconscious mimicry of particular styles, modes, or genres. Imitation becomes apparent through the combined effect of various generic cues, modal patterns, borrowings from particular styles, and techniques of presentation--even some from non-print media. Occasionally, a turn of phrase or choice of words recalls a certain style, mode, or genre, but the implications for behavioral assessment are less compelling than the impression made by the whole message.

The most straightforward kind of imitation is the writer's adoption of a particular professional or institutional style. For example, quasi-legal language abounds in threat messages. Writers begin by stating that "this letter is to inform" the reader of the threat. They refer to themselves as "We, the undersigned 'Brotherhood'." And they warn readers to "Be advised."

This use of legal language is another manifestation of the Oz syndrome: The writers apparently believe that a message couched in legal terms will assume the mantle of legality and legitimacy (and evoke the same apprehension that a lawyer's letterhead does). Analogously, imitation of military language attempts to imply the writer's operational and technological expertise with weapons through his familiarity with military jargon. In most cases, this kind of imitation suggests that the writer has a negative self-image, believes he will not be taken seriously, and attempts to "borrow power" from a professional or institutional image.

Some threat writers also try to borrow power from genres and modes that, they believe, have intrinsic rhetorical force. This message rather spectacularly illustrates the effect that kind of imitation has:

Mother's Day 1974

MEMO: to media of the san francisco people

to enemies of life and modulators of the energy crisis

Let the people know the following message is inspired in part by the revolutionary hope of the Symbionese Liberation Army and as a service to the life of the earth.

LIGHTFORCE proclaims revolutionary hope. LIGHTFORCE repudiates the corporate manipulation of personal energy by fascist technology. LIGHTFORCE exposes the domination of an energy machine over human freedom willed by the corporate criminals. LIGHTFORCE sentences the fascist offenders to poisons of their own design. LIGHTFORCE represents for the people the moral righteousness of equal violence to wrest our freedom from vise-tightening oppressors.

LIGHTFORCE guards a six kilogram "strategic" quantity of the exploding biocide plutonium 239, an alpha emitter toxic in the lung, with a radioactive half-life of 24,400 years. We insist the corporate fascists identify this quintessential gem of power as their weapon of controlled execution. Remember Nagasaki? Has not our chemical the lethality of botulism? Is it not the "peaceful" power corporate criminals will use to enslave and destroy the people?

Our birdcage is not difficult to acquire. Perhaps Pittman (USAEC) knows where it comes from. Or Taylor (IRTC)? Or Edlow? Or Dixy Ray? We will not explode an implosion warhead above the offices of San Francisco. Instead we issue an ultimatum first.

ALL FINANCIAL POWERS OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO WILL HALT SUPPORT AND COMMENCE OPPOSITION TO ATOMIC POWER BEFORE MEMORIAL DAY 1974.

Failing this resolution to stop further deployment of nuclear reactors, tacticals of LIGHTFORCE will visit the following corporate headquarters: Bank of America. Financiers. Giannini, corporate criminal. Bechtel Corporation. Builders. Stephen D. Bechtel, Jr., arch-criminal. Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Utility. Shermer Sibley, arch-criminal. Westinghouse Corporation. Designer. Arch-profiteer. John Simpson, arch-criminal.

Each tactical carries a half kilogram explosion device designed to release vast quantities of pollen sized carcinogens into the lungs of the corporate atmosphere as permanent punishment for unpardonable crimes. We respectfully compare these devices with equivalent devices carrying botulism toxin. Our tacticals willfully die as a result of their exposure. Do not cremate their bodies.

On Friday next week we shall expect full public renunciation of atomic weapons by the four arch-criminals identified above. One month from today we shall expect the passage of the above resolution. If same is not forthcoming LIGHTFORCE sentences all to die by bone cancer.

May their gods forgive them.

LIGHTFORCE

This message reflects considerable imagination and creative energy. Indeed, one could easily construct a television docudrama from it. The writer unwittingly reveals from the beginning that he sees this as a

"media event," and his unrelenting imitation of various advertising, journalistic, and television techniques finally amounts to parody. Combined with the excesses of his diction and misuse of words, this parody makes it difficult to take the writer or the threat seriously. Nevertheless, an analysis of this message illustrates the cumulative effect of imitation very instructively.

The writer identifies two intended audiences for his MEMO--the media, which has so obviously influenced him, and the "enemies," whom he castigates throughout. The opening tips his hand in several ways and begins pushing him toward the parody that finally undoes his credibility. Everything has to be made as important as possible. His memo is issued on Mother's Day, not a simple date (and his demands must be met by "Memorial Day"). By adopting the memo mode, he attempts to imitate the "no-nonsense" communication of bureaucracies and the corporate world.

Although he begins in that mode, he quickly moves to imitation of advertising and broadcast media. Throughout the message, echoes of the "announcer's voice" come through: "...the following message is inspired in part...and as a service to..." Substitute "sponsored" for "inspired" and that line sounds like the opening of a commercial or the attribution of credit for an educational television program. In that imitative context, the next paragraph sounds like an advertisement for LIGHTFORCE. And the opening of the following paragraph can be turned into a spiel for any complex, mechanical product by substituting other words in the hackneyed structure: For example, your Ford dealer has a six-cylinder four by four, light truck, a hard-driving off-roader for tough jobs, with a 12,000-mile warranty.

The message also imitates the telegraphic style of the orator who is performing before a politically sympathetic crowd. The rhetorical questions, the denigrating images, the ultimata--all these sound like a man addressing a cheering audience, in front of the cameras. However, once the writer has issued the ultimatum, the message begins to imitate presentational techniques of a docudrama, more specifically a propaganda film, and borrows power from military diction. He speaks of "deployment of nuclear reactors" and coins the noun "tacticals" to characterize the members of his, apparently paramilitary, organization.

One can imagine the writer visualizing these "tacticals" going off with their lethal devices, while faces of the "corporate criminals" flash on the screen, and the voice-over intones their names and the accompanying epithets. The remainder of the message has the quality of a scenario, fleshing out the action that would be seen on the screen as the voice-over provides interpretive and polemical commentary.

As I said above, the cumulative effect of imitation is parodic. However, the writer does not intend to parody the forms that he is, probably unconsciously, imitating; they have evidently profoundly impressed and influenced him. Nevertheless, his excesses wind up parodying both the media and his kind of response to them. The cumulative effect makes it difficult to take the writer's threats seriously. We see the Oz syndrome carried to its logical extreme here: The writer has become so involved with the verbal pyrotechnics that he seems, paradoxically, to have forgotten his actual audience altogether. His fiction has overwhelmed him, and his stance seems to have become more important than his ostensible purpose.

Not only is the message bizarre, but it creates the the impression that the writer has exhausted his energy with the message itself. Nevertheless, it would be risky to dismiss the threat that this kind of person could pose *if he were in a position of power*. The kind of diction, constructions, and imitation here point to a radical, young person, who has probably had some college or university education. Coming from such a person, the threat can probably be safely dismissed as harmless. But recall that many of this century's demagogues have also reveled in exaggerated public stances, media events, and virulent language and have exploited the techniques of oratory, advertising, and the propaganda film.

### INCONGRUITIES

Incongruity becomes apparent only in looking at the whole message: As with inconsistency in diction, we have to see the general tenor of a message before we can recognize departures from it. While these categories overlap somewhat, the elements identified as incongruities represent more than shifts in level or kind of diction. They "fit" so



poorly with the general stylistic context that they immediately undercut the writer's stance and credibility: They suggest that he is simply unbalanced, is too unstable to follow through, or is poor at maintaining a fiction. Metaphorically speaking, incongruities reveal the actor behind the character he is trying to play.

The LIGHTFORCE message contains at least two incongruities. At one point, the writer suddenly introduces acronyms, a print-oriented element that is incongruous in a message that continuously imitates oratorical and visual media techniques. At another point, he suddenly deserts his consistently aggressive and flamboyant tone and "respectfully submits" a comparison between nuclear and biological devices. These incongruities combine with the malapropisms of "modulators" and "willfully" to make the writer seem suddenly unequal to the role of grand-scale operator. The false moustache is slipping on one side.

Another message provides a grimly humorous example of incongruities:

Dear. Mr. Editor

If you want to save the City of Lincoln from a nuclear wipeout as in Japan in 1945 you had better send a copy of this to the mayor or Gov. for further action (Thank you)

Dear Mr. Mayor or Gov.

We the FEAG have in our possession a nuclear bomb capable of destroying lincoln. Now to save lincoln and its people we demand in return for the location of the bomb \$7 000 000 and safe passage from the country. If our demands are not met in  $2.4 \times 10^3$  hours that's 10 days you can kiss lincoln Good bye. We will send photo instructions later so you had better get \$7 000 000 fast. TIMES A WASTE'UN.

Up to the last three sentences, the general tone of this message is straightforward, rather moderate, and even polite--under the circumstances. The kind of diction reveals no particular hostility, no particular political or moral stance, and no defensiveness or insecurity. The level of diction is fairly low and, with the lack of punctuation, implies an uneducated writer. Nevertheless, the sentence constructions are mostly complex, grammatically correct, and coherent. The general impression is of a simple person, evidently motivated by profit, who might be capable of carrying out a threat, if he had the technological capability.

However, the incongruities of the last sentences shatter this impression. Is that bizarre (and incorrect) equation an attempt to seem scientifically savvy and, thus, technologically credible? If so, it argues a very juvenile or very skewed sense of effective evidence. Coupled with the cliched threat about "kissing Lincoln goodbye," the equation gives the impression that the writer is losing control over his attempt to appear mature, sensible, and systematic. The final sentence caps this revised impression. The writer may not know that the "Barney Google-Snuffy Smith" comic strip made this line a byword, but even if he has picked it up on the street, he could hardly have heard it as anything but humorous.<sup>12</sup> In other words, anyone who wanted to be taken seriously--and understood how one makes a serious impression--would be unlikely to use this expression in this context. The effect recalls Harpo Marx trying to impersonate a serious character while his disguise unravels inexorably under the pressure of circumstances.

## VERBAL CONTROL

Control is the writer's ability to convey his semantic meaning and create his desired impression effectively and economically. Identifying his "desired impression" and deciding whether he creates it involves the analyst in some arbitrary judgments. However, given the usual intentions of threat messages, it is reasonable to assume that there are some impressions that the writer would never want to make--for example, inadequacy, foolishness, and timidity. Consequently, we judge control largely negatively--that is, has the writer's volume and choice of words created an impression inimical to his objectives?

As the examples used so far indicate, threat writers line up at various places, between verbosity and taciturnity, on the spectrum of control. The writer who threatened to "blow planes" or "shoot cockpits" is about as taciturn as one can be and still communicate. But although he manages to communicate his threat and the means and instructions to forestall it, his elliptical style finally creates an impression of rigidity and tenuous control rather than verbal economy and restraint.

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<sup>12</sup>The spelling implies that he has only heard this expression. As I recall, the balloons in the strip read "Time's A Waste'n."



That impression is strengthened by his loss of verbal control in those constructions dealing with the consequences of failure to meet his demands. His taciturnity implies a fear that the more words he commits to paper, the greater his chances of self-exposure.

In contrast, the LIGHTFORCE writer evidently luxuriates in language, choosing and piling up words to paint himself as large as possible. He is not actually verbose--that is, he does not use many more words than he needs to convey his semantic meaning--but he is flamboyant. He evidently believes that his figurative flights are necessary to establish his stance. He clearly wants to impress the audience with his revolutionary zeal, his hatred of the "corporate criminals" and their exploitation of nuclear power, and his skill with words. While he does establish the first two points, his diction is so consistently exaggerated and the quantity of abuse so great that he unconsciously parodies himself as a polemicist. By the end, he has parodied the media, his kind of response to the media, and himself as writer.

In these two cases, the loss of control has different implications for behavioral assessment. If the technical and operational teams could ascertain whether the threat is credible on those levels, the first writer's loss of control suggests that he might be lethal. Because he controls his style when discussing the mechanisms in place, we would have to consider that he might have all that ready to go, as he says. However, his loss of control when he considers that his demands will not be met suggests that he might "push the button" only suspecting opposition. In contrast, the LIGHTFORCE writer's loss of control suggests that he is more fiction- than action-oriented and that, having had an audience, he is unlikely to do more.

#### IV. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A THREAT MESSAGE

Most nuclear threat messages have turned out to be hoaxes in which no arrests were made. Moreover, no new messages were received while I was testing the stylistic analysis. Consequently, although tests like the examples in Sec. III suggest that stylistic analysis can derive coherent, and reasonably comprehensive, personality sketches of the extortionists, the Rand team has not been able to test the theory operationally. Nevertheless, circumstances allowed us to create an exercise that indicates how useful stylistic analysis may be for assessing behavioral credibility.

In this exercise, I was given a threat message that the Rand team had analyzed before I was involved. The challenge was to characterize the writer and assess the credibility of his threat as though the message had just been received. Once I had performed the analysis, the project leader compared my conclusions with the actual outcome of the case and his knowledge of the extortionist.

In addition to information contained in the message, I had only these facts:

- The letter was addressed and delivered to Randall Alkema, manager of the G.E. nuclear plant in Wilmington, North Carolina.
- The writer had been an employee at the plant.
- He was subsequently arrested.

I did not know that the uranium oxide in question presented virtually no radioactive threat.

To suggest how the exercise worked, this section presents the elements in order: first, the message itself; then, my assessment as presented to the rest of the team; finally, a summary of the actual case, compared with that assessment.

## THE THREAT MESSAGE

On January 29, 1979, the manager of G.E.'s nuclear fuel fabrication plant in Wilmington, North Carolina, received the following letter, addressed to him personally:

*PERSONAL AND PRIVATE*

*ALKEMA*

The vial you are looking at contains a sample of uranium abstracted from your stock in Wilmington. We are in possession of 66.350 kilograms. It consists of containers number 2602 MO. 1024 1035.350TG? and a number 2602 MO. 1017 1031.000KG? Plan A is as follows: Beginning this Thursday, February the first, 1979, vials like this will be sent from various parts of the country to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Union of Concerned Scientists (who will verify the contents), the Clamshell Alliance and all other anti-nuclear groups, Ralph Nader, every major newspaper in the country, the White House and every Senator or Congressman who has ever expressed doubt about nuclear power.

It will be made very clear where the uranium came from. You know we have a supply sufficient to do this.

The result will be a mass of outcry from all quarters.

The NRC, for political reasons if nothing else will force an immediate shutdown of your plant. Having just repudiated their own safety study they can do no less. However, their own regulations require it.

The newspapers with their love for scare stories will blow it up and give it wide coverage.

The Clamshell Alliance and other groups will receive a big boost to morale and spur on to demonstrations, recruit members and be a stronger force than before, creating even more news stories. The Union of Concerned Scientists and Nader's people will call press conferences to denounce GE and the whole industry. You will have no answer for them. Some of the more political motivated members of Congress will make speeches and call for a Congressional investigation that will drag on for months. (They know the value of a good issue with elections just next year.) The result will be new laws with more and tighter regulations and government control.

Any possible good will generated by the First National Conference on Energy Advocacy (February 2-4) will be destroyed and the blame placed on you and GE. The other members of your own industry must make you and GE the scapegoats or they will share the blame.

In the public mind--for this to happen after years of assurances that uranium stocks were secure from terrorists will convince many who may have previously favored nuclear power that it is after all dangerous and they have been lied to again. You will see a dramatic swing against you in public opinion. This is inevitable after this combined with the NRC rejection of the Safety Study.

Again you and GE will take the blame. With the attention focused on Vice Premier T'eng visit it will be recalled that the first Chinese H-bomb was made with stolen American uranium. This fact publicized now will antagonize the White House, the State Department, and all others committed to smooth dealings with China. They will also blame you and GE.

In addition--your plant being shut down for a long time will cause horrendous problems in loss of production, delayed projects, missed deliveries, governmental interference and loss of income, all of this will cost you and GE millions.

The GE Board will have no other choice but to fire you ignominiously. You know they do not reward failure.

In short, this action will be resounding defeat for the industry in general, a disaster for GE in particular, and will destroy your career.

There is *one way* and one way only that this can be avoided.

You have 48 hours to arrange for \$100,000 in cash in 10-s, 20-s, and 50-s. *No other combinations, all used bills and not consecutively numbered.* You will be contacted as to how the money is to be turned over to us. After an additional 48 hours during which we will count, examine and test the money for any identifying characteristics, chemical or otherwise the uranium will be returned to Wilmington. You will be notified where it is. You pick it up, return it to your stock, and it will be all over. No one need ever know.

It will do you absolutely no good to attempt to stop us. The uranium has already gone at least 1,000 miles and cannot be located. Those of us here do not even know where it is now.

If you make even so much as an attempt to bring in the police (and we will know if you do) Plan B will be implemented automatically.

This Plan calls for all the above mentioned things to happen and as well the contents of one can will be spread through the downtown area of a major city.

The authorities will be notified that it has happened and that you knew *in advance* and had been able to stop it.

Following that the price for other can goes to \$200,000, and if that is not paid the name of the next city so treated will be announced in advance.

You can imagine the panic that would cause and the anger directed at you and GE.

As you see, there is *no choice*.

Remember that a good part of the \$100,000 will be offset by the recovery of the 66 kilograms.

Your main concern is if we will actually return it once the money is paid.

It will be and you can rely on it because of an extremely strong motive on our part--self interest.

If you pay and take back your uranium, we can be sure you will never announce it. If you never admit it then no crime is reported and we are free from any possible consequences. Then if one of our group went crazy in the future and claimed to have done it no one would believe them. You would have your uranium to prove it and we are thus safe even from members of our own group.

We realize following this security will be taken to the point where it can never happen again. We also realize that you can hide this expense in any one of a dozen projects for accounting purposes. We will accept no excuses.

*Do not* call attention to this in any way. If you verify that the cans are gone do so *without any notice*. Arrange for the money to come from *several different banks*. Make up a plausible story for the banks. Any slip ups here will cause the bomb to drop. It is not under our control so *be very careful*.

We are a very disciplined group determined to see this through to the end.

This is a very serious matter.

It can end well or it can be a disaster for you and GE. You will be contacted.

A Friend

## ASSESSMENT DERIVED FROM STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE MESSAGE

On first reading, this message sounds like the work of an analytical, strategy-oriented, and persevering person, who has better-than-average writing skills, a logical intellect, and native rhetorical talent. His vocabulary and sentence structures (generally) suggest that he has had some higher education or has educated himself.<sup>1</sup> And he conducts his argument logically and forcefully--up to a point. Given that he really does have nuclear material, a person with these characteristics could present a serious threat. However, a careful analysis of his style suggests that not only is he less aggressive, tenacious, and controlled than he would like to appear, but that he has neither the operational capabilities nor the character traits necessary to carry through his threat.

The writer clearly attempts to present himself as a virtually irresistible force. His argument has a powerful lever: Without really harming anyone, he can embarrass the NRC into shutting down G.E.'s Wilmington plant, get sensational coverage in the media, provide grist for the antinuclear mill, turn public opinion against the nuclear industry, and force stronger regulation of that industry. As a consequence, G.E. and Alkema will be pariahs in the nuclear industry, G.E. will lose money, and Alkema will be fired. However, Alkema can prevent all of this for a mere \$100,000. And the writer points out that 'liberating' such a small amount is simply an accounting problem. No one will get hurt unless Alkema is so unreasonable as to notify the police.

The writer handles this argument very skillfully. He describes the consequences of failure to meet his initial demand before telling Alkema what that demand is. If his scenario exaggerated the

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<sup>1</sup>Although the sentence structures are complex, the writer does not--perhaps does not know how to--punctuate these sentences. He uses little punctuation other than capitals and periods. This configuration suggests a person who has verbal skill but who is not print-oriented. In other words, he has a good ear for verbal construction, but either is not a reader or does not notice punctuation when he does read. However, this does not rule out the possibility that he has had higher education. As most university and college professors can testify, higher education often has little effect on students' punctuation skills.

consequences of sending those vials to the groups he names, this strategy would be less powerful. But the reactions he describes ring true. Anyone who has followed the debate over the nuclear industry would have to recognize how likely those reactions are. By telling Alkema his plan and its consequences--before even hinting that there is any recourse--the writer attempts to ensure compliance with his demand. Faced with these credible consequences, Alkema should almost welcome being told that "There is *one way* and one way only that this can be avoided." One alternative is better than no alternatives at all.

In his stylistic choices, the writer also manifests this desire to control response. He uses periodic sentences and embedding repeatedly to make his main points airtight. For example, note the effect of embedding (*italicized*) in this passage:

The NRC, *for political reasons if nothing else* will force an immediate shutdown of your plant. Having just repudiated their own safety study *with all the publicity* they can do no less.

Rather than telling Alkema what the NRC will do and then why, the writer seems compelled to validate his claim before he makes it. He evidently believes that political motivations and public embarrassment are more telling motivations for the NRC than their public mission is. Consequently, he wants Alkema to consider them before dismissing the claim that the NRC will indeed take that action.

Although these constructions suggest that the writer is analytical and strategy-oriented, their high incidence also suggests that he is straining very hard for control. That suggestion is seconded by his repeated use of underlining and redundancy. By underlining phrases like "one way" and "no choice, he attempts to make them more binding on the reader. By saying "personal and private" and "this Thursday, February the first, 1979," he tries to avoid any possibility that the reader will misunderstand and respond inappropriately.

The apparent obsession with control is also suggested by the paragraph structure and the variation of sentence length. The writer prefers short paragraphs that develop one point economically, usually in lengthy periodic or loose sentences, and that end with simple, emphatic



assertions. He also favors one-sentence paragraphs, particularly when he wants to make a dramatic point: "As you see, there is *no choice*"; "This is a very serious matter." These patterns may reflect a desire to keep the individual points in his argument as simple as possible--as though he feared losing control if things got too complex.

Despite this straining for control, the writer uses stylistic features that create ambiguities. He says that "You know we have a supply sufficient to do this," but does he mean sufficient to make clear where the uranium came from or sufficient to send a vial to all the groups he names? In talking about the change in public opinion, he states that "This is inevitable after this combined with the NRC rejection of the Safety Study." The first "this" evidently refers to the "dramatic swing" in opinion. However, the reference of the second "this" is unclear and, on first reading, seems to have the same referent as the first.

In addition to these lapses, his occasional mixed constructions and solecisms also suggest that his desire to constrain response can make him inattentive to other effects. He says that "The Clamshell alliance...will receive a big boost to morale and spur on to demonstrations, recruit members and be a stronger force than before, creating even more news stories." From this construction, it is hard to tell whether the alliance will be spurred to action or will initiate action on its own, and the modifier, "creating even more news stories" has no certain agent--who or what will do the creating?

These failures of attention seem very inconsistent with the writer's attempt to cover all bases, control the argument, and constrain response. However, there is a certain consistency here. So many features imply that the writer is constraining and compulsive that his lapses offer a basis for his compulsion: He is basically tentative and insecure. Consequently, he cannot tolerate uncertainty, ambiguity, or undesired responses. He is not flexible or assertive enough to handle unforeseen contingencies or failures in the plan.

This impression is borne out by the inconsistency of voice in the message. Throughout the description of his scenario, the writer primarily uses the active voice. His stylistic mode is predictive assertion. He tells Alkema what everyone who receives the vials will do



and why. He predicts how the nuclear industry, G.E., and Alkema himself will react, and he repeatedly asserts that they can respond in no other way.

This stylistic mode suggests an "ego-morphic" personality--that is, the writer sees the behavior and motivations of others as he wants them to be and his own motivations as normative. Although his predictions about how people will react ring true, that does not change the fact that he claims they can react in no other way. This implies that he cannot face the possibility that they would act otherwise and that, by asserting how they will act, he can make it come true. In short, this verbal behavior suggests that he is "magical" in his thinking and would not handle confrontation very well.

The writer's apparent inability to handle confrontation is underscored by his switch to passive voice almost every time he talks about the implicit actions of his group. I say "implicit" advisedly because, for extortionists, this group is strangely inactive and almost morbidly disembodied. They are the active subject of only eight sentences. Although he asserts in the second sentence that "We are in possession of" the 66 kilograms of uranium, he goes on to say that "vials like this will be sent..." If his group has the uranium, who else would be sending the vials? By changing to passive voice when he describes this action, he suggests that his group will not take that action, that it will simply happen somehow. In one of the more curious and telling constructions, the writer says that "After an additional 48 hours during which we will count, examine and test the money for any identifying characteristics...the uranium will be returned to Wilmington." This sentence has the curious effect of presenting the group as intermediaries somewhere behind the scenes: They will count money that has been "turned over to" them, and then the "uranium will be returned to Wilmington." They seem to be passive parts of a mechanism that is beyond their control--and thus their responsibility.

As the message progresses, this sense of a reified and autonomous mechanism grows--as does the impression that the writer is evasive, insecure, self-exculpating, and mechanistic. Somehow, the uranium "has gone at least 1,000 miles and cannot be located" and "those of us here do not even know where it is now." Yet, somehow it will get back to

Wilmington, and Alkema "will be notified where it is." This bizarre use of passive constructions creates a sense of animism, of a world in which things move under their own autonomy, and people simply respond rather than initiating action. Moreover, it suggests that the strain of controlling the situation is becoming too much.

The writer totally relinquishes control when he discusses what will happen if Alkema so much as attempts to bring in the police. Although he says that the group will know about the attempt, "Plan B will be implemented automatically." The word "automatically" makes explicit his implicit attempt to dissociate himself, by using the passive voice, from the consequences of Plan B. And curiously, the writer does not seem wholly familiar with Plan B. Will it be implemented only if Alkema tries to notify the police, or will it also be implemented if he refuses to pay? The writer makes a further stylistic retreat by saying that "Plan B calls for" certain things. If the Plan is in charge, he and his group can hardly be responsible for the "panic" that will follow.

With his statement "As you see, there is *no choice*," the writer stylistically takes the matter out of his own and Alkema's hands. He does not say that he has no choice or that Alkema has no choice; rather, he states that choice does not exist. Later, he simply asserts that this is true. He metaphorically reifies the Plan as a "bomb" that will drop if there are any slip ups, and then he states flatly that "It is not under our control so *be very careful*." Nobody has responsibility; nobody has choice. In this reified verbal world, Alkema will have to do what the Plan demands, and the writer will not have to confront unforeseen contingencies or failure. He gets the control he has been striving for by implying that he, too, is controlled.

However, the writer pays a price in credibility by taking that position. He evidently has not given as much thought to the consequences of Plan B as he gave to the scenario following Plan A. Instead of predictive assertions, he chooses passive voice to describe what will happen. However, that choice is predictable: The group will have to respond actively under Plan B, rather than letting the projected response of others convince Alkema to comply, and the writer seems incapable of presenting the group in action. With one exception, he makes them the subject-agent only of sentences that predicate their

security: "...we can be sure," "...we are free," "...we are thus safe," etc.

This protectiveness raises doubts that the writer could actually carry through Plan A--much less Plan B. Moreover, his bizarre use of the passive voice raises questions not only about his psychological stability but also about the existence of any group. After all the passivity implied by his stylistic choices, his statement that "We are a very disciplined group determined to see this through" seems paradoxical. He tries to bolster their image by insisting that "this is a very serious matter" that can "be a disaster for you and GE." But in the end, he still cannot directly confront or menace his target. He says that "you will be contacted," but he doesn't say by whom. He might have chosen this indirect, evasive approach on the principle that an unseen menace is more frightening. This possibility seems undercut by his willingness to talk directly about the group in a safe, free, secure context.

In its entirety, his stylistic performance implies that he has no group,<sup>2</sup> that he has invented the group because he believes there is strength in numbers, but that his basic insecurity, fear of confrontation, and inflexibility will keep him from carrying out the plan. He might actually send the vials out, but if there were any negotiation before he decided to do so, the character traits implied by his stylistic choices should make him fairly easy to throw off balance. Given the fear of losing control and the insecurity he manifests, I would guess that the mere strain of having nuclear material might begin to unnerve him fairly quickly.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Although this observation is hardly in the purview of a stylistic analysis, the amount the writer demands also argues against the existence of a group. Why would any large gang be willing to take the risks of stealing radioactive material, getting caught, and going to jail for \$100,000? Assuming that a "group" has to comprise at least three people, why would they take such high risks for \$33,000 each?

<sup>3</sup>Had I been aware that the material he had stolen presented no hazard for anyone handling it, I would not have made this conjecture.

## COMPARING THE CASE WITH THE ANALYSIS

### The Events in the Case

On Monday morning, January 29, 1979, Randall Alkema, manager of the General Electric nuclear fuel fabrication plant in Wilmington, North Carolina, found two envelopes on his desk, one containing the threat message and the other a vial of material. His secretary had put them there after finding them propped against the office door when she came to work.

This plant annually produces approximately 1000 metric tons of low-enriched uranium oxide pellets, which are placed in rods or bundles and used as nuclear reactor fuel. These pellets are stored in five gallon cans. The plant is licensed to enrich material up to 4 percent U-235, whereas uranium used for bombs is much more highly enriched. This material is more a chemically toxic material (like lead) than a radiological hazard. Consequently, the NRC had required a lower level of security for plants producing it than for facilities handling highly enriched material.

The NRC rated the G.E. plant's accountability system so highly that it required a full inventory check only once a year. However, the plant made spot checks for container identification, conducting an inventory at different areas every two weeks. Coincidentally, on the morning before Alkema found the envelopes on his desk, a spot check was conducted and two cans were missing. Although normal search procedures were put into effect immediately, the staff felt no particular alarm. Since they were handling between five and seven thousand cans, it was not unusual for a few cans to be temporarily misplaced within the immediate area.

After Alkema read the letter, he asked the Quality Control Manager to make discreet inquiries concerning the cans described. Within two hours, the latter verified that the cans described in the message were the same ones that the spot check had identified as missing and that they could not be found. Alkema did not believe that the extortionist had actually taken the cans off the premises. He decided not to comply with the demands and began by contacting the NRC office in Atlanta. The NRC, in turn, contacted the FBI, which sent two of its agents from the Wilmington region in an unmarked car to the plant.

While they were conferring with him and the G.E. management, Alkema received a call from the editor of a local paper, who had been given a copy of the letter and a vial of material. The editor was asked to bring both to the plant and to keep the story quiet. The FBI also placed an agent in Alkema's home and set up a tape recorder and a wire tap in case the extortionist tried to contact Alkema there. Meanwhile, the material was analyzed and finally identified positively as having come from the missing cans.

On the evening of January 30, Mrs. Alkema took a call for her husband, ostensibly from someone at the plant who needed to reach Alkema because there was a problem there. However, that person would not leave his name and said he would call back. Although the tape recorder malfunctioned, the wire tap worked, and the agents identified the origin of the call. The phone belonged to a Dr. Dale who was employed at the plant, but would not have any reason to call the plant manager. Moreover, his supervisor stated that Dr. Dale was a responsible, courteous person who would probably have been more polite to Mrs. Alkema, would have left his name, and would have called back. However, he also told the agents that Dr. Dale had a brother temporarily working at the plant but employed by the contractor who provided construction and maintenance services there.

Although this man had no police record, his history suggested a degree of instability that made the agents consider him a suspect. After an FBI handwriting expert confirmed that the printing on the suspect's job application form was the same as the printing in the threat message, agents arrested David L. Dale at the plant on the afternoon of February 1st. Dale confessed to the extortion attempt after only three hours of interrogation and also identified a construction site, about three miles from the plant, where he had hidden the containers. He was subsequently convicted on extortion charges and is serving a sentence in federal prison.

### How Accurate Was the Stylistic Analysis?

The analysis proved accurate on the following counts:

- The extortionist did have some higher education. David Dale holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami and was hired by the Daniel Construction Co. to work as a laboratory assistant at the G.E. facility.
- He had no group and was working alone.
- Like his "Plan A," his tactics in obtaining the containers indicated that he is analytical and strategy oriented.
- However, his actions after sending the letters and samples indicate that he is basically tentative and insecure, constraining and compulsive, magical in his thinking, and unable to handle confrontation.
- He tends to value plans inordinately, acting as if, once set in motion, a plan can control events and people, and he is not flexible enough to handle unforeseen contingencies or failures in a plan.

Although Dale has a bachelor's degree and was 39 at the time of the incident, he had evidently been unable to get his bearings in life. Before going to Wilmington, he had spent time in the Special Forces and then served as a boat captain in Puerto Rico and the Netherlands Antilles. It is unclear why he left that job, but when he came to Wilmington, all he had were debts and a desire to go to California. This fecklessness would seem inconsistent with his evident intelligence, awareness of current events and trends, and ability to analyze the psycho-social effects that his extortion plan could have. However, his behavior in the case suggests that these traits were characteristically overwhelmed by his basic tentativeness and insecurity. Magical thinking seems to have become his substitute for rational action.

Dale probably did not hatch his extortion plan on the spur of the moment. The FBI believes that he had thought about it for a while. When they searched his room, they found pamphlets, obtained from the plant, that provided information about plant operations and material on

the Clam Shell Alliance. They suspect that when he left the job he might have attempted the extortion to get enough money to buy a boat and go back into the charter boat business. However, he did have a more immediate and prosaic plan: to save enough every week during his temporary employment to pay his debts and finance his return to California.

Unfortunately, this plan hit a snag. In a meeting aimed at cutting costs, Alkema mentioned that the contractor seemed to have too many people on payroll. Consequently, the contractor planned some cost cutting of his own, and Dale's supervisor notified him that his job would end two or three weeks earlier than he had originally been told. Dale evidently perceived this as a breach of faith and a real setback to his plan and became quite angry. He brooded over this setback, convinced that he could not get another job to fill in the two weeks until he had completed his plan. On Friday night, January the 26th, he evidently decided to put the extortion plan in motion.

After having dinner and a few drinks with his girlfriend--during which he complained bitterly about his lack of money, he went back to the plant. Dale's job there was to construct a small model of a ceramic furnace using ceramic bricks. This job required that he use small specimens of the uranium oxide. Consequently, he had a badge giving him access during regular hours to the area where the material was stored. Moreover, he knew enough about the location of material, shifts, sign out procedures, guards' habits, and unusual circumstances (such as a malfunctioning lock and a gate that was temporarily wedged open) to get into the plant on Friday night, get the containers into his trunk, and drive right past the guards. He then hid the containers at the construction site, and before work on Monday, he was able to prop the envelopes against Alkema's office door.

Although this burglary required both planning and daring, what happened afterward bears out the conclusions of the stylistic analysis that Dale's basic insecurity and tentativeness underlie and undermine his attempts to control events through plans. Unlike more stable people, he is unable to adapt or to tolerate undesired or unforeseen contingencies. As a result, he retreats to magical thinking in which plans themselves take on autonomy and power to control both his and



others' actions. This kind of thinking evidently keeps him from applying his analytical capabilities once a plan is in motion. What he wants is what he believes, and he acts on that belief.

Such magical thinking and ego-morphism would explain why Dale put himself in jeopardy by not only calling Alkema, but calling from his brother's house. In the message, Dale stated:

If you make so much as an attempt to bring in the police (and we will know if you do) Plan B will be implemented automatically.

It is hard to imagine that Dale really believed he would know if Alkema called in the authorities. It is equally hard to imagine that the strategist of "Plan A" would not consider the possibility that Alkema would call them. If he considered that possibility, it is even harder to imagine that he could not predict that the phone would be tapped. Yet, his action suggests that he either wanted to be caught or had come to believe that the plan would constrain Alkema's actions.

After his arrest, Dale confessed to the attempt after only three hours of interrogation. He seems to have folded with the plan. This behavior accords with the stylistic analysis' conclusion that he would not handle confrontation very well.



## V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The preceding sections suggest that stylistic analysis can derive coherent personality sketches and might prove useful for behavioral assessment of nuclear threat messages. Further, because this methodology uses the definitions and analytical tools of literary and rhetorical criticism, it has potentially high inter-analyst agreement. These definitions and tools have been mastered and routinely used by thousands of literary and rhetorical researchers in their academic studies. Moreover, in analyzing the behavioral implications of characteristic style, these researchers make the same general assumptions that clinical psychologists make: that the individual's verbal behavior reflects his psychological nature.

Nevertheless, quite a lot of empirical research would be needed to demonstrate the validity of the technique and its operational usefulness. Most basically, it needs some adaptations to reflect the shift from literary work to life--and the special context of extortion. We need to know more about the generic nature of threat messages: Do they exhibit certain characteristic features, and what does the way an extortionist handles those features say about him? We also need to consider whether there are categories of self-presentation that make a threat seem more or less credible.

Stylistic analysis would be especially useful for nuclear threat analysis if empirical research could establish:

- a. that certain stylistic and tonal effects consistently correlate with certain levels of apparent technical and operational competence, and
- b. that certain stylistic patterns correlate consistently with particular psychological and emotional traits.

This list implies an extensive and complex research agenda, which might begin with a broader set of cases and more "blind trials."

However, as I have said repeatedly, such an effort is not within the

scope or mission of the present project. This exercise has merely tested the potential usefulness of stylistic analysis. It remains for further research to establish whether that potential can be realized.

## Appendix

### GLOSSARY OF STYLISTIC TEXT FEATURES

In discussing style, the candidate features are legion. This glossary is limited to those features that have actually appeared in threat messages often enough to merit discussion. Consequently, the list is relatively short and tentative. For convenience's sake, I have grouped the definitions in four categories: grammatical features, syntactic features, diction, and figurative language. For further clarification, each definition is illustrated with an example from the threat messages.

#### GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

Grammatical features reflect the structural relationships (among words, phrases, and clauses) that generate meaning in a language. While most of the features we identify are descriptive, grammar also includes the conventions that govern "correct" use of language.

##### Simple Sentence

The simple sentence has a single main clause, although it may have a compound subject or a compound verb:

- These bombs will explode at 7:00 p.m.

##### Complex Sentence

A complex sentence has one main clause and two or more subordinate clauses. The subordinate clause can have a variety of logical, grammatical, and rhetorical relationships to the main clause:

- If the Amchitka blast takes place, the Manhattan device will be exploded by a remote device.

### Compound and Compound-Complex Sentences

A compound sentence has two or more main clauses:

- We would rather drop the bomb on Hanoi but we have no means to do it.

A compound-complex sentence has two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses:

- If you never admit it, then no crime is reported, and we are free from any possible consequence.

### Compound Modifier

Modifiers range from single adjectives to complex relative clauses. They stand in various grammatical relationships to the entities they modify. They describe or limit the meaning of a word or group of words. The compound modifier includes two or more modifying elements.

- The "cover" for the committee is incredibly *square and straight*.
- The bombs were originally intended for use against other *paranoid, repressive* nations...

### Passive Voice

In clauses using the passive voice, the subject is acted upon rather than acting; the agent is omitted or placed after the subject.

- A sample of the plutonium-oxide is hidden in the old yellow cab building...
- I have been instructed by a member of the Committee...

### Active Voice

In clauses using the active voice, the subject acts.

- We have secreted a low-yield nuclear bomb in San Francisco.

### Expletive

Clauses using expletives begin with "it" or "there," putting the subject after the verb:

- There will be bombs placed on each of these airlines...

### Imperatives and Functional Imperatives

Imperatives issue commands. The standard imperative is created by direct address, that is, by omitting the personal pronoun "you."

- Do not try to find the bomb.
- Immediately contact American Airlines.

Functional imperatives also issue commands, but instead of using direct address, the writer phrases his command as a predictive assertion.

- Each airline is to place in a strong canvas bag one million dollars.
- ALL FINANCIAL POWERS OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO WILL HALT SUPPORT...

### Solecism

For economy's sake, I have not distinguished among all the kinds of grammatical error.<sup>1</sup> Rather, I identify most ungrammatical constructions as "solecisms":

- It is safely held, and is connected to phone lines, *in order to detonate it from any point on the globe.*
- Our organization now has seven atomic bombs...which we made ourselves with *artificial made* uranium.
- ...Just to clear any doubts you may have about *us using a* nuclear bomb...
- ...if there *is any radio transmitters, dusting powder, tear gas...*

## SYNTACTICAL FEATURES

I am distinguishing between syntactical and grammatical features on the basis of convention: Grammatical features reflect the conventions that govern coherent and "correct" relationships among words, phrases, and clauses. A writer may violate them, willfully or otherwise, and still make sense. However, as the examples of solecisms show, his alternative structures are, nevertheless, unconventional and incorrect. Syntactical features represent a range of alternative structures that the writer may use and still observe grammatical conventions.

### Periodic Sentence

The periodic sentence is usually lengthy and complex and holds back its main point until the end:

- After an additional 48 hours during which we will count, examine, and test the money for any identifying characteristics, chemical or otherwise, the uranium will be returned to Wilmington.

### Embedding

Embedding is placing intervening phrases or clauses between grammatical elements that are directly related, e.g., between subject and verb, verb and object.

- A committee of five...is now assembling in [a] quiet dwelling in Manhattan a nuclear device

### Delayed Predication

Here, the writer chooses to elaborate on the subject of the main clause considerably before revealing the verb (this strategy is typical of periodic sentences):

- For this to happen after years of assurances that uranium stocks were secure from terrorists will convince many...

### Loose Sentence

This term describes an extended sentence that makes its main point at the beginning (or the middle) and then modifies it.

- The dynamite is exploded by a clock that I've set to run only 2 hours a day by using one of those little lamp timers.

### Belated Intensifier

The writer uses an intensifying expression after, rather than during, the discussion to which it pertains.

- Whether [this warning] is taken seriously does not matter. The point is, it sure as hell will be taken seriously after the New York blast goes off.

### Functional Ellipsis

This kind of ellipsis differs from argumentative ellipsis, which leaves propositions or assumptions unspoken. In functional ellipsis, the writer omits idiomatic or grammatical elements in constructions.

- Any following aircraft, we call off the deal and start blowing planes.
- New industry shall be brought in to replace.

### Ambiguous Modifier

This feature does not strictly violate grammatical conventions governing modifiers: That is, the implied subject of the modifier must be the same as the subject of the main clause. However, where the writer places the modifier makes its subject unclear.

- LIGHTFORCE exposes the domination of an energy machine over human freedom *willed by the corporate criminals.*

### Mixed Construction

The sentence begins with one kind of construction and ends with another, but the relation between the two is not clear:

- The Clamshell Alliance and other groups will receive a big boost to morale and *spur on to demonstration, recruit members and be a stronger force than before...*

### DICTION

Diction is most simply defined as word choice. As the writer chooses (or fails to choose) his words carefully, he also often reveals his attitudes toward his subject, himself, his intentions, and his world. Consequently, consistency in diction can create a tone and imply a stance in a message.

### Dysphemism

This feature uses exaggerated terms to put the person, place, idea, organization, etc., in the worst light possible, often through metaphor:

- LIGHTFORCE repudiates *the corporate mainpulation* of personal energy by *fascist technology.*



- The bombs...were originally intended for use against other *paranoid, repressive states*. But as a result of the *criminally sadistic action* of Khomeini and his *degenerate* followers...

### Cliche

Cliches are expressions that have been worn out with use. They may be adjective-noun phrases ("towering peaks"), metaphors ("back to square one"), or other kinds of figures ("cool as a cucumber"), many of which originally had fresh expressive force.

- If our demands are not met *you can kiss Lincoln goodbye*.
- ...just check up on this info, *it's all bonafide*.
- He will then call the airlines and *give the all clear*.
- Keep someone available as *time is of the essence*.
- Your *time is running out fast*.

### Jargon

The writer uses language (especially arcane language) peculiar to a particular science, academic discipline, profession, or other sub-culture.

- LIGHTFORCE guards a six kilogram "strategic" quantity of the exploding biocide plutonium 239, an alpha emitter toxic in the lung, with a radioactive half-life of 24,000 years.
- Aircraft - Cessna 182 or equivalent.  
Plane rigged for shute drop.  
Plane is to be spotted in front of lounge at TWA departure at 16:00 hours.  
Indicated air speed 100 miles per hour.  
Small drag shute and blinking light attached to bag...

### Violated Idiom

Idioms are expressions established by usage and are peculiar to particular languages. In English, idiom often dictates what prepositions may be used after which verbs or nouns. It also governs other possible word combinations. I categorize "violated idiom" here, rather than under grammatical features, because idioms are not governed by grammatical conventions.

- ...we will initiate preparations *toward* the bombing of your oil storage and refinery facilities.
- There will be absolutely no publicity *of* this matter.
- This bag is to be marked *as to* the airlines name.
- The bombs *in mention* were originally intended...

### Malapropism

Here, the writer chooses the wrong word for the semantic context. Often, the correct word is very close in form or sound:

- Our tacticals *willfully* die as a result of their exposure.
- We have *contacted* cancer in the handling [of this substance].

### Redundancy

The writer qualifies a word or phrase in a manner that anticipates or restates its meaning:

- One million dollars *cash* in small bills...
- ...no chance *at all*.
- There is one way and *one way only* that this can be avoided.
- ...any plans of a *mass* exodus...will not be tolerated.

### **Repetition**

The writer uses the same word or phrase again and again. For example, in the LIGHTFORCE message discussed under Imitation, "corporate" is almost a verbal tic for the writer.

### **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Figurative language denotes the nonliteral ways of conveying meaning. I have included syntactic figures, substantive figures, and even punctuational figures in this category. In all cases, these figures generate more meaning and have a greater effect than the semantic content of the language can explain. Virtually all speakers use some figurative language, but not all writers do. It occurs more naturally in literature (especially poetry) than in other writing.

Because figurative language represents a fusion of rational and imaginative cognition, these text features have more ambiguous psychological implications than the others.

### **Chiasmus**

In this classical (rhetorical) figure, the two parts of a sentence (or a pair of sentences) have parallel but reversed structure and sense:

- Reason has failed, so now we must resort to force.

### **Isocolon**

In this figure, phrases of equal length and corresponding structure are repeated:

- We have marched and rallied, waited and hoped, pleaded and begged, all to no avail.

### **Anaphora**

The writer creates this figure by beginning a series of phrases, clauses, or sentences with the same word:

- LIGHTFORCE proclaims....LIGHTFORCE repudiates....LIGHTFORCE exposes....LIGHTFORCE sentences....LIGHTFORCE represents....[these are the opening words of the sentences in a single paragraph].

### Paradox

In paradox, the writer yokes two evidently contradictory concepts to create a counterintuitive "truth":

- LIGHTFORCE represents the *moral righteousness of equal violence*...
- From those materials, I have buil[t] a "*good*" bomb.

### Metonymy

In this figure, the writer uses the name of one thing for that of another with which it is associated:

- The *blood of New York* is then on the hands of the AEC...
- LIGHTFORCE sentences the fascist offenders to *poison of their own design*.

### Synecdoche

This figure is like metonymy but uses a part of something to signify the whole or vice versa:

- We have filled books with reasonable discussion...still, *piles of bombs* grow higher.

### Irony

The traditional definition of irony is saying the opposite of what one means or describing something in evidently inappropriate terms:

- ...Manhattan real estate will go up in a *beautiful mushroom cloud*.

- If you think this is a joke, then *we can all laugh together while Brussels and Chicago burn.*

### Allusion

In allusion, the writer recalls a real or fictional event, person, or place or a proverb, catch phrase, epigram, poetic line, scriptural quotation, etc., to characterize, qualify, or intensify his meaning:

- This is no *Orson Welles publicity stunt.*
- ...do not let a new *Pearl Harbor* occur.

### Metaphor

A metaphor is an implicit comparison between two, often unlike, things, created by describing or naming one entity or action in terms of another:

- ...to *wrest our freedom from the vise-tightening oppressors.*
- We insist the corporate fascists identify this *quintessential gem of power* as their *weapon of controlled execution.*
- We have watched the arms race *spiral out of control.*

### Mixed Metaphor

In a mixed metaphor, the terms of the implicit comparison are illogical or contradict one another

- Each tactical carries a half kilogram plutonium explosion device designed to release vast quantities of...carcinogens *into the lungs of the corporate atmosphere.*

### Alliteration

Alliteration is one of the figures that employs sound to intensify meaning. It is the repetition of the same initial letter(s) in a series of words or accented syllables:

- ...as permanent punishment for unpardonable crimes.
- I am not acting in affiliation with any anti-nuclear organization.

### Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is an assertion phrased interrogatively, strictly for effect. In verbal exchange, the speaker expects no answer.

- Four aircraft should be worth four million, don't you think?

### Rhetorical Punctuation

Punctuation would not ordinarily be considered under figurative language. However, in threat messages, the writers frequently use punctuation to enhance, intensify, or qualify meaning.

- ...this warning is not a "crank" letter...we are an organized "brotherhood."
- From those materials, I have buil[t] a "good" bomb.
- Rest assured that we mean business and any plans of...evacuation of the city will not be tolerated!!!
- ALL FINANCIAL POWERS OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO WILL HALT SUPPORT AND COMMENCE OPPOSITION TO ATOMIC POWER BEFORE MEMORIAL DAY 1974.

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