



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S3. The Cognitive Turn in Literary Studies and its Use in Practical Interpretation

Wednesday 30 August: 2.30-4.30pm

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In recent years we have witnessed an enormous expansion of attention to cognition in literary studies to the point where people now talk about a “cognitive turn”. In the seminar, we will explore what this cognitive “way of thinking” about literary texts means in practical terms. We will deal with such cognitive-poetic topics as profiling (the figure-ground opposition), prototypes, metaphors and conceptual blending, cognitive or cultural models, contextual frames and schemas, cognitive deixis and grammar, the management of text worlds, the affective dimension of literary texts, etc. Participants will concentrate on the practical application of these cognitive concepts in the interpretation of texts.

The Real in the Unreal: Mimesis and Postmodern American Fiction

Bo Pettersson (University of Helsinki)

This paper aims to contribute to the hermeneutic dimension of cognitive literary studies by studying how mimesis is established in fiction. More particularly, it argues that the representational dimension of postmodern American fiction has largely been neglected. This is due partly to an exaggerated valuing of experimental, fantastic and metafictional features in postmodern American fiction and partly to the concomitant critical discrediting of realist fiction. This in turn has to do with the fact that the semantic field of the concept of mimesis has been narrowed to ‘imitation’. By broadening the view of the cognitive operation of establishing fictional representation, I claim that we could better understand the real in the unreal of postmodern American fiction by authors as diverse as Donald Barthelme, Toni Morrison and Thomas Pynchon.

“Slipping and sliding to a new adjustment”: the Cognition of Past and Future Worlds in Tales of Time Travel

Susanne Reichl (University of Vienna)

The cognitive turn in the humanities has drawn attention to how readers experience text, but also to the way characters in texts experience and understand their fictional environment. Cognitive disorientation occurs when there is an incongruence of perception and memory, or in other words, when the conventional modes of

understanding fail in the face of the unknown and the puzzling. Tales of time travel, to the future and to the past, present such a situation, in which a character is thrust, with more or less control over and knowledge about what is happening, into an entirely different contextual frame. In the case of travels to the past, time travellers usually have some sort of historical knowledge, whereas the traveller to the future enters new territory altogether.

This paper will investigate problem-solving strategies, hypothesis-building, frame-management and strategies of cognitive orientation in stories of time travel, as well as the substitution of metaphors of space for relations of time. The time traveller, as my paper will demonstrate, faces the ultimate cognitive challenge in his/her new surroundings, and time travel narratives therefore present the perfect testing ground for cognitive studies as an approach to literary texts.

Texts discussed will be the time travel “classics,” H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895), from which the quote above is taken, and Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), as well as two recent novels, Audrey Niffenegger’s *The Time Traveller’s Wife* (2004) and Marianne Mancusi’s *A Connecticut Fashionista in King Arthur’s Court* (2005).

Malachi Whitacker’s Short Story *Hannah*: an Empirical Survey of Reader Responses

Margarete Rubik (University of Vienna)

The three page story centres on a young girl preparing a party, which will be attended by a boy she likes and another one favoured by her mother. At this point the story breaks off. To find out what frames readers use to decode and what kind of projections they make students were asked to comment on the story in speak-aloud protocols as they went along and to predict how the story will end. The last paragraphs show Hannah as an old, demented woman who has evidently forgotten her marriage to the unloved suitor and signs her forms with the romantic lover’s name.

First results show that students show a high degree of reliance on text frames rather than world frames (which indicates a high degree of “indoctrination” through literary studies). Expectations were predominantly conditioned by reading experiences -not by world schemata of parties and young love but by text schemata about usual short story plots.

Narrative Structuring of Emotional Response: Theoretical and Practical Approaches

Howard Sklar (University of Helsinki)

Researchers in narratology, discourse processing, cognitive psychology and other disciplines have suggested that specific textual features can influence readers’ responses to works of fiction. In this presentation, I will look at some of the textual features that may have an effect, particularly, on readers’ emotional experiences while reading stories. First, I will outline a variety of narrative techniques that I believe structure, in a number of ways, readers’ emotional responses. With this background in mind, I then will examine some of those techniques in practice in “The Hammer Man”, a short story by Toni Cade Bambara. Finally, I will consider the accuracy of my claims by reviewing the

results of my own empirical study involving adolescent readers and their responses to Bambara's story. I hope to show that, by combining narratological analysis with cognitive-empirical research, we can gain a clearer perspective both on fictional texts themselves and on the ways in which they actually operate on readers' emotions.

The Image of Queen Elizabeth I as Created in English Renaissance Religious-Political Pamphlets

Nataliya Torkut & Kateryna Vasylyna (Zaporizhzhya State University, Ukraine)

The paper deals with the analysis of semantic representations of Elizabeth Tudor's image in early Elizabethan religious-political pamphlets. It is stressed that the new monarch was perceived by her subjects rather ambiguously. This can be proved by the textual analysis of pamphlets by Knox and Aylmer, which present a controversy over the dilemma of women in power and depict the problem with subjectivity and vehemence peculiar to the pamphlet matter. Singling out binary oppositions, the authors of the paper study the process of nourishing a traditional female image with distinctly male traits and producing a positive metaphor of the new ruler.