



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S47. Emotion, Language and Literature

Tuesday 29 August: 4.30-6.30pm

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This seminar will focus on emotions, especially on ways of applying the insights of affective neuroscience and cognitive linguistics to the study of literature. We will focus on such questions as: What is the relationship between emotions and cognition in literary creation and response? What is the relationship between the language we use to conceptualize emotions and the stories we tell, hear and read to evoke, regulate and modify emotions? Can we create a theory of feelings in literary response able to take into account phonological, syntactic/semantic, and narrative aspects along with evolutionary, social, cultural, historical and gender issues?

“Rich notes to each sensation fitting”: Towards a Theory of Rhythmic Articulation and Gesture in Poetry

Joseph Flanagan (University of Helsinki)

In this paper, I want to explore how rhythm broadly defined can lend a poem expressive emotional import. First, I will define “rhythm” as the way a poem organizes time. Then, I will draw a comparison between a poem’s temporal organization and Manfred Clynes’s notion of “sentic forms” – the durational energy patterns of growth and decay – that characterize particular emotional states. I will then consider whether the perceived resemblance between the two can be responsible for a poem’s affective power and ask whether poetic rhythm can characterize particular emotions or only general moods.

“I will speak daggers to her, but use none” (Hamlet, III.ii): Notes on the metaphorical construction of emotional pain in literature

José L. Oncins-Martínez (University of Extremadura)

This paper explores the role of metaphor in the linguistic construction of emotional pain in literature, and more specifically in Shakespeare’s plays. It draws mainly on the cognitive-linguistic theory of metaphor, a model frequently and fruitfully used for analysing the linguistic organization of other abstract areas of experience, both in literary and non-literary language. It also takes account of recent research in the field of

neuroscience that suggests reciprocal relationships between physical and emotional pain, based on common neural systems.

Attribution Theory and Emotions

Alan Palmer (Independent Scholar)

Fictional narrative is, in essence, the description of mental functioning. In particular, the emotions experienced by characters in novels are central to our understanding of those novels. However, characters' emotions are generally absent from narrative theory. I suggest that we begin the task of theorising fictional emotion by applying to it some of the work that has been done on emotions in real minds by social, cognitive and discursive psychologists, philosophers, psycholinguists and cognitive scientists. I illustrate some of this work by asking four very general questions about a short passage from Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Mirroring Emotion: From Neuroscience to Literature

Ruth Parkin-Gounelas (Aristotle University, Thessaloniki)

Whereas the Kantian-Lyotardian definition of the sublime describes emotion as both subjective and incommensurate with the conceptual structures available to understanding, an alternative view, which I shall call "emotion as mirroring", has come to occupy a central place in psychological and neuroscientific thought. Using an interdisciplinary approach which traverses developmental psychology, object-relations psychoanalysis and phenomenological philosophy, this paper will attempt to explore affect as a social event (a response to an object), a view which has received recent endorsement from the neuroscientific discovery of "mirror neurons". It will conclude with a literary paradigm.

Thinking and Feeling: Mimesis and the Pleasures of Reading in A.S. Byatt's Novels

Merja Polvinen (University of Helsinki)

Instead of the empathic emotions experienced by a reader who engages in the lives of fictional characters, my paper will focus on the emotions inherent in the more abstract cognitive functions of reading. How does it feel to think, to realise, to comprehend? How is that feeling described in literature? How does a literary work induce that feeling? I will ground this discussion, firstly, on the concept of mimesis and, secondly, on cognitive-evolutionary theories of language development. I will also use these theories to illuminate the way the intellectual pleasure of reading appears in A.S. Byatt's novels.

Towards an Integrated Perspective on Emotions and Fiction

Howard Sklar (University of Helsinki)

Recent empirical evidence indicates the powerful effects that fiction can have in generating empathic or sympathetic response, and suggests the possible role that these emotions can play in stimulating what Robert Coles has called "the moral imagination." I will examine the ways in which the investigation of these claims can be enhanced by

greater interdisciplinary cooperation, including the clarification across disciplines of key terms related to emotions. I also will discuss my own empirical studies of emotions and fiction, and suggest some of the implications that I believe this research will have for the integration that I have described.