Explanation, Interpretation, and Close Reading: The Progress of Cognitive Poetics

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In the unfolding history of a new approach to the study of literature, the appearance of introductory textbooks marks a kind of milestone, for it suggests that the approach has managed to reach an important threshold of scholarly use. A complex theoretical apparatus has been worked through in writing by scholars to the point that the most generally accessible and usable core of concepts has emerged. A textbook both proves that theory has already become understandable and fruitful for a significant audience and serves to recruit more people into that audience. Cognitive literary studies, which brings various kinds of cognitive scientific study to bear on the nature of the literary, appears to have reached such a point with the publication of two companion books: *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* and *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*. Because these two books present themselves as textbooks, we must consider them somewhat differently than we would their predecessors in the relatively brief history of cognitive literary studies. They do not differ from other writing in the field simply by their focus on application. We have other examples of application already, including two earlier numbers of *Poetics Today* (23:1, 24:2) as well as book-length studies (e.g., Crane 2001;

Spolsky 2001; Hogan 2003, 2004; for a fine annotated bibliography of both cognitive and evolutionary-psychological studies of literature, visit Alan Richardson's Web page, www2.bc.edu/~richarad/lcb/bib/annot.html; for the most recent and thorough overview of the relevant interdisciplinary issues, see Sternberg 2003a, 2003b). Rather, these introductory texts establish their significance in the *way* they present concepts and applications. They do not, for instance, feel the need to argue in typical scholarly detail for the validity of their concepts, nor to survey critically the field of already existing, competing theories, nor to confront in rigorous detail the kinds of critical objections that can always be raised against new theories. To concentrate on these kinds of issues would be to write a scholarly book on theory rather than a textbook on theory.

But other issues become relevant to a textbook on theory that would not be so relevant to a scholarly monograph on theory. And this brings us to the issue of practice. There are two primary, closely related, but distinct audiences in relation to which a literary-theory textbook or introduction must be judged: professional literary scholars who are not already involved with the theory and college-level students of literature. After all, there's no great need to make concepts and applications clear to a scholar who already knows them. So, as I read these two books, I want always to consider whether they are books that I would recommend to a fellow literary scholar who wants an introduction to cognitive poetics or that I myself would use in a college literature class. To my mind, the truly bottom-line audience must be college students, if only because the immense majority of literary scholars are teachers of those students. Now, the near-universal, primary aim in making theories accessible to college students is to produce understanding of concepts as a means of producing literary-interpretive applications. This fact is backed up by a large wealth of college literature anthologies and introductory theory textbooks, nearly all of which begin by one way or another raising the issue of why theory should have anything to do with literary study in the first place and then go on to show how theories can be a productive means of writing interpretations of actual literary texts. The act of interpretation, then, is a kind of sine qua non in the teaching of literature on the college level.

But of course, the definition of *interpretation*, like my other key term in what follows—*explanation*—is difficult, maybe impossible to nail down. I will mean interpretation in its most common sense, as it has been used throughout human history, concerning dreams and religious texts, for instance, and as I take it to be most typically used in the classroom setting: the act of engaging critically and imaginatively with, at least, the words of a literary text in such a way as to produce an understanding of the mean-

ing of the text as a whole. Obviously, all of my keywords here—critically, imaginatively, understanding, meaning—can be easily picked apart. Obviously, too, I appear to be invoking the tenets of the New Criticism. But in fact, my definition only brings in the basic method of close reading, which as a skill need not itself be constrained by the aims of the New Criticism as a literary school. We will return to this idea below. For now, my definition of interpretation reasonably defines the common goal of teaching literature to students. I take that goal as paradigmatic because it is in the classroom that, to one degree or another, scholarly complexity must be democratized, made accessible and useful to the average, nonscholarly person. I certainly do not claim that any given research must in itself have an immediate use in the classroom; but for scholar-teachers in the classroom, whether we like it or not (I do), such use must be the bottom-line, common proving ground for ideas that are relevant to humanity in general. *Explanation*, my other key term, will become clearer as we go; for now it will be synonymous with *poetics* and will be the term for laying out the nature of literature or of the act of reading, as opposed to laying out the meaning of some particular text (interpretation).

In the original *Poetics*, Aristotle systematically presents the necessary elements of good tragedy. After thinking seriously about a wide array of specific cases, he has sifted out the indispensable elements common to all, has directly defined each element, and has organized all the elements into a rough hierarchy of importance. Along the way he does not fail to illustrate the elements by way of specific examples. A poetics after this model will typically be overtly theorizing what has been going on, untheorized, in literary practice. Aristotle makes no direct mention of whether or how his theories and terms might lead to interpretations of specific works, nor is there any necessity that he should. But whether or not Aristotle specifically deals with interpretation, his explanations, like all versions of poetics, suggest an interpretive practice simply in the way it uses literary examples to demonstrate its theoretical points. This will also be true, for instance, of later poetics as various as, say, Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1975), or Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the novel in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), or Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).

With Aristotle as our model, then, we can conclude that no given poetics need necessarily make a case for an interpretive utility of its theories. And yet, if we are presenting a textbook version of a theory of poetics, then the issue of interpretation is always waiting in the wings. Our companion textbook volumes, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* and *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, well illustrate this point.

Strictly speaking, Peter Stockwell's *Introduction* is to be read first, because

Joanna Gavin and Gerard Steen's *In Practice* "aims to demonstrate at a more advanced level [than his book] what cognitive poetics may look like in actual academic practice" (Gavins and Steen 1). But I do not really find it to be the case that *In Practice* is the more advanced. Further, its position on interpretation will set the stage for my discussion, so I begin with that volume.

In its introductory chapter, we find a long quote from Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), in which he attacks the nineteen-seventies literary-critical status quo as rather mindlessly bound to interpretation and makes the case for a new kind of literary study, namely structuralism, which will be a poetics. As a poetics, structuralism will not be "primarily interpretive." It will not be, as Gavins and Steen say, "a criticism which discovers or assigns meanings" (5). Culler, in his publishing career (1975, 1981, 1982, 1997), has regularly addressed the difference between poetics and interpretation, or what he elsewhere comes to call hermeneutics. Gavins and Steen, then, are wise to pull him in as a theoretical support. And they are quite right to claim that "by 'poetics' Culler means an encompassing and systematic *theory* of literature, which may or may not be applied in practical criticism as the scholarly interpretation . . . of individual texts" (6).

Presumably, Culler is also a good model for them because of the success of his call for a poetics. If we look back especially to "Beyond Interpretation" (Culler 1981: 3–17), he was downright prophetic about what would become the new status quo of the eighties. (There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that Gavins and Steen are now invoking Culler's take on poetics in order to disrupt the very status quo that Culler himself helped bring into existence.) Culler's ideas are then linked with one of the best-known theorizers of cognitive literary study, Mark Turner. In his book *Reading Minds*, which has become a sort of manifesto for cognitive literary studies, Turner (1991: 5) attacks the late-eighties literary-critical status quo or what he calls "our elite Disney World for literary critics." In its place, Turner offers a new cognitive-based theory of literature and literary study, which is to say a poetics. His discussions in that book pointedly do "not consist of 'giving' and 'arguing for' 'readings'" of specific texts (Gavins and Steen 6). Taking this to an extreme, Gavins and Steen conclude that "[modern] poetics" in general has fully incorporated the idea of the "eventually incompatible aims of interpretation versus explanation" (7). Cognitive poetics, according to them, will take up this same theoretical stance with respect to the issue of interpretation. So, given the title (*In Practice*), we must expect to encounter some form of practical applications but not interpretations.

As for Peter Stockwell, he states outright that his *Introduction* is a "textbook" and so will require a certain amount of schematizing or simplification

"in order to present complex ideas in a way that is accessible and useable" (6). His goal is to "capture the practical nature and value of cognitive poetics as an essentially *applied* form of exploration" (10). In his opening chapter, he considers two most likely uses of a cognitive poetics, and right away we see that, unlike Gavins and Steen, he does not situate himself against interpretation. I quote the following passage at length because in it we encounter two primary kinds of application that Stockwell will reject in the process of arriving at his own preferred version. The "status of the findings of cognitive poetic . . . exploration," Stockwell writes, is in debate:

> On the one hand you could argue that readers reach a primary interpretation before any analytical sense is made apparent. The purpose of a cognitive poetic analysis would then be to rationalize and explain how that reader reached that understanding on that occasion. In this perspective, cognitive poetics has no predictive power, and cannot in itself produce interpretations. The advantage of this view is that the readings themselves, if held honestly, can only be argued against by reference to the common currency of the cognitive poetic framework and its terminology: it means the discussion can continue systematically on the basis of a common language. . . . An alternative view would suggest that the process of engaging in cognitive poetic analysis offers a raised awareness of certain patterns that might have been subconscious or not even noticed at all. Cognitive poetics in this view has a productive power in at least suggesting a new interpretation.   (7)

The first view proposes that, rather than enabling new interpretations of texts, cognitive poetics would provide a set of terms to explain how any given, already achieved understanding of a text has occurred. Because those terms come from established operations of human cognition, we would have a definitive baseline ("common currency") against which to judge a given interpretation, much in the way we have baselines for blood pressure or cholesterol. A key word here is "systematically." As I have argued in an earlier number of *Poetics Today* (Jackson 2003), by the standards of systematicity that we normally expect of scientific kinds of explanations, no current literary theory would pass muster; and since cognitive poetics involves "the excitement of connecting scientific principles with a love of literature" (Stockwell 11), we can assume Stockwell means "systematically" in a scientific sense. Later in the book he is much more explicit about this issue. Cognitive poetics "offers a grounding of critical theory in a philosophical position that is scientific in the modern sense: aiming for an account of natural phenomena (like reading) that represents our current best understanding while always being open to falsifiability and a better explanation" (59). This means that, unlike other current theory, cognitive poetics "avoids the trap of circularity by deriving analytical methods not from within literary reading but from fields of linguistics and psychology" (ibid.). Making a

wise rhetorical choice not to be overly contentious, Stockwell never attacks any specific contemporary theory, but he makes his point clear nonetheless: scientific systematicity will be of fundamental importance to cognitive poetics.

In the second view, the theory would identify elements of cognitive work that must subconsciously underlie a given act of reading. I do not see how this differs substantially from the first version. How could you identify subconscious cognitive operations except against some established norm or baseline? And, for that matter, why would you need a cognitive poetics at all unless you were revealing or making conscious what has heretofore been going on un- or subconsciously? So the first view would have to involve this as well. As for this second use "suggesting a new interpretation," Stockwell does not give an example. The only possibilities I can imagine are the kinds of readings he will himself do in this book, so I am not clear about how he distinguishes the present case from his own uses later.

Having laid out these two versions of cognitive poetic practice, Stockwell goes on to explain why they are unacceptable in his view. The first version has the problem of being an "infinitely open and non-predictive framework, which in allowing any interpretation at all, ends up being a model of nothing very substantial" (7). This statement reveals that Stockwell wants to institute a sense of there being right and wrong interpretations of texts and that a poetics needs to have built into it some reasonable means of making such judgments. If not, his new theory will be too much like the currently reigning theories, in which it can appear, from the scientific perspective, that any interpretation goes.

The second version turns out to have the opposite consequences. It "seems to suggest some interpretations are only available to analysts who have a knowledge of cognitive poetics. This has the unfortunate consequence of implying that prior interpretations were faulty and only cognitively aware analyses are valid," and therefore the theory is "highly limiting and deterministic" (ibid.). With this, we find an important awareness of a major objection to any interdisciplinary literary study involving anything like scientific method. If, as Stockwell writes, he is establishing a "new science of literature and reading" (11), then not only "prior" but *any* other nonscientific interpretation may be seen as "faulty," if not outright groundless. The other nonscientific theories will, in fact, be seen as simply disguised versions of the object of study, which is what he means by analytical methods derived "from within literary reading," mentioned above. Scientific claims in general carry such a unique and powerful weight that they will tend automatically to undercut the authority of any other kinds of interpretation. Rightly or wrongly, this fact produces an immediate resistance

in many scholars of the humanities. And Stockwell, to his credit, is at least trying to defuse this resistance right here at the beginning.

Stockwell now provides a third direction, one that he sees as the right way to go. Cognitive poetics "models the process by which intuitive interpretations are formed into expressible meanings, and it presents the same framework as a means of describing and accounting for those readings" (8). We have, then, "intuitive interpretations," which, after Stockwell's own definition, I take to be more or less immediate, nonanalytical understandings of a text. And then that purely intuitive response gets transformed into something that can be said or written: that is, a fully conscious, expressible meaning. Thus cognitive poetics will provide a scientific model of how readers make meaning of the words on the page. But if this is to be scientific, it is hard to see how it substantially differs from the rejected theories mentioned above. As far as I can tell, the only way this could be scientific is if it begins with some empirically established, more or less universal cognitive operations that, again, must underlie all acts of literary reading; and then these averages or norms or baselines would be used as a means of explaining how a given, actual expressed meaning must have been reached. The same theory would also be used "as a means of describing and accounting for" the expressed meanings. So I take it that cognitive poetics would explain *how*, given certain unconscious cognitive operations, intuitions are formed into expressed meanings; and then it would also explain *what* that meaning is ("describing" its nature) as compared to the baseline established by the theory and offer some explanation of *why* ("accounting for") that meaning happened rather than the baseline meaning. I do not see how the issue of determinism can be avoided in this version of the theory; but we may now leave that issue aside and turn to actual examples of practice.

To take Stockwell's *Introduction* first, we find that he has done a fine job of isolating major concepts and terms within the still-consolidating discipline of cognitive poetics. He sorts out the ten most established concepts—figure/ground; prototypes; cognitive deixis; cognitive grammar; scripts and schemata; discourse worlds; conceptual metaphor; parable; text worlds; comprehension—in separate chapters, defines each in an accessible way, and then applies the concepts directly to literary examples. But precisely in this last activity we come upon a recurring problem in the practical applications of cognitive poetics. The problem is one that, again to his credit, Stockwell acknowledges in the introductory chapter, where he writes that at times cognitive poetics "might seem to be no more than recasting old ideas with new labels." To his mind, this is not so bad, because "new labels force us to conceptualize things differently" (6). This will certainly need to be the effect if the textbooks are to recruit new scholars to the interdiscipline. But

in the chapter on figures and grounds, for instance, when we look at his first actual examples—a series of literary titles and then a series of quoted passages from drama, prose, and poetry—we find new terms that do not really force a significantly new conceptualization, and the result is that he seems to be revealing the obvious, at least to fellow literary scholars.

Like so many of the concepts of cognitive poetics in both of these books, the figure/ground distinction is established by analogy with the psychology of visual cognition. We take the empirically established facts of the process of seeing and transfer them analogically to the process of reading literature. (To me, this basic move seems reasonable enough, but I have to wonder how really scientific it can be.) In the figure/ground discussion, he explains how "image schemas" in the mind work in the operation of distinguishing figure from ground. A key kind of verbal image schema is "locative expressions," and these are often "expressed with prepositions that can be understood as image schemas" (16). This can help us understand actual literary language. For example, the prepositions or image schemata in titles such as *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Out of Africa*, and *The Voyage Out* all "involve a dynamic movement, or at least a final resting position resulting from a movement" (ibid.). I am not sure who would need to be told this, but just this is the application of the terms to the titles. We can further classify image schemata in relation to prepositions. In the "OVER image schema, the moving figure can be seen to follow a **path** above the ground. Within the image schema, though, the element that is the figure is called the **trajector** and the element it has a grounded relationship with is called the **landmark**" (ibid.). Here, certainly, are new labels for old ideas. But what of their use? To cite just one: from a Raymond Carver story, "Your Dog Dies," we have the quoted example: "it gets run over by a van." The explanation? "The trajector (van) crushes the landmark (your dog)" (17). There are six other examples with exactly the same kind of application.

Shortly after this, Stockwell brings in more terms, this time by analogy with psychological findings having to do with "attention in the visual field." We have "attractors" for devices that hold attention in the text and "inhibition of return" for loss of attention. How, given these terms, do we apprehend the "rich complex" of literary language? Our attention's "'spotlight' moves depending on which object is the most interesting: textually, which is placed in the most focus, or has the majority of text-space allocated to it, or is expressed with the most noticeably deviant words or phrases." Then, as if going out on a theoretical limb, Stockwell says: "I would like to suggest that inhibition of return is overcome . . . primarily by action, by clear and explicit character development, and by strikingly deviant style" (19). Aristotle and, really, almost any reader would readily agree: if we have exciting

action and believable characters written up in gripping language, then our attention is likely to be maintained. Of course, I am pulling all this out of context, which can perhaps exaggerate what I want to point out, and I will below discuss other, more successful examples by Stockwell. But still, I do not have to go out on a limb to complain that these new terms have not forced any significantly new conceptualization.

The *In Practice* volume is set up in exact coordination with the *Introduction*. This is a useful publication plan. With Stockwell we get one scholar's explanation of the main ten concepts, and with Gavins and Steen we get the same concepts but set out and illustrated by various other scholars. This makes for a solid overview of key ideas. Unfortunately, the same introduction of new terms without any significantly new conceptual content occurs at times in the *In Practice* volume as well. As one example, we may take Gerard Steen's chapter on cognitive scenarios in love poetry. From his own and other surveys of many kinds of literature, he concludes that there is a "kind of constancy" across the many

> different messages about love. What we need is a kind of cognitive model in which we may represent these constant features, so that we may apply that model in our examination of the possible cognitive effects of individual textual instantiations of the "love story." It is the purpose of this chapter to advance such a model and explore its relations with the analysis of text content and text types of love poetry.   (67)

The process, though not taking off from the psychology of perception this time, is still the same: we establish a universal cognitive model (scenario), and then we use it to understand a given actual case (instantiation). "It is one task of cognitive poetics," Steen writes, "to show how such models might work in facilitating the interpretation of a love poem" (72). I am not clear on how this goal (facilitating interpretation) squares with the statements on poetics versus interpretation in the introduction. In any event, Steen then goes on to explain that readers must resort to a love scenario in order to understand George Crabbe's "A Marriage Ring." We know this is true because the "scenario is triggered by the word 'marriage' in the title, for marriage is one specific kind of love relationship" (ibid.). In a later example, we find in a poem by Robert Graves that "the relevance of the love scenario is indicated by the use of the word 'love' in the first line" (76). Hard to argue with that. I imagine that not just literary scholars but college students would find this less than revolutionary. Once again, this is all true enough and understandable, but if this is the only kind of insight that a theory of "scenarios" can give us, then why should a literary scholar, or even a student, bother learning about scenarios? This same problem has been recurrent in

the short history of cognitive, as well as in evolutionary-psychological, literary studies (Adler and Gross 2002; Jackson 2000, 2002). Despite regular, enthusiastic claims for radically new insights, the actual application of theories to texts has much too often produced interpretations that are painfully obvious.

But they have also produced some readings that, at least in some ways, are not so obvious. As my primary example, I take Stockwell's reading of a Ted Hughes poem, "Hill-Stone Was Content," through figure/ground theory; it appears in the first application-chapter of his *Introduction*. I do not know if there was any particular strategy in the chapter by chapter sequence of theoretical ideas, but it does seem rhetorically smart to begin with this reading, because it seems to me the best of any in the two books. Significantly, Stockwell does not shy away from the idea of interpretation. He begins his reading by saying straight out that, like "all cognitive poetic analyses, the discussion that follows is a matter both of textual patterns and an interpretation, which in this case is mine" (21). This would in general appear to be in conflict with the attitude toward interpretation in the Gavins and Steen volume, and we will turn to that conflict shortly. For now, I want to show a problem with even the good readings in these books. I will quote the first paragraph of Stockwell's reading, and then I will present my own version of that same reading.

> My attention is caught first of all by a variety of attractors, primarily the personification of "Hill-stone" in the title which runs over into the first stanza. The usual pattern of a human figure against a hill-stone moorland ground is reversed by this. The personification is effected in the usual way by attaching a human predicate ("was content") to the inanimate noun ("hill-stone"). However, this personification creates a paradoxical balance in foregrounding the passivity of the stone ("content") using an active verb-form, against the activity of the humans embedded as the unnamed agents in passive grammatical form ("to be cut, to be carted / And fixed"). Right from the beginning, a pattern of reversal of expectations is being set up.   (21)

Now for my version of his reading:

> We begin with the title, which runs over into the first stanza. We are immediately confronted with the personification of the "hill-stone," which, though of course inhuman, is portrayed as having the ability to experience contentment. If we look closely at the verb forms in the first stanza, we discover an intriguing paradox. The stone as subject is tied to its contentment through a relatively active verb, at least in the sense of a conjugated form: "was content." Further, the stone, though personified, is a passive actor in the scene. By contrast, the implied but unnamed human agents, who must be the ones doing the cutting, carting, and fixing, are fully active, and yet they appear through the least active

verb form, the infinitive: "*to be* cut, *to be*, carted / And fixed." So right away the reader experiences a set of reversals or inversions. The stone, not the humans, is the focal character in the moorland scene. The stone, though passive, comes to us through the active verb form. The humans though anonymous and active, come to us through the stative verb form.

I have had to hypothesize a bit because I find the idea of "was content" being more active than the infinitives to be, at least, a stretch; this is why I have felt the need to say "relatively active." But still, I think the demonstration remains effective. Stockwell's reading is not dependent on the cognitive terms. In fact, this is an example of close-reading skills. I am not claiming that I myself or anyone else would necessarily have come to just this reading without Stockwell's prompting. But I am trying to show that he does not need the cognitive poetic terms in order to make the statements he makes.

Having said this, though, I need to make sure I consider the purpose of a *textbook* presentation of a theory. With this in mind, while as a literary scholar I may not find the terms especially important to the actual readings, nonetheless I can see how they could work as models in a classroom. As a heuristic tool for opening up angles into texts, many of these concepts seem quite useful on the student level. The concepts are presented in concise and adequately schematized ways, and a student can readily see how they can generate interpretations of texts. The rest of Stockwell's readings work equally well in this respect. They are detailed and convincing and make the point to arrive at some kind of interpretive conclusion. Any professional close reader could likely do the same without any knowledge of the terms, but a student might well be able to latch onto the terms as a systematic way to deal with literary language. A scholar could likely take the concepts and put them to more sophisticated use, but because this is a textbook, that kind of example does not appear. So there is a risk in failing to appeal to scholars, and Stockwell senses this. Later in the book, after a close reading of short passages from two very different novels using "text worlds" theory, he admits that "you do not require a text world analysis to draw out the crude differences between lyricism and action in these sorts of texts. However, text world theory offers a principled means of exploring the detail of these differences" (145). I would say the "you" here must principally refer to teachers rather than to students of literature, because a student, though perhaps not *requiring* text-world theory, could possibly find it to be a quite useful tool for unpacking literary language.

The case is much the same in the *In Practice* volume. A Wilfred Owen poem as read by Craig Hamilton, a Donald Barthelme short-short story as read by Joanna Gavins, and a Lawrence poem as read by Peter Crisp, to take three examples, all work quite well as close readings, but none has a

clear need for its particular terminology in order to arrive at the reading. And we find Stockwell's concern in his *Introduction* about merely recasting old ideas in new labels occasionally echoed in *In Practice*. Craig Hamilton, after performing a very respectable close-reading of Wilfred Owen's "The Barge," concedes that many of the points he has made "are precisely the ones that critics have made for decades because they seemed important for reading" and so "have informed critical machinery for quite some time" (63). The key difference, Hamilton is at pains to point out, between his close-reading and the traditional reading for rhetorical effects is that "cognitive poetics concerns itself with the mental *causes* that bring about those effects." He goes on to say, "If cognitive poetics is anything, it is different in some respect from most literary criticism preceding it," the main difference being the grounding in language and cognition. Like Stockwell above, he worries about "mere duplication of terms" without new conceptual content. Then, very revealingly, he concludes: "But since we are not bent on doing what new criticism could do better fifty years ago (i.e., *explications de texte*), the saving grace of cognitive poetics is that it is not good old-fashioned hermeneutics at all: it is poetics" (63). End of paragraph, end of section. He, in effect, admits that his reading is of a kind with, but not as good as, good old-fashioned New Critical close reading. But is his project saved because it has a different intention and name than New Criticism? Hamilton is clearly intelligent and a fine close reader of literary language, so I find it hard to believe that he means this just as it sounds. I have to wonder if, in fact, this is not a veiled confession of a certain failure.

If so, I would say we run again into the question of the two related but distinct target audiences for all this. While on the level of the literary scholar, Hamilton might need to worry about this "saving grace," the same does not really hold at the classroom level. There need be no one right way to teach college students the skill of close reading, but Hamilton's method would certainly be one reasonable means to do so.

In both books, if we drop the cognitive poetic terms in most of the readings, we have solid examples of just the kind of precise, detailed attention to words—close reading—that became institutionalized in the wake of the New Criticism. When we return to the issue of interpretation, though, I would argue that Stockwell's book is the superior of the two because he does typically make interpretive statements along the way. The difference between the two books in the attitude toward interpretation shows most clearly at the end of Stockwell's own chapter in *In Practice*. His essay on surrealist poetry comes right up to a generalization which, if developed, would make of his reading a regular interpretation, but he pulls back, apparently only out of a sense of obligation. So, after a close reading of an André

Breton poem, he concludes that "the cognitive pattern that surrealist writing exploits is one that is common to a lesser degree in all literary reading. That claim, though, is for another time" (Gavins and Steen 24).

To my mind, *In Practice* makes a serious mistake in disallowing the move from close reading to interpretation, especially since it wants to serve as a textbook. In setting up a new poetics, someone like Jonathan Culler can refuse interpretation, but because he remains within some accepted realm of literary language and especially because he is not involving any theory that would be considered scientific in the conventional sense—involving controlled experimental conditions, empirical data, falsifiability, and the like—his claims can still have clear appeal for literary scholars. But the same will not so readily hold for cognitive poetics. While the resistance to interpretation is logically supportable, while it may help clear the ground for the creation of a new poetics, one outcome of bringing in psychological theory and then refusing to give literary interpretations is that the "poetics" seems to be laid out only for psychologists, not for literary scholars or students. I assume that the applications of theory in these books would directly appeal to psychologists because, no matter what the literary quality of the readings, they help validate (or possibly invalidate) the given cognitive model. So the book seems in a way to be showing psychological, not literary, theory "in practice."

To return to my bottom-line standard for evaluating these books: would I use them in my own classroom, and would I recommend them to a fellow literary scholar who wants an introduction to cognitive poetics?

As for the classroom, I am torn. On the one hand, I already teach students to close-read by using the rhetorical terms that, though perhaps institutionalized in literary study by New Criticism, have in fact been in place for centuries. This method works. On the other hand, the systematicity, the anchoring of terms in human cognition, could well have the same appeal for students as it does for the writers of these two textbooks: instead of an apparent hodgepodge of angles and approaches, interpretation appears to be systematic and falsifiable in some roughly scientific way. And as with cognitive poetic scholars, so with students, this anchoring will be good and bad. The good side is that interpretation will not seem so vague and subjective, but I do not see how the problem of determinism can be avoided.

The answer to the second question is a qualified yes. Both books do make an array of cognitive-based theories accessible to uninitiated scholars, and Stockwell's book in particular shows how the theories can be used for interpretation. A scholar can read these books and come away with a solid sense of what is going on in the interdiscipline of the cognitive sciences and literary study. But of course, other literary scholars might likely have the same

objections as I have expressed. Why learn a whole batch of new terms in order to do what I take it that most of us already know how to do: close read literary texts? And yet it is certainly possible that these general introductions could sow the seeds for a more sophisticated use of the concepts, including the basic act of interpretation. If we consider, especially, some of Stockwell's readings, we find that, interpretively speaking, he has always remained within the realm of the text itself. He has not tried to interpret the significance of his findings in relation to, say, cultural or historical contexts: in other words, he has in a sense been most thoroughly New Critical. For the purposes of an introductory textbook, this is fine. But the next step in the progress of cognitive poetics on the scholarly level will have to involve, if this can be insightfully done, the publication of studies that bring cognitive terms to literature and explain the significance of what those terms reveal in relation to cultural and/or historical contexts. I can imagine scholars studying these two volumes, absorbing these very basic models, and then going on to do just that. I look forward to reading such interpretations.

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