



**EXPRESSIVE  
MINDS**

and

**ARTISTIC  
CREATIONS**

*Studies in Cognitive Poetics*

*Edited by*

SZILVIA CSÁBI

COGNITION AND POETICS

# Expressive Minds and Artistic Creations

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## FOREWORD

### *Poetry and Metaphorical Cognition*

ZOLTÁN KÖVECSES

Perhaps one of the most common technical terms in discussions of the “poetic mind” is metaphor and the creative imagination that it can afford. In the view of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999), metaphor is one of the most powerful means by which the human cognitive system can create and re-create experience. In one form or another, and to varying degrees, most of the chapters in the present volume address the issue of how this is accomplished.

Poetry and cognition assume each other. Poets use their cognitive devices to create poetry, on the one hand, and the nature of human cognitive abilities is such that it allows us to say things that have not been said before, that is, to be creative, on the other. Although being creative is not limited to poetry, it is a big part of much of poetry. Creativity used by poets can take many forms, including a variety of conceptual linguistic devices. Such devices range from syntactic constructions to metaphor, with many other things in between. To illustrate these two—constructions and metaphors—consider the “most beautiful” lines in English poetry (Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 2; see, for instance, Hogan, 2003, 71):

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

These are words said by Horatio at the prince’s deathbed in *Hamlet*. As regards the metaphors, the lines employ a variety of conceptual metaphors and metonymies. “Now cracks a noble heart” is based on the LIFE IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER metaphor and the HEART FOR THE PERSON metonymy. “Good night, sweet prince” employs three metaphors: DEATH IS NIGHT, THE

OBJECT OF LIKING/LOVE IS SWEET, and THE OBJECT OF LOVE IS A YOUNG CHILD. Moreover, the expression “sing thee to thy rest” relies on the DEATH IS SLEEP/REST metaphor again. As regards constructions, we have an innovative case of the caused-motion construction in the phrase “And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” In the prototypical construction, we have a transitive verb, like *throw* (e.g., “He *threw* the ball over the fence.”) (see Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). However, *sing* is an intransitive verb, like *sneeze* and *walk*. Thus it is used innovatively in the construction, producing a pleasing aesthetic effect.

In the past thirty years, several cognitive linguists have suggested that the metaphorical conceptual system used by poets is not different in kind from that used by ordinary people: The conceptual metaphors used by poets are the same as those used in everyday situations by ordinary speakers (cf. Lakoff and Turner, 1989; Gibbs, 1994). What is this shared metaphorical conceptual system like and how can we account for its creative aspects? In this brief foreword, I attempt to outline its most essential features from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

## COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC ACCOUNTS OF METAPHORICAL CREATIVITY

How can we characterize metaphorical creativity in general? In my book *Metaphor in Culture* (2005), I distinguish two types on the basis of conceptual metaphor theory. There is creativity that is related to the source domain, on the one hand, and creativity that is related to the target, on the other. *Source-related* creativity can be of two kinds: *source-internal* and *source-external* creativity. Source-internal creativity involves what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to as making use of *unused* aspects of a source domain. Source-external cases of creativity operate with what I called the “range of the target” phenomenon, in which a particular target domain receives new, additional source domains in its conceptualization (Kövecses, 2005). For instance, Yu (1998) notes that the concept of HAPPINESS is conceptualized by means of the metaphor HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART, which is additional to other, more conventional source domains that are present both in Chinese and English.

I also described the type of creativity in discourse that is based on the *target* (2005). In this type of creativity, a particular target that is conventionally associated with a source “connects back” to the source, taking further knowledge structures from it. Musolff (2001) provides several examples (which I reanalyzed [2005]) in which metaphorical expressions, such as *fire exit*, are selected from the source domain of BUILDING on the

basis of target domain knowledge in the EUROPE IS A BUILDING metaphor, though they are not part of the conventional mappings. We can call this *target-induced* creativity.

## METAPHORICAL CREATIVITY IN POETRY

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), metaphorical creativity in poetry is the result of four common conceptual devices that poets use in manipulating otherwise shared conceptual metaphors. These include the devices of *elaboration*, *extension*, *questioning*, and *combining* (Lakoff and Turner, 1989). An example of *extending*, in which unused source-internal conceptual materials are utilized to comprehend the target would be the following: Given the conventional DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor, we find in Hamlet's soliloquy *To die to sleep? Perchance to dream!*, in which dreaming is an extension of the SLEEP source domain (Lakoff and Turner, 1989).

More recently, it has been noticed that not all cases of the creative use of metaphor in poetry are the result of the four cognitive devices previously mentioned. Turner and others proposed that in many cases poetry and literature in general make use of what he and Fauconnier call (*conceptual blends*), in which various elements from two or more spaces, domains, or frames, can be conceptually fused, or integrated (see, for instance, Turner, 1996; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). This is another source of creativity.

An even fuller account of the poetic use of metaphor, and thus metaphorical creativity, requires that we look at the possible role of *context* in which poets create poetry (Kövecses, 2010). Poets work under the same conceptual pressures (which I called "the pressure of coherence" [2005]) as ordinary people do in the creation of novel metaphors, and the effect of context may in part be responsible for the creative use of metaphor in poetry (and other kinds of discourse). In other words, there is yet another form of metaphorical creativity in discourse—creativity that is induced by the *context* in which metaphorical conceptualization takes place.

In sum, then, metaphorical creativity in discourse can involve several distinct cases: (1) the case in which a novel source domain is applied or novel elements of the source are applied to a given target domain (source-induced creativity); (2) the case in which elements of the target originally not involved in a set of constitutive mappings are utilized and matching counterparts are found in the source (target-induced creativity); (3) the case of conceptual integration in which elements from both source and target are combined in new ways; and (4) the case in which various contextual factors lead to novel or unconventional metaphors (context-induced creativity).

## THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN METAPHORICAL CREATIVITY IN POETRY

Because it is less discussed and theorized (but see Kövecses, 2015), I briefly outline option (4) here. Conceptualizers seem to rely on a number of contextual factors when they use metaphors in discourse. The ones that I have identified (2010, 2015) include (a) the immediate linguistic context, (b) the knowledge conceptualizers have about themselves and the topic, (c) the immediate cultural context, (d) the immediate social context, and (e) the immediate physical setting. Because all of these are shared by the speaker and hearer (the conceptualizers), the contextual factors facilitate the development and mutual understanding of the discourse.

The view that many metaphors in real discourse emerge from context has implications for conceptual metaphor theory. The dominant version of conceptual metaphor theory emphasizes the importance of primary metaphors that arise from certain well-motivated correlations between bodily and subjective experiences (e.g., KNOWING AS SEEING) (see, for example, Grady 1997; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). However, in addition to such metaphors, there are what can be called *context-induced metaphors* that derive not from some such correlations in experience but from the context of metaphorical conceptualization. This contextualist view of metaphor creation has certain implications for a variety of issues in the study of poetry (see Kövecses 2010; 2015).

We can begin with approaches to the interpretation of poetry. Poems and poetic language are sometimes studied from a purely hermeneutical–postmodernist perspective without any regard to the social–cultural–personal background to the creative process. Poems are, on the other hand, also sometimes studied from a purely social–historical perspective without any regard to the text-internal systematicity of the poem. In my view, the contextualist approach to metaphors provides a natural bridge between these two apparently contradictory views, in that context-induced metaphors can be seen as both resulting from the social–cultural–personal background and lending coherent meaning structures to particular poems. Some literary scholars, such as Guthrie, seem to support this claim:

Finally, I would add that I am only too well aware that readings based upon biographical evidence are apt to become excessively reductive and simplistic. Nevertheless, in the prevailing postmodernist critical climate, I think we actually stand at greater risk of underestimating the degree of intimacy existing between an author's literary productions and the network of experiences, great and small, that shapes an individual life. (1998, 5)

In other words, a poetic text is not simply a text with some coherent interpretation created by the participating metaphors, but it is also the product of contextually induced metaphors, such that, in this way and to an extent, the interpretation emerges from the context of metaphor production.

Furthermore, in many cases, context-induced metaphors can point to an additional source of metaphorical creativity in poetry. The use of contextually based metaphors is often novel in poems, simply because the contexts themselves in which poems are created are often unique and/or specific to a particular poet. Moreover, although the particular situations (contexts) in which poets conceptualize the world may often be specific to particular poets and hence the metaphors they use may be unique, the cognitive process (specifically, the effect of priming by contextual factors on conceptualization) whereby they create them is not. As previously noted, context-induced metaphors are also used in everyday speech. What seems to be unique to metaphorical conceptualization in poetry is the density and complexity of the process of contextual influence on poets. In many poems, we find that a variety of contextual factors can jointly shape a poet's metaphors within the space of a few lines. In other words, it is not claimed here that everyday discourse and poetry are not different. What is claimed instead is that their difference does not come from the use of particular conceptual metaphors (such as *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*). Our felt sense of the difference (in addition to many other things, such as formal properties of poetry) derives in part from the *density* and *complexity* of context-induced and bodily based metaphors we find in poetry.

Finally, the view of metaphor as not only cognitively based but also context induced may have certain implications for the study of embodied cognition. If it is the case that, for instance, the physical–biological properties of a poet can influence his or her metaphorical conceptualization in the course of creating poems, as is the case in, for instance, Dickinson's poetry, then embodied cognition can be based on personal experiences as well—not only universal correlations in experience, as assumed by the dominant view of conceptual metaphor theory. Embodied cognition may be based on a variety of different experiences in metaphorical conceptualization, including universal experiences, but also social, cultural, and so forth, experiences, and, importantly, unique personal ones.

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# Expressive Minds and Artistic Creations





# Introduction

SZILVIA CSÁBI

Most of current research in the field of cognitive poetics is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, including the works of scholars from the fields of literature, anthropology, aesthetics, semiotics, linguistics, cognitive science, neuroscience, philosophy, history, and psychology, among others. The volume *Expressive Minds and Artistic Creations: Studies in Cognitive Poetics* aims not only to take a fresh look at literature and other poetic artifacts from a cognitive perspective, but also to create a fruitful collaboration between the different disciplines for the advancement of scholarship on cognitive poetics.

Cognitive poetics has traditionally been interested in literary research, but scholars from various fields, ranging from aesthetics through psychology to neuroscience, have employed different empirical methods and terminology in their individual analyses of literary and multimodal texts. These different approaches to studying literature and multimodal artifacts provide a wealth of new knowledge about the ways people interpret and appreciate poetic works. Yet a critical development in the rise of cognitive poetics in recent years is the attention given to the strengths and weaknesses of various research approaches and findings, with an eye toward understanding a greater diversity of perspectives on poetic experience. The dialogs that occur among scholars from different disciplines are an important part of what makes cognitive poetics such an exciting, fertile field of study. To take one significant example, how do scholars reconcile traditional individual analyses or readings of literary

texts with larger-scale scientific studies on how ordinary people come to interpret specific instances of literature or multimodal artifacts? Is such a reconciliation even possible in practice? The present volume highlights both specific empirical research on literary texts and multimodal artworks and the explicit negotiations that scholars engage in as they attempt to situate their analyses and findings within the larger, emerging field of cognitive poetics.

The title, *Expressive Minds and Artistic Creations: Studies in Cognitive Poetics*, refers not only to the producers of literature and art, but also to people who engage with these artifacts for meaningful, aesthetic purposes. Readers and art observers do not merely “receive” what has been artistically produced (i.e., “literary reception”), because they are active, mindful creators of their own individual interpretations of these artworks. The study of cognitive poetics is fundamentally centered on the expressive, creative dialog among writers and readers, artists and observers, leading to both subjective and collective poetic experience.

This book examines language, literature, and cognitive processes and goes into great detail about the connections between cognition and poetics, between expressive minds and artistic creations, and how different approaches can inform a deeper understanding of literary and multimodal texts. Each chapter spotlights some new development in the field of cognitive poetics, calling attention to further possible pathways for future research, with particular attention given to the issues of embodiment, simulation, figurative operations, multiperspectivity, and multimodality.

Within the field of cognitive literary studies, the chapters emphasize how literary studies may contribute to cognitive scientific research through the investigation of embodiment and emotion in poetic experience, the role of context in conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending theories, and the influence of multimodality and musicality in literary expression and interpretation.

The volume begins with a foreword by Zoltán Kövecses, who examines the relationship between poetry and metaphorical cognition. Kövecses outlines the fundamental characteristics of creativity within the human metaphorical conceptual system that are shared by both great poets and ordinary people, such as the common use of primary metaphors in language and thought. Moreover, creative language use emerges from “context-induced metaphors,” which reflect the influence of immediate social and physical environments in how people conceive of different situations. In this way, metaphorical creativity is motivated by more than just past embodied experience and is expressed in coherent ways by means of people’s specific understandings of in-the-moment social and linguistic

contexts. This preface provides a good example of how new directions in cognitive poetics scholarship significantly extend more established ideas on poetic thinking and expression.

The main body of the book consists of four parts, reflecting four important themes in cognitive poetics that the papers address in different, detailed ways. All these parts investigate the relationship between cognition and poetics and contribute to a better understanding of the interpretation of literary and multimodal texts and cognition.

Part 1, on *Imagination as Simulation*, concentrates on some of the psychological processes that people, regardless of their expertise, automatically engage in when they experience literary texts and other artistic artifacts. A primary focus here is on the role that embodied simulations have when people interpret expressive meanings. Embodied simulations refer to processes in which people imagine themselves engaging in the actions mentioned in language or implied by the artistic works. Current behavioral and neural empirical findings from cognitive science concerning simulation, situated conceptualization, grounded cognition and emotion, and the bodily experience of literature are applied by authors in this section to characterize how people interpret expressive artworks as having specific, coherent meanings.

Marco Caracciolo's paper on embodiment in literary reading analyzes key issues through the case study of the novel *American Psycho* with the help of linguist David Ritchie's scalar account of embodied simulation. The chapter focuses on the ways in which reading literary narratives is influenced by embodied simulation phenomena such as motor resonance and bodily imagery. Types of embodied involvement are shown by the alternation, and juxtaposition, of passages in the novel ranging from "low embodiment," in which readers are less bodily engaged, to "high embodiment," in which readers are more likely to experience bodily imagery. Caracciolo claims that the results of cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics are significant for literary analyses, and further empirical research on embodiment and literary reading is necessary in the future.

Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. and Lacey Okonski explore allegorical experience and claim that allegory is a fundamental cognitive principle that underlies several aspects of everyday imagination and reasoning, and it is therefore not merely a rhetorical, literary tool to convey abstract, symbolic ideas in concrete ways. Indeed, ordinary human experience propels the existence of allegory, and embodied conceptual metaphors may reflect different patterns of allegorical thought. Our life and discourse are full of manifestations of allegory as seen in the study of religious and political discourse, legal and literary texts, and proverbs. Different empirical studies clearly

demonstrate how both ordinary readers and expert critics perceive allegory in poetry and novels and situate allegory as having deep ties to embodied action, similar to other contemporary ideas on metaphorical thought and language.

Part 2, *Beyond Metaphors: Conceptual Integration and Other Complex Figurative Operations*, focuses on conceptual mechanisms and processes in language, music, and the poetic/musical mind, such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, irony, paradox, and different conceptual integration or blending processes. The dialogs between cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics, including studies on music, are highlighted, with particular attention being given to how different conceptual mechanisms shed light on the creation and interpretation of language, music, and poetic/musical imagery. New insights concerning blending and conceptual integration theory within multimodal artworks also suggest some of the deficiencies with older versions of these theories.

Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas and Anna Piata explore the conceptualization of time in poetic language with the help of conceptual integration theory. By meticulously analyzing Greek, English, and Spanish examples, Cánovas and Piata demonstrate how various poetic effects—powerful aesthetic and emotional effects—can be created with the help of time-space blends, depending on whether the spatial feature of path-trajectory is manipulated in various ways in the conceptual template. This chapter also argues that conceptual integration theory offers several advantages over conceptual metaphor theory in explaining the diverse range of metaphors and their meanings in poetic discourse.

Mark J. Bruhn also concentrates on conceptual integration theory and proposes a “systems-theoretic adjustment” to this account, particularly in regard to the notion of the generic space. Bruhn suggests that the role that the generic space plays in the blending process has not been properly explained in earlier research, which viewed it as an optional by-product of preexisting conceptual mappings across input spaces. Instead, Bruhn claims that the generic space has the important role of providing the cause for matches between the input spaces of the blend. For this reason, the generic space does not *select* the relevant mappings, but *constrains* against any other mappings than the relevant ones when interpreting poetic meanings. To illustrate this claim, Bruhn examines three increasingly complex creative blends as case studies involving a sentence-level metaphor, an extemporaneous discourse exchange, and an iconic lyric poem.

Paula Pérez-Sobrinó's chapter explores several different cognitive operations through twelve examples of classical and contemporary musical works that involve both music and text. Pérez-Sobrinó spells out details

regarding the directionality and scope of the mappings between language and music that give rise to specific communicative effects. For example, the dynamic and flexible conceptual mechanisms of metonymy and its complexes, metaphor and its complexes, as well as hyperbole, paradox, and irony are compared and contrasted to account for various meaning constructions and possible communicative effects in multimodal contexts. By outlining these complex cognitive operations in specific multimodal artworks, Pérez-Sobrino illustrates one way to overcome the limitations arising from the two-domain layout of isolated metaphors.

Part 3 deals with *Multiperspectivity: Proximity and Distance* in literary language and highlights questions regarding the possible existence of similarities and (near) universals in the choices of linguistic tools and the narrative perspectives adopted in the study of literary works in different languages, literary works, and centuries. In addition, grammatical and contextual conventions apparent in literary texts are also shown to often be the results of authors' manipulations of texts, done in order to create various emotional effects in readers.

Wei-lun Lu, Arie Verhagen, and I-wen Su tackle the problem of viewpoint in literary narratives in English and Chinese with the help of a MultiParT (multiple-parallel-text) approach. Using multiple translated versions of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, the authors attempt to systematically account for individual variations in the translated texts. One important finding is that the Chinese translations are more heavily demonstratively viewpointed than the original English text. Furthermore, the English and Chinese texts do not often correspond in their viewpoint constructions. Also, there are certain, systematically different, viewpointing preferences that appear in the Chinese translations. The use of MultiParT in cross-linguistic cognitive poetic research thus offers new insights into viewpointing constructions, among other issues.

Antonina Harbus takes "the long view" to approach dynamic affect in Early English verse and investigates the ways in which modern readers can interpret, and react emotionally and aesthetically to, medieval texts. The interaction between poetic language and different cognitive structures and processes is examined closely through a new diachronic perspective. Analyzing (translations of) short elegiac poems written over 1,000 years ago in Old English, Harbus investigates how linguistic features, including metaphoric language and affective triggers, can produce literary effects, which in turn give rise to reader's emotional responses to these texts. Even though the content, language, and cultural referents of these texts are remote to contemporary readers, the texts are still comprehensible primarily because of the shared embodied human experience across time and cultures.

Natalia Igl uses perspectivization and multiperspectivity to examine two German avant-garde novels of the New Objectivity movement by Irmgard Keun and Alfred Döblin. She shows how the relationships among cognitive linguistic principles, textual and narrative strategies, and contemporary poetological positions collectively provide a critical foundation for understanding viewpoint splitting and deictic shift, polyphony, and multimodality in the two novels. Igl situates her analyses as being related to the “aesthetics of observation,” which she views as the recursive embedding of viewpoints that allows for a multiplicity of readings, ones that are often in direct tension with one another. From this perspective, cognitive poetics functions to reveal deeper insights, which also include conflicts, between the theoretical models of poetic experience and the workings of actual creative artifacts.

Part 4, on *Multiperspectivity: Verbal and Visual Modalities*, adds another perspective on the analysis of multiperspectivity by focusing on various modalities. Partly related to the previous section, the chapters in this part emphasize how visual devices in literary texts may be traced back to different patterns of narrative perspectivization and described in terms of subjectivity and viewpoints. A goal of this section is to discern how people comprehend multimodal representations, such as visual language, graphic literature, and cartoons. It is important, though, to not only focus on *what* we read but to also consider *when* and *how* we read, so the locations and means of literary reading, and the changing technological environment of the last decade, must be a critical part of cognitive poetic studies. Another objective here is to discover whether the complicated arrangements of multimodal texts and the elusive sensations in poetry can be successfully studied within the framework of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics. Finally, a further aim is to see whether, and to what extent, cultural background knowledge is necessary to understand multimodal artifacts.

Michael Burke and Esmeralda V. Bon explore the relevance of the means and locations of literary reading and investigate whether these have changed in the last decade, since e-readers and other electronic devices have appeared. The multiplicity, flexibility, and preference of places and manner of literary reading are examined, and the direction of change from paper to digital and hybrid reading is outlined through the comparison of the findings of past and their own survey studies. For example, Burke and Bon show that contemporary students are mostly “hybrid readers” now, given the various places and ways in which they engage with literary texts. Their empirical results on the importance of the location of reading, which influences the reader’s reception process, are interpreted within the theory

of embodied or situated cognition. Burke and Bon argue for a cognitive poetics that is sensitive to the ways and places literary texts are encountered, understood, and appreciated.

Sonja Zeman addresses the issue of the vivid visual and pictorial nature of verbal poetry and the literary pictorialism of literature—that is, the way in which pictorial impression arises from textual language. The model described, which is illustrated by several literary examples, uses vision, picture-viewing, and mental imagery to shed light on the visual/pictorial character of texts and its relationship to the reader's experience. By applying the results of recent neurocognitive studies, Zeman suggests that, instead of keeping visibility, pictoriality, and vividness as core concepts in literary analyses, a general model of representation of poetic iconicity must be developed and applied to cognitive poetic works.

Christian W. Schneider and Michael Pleyer investigate the relevance of mental scanning in multimodal visual texts, especially comics. Complex scenes and events, such as those presented on the still images of comics, can be viewed either holistically and statically in their entirety, or successively and dynamically as events unfold in time. Schneider and Pleyer examine the temporal configurations in *Watchmen*, a multimodally self-reflexive comic, to show how the past, present, and future can be perceived by focusing on the simultaneous configuration of comics panels.

Reuven Tsur's chapter is about mental strategies that contribute to elusive perceptions in poems. Tsur examines the significance of poetic structures in two poems by the French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine and compares them with those appearing in poems written by English Romanticists. By referring to John Keats's "Negative Capability" and the perceptual qualities of strong and weak gestalts, he intertwines his analysis with the meanings of Rudolf Arnheim's term "passively receiving mind" (as opposed to "actively organizing mind") and some neuropsychological findings to point out that an actively organizing mind is less sensitive to elusive sensations in poetry than a passively receiving mind. Tsur lists and analyzes the linguistic tools, including the syntactic, semantic and phonetic structures, in Verlaine's text that maneuver the speaker/reader into passivity.

The volume ends with a postscript by Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., who imagines the future of cognitive poetics, and expresses his commitments, hesitations, and desires with respect to the advancement of the scholarly study of poetic experience. Gibbs's main suggestions include striving for clarity and transparency in the methods employed in cognitive poetic analyses, considering alternative hypotheses, as well as expanding the scope of cognitive poetics to consider different noncognitive factors in artistic expression and understanding.



All these chapters present various cognitive literary studies from an interdisciplinary point of view, including literature, culture, aesthetics, semiotics, linguistics, cognitive science, neuroscience, philosophy, history, and psychology. The authors offer new linguistic and literary analyses, demonstrate the relevance of psychological and neuroscience research for studying expressive artworks, and expand cognitive poetics to include the study of the making and understanding of multimodal creations. Looking across the chapters, many issues arise concerning the variety of methods employed within cognitive poetics as we try to better recognize what analytic tools best answer different, specific theoretical questions. Certain tensions also emerge in how we conceptualize cognitive poetics in terms of the study of generic or contextualized individual minds and bodies in the experience of poetic meaning. Many authors here also push against the limitations of several contemporary, cognitive theories of meaning construal, which opens up novel possibilities for research into creative, poetic, artistic expression. Most notably, many of the present chapters illustrate some of the pleasures and struggles of individual scholars who do not merely collaborate with people from neighboring disciplines, but who individually aim to embody interdisciplinarity within their own respective research efforts. In this manner, this collection sits at the cutting-edge boundary of new directions in cognitive poetics in regard to what we are now learning about artistic expression and understanding, the diverse ways of theoretically characterizing poetic experiences, and the empirical challenges that each of us faces in studying creative artworks and their complex meanings.

PART 1

*Imagination as Simulation*



## CHAPTER 1

# Degrees of Embodiment in Literary Reading

*Notes for a Theoretical Model, With American Psycho  
as a Case Study*

MARCO CARACCIOLO

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

About seventy pages into Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 novel *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman, the narrator and protagonist, is in his living room, impatiently waiting for his girlfriend—a top model named Patricia. After a somewhat lengthy description of Patrick's workout routine, grooming habits, and outfit for the evening, we run into the following passage:

I have a glass of [champagne] while waiting for her, occasionally rearranging the Steuben animals on the glass-top coffee table by Turchin, or sometimes I flip through the last hardcover book I bought, something by Garrison Keillor. Patricia is late. While waiting on the couch in the living room, the Wurlitzer jukebox playing “Cherish” by the Lovin’ Spoonful, I come to the conclusion that Patricia is safe tonight, that I am not going to unexpectedly pull a knife out and use it on her just for the sake of doing so, that I am not going to get any pleasure watching her bleed from slits I’ve made by cutting her throat or slicing her neck open or gouging her eyes out. (1991, 76)

The adverb “unexpectedly” here works just as well for Patricia as for the reader of this passage: Not only doesn’t the girl—in the narrator’s fantasy—expect the protagonist’s sudden knife-flashing, but readers themselves are likely to be surprised by the narrator’s violent outburst. This effect is partly lost if we read the passage in isolation from the rest of the novel, as we are bound to do here. In this extremely slow-moving beginning of *American Psycho*, peppered as it is with designer names and apparently irrelevant details (such as the glass-top coffee table or the hardcover book in our quotation), the suddenness of Bateman’s imaginary violence will be greatly magnified. Further, the protagonist’s actions are arranged in a clear crescendo, from the perverse indeterminacy of the expression “use [the knife] on her” to the much more explicit, and emotionally resonant, “gouging her eyes out.” Ultimately, both the abruptness and the escalation of the violence throw into sharp relief the semantic opposition between the vacuity of brand names and the clear-cut concreteness of the protagonist’s actions: “Steuben,” “Turchin,” “Garrison Keillor,” “Wurlitzer,” and the “Lovin’ Spoonful” will strike most readers as empty signifiers when compared with the precise language of “pulling . . . out,” “cutting,” “slicing,” and “gouging . . . out.”

What reception dynamic is likely to be triggered by this opposition? Only empirical research can answer this question conclusively. But it is still possible to advance some hypotheses on the basis of my own, introspectively apprehended experience. First, Bateman’s actions seem to result in vivid mental imagery—which seamlessly shifts among a predominantly kinesthetic mode (“pull a knife out”), visual experience (“watching her bleed from slits”), and a final, imaginary pang of pain, mirroring the victim’s own pain (“gouging her eyes out”). Throughout this dynamic, the affective and embodied quality of my experience stands in stark contrast to the rest of the narrator’s monologue, with its trivial name-dropping. To borrow the terminology proposed by Anežka Kuzmičová (2014): I experience the protagonist’s actions through “enactment-imagery,” a fully embodied process in which we take the character’s perspective on the storyworld and imaginatively perform his or her actions. By contrast, the proper names will—at best—lead to “speech-imagery,” which consists in imagining hearing these words (or imagining oneself pronouncing them) through a phenomenon known as “subvocalization.”

The main idea behind this chapter is that a theory of literary reading inspired by embodied cognitive science is uniquely able to capture these reader-response dynamics and account for them in terms of specific psychological processes. In this way, the literary scholar’s hypotheses and introspective intuitions can be cross-pollinated with empirically based

models and theories grown out of the mind sciences. I have already discussed at length elsewhere (Caracciolo, 2014c) how literary narrative can be theorized in light of embodied—and specifically enactivist—approaches to cognition. In this chapter, I try to refine that account by drawing on recent debates in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics, which have resulted in a set of distinctions between *degrees* of embodied engagement with language. To anticipate my argument in what follows, the contrast between the brand names and the protagonist's violence in the Ellis passage reveals that the involvement of readers' bodily responses is a scalar phenomenon: from a predominantly semantic mode of processing, in which embodiment *almost* doesn't seem to matter to full-fledged bodily feelings that are felt not only through but *in* the reader's own body.

Although the embodied account of language comprehension is anything but set in stone, and much remains to be done in terms of both empirical verification and theory building, these discussions are of immediate relevance to literary analysis. Through a close reading of Ellis's *American Psycho*, in Section 1.4 I show that distinctions inspired by work in psycholinguistics can help bring into focus the effects of individual texts, exploring the largely shared psychological processes that *underlie* the diversity of readers' interpretations. On this view, the cognitive approach to literature aims not at disclosing new readings of literary works—as claimed by some of the critics of cognitive literary studies (Jackson, 2003)—but at revealing factors that cut below individual interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, I point out some of the limitations in current psychological theories, which keep them from offering a fully convincing account of embodiment in literary reading. I argue that psychological approaches to literary narrative should take phenomenology—that is, readers' lived experiences—more seriously and devise empirical methodologies capable of capturing experiential phenomena. I also suggest that the concept of “simulation” is somewhat problematically suspended between low-level, unconscious processes and readers' fully conscious imaginative experiences—an important divide that is not always recognized and accounted for by psychologists. Some of the reasons for this short-shrifting of experience will become clear in what follows. My analysis of *American Psycho* serves a double function: On the one hand, it demonstrates the possibilities of an embodied approach to literary reading, putting into practice the distinction among degrees of embodied involvement; on the other hand, this case study attempts to point to areas in which more empirical research is needed—possibly as a result of interdisciplinary collaboration between literary scholars and psychologists.

## 1.2. A SURVEY OF PSYCHOLINGUISTIC RESEARCH

The core tenet of embodied cognitive science is that *all* psychological processes—including those that are traditionally seen as abstract and independent of bodily experience—reflect patterns derived from our physical engagement with the world.<sup>2</sup> Language is no exception: Producing and understanding language (be it oral or written) is not a purely conceptual activity—the processing of propositional representations, as artificial-intelligence-inspired models had it—but one that involves our bodies in a variety of ways (see Pecher and Zwaan, 2005). Evidence from this view comes from a number of studies in psycholinguistics and related fields. From Lawrence Barsalou’s (1999) theory of “perceptual symbols” to Rolf Zwaan’s (2004) “immersed experienter framework” to work on metaphor understanding by Raymond Gibbs and Teenie Matlock (2008), the evidence for the embodiment of language comprehension keeps growing. Not all of these research programs share the same assumptions and goals, but they converge on the idea that people’s use and comprehension of language tap into our familiarity with the body, and particularly with perceptual experience and with the sensorimotor affordances—or action potentials—of objects in the real world. Take, for example, the sentence: “Robert climbed the ladder and replaced a dead lightbulb.” Robert’s actions are readily understandable because we are acquainted with the function and physical characteristics of ladders (which afford climbing) and lightbulbs (whose removal necessitates a relatively precise hand gesture). What does this idea of “familiarity” involve concretely? Experimental studies have focused on three areas, which relate to different aspects of linguistic comprehension: motor resonance in understanding action verbs, embodied metaphors, and situation models in reconstructing a linguistically described scene.

Glenberg and Kaschak (2002) have shown that participants perform better on a simple task if they have been exposed to a verbal description of an action that is congruent with the task itself (for instance, if they are required to push a button that is far from their body after reading a sentence that implies movement away from the body, such as “close the drawer”). If, however, the participants’ task is opposite to the physical action they are asked to carry out (e.g., pushing a button close to the body after reading a sentence describing *away* movement), their response times are significantly slower. This interference effect is generally taken to suggest that reading linguistically described actions triggers a mechanism of “motor resonance,” engaging some of the neural structures that are associated with *actual* movement (see Pulvermüller, 2005). The motor system is thus shown to be involved in understanding action verbs.

Work on metaphor understanding suggests that bodily schemata also play a role in making sense of embodied metaphors for abstract processes. In a study, for instance, Gibbs (2013) asked two groups of blindfolded participants to walk toward an object 40 feet away from them. Both groups had listened to a story about a romantic relationship, but only one of these stories contained an embodied metaphor (e.g., “the relationship was moving along in a good direction,” which compares an abstract entity to a physical object moving in space). Gibbs found that participants who had been exposed to the embodied metaphor walked reliably farther and for a longer time than those who had listened to the nonmetaphorical story. The journey metaphor thus seems to “prime” the participants toward physical movement in space—again indicating that these activities share part of the same neural underpinnings.

A different line of research looked at the role of so-called situation models in understanding spatial descriptions (Zwaan and Radvansky, 1998). Using behavioral experiments similar to those just described, psychologists have argued that making sense of linguistic descriptions of a concrete situation requires constructing a mental representation that is spatially organized and therefore analogous to the described space itself. Evidence for this can be found in an early study by Barbara Tversky and colleagues (Bryant, Tversky, and Franklin, 1992), in which participants were instructed to memorize a spatial array containing several objects (and their respective positions). When asked what lay to the right of a given object, for instance, participants responded “as fast to internal spatial relations as to spatial relations explicitly stated in the narrative, indicating the use of mental models” (1992, 82). For Zwaan, these mental models are embodied insofar as they are based on “experiential traces” (Zwaan, 2008) derived from past acts of perception. We thus reconstruct fictional domains in ways that reflect embodied strategies for apprehending *real* space.

These findings are suggestive in many ways, and their relevance for literary reading is immediately evident: Both action and metaphor have played a central role in literary theory since Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and (literary) narrative abounds in stage-setting spatial descriptions, which are likely to be understood through situation models. But, of course, the gap between experimental studies of this kind and a general account of literary reading should not be overlooked. The theories developed by psycholinguists themselves can help address this gap, but only—as we’ll see—up to a point.

Some of the open issues involved in bridging the divide between psycholinguistics and literary studies are illustrated by the notion of “embodied simulation,” which has been widely embraced by literary scholars. This notion ties in with discussions on so-called simulation theory in



the philosophy of mind (Goldman, 2006), and particularly with Vittorio Gallese's (2005) proposition that we understand others through "embodied simulations" grounded in our mirror neuron system. Closer to our concerns here, the concept of simulation has been invoked by psychologists working in all of the three areas of study reviewed in the previous paragraphs, thus promising to offer a unified theory of embodiment in language. The general idea is that in understanding action verbs, spatial descriptions, and embodied metaphors we run an "internal," mental simulation of what it would be like to perform these actions or experience these spaces in the real world. For instance, Gibbs and Matlock write, "People understand metaphors by creating an imaginative simulation of their bodies in action that mimics the events alluded to by the metaphor" (2008, 162). In Zwaan's words, in order to comprehend a sentence, the reader has to "construct an experiential (perception plus action) simulation of the described situation" (2004, 38). The same applies to the verbal description of actions, such as Patrick Bateman's "slicing" and "cutting" and "gouging out" in the passage previously quoted. Drawing on psycholinguistic work such as the studies mentioned in this section, Benjamin Bergen (2012) goes even further, arguing that embodied simulation is key to language understanding across the board. Bergen's book is, to date, the most comprehensive account of embodied simulation in language, but it doesn't solve all the problems associated with this notion. First, what exactly is an embodied simulation? How is it different from the psychological processes that we capture under the heading of "mental imagery" or, even more broadly, "imagination"? Second, we may wonder about the generalizability of this concept: Does embodied simulation *always* matter in understanding language—and literary language in particular—or only in specific scenarios? To these questions we turn in the next section.

### 1.3. FROM EMBODIED SIMULATION TO MENTAL IMAGERY

Virtually all embodied accounts of literary reading that have been offered by literary scholars so far fall back on the simulation concept in one way or another (Esrock, 2004; Wojciehowski and Gallese, 2011; Bolens, 2012). One of the reasons for the popularity of embodied simulation in cognitive approaches to literature is, no doubt, the way in which it maps neatly onto our intuitions about the centrality of the imagination in literary reading. A brief look at philosophical accounts of the imagination can help us contextualize embodied simulation vis-à-vis this broader notion. Philosophers such as Colin McGinn (2004) distinguish between

propositional and sensory imagination. The former is merely a matter of supposing that something is the case. Imagine that you were born in 1500: What would you like to do for a living? Answering this question involves retrieving propositional knowledge about the sixteenth century—knowledge that rules out answers such as “computer scientist” or “bus driver.” Engaging with narrative involves a good deal of imaginative gestures of this kind: Readers are asked to keep track of story-relevant information even if it differs from their knowledge about the current status of the world. Put otherwise, narrative, and especially fictional narrative, taps into our capacity to entertain counterfactual states of affair. But clearly this conception of the imagination doesn’t tell the whole story about literary reading. The imaginative richness of literature is a function of readers’ sensory imagination or of literature’s power to evoke in readers mental imagery—that is, experientially dense sensations comparable to perception despite the absence of the appropriate perceptual stimuli (Thompson, 2007).<sup>3</sup> Embodied simulation seems to have much more in common with mental imagery than with the propositional imagination. Indeed, inspired by enactivist accounts of mental imagery, some literary scholars have argued that the mental imagery evoked by literary language is, in itself, embodied because of how it recreates the sensorimotor patterns distinctive of perception (Troscianko, 2010; Caracciolo, 2013).

But even this move doesn’t solve all the problems that come with linking embodied simulation and mental imagery. The issue, as Anežka Kuzmičová (2014) has noted, has to do with consciousness: Mental images are experiential phenomena; they are fully conscious sensations that *may* accompany our engagement with literary language, though the psychological evidence points to substantial differences across readers in terms of both vividness and frequency of imagery (see Esrock, 1993, 118–19). Embodied simulation is much more ambiguous in this respect. When Gibbs and Matlock write that people “understand metaphors by creating an imaginative simulation of their bodies in action that mimics the events alluded to by the metaphor” (2008, 162), it remains unclear whether simulations of this sort are conscious phenomena or the result of a subpersonal (i.e., unconscious) psychological mechanism. The first option would imply equating mental imagery and embodied simulation, which is a controversial idea: When we hear or read the sentence “Robert closed the drawer,” do we really imagine Robert’s action in a sensory way? Certainly, we can do so. But the fact that we can doesn’t mean that we *have to* in order to understand the sentence. Arguing that embodied simulation is a subpersonal process seems much more plausible: We don’t have to be conscious of our simulative activity for it to play a functional role in cognition, influencing our performance in a

variety of tasks (such as those involved in the experimental studies previously described). Barsalou addresses this point explicitly, commenting on the close resemblance between simulative processes and imagery but then concluding that recent “theories focus increasingly on neural representations . . . , and less on conscious imagery” (2008, 620). Still, given the centrality of mental imagery in literary experience, an embodied account of language geared toward literary reading would have to shed light on the link between imagery and embodied simulation.

Linguist David Ritchie’s (2008) approach to embodied simulation goes some way toward tackling this issue. Ritchie’s goal is to integrate his previous account of embodied simulation (in Ritchie, 2006) with Gibbs’s (2006) account. Although the resulting model is mainly aimed at metaphor understanding, it can be easily extended to a more general theory of embodiment in literary language. Ritchie starts by contending that embodied simulation is not an on-off phenomenon, but one that comes in three different degrees. First, we may process language in an exclusively semantic way—that is, without a significant involvement of the motor system or schemata derived from bodily experience. In Ritchie’s term, the “associations” triggered by language in this scenario are purely conceptual and abstract instead of experiential. This degree zero of embodiment corresponds to what Louwerse and Jeuniaux (2008) call “shallow processing.” It’s important to keep in mind that this is a limit case more than an actual scenario: If cognitive scientists of the embodied stripe are right, embodiment shapes our mental—and linguistic—capacities through and through. But it still makes sense to say that in processing abstract language, and especially abstract language devoid of embodied metaphors, the involvement of bodily schemata will be extremely limited. Bergen, for example, argues that “language [sometimes] activates the appropriate inferences. This might be faster and more efficient than performing an embodied simulation of the whole described scene” (2012, 281). This is how I use Ritchie’s notion of semantic processing—even though we must concede, as Bergen does, that research on the differences between abstract and concrete language is still very much in its infancy.

A second level of Ritchie’s account consists in the activation of traces of readers’ past bodily experiences—for instance, perceptual sensations or sensorimotor patterns—through motor resonance or the use of subpersonal situation models. This activation will tend to remain unconscious or evoke phenomenologically weak imagery, which readers are likely to forget soon afterward. By contrast, a third type of embodied simulation will result in detailed, and fully conscious, imagery of a verbally described action or scene.