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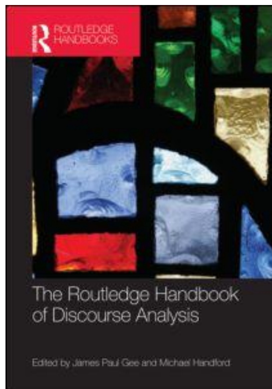

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James Paul Gee, Michael Handford

Literary discourse

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44
Literary discourse

Peter K. W. Tan

Is there such a thing as literary language?

One of the difficulties in trying to discuss literary discourse is that it is in dispute whether there is such a thing as a form of discourse that is *intrinsically* literary in nature. This is not to say that the notion of literary language in itself is denied. What is in contention is whether literariness resides in the language or whether it is a function of something outside the language such as the readers, their expectations or the cultural norms of the time. There is, for the moment, no agreed position on this, and in this section it might be worth our while to consider the various positions that we could take.

One popular notion is that language and, in particular, words can have literary qualities. Dictionaries conventionally label particular words as being *literary*. Here is the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989):

> the English vocabulary contains a nucleus or central mass of many thousand words whose 'Anglicity' is unquestioned; some of them only literary, some of them only colloquial, the great majority at once literary and colloquial – they are the *common words* of the language.

And, in diagrammatic representation (see Figure 44.1), the *literary* is still within the common core.

The label therefore finds its way into various dictionaries together with various other register labels such as *technical*, *formal* or *humorous*. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, for example, labels words like *anew* and *asunder* as 'literary'. We also find discussions about items of English vocabulary based on their source:

> The simultaneous borrowing of French and Latin words led to a highly distinctive feature of modern English vocabulary …. The Old English word … [e.g. *kingly*, *ask*] is the most colloquial, the French … [e.g. *royal*, *question*] is the more *literary*, and the Latin word … [e.g. *regal*, *interrogate*] more learned.
>
> *(Jackson and Amvela 2000: 35, my emphasis)*

Probably a couple of things need to be said: literariness appears to be a gradable feature – in that a comparative form (*more* literary) is available rather than a distinctive one. The other is that the feature of literariness is not clearly defined. Ikegami (2005), who examined these labels in dictionaries, concluded that '"literary" tends to be a highly uncertain label throughout'.

It might be worthwhile then to consider a well-known account of this (gradable) literariness, given by Jakobson – although his label is the 'poetic function'. In this, Jakobson shared the views of the group known as 'the Russian formalists', who held that art, including literary works, should draw attention to itself: in other words, readers should look *at* the text rather than look *through* the

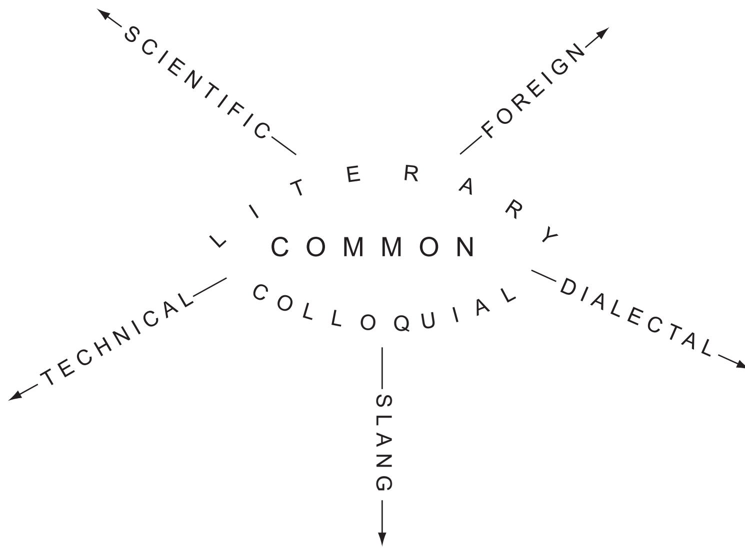

Figure 44.1 English vocabulary, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*

text. In his well-known essay 'Linguistics and poetics' (1960), he describes six functions of language, but he maintains that verbal messages are diverse not because they take on different functions but because they assign different hierarchical orders of function. The poetic function of language is said to be in operation when there is 'focus on the message for its own sake' and forms the 'dominant, determining function' in verbal art (Jakobson, 2000 [1960]: 337). This is expressed in a more complex fashion when Jakobson says:

> *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.*
> *(p. 339, original italics)*

This simply means that, in 'normal' discourse, the discourse producer makes choices between similar or roughly equivalent items; whereas in verbal art these are put together so that there is evidence of additional patterning there.

For example, in employing a word or a phrase, the user normally has to make the choice of a particular sense of the word or phrase. Yet in literary discourse ambiguity or multiple meanings might be desirable. Here is the beginning of Act 3, Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*, where Tybalt (from Juliet's clan of the Capulets) confronts Mercutio (from Romeo's clan of the Montagues), their two clans being rivals.

TYBALT: Gentlemen, good den [= good evening]: a word with one of you.
MERCUTIO: And but one word with one of us? couple it with something; make it a word and a blow.
TYBALT: You shall find me apt enough to that, sir, an [= if] you will give me occasion.
MERCUTIO: Could you not take some occasion without giving?
TYBALT: Mercutio, thou consort'st with Romeo, –
MERCUTIO: Consort! what, dost thou make us minstrels? An thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords: here's my fiddlestick; here's that shall make you dance. 'Zounds, consort!

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Mercutio deliberately ignores the idiomatic phrases said by Tybalt. He deliberately chooses not to accord 'a word' its conventional sense, 'a short conversation', but takes in its literal sense. He chooses not to understand 'to give occasion' to mean 'provide a reason' but 'unbleaches' the meaning of *give* from the expression. (I use 'unbleaching' to mean restoring the full meaning to the word.) He also chooses not to focus on the sense of 'consort' to mean 'to accompany', but instead focuses on the sense 'a musical group' and therefore refers to minstrels, discords, fiddlesticks and dancing. This kind of talk draws attention to itself as talk and is surely an instance where Jakobson's poetic function is dominant. Obviously, the patterning could be at different linguistic levels, not just the semantic or the lexical. There could be patterning at the level of orthography, phonology, morphology or syntax. The fact that the text is from an avowed literary work that is part of the canon of English literature might cause us not to be surprised at its presence here.

The question that arises is how this is different from what David Crystal's (1998) example of a conversation between two couples where the coinage *cat*-frontation (a confrontation involving a cat) was followed by a comment about how the event was to have been a *cat*-astrophe, a *cat*-alyst for something and so on. This, together with instances of punning and word play, he describes as fulfilling the ludic function of language; this is roughly what Sherzer (2002) calls speech play. The answer to that question must be that the poetic function is as much in operation and dominant in spontaneous word play as in the *Romeo and Juliet* extract, and both could in fact be labelled 'literary' – although the spontaneous word play could be called 'literature with a small "l"' (McRae, 1994).

Some empirical work done on readers (e.g. Miall and Kuiken, 1999) suggests that a model of literariness needs to continue to include the notion of foregrounded textual or narrative features. The term 'foregrounding' is of course borrowed from visual art and applied to verbal art to refer to all that is thrust into prominence for the reader or the audience. This is also in line with the poetics of the Russian formalists mentioned earlier, in that literary discourse is seen as that which disorientates through manipulating the language, and by doing so it gives prominence to Jakobson's poetic function.

These approaches continue to emphasize the textual distinctiveness of literary discourse. This needs to be balanced with the view that the distinctiveness is not of the text or of the language. Particular texts are elevated to literary status as a result of the social conditions in which they were produced or received.

> In this view there is nothing distinctive about either the language of literary discourse or its representations of the world; it is rather that some texts become literary when presented as such by institutions or when read in certain ways by readers, and that is all. Which texts these are will thus always be relative to a specific social milieu.
>
> *(Cook, 1994: 1)*

A well-known and prominent proponent of this view is the American literary critic Stanley Fish. His book *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) launched the interest in reader-orientated research and the notion of the interpretive community. His essay 'How to recognize a poem when you see one' best illustrates his point. In it he describes how he tells his class that a series of names on the blackboard (which was actually the reading list from the previous class) was a poem to be interpreted. The students, well armed with a familiarity with Christian symbolism and biblical allusions, gamely pulled apart the names and interpreted their 'message'. So what was originally a reading list can be treated like a 'found poem' (*un poème trouvé*).

> Skilled reading is usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is there, but if the example of my students can be generalized, it is a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can

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> thereafter be said to be there. Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them.
>
> *(Fish, 1980: 327, original italics)*

It therefore follows that the acceptability of any interpretation is not dependent on textual support, but on the status accorded to the interpreters by the community. As the community is bounded by space and time, there can be no universal meaning for all time. If that is the case, the notion of literary discourse is like a will o' the wisp.

It will probably be possible to manoeuvre around the more entrenched positions taken up and we might want to consider whether those positions are only supported by the 'literary' texts that are less prototypical in nature.

How is the discourse situation different in literary texts?

Another way to consider literary discourse is to examine it from the point of view of fictionality. Literary discourse has been characterized by the use of 'duplicitous' communication. For example, from early on Widdowson (1975, 1992) has pointed out that, when one reads poetry, the pronoun system must be understood to behave differently from what it does in non-literary systems. Poetry readers have long known not to equate the 'I' in the poem with the author and will have been trained to talk about the *persona* (the word originally means 'mask') of the poem. In prose, outside of reported speech, the 'I' is also not to be identified with the author: this is the *narrator*.

Short (1996) also points out that communication in dramatic texts is marked out by the presence of multiple discourse layers, as illustrated in Figure 44.2. The author has normally no way of communicating directly with the reader or the audience except indirectly, through the mediation of the characters. The Shakespearian term is the *dramatis personae*: the masks of the drama. The only occasion when the author might be able to communicate directly, in a manner of speaking, is through the use of the chorus in Greek plays (the device is also employed in Shakespeare). There are at least two levels of discourse and it might be necessary to include more for play-within-a-play situations (Figure 44.3).

Literary texts cannot be taken at face value, because the reliability of the character, persona or narrator can be held in question. Some literary works continue to be unresolved in their interpretation because of this question of reliability. A notable example is Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*: did the governess really see ghosts, or was the narrator neurotic, or something else? Cook (1994) calls this the hearsay principle: because communication is indirect, there must always be consciousness that distortion is possible.

The layered and embedded nature of literary discourse also opens up the possibility of other worlds that partly resemble the world as known by the reader, to a greater or lesser extent. The concept of 'possible worlds' is one that continues to attract the attention of philosophers and

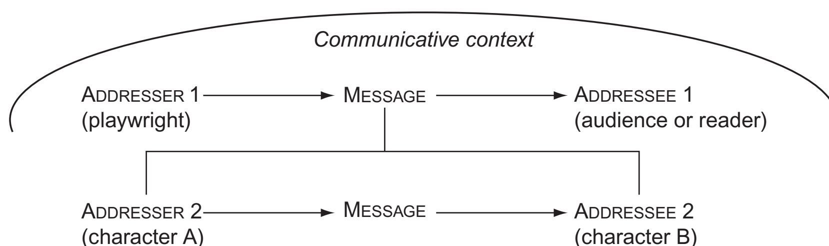

Figure 44.2 The dramatic communicative situation
Source: from Short 1996: 169

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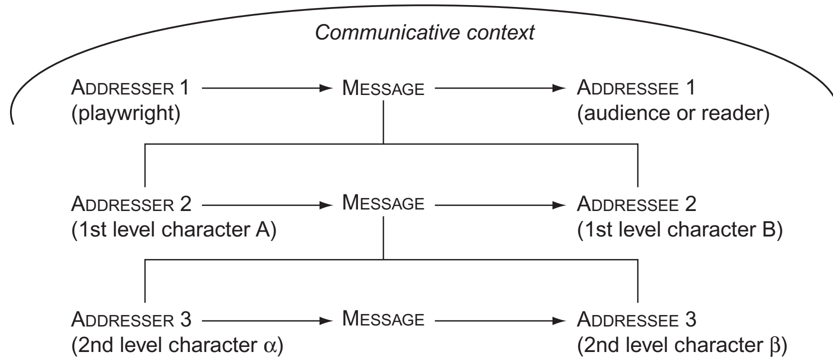

Figure 44.3 The play-with-a-play situation

semanticists. This concept is clearly exploited in genres such as science fiction or fantasy. We accept the possibility of the alternative magical world of witches, wizards and other creatures existing alongside the Muggle (human) world in the Harry Potter books.

An early response to fictionality in speech act terms came from one of the main proponents of speech act theory, John Searle. The account that is given in a novel, for instance, would seem to fit into one of his five categories of speech acts: representative or assertive, whose function is to represent a state of affairs in the world. In Searle's terms, this category has a word-to-world fit; in other words, the language maps onto a pre-existing state of affairs in the world. To describe a journalist's account as an assertive would seem to be unproblematic, but to describe a novelist's account as such would certainly be highly problematic. Searle's (1975) solution is the describe fiction as the author's pretence at performing speech acts: the author only makes a pretence at asserting, promising, and so on. For him/her, the vertical relationship between the language and the world are cancelled, and this is replaced by horizontal rules. (This particular conception bears some resemblance to Short's representation above.)

Many have been dissatisfied with an account of fictionality in literary texts that is based on pretence:

> the author is performing a genuine communicative act that is not merely the pretense of some other act, assertive or otherwise. … At best the pretense theory is incomplete. The author of fiction must be doing something more than merely pretending to assert.
>
> *(Currie 1990: 13, 18)*

Currie suggests instead that a different kind of act is being performed, perhaps something akin to make-believe: 'make-believe allows us to achieve in imagination what we are denied in reality' (p. 19). Currie uses the phrase 'fictive communication' and describes what an author produces as fictive utterances.

A seminal account of how a literary work should be regarded as performing its own speech act is the one by Mary Louise Pratt (1977). Her work develops the notion of the literary text as being an extended 'display' text. For a successful rendition, it must demonstrate the key feature of *tellability* (borrowed from Labov's (1972) account of oral narratives), which would be seen as an appropriateness condition (or felicity condition) of performing this speech act. A tellable story is simply one that is worth telling, with sufficient interesting parts, in a style that is engaging. Readers do not expect to have their time wasted on a pointless or badly written story! She also argued that literary texts were *detachable* from the immediate context, and in this manner she confirms what was mentioned earlier in this section.

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The concern about the distinctive nature of the author-to-audience communication, with it particular functions and constraints, eventually gave rise to what Roger Sell calls *literary pragmatics* (e.g. Sell, 1991): his particular focus was on the politeness pragmatics of literary communication. More broadly speaking, we could ask how general pragmatic constraints that apply to ordinary communication expressed in terms of Grice's cooperative principle (CP) or in terms of politeness or face constraints could be applied to literary communication. There is clearly an expectation for authors to be sensitive to their audience and that the literary text will be in an appropriate style and contain sufficient information for interpretation; in other words, authors are expected to demonstrate some level of cooperation (in Grice's sense) and politeness. Where there are deviations, we could expect these to be instances of *flouting* rather than *violation* of maxims. (Flouting refers to the deliberate and open breaking of the maxims of the CP, whereas violation refers to their surreptitious and misleading breach.)

When Muriel Spark disrupts the chronology of the narrative in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) by frequently resorting to prolepsis, when future events are included sporadically in the novel, we assume that this is a case of the flouting of the maxim of manner, and we consider the effects intended (see for example Bridgeman 2005).

In the case of detective fiction or whodunits, it is almost standardly the case that a crucial bit of information – the identity of the murderer – is omitted and only revealed at the end, and therefore the natural order is disrupted. So it is that, in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), the narrator, Dr James Sheppard, does not reveal that he is indeed the murderer until the last chapter, which constitutes his suicide note. In such a case, this omission of information is expected, as it characterizes the genre, and it might be more helpful to consider this not a case of *flouting* but of which Jenny Thomas (1995) calls the *suspension* of a maxim. A suspension comes into effect, according to Thomas, when special cultural circumstances or genres prescribe a norm that is different from the prevailing norm of cooperation. In the case of detective fiction, some aspects of the maxims of quantity (providing the right amount of information) and manner (providing the information at the appropriate time) are suspended. It might be worth considering how literary texts and genres of literary texts might suspend particular maxims. For example, ambiguity is sometimes prized in literary texts rather than seen as a problem. It might be worth considering the ambiguous nature of *The Turn of the Screw* (mentioned above) a case of maxim suspension as well.

Do the different literary genres require different approaches?

In order to answer this question, I would like to invite us to consider the discourse levels mentioned above. If we consider the topmost level of discourse and the features of literary communication, we could be reasonably comfortable about pointing out features that are special to literary texts. However, there are features of literary texts that seem to be derived from other texts. One of the most important features of literary texts is that it borrows, manipulates or transforms other kinds of discourse. One way it does this is by quoting or alluding to some other text, a phenomenon usually referred to as *intertextuality*, so that 'literature is nothing but a re-writing or recycling of other texts, and has of necessity to be parasitic' (Broich, 1997: 252). However, literary texts can be considered parasitic in the way in which they make use of, or redeploy, other kinds of discourse – the most notable among them being conversation in its widest sense. It is of course not only literary discourse that can be parasitic; advertisements can take on features of conversations, or news articles and recipes can include characteristics of a travelogue. Texts were said to contain *residual register features* of other texts (the expression is from Ellis and Ure, 1976).

As mentioned above, the conversation was the most common genre that was reproduced in literary texts, notably in drama and novels, but it is not infrequent in poetry. In fact the

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representation of conversational dialogue is an area that has generated much interest, and in particular the use of the *free indirect speech* is said to be prevalent in novels. Known in French as *discours indirect libre*, this was said to characterize the novels of Flaubert in the nineteenth century. And in England 'Jane Austen is generally acknowledged to be the first English novelist to make sustained use of free indirect discourse in the representation of figural speech and thought' (Gunn, 2004: 35). Here is an extract from Chapter 22 of *Northanger Abbey* that illustrates its use.

> And when they had gone over the house, he promised himself moreover the pleasure of accompanying her into the shrubberies and garden. She curtsied her acquiescence. 'But perhaps it might be more agreeable to her to make those her first object. The weather was at present favourable, and at this time of year the uncertainty was very great of its continuing so. Which would she prefer? He was equally at her service. Which did his daughter think would most accord with her fair friend's wishes? But he thought he could discern. Yes, he certainly read in Miss Morland's eyes a judicious desire of making use of the present smiling weather. But when did she judge amiss? The abbey would be always safe and dry. He yielded implicitly, and would fetch his hat and attend them in a moment. [He left the room.]

General Tilney is represented as speaking to Catherine Morland here, but his speech is in free indirect speech in that the original first and second personal pronouns have been turned into third-person pronouns ('he promised himself … the pleasure of accompanying her' as opposed to 'I promised myself … the pleasure of accompanying you'). But this is not indirect speech, because the interrogative form is left intact ('Which would she prefer?' rather than 'He wondered which she would prefer').

The use of free indirect speech becomes significant in the light of other available choices: free direct speech, direct speech, indirect (or reported) speech. Against the norm of direct speech, the use of free indirect speech creates a distancing effect and positions General Tilney, the speaker here, further away from the reader.

Speech and thought presentation have also become the subject of a number of corpus studies with the setting up of the Lancaster Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation (SW&TP2) Spoken Corpus. (See, for example, McIntyre, 2004.) It is also an important component in the investigation into point of view or perspective in literature.

When conversations are represented in literary texts, we would also generally not expect them to be exactly like real-life conversations. There are of course different tolerances for the gulf between them and this depends on the author's perspective on realism, in particular mimetic realism. Even if the author had a good ear for dialogue and wanted to represent it faithfully, the constraints of tellability (the need to render something interesting and worth listening to, as mentioned above) might mean that the tedious repetitions, false starts and reformulations that characterize spontaneous conversations will not be fully represented in literary conversations. The constructed nature of literary conversations, which undergoes several rounds of editing, will also cause it to be different from unplanned speech. It would not be surprising to expect literary conversations to be neater and to fulfil Grice's conversational maxims more fully than real-life conversations.

Carter and McCarthy (2006) note the following features in their extract of everyday informal conversation:

1. Sentences can be difficult to identify
2. There are many short units of communication
3. The minimal unit of communication is the tone unit
4. Turns can be untidy

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5. Back-channelling behaviour (*mm, yes*) is normal
6. There are abandoned or incomplete structures
7. References (e.g. pronouns like *he*) are not explicit
8. Subordinate clauses might be unconnected to main clauses
9. Structures can be difficult to label
10. Ellipsis is common
11. Some words have uncertain status: they could be discourse markers or interjections
12. The grammar can share many features of written English (pp. 165–167).

In poetry, the dramatic monologue is a form that is derived from conversation, although usually only the speech from one party in the conversation is represented. The most well known, arguably, is Browning's 'My Last Duchess'. Here is a portion of the poem.

She thanked men, – good! but thanked	1
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked	2
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name	3
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame	4
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill	5
In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will	6
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this	7
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,	8
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let	9
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set	10
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,	11
– E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose	12
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,	13
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without	14
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;	15
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands	16
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet	17
The company below, then.	18

The poem successfully imitates the style of someone talking, and it does this through the use of short, loosely connected clauses (points 2 and 3 above). There is some ellipsis (point 10: [*that is*] *good!*, line 1), and there is an exclamation (point 11: *Oh*, line 13; perhaps also *good!*, line 1). However, the sentence structures are clear and complete: there are no abandoned or incomplete structures. In addition to this, we might also notice features associated with poetry: there is a pattern of rhyming couplets (*thanked/ranked, name/blame* etc.).

We might also note the use the flouting of conversational maxims, designed to generate implicatures (roughly: what is suggested in an utterance rather than said explicitly). For example, the Duke says, 'Who'd stoop to blame/This sort of trifling?' (lines 4–5). This is literally a question. Such a question would, however, seem irrelevant in the context, and we could assume that it *flouts* the relevance maxim to generate at least two implicatures: (a) nobody in these circumstances would deign to lower himself to reprimand the Duchess; and (b) he himself did not stoop to blame her. (This would, of course, be a 'rhetorical question' in traditional terminology.)

We might also notice, similarly, that the Duke seems to give incomplete information later: 'I gave commands;/Then all smiles stopped together' (lines 15–16). *What* did he command? *Why* did the smiles stop? These break the quantity maxim relating to the amount of information. One interpretation is that he ordered his wife to be killed; another is that all his strictures caused her to

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sicken and die. Nothing is explicitly said. Is the implicature to threaten the hearer (an emissary of his prospective new wife)?

The poem therefore exploits the features of conversation so that we are able to have some access to the character of the Duke from a close perspective.

Browning does not use all the features of conversation, and it is possible to include more, as in some modernist works like T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

> When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said –
> I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
> HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
> Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
> He'll want to know what you done with the money he gave you
> To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there …
>
> *(T. S. Eliot, The Wasteland III)*

Here we see the use of colloquialism (*demobbed* rather than *demobilized*), non-standardism (*what you done* with the money rather than *what you did* with the money) and interruption (HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME).

Apart from informal conversation, literary texts can also be parasitic upon discourses such as institutional discourses, including doctor–patient discourse – as in the play *Equus*:

> *Nurse goes out and back to her place. Dysart sits, opening a file.*
> DYSART So did you have a good journey? I hope they gave you lunch at least. Not that there's much to choose between a British Rail meal and one here.
> *Alan stands staring at him.*
> DYSART Won't you sit down?
> *Pause. He does not. Dysart consults his file.*
> Is this your full name? Alan Strang?
> *Silence.*
> And you're seventeen. Is that right? Seventeen? … Well?
> ALAN (*singing low*) Double your pleasure
> Double your fun
> With Doublemint, Doublemint
> Doublemint gum.
> DYSART (*unperturbed*) Now, let's see. You work in an electrical shop during the week. You live with your parents, and your father's a printer. What sort of things does he print?
> ALAN (*singing louder*) Double your pleasure
> Double your fun
> With Doublemint, Doublemint
> Doublemint gum.
>
> *(Peter Shaffer, Equus, Act 1, Scene 3: pp. 5–6)*

In this extract, the play is doubly parasitic in that it not only employs doctor–patient discourse, with its use of a question-and-answer sequence, but it also includes an advertising jingle, and the incongruous juxtaposition should cause us to interpret the extract more carefully.

This parasitic relationship between literary texts and other kinds of discourse means that it is possible to discuss general linguistic and pragmatic phenomena through examining literary texts: for example, Rudanko (2006) examines the phenomenon of impoliteness through examining Shakespeare. Literary texts have also been used for a long time to teach the language.

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It is appropriate now to return to the original question. Different literary texts are parasitic on different kinds of discourses: this should be clear from our examination of Austen, Browning, Eliot and Shaffer. The discourse methods for analysing these discourses, which the literary text exploit, must be the ones that can be used as well. It must therefore follow that there cannot be a standard, single method of analysing different literary texts. Much depends on the lower levels of discourse. If there is much dialogue involved, it might make sense to examine dialogue structure and ask questions like 'Who initiates the exchanges?' or 'Are supportive responses given?'. If, however, there is a long soliloquy or confessional, examining dialogue structure is less likely to be helpful.

We also noted features of the discourse that could be attributed to the topmost level of discourse (i.e. to the author rather than narrator, persona or character) – features such as the use of rhyme in 'My Last Duchess'. These would be non-parasitic elements of literary discourse and discussion about these elements has been developed within literary criticism: we can think about metre and rhyme in poetry; characterization, plot and setting in prose and drama.

What work in discourse analysis is useful for analysing literary discourse?

Almost the whole gamut of approaches used in discourse analysis can potentially be appropriated for analysing literary discourse. A lot of the discussion about literary discourse that examines the language with some degree of rigour comes under the rubric of stylistics. (Initially, the label 'literary stylistics' was also used for contrast with the study of style in non-literary texts.) Stylistics is sometimes seen as an approach within discourse analysis, although what really happens is that stylistics employs a range of approaches, including (but not restricted to) those in discourse analysis.

The work on functional grammar, especially the systemic functional grammar as developed by Michael Halliday and continued by Jim Martin and others, remains significant. A functional grammar has been seen to be useful because in this model form is related to function and meaning. One of the earliest landmark works has been Halliday's (1971) analysis of Golding's *The Inheritors*, which focuses on the different transitivity choices made by the Neanderthals and the humans. This also opens an important entry to the discussion of point of view. Functional grammar continues to be an important framework for analysing prose in particular, and a lot of textbooks on stylistics in the 1990s devote a lot of attention to the use of systemic functional grammar for analysis, for example that by Toolan (1998).

The work on the ethnography of communication, with its emphasis on norms within speech communities establishing the culture, is also significant in turning the attention of literary scholars to the production and reception of literary texts. Sell's (1991) literary pragmatics has clear links to this. Indeed, the initial, gut reaction, inherited from new criticism, to trust only the text has largely been abandoned, and aspects of the conditions under which literary texts are published are readily incorporated, as in Cooper's (1998) discussion of whether the ending of *The Taming of the Shrew* is ironic or not.

The Birmingham school of discourse analysis, a development from systemic functional grammar, has also generated some interest in stylistics. Discourse is conceived of as having a hierarchical structure, with moves combining to form exchanges. An early application can be found in Nash's (1989) analysis of the change of guard in *Hamlet*. It will be noticed that there is a greater focus on the lower levels of discourse – in other words on interactions between characters.

In so far as the lower discourse levels in literary texts, particularly but not only dramatic texts, resemble 'ordinary' discourse, it would seem obvious that any framework developed to deal with that can be appropriated. A lot of the developments within pragmatics (speech act theory, Grice's cooperative principle, relevance theory) are readily applied to that level of discourse. This is also

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the case with work in conversation analysis (e.g. the work on turn-taking). Much of this can be seen in Cooper (1998) and in Black (2006).

The work on cognitive psychology also provided the impetus for much of the more recent work on stylistics; but more of that below.

Looking to the future

What kinds of developments in the investigation of literary discourse can we look forward to? I shall only highlight two areas, which are not brand new, but have attracted recent attention.

The first is the investigation of literary discourse involving the corpus – corpus stylistics. The developments in corpus linguistics, including software that can retrieve more and more complex information from the corpus, have meant that it is increasingly possible to get more nuanced information from a corpus of literary texts. The Lancaster Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation (SW&TP2) Spoken Corpus has already been mentioned. In this case, though, the analysis had to be done by hand.

The second area is that of developments that involve marrying an interest in the close study of literary texts with 'a systematic and theoretically informed consideration of the cognitive structures and processes that underlie the production and reception of language' (Semino and Culpeper, 2002: ix). This enterprise is sometimes labelled 'cognitive poetics' (Stockwell 2002; Gavins and Steen 2003), in recognition of the fact that the emphasis is on *explaining* how interpretations are derived (as is the case with the enterprise of poetics) on the basis of cognitive theories, rather than on *producing* new interpretations. On other occasions, this field is known as cognitive stylistics. (Some might make a subtle distinction between them; others don't.) The earlier work based on reader-response theories (including those by Fish mentioned above) and the empirical study of literature (Miall and Kuiken 1999 mentioned above) paved the way. Prominent focal points include those that apply the notion of schema or the conceptual metaphor.

Cook links the notion of schema to readers' expectations: 'the essence of schema theory is that discourse proceeds and achieves coherence by successfully locating the unexpected within a framework of expectations' (1994: 130). The schema can involve expectations about how things typically operate or the objects typically found and there can be world, text and language schemata. Walsh (2008) employs schema theory, among other things, to highlight the contrast in perspective between a narrator with Asperger's syndrome and the reader, because the narrator lacks the schemata that we take for granted. (She focuses on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 2003, by Mark Haddon.) The contrast can also be used for comedic effect. We can consider the beginning of the third act of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Gwendolen and Cecily have gone back into the house in a huff because they discovered that their suitors Jack and Algernon have been lying to them.

> GWENDOLEN: The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.
>
> CECILY: They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

There could be a variety of appropriate behaviour accompanying repentance, so the schema could vary between cultures. We might, for example, be familiar with the biblical wearing of sackcloth and application of ash. It might be just a matter of adopting a hangdog look. Whatever it is, it would not involve consuming pleasurable food; the eating of muffins would, instead, be interpreted as self-indulgent behaviour. The girls' schema contradicts our schema; and it is the ludicrous contrast that generates humour here.

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Another way of separating the way 'our' world works and the way the text-internal world works is through the text world theory, developed by Gavins (for example, Gavins 2003). (This is related to the notion of 'possible worlds', discussed above in relation to the Harry Potter books.) A text world analysis would distinguish between the *discourse world* where participants engage in a language event (in this case, the author communicating with the reader or audience), where general discourse principles such as cooperation and face operate. Participants also need to construct a *text world*: this is a mental representation constructed in order to understand the discourse through the use of textual cues (in the case of our example, 'eating muffins'). There could be numerous text worlds created by participants or characters.

Work on conceptual metaphor, first initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), continues to garner interest. Arguments are often expressed, for example, in terms of warfare. These are Lakoff and Johnson's (1980: 4) examples.

> Your claims are *indefensible*.
> He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.
> His criticisms were *right on target*. (Original italics)

Semino (2008: 5) defines conceptual metaphors as

> systematic sets of correspondences, or 'mappings', across conceptual domains, whereby a 'target' domain (e.g. our knowledge about arguments) is partly structured in terms of a difference 'source' domain (e.g. our knowledge about war).

Lakoff and Johnson's examples therefore generate the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR.

Semino (2002) makes use of the conceptual metaphors employed by the protagonist of John Fowles's first novel, *The Collector*, as a way into the mind of the character. This character, Frederick Clegg, is a clerk who also collects butterflies. He kidnaps Miranda Grey, an art student, who eventually dies after two months. Evident in much of the book is the construction of Miranda as BUTTERFLY. Semino shows a systematic mapping between the BUTTERFLY source domain and the MIRANDA target domain, such as the following:

> I watched the back of her head and her hair in a long pigtail. It was very pale, silky, like burnet cocoons.
>
> *(p. 9)*

> Seeing her always made me feel like I was catching a rarity, heart-in-mouth, as they say. A Pale Clouded yellow, for instance.
>
> *(p. 9)*

It is these correspondences that account for much of Clegg's behaviour. The persistence of the metaphor in the parts of the novel told from Clegg's point of view also establish his peculiar preoccupation and his mental illness.

The work on cognitive poetics – including the schema theory, text worlds theory and the conceptual metaphor – is very likely to continue to attract attention.

Further reading

Rather than reinventing the wheel and give a list of reading items, I will refer the reader who wants to explore this area to two volumes.

Carter, R. and Stockwell, P. (eds.) (2008) *The Language and Literature Reader*. London: Routledge.

This volume contains 28 chapters and is organized around three main periods. The section entitled 'Foundations' presents work from the 1960s and 1970s and contains chapters that employ grammatical

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analysis of literary texts (and includes the Halliday (1971) study mentioned above). 'Developments' covers work from the 1980s and 1990s (such as Nash's study on *Hamlet*). 'New Directions' showcases more recent work, including work in cognitive and corpus stylistics. The volume also contains a reprinted version of Gavins (2003) and Semino (2002).

Lambrou, M. and Stockwell, P. (eds.) (2008) *Contemporary Stylistics*. London: Continuum.

This volume of 20 chapters is organized around the three main literary genres of prose, poetry and drama and provides a very wide range of approaches to literary texts. It includes the chapter on schema poetics by Walsh mentioned above.

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