

Emotion and Intertextuality

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to investigate the relationship between intertextuality and the affective response to literary texts in an attempt both to strengthen the link with cognition and to investigate further aspects of the phenomenon of intertextuality. Moreover, this research will introduce a new approach to the study of intertextuality.

Keywords: phenomenon of intertextuality, cognition and emotion, a literary text, intertextual knowledge, intertextual links.

Introduction. The connection between cognition and emotion was highlighted in *appraisal theory*, which has been developed and described by Schachter (1971), Lazarus (e.g. 1984, 1991), Frijda (1986) and Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987) among others. According to appraisal theory, emotion is experienced as an effect of both physiological arousal and *cognitive appraisal*. As Oatley and Jenkins have stated, 'an emotion is usually caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (a goal) that is important'.¹ This remark brings to mind to literary reading and the readers' engagement with text, which was highlighted as a crucial parameter for the creation of intertextual links. The article involves a short mixed methods study that is aimed at investigating the construction of intertextual links and their role in the affective responses of the participants.

Emotion and literary tradition. Emotion has occupied a central role in the discussion of literature since Aristotle's account in *Poetics*. The discussion has taken a number of directions exploring the role of the various agents in the process, namely the literary text, the author and the audience. Two of the core concepts Aristotle focused on, *mimesis* and *catharsis*, have exerted major influence on Western thought. For Aristotle, *catharsis*, i.e. the feeling of cleansing or purging, is tied to the role of plays, and it is related not only to the emotional cleansing of the play's characters but most significantly to the audience's experience of the same feeling at the end of the play. This experience becomes possible through *mimesis*, i.e. the representation of a significant and complete event. Literary theorists and philosophers have discussed extensively the concept of *mimesis* in relation to artistic creation preferring the aspect of 'representation' first suggested by Philip Sidney². On the other hand, psychologist Keith Oatley prefers the term 'simulation' as the meaning behind the Aristotelian concept and uses a metaphor from cognitive science to exemplify how individuals process plays or literary texts: 'A play or novel runs on the minds of the audience or reader as a computer simulation runs on a computer'³.

On the other hand, the role of the text and its creator in the affective

¹ Oatley, K., & Jenkins, I.M. (1996) *Understanding emotions*. Oxford: Blackwell.

² Sidney, P. (1989) 'An apology for poetry'. In C. Kaplan (Ed.), *Criticism: The major statements* (2nd ed.). New York: St Martin's, pp. 108-147.

³ Oatley, K. (1999a) 'Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: Fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation', *Review of General Psychology* 3(2): 101-117.

experience was prominent in the works of romantic poets, who were the first to place emphasis on the role of emotion in the creation and appreciation of literary works.

Wordsworth identified the creation of poetry with emotion: 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'⁴. Emotion is contemplated by the poet or the reader and this contemplation results in the recreation of the original emotion. As Opdahl notes, for Wordsworth 'emotion represents the poet's subject first in the poet's memory in the moment of writing ... [and also] the poet's meaning within the reader's mind' allowing the latter to move from the text to emotion in order to represent the subject. Coleridge, on the other hand, tied emotion to imagination and thought in *Biographia Literaria*⁵. Imagination 'dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates in order to recreate' (I, 304). However, this conception of the author was not accepted by twentieth century critics and writers including T.S. Eliot and Susanne Langer. The former claimed in his essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* that Wordsworth's premise is 'an inexact formula', since it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor tranquillity but concentration that allows for experiences to be united. Moreover, for Eliot poetry 'is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion'. The American philosopher Susanne Langer shared a similar view with Eliot and perceived art as 'the articulation, not the simulator or catharsis, of feeling' and a true work of art as being 'often above sympathy, and the role of empathy in our understanding of it is trivial'⁶. These claims for the more impersonal role of the author have urged a number of critics to profess the readers' need to rely on their subjective experiences while reading literary texts. This idea of subjectivity is mainly reflected in Wolfgang Iser's writings. For instance, he writes that readers have to rely on their own experience in order to judge what the literary texts communicate to them; the literary text occupies a 'peculiar halfway position between the world of objects and the reader's own world of experience'. This move away from the assumed objectivity of an authority is in accordance with the arguments of reader response criticism, Iser being one of the first that pointed towards the need for looking at readers' responses to literary texts in his influential book *The Act of Reading*. It is within the latter's premises that the research on emotion has taken an empirical turn incorporating findings and suggestions from cognitive science. Scholars like Willie van Peer, David S. Miall and Keith Oatley have conducted diverse experimental studies focusing on readers' responses to literature and more specifically to the way their feelings resonate. Kneepkens and Zwaan propose that there are two types of feelings associated with text comprehension, namely fiction emotions and artifact-emotions. Fiction emotions relate to the events described in the fictional world or the characters that inhabit it, while artifact-emotions relate to the aesthetic quality of the work. Artifact-emotions control fiction emotion, as they are able to diminish the diegetic effect, their awareness that they are being transported into a fictional world. Kneepkens and Zwaan also note that fictional feelings can be either altercentric, when readers imagine themselves in the position of the characters and experience similar feelings, or egocentric, when they 'activate their own emotional experiences to give meaning to the story world'. More recently, Miall and Kuiken have distinguished four types of feelings: *evaluative feelings* towards the text; *narrative feelings*, such as empathy with a character; *aesthetic feelings* in relation to specific aspects of the formal features of texts; and finally *self-modifying feelings*. These are distinctive to the literary response and they refer to the restructuring of the reader's understanding of a narrative as well as to the reader's self of sense. Miall and Kuiken note that selfmodifying feelings can be generated by metaphors of personal identification leading to the identification of the reader with the character. Participants in their study of Sean O'Faolain's short story 'The Trout' (1980) shifted to the use of the pronoun 'you' while describing the main character's experiences. Through the process of reading the text, participants seemed to be confronted with personal feelings and to have recontextualised them in the light of new feelings evoked by the text. Miall and Kuiken's proposal appears to have strong connections with literary stance and the readers' ability to immerse into the world of the literary text and become emotionally involved with the story. The relationship between intertextuality and emotion has remained an unexplored issue with scarce references in literature. Neither literary theorists nor linguists have considered intertextuality in conjunction with the affective responses of

⁴ Wordsworth, W. (1953) *The poetical works of Wordsworth* (ed. E. de Selinecourt). London: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Coleridge, S.T. (1965) *Biographia literaria* (ed. G. Watson). London: Dent

⁶ Langer S. (1967) *Mind: An essay on humanfeeling* (Vol. 1). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

the readers, though Barthes claims that the origins of emotions are texts themselves and that there are no emotions before textual descriptions of emotions: 'without the - always anterior- world of Book and Code no desire, no jealousy ... itself a lost origin, writing becomes the origin of emotion'. These lines reflect Barthes' idea of the *deja lu* and the author as a scriptor who merely 'arranges and compiles the already written, spoken and read'.

Conclusion. The main reason for this may be the fact that most literary theorists treat intertextuality as a property of the text, not thus encouraging explorations of its relationship with affective responses. Even critics who are more sensitive to the role of the reader like Genette and Riffaterre have not pointed to this direction. In linguistics, as mentioned before, intertextuality has largely been neglected while scholars who investigate and test empirically the relationship between literary reading and emotion have also disregarded intertextuality. On the other hand, the current approach to intertextuality has been grounded on the principles of cognitivism facilitating its connection with emotion due to the intrinsic relationship between the two. I believe that the account of their relation will allow for a better understanding of 'how feeling is related to the cognitive mode of understanding', as Miall has claimed and how background knowledge can influence the reading experience in an affective level. Moreover, it will enable us to investigate the extent to which feeling takes control of the reading process, for example by comparing the emotional responses of the readers before and after the construction of links.

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