

COGNITIVE POETICS AND ITALIAN LITERARY CRITICISM

Comparative investigation and practical applications

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the possibility of the application of cognitive poetics to Italian literature, with a comparison to four major nineteenth century currents of literary criticism. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the research, the data was obtained from reviewed psychology articles, textbooks regarding both psychological and literary subjects, original sources containing the examined poetry and prose, e-books, and open source web material for literary works that lacked copyright. Unless specified, all translations from Italian to English were done by me. Since cognitive poetics are based on the assumption that we perceive literature similarly to how we perceive reality and that no other information outside the text is needed, the method proved to be highly applicable to any examined literary work, regardless of the author or period in which it was composed. A less unexpected discovery after the two-year long investigation was that, while at first the old and new methods seem to clash, the Italian techniques of literary criticism gained gradually increasing common elements with the cognitive method. This seems to suggest an inherent tendency to strive towards an analytical and objective examination of art which, through the application of scientific cognitive principles, is the ultimate goal of cognitive poetics.

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Introduction

This thesis is not meant to offer exhaustive knowledge of the history of Italian literary criticism, neither it is meant to explain in detail every possible application of the theories behind what is today known as cognitive poetics. The purpose of this thesis is to reevaluate, from a cognitive perspective, literary works that have been previously analyzed by the pillars of Italian literary criticism. There are several factors that make this path an arduous one, and the thesis is meant to be considered as a mere experiment, the beginning of something new, a superficial exploration of an uncharted territory. Firstly, we are comparing giants that lived a century from each other. On one side we have the founders of a literary tradition that lasts to this very day such as Francesco De Sanctis and Benedetto Croce while, on the other end of the field, we find cognitive-linguistic researchers such as George Lakoff and Peter Stockwell. Another great obstacle comes from the fact that cognitive poetics is a largely unexplored approach when it comes to Italian literature. This has two implications. The first one is that every single application of cognitive poetics is going to be done from scratch, with no previous guidelines available since the analyzed works have been untouched by this method. The second one is that there is rarely going to be a link between the classical analysis of the text and the cognitive approach. Because of this limitation, comparisons will be limited to the applicability of each method to the text.

Given the unusual combination of elements and authors, the thesis will be structured in two halves. The first one will briefly explain the main principles of four major currents of literary criticism. We will start with the theories of Francesco De Sanctis, progress with Benedetto Croce, move forward to Leo Spitzer, and finally end with examples of psychoanalytic criticism applied by Barberi Squarotti. Each one of these schools of thought will be accompanied by a text that was previously analyzed through the lens of one of the Italian critics, and then examined through the application of a specific principle of cognitive poetics. I must remind that, while sometimes continuity can be found, there is no inherent connection between the Italian critics and the cognitive techniques. The link is the text itself, an example of previous analyses and proof of the universal quality of cognitive principles.

It is also important to remember that Italian literary criticism and cognitive poetics, generally speaking, move in almost opposite directions. The former is based largely on content, the latter on structure. Also, the focus of the analysis is also opposite. Nineteenth century Italian criticism revolves around the author and the interpretation of his message, while cognitive poetics can only predict the effect of the literary work on the reader. A last but fundamental distinction among the two approaches is the fact that the Italian analysis is incredibly contextualized, with each theory seen as belonging to a historical continuum the same way the text is considered product not only of the author, but of the entire history of Italian literature. Each word is entwined to its own work and to what came before it. Each sentence becomes a tile in the infinite mosaic that is Italian literature. In an opposite way, cognitive poetics takes into consideration the text and the text alone, severing all links and influences that are not identifiable from the work itself.

The second half of the thesis will have the literary text become the protagonist. In each chapter, a new aspect of cognitive poetics will be introduced according to the principles of George Lakoff, Reuven Tsur, and Peter Stockwell. These authors never analyzed the presented works but their principles can be applied to any literary work independently from the knowledge one might have of the author or his historical context. It would be impossible, within the scope of this thesis, to explore the entirety of each researcher's theory, and the practical application of their theories will make the concepts more understandable and pleasant to explore.

With all this in mind, let us embark on a journey through a century of literature and trace the steps of the giants that were there before us, leaving a small but innovative mark along the way.

De Sanctis, Lakoff's Metaphors, and Dante Alighieri

Because of his role within the advancement and evolution of literary criticism in Italy and his chronological place within this process, Francesco De Sanctis will constitute the starting point of our investigation. What is perhaps the concept for which De Sanctis is mostly known for is the notion that art is “autonomous”.

Firstly, according to the author, the artistic product and, more specifically, the poetic work are not a mere product of the influence of exterior domains such as philosophy and ethics. In his own words “morality is not a consequence of art, but the premise, the antecedent” (qtd. in Marchese 256). Also, the poem is always expressed in a singular and inimitable moment and never becomes emulation of a stereotype. For example, in the same work, De Sanctis explains that, “Saying that Achilles is the stereotype of strength and courage [...] is incorrect, since these qualities can find infinite expressions among individuals. Achilles is Achilles”.

While it is true that the literary product is autonomous, that does not mean it is isolated from its historical context. In fact, according to De Sanctis, each work has to be considered part of a continuum, as belonging to the history of Italian literature¹. As

¹ De Sanctis offers an all-encompassing view of Italian literature as a historical process in “Storia Della Letteratura Italiana”. A specific analysis of Alighieri's works can be found in chapters III and VII. See De Sanctis.

society and culture evolve, the poetic product reflects historical evolution. Only through the knowledge of the history of Italian literature can the critic fully understand the content of the poetic work and recognize the connections that are necessary to its interpretation (Marchese 262).

De Sanctis defines literary criticism as “the conscience, or eye of the poem” and also that states that “Its purpose is not to dissolve the poetic universe in its parts, but to show unity through reason” and that “criticism does not create, it reproduces”². These statements seem to not specifically give a task to the literary critic, but simply suggest to stay away from dissection of the work and to preserve the message, or the form, as a “whole”. Still, it seems that the true purpose his proposed model of criticism has not been defined.

Unfortunately, the answer only becomes clear as we move further and further from objectivity. In fact, according to De Sanctis, criticism has a duty that goes beyond interpretation, it has to provide a **value judgment**. Each work has an inherent value that exists regardless of its century, of the literary trends, and previous authors. The critic is the only one that has achieved the necessary knowledge of the poetic world and is capable of assigning the work its true value and its true place.

² For the quotes in Italian refer to Marchese 257

The principles according to which the author would make such a value judgment are still shrouded in subjectivity and present one of the major limits of such an early theory of literary criticism.

In order to contrast this view with a modern cognitive interpretation we will examine the following piece of literature from two different perspectives, the model proposed by the Italian critic and a new approach taken by George Lakoff.

As De Sanctis represents a great starting point to represent Italian literary criticism, no work is more iconic than Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. In particular, we will be examining the very first verses of the work, as De Sanctis openly criticizes the use of metaphors within the text. The first three verses recite as follows:

*Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.
Ah me! How hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.
So bitter is it, death is a little more;
But of the good to treat, which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.
I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.
But after I had reached a mountain's foot,
At that point where the valley terminated,
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,
Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,*

Vested already with the planet's rays

*Which leadeth others right by every road*³.(Alighieri, “The Divine Comedy”)

The main criticism that De Sanctis makes about such an important text revolves around the concept of the “selva” or, as Longfellow translates, the “forest dark”. The critic makes the distinction between *figura* and *figurato* or, in other words, the figure and what the figure is supposed to represent. In this case, starting with the concept of the forest as a symbol of sin⁴, De Sanctis argues that Dante loses himself within the use of metaphors and allegories to the point where the *figura* holds little to no resemblance to the *figurato*. He states that while the metaphor expands the literary world constructed by the Florentine poet it also murders it, depriving it of the life of the elements that constitute it, giving importance to the metaphors instead of the concepts they were intended to represent (De Sanctis 164). The Divine Comedy, he explains, is *not yet art*⁵.

In order to offer a different interpretation and a re-evaluation of the function of the metaphor, we can start applying some of the fundamentals of modern cognitive poetics. In this specific case, nothing applies to the allegorical work of Dante better than George Lakoff’s theory on the function of the metaphor.

One of the fundamental principles present in Lakoff’s *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* is that metaphors are not exclusive to literary language but are ingrained in

³ For the original Italian version refer to: *La Divina Commedia di Dante. Inferno I, vv1-3*. USA: Gutenberg Project, 1997. PDF e-book.

⁴ Based on Dante’s *Convito*, De Sanctis defines the sin allegory as a state of ignorance and error. See De Sanctis 157.

⁵ It is important to remember that De Sanctis is not considering Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* as an isolated work, and that this comment refers to an ongoing process that involves the entirety of the history of Italian literature. See Croce 165.

our own way of thinking and, to a certain extent, they permit communication (3). The author argues that, for example, we are incapable of conceptualizing the idea of “categories” without the aid of metaphors. We think of classical categories as characterized by specific boundaries which may or may not contain objects or other categories. For instance if object X is contained in A, and A is contained in B, then X is contained in B. Lakoff states that this deduction is only possible because we, as humans, are familiar with the properties of containers. The logical qualities attributed to categories are nothing more than the logical qualities we attribute to containers! (Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor” 9)

Conceptual metaphors, such as the one we just examined, are defined in cognitive linguistic by the following formula, *TARGET-DOMAIN IS SOURCE-DOMAIN* or, alternatively, *TARGET-DOMAIN AS SOURCE-DOMAIN*. In our example with categories and containers, the conceptual metaphor will therefore be defined as *CLASSICAL CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS*, where classical categories constitute the abstract concept we intend to represent and containers represent the familiar realm from which we obtain the characteristics to define the unfamiliar model⁶.

Of course, Lakoff’s theory of the metaphor can be applied to so much more than classical categories and, as we are about to discover, can be used within our excerpt from the Divine Comedy.

Let us try to identify the main conceptual metaphor behind the text. The word *nostra*, or *our*, immediately communicates to the reader that the author is not narrating a

⁶ For additional examples on how Lakoff’s theory of metaphors can be applied to our everyday language, refer to his article “Metaphors We Live by”

personal experience, but something that can be extended to mankind as a whole. The concept gains even more importance if we consider that the author was 35 at the time and that the age was in fact considered to be exactly halfway through a man's life. But since cognitive poetics operate without knowledge that is extraneous to the composition, we must leave this element out of our analysis. Immediately after, in the second line, the author re-establishes connection between the universal character of the voyage and his own personal experience by using the word *I*. The first identifiable conceptual metaphor is therefore EVERYONE'S JOURNEY AS MY JOURNEY. As we keep reading, more elements start coming together in the creation of another conceptual metaphor that encompasses most of the elements found in the remaining lines. Dante projects the qualities of a dark and entangling forest (which is the best way of translating the word *selva*) upon the more obscure concept of sin. In fact, the connections between the source and target are evident throughout the text. The Dante character is not able to remember how he **entered the forest/gave into sin**, he abandoned **the true way/the pious way**, and is able to catch a glimpse of **the exit/redemption**. The resulting conceptual metaphor is *SIN IS THE FOREST*.

The question arises, how is a cognitive interpretation of the poem different from the view of De Sanctis? The main difference is that the Italian critic believed that Dante Alighieri drowned the readers beneath an allegorical sea while losing complete sight of what he was trying to describe in the first place. By viewing the poem from a cognitive perspective we realize that the use of metaphors was a necessity for Dante's work. How else could he have described concepts like sin and redemption without them? It is barely possible for even the modern readers to conceptualize the transition from sin to salvation

without thinking of it as a *Journey*. We need something physical from which we can obtain the colors to paint the picture of something metaphysical. The *Selva* is the starting point of the journey; it is a necessary metaphor for our comprehension.

It is vital to understand that the differences in value attributed by the two methods to the metaphor derive from the perspective from which it is analyzed. The cognitive approach lets us see the device as a tool for communication, a necessary process without which such metaphysical and abstract concepts would be indescribable, but it also considers the work as an isolated one. When De Sanctis criticizes the overuse of the metaphor, he is not simply describing the Divine Comedy but determining its value and place within an evolutionary process. It is a comparison between the work and the literary and historical context that generated it (Marchese 258).

Croce and Movement Schemas within Pascoli's poetry

The man that set the standard for Italian literary criticism throughout the nineteenth century is, without a doubt, Benedetto Croce. In order to understand his method we must first understand his definition of art and the consequent function of the literary critic.

For the philosopher, art is *intuition*. Croce describes a specific process through which the *intuition* is manifested. The first step is the contemplation of an *image* on behalf of the author, an act that cannot be guided by morals and must have no utilitarian goal. The *intuition* cannot be lifeless and has to be animated by *sentiment*. Croce defines sentiment as an ever evolving feeling that fluctuates from one state to the other. It moves from joy to worry, from pleasure to pain, from strength to surrender and, after each transition, it always carries over elements from its previous states. Finally, art is created when the author is able to give representation to the sentiment of the original image that inspired the author in the first place⁷ (Marchese 276).

Since representation is the last fundamental step in the creation of art, the critic states that the concepts of intuition and expression are deeply entwined to the point that, in art, one cannot exist without the other. Given the intuition-expression identity,

⁷ For an extensive explanation of Croce's idea of art, refer to the first chapter of Ainslie's English translation of "The Essence of Aesthetic", London, Heinemann, 1921.

Benedetto Croce finally concludes that art *is* language⁸. This represents an enormous step towards a new model of literary criticism. The subjective views of the critic still play an important role in the determination of the “rules” needed to evaluate art, but there is also a new emphasis placed upon language and specific linguistic devices.

Now that we have defined what is the essence of art is in whichever form it manifests, we must identify the purpose of the critic. Croce states, “Artistic criticism does not produce the logical or intuitive equivalent of art. The former is impossible because the art is not logical thought, the second because art cannot be translated. It [criticism] only gives knowledge of what we have in front of us and that is whether or not it is art.” (qtd. in Marchese 278).

The purpose of the literary critic is to distinguish *art* from *non-art* or, within a work, the artistic parts from the non-artistic ones. Croce is particularly known for this distinction which is carefully explained in his book *Poesia e non poesia*. For example, the author defines “zeppe” those parts that fill in the gaps between two poetic sections of a text. Such fillers could be explanations of past events that are necessary to the understanding of the story, the genealogical history of the protagonist, or even characters that serve the only purpose of moving the action forward (Marchese 282). At the same time Croce points out in “*La Poesia*” that by separating a poem in words, metaphors, rhythmic schemes, and comparisons, we do not reach an evaluation of the work but the creation of a lifeless product made from inanimate parts. Poetry, according to Croce, can only be evaluated holistically (Marchese 279).

⁸ For a complete English version of Croce’s “*Estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale*” refer to Douglas Anslie’s translation work. “*Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*”, USA: Gutenberg Project, 2005.

The attempt to preserve the interpretation of the whole from the fragmentary nature of its parts brings this type of criticism to an excessive focus on the content as opposed to a careful consideration of its structural elements and, in the end, presents a major limitation to Croce's literary theory. To show an example of Croce's method and compare it to a cognitive approach, we will examine an excerpt from Giovanni Pascoli's *Psyche* from both perspectives:

Around your house, oh captive,
A savage being grazes your herds,
Horned, bristly, always erected
on his hooves, as if about to spring.
And you always fear, there he threatens
Impatiently, always howling and running;
and often swims in the deep river,
as the rain, and often the forest collapses,
as if bent by the wind; and it's never the moment,
In which you don't hear or see him, o Psyche,
Pan, the multiform. But he sometimes blows
softly in the canes of the swamps,
so that you hear him, oh Psyche, and cry
without sorrow, because it was already cried for
and lost its sadness as it passed through the eyes
the first time⁹.

⁹ For the original Italian poem see Pascoli 110.

Croce views this poem, among others by the same author, as a testament to his idyllic, or pastoral, soul. Contrarily to the considerations of the critics at the time Pascoli, according to Croce, is not to be inserted within the Romantic trend¹⁰, as if his creations were a derivation of it¹¹. His works should be considered as a product of his own and inimitable genius (Croce, *Giovanni Pascoli* 46). Within his poetry we don't find the characteristic theme of struggling against adversities, but a calm avoidance of them and a desire to retire in a peaceful place. Not only he finds refuge against the troubles in life, but he seems to escape what he describes as "la pienezza della vita" or the fullness of life. He abhors the sea with its storms and remains anchored to the firmness of the land. He is not an ascetic, avoiding the pleasures in life and living in solitude, but a loving soul that finds joy within the small gratifications of life. He loves the world, but a small one, a rural world confined by the fences of the shepherds. But the idyllic life can also be painful, haunted by the melancholy brought by ancient memories or even disturbed, in the case of our poem, by a creature that is both terrifying and soothing (Croce, *Giovanni Pascoli* 53).

After reading the poem and Croce's criticism, it is hard to not agree with his interpretation. He finds a definite dissonance between the author of the text and the current he was usually placed within, and offers a great explanation of the theme that underlies many of the poet's works. As we can see, Croce's criticism revolves mainly around the content of the work, with a marginal consideration of the literary devices that

¹⁰ Croce is also aware that Pascoli had received a rhetoric education based on Latin poetry in which the themes are strongly different from the characteristic Romantic ones such as escapism towards reality, the value of irrationality, and a strong emphasis on the sense of nationalism.

¹¹ Croce is comparing Pascoli's poetry and two other authors he considers Romantic, Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi. See Croce, *Giovanni Pascoli* 46.

populate the text but there are some details we must pay attention to and that represent a great step forward. In the same article Croce says, “The expression of the reader is what I have noticed in the beginning. Attraction and repulsion, captivation and disgust alternate each other.” In these lines there is a shift of focus. Croce is not only concerned with the *true* meaning of the poem or with the interpretation of the author’s soul. He also observes the effect on the reader, which is one of the fundamental aspects of cognitive literary criticism. Let us put observe how some of these principles can be put into practice.

One of the main assumptions in cognitive poetics is that we pay attention to specific words and expressions in literature through the same mechanisms that regulate our attention priority in other domains of our lives. Since our brains are hardwired to work according to such mechanisms, we can determine with accuracy what the reader, any reader, will focus on. Peter Stockwell, in his *Cognitive Poetics*, illustrates the phenomenon as he discusses the concepts of figure and ground. Anyone familiar with literary terminology will be able to recognize these concepts but they acquire a specific meaning in cognitive poetics.

Stockwell attributes the first principles of figure and ground to gestalt psychologists and he explains that¹²,

If we did not have the facility for creating a difference between figure and ground, then we would only be able to perceive a ‘flat’ field of interlocking shapes and colors in our environment. However, we see, hear and move in stereo three dimensions, and so the cognitive capacity for making figure and ground is clearly and literally an embodiment of this human condition. (Stockwell 15)

¹² For an explanation on gestalt principles regarding perception see Galotti 40-45

The author also enunciates the principles that regulate what, within the visual field, is more likely to be perceived as the figure as opposed to the ground. The principles are the following¹³:

1. It will be regarded as a self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground;
2. It will be moving in relation to the static ground;
3. It will precede the ground in time or space;
4. It will be a part of the ground that has broken away, or emerges to become the figure;
5. It will be more detailed, better focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field;
6. It will be on top of, or in front of, or above, or larger than the rest of the field that is then the ground.

Let us now apply some of these principles to Pascoli's *Psyche*. The description of the horned creature, Pan, meets all of the requisites described above. His description is much more detailed than those of the house, the river, and the swamps. He is introduced to us before any of the other environments except the house, and it is only by its movement that we are exposed to the rest. He is both in movement and the producer of every other movement in the poem. The most representative lines are, perhaps, the third and fourth:

*horned, bristly, always erected
on his hooves, as if about to spring.*

¹³ The validity of Stockwell's assumptions is reinforced by the fact that our perception and imaginative processes share common elements. For ulterior information on the subject see Borst, Gregoire, and Stephen Kosslyn. For Information about visual imagery see chapter 8 in Galotti.

Not only these verses vividly describe the creature, satisfying the first and fifth principle, but they also create a snapshot of a movement that seems inherent to the subject. Pan seems to always be in a springing motion (principle 2) and, starting from his feet, the author traces a kinetic line from the creature's feet to an indefinite height, placing the subject above the ground (principle 6) in the instant he is about to detach from it (principle 4).

It is undoubted that, reading the poem, our attention is captured from the beginning by Pan and that everything else slowly fades statically in the background until the very end when where the pagan god is replaced by Psyche in the foreground.

Ultimately, the two approaches offer completely different interpretations, an inescapable consequence due to the nature of the two methods. Croce's investigation revolves around the poet and analyzes the poem by linking it to his other products, weaving an interconnected web of elements that once together allows the critic to paint a picture of the author himself. It is a deductive process that starts from a writer's works and culminates with the description of their creator and his philosophy. On the other hand, an analysis based on cognitive principles focuses entirely on the poem and the effect that is produced in the reader. Following precise guidelines that govern our perception and attention, the critic can reliably predict how the elements in the poem will be perceived and what consequences they produce. The ability of the author then lies in his ability to manipulate cognitive principles in order to lead the reader's attention to specific objects by creating a clear distinction between figure and ground.

Concluding, while it is true that through cognitive poetics it is possible to analyze any literary work regardless of the historical period and without even knowing anything about the author, this “objectivity” comes at a cost. The poem becomes isolated, taken out of its own history¹⁴, and all the links between the author and its creation are shattered.

¹⁴ For Croce, the analysis of a literary work is to create its history. Unlike De Sanctis, Croce believes that it is the single author to be considered, placing more importance on the writer and moving away from the concept of criticism as a history of literature and consider monographs instead. See Puppo, *Il metodo e la critica di B. Croce*, Milan, Mursia, 1964, 80-86

Spitzer and Stockwell's metaphors in Dante

A great example of literary criticism that starts converging towards the principles that define cognitive criticism is Leo Spitzer. As a stylistic critic¹⁵, Spitzer breaks apart from Croce's legacy and detaches his theories from the influence of the ever present De Sanctis. His method is founded on the premise that each emotion, defined by the author as moving away from our "normal" psychological state, corresponds to an equivalent furthering from conventional language. Furthermore, he states that he analyzes a writer's style from an accurate and in depth reading of his works, and derives any governing laws from the authors itself. A deep reading, he says, is the only tool he works with. Spitzer describes his method as *Zirkel im Verstehen*¹⁶, a moving towards the peripheral details of the circle and back to the center in order to keep in consideration all the elements of the poem without losing the perspective of its totality.

Spitzer is famous for the analysis of the thirteenth Canto of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, where the Dante character meets Pier delle Vigne. According to the poet, this man took his own life to wash off the accusation of having betrayed the emperor Frederick II. Even if Dante "absolves him" of the accusation, he still sinned for being a

¹⁵ There is no clear definition of stylistic criticism in Italian literature. In Spitzer's case, it is the analysis of the style of an author while completely ignoring historical and cultural influences.

¹⁶ For the original Italian text see L. Spitzer, *Critica stilistica e semantica storica*, Bari, Laterza, 1966, 46

suicide and is sentenced to bend and break as a tree while tortured by harpies. Let us consider the critic's interpretation of some fragments of the poem:

*As out of a green brand, that is on fire
At one of the ends, and from the other drips
And hisses with the wind that is escaping;*

*So from that splinter issued forth together
Both words and blood; whereat I let the tip
Fall, and stood like a man who is afraid. [...]*

*Then blew the trunk amain, and afterward
The wind was into such a voice converted:
"With brevity shall be replied to you".*

*When the exasperated soul abandons
The body whence it rent itself away,
Minos consigns it to the seventh abyss.*

*It falls into the forest, and no part
Is chosen for it; but when Fortune hurls it,
There like a grain of spelt it germinates.*

*It springs a sapling, and a forest tree;
The Harpies, feeding then upon its leaves,
Do pain create, and for the pain an outlet.*

*Like other for our spoils shall we return;
But not that any one may them revest,
For 'tis not just to have what one casts off.
(Alighieri, "The Divine Comedy")*

Leo Spitzer states that there is equivalence between human blood and the lymph of the tree, word and wind, a fact that the transformed Pier delle Vigne makes evident to the living visitor¹⁷ once he starts speaking (qtd. in Marchese 230). The fact that the act of speaking is produced through laceration of the trunk-bodies, often as a result of the harpies' active torture, makes the language "physical", bringing closer together the concepts of blood, lymph, wind, and words (Marchese 321). He also argues that each alliteration and onomatopoeic sound is aimed to consolidate Dante's "equivalences" by making each word evoke the idea of trunks, bushes, and mutilations¹⁸.

As we can see, Spitzer's criticism begins to close the gap between the classical and cognitive views of the metaphor. In fact, his "equivalences" are very close to Stockwell's conceptual metaphors.

Similar to Lakoff's metaphors, Stockwell's conceptual metaphors always have a source domain from which we obtain familiar information and a target domain that is foreign to our senses or experiences. The familiar concept, as the wind in the analyzed excerpt, is called the *tenor* while the unfamiliar concept, like the words spoken by the tree-people, is called the *vehicle*, (Stockwell 106). The traditional nomenclature for metaphors is still kept so that, in our case, we would say that WORDS ARE WIND.

Dante author never openly states that Pier delle Vigne is a tree-creature, but we slowly understand it as the metaphors unfolds. The lymph and the wind slowly but clearly unveil their true nature, and eventually the tortured soul reveals his identity. It is

¹⁷ Dante is the only living being allowed to venture in the underworld.

¹⁸ For the original Italian passage refer to Alighieri, Dante. *La Divina Commedia di Dante*. Inferno XIII, vv 40-105 USA: Gutenberg Project, 1997

also important to notice that the reader has already witnessed a great deal of the Dante character's encounters, so there is an underlying assumption that the creature might be a man that the protagonist is able to recognize. Stockwell defines the initial metaphors as *invisible metaphors*, since they are only manifested gradually through exploration of the content. The process through which the reader unveils the nature of a metaphorical reading is called a *vehicle-construction* (Stockwell 106). Stockwell also makes an important clarification from a stylistic standpoint. There is a distinction from the metaphor in cognitive terms and how the word is commonly understood in literature. Conceptual metaphors, in fact, extend to other figures of speech such as similes, analogies, parallelisms, genitive expressions, compounds, lexical blends, and allegories. Therefore, it is not necessary for the author to openly state "His words were like wind flowing from a tree" as the metaphor, or the equivalence as Spitzer would say, is established through a series of linguistic devices.

While cognitive criticism is often depicted as a method that devalues the previously affirmed approaches¹⁹, it is clear that Leo Spitzer's system creates a bridge between the classical and cognitive systems. The focus starts shifting from content to language, from author to reader, and figures of speech such as the metaphor are viewed as devices necessary to convey meanings instead of an embellishment technique.

¹⁹ The criticism to cognitive poetics resides in the fact that the approach presumably brings ordinary and literary language on the same level, since both are part of the same mental processes. See Rossi.

Psychoanalytic Criticism in Pascoli

One of the first methods that attempted to apply psychological principles to works of literature was what is known as psychoanalytic literary criticism. Not without its limitations, the process was largely based on Freud's principles of condensation and displacement. According to the Austrian scientist, an individual's psychological mechanisms have the purpose of liberating him from the tensions that are present in him because of unsatisfied needs (Freud, "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis" 1776). These needs can be satisfied in two ways. The first one involves exerting physical dominance over the individual's environment while the second one involves the realization of affective desires. When the needs in the latter category cannot be properly met, an alternative route must be taken. Art, through the sublimation²⁰ of these instincts, provides an outlet for a symbolic satisfaction of unreachable needs (Marchese 369).

Interpretation of the literary text follows a process that is similar to Freud's interpretation of dreams. In both there is manifest and latent content. The former, from a literary perspective, involves exactly what the author consciously wanted and succeeded in depicting. The latter consists of the unconscious meanings that are hidden within the text because they have been censored by the author's consciousness²¹. The two processes through which the inhibitory process masks the latent content are, as mentioned, condensation and displacement (Freud, "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis" 3302).

²⁰ The process of sublimation is intended as a way for socially unacceptable desires to surface in an acceptable way. See Freud 4837.

²¹ Latent and manifest content are thoroughly explained in Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ch. 4

Through condensation, several different concepts and feelings become unified in a representation that possesses qualities that are common to all of the included elements (Marchese 370). From this perspective, the application of condensation to literature is analogous to Lakoff's conceptual metaphor. The newly formed image would be the target domain of the metaphor and the condensed elements would be several source domains from which the author obtains the necessary qualities to describe the new concept. It is vital to stress the main differences between Freud's condensation and Lakoff's conceptual metaphor. While the first one is considered an unconscious mechanism aimed at the deformation of several concepts in order to escape censorship, the second one is a cognitive function that is not only conscious, but necessary for communication.

The process of displacement, on the other hand, involves a shift of focus on elements and details that are only marginally close to the latent idea and are perceived as secondary to it. According to Freud, this would be one of the tools that our unconscious mind uses to mask the latent meaning from our conscious mind and, from a literary perspective, is analogous to the metonymy, a figure of speech where only a part or section of something is used to represent the whole (Marchese 370).

From this perspective, the purpose of the literary critic and the psychoanalyst are very similar. They both have to be able to recognize the mechanisms that hide unconscious thoughts and, once the barrier is broken, divide manifest and latent content. One of the Italian critics that ventured in this direction is Barberi Squarotti in his *Simboli e strutture della poesia pascoliana*. Within his work, he analyzes one of the most controversial poems by Giovanni Pascoli, *Il Gelsomino Notturmo*. The poem follows:

*The Nocturnal Jasmine*²²

*And the nocturnal flowers open,
When thoughts of my loved ones come.
They appear between the viburnum
The dusk moths*

According to Squarotti, the first stanza already contains elements that echo the relationship between desire and censorship. The image of the flowers that open at night is, presumably, product of the displacement of the concept of copulation that will become even more evident when we read the rest of the poem. Also, the fact that this moving “flower” triggers, as an immediate reaction, thoughts about his deceased relatives, represents an automatic psychological censorship on behalf of the super-ego. Unmentioned by the critic, the word “farfalla”, or butterfly, is also an “innocent” synonym of the female genitalia, a word that children are likely to use. This additional element would also reinforce two of Squarotti’s beliefs. The first one is that the author is still trapped, in adult age, in a childish concept of family that translates in his repressed and unhappy life²³. The other is that female sexuality is a dominant theme in this poem²⁴.

*For a while the moans have stopped:
There only a house whispers
Under the wings sleep the nests
Like eyes underneath the lids*

²² For the Italian Original text see Pascoli, Giovanni. “Il gelsomino notturno.”

²³ Pascoli had a traumatic life. His father was assassinated when he was eleven while he was in his own carriage. The horse slowly brought the corpse home, to which the child was exposed. Even as an adult, he sought refuge from the world within his place of origin and lived with his sisters.

²⁴ See G. Barberi Squarotti, *Simboli e strutture della poesia pascoliana*, Messina-Firenze, D’Anna, 1966

Squarotti explains that the idea of the solitary house and the whispers that inhabit it represent the detachment of the author-child from the parents that are, from an intimate point of view, isolated from the rest of the family. The parents are still emotionally connected to the children and shelter them re-evoking Pascoli's idea of the nest as a pure and happy place, in which the family nucleus represents innocent happiness against the corruption of the world. The nest sleeps under the bird-parents' wings as "eyes under the lids". The author-child is, in other words, sheltered physically and made blind to the ongoing sexual act (qtd. in Marchese 377).

*From the open chalices exhales
The scent of red strawberries
Shines a candle there in the hallway
Grass is born above the graves*

Squarotti argues that the open chalices do not simply represent the crowns of the flowers, but are displacement of, once again, the image of female genitalia. He states that even the described scent and colors contribute to its description, forming an image that is censored enough to flow to consciousness. The following lines describe exactly this filtering process. The light in the hallway represents the thoughts of his deceased relatives leading him away from sinful thoughts and back to a place of peace, where the grass grows on the graves.

*A late bee whispers
Finding the cells to be full.
The Hen through the celestial farmyard
Goes with her cheeping stars.*

Once again the all-pervasive idea of the family nest resurfaces. As he looks at the sky, the author is again at peace as he feels protected just like the stars that follow the celestial hen.

*All night one breaths in
The scent carried by the wind.
The candle moves up the stairwell
It shines on the first floor: it's gone...*

Sqarotti uses these lines to prove his argument. As the sexual act goes on, the wind carries the prohibited scent from which the child-author cannot subtract himself from. Also, this time the light goes off as it fades upstairs, a symbol usually perceived as an antecedent for the sexual act. Of course, there is temporal inconsistency within the poem but, similarly to dreams, the latent message manifests through incoherent images.

*It's dawn: the petals close
a little damaged, it's breeding,
inside the soft and secret urn,
an unknown new happiness*

Following the same principles, the critic sees the closure of the damaged petals as the termination of the act that result in the lost virginity of the woman. The *molle* (an

adjective that is best translated as something that is soft, wet, or even squishy) urn within which happiness is breeding becomes then the maternal uterus²⁵.

There are, of course, several limitations within the application of psychoanalytic processes to the interpretation of poetry. The first one resides in the discipline itself. While it is true that Freud has left an indelible mark in history, many of the central points of his theory are surpassed and not considered scientifically valid (Kihlstrom). There is no evidence, for example, to validate his developmental theory that divides a child's early life into oral, anal, phallic, and genital stages.

The second limitation lies within the application of the theories. In order to be able to analyze the poem, we have to assume two things. The first assumption is that there is necessarily latent content that is also detectable; the second is that it is possible to treat the poem as a clinical case and the poet as a patient. Using psychoanalysis for literary purposes seems then to almost imply that there is something inherently deviated within the piece of literature, that the author is repressing a desire that is cause of unhappiness, and that the critic can unveil what it is and "cure" the poet.

The last limitation comes from a linguistic and technical point of view. Above all forms of literary criticism, the psychoanalytic approach is the one that most centers on the author, leaving completely out of the picture both the reader and linguistic devices. It is not only content above form, but an absence of consideration on the latter and complete attention on the former. The result is a technique that seems to finally move towards a scientific interpretation of literature but in reality falls prey of its own subjective character.

²⁵ Squarotti's inferences about the repressed sexual content within the poem are also derived from knowledge about the author's life. He canceled his own marriage with his cousin Imelde Morri and, when his sister married to "another" man the same year he felt betrayed.

Practical applications

Now that we have ventured through a century of Italian literary criticism and observed the points of union and fracture with the cognitive method, it is time to focus on the latter techniques. The following section shows a practical application of the principles of cognitive poetics to pieces of Italian literature, material that has remained largely untouched by the method.

It would be impossible to enumerate every rule of analysis within this thesis. The theories taken into consideration are the utilization of scripts and schemas, the concept of prototypicality, and the involvement of emotions within the reading. Where possible, psychological research regarding the principles is mentioned, along with theories that may contrast with said principles²⁶.

The Italian text is left for demonstrative purposes. Each line is also accompanied by the English translation.

²⁶ The main assumption of cognitive poetics, that the cognitive mechanisms that regulate our attention and perception also apply to what we read and imagine, is still object of debate. For example, regarding the spatial relations within visual imagery, Kosslyn argues that imagining to move from a point to another takes longer based on the actual distance. Pylyshyn, on the other hand argues that the longer delay is due to the fact that people expect it to take longer. For articles regarding the issues see Kosslyn, S. M.. "Scanning visual images: some structural implications." *Perception and Psychophysics* 14 (1973): 90-94. And Kosslyn, S. M.. "Can imagery be distinguished from other forms of internal representation? Evidence from studies of information retrieval times. *Memory and Cognition* 4 (1976): 291- 297. And Pylyshyn, Z.W.. "The imagery debate: Analogue media versus tacit knowledge." *Psychological Review* 88 (1981): 16-45.

Scripts, schemas, and Italo Calvino

We have already familiarized with the application of the basic principles of gestalt principles within literary environment²⁷. We now know that our minds are hardwired to perceive our surroundings in specific ways. We developed, over the years, visual cues that help us interpret what we see and that allow us organize the information into a coherent whole. Similarly, in literature, we tend to utilize the information presented to us in specific ways, giving importance to one element or another based on the context in which we encounter them.

Similarly to the way we organize what we see in our visual field according to a frame, we also organize what we read through what, in cognitive poetics, is referred to as a script (Stockwell 77). For example, if we read that “Rachel is going to the salon”, the reader “expects” the presence of several elements such as a hairdresser, several chairs, mirrors, the noise of hairdryers etc²⁸. Besides information on the environment, the script will also contain expected behavioral processes. Rachel will probably enter the salon and be greeted. She will then find a seat, maybe grab something to read and wait for her turn.

²⁷ For a complete list and explanation of Gestalt principles refer to Pomerantz, J.R., and M. Portillo. “Grouping and emergent features in vision: Toward a theory of basic Gestalts.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 37 (2011): 1331-1349.

²⁸ Words that trigger expectations or schemas are said to have primed the schema. An explanation of the effects on priming of specific words and attention is Treisman, A. M.. “Verbal cues, languages, and meaning in selective attention.” *American Journal of Psychology* 77 (1964): 206-219.

One thing to keep in mind is that scripts are born from our experience and can sometimes vary among readers. In order to acquire the salon script, one would have to be exposed to it in the first place through personal experience or, perhaps, through media representation. My personal schema for taking a test, for example, was completely revolutionized when I was, for the first time, asked to compile a Scantron since they are never used in Italy where I come from.

The cues that determine which schema we unconsciously apply to a given situation is, in literature, found in the script header. In *Cognitive Poetics*, Stockwell describes four different types of headers²⁹.

1. Precondition headers. As the name suggests, these are preconditions that allow the application of a specific script. For example, “Rachel wanted a haircut”.
2. Instrumental headers. These are descriptions of actions that lead to the realization of the script. For example, “Rachel started the car”.
3. Locale headers. These are simply references to the setting in which the schema is expected to be applied. For example, “Rachel was sitting in the salon’s chair”.
4. Internal conceptualization headers. These are references to an action that would be present in the script. “Rachel paid the hairdresser”

(Stockwell 78)

²⁹ Information about the value of priming in visual imagery see Perky, C. W.. “An experimental study of imagination.” *American Journal of Psychology* 21, 422-452. And Farah, M. J.. “Psychophysical evidence for a shared representational medium for mental images and percepts.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 114 (1985): 91-103.

Every script usually includes *slots* that are occupied by elements that would normally be expected to belong to the situation to which the script applies to. The slots are filled by props, participants, entry conditions, results, and sequence of events. For instance hairdryers would be one of the expected props in our saloon example, the hairdresser a participant, arriving to the salon would be an entry condition, obtaining the requested haircut would be the result, while the expected sequence of events would be to arrive, sit, be called, request the haircut, and eventually leave.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, scripts are created through experience³⁰. More specifically they are born from plans we create and follow in order to have a consistent procedure that can help us in a variety of situations and encounters. Eventually we follow these plans automatically and they become schemas.

Since scripts arise from the knowledge acquired from experience, they can change throughout our lives. The three main ways through which this happens are the accretion, tuning, and restructuring³¹. Accretion happens when we add new information to the script or the schema. Tuning occurs when such facts are modified or when something that was previously related to the script has changed. Finally, restructuring happens when a completely new schema is created.

³⁰ Schema theory was initially proposed by Neisser. See Neisser, U.. *Cognition and reality: Principles and implications of cognitive psychology*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman 1976.

³¹ Generating new schemas or restructuring old ones seem to be fast processes. For detailed information see Posner, M. I., and S.W. Keele. "On the genesis of abstract ideas." *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 77 (1968): 353-363.

In the literary field, we say that everyday language is simply schema preserving because it does nothing to add to our previously possessed scripts and actually reinforces them³². **The quality of literariness is associated with a disruption of the schema.**

According to Stockwell, the modification of schemas, or scripts, can fall under any of the following categories:

1. Knowledge restructuring. New schemas are created from previously possessed ones.
2. Schema preservation. Where the information we obtain conforms to the knowledge we already have.
3. Schema reinforcement. When we encounter novel information but it strengthens rather than modify previous schematic knowledge.
4. Schema accretion. As previously mentioned, new information is added to our schema resulting with an expanded knowledge about it. For example, over the years, horror movie fans have become used to expect more gore and sexual content compared to the past generation because additional elements have been incorporated in the “horror” schema as cinematography evolved.
5. Schema disruption. Where the information clashes with our previously constructed knowledge of the schema. This is thought to be a crucial requirement for good literature. A very simple and effective example can be the difference between “Rachel was brought to the operating room. Three doctors were waiting.” and “Rachel was brought to the operating room. There were no

³² This principle is often overlooked by those who oppose the cognitive method of interpretation. One of the main criticisms is that considering literature as the result of a cognitive process would bring conventional and literary language on the same level.

doctors”. A similar example can be done from a linguistic perspective. Let us just take into consideration the difference between “Rachel went to the rave party *and* there were many people dancing”³³ and “Rachel went to the rave party *but* there were many people dancing”. This last sentence obviously deviates from our expectations and forces us to, at least temporarily, modify our schema in order to take in and use the information.

6. Schema refreshment. This happens when we are forced to revise our schemas. This usually happens through defamiliarization in literature, and is also thought to be an important element in literary works.

Italo Calvino’s novel, *Il Visconte Dimezzato*, is an excellent example of how the constant modification of schemas can contribute to the literary quality of a text and to the overall pleasure of the reading. The entire work is filled with deviances on both the linguistic and content levels but, for the sake of brevity, we will analyze specific excerpts from the first two chapters³⁴.

C’era una guerra contro i turchi. Il visconte Medardo di Terralba, mio zio, cavalcava per la pianura di Boemia diretto all’accampamento dei cristiani. Lo seguiva uno scudiero a nome Curzio. Le cicogne volavano basse, in bianchi stormi traversando l’aria opaca e ferma.

There was a war against the Turks. The viscount Medardo of Terralba (Dawnland), my uncle, rode across the Bohemian planes directed towards the Christian

³³ For more information on how we use context within scenes see Biederman, I., A. Glass, and E. Stacy Jr.. “Searching for objects in real-world scenes.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 97 (1973): 22-27.

³⁴ The chapters are taken from Calvino.

encampment. Following him, a squire by the name of Curzio. The storks flew low through the still and opaque air.

The very first line of the entire novel works as a precondition header for our script in two senses. Firstly, we are primed with the war schema so that now we have a script with props, situations, and events that are expected to be present within the war frame. Secondly, from a linguistic perspective, writing “There was a war against the Turks” already disrupts our war schema. When dealing with such events, they are hardly ever described as “*a* war” or “*a* conflict between X and Y” and we would never encounter, in everyday language, “*a* war in Vietnam”. The linguistic choice is, in fact, slowly restructuring our knowledge. This is even more evident when we consider that in Italian “C’era una guerra” sounds very much like “C’era una volta” or, in English, once upon a time. We have been primed with the war schema and immediately acquired information clashing with our previous exposure to such a concept so that now we are caught in between a war and a fairy tale, all within one line. This can be further observed with the author’s description of the flock of storks on the battlefield. The author replaces carrion birds with animals that are usually associated with the bringing of life, swapping within our mental slot symbols that are opposite to each other. With just a few lines, the author has already forced us to reconsider our knowledge and set up a world of which rules we are unaware, offering a great example of how schema disruption plays an important role in the literary quality of a text.

La battaglia cominciò puntualmente alle dieci del mattino.

The Battle began punctually at ten o’clock in the morning.

Once again, the author is mixing elements that seem to belong to two different worlds. Not only the battle seems to follow a pre-existing law that everyone in Calvino's universe seems to respect, but it also seems *normal*. It makes us doubt and reconstruct our own schemas, as we have no choice but to accept the laws that govern this new constructed world. The tone at this point starts becoming ironic, a trait for which the author is particularly famous.

Li vide, i turchi. Ne arrivavano due proprio di lì. Coi cavalli intabarrati, il piccolo scudo tondo, di cuoio, veste a righe nere e zafferano. E il turbante, la faccia color ocra e i baffi come uno che a Terralba era chiamato Miché il turco.

He saw them, the Turks. Two of them were coming right there. With the horses all wrapped up, the tiny round shield, of leather, their dresses with black and saffron stripes. And the turban, the face of ochre color, and the mustache like someone that at Terralba was called Mike the Turk.

Here we are finally introduced to the “enemy”. The depiction of the Turks is undoubtedly unlike what the reader would expect. The description is unnaturally calm, and the soldiers appear more like exotic creatures than humans. The sentence “Ne arrivavano due proprio di lì” would be used, in the English language, in an expression similar to “Oh, look at that, two of coming close to us right now”, creating a situation that is more similar to a zoo than a battlefield³⁵. The exotic character of the Turks is even more stressed with the hilarious overturned metaphor at the end of the paragraph. The author is using *Miche 'il turco*, Mike the Turk, as the tenor (the familiar concept) to

³⁵ The impacts of context in the formation of a scene are discussed in Biederman, I., A. Glass, and E. Stacy Jr.. “Searching for objects in real-world scenes.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 97 (1973): 22-27.

explain the features of the actual Turks that act as the vehicle (the unfamiliar concept). The reader, of course, is likely to imagine Mike's Mustache to be somehow East-Mediterranean, or eastern in general, and not attribute to the Turks a mustache similar to that possessed by Mike, of which we have no knowledge. The author therefore forces the reader into a backwards inferential process, disrupting once more our regular way of thinking.

Così correva, scansando i colpi delle scimitarre, finché non trovò un turco basso, a piedi, e l'ammazzò. Visto come si faceva, andò a cercarne uno alto a cavallo, e fece male. Perché erano i piccoli, i dannosi. Andavano fin sotto i cavalli, con quelle scimitarre, e li squartavano.

And so he ran, dodging the blows of the scimitars until he found a short Turk, unmounted, and killed him. Since he had learned how to do so, he went to find a mounted tall one, and that was a mistake. The little ones were the damaging ones. They would go all the way under the horses, with those scimitars, and eviscerated them.

The description of the "enemy" continues, and it becomes even more bizarre. From the observation of exotic animals, we move to the interaction with gremlin-like creatures, especially when considering the content of the last two sentences. The paragraph also offers more peculiar stylistic choices to observe. Firstly, there is something odd about the structure of the sentence "Since he learned how to do so (slaying short unmounted turks) he went to find a mounted tall one". The beginning of the sentence prepares us for an act that is about to repeat but the author offers instead a completely opposite scene. It is as if we read something along the lines of "Since he

learned how to repair his car he hired a mechanic”. It is this constant deviation from regular schemas and the shattering of our pre-existing scripts that makes the reading so engaging.

Il cavallo di Medardo si fermò a gambe larghe. - Che fai? - disse il visconte. Curzio sopraggiunse indicando in basso: - Guardi un po' lì -.Aveva tutte le coratelle di già in terra. Il povero animale guardò in su, al padrone, poi abbassò il capo come volesse brucare gli intestini, ma era solo un sfoggio d'eroismo: svenne e poi morì.

Medardo's horse stopped in place with his legs spread out. – What are you up to? – said the viscount. Curzio caught up with him and pointed below: -Oh, take a look right there -. It had its bowels already on the ground. The poor animal looked upwards, towards its master, and then lowered its head as if it intended to nibble on its own intestine. But it was just a demonstration of heroism: it fainted and then it died.

More content and stylistic oddities. The horse is given human connotations that go beyond those given to the Turks. The protagonist even talks to the animal, which in turns seems to be experiencing grief and loyalty as he looks at his master right before he dies. Also, unlike the gremlin-Turks, the horse gets to have a heroic death as he keeps standing on his own feet, against instinct, even after disembowelment. The language also presents some distinct peculiarities. The ironic tone of the narration is reinforced as the squire almost casually points to the fallen viscera of the mount, as if it were a matter of trivial importance. Also, at the end, the author says that the horse “fainted and then it died”. It is a very unusual way of describing such a violent and gruesome death. In conventional language, it is unlikely to imagine a doctor describing the passing of a

patient in the same way, and we would not imagine an historical record to mention that someone “fainted, and then died”. It seems to be another linguistic deviation that might add a certain human quality to the horse but, more importantly, prevents us from escaping this ironically and absurdly crafted world. At this point, in fact, we are past schema disruption as we are slowly adapting to the author’s world. We are less surprised when we encounter such elements that contribute now to schema accretion and reinforcement.

Tirato via il lenzuolo, il corpo del visconte apparve orrendamente mutilato. Gli mancava un braccio e una gamba, non solo, ma tutto quel che c’era di torace e d’addome tra quell braccio e quella gamba era stato portato via, polverizzato da quella cannonata presa in pieno.

Once the sheet was removed, the body of the viscount appeared horrendously mutilated. He lacked an arm and a leg, not just that, but everything that belonged to the chest and abdomen in between the missing leg and arm was also taken away, pulverized by that cannon shot that hit him right in the middle.

Notice how not only there is no mention of death despite the horrible physical description of the protagonist, but nothing seems to infer that, in this universe, death would be a necessary consequence of losing half of one’s entire body. This paragraph has an ulterior purpose besides lightly horrifying the reader, it acts as a header to trigger our schema in which we would expect death and, at the same time, disrupt it by removing the concept of death from the “slot”. In other words, we now stop expecting fatal injuries to lead to death.

I medici: tutti contenti. - Uh, che bel caso! - Se non moriva nel frattempo, potevano provare anche a salvarlo. E gli si misero d’attorno, mentre i poveri soldati con una freccia in un braccio morivano di setticemia. Cucirono, applicarono, impastarono: chi lo sa cosa fecero. Fatto sta che l’indomani mio zio aperse l’unico occhio la mezza bocca, dilatò la narice e respirò. La forte fibra dei Terralba aveva resistito. Adesso era vivo e dimezzato.

The medics: all of them happy. –Oh, What a wonderful case! – If he did not die in the meanwhile, they could have even tried to save him. So they gathered around him, while the poor soldiers with an arrow stuck in their arm were dying of blood poisoning. They sewed, they applied, and they kneaded. Who knows what they did. Fact is that the next day my uncle opened his only eye and his half mouth, widened his nostril and breathed. The strong fiber of the Terralba's had resisted. He was now alive and halved.

The medics' reaction reinforces the modification of our schema. There is no negative reaction and the injury is met with excitement. Also, we immediately meet a foreign use of the language. We would expect a sentence similar to "They gathered around him and ignored the soldiers that were at risk of blood poisoning", but the gravity of the situation is again ironically reversed by portraying superficial arrow wounds and blood poisoning, a very long process, as the conditions in need of urgent care while the halved Viscount seems to be gaining attention merely because of the peculiarity of the case. As we have been slowly prepared to accept through clever use of the language and astute narration, we at last know that the Viscount is alive. It is the ingenious breaking and recomposing of our knowledge of the world and the schemas through which we perceive it³⁶ that gives the novel a great literary quality. Just imagine the difference between the gradual acceptance of Calvino's world and how it would have been for the reader to come across, in the beginning of the first chapter, to the story of a living half man. We would struggle to accept the new information and dismiss it as implausible.

³⁶ Several principles of cognitive poetics are based on the equivalence between perception and images. See Perky, C. W.. "An experimental study of imagination." *American Journal of Psychology* 21, 422-452.

The concept of Prototypicality and Giuseppe Ungaretti

As previously mentioned, cognitive poetics work on the assumption that we have common and predetermined ways of perceiving the world, elaborating the information, and reasoning. One of the fundamental structures upon which cognitive analysis is based is our categorization system. Stockwell introduces the subject with a very clarifying example disguised as a magic trick. We can fold a piece of paper in half and write the words “apple” and “orange” on each one of the sides. From that point on, we can ask anyone to name, randomly, the name of a fruit. In all probability the answer is going to be either apple or orange, with a slight margin of error. All we have to do is produce the half of the paper with the word corresponding to the obtained answer to prove that we “predicted” the answer³⁷.

The mechanism behind the success of the “magic” trick is the prototype effect. The reason for which those two fruits, in particular, are automatically selected is the fact that both are central examples. To understand the concept of centrality we must visualize our categorization process as a radial one rather than linear. At the center we would have our base level, a prototype that seems to share the most common attributes of the other

³⁷ For role and formation of prototypes see Posner, M. I., R. Goldsmith, and K. Welton Jr.. “Perceived distance and the classification of distorted patterns.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 73 (1967): 28-38.

See also Posner, M. I., and S.W. Keele. “On the genesis of abstract ideas.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 77 (1968): 353-363.

objects around it. Close around the apple, for example, we would most likely find pears, then peaches, and maybe plums. The further we move from the center the more likely we are to find examples such as pineapple and even cucumbers. All the mentioned fruits share characteristics with the apple, but the transition is not linear. We don't move gradually from apple to orange, to peach, to pineapple, and to cucumber. Instead, we move in completely different directions from the center based on the shared attributes that are kept with the prototype. Examples that fit or that are close to the prototype model are referred to as central, those that are somewhat poorer examples are secondary, and those that barely fit into the category are called peripheral.

How do we use the concepts of categorization and prototypicality in cognitive literary analysis? The answer is actually extremely close to one of Leo Spitzer's theories. He stated that, in literature, states of mind (emotions) that are far from our neutral one correspond to language that also deviates from our typical way of writing and speaking. In cognitive poetics we look for deviations from the basic level. For example, as Stockwell explains in his "Introduction to Cognitive Poetics", it would be considered normal for someone to say that they are about to walk the dog. But if the speaker said that he was about to walk a specific breed like a German shepherd, the sentence would seem inappropriate unless, of course, the expression was used to discriminate the dog from another. In the same way, we would not say something like "I'm going to take the mammal for a walk" (31).

Generally speaking, over-specification confers a sarcastic character to the language. Consider the following example. If someone were to ask a simple question like "How are you doing today", one would certainly not expect "My blood pressure is 120

over 80, my glucose levels are currently beneath 140 mg/dL even one hour after lunch, and my bowel movements have been punctual”.

In a similar way, under-specification leads to an evasive or rude tone. Consider, for instance, the following example. What if someone asked a soon-to be bride if they were able to decide what to wear the day of her wedding and the only answer received was “A dress”.

Of course, there is also context dependency to take in consideration. The answer in our over-specification example would be completely appropriate if the person asking the question was a doctor³⁸. This, unfortunately, adds relativism to the cognitive interpretation of a text since some expressions can be more or less common and closer or further from the basic level depending on the specific situation, the culture, or the time of the writing. A similar obstacle can be found when considering texts of a different language, as in the case of this thesis. The dent in the validity of the cognitive process is not a severe one though. We know that Dante’s description of the tree-man as a representation of the soul of a suicidal man is far from prototypical, regardless of the time, culture, and language of the author.

The concept of prototypicality in literature is not limited to the content, but is often extended to linguistic choices. When we find an expression that is far from the “prototype”, we say that we have encountered a linguistic deviation. Generally speaking, in traditional grammar, there is a set of rules that defines our base level of communication. The sentence of expression must:

1. Have a noun phrase and a verb phrase (predication)
2. Have a finite verb form in order to describe an action that is completed in time
3. Have positive polarity. Negatives do not make a claim about reality
4. Be declarative. Cannot be interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory.
5. Have a definite reference.

(Stockwell 32)

The five rules are enunciated in order of deviance. A sentence that does not meet the first requisite would be considered much more deviant from the prototypical sentence structure than one that does not meet the fifth one. We say that a sentence that meets all of the mentioned requisites is actualized. Consequently, the further the text is from actualization, the more it is open to interpretation. Let us apply these principles to the reading of Giuseppe Ungaretti's *Veglia*³⁹ :

<i>Un'intera nottata</i>	<i>An entire night</i>
<i>buttato vicino</i>	<i>thrown near</i>
<i>a un compagno</i>	<i>a comrade</i>
<i>massacrato</i>	<i>massacred</i>
<i>con la sua bocca</i>	<i>with his mouth</i>
<i>digrignata</i>	<i>gnashing</i>
<i>volta al plenilunio</i>	<i>towards the full moon</i>
<i>con la congestione</i>	<i>in all its swollenness (With the swollenness)</i>
<i>delle sue mani</i>	<i>of his hands</i>
<i>penetrata</i>	<i>penetrated</i>
<i>nel mio silenzio</i>	<i>in my silence</i>
<i>ho scritto</i>	<i>I wrote</i>

³⁹ Original poem taken from Ungaretti, Giuseppe. "Veglia." *L'allegria*. Ed. Leone Piccioni. Milano: Letteratura italiana Einaudi, 1969. 21. Web. 1 July 2013

lettere piene d'amore

letters full of love

Non sono mai stato

I have never been

tanto

so much

attaccato alla vita

attached to life

When we first read the poem, we are exposed to bits of information, line after line, always wondering what the main sentence is until we reach the thirteenth line where the picture is finally complete. But it is the fragmentary nature of the poem that we must analyze, grouping in sentences in the order in which the reader would be exposed to them. We can identify the first fragment by considering together the first three sentences. According to the rules of actualization, the “sentence” would be considered deviant. Firstly, the proposition lacks a definite reference. There is no agent of the action or a clear subject that we can identify. We can only imply, with no guarantee of accuracy, that the “thrown” person is the author. Furthermore, “thrown” or “buttato” is merely acting as an adjective describing the result of the agentless action, breaking the principle of predication. The literary character of this first section is given by the under-specification of its sentence that, as a result, acquires a sense of vagueness that makes the reader wonder, forcing him to “fill in the blanks”.

The third line acts a link of a chain, belonging to two sentences at once. It can be read as the ending of the sentence composed by lines 1 through 3, or the beginning of the sentence that moves from 3 to 7. Once again, the sentence is deviant. “Massacred, with his mouth gnashing towards the full moon in all its swollenness”. As we can see, there is no finite verb, which violates the second principle. We can also observe one of

Ungaretti's frequent tricks. "In all its swollenness" can be referring to both the moon and the mouth. Not only the author adds intriguing vagueness to the seventh line but, once again, he creates another link. In fact, the translation of "con la congestione", can be contextually translated as both "in all its swollenness" and "with the swollenness". In the latter case, the link introduces the sentence "With the swollenness of his hands in my silence I wrote letters full of love". It is important to notice that line 11 is another link, that can belong to the sentence we just mentioned or be read as a detached statement "In my silence I wrote letters full of love". And it is finally now that we reach the end of the proposition, when the author reveals himself as the subject of the action and offers the actualization the reader was longing for all along. Once the vagueness is dissipated by the clarification, the ambiguity ceases, leaving us with a separately written, three line conclusion that, once more, re-establishes the author as the central figure of the poem.

Let us apply the same principles to another of Ungaretti's poems, *Soldati*⁴⁰:

Soldati

Soldiers

Si sta come

One stays like

d'autunno

in autumn

sugli alberi

on the trees

le foglie

the leaves

⁴⁰ Original Italian poem from Ungaretti, Giuseppe. "Soldati." *L'allegria*. Ed. Leone Piccioni. Milano: Letteratura italiana Einaudi, 1969. 80. Web. 1 July 2013.

The first obstacle we find lies within the translation process. Unfortunately, “Si sta” does not have a literal translation in English. The closest equivalent would be “One stays” because the expression is impersonal, there is no defined subject. Additionally, the translation implies singularity, while the Italian equivalent implies plurality, as to extend the condition to an undefined but wide group. The poem itself therefore violates the fifth principle of actualization since there is an indefinite reference, but the reader can still imply, from the title, that the poem’s subject is a specific group, soldiers.

The order in which the sentences are presented also make it impossible to create a proper noun phrase and a verb phrase while considering all four lines at the same time. Even if we scrambled the order to obtain “One stays like the leaves on the trees in autumn” we would be altering the meaning of the poem. The line “in autumn”, especially when considering its significance in Italian, is not referring to anything in particular. To say “d’autunno” is similar to saying “when in autumn”, as to introduce an event or activity that takes place in that specific season. The first principle is therefore also broken.

Let us take a close look at the verbs. As we can see, there is only one, and it is used with the impersonal form and, more importantly, it is not completed in time. The suspension of the action stresses the precariousness of the condition of being a soldier, or a leaf, and the uncertainty of when the moment will, if ever, come. This particular aspect of the poem breaks the second rule of realization.

Ungaretti's poems offer an excellent example of how constant deviance from prototypical structure and content contribute to the literary character of the text creating a noticeable difference from conventional language.

Emotions theories and Giosue' Carducci. Applications and limitations.

Reuven Tsur is one of the most prominent figures in the application of cognitive poetics. According to him, there is an inherent distinction between simple words and poetry. The former, he says, bring to mind specific and compact concepts while poetic language produces diffuse⁴¹ and less defined emotions. From this premise, Tsur investigates on the mechanisms that allow poetic language to move past the limitations of conventional discourse.

The professor explains that:

One major assumption of cognitive poetics is that poetry exploits, for aesthetic purposes, cognitive (including linguistic) processes that were initially evolved for non-aesthetic purposes, just as in evolving linguistic ability, old cognitive and physiological mechanisms were turned to new ends. [...] The reading of poetry involves the modification (or some times, the deformation) of cognitive processes, and adaptation for purposes for which they were not originally “devised”. In certain extreme but central cases, this modification may become “organized

⁴¹ Tsur refers to the fact that emotions are not localized in a specific area of the brain. The signals from the separate regions as well as the physiological reactions from the body cooperate in creating the emotion.

violence against cognitive processes”, to paraphrase the famous slogan of Russian Formalism. (Tsur, “Aspects of Cognitive Poetics”)

As we can infer from Tsur’s statement, there are several similarities between his theory and Stockwell’s, especially regarding the concept of deviation from conventional scripts, schemas, and conventional language. The “violence” against cognitive processes mentioned by the Israeli researcher is closely linked with Stockwell’s idea of schema disruption. What is different between the two is that Tsur adds, and focuses on, the emotional element in poetry.

Reuven Tsur’s view on emotions is based on four principles gathered from psychological research and described in his article, “Aspects of Cognitive Poetics”. The first one is that emotions derive from the appraisal of a situation⁴². The second one describes emotions as a result in the deviation from normal energy level⁴³. An increase would lead to intense emotions such as gladness and anger, while a decrease in the energy level would lead to sadness or calm. The third principle states that emotions arise when we receive “Diffuse information in a highly activated state that is less differentiated than conceptual information”. The fourth and final principle is that the diffuse information gathered through the reading remains active, as Tsur describes, “in the back of one’s mind”.

⁴² It is unclear if the author refers to a social or cognitive, appraisal, or subconscious appraisal of the situation.

⁴³ The author offers little specification regarding the “kind” of energy he refers to.

Let us apply Tsur's system to a renowned poem by Giosue' Carducci, *San Martino*⁴⁴:

*La nebbia a gl'irti colli
piovigginando sale
e sotto il maestrale
urla e biancheggia il mar;*

*ma per le vie del borgo
dal ribollir de'tini
va l'aspro odor dei vini
l'anime a rallegrar.*

*Gira su' ceppi accesi
lo spiedo scoppiettando:
sta il cacciatore fischiando
su l'uscio a rimirar*

*tra le rossastre nubi
stormi d'uccelli neri
com'esuli pensieri,
nel vespero migrar*

*The fog to the bristly hills
sprinkling rises
and beneath the northwest wind
roars and whitens the sea*

*but through the streets of the city
from the boiling of the vats
goes the pungent scent of the wines
to lighten the souls*

*Turns on the lit-up logs
the crackling spit:
stays the hunter whistling
at the door looking*

*between the reddish clouds
flocks of black birds
like thoughts in exile,
migrating in the sunset*

One of the salient points of Tsur's theory is the ability of poets to produce emotions in the reader without explicitly "naming" them. The emotion would be created based on the rules mentioned previously, with a particular emphasis on the second rule

⁴⁴ Original poem in Carducci, Giosue. "San Martino." *Rime nuove*. Ed. Letteratura italiana Einaudi. Bologna: Zanichelli, 1887. 39.

according to which an increase in energy level would lead to strong emotions while a decrease in the energy level would produce sadness or calm.

In the case of *San Martino*, there is absolutely no mention of any emotional state until the eighth line where the term “rallegrar” implies, besides the literal translation to “lighten”, the act of bringing cheerfulness to someone. The fog rising through the sprinkling rain atop the hills creates an upward motion that contributes to gradual increase in the level of energy. The rhyme between “maestrare” and “sale” creates a parallel link between the fog moving above and the sea roaring below⁴⁵. It is the composition of these “diffuse” elements that, once recomposed by our brain into a singular concept, generate an emotion that can vary depending on the reader but that will more likely be associated with an increase in energy, so that emotions closer to happiness, anger, or fear are more likely than calm or sadness. This phenomenon would be also explained by the specific direction traced by the poem. According to Lakoff, for example, our collective cultural experience creates an MORE IS UP type of schema, according to the conceptual metaphor theory. We think of work piling up, of taxes rising, of prices going to the roof (Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor” 9). Similarly, when we read that the fog is rising, especially when it rises by sprinkling which is a phenomenon usually associated with rain and characterized by downward movement, our mind cannot help but experience a high-energy emotion. The cognitive effect produced by the upwards sprinkling would also be produced by Stockwell’s theory

⁴⁵ Tsur usually refers to content of a poem that “moves” in the same direction or that is connected in some manner. He is referring to a gestalt approach to perception. See Pomerantz, J.R., and M. Portillo. “Grouping and emergent features in vision: Toward a theory of basic Gestalts.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 37 (2011): 1331-1349.

of schema disruption, as the information presented to us openly clashes with the script of water we possess (Stockwell 80). Even if we do expect fog to rise, we certainly expect sprinkling water to fall.

Let us persevere in our investigation and explore the rest of the poem in search of clues that can help us predict the emotions resulting from its reading regardless of the audience. Lines 4 through 8 create another parallel with the motion we observed in the previous stanza. Just as the fog was rising above the tempestuous sea below, the fumes of the wines rise from the boiling vats and inundate the city. The concept of increasing energy and emotion is then fully realized as the vapors bring happiness to the town's inhabitants.

Finally, considering the last stanza of the poem, the upwards-and-forward movement culminates with the last parallel picture of the birds elevating to the sky and disappearing in the distance as escaping thought. The rising of the fog, the vapor, and the birds all belong to the UP IS MORE schema while the longitudinal, forward movement of the sea, the fumes, and the birds/thoughts belong to the FORWARD IS MORE schema. Both schemas work together in creating that level increase that Tsur describes, as well as promoting the assembly of the diffuse elements throughout the poem that are recomposed by our cognitive processes.

Unfortunately, Tsur's system presents several limitations. The first one, which is also recognized by the theorist, is the amount of variation in the interpretation brought by the reader. This occurs mainly because of two phenomena. The first one is the fact that while schemas or, in literature, scripts are socially and culturally acquired (we all expect

someone walking in a grocery store, looking for the groceries, getting in a line, paying, and eventually leaving when we are prompted with “Mr X went to buy groceries”), there is always some degree of variation among individuals since the information was acquired through their personal experience. Many of these schemas though are virtually universal. In the case of Giosue’ Carducci’s poem, there is no conceivable personal or cultural variation that can account for differences in schemas regarding the flight of birds, the boiling of wine, or the ascension of fog. A second source of unreliability within the method can be explained through the Stroop test effect.

A stroop test is a simple procedure in which subjects are required to read several written color names, such as blue, red, or green. The peculiarity of the task resides in the fact that these words are written with colored ink that differs from the described name. The ink acts as a distractor and, in fact, latency (the amount of time between the exposure to the word and the subject reading it out loud) is increased compared to the control, regular ink, condition (Stroop and Ridley).

The principles behind the Stroop test can be also extended to other domains. Several studies have shown that, instead of ink color, the content of a word can also function as a distractor. Through an emotional stroop test, it is possible to measure how specific words affect people based on what type of emotional content they refer too. For example, anxious people may have higher latency when encountering threatening words.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ There is contradicting data regarding emotional interference within the Stroop test. Two constraing opinions can be found in: Chajut, Eran, Asi, Schupak, and Daniel Algom. “Emotional Dilution of the Stroop Effect: A New Tool for Assessing Attention Under Emotion.” *Emotion* 10.6 (2010): 944-948. *PsycINFO*. And

Tsur's theory does not account for this effect. Readers with different varying degrees of specific traits such as anxiety or depression, for example, would experience different emotions based on the words they encounter.

Another weakness of Tsur's system lies within the very principles that are necessary for the application of the method. Specifically, the first rule states that emotions arise from appraisal of a situation. Two of the most prominent psychologists on the matter are Stanley Schachter and R.S Lazarus. I will briefly describe the theory of both psychologists to explain why I think that the first principle of Tsur's method is inapplicable to literary interpretation.

According to Schachter, emotions are born from a two part process. The first part is physiological arousal, such as increased heartbeat and blood pressure, increase in temperature, contracting of muscles and so on. The second part involves a labeling process and it is referred as the cognitive part. In other words, an emotion arises from the combination of internal biological changes and a probable "reason" to attribute the changes to (Schacter, Stanley, and Singer).

An interesting application of this theory was offered by Dutton and Aron (Dutton, Donald G., and Aron). The researchers decided to conduct a study at a location within which people would be naturally subject to physiological arousal. The chosen place was a remarkably long and scary bridge at the end of which an attractive woman (a confederate of the experimenters) would meet male participants and ask them to fill out a brief survey. The accomplice would also give her phone number to the subject, asking him to

Alansar, Bader. "The Relationship Between Anxiety and Cognitive Style Measured on the Stroop Test." *Social Behavior and Personality* 32.3 (2004): 283-294. *PsycINFO*.

call if there were any questions he wanted to ask. The same procedure was also enacted across a bridge that was perceived as much safer. The results of the experiment confirmed Shachter's theory. The men that crossed the dangerous bridge were much more aroused (physiologically) when they arrived on the other side and, in search for a cognitive label, attributed their altered state to the presence of the woman. They misattributed arousal from the situation to the attractiveness of the confederate and, in fact, were much more likely to call her compared to men that had crossed the safe bridge.

Regarding Lazarus' theory, Appraisal of the situation happens in two distinct steps (Lazarus). The first one is primary appraisal, a moment in which the person decides whether or not a situation affects the self. This first phase divides in three ulterior sub-sequences. The first one is goal relevance, a moment in which the person simply determines if there is any relationship between the situation and ones goals. It is important to notice that if there is no goal relevance, according to Lazarus, **no emotion will occur**. The second sub-sequence is goal congruence. Put simply, if the situation facilitates ones goals, the resulting emotion will be a positive one. On the other hand, if the goals are hindered by the environment, an unpleasant emotional response will occur. The third and final part of primary appraisal is the type of ego involvement such as effects on self-esteem, one's ideas, moral values etc.

Secondary appraisal involves three more steps. The first one, referred to as the blame or credit step, involves the determination of the cause of what occurred in the environment. The second step involves coping potential, one's ability to adapt to the presented situation or encounter. The third and final step of this dual process is known as

future expectancy, a phase in which the person determines how this occurrence might affect future encounters of the same type.

As we can see, both Shachter and Lazarus' theories apply to very specific circumstances. The first one involves a previous physiological arousal and the subsequent attribution phase, while the second one requires one's personal goals to be involved in a situation in order for an emotion to arise at all. Placing these theories as the first premise for a cognitive interpretation of the text seems to be out of place. If we use Shachter's theory, one would need to be aroused physiologically **before** reading in order to experience any emotion whatsoever. If we use Lazarus' view, experiencing an emotion through the reading of literature would be impossible unless the text is relevant to the reader's goals.

While it is undeniable the reading literary works is often associated with emotions, I believe that Tsur's seeks validity among principles that cannot be applied to his literary interpretative system.

Conclusion

It is evident, from our investigation, that the Italian literary criticism of the 1900's relies, in the majority of the cases, on principles that are very far from those utilized by cognitive poetics. Since the two approaches focus on entirely different aspects, author as opposed to reader, content as opposed to language, and the text within its culture instead of the single work, it was expected for little or no connection to be found. But this was not the case. Surprisingly, there are many common elements among approaches that are a century away and born in completely different cultures. For example, not only Croce does reveal to have observed the reactions of the reader, he also was "expecting" specific ones and assumed they would be constant⁴⁷! Probably the most remarkable point of conjunction between the two literary traditions is created by Leo Sptizer. He, in fact, identified a connection between the reactions of the reader and how much the language in the text deviated from normal canons⁴⁸. This seems to be an exact reformulation of Stockwell's concept of deviance from prototypicality in literature, and even close to Tsur's theory of emotion.

The fact that Italian literary criticism and Cognitive poetics seem to eventually move towards a common point, especially starting from Croce, and reaching similar

⁴⁷ Statement found in B. Croce, *Giovanni Pascoli*, Bari, Laterza, 1931, 46.

⁴⁸ Statement found in L.Sptizer, *Critica stilistica e semantica storica*, Bari, Laterza, 1966, 46

interpretations suggests that there is an inherent universal quality to literariness that is, although hard to define, identifiable regardless of approach and culture.

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