

Grenzen der Literatur

Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen

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Literature as a Human Universal

1. The Adaptive Function of Literature

The practice of making and consuming imaginative verbal artifacts appears in all known cultures.¹ People all over the world, in all ecological and social conditions, play with the sounds and meanings of words, create imaginary worlds with intentional agents, goals, and symbolic images, and produce fantasy structures in which characters and events are linked in thematically significant ways to produce tonally modulated outcomes. Taking this cluster of characteristics as a working definition for the term ›literature‹, we can identify literature as a ›human universal‹. Universality gives strong prima facie evidence that any given cultural practice has roots in genetically mediated human dispositions, and all genetically mediated dispositions are the products of evolutionary history. (Writing and reading are of course not universal. Not all cultures are literate. Throughout this essay, whenever I use the word ›literature‹, I ask the reader always to understand this word as a short-hand term for the longer phrase ›literature or its oral antecedents‹).

Within Darwinian social science, theorists have offered divergent opinions on whether the oral antecedents of literature evolved to fulfill an adaptive function. Steven Pinker argues that all the forms of higher imaginative culture – art, literature, religion, philosophy – are largely non-adaptive side effects from the evolution of adaptively functional cognitive aptitudes.² Geoffrey Miller argues that artistic production primarily serves the purposes of sexual display.³ Other theorists have argued that literature and the other arts serve to convey adaptively relevant information, focus attention on adaptively relevant aspects of human behavior, or promote social cohesion.⁴

1 Brown: Universals, p. 132.
2 Pinker: Mind, pp. 534-543.
3 Miller: Mind.
4 Boyd: Theories.

And finally, some theorists have argued that, while the arts can subserve other adaptive functions, they also have an adaptive function that is peculiar to their own nature. This final hypothesis guides my own thinking on the nature of literature.⁵

Humans have vastly greater cognitive and behavioral flexibility than other animals. Even the higher primates are capable of only very simple forms of analogical and inferential reasoning, and they do not, in all likelihood, possess reflective powers sufficient to assess their own motives, make conscious decisions about value structures, and subordinate immediate impulse to abstract concepts and symbolic figurations.⁶ In contrast to the instinctually regulated behavior of other animals, human behavior is crucially influenced by imagination. Humans perceive the world as a set of contingent circumstances containing complex causal processes and intentional states in other minds. Before taking action, they must weigh alternative scenarios in the light of competing values and impulses.⁷ By providing emotionally saturated images of the world and of human experience, literature and the other arts fulfill a vital psychological need. Through these images, readers can vicariously experience the affective and moral quality of alternative scenarios. Since that vicarious experience influences dispositions that eventuate in adaptively relevant behavior, literature seems to fulfill an adaptive function that could not be so well fulfilled in any other way. Human action depends on the human sense of value and meaning, and literature and the other arts provide a means for making the value and meaning of experience available to the imagination.

Hypotheses on the adaptive function of literature help to guide research into the way literature actually works. Conversely, by examining how literature actually works, we can produce evidence bearing on the adaptive function of literature. In this essay, I describe a model of literature as a referential and communicative medium, I locate that model within a larger model of human nature, and I delineate universal features of literature through which humans adjust their own subjective sense of value and meaning. I argue that literature is a human universal because literature originates in the universal, evolved characteristics of human nature. This adaptationist conception of literature is relatively new and controversial, and in the final sections, I compare this conception with other, competing conceptions. Having made a case that psychological analysis should precede and constrain cultural analysis, I compare adaptationist psychology with the two psychological theories that have had the most influence on literary study –

5 J. Carroll: *Revolution*.

6 Budiansky: *Lion*.

7 Wilson: *Consilience*, pp. 112f.

those of Freud and Jung. At the highest theoretical level, literary study now divides itself into two chief alternatives: traditional humanism and post-modernism. Taking the concept of human nature as a central point of reference, I compare adaptationist ideas with those of the humanists and the postmodernists. If we affirm, as I do, that adaptationist ideas best explain the relation between literature and human nature, we can also affirm that adaptationist ideas most fully illuminate the universal character of literary experience.

2. Literature as a Referential and Communicative Medium

From the traditional humanistic perspective, authors are persons speaking to other persons about their shared interests within a world that they also share.⁸ Characters in drama and fictional narratives are intentional agents who occupy a world that they share with other intentional agents. Adopting a specifically Darwinian or «adaptationist» perspective, I extend these traditional concepts into deep evolutionary time and posit a causal mechanism for them by observing that humans have evolved as social creatures within a physical environment that severely constrains action promoting survival and reproduction. From the adaptationist perspective, authors and readers are organisms that have evolved in adaptive relationship to an environment they share with one another. Literary characters and settings are simulacra of organisms within that shared environment.

Darwinian studies of narrative and drama typically presuppose that literary works depict «human nature» and are thus «mimetic» or representational.⁹ I accept that assumption but incorporate it within a broader model of the purposes and effects of literary representation. Literature and its oral antecedents do not merely depict social behavior. As communicative interactions between authors and readers, they are themselves forms of social behavior. Authors select and organize their material for the purpose of generating emotionally charged evaluative responses in readers, and in this purpose they are generally successful. Readers become emotionally involved, participate vicariously in the experiences depicted, and form personal opinions about the characters. In this way, authors and readers collaborate in producing a simulated experience of emotionally responsive social interaction.¹⁰

The culture in which an author writes provides a proximate framework of shared understanding for the collaborative process between writer and

8 Abrams: *Transformation*, p. 115.

9 J. Carroll: *Study*.

10 Oatley: *Fiction*.

reader, but every specific cultural formation consists in a particular organization of the elemental dispositions of human nature, and the elemental dispositions of human nature form the broadest and deepest framework of shared understanding between an author and an audience.¹¹ When literary authors invoke the concept of ›human nature‹, they are participating in an intuitive ›folk psychology‹.¹² By delineating the specific features in the folk psychological concept of human nature, we can reconstitute the shared framework of understanding within which authors interact with readers. That shared framework includes shared intuitions about the constitution of persons as agents with goals, the basic human motives, the qualities of emotion, the features of personality, the phases of life, the relations of the sexes, the relations of parents, children, and other kin, and organization of social relations. Readers and writers share intuitions about human nature, and they are also themselves subject to the forms of imaginative bias through which human beings organize their own motivational systems.

3. Human Nature and the Reproductive Cycle

Natural selection operates by way of ›inclusive fitness‹, shaping instincts and dispositions so as to maximize the chances that an organism will achieve reproductive success and thus replicate its genes.¹³ In an earlier phase of Darwinian social science, ›sociobiologists‹ tended to envision ›fitness maximization‹ as a direct motivating force in human behavior. More recently, ›evolutionary psychologists‹ have distinguished between inclusive fitness as an ›ultimate‹ force that has shaped behavioral dispositions and the ›proximal mechanisms that mediate those dispositions.¹⁴ The motives and emotions shaped by natural selection include those directed toward survival (obtaining food and shelter, avoiding predators) and toward reproduction, a term that includes both mating effort and the effort aimed at nurturing offspring and assisting other kin. In humans, inclusive fitness has produced behavioral dispositions that include bonding between mothers and offspring, long-term pair-bonding between adult males and females, shared parenting, a uniquely extended period of childhood development, an inclination to favor kin, a fundamental need for belonging to social groups, a drive to build coalitions and organize social groups hierarchically, and a disposition to divide social groups into in-groups and out-groups.¹⁵

11 Scalise Sugiyama: Variation.

12 Geary: Origin, p. 131.

13 Alexander: Darwinism.

14 J. Carroll: Darwinism, pp. 193f.

15 Geary / Flinn: Evolution.

Human nature includes differences between men and women, differences among infants, children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly, differences among mothers, fathers, and children, lovers, friends, and enemies, socially dominant and socially subordinate individuals, differences between people at work and play, and differences between people in peace and war. In casual invocations of the phrase ›human nature‹ – as in, ›Oh, that’s just human nature‹ – people usually have in mind one or another specific trait or characteristic. They might, for instance, be referring to the instinctive pursuit of self-interest, the tendency to give special preference to one’s own kin, the love of mothers for children or children for mothers, male attraction to female beauty, female attraction to male status and power, sexual jealousy, bias in favor of one’s own social group, or tendencies to self-justification and self-deceit. Modern Darwinian social science envisions all the separate phases and conditions of life as an integrated structure regulated by inclusive fitness, and they denominate that structure, extending over time, as ›human life history‹.

For every species, including the human, the species-typical pattern of life history forms a reproductive cycle.¹⁶ In the case of humans – as a pair-bonded highly social species – that cycle centers on parents, children, and the social group. If parental care is successful, it produces children who are capable, as adults, of forming sexual pair bonds, becoming responsible members of a community, and producing children of their own. Effective participation in this cycle imposes definite constraints on the functional variability of human behavior. Consequently, appeals to ›human nature‹ often imply a normative model of human life history. In this context, the word ›normative‹ signifies distinctions between health and disease, and it signifies also a standard for what counts as developing successfully into a socially and reproductively competent adult. Individual authors need not feel personally and emotionally committed to a normative model of human life history, but that normative model forms the largest framework of intuitive shared understanding between any author and a general audience animated by a folk understanding of human nature. An author can work in tension with that framework – can resist it or seek to subvert it – but to communicate at all, the author must have reference to that shared framework.

The species-typical pattern of human life history hinges on sexual and familial bonds within a socially supportive community, and this central cluster of concerns also regulates the structure of two basic literary genres: romantic comedy and tragedy. Romantic comedy typically concludes in a marriage that serves as a focal point for the resolution of conflicting social interests. In producing that resolution, the author affirms and celebrates

16 Low: Sex.

the social organization of reproductive interests within a given culture. By participating vicariously in the sense of fulfillment, the reader also tacitly affirms and accepts the ethos of that social order. The resolutions of romantic comedy encapsulate moments in which competing fitness interests unite in a cooperative and reciprocally advantageous relationship, but no such relationship is perfect or permanent, and many are radically faulty. In tragedy, the most intimate relations of lovers and kin become pathological, and the bonds of community break down.¹⁷ In a subsequent section, we also consider the affective and perspectival features that distinguish romantic comedy and tragedy. All these aspects of genre – the themes lodged in motive concerns, affects, and the perspectival relations of readers, characters and authors – form an integrated complex in the total configuration of literary meaning, and all the elements in this complex originate in the universal features of an evolved and adapted human nature.

4. Agonistic Structure

Conflict and cooperation are fundamental elements of social interaction. Friends and allies are people with whom we enter into cooperative and affiliative relations. Enemies are people who seek the resources we also seek and who thus attempt to dominate and exploit us. Humans form alliances, constitute themselves as distinct social groups, and compete with other people who also form distinct social groups.¹⁸ The psychology of in-groups and out-groups typically involves a systematic distortion in which one's own group is invested with morally positive qualities and one's enemies and competitors are invested with morally negative qualities. It is thus typical in war to glorify one's own group and to emphasize its affiliative and cooperative character while treating of enemies as pure embodiments of the desire for domination. Suppressing or muting the sense of competition within a social group enhances the sense of group solidarity and organizes the group psychologically for cooperative endeavor.¹⁹

In literature, conflict typically manifests itself as an agonistically polarized structure. Authors invest characters with specific motives and features of personality; readers respond emotionally to those characteristics; and the emotional responses of readers correspond to the agonistic roles to which readers assign characters. Protagonists typically embody the qualities to which readers respond in an emotionally favorable way, and

17 Frye: *Anatomy*, pp. 163-186, 206-223.

18 Premack / Premack: *Origins*.

19 Kurzban / Neuberg: *Managing*.

antagonists typically embody the qualities to which readers respond in an emotionally negative way. Because agonistic structure is lodged within the constitution of human nature itself, it appears pervasively in drama and in fictional narratives of all periods and all cultures. Agonistic structure reflects and satisfies an adaptive psychological need to envision human social relations as morally polarized struggles – to envision ourselves and our associates as protagonists, and to envision our opponents as antagonists. Protagonists are agents seeking common human goals: survival, education, resources, social standing, love and marriage, family, and friends. Antagonists are agents who oppose them or obstruct them in some fashion. In the social organization of groups within dramas and fictional narratives, protagonists and their friends typically form communities of affiliative and cooperative behavior, and antagonists are typically envisioned as a force of social domination that threatens the very principle of community. By ministering to our protagonistic self-image, agonistic structure helps us to organize our behavior in ways that promote our own interests, and those interests are ultimately shaped by the regulative power of inclusive fitness. The agonistic organization of characters in novels and plays can thus be traced to a causal source in human psychology, and that causal source can be traced to an ultimate causal source in the adaptive logic of human evolution.

5. Basic Emotions, Tone, and Personality

Human behavior is organized through motives – goal directed action that is prompted by needs rooted in the adaptive history of the species. Sex is a motive, and we seek mates. Social affiliation is a motive, and we seek friends and seek to make alliances. Nurturing offspring is a motive, and we seek to provide food, shelter, and education for our children. The most immediate, proximal mechanism for activating motives are emotions – feeling states that are caused and accompanied by distinct configurations of physiological and neurochemical changes manifesting themselves, on the phenomenal level, as qualities of sensation.²⁰ Emotions prompt characters to action and can often be inferred from action. Moreover, characters often reveal their motives expressively or overtly declare their feelings, and authors often describe, analyze, and explain the emotions of their characters. Authors respond emotionally to their own characters – liking some, disliking others, grieving over some, and rejoicing with others. Literary critics can and often do assess emotions in characters, attribute emo-

20 Plutchik: Emotions.

tions to authors, infer emotional responses in an implied audience, and give expression to the critics' own emotional responses.

Psychologists have identified universal emotions that mediate the basic motives of an evolved and adapted human nature. By isolating emotions that can be universally or almost universally recognized from facial expressions, Paul Ekman and other researchers ultimately produced a core set of seven 'basic' emotions: anger, fear, disgust, contempt, joy, sadness, and surprise.²¹ Different researchers sometimes use slightly different terms, register different degrees of intensity in emotions (for instance, anxiety, fear, terror, panic), organize the emotions in various patterns and combinations, or link them with self-awareness or social awareness to produce terms like embarrassment, shame, guilt, and envy. Despite these complications, this core group of seven emotions has wide-spread support as a usable taxonomy of basic emotions.

Dramas and fictional narratives are typically organized around the motives of individual characters. Those motives over time constitute life plans, and the life plans have an emotional quality and an emotional tone that is modulated over time. This modulated sequence of emotions constitutes something like the musical score in a film, the emotionally evocative imaginative melody of a life, and the emotional melody within a character's own life is interwoven with the emotional responses both of author and of reader.²² 'Tone' in a novel is a combined product of an author's attitude toward the depicted subject, the emotional quality registered in the subject, and the affect produced in the mind of a reader. Joy, the pleasure of fulfillment in the pursuit of basic human needs, is the central emotion shared by readers in the response to romantic comedy. Fear and sadness are tragic emotions. Anger, contempt, and disgust are the core emotions activated in satire, but satire usually also involves some degree of 'amusement'. Amusement thus bridges the range between hostile laughter – laughter of derision like that which accompanies Malvolio off stage in his yellow, cross-gartered stockings – and the laughter of affectionate condescension like that which accompanies Don Quixote in his attack on a windmill or a flock of sheep.

Evolutionary psychology, as a distinct school, has tended to focus on human universals or species-typical characteristics in human beings. Personality psychology, in contrast, is a chief locus for the analysis of 'individual differences' among people. But all heritable elements of human nature are variable elements, and personality factors offer a way of linking the close analysis of individual identity with the elemental motives that are

21 Ekman: Emotions.

22 N. Carroll: Art.

rooted in the deep adaptive history of the species. Personality and emotions are closely related, and emotions and motives are also closely related.²³ The features of personality dispose people to feel in certain ways. Disagreeable people tend to be hostile, either angry or cold; emotionally unstable people tend to be depressive and fearful; extraverts tend to be optimistic and enthusiastic, and so on.²⁴ Such differences, important as they are in distinguishing individuals, are differences only of degree. In participating vicariously in the experiences depicted in literary texts, we share in the universal human emotions and the universal attributes of personality.

The capacity for penetrating the perspectives of other people and of inhabiting multiple perspectives simultaneously is a universal, evolved feature of the human cognitive apparatus.²⁵ In literature, and especially in drama and in fictional narrative, we can find the most highly developed form of that human capacity. The interplay of perspectives can operate in affiliative ways through empathy, and it can also operate for hostile purposes in assessing the intentions of an enemy, unveiling duplicity and deceit, and seeking to dominate the perspectives of others. The agonistic capabilities of perspectival penetration fall broadly into the three main generic categories that are produced by combinations of basic emotions: comedy, tragedy, and satire. Comedy and tragedy both activate affiliative dispositions. They enable the reader either to participate happily in the good fortunes of a protagonist – some character they like and admire – or to share with sorrow the protagonist's unhappiness. All satire is designed to ridicule and is thus hostile in intent. Irony is the tonal basis of satire. The ironist simultaneously evokes the perspective of its target while encompassing that perspective within a perspective from which the evoked target appears contemptible. The discrepancy between the two perspectives produces laughter through the sense of absurdity, and the laughter is strongly tinged with dislike. The satirist achieves perspectival dominance over his or her target, and contempt for the target is an integral emotional feature in the satisfaction produced by this dominance. By engaging the reader's empathy for protagonistic characters and activating an alienating distaste for antagonistic characters, authors enable readers to simulate an emotionally responsive social interaction with the characters.

23 MacDonald: Evolution.

24 Buss: Adaptation.

25 Baron-Cohen: System.

6. Realism and Symbolism

Ghosts, vampires, dragons, magical carpets, genies in lamps, immortal souls, the nine circles of hell, the celestial city, talking animals, time travel, invasions from Mars, magic potions, people who live happily ever after, fairies, elves, goblins, witches, miraculous coincidences – all of these are objects depicted in literary texts. Clearly, literature does not necessarily depict real objects, but the humans who do the depicting and the humans who read the depictions are real. All depicted objects in literature, if they are not merely random, are charged with human meaning and human emotions. Every object depicted in a literary text can be understood in relation to its source and in relation to the effect it has on readers, and every object can also be compared with what we know or suspect about what actually does exist. By comparing reality with the depicted objects of literature, we can better understand how the depictions work and what they are designed to accomplish.

Literary figuration can be located on a continuum that consists at one polar extreme in what I shall call ›mimetic verisimilitude‹ and at the other in what I shall call ›symbolic fantasy‹. Mimetic verisimilitude is the figurative mode through which literature assimilates the particulars of commonplace reality, and symbolic fantasy is a medium through which those commonplace particulars are integrated into affectively modulated imaginative structures. Mimetic verisimilitude consists in depictions that seek to reflect ordinary reality as if the depiction were an accurate and objective account of real people in real places involved in real situations and engaged in real actions. Symbolic fantasy, in contrast, is the medium of myth and fairy tale. The objects depicted in symbolic fantasy need have no more objective reality than the figments of dreams or the hallucinations of delirium, but unlike dreams and hallucinations, the images of symbolic fantasy are organized and purposeful. They are the forms in which the literary imagination commonly envisions experience, and those forms consist most characteristically in metaphor and personification. The metaphors can consist in single images or in elaborately interwoven ›motifs‹ of multiple and repeated images. They can even consist in elaborately contrived arrangements of plot, theme, tone, and style that are designed to reveal the essential relationships within a set of characters, to exemplify the nature of social processes or institutions, or to exemplify the structure of nature itself. A complex of depicted characters, scenes, and events can serve to encapsulate a religious or philosophical vision of the world, or it can serve to exemplify the interaction among the elements within the personal identity of an author.

Realism depends on elementary, universal aspects of human experience: shared participation in a physical world, shared sensations of physical needs like hunger, thirst, and sexual desire, shared intuitions into the elementary nature of individuals as persons with beliefs, motives, and goals, and a shared understanding of the elemental structures of human life history. All depiction at least tacitly invokes some of these universal aspects of human experience. Without these points of reference, symbolic fantasy would simply be unintelligible. Symbolic fantasy is thus itself necessarily impregnated with realism. Conversely, the local and particular depictions of realist fiction can be conceived as instantiations of universal elements of human experience, and they are, in that respect, symbolic. In their fully elaborated and articulated form, symbolic figurations are not necessarily universal. Myths and religious fantasies, for example, are culturally local, but all myths and religious fantasies are made up of constituent elements that are informed by the elemental, universal components of the human psyche. (Among the universal figurative elements in myths and religions, family motifs – mothers, fathers, children – bulk particularly large.)

The substantive constituents of symbolic fantasy are legion, but they tend to cluster in the elemental or primary aspects of life. They consist often in forces or elements of nature, for instance, lightning and thunder, rivers, mountains, and oceans, earthquakes and floods. And they consist also in personified elements of human nature – love and hatred, dominance and submission, gloom, despair, and hope. They consist in reductions of characters to elemental social roles such as mother, child, brother, sister, friend, enemy, master, and slave. And they consist in personified moral concepts such as good and evil, remorse, redemption, justice, betrayal, and retribution. They consist in the phases and aspects of life, in youth and age, birth and death, sickness, health, beauty, and ugliness. They consist of wild beasts, of jackals, hyenas, lions, snakes, wolves, and insects, of filthy things, excreta and decay, and of things sweet, fragrant, and lovely, flowers and the freshness of morning or spring. In all these aspects, the metaphoric constituents of symbolic fantasy depend crucially on elemental affective dispositions that mediate the elemental motive structures of human life history.

7. Human Universals and Psychological Literary Study

Much current literary criticism identifies itself as cultural critique, and the emphasis on specific forms of culture clearly gives access to a major dimension of literary meaning. Humans are social animals, and there are virtually no human beings who exist outside of culture, or whose personal

identities are not profoundly influenced by the culture in which they happen to live. Nonetheless, in causal sequence, the elemental forces in life are prior to cultural formations, and psychological analysis should accordingly precede and constrain cultural analysis. Physiological processes and the drives for survival and reproduction have been conserved in humans from ancestral organisms that precede the evolution of mammals. Like all mammals, humans are physically dependent on live birth and mother-infant bonding, and that physical dependence fundamentally influences all specifically human forms of psychological organization. Specifically human dispositions for mate selection, pair-bonding, parenting, and kin association precede and constrain all specific cultural forms for the organization of marriage, family, and kin. Humans share with social primates the elementary dispositions of affiliation and dominance, and those dispositions constrain all specific forms of social organization. All forms of cultural imagination – religious, ideological, artistic, and literary – are imbued with the passions derived from the evolved and adapted dispositions of human nature. Literature and the other arts derive their deepest emotional force from those dispositions.²⁶

In seeking explanatory reductions of the psychological processes at work in literature, literary scholars have made far more use of Freudian depth psychology than of any other form of psychological theory. For generations now, literary scholars who have had some intuitive conviction about the psycho-symbolic structure of literary figuration have been drawn, as if by a fatal necessity, into the vortex of Freudian critique. The attractive force exercised by Freud has in good part been a force exercised in a vacuum. Freud offers a comprehensive, internally coherent, and provocatively sensationalistic explanation of the structure of the psyche, the most intimate bonds of family life, sexual identity, and the phases in the development of the individual personal identity. He sketches out a rudimentary theory of literature as a form of wish fulfillment fantasy projection, but that theory has been far less influential than the theory of psycho-symbolic figuration articulated in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. For much of the twentieth century, if one wished to explore psychosexual development and psycho-symbolic figuration, and to do so in a systematic and theoretically consequent way, there were few alternatives outside the work of Freud.

Within the field of psychology proper, Freud's theories have drifted steadily into the backwaters of obsolete speculative notions. Those notions were systematically developed, but their distinctive character depended more on the peculiar stamp given to them by the personality of their originator than by any claim they might have had to empirical validity. The

26 McEwan: Literature.

subjects of Freud's speculations – human family relations, sexual identity, the structure of the psyche, and the phases of individual development – are essential components of human experience and thus of literary meaning. The account Freud and the Freudians give of those subjects, though, is radically flawed. The Oedipal theory is at the very center of Freud's thinking on human development and on the psychological foundations of culture. One of the display pieces of a specifically adaptationist understanding of human psychology is the decisive demonstration that the Oedipal theory is quite simply mistaken.²⁷

Freud is still cited respectfully by literary critics, but he no longer serves, very often, as a primary, unmediated source. Most postmodern literary criticism has at least a tinge of psychoanalytic thinking about it, and much of it is dyed through and through with psychoanalytic thinking, but most practical psychoanalytic criticism is derived from second and third-generation Freudian theorists. Overwhelmingly, for literary study, the most important of such later Freudian theorists is Jacques Lacan. One hears now very seldom of the ego and the id, and even less often of anal and oral stages of development, but one still hears constantly of the Phallus and The Mirror Stage of Development. Such theories, like those of Freud himself, have an obvious suggestive appeal, but like Freud's theories they also contain much that is simply false and mistaken. Moreover, Lacan's Freudian ideas are bound up with poststructuralist linguistic ideas, and Lacan's theories thus extend psychology still further into the region of speculation divorced from empirical constraint.

In the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, the one chief alternative to Freud, for psychological theory relevant to literary study, was that of Freud's apostate disciple, Jung. Freud was himself concerned chiefly with the personal unconscious of individuals, and Jung, in his own understanding of his work, was concerned with a broader and deeper subject – that of the collective unconscious of the whole human race. Jungian archetypal theory provided a major stimulus to the comprehensive taxonomical effort of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, and Frye was widely recognized as one of the most creative and commanding intellects in literary study in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, in the early 1980s, archetypal criticism quietly faded out of existence, and Frye's taxonomy has produced no substantial fruits within at least the past two decades.

In a formulation that has become a standard point of reference for adaptationist psychology, the Dutch ethologist Niko Tinbergen identifies four areas in which research into animal behavior should seek integrated

27 Daly / Wilson: *Homicide*, pp. 107-121.

answers: phylogeny, ontogeny, mechanism, and adaptive function.²⁸ Phylogeny concerns the evolutionary history of a species and ontogeny the individual development of an organism within that species. Jung's chief range of interest was that of phylogeny, and Freud's that of ontogeny. Because of advances in adaptationist social science, we now have means for exploring both these areas in scientifically fruitful ways that were not available to Jung and Freud. Adaptationist psychology operates both on the scale of conserved ancestral psychic structures envisioned by Jung and also on the scale of individual development on which Freud concentrated his attention. By integrating research in these fields with research into psychological mechanisms, and by locating all three forms of explanation within an adaptationist understanding of adaptive function, we can replace the speculative theories of Jung and Freud with theories that involve the same range of universal human concerns but that can produce empirically valid results.

8. Humanism, Postmodernism, and Adaptationist Literary Study

Since the late 1970s, the predominating theoretical framework of literary study has been that of »poststructuralism« or »postmodernism«. The two chief tenets of poststructuralism are »textualism« and »indeterminacy«. Proponents of textualism affirm that everything we know or think we know is fundamentally constituted by language. In Derrida's famous formulation, »*Il n'y a pas de hors texte*« – there is no outside the text; there is nothing outside the text.²⁹ Proponents of indeterminacy affirm that all meaning is self-subversive and that, consequently, no determinate meaning is possible. In Fredric Jameson's formulation, »Poststructuralism«, or, as I prefer, »theoretical discourse«, is at one with the demonstration of the necessary incoherence and impossibility of all thinking.«³⁰ In its political aspect, poststructuralism seeks to undermine traditionally dominant terms in social, psychological, and sexual concepts. In modern Western civilization, science is itself a dominant cultural value, and poststructuralist theories of science seek to undermine the ideas of »truth« and »reality« through which science claims normative epistemic authority.³¹

The epistemological stance of adaptationist literary theory differs fundamentally from that of the postmodernists. In adopting the framework

28 Tinbergen: Aims.

29 Derrida: *Grammatology*, p. 158.

30 Jameson: *Postmodernism*, p. 218.

31 Gross / Levitt: *Superstition*.

of Darwinian social science, adaptationist literary scholars adopt along with it a comprehensive rationale for integrating all disciplines under the achieved knowledge of the sciences. For adaptationist literary scholars, nature forms a unified causal network, and science provides an integrated understanding of that network. The subjects of the sciences form a hierarchy of causal forces in which the more elementary principles of the natural order constrain phenomena at higher levels. Physics constrains chemistry; chemistry constrains biology; biology constrains psychology and the other human sciences; and the evolutionary social sciences constrain the study of all cultural products, including literature and the other arts. In *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Edward O. Wilson makes a forceful case for this comprehensive vision of nature and knowledge, and he argues that the humanities present the ultimate challenge to those who believe that all phenomena can ultimately be brought within the range of scientific understanding. Adaptationist literary scholars seek to meet this challenge.

Whether traditionally humanistic or poststructuralist in orientation, literary criticism over the past century has spread itself along a continuum between two poles. At the one pole, eclectic general knowledge provides a framework for impressionistic and improvisatory commentary. At the other pole, some established school of thought, in some domain not specifically literary, provides a more systematic vocabulary for the description and analysis of literary texts. The most influential schools have been those that use Marxist social theory, Freudian psychology, Jungian psychology, phenomenological metaphysics, deconstructive linguistic philosophy, and feminist gender theory (the theory of patriarchy). Poststructuralist literary criticism operates through a synthetic vocabulary that integrates deconstructive epistemology, postmodern Freudian analysis (especially that of Lacan), and postmodern Marxism (especially that of Althusser, as mediated by Jameson). Outside of literary study proper, the various source theories of poststructuralism converge most comprehensively in the cultural histories of Michel Foucault, and since the 1980s, Foucauldian cultural critique has been overwhelmingly the dominant conceptual matrix of literary study. Foucault is the patron saint of New Historicism, and in England and America, New Historicism remains the most pervasive, all-encompassing approach to the study of literature. Post-colonialist criticism is a sub-set of historicist criticism and employs its synthetic vocabulary chiefly for the purpose of contesting Western hegemony. Queer theory is another sub-set of historicist criticism and employs the poststructuralist vocabulary chiefly for the purpose of contesting the normative character of heterosexuality. Most contemporary feminist criticism is conducted within the matrix of Foucauldian cultural critique and dedicates itself to contesting patriarchy – the social and political predominance of males.

Each of the vocabulary sets that have come into prominence in literary criticism has been adopted because it gives access to some significant aspect of the human experience depicted in literature – class conflicts and the material base for imaginative superstructures, the psycho-symbolic dimensions of parent-child relations and the continuing active force of consciously repressed impulses, »mythic« images derived from the ancestral experience of the human race, elemental forms in the organization of time, space, and consciousness, the irrepressible conflicts lying dormant within all partial resolutions, or social gender identity. All of these larger frameworks have had some utility and have enabled some insights not readily available through other means. They have nonetheless all been flawed or limited in one crucial respect. None of them has come to terms with the reality of an evolved and adapted human nature.

Humanist critics do not often overtly repudiate the idea of human nature, but they do not typically seek explanatory reductions in evolutionary theory, either. Instead, they make appeal to some metaphysical, moral, or formal norm – cosmic equilibrium, charity, passion, moderation, the integration of form and content, or some such – and they typically represent this preferred norm as a culminating extrapolation of the common understanding. Postmodern critics, in contrast, subordinate folk concepts to explicit theoretical formulations – deconstructive, Marxist, Freudian, feminist, and the rest – and they present the characters in literature as allegorical embodiments of the matrix terms within these theories. In their postmodern form, all these component theories emphasize the exclusively cultural character of symbolic constructs. »Nature« and »human nature«, in this conception, are themselves cultural artifacts. Because they are contained and produced by culture, they can exercise no constraining force on culture. Hence Fredric Jameson's dictum that »postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good«. ³² From the postmodern perspective, any appeal to »human nature« would necessarily appear as a delusory reification of a specific cultural formation. By self-consciously distancing itself from the folk understanding of human nature, postmodern criticism loses touch both with biological reality and with the imaginative structures that authors share with their projected audience. In both the biological and folk understanding, as in the humanist, there is a world outside the text. From the adaptationist perspective, the human senses and the human mind have evolved in adaptive relation to a physical and social environment about which the organism urgently needs to acquire information. ³³ An adaptationist approach

32 Jameson: *Postmodernism*, p. ix.

33 Lorenz: Rückseite.

shares with the humanist a respect for the common understanding, and it shares with the postmodern a drive to explicit theoretical reduction. From the adaptationist perspective, folk perceptions offer insight into important features of human nature, and Darwinian social science makes it possible to situate those features within broader biological processes that encompass humans and all other living organisms.

Literature is a human universal because it is grounded in the biological reality of human life. Literature depicts human nature and satisfies the needs of human nature. Whatever our theoretical orientation might be – humanist, postmodern, or adaptationist – we all have imaginative access to literature from all periods and all cultures. No matter what theory we hold, we all participate in the common, universal attributes of human nature. We benefit from the common, evolved human capacity for intuiting universal human motives and sharing in universal human emotions. Our cognitive apparatus is designed by natural selection to envision characters as agents driven by passions, informed by beliefs, and orienting their actions toward goals. We all share in the universal human disposition to envision social relations in agonistically polarized ways. »Realism« is imaginatively effective because we all share in the same basic conditions of life – the same physical conditions, the same elemental forms of social interaction, and the same elemental passions. Symbolic fantasy is imaginatively effective because even our most fantastic imaginings are tightly constrained by the universal cognitive and affective dispositions that have evolved through natural selection. By delineating the evolved and adapted structure of human nature, we can gain analytic access to the universal basis of literary depictions, and we can thus bring our theoretical perspective on literature into alignment with our actual experience of literature.

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