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SUMMARY

In chapter 1 “Responding to Style”, Alice Bell, Sam Browse, Alison Gibbons and David Peplow justify the collection’s emphasis on “minds”, “media”, and “methods”, which reflects the research landscape.

In fact, the “cognitive turn” (Steen, 1994) in the humanities has propelled the establishment of the sub-discipline of Cognitive Poetics (hereafter CP). CP draws from work carried out in Schema Theory (Schank & Abelson, 1977), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (hereafter CMT: Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Text-World Theory (hereafter TWT: Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999) and Cognitive Grammar (hereafter CG: Langacker, 2008). Schema Theory (Schank & Abelson, 1977) advances that human beings process the world around them through knowledge structures that cognitively represent stereotypical situations. CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) is a cognitive approach to metaphor which refers to the understanding of one idea in terms of another. TWT (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999) is a cognitive grammar which separates a given discourse into various ontological levels: the discourse-world (which we inhabit) and the text-world(s) (i.e., the fictional worlds). CG (Langacker, 2008) rests on the idea that grammar, semantics, and lexicon exist on a continuum.

In the context of online “participatory cultures” (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 5-6), the section on “media” is particularly relevant as stylistic inquiries come to include various monomodal and multimodal text-types. These changes lead to questioning the soundness of the “methods” used as well as the co-dependency between research questions and methodologies. The section devoted to “methods” distinguishes two objects of inquiry in reader-response stylistics: the cognitive phenomenon
investigated through experimental methods and the socio-cultural phenomenon investigated through naturalistic methods.

Chapter 2 “Interpretation in Interaction: On the Dialogic Nature of Response” opens the section on “minds”. Peplow and Whiteley investigate how “social reading” (Peplow et al., 2016, p. 30) sheds light on the inherently dialogic nature of literary response. Bakhtinian dialogic theory functions as a conceptual framework for identifying the instances where readers’ responses are permeated by and/or directed towards other texts, readers, and the wider socioculture (Bakhtin, 1984). To map out the interrelations between text and response, the authors first carry out a stylistic analysis of the poem under discussion: Armitage’s ‘Upon Opening the Chest Freezer’. Then, they use the conversation transcripts of a Sheffield-based reading group to discuss potential resonances between the poem and co-constructed responses to it. The reading group focused on the metaphorical aspects of the poem. In light of this finding, Peplow and Whiteley analyse their data using cognitive-dialogic linguistic resources, namely Lakoff and Johnson’s CMT (1980) and Du Bois’s dialogic syntax (2014). Findings reveal that readers collectively build on the metaphorical connections between the couple’s relationship and the chest freezer to establish, maintain, and develop various configurations of the metaphor RELATIONSHIP IS A CHEST FREEZER. Across multiple and disparate turns, readers display linguistic resources parallel to the utterances which have been previously uttered. The significance of parallelism creates resonance at morphosyntactic, lexical and metaphorical levels (p. 39). The dialogic interaction between discourse-participants manifests in their engagement with past discourses and in their co-construction of interpretative metaphors.

Jessica Norledge’s chapter 3 “Modelling an Unethical Mind” examines the ways in which the stylistic features permeating homodiegetic dystopian minds affect readers’ interpretations of and responses to unethical narrators. In dystopian narratives, the reader’s ability to make connections between the text-world and the discourse-world comes from a perceived sense of estrangement (Suvin, 1979, p. 1). Using a productive TWT-driven response-oriented approach, Norledge carries out a stylistic analysis of Bacigalupi’s “Pop Squad” and subsequently qualitatively examines the interactional responses of three readers. Norledge notes that, in “Pop Squad”,

instances of characterisation propel the text-world forward – thus constituting what TWT terms ‘function-advancing propositions’ – and shape readers’ mind-modelling of the characters, especially those through which the narrative is focalised. Processes of mind-modelling (Stockwell, 2009) implicate a blurring of ontological boundaries between discourse- and text-worlds insofar as readers temporarily inhabit a fictional mind to which they assign needs, thoughts, and motives. Here, readers’ discussions emphasise the shifts in the narrative voice, going from passivity to agency in the murders. Findings distinguish two mind-modelling processes. Participants 2 and 3 challenge the narrator’s actions and motives by mobilising their discourse-world ethics. Thus, a sense of estrangement between immoral text-world events (fiction, text) and real-world practices (reality, context) is emphasised. Participant 1 accepts the narrator’s mind by mobilising their text-world logic (fiction, co-text). These observations lead Norledge to suggest that mind-modelling effectively ‘builds’ text-worlds.

In chapter 4 entitled “Towards an Empirical Stylistics of Critical Reception”, Sam Browse uses the cognitive frameworks of TWT and CG to investigate Labour readers’ hostile responses to a piece by Theresa May, published in 2018 in The Observer. The study uses the “think aloud” data provided by 39 Labour supporters. The research procedure involves having participants reading excerpts from May’s piece and writing their thoughts immediately after the reading. Then, participants answer three questions along a five-point Likert scale asking them to explain their answers. Using TWT enables the author to indicate two ontological levels at which readers form a critical attitude to the text: the discourse-world, emphasising top-down resistance and the text-world, featuring bottom-up resistance (Browse, p. 65). Three discourse-world critical interpretative strategies are identified. Firstly, some readers reject May’s textually constructed target identity by mobilising their pre-existing knowledge frames. Secondly, some participants use mind-modelling (Stockwell, 2009) to imagine the responses of other readerships. Thirdly, some readers criticise The Observer for publishing the piece (p. 71). Browse distinguishes two types of text-world critical interpretative strategies: readers either use mind-modelling to explain the cognitive dissonance between text-world and discourse-world or offer differing “construals” of the text. In CG, “construal” refers to the choice between alternating expressions: different grammatical choices construe different situations (p. 73). Here,
the participants' disagreement with the bottom-up construal “employment is up” lead them to “reconstruct” the text-world with their own frames. Browse’s cognitively grounded framework for analysing critical responses is summarised page 77.

In chapter 5 “A Cognitive and Cultural Reader Response Theory of Character Construction”, Julia Vaeßen and Sven Strasen present the affordances of cultural models for examining the reception of literary characters. Cultural Model Theory – which is rooted in the field of cognitive anthropology (e.g., Strauss and Quinn, 1997, Bennardo & de Munck, 2014) – refers to particular types of schematic knowledge shared by members of a same culture through repeated embodied socio-cultural experiences (Vaeßen & Strasen, p. 81). The authors advance that the reader’s ability to construct characters and use mind-modelling (Stockwell, 2009) strategies in the reception process depends on both textual and extra-textual elements (p. 86). Cultural Models of Characters (CMC) include terminals (i.e., slots that must be filled) and default assignments (i.e., the standard expectations regarding these slots, based on previous socio-cultural experiences) (p. 90). The authors illustrate CMC by examining their own responses to Written on the Body (1993) by English writer Jeanette Winterson. They argue that heteronormative norms in Western societies lead Western readers to assign a masculine gender to Winterson’s protagonist, whose gender remains undisclosed. CMC can be activated by various textual cues, which entails that the moment of activation differs across readers (p. 94). Vaeßen and Strasen suggest that corpora of readers’ responses taken from Amazon or Goodreads could enable researchers to identify prevalent cultural models in a (sub-)culture and to empirically test the relevance of CMC.

Alison Gibbons’s chapter 6 “Why Do You Insist That Alana Is Not Real?” opens the section devoted to “media”. This multimodal and multidisciplinary reader-response research explores visitors’ perceptions of the protagonist Alana in the fictional autobiographical exhibition “there’s no place like time”. The study seeks to interrogate Paul John Eakin’s claim (1992, p. 29) that the viewer’s perceived difference between fictional and non-fictional autobiographies pertains to referentiality. To do so, Gibbons uses methods drawn from CP and museum studies. Specifically, TWT is used in concordance with Stockwell’s (2009, pp. 17-55) and Bitgood’s (2011, pp. 237-43) respective models of attention-resonance and attention-value. Gibbons’s
analysis finds that three elements work towards blurring the boundary between reality and fiction. Firstly, depending on whether visitors read paratextual fictionality signposts (e.g., opening text-plate) and whether their attention is focused (shallow-processing) or engaged (deeper-processing), ontological confusion is created. Secondly, the apodeictic addresses contained in Aila’s text-world lead viewers to assign a referential and representational status to the text. Lastly, negation – which functions as an attentional foregrounding device – prevails in Alana’s text-world, which attracts visitors' attention (Gibbons, p. 110). The researcher’s optional questionnaire to be completed by visitors reveal that 43.5% of participants believe that Alana is real. 32.6% of participants give ambiguous responses. These findings support prior research in psychology regarding default belief: visitors without prior knowledge predominantly interpreted Alana Olsen as real. The real-world museum context and the autobiographical nature of the story – combined with the elements aforementioned – enhances felt referentiality (p. 117).

Chapter 7 “Reading Hyperlinks in Hypertext Fiction” composed by Isabelle van der Brom, Lyle Skains, Alice Bell and Astrid Ensslin, presents results from an AHRC-funded reader-response study which sought to identify different types of hyperlinks and to explore the cognitive effects of hyperlinks in digital fiction. Hyperlinks prevail in hypertext fiction, which can be defined as a form of digital fiction in which individual units of texts termed “lexias” are connected (Ensslin & Skains, 2017). The research aims to empirically verify the theory that “readers anticipate where a hyperlink will lead and then retrospectively process the semantic associations they believe are implied by that link” (van der Brom et al., p. 125). Building on Parker’s (2001, n. p.) and Ryan’s (2006, pp.110-11) respective typologies of hyperlinks, the authors develop a meta-typology comprising four links: Narrative Navigation (NN), Affective Navigation (AN), Narrative Exploration (NE) and Affective Exploration (AE). NN explicitly leads the reader down a narrative path; AN implicitly leads the reader down a narrative path; NE provides the reader with additional layers of narrative and AE generates an affective response on the part of the reader (pp. 128-9). The study examines the responses of 19 student participants, reading the purpose-built hypertext fiction in presence of the researchers. Findings reveals that readers make inference about hyperlinks and retrospectively engage in meaning-making (p. 139).
The authors find that readers recognise different types of links and privilege clear and relevant NN links which advance the narrative plot.

In chapter 8 entitled “Evaluating News Events”, Martine van Driel applies media linguistics methods of text analysis to the study of reader-response. The research seeks to explore whether readers respond differently to instances of personalisation in live blogs as compared to traditional online news articles. The news articles – dealing with the Gaza conflict and the Oregon college shooting – are collected from the BBC and *The Guardian* websites. Responses to the articles are collected through semi-structured interviews and are examined qualitatively through the lens of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), which is a framework for analysing interpersonal meanings. The interview comprises two types of questions: descriptive ‘event’ and evaluative ‘perspective’ questions. Analytically, the author uses the sub-system of Appreciation within Appraisal, which pertains to the evaluation of objects. Appreciation encompasses three resources: Reaction, Composition, and Valuation (Martin & White, 2005, p. 56). Because preliminary analysis shows the prevalence of the sub-category of Quality within Reaction in both mediums, the author focuses on Quality. Quality includes positive and negative evaluations. Findings reveal that respondents primarily use negative Quality, regardless of formats. However, responses to traditional articles use negative Quality to refer to the experiences of large groups of people (e.g., families) while responses to live blogs use negative Quality to refer to the experience of specific individuals. These findings suggest a link between negative Quality evaluations of news events and the construction of the Personalisation news value (van Driel, p. 158).

Chapter 9 “In Defence of Introspection” opens the section pertaining to “methods”. Peter Stockwell begins by reminding stylisticians that introspection plays an integral part in any stylistic research (p. 165). The current difficulties with external empirical methods of investigating reading are threefold: (i) they are indirect, (ii) they involve a spatial displacement between two minds (i.e., the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’), and (iii) they involve a temporal displacement between different states of mind (i.e., introspection and retrospection) (Stockwell, p. 168). For the sake of rigour, introspective analyses should be triangulated with insights from cognitive poetics and corpus stylistics (Stockwell & Mahlberg, 2015). To illustrate his point, Stockwell
carries out an analysis of the last poem in Thomas Hardy’s *Wessex*, which deals with ageing. Introspective analyses are complemented by TWT, etymology, and corpus analyses to ensure that the analytical frameworks used do not determine *a priori* the findings. Stockwell shows that the poem features two text-worlds: one framing text-world corresponding to Hardy’s current life and one text-world featuring Hardy’s imagined life. The former text-world is portrayed as emotional and exclamatory while the latter text-world emphasises loneliness. The author argues that, although the switching between worlds and the personalisation of the poem generate a strong response on his part, introspection-driven stylistics requires readers to recognise their own feelings in the analyst’s account. Thus, acknowledging the relevance of introspection is essential to the study of literature as human communication.

In chapter 10 entitled “Reading the Readers”, Bronwen Thomas reflects on the appropriate steps to be taken and methodologies to be adopted for the purpose of carrying out ethical reader-response research in the context of new media. In the early twenty-first century, the development of Web 2.0 – also known as the ‘participatory web’ – entailed a blurring of boundaries between readers and writers, hence the introduction of such terms as “wreader” (Landow, 1997, p. 17). As Thomas notes, the growing access to textual content does not entail “ethical access” (Giaxoglou, 2017). Questions arise as to whether to ensure anonymity for online participants and whether to quote or paraphrase their texts. Additionally, Thomas indicates that, in the context of reader-response, the emphasis on the written text entails that multimodal elements remain unattended (Spilioti, 2017, p. 13). Moving from the position of observer to that of participant in online communities led the author to adopt a mixed-method approach combining analytical observations with interactions with participants to remedy the issues linked to ethics and monomodality in two projects pertaining to digital reading. The author’s recent project, Reading on Screen (2017-18), goes a step further by using creative participatory methods to co-create the digital stories with participants through multimodal resources, including animations, and oral narrations. The success of the approach lies in the inclusion of varied – and perhaps conflicting – individual narratives in the research and in the dissolution of the dichotomy between ‘researcher’ and ‘object of analysis’ which still permeates literary studies.
In chapter 11 “Extra-Textuality and Affective Intensities”, Hugh Escott argues that literary practices be deemed relational insofar as they are embedded within affective assemblages of people, socio-material environments, and artefacts. These assemblages – termed “affective intensities” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 22) – play a part in the reader’s/writer’s construction of meaning throughout the reading/writing process. Although the significance of so called “extratextual” socio-material relations for reader-response stylistics has been acknowledged, the relational aspect of literary practices has yet to be investigated. Focusing on affect entails an obligation of openness to disruption, change, and newness (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, p. 67; Massumi 2015, p. 8). The author notes that the longstanding boundary between ‘textual’ and ‘extratextual’ is opaque insofar as the ‘extra’ textual always conditions the text (Escott, p. 207). Escott’s own research seeks to develop new approaches to reading and writing through the use of participatory research methods. In the context of the “Un-thinking” project – carried out in collaboration between The University of Sheffield and the creative organisation Grimm & Co – workshops encouraged participants aged 7-18 to use their embodied experience of the immediate socio-material environment in the production of texts. In a similar vein, the author’s experience of the writing event – embedded in a network of relations – make up the field notes which have become vignettes in the present chapter. This leads Escott to conclude that attending to participants’ epistemologies requires researcher to develop flexible methodologies which take into account the coming together of people, places, and things (p. 213).

EVALUATION

Situated within the field of empirical reader-response stylistics, Style and reader response: Minds, media, methods showcases ten studies in which “verifiable insights from style and response are used to generate new stylistic models and new understandings of texts across media” (p. 1). This edited volume provides an eclectic selection of reader-response research across three interrelated dimensions: minds, media, and methods. The opening chapter “Responding to Style” first discusses the nature of the “reader” in stylistics; then, it justifies the relevance of “minds”, “media”, and “methods” through historically-informed and research-based considerations. The
postscript, written by Moniek M. Kuijpers, makes a case for closer collaboration both amongst reader-response researchers and between reader-response researchers and researchers specialised in such disciplines as computational linguistics. Kuijpers judiciously points out that the increasing importance of “minds”, “media”, and “methods” calls both for more varied expertise and for the collection of a larger amount of data. It is noteworthy that the first and last chapters imbricate the ten contributions in a productive dialogue between past developments and future research. The book’s solid temporal grounding certainly increases its relevance across audiences. Not only will it appeal to (under)graduate students wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the wide plethora of research falling in the remit of reader-response stylistics, but it will also engage experienced researchers willing to be challenged by the innovative methodologies and ethical considerations featured in the volume.

In chapter 9, Stockwell positions himself against “a view within literary linguistics that can often seem to fetishise measurement and quantification to the detriment of regarding literature as human communication” (p. 176). The book contributions do not feature the reductive approach mentioned by Stockwell. In fact, several chapters feature in-depth qualitative analyses. Peplow and Whiteley’s chapter “Interpretation in Interaction” provides insightful reports on the collaborative and discursive construction of meaning among readers. In a similar vein, Norledge’s investigation of unethical minds enables her to draw detailed conclusions about the functions of mind-modelling processes in responses to dystopian narratives. As for Gibbons’s research, it productively combines TWT and models of attention to explain why visitors may believe that the fictional protagonist Alana is real. The research carried out by Stockwell, Peplow and Whiteley, Norldege, and Gibbons clearly shows the entanglement of style and response. Their respective research findings would not have been as significant had they not analysed their data in such a meticulous way.

The success of this edited volume does not solely lie in its overall qualitative approach to data analysis. Although this aim is not stated by the editors, it appears that various chapters challenge the longstanding distinction – inherited from Cartesian dualism – between ‘analyst’ and ‘object of analysis’. Norldege’s “introspective analysis” hints at the personal nature of textual analysis. Stockwell's,
Escott’s, Thomas’s, and Vaeßen and Strasen’s contributions embrace the situatedness and researcher-specificity of research findings without falling into relativism. Both Escott and Thomas argue that participants’ epistemologies should be taken care of. Stockwell emphasises the importance of the researcher’s own intuition and emotion in stylistic analyses while Vaeßen and Strasen highlight the cultural specificity of response. These chapters suggest that the interrelation between style and response is always supplemented – overtly or covertly – by the interrelation between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’.

A few innovative methodological approaches and models deserve particular attention. In terms of methodology, van Driel’s use of Attitudinal Appraisal for the purpose of reader-response stylistics leads to a very incisive discussion about readers’ responses to similar events on different mediums. On a similar note, Thomas’s work with readers using creative participatory methods allows for an inclusive reader-response analysis which does not project the researcher’s bias onto the data. As far as models are concerned, it must be noted that both Browse’s cognitive model of critical reception and van der Bom, Skains, Bell and Ensslin’s typology of hyperlinks have significant potential-use value. Browse’s rigorous framework – which distinguishes two ontological levels of critical reception – could be applied to other text-types. Similarly, van der Bom et al.’s typology – which offers a categorisation of hyperlinks in terms of their respective functions during the reading experience – could open up new opportunities for understanding readers’ engagement with digital fiction.

*Style and reader response* conveys manifold strengths: its emphasis on “minds”, “media” and “methods” shows the editors’ openness to various research interests and approaches while resisting academic dogma. Additionally, various genres are investigated throughout the volume: poetry, dystopias, hypertext fictions, news, and exhibitions. While the eclectic selection of research constitutes a genuine strength, the richness of terminology would have justified the inclusion of a glossary, particularly for students. Following this observation, the first and last chapters shed light on the rationale underpinning the book and provide readers with useful information and clarifications of concepts. Thus, these chapters should be particularly valuable to student-readers. In any case, this volume is comprehensive, thought-
provoking, and extremely insightful. Without doubt, the research presented in *Style and reader response: Minds, media, methods* has the potential to influence and shape future reader-response stylistic investigations.

REFERENCES


