

Contribution of cognitive literary studies in literary interpretation

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Abstract

The focus of the present paper is that 'cognitive literary studies' are beneficial for 'literary studies'. There are scholars, like Adlerand who are not in favour of exploiting the science based concepts for literary interpretations. Their argument is that the 'two approaches may simply be incommensurably different'. Still, there are the scholars, like Jackson and Levingston who assert that cognitive literary studies, based on scientific concepts are able to provide new, enticing and legitimate extrapolations to the literary interpretations. However this never means that the existing critical theories of literary explanations have no value. They certainly have their procedures and concepts to achieve their aims. If combined with the principles of cognitive studies, wonderful interpretations would appear. Then we would taste 'new knowledge'.

Keywords: literary studies, knowledge

Introduction

The present paper has been written with a focus, whether 'cognitive literary studies' are beneficial for 'literary studies' or not. The supporters of cognitive literary studies might have been feeling affirmative in this regard. E Jackson (2003) ^[5] observes, 'To these scholars' minds, we can have a reasonable blending of humanistic and scientific discourses as long as we are careful about how we bring the approaches together and about what we can expect their blending to reveal. A cognitivist approach to literary interpretation will try to base its claims on relatively solid scientific fact while not failing to treat the text as literature, which is to say as more than a product of biological processes'. However, the critics, like Hans Adlerand do not think on the same lines as those supporters of cognitive literary studies do. According to Adlerand, 'the two approaches may simply be incommensurably different. We cannot really hope for a blending that will work. The split between the "two cultures" of the sciences and the humanities that bothered... remains in place'. The present paper is an outcome of conflicts taking place between these two different 'cultures'.

What is the Object of Literary Interpretation?

In the Jackson's view, the word 'literary' denotes the object of interpretation. He states, 'This understanding stresses the difference between the explanation and that which gets explained. We have an object of study known as literature...'. This means that the 'object' (here 'literature') of interpretation is certainly different from the 'approach' or 'methodology' of its interpretation. He further argues, 'In this most broad sense, literary interpretation bears a similarity to other kinds of argumentation, including scientific explanation. Roughly speaking, in the prevailing models of interpretation at least, you have an introduction in which you lay out some issue or question, you have a body or middle that considers in a systematic way some significant evidence in relation to the issue or question, and you have a conclusion of some kind. The argument moves according to widely accepted notions of logical analysis. As far as I can tell, this remains a nearly

universal model of establishing claims' (Jackson, 2003) ^[5].

The concepts from cognitive studies would bring in logical notions to the literary interpretation. These logical notions are widely accepted therefore the interpretations will also be acknowledged. Thus Jackson appears to be a supporter of the 'cognitive literary studies'. The reason is that it would enable the writers of literary interpretation to have confidence of validity, intellectual pleasure and feeling of worthiness.

However there is a catch in this approach. The literary critics and the cognitive literary critics should make no claims that the 'import of concepts' would transform the literary critic to a scientist, in the sense of a 'astrophysicist', or a 'neurologist'. According to Jackson (2000) ^[4], there are 'general differences between scientific and humanistic methodologies, bringing scientific concepts or theories into literary studies cannot be simply a neutral move. The issue of how we use those imported ideas will inevitably become important.... The contributors to this and the earlier special issue dealing with cognitive literary study make no claims to being scientific in the sense that a physicist or neurologist or even sociologist'. However, the science based concepts will strongly appear as one of the leading interpretations to the literary studies.

How are the Science Based Concepts Useful to the Literary Studies?

Jackson argues that apart from the 'anchoring interpretation' and 'reasonable interest', the science based concepts will bring the idea of legitimacy to the literary interpretation. He states, 'For the idea of legitimacy will come up in the interdisciplinary context. Imagine a scientific writer making foundational use of some literary concept in interpreting his or her data. This is so illegitimate as to be inconceivable. But in the other direction, because humanistic studies have such broad methodological tolerances, it is at least conceivable to try to ground interpretation in a scientific concept. Nonetheless, doing so will open the doors to certain argumentative expectations that will have to be dealt with'. Presently, literary theory seems to be in the relativistic confusion in practice, because it is yielding the same

interpretation of the literary works, even belonging to different genres. Then it is not possible to keep those interpretation in the stakes of legitimacy.

The idea of legitimacy will bring new relevance with the appearance of cognitive literary studies. The reason being, any 'scholar could find cognitive science just plain interesting in itself for literary research,... because they feel it will bring a new kind of rigor and legitimacy to' their literary work. P Levingston relates the issue of literary argumentation to philosophy of science. In his important work, *Literary Knowledge*, he concludes, "many critics are at least implicitly engaged in work that approximates a very basic model of inquiry". This position damages the literary critical research by manifesting an undeveloped interpretation patterns to scientific extrapolations. Levingston concedes, 'in a kind of damning with faint praise, that literary critical research sometimes manifests a rudimentary explanatory pattern that is similar, in its most basic form, to scientific explanations'. In simple words, an uneven kind of system procedures exist in literary discussions.

Levingston also responds to the objection, 'how it can be that, in spite of this systematicity, most critics "produce such divergent and apparently noncumulative results"'. The reason behind this objection is that 'patterns of literary explanation seem to be made and broken without there being anything remotely resembling overall progress'. In this situation, it does not seem possible for a 'formalized method of inquiry to lead to a relatively unified, cumulative, and progressive kind of knowledge, as is famously the case with science'.

Levingston argues that, 'literary interpretation does not set out to explain in anything like the scientific sense, where explanation has to do with discovering "recurrent types or patterns of events and their lawful repetition"; rather, interpretation has to do with "the properly humanistic task... of *understanding*"; and therefore judging literary interpretation by scientific explanation makes no sense. "What is wrong with this objection," he says, "is the fuzziness and incoherence of the notion of understanding it advocates, for insofar as such understanding is truly different from explanation... Said another way: the objection itself will not stand because it does not subscribe to the meaning of knowledge by which scientific explanation is judged. From the perspective of such knowledge'. In other words, Levingston is right for the reason that his standard of genuine research and knowledge is based on coherence and progress of the knowledge across the disciplines.

Conclusion

Hans Adlerand, though seems genuine while arguing that 'the two approaches may simply be incommensurably different. We cannot really hope for a blending that will work do not think on the same lines as those supporters of cognitive literary studies'. He seems to be standing firmly on the position, when writing that the 'split between the "two cultures" of the sciences and the humanities that bothered... remains in place'. Yet there are the arguments of Jackson and Levingston which emphasize that cognitive literary studies, based on scientific concepts are able to provide new, enticing and legitimate extrapolations to the literary interpretation. However this never means that the existing critical theories of literary explanations have no value. They certainly have their procedures and concepts. If combined with the principles of

cognitive studies, wonderful interpretations would appear. Then we would taste 'new knowledge'.

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