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Cognition and Poetics: Minding Language and Literature

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Abstract

Extending the concept of speech act, as it has been developed in classic pragmatics, I have defined the 'pragmatic act' as an interactive communicative practice in which we determine, and are determined by, the entire context of communication (See Mey 2002, chapters 8 & 9). Applying this notion to poetics, I want to establish the concept of the 'poetic act' by which we create the fictional universe called the 'poetic space'. The poetic (or more generally, the literary) space is where authors and readers meet; furthermore, the poetic (or more generally, the literary) pragmatic act creates the 'chronotope' (to use Bakhtin's expression) that characterizes the poetic context in time and space. The co-creators of this chronotope communicate by using their 'voices', understood as the entirety of their time/space affordances as authors and readers, aka. producers and consumers of the literary product. I will illustrate my ideas by analyzing a few texts: a sonnet by the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Fraga e sombra; an extract from Virginia Woolf's novel Jacob's Room; a work, Surfaces, by the contemporary US poet Peter Meinke; and finally a poem by the late US writer John Updike, entitled Commencement, Pingree School.

1. Breaking the Seal

Instructions on a package of software usually contain a reference to property rights (of the software producer/distributor) and to obligations (of the prospective user). The language in questions reads more or less as follows:

"By opening this package, you agree to all the conditions as set forth in the accompanying agreement for use of this software."

The 'accompanying agreement' is in the form of a normal business contract, except that it need not be signed nor can it be negotiated. Thus, it is a 'package deal' in more than one sense; in addition, the agreement is entered into by the one part performing a specific action, viz. that of opening the package. No signature is needed nor required (or in fact possible to obtain, given the conditions of sale in this particular instance).

Breaking the seal on this package leads the user into a contractual universe, where one's behavior and actions are subject to a set of rules, not all of which are specified in the accompanying brochures. In every society, there is a corpus of legality that specifies individual contractors' rights and obligations; these may differ from society to society, even from sector to sector in a particular society. Thus, there are specific rules that determine the legality of actions performed by a doctor in a hospital; in many countries, patients have to 'sign their rights away' before they can be treated or operated on. In this way, the hospital and the physicians safeguard themselves against malpractice suits and their disastrous

financial consequences. Surrounding these particular segments of society is the law-at-large, which specifies penalties for certain categories of crimes such as (in)voluntary manslaughter (a law that is often invoked when medical malpractice is alleged to have led to the death of a patient).

By breaking the package seal, the user implicitly accepts to obey these rules, and subjects him- or herself to the penalties that s/he may incur when the rules are broken (e.g. by using the software illicitly, copying it, transferring it to an unauthorized user and so on). There is no doubt that the user is engaged in some kind of *act*, which normally would be classified under one of the Searlean categories of speech acts (most likely a commissive, like that of 'promising'). But rather than considering the speech act in isolation, I suggest that this kind of act, just like all other acts of communication, only makes sense when placed in its 'total context' (to borrow an expression coined by Saussure himself, who most likely did not realize the full pragmatic implications of this term). What we are dealing with here is what I have called a 'pragmatic act': an instance of human behavior that is 'boxed in' by a variety of constraints and typified in a special way, depending on the context; when we focus exclusively on the verbal part of the act, we are close to what traditionally is called a 'speech act'.

2. The Total Context

In the previous section, I said that the act of breaking the seal on a package of software only can be properly understood, and have validity in a legal sense, when placed in the total context of the act. By this, I mean that the act, taken by itself, does not involve anything except a rather insignificant physical action of removing a piece of paper from a cover; it is first when we read the accompanying text on the package ("By removing this seal, you agree …" etc.) that the full intended meaning of the act becomes clear.

But whose intention are we talking about here? Clearly, the originators of the message, the software company or it distributors, intend to impose a legally binding obligation on the user, viz.: not to use the software except in accordance with the prescribed behavior for users (including the restrictions on dissemination and the like that I mentioned earlier). I will not discuss the legal status of such an obligation, even though I have a feeling that we are moving around in a gray zone of undefined legal constraints here; after all, this way of dealing with, and selling, commodities is quite new.

The closest I can come up with in the line of historical precedents is the way merchants in earlier times used to send shipments 'for inspection': commodities such as Persian rugs, ladies' clothing, books etc. were delivered to a prospective buyer, who could then, at his or her leisure, examine the goods and either purchase or return them without penalty or extra cost. In these cases, no written legal documents accompanied the shipments; by a gentleman's agreement the prospective buyer would refrain from damaging the goods, using them for other purposes than testing their quality and value, or even failing to return them. One could for instance not lend the books to friends, or start wearing the clothing that one didn't want to buy in the end. All of this was implicitly understood, and no special 'acts' were needed to create an obligation (which probably would not be enforceable anyway). The sole force of the agreement resided in the conventional context of dealing with a

high-class purveyor of luxury goods, with whom the prospective buyer probably had a long-standing business acquaintance; this acquaintance basically constituted the 'total context' in which these transactions were carried out.

3. Consuming a Poetic 'Commodity'

Characteristic for the pragmatic act of breaking the seal is the active participation of the consumer who, by performing a simple manual operation, enters into a binding contract with the purveyor of the sealed commodity. This parallel from the world of business can teach us something about another context of 'breaking a seal': that in which a poetic 'sealed' commodity is provided to a consumer on specific conditions that are not normally part of a regular 'buy-sell' situation; this context likewise implies the consumer's implicit acceptance of such conditions. Just as the breaking of the package seal constitutes a pragmatic act, so the breaking of the poetic seal qualifies as the particular kind of pragmatic act, which I call the 'poetic act'. Let's consider this act and its 'agents', and how they go about acting in the fictional, poetic universe.

The consumer of a literary product is essentially different from the consumer of a 'normal' commodity (like a car, a piece of furniture, or a washing machine; see Mey 2002: 237). At first glance, we seem to recognize the prospective reader as simply a buyer/consumer: he or she acquires the products of someone else's literary activity and by consuming ('reading') them, satisfies a personal need, and indirectly, provides the author, the producer of the text, with a living. However, in the case of the production and consumption of poetic works (or, in general, literary texts), the relationship is not one of pure buying and selling (as in the case of a regular commodity). In the literary market, authors and readers (like producers and consumers in the regular market) have different positions: authors on the supply side, readers on the demand side. However, despite their difference in placement they have much more in common than regular sellers and buyers have. What makes the literary market different from the simple exchange of commodities, as practiced in the regular market, is its *collaborative* character.

Buying goods in the regular marketplace puts us under no special collaborative obligations. Of course, for our own benefit, we respect the intentions of the producer, as expressed in 'Directions for Use', 'Consumer Manuals', or similar pieces of documentation (including the warranty: a legal instrument which safeguards the product from production faults and producer negligence). But otherwise, no collaboration is expected from either side. The ideal sales situation is that in which post-trade costs and contacts are reduced to a minimum; producer and consumer part ways, and probably never will meet again.

With respect to the literary market, the activities of producing and consuming are rather different, as they essentially depend on the participants' collaboration. We don't just buy a book: we buy an author to take home with us. The author's homework of producing the poetic text demands to be supplemented by our homework as readers. Every text needs a reader for its completion and full realization; this is why reading always is a collaborative activity, taking place between author and reader.

A contemporary novelist, Susan Antonia Byatt, has expressed this cogently and succinctly:

[A novel] is made in the head, and has to be remade in the head by whoever reads it, who will always remake it differently. (Byatt 1996:214)

In other words, reading is more than a passive, pre-scribed and pre-determined use of a 'recreational facility': it presupposes an *active re-creation* of the poet's original creative work. And this holds for both recent and older literature, as two contemporary US scholars, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, writing on the subject of reading Shakespeare today, express it:

"… the potential of great works is realized by an act of creative understanding from an alien perspective reflecting experiences the author never knew, and so Shakespeare grows in meaning by virtue of what his works contain but could only be realized by active understanding from a new perspective". (Morson and Emerson 1990: 310)

By being active collaborators in the poetic effort, readers are major players in the literary game. Their impact extends beyond the acquisition of a text and its subsequent assimilation through the visual and psychological processes that we usually associate with reading. As I will argue in the next section, upon entering the poetic space/time that the author has created, readers become active participants in the literary game, rather than mere spectators or listeners. This readerly activity, however, changes the play; in the final analysis, what *readers read is their own co-production of the text*: the text as produced in collaboration with its author. In this dialectic interaction, the author depends as much on the readers (for support of his or her literary activity), as the readers depend on the author (for guidance in the world of fiction): the author provides a 'script' that the readers have to actively internalize in order to successfully take part in the literary game.

4. Creating the Poetic Universe: the 'Chronotope'

Let's now look more closely at what it is that an author has to offer his or her prospective customers, the readers. In earlier work (e.g. Mey 2001, 2002), I have used the notion of a fictional 'space', into which the readers are introduced, led by the hand, so to speak, by the author. Readers are delivered ('newly born', one could say, punning metaphorically) into this universe of poetic reality, where they meet with the narrative characters whose voices determine the outlay of the universe in question and carry the ongoing action. Such voices may sound in unison, or they may clash, when characters speak out of turn or their voices sound out of tune (See Mey 2001: ch. 7 for more details).

What is lacking in this spatial metaphor is of course the dimension of *time*. When space and time are combined into 'time-space', we get what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the 'chronotope', an 'Einsteinian' concept that unites both the spatial and the temporal dimension. As Bakhtin says (by his own confession, inspired by Einstein's theories), the chronotope is

"almost a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)." (Bakhtin 1982: 84)

With regard to what I refer to as the 'poetic universe', the chronotope is where the voices of the characters meet with, and confront each other, in "dialogue and dialectics", as Bakhtin calls it:

"Every utterance necessarily elicits a response in one form or another … in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener… Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another." (Bakhtin 1994: 104)

The poet's activity, and the reader's dialogic and dialectic response, all happen in the dialectic chronotope of the literary work.

Brian McHale has complemented this idea by pointing out that the text, as such, not only creates the spatiotemporal conditions for the poetic work to be realized; in addition, or perhaps more correctly, the text can be seen "as a 'map', or 'model', whose final constitution requires the reader's active response" (McHale 1992: 27). This will be the topic of the next section.

5. Cognitive Mapping

Monica Fludernik has commented on McHale's proposal as follows:

"McHale proposes to read … poems as affording the reader opportunities for cognitive mapping, inviting the reader to engage creatively with the text, trying out a number of avenues of sense-making and, ultimately, asking the reader to read herself [sic] into the text." (Fludernik 1996: 304; see also McHale 1992: 29)

As I see it, this 'cognitive mapping' activity is essential to the understanding of any kind of poetry, and not just the "postmodernist nonsense" poems that McHale is talking about in the passage I just cited. And as for 'reading oneself into the text', this corresponds pretty much to what I have called 'entering the poetic universe', aka. the Bakhtinian chronotope.

Now, let's for a moment consider what such a mapping could look like, and what it presupposes, respectively has as its consequences. Reading a map consists basically in collating two universes: the one universe is that of the world being mapped, the other is that of the map. Between these two worlds, there is a correspondence, expressed in the form of lines and arrows, dots and squares, and sometimes partial relief and color (to denote differences in height and natural composition: rocks, water, pastures etc.) What is important for the cognitive aspect involved is that the map's reader is able to reproduce the outside universe, as represented by the map, by an internal universe that corresponds to, but also re-creates, the visual data provided by the map. One could call this cognitive activity a spatiotemporal imaging, and it is an essential prerequisite for being able not just to read a map, but to cognitively reproduce it and enter the universe that is mapped.

Such a cognitive reproduction or mapping does not imply a bit-by-bit reproduction of the individual items represented by the map; rather, it consists in a general re-building of the outside universe in a mental representation, where the individual elements may or may not correspond directly and one-to-one to the elements of the outside world.

For instance, recreating (or 'cognitively mapping') a city on the basis of previous knowledge, a city plan, and possibly some tourist brochures will result in very different 'cognitive mappings' for each individual doing the mapping. I recall how, having been confronted, from an early age, with pictures of the Acropolis in Athens, I had

constructed a ‘cognitive map’ of the building and its surroundings, taking into account all the things I had been told by my teachers about Greek antiquity, the history of Athens, the artistic and political life of the city and so on. Yet, on being confronted with the ‘real thing’, I had some problems relating this decrepit piece of ancient architecture to the idealized representation that I had been carrying around in my mind. While my cognitive mapping was a prerequisite for any understanding of the Acropolis, yet it was only a necessary, and by no means a sufficient condition.

The above considerations suggest that neither in literature, cognitive mapping (what I have called ‘entering the poetic universe’) is the last word. Once inside that universe, one has work to do, and this labor is necessarily a matter of subjective interests and preferences, of personal history and a will to overcome and resolve (or else accept as unresolved) possible contradictions and ambivalences. No Acropolis is the same for each human confronted with it: everybody has his or her own Acropolis.

As a German historian of culture, the numismatist Kurt Lange, writing in the tradition of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, once said, in every new generation, the heritage from the Greeks has to be acquired anew (“jede Generation muß das griechische Vermächtnis selbst erwerben um es zu besitzen”; Lange 1941: 7). From this point of view, the act of poetic (re-) creation, the pragmatic 'act of reading' (Wolfgang Iser’s “Akt des Lesens”; 1976), similarly remains a context-bound, space/time determined activity; the individual mappings are realized against the backdrop of time and space that is common to a particular generation, a time/space bound society.

Coming to grips with a literary product is therefore always a double-edged activity: on the one hand, the reader’s personal re-creation is its necessary condition, but on the other, entering the worlds of the poet’s imagination and the recipient’s affordances poses important, but sometimes difficult-to-handle constraints on this ‘entering’ (think of the problems involved in understanding a poem, not to speak of explaining it to others).

The poetic act always involves what Fludernik (1996: 306) has called a “creative reshuffling” of the constituent elements; it’s a bit like rotating a kaleidoscope and rearranging the different bits in various new patterns. But at the same time, there can be no doubt that some reshufflings will appeal more to me than they do to other persons: my reshuffling will be different from, and presumably preferable (at least for me!) to the mappings that others have created of the same space/time bound object. In the Greek example, my mapping of the Acropolis will therefore re-create ‘my’ Acropolis, as distinct from, and preferable to, whatever way others may have cognitively mapped it.

6. Four Poets and their Chronotopes: Drummond, Woolf, Meinke, Updike

This section will illustrate the theoretical considerations offered above by appealing to a common kind of understanding, a ‘cognitive mapping’, of four texts: one in prose (Woolf), the other three (Drummond, Meinke, Updike) in the form of poems.

I will start out with a sonnet by the Brazilian modernist poet Carlos Drummond d’Andrade (1902-1987), called ‘Fraga e sombra’ (‘Crag and shadow’; my translation).

FRAGA E SOMBRA

Carlos Drummond d'Andrade

A sombra azul da tarde nos confrange
Baixa, severa, a luz crepuscular.
Um sino toca, e não saber quem tange
É como se este som nascesse do ar.

Música breve, noite longa. O alfanje
Que sono e sonho ceifa devagar
Mal se desenha fino ante a falange
Das nuvens esquecidas de passar.

Os dois apenas, entre céu e terra,
Sentimos o espetáculo do mundo,
Feito de mar ausente e abstrata serra.

E calcamos em nôs, sob o profundo
Instinto de existir, outra mais pura
Vontade de anular a criatura.

(Carlos Drummond d'Andrade, *Reunião*, 1969: 177)

[Translation:

CRAGS AND SHADOWS

The evening's blue shadow's our unmaking,
low and forbidding, and the light is rare.
A bell is tolling—knowing not who's making
the sound appear as born out of the air.

The music stops, the night is long. The sickle
that slowly is dissecting sleep and dream,
is barely visible against the fickle
flight of the passing clouds' forgotten stream.

The two of us between the earth and skies
Barely perceive this worldly show,
made up of absent sea and abstract highs.
And in ourselves, under our instinct's woe-
ful wish to live, we crush the other, purified
desire to do away with what's our nature side.

Jacob L. Mey (tr.)
[Engenho Velho, Florianópolis, S.C., Brazil, 24 August 2001; revised, Austin, Tex., 2 November 2012]

Drummond's chronotope is sketched out in the first two stanzas: reference is made to the 'night', following the 'blue shadow' of the twilight, and illuminated by the faint rays of the waning moon. This *temporal* collocation is further developed *spatially* by a bell tolling, 'low and forbidding' somewhere in the distance, moved by an unknown hand. The entire chronotope is then cognitively disrupted by the symbolism of the moon's 'cleavage', said to 'dissect sleep and dream': the poet will not allow us, readers, to simply enter the cognitive space: we are being challenged in our sleep and dreams, leading to the 'unmaking' that was announced in the first line of the poem. This notion is then developed in the terzines: the 'worldly show' of the 'passing clouds' is given an *otherworldly* interpretation: the cognitive map leads us straight into the final unmaking of 'our instinct's woeful wish to live', doing away with nature altogether in a 'purifying' move. The chronotope's cognitive circle is closed: the bells that tolled in the beginning are now signaling the end of our existence 'between earth and skies', in the 'worldly show' where the 'sea [is] absent' and 'the mountain's highs' [are] 'abstract[ions]'.

What makes the poem different from an everyday speculation about life and death is our will to follow its cognitive path, along with the poet, thus transforming, in an active readerly effort, Drummond's sonnet into a

metaphysical statement. This is done through the *cognitive* transformation of the poem's chronotope, by which our lives are re-*cognized* as being pathways to the end of all time/space.

The cognitive space/time in this sonnet is clearly limited to the poet's whose voice we hear in the reflections of 'crag and dusk', and who reappears in the first person plural of the two closing stanzas. By contrast, the British writer Virginia Woolf uses a different technique in her short novel *Jacob's Room*. The room that is alluded to in the title is clearly not just a place in time, a chronotope that changes in the course of the narration. Rather, one could call it a 'virtual' space/time, a chronotope whose dimensions are related to the protagonist, Jacob Flanders, who "swims into sight" and vanishes again, as one of Woolf's critics has remarked. Small vignettes characterize the various dimensions of the actual places where things happen; one such place is the hallway in one of Jacob's lodgings, where he has "taken up" with Florinda, "one of those little prostitutes" (Woolf 1978: 94).

The actants in this chronotope are not so much Jacob and Florinda themselves as their virtual presences in the hallway, where a letter is lying on the table. What happens in the sequel is centered around this letter and its actual place, "under the lamp between the biscuit-tin and the tobacco-box" (ibid.) This placement is essential for evoking the chronotope where the letter plays the role of a participant in the action. Jacob had recognized "the hand on the envelope" as being his mother, Betty Flanders', and probably because he recognized "the hand", decides not to open the envelope, but leaves it unread on the sitting-room table, while he and Florinda go into the bedroom and "shut the door behind them" (ibid.).

In this passage, Woolf carefully sets up two chronotopes, two separate fictional time/spaces: the one inside the bedroom and the other outside, in the sitting room. The former contains "the obscene thing: the alarming presence" of Jacob "stretched with Florinda", a woman about whom we know next to nothing, except that she can't spell, is scatterbrained, and in the end deserts Jacob for another man. As such, she barely enters the chronotope to vanish almost immediately from the "room" that is "Jacob's". The other, the now-empty sitting room, is characterized by the fictional perspective, the 'vanishing point', from which we readers perceive the events going on behind the bedroom's closed door.

Since initially there are no characters present, the sitting room is a cognitively neutral portion of "Jacob's room": the "sitting room neither knew nor cared", as Woolf puts it. But on closer inspection, this empty space becomes populated by a cognitive presence, namely Jacobs's mother Betty Flanders', whose "hand" is still on the table. And Betty does "know" and "cares", listening to the sounds coming from the other space, courageously trying to explain them away as normal in "old houses" that are full of rats, where the "wood is dry", and "little creaks and sudden stirs" are to be expected.

A cognitive map is deployed in front of us, by means of which Woolf makes us aware of this presence by evoking Betty's letter: even though we are not told its contents, we are guided towards an understanding by way of the author's description. We *read* the letter, not in the literal sense of opening it and perusing its contents, but in the sense that we perceive its presence on the table as that of Jacob's mother, whose "hand" has been recognized on the envelope and whose

presence has been explicitly rejected and shut out.

Here is how Woolf's creates this particular chronotope:

"The sitting room neither knew nor cared. The door was shut; and to suppose that wood, when it creaks, transmits anything save that rats are busy and wood dry is childish. These old houses are only brick and wood, soaked in human sweat, grained with human dirt. But if the pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box had the feelings of a mother, the heart was torn by the little creak, the sudden stir. Behind the door was the obscene thing, the alarming presence, and terror would come over her as at death, or the birth of a child". (1978: 94)

It is important to note that we enter this fictional space thanks to what Fludernik has calls our "perceiving consciousness" (1993:391) – that which I referred to as the 'cognitive map' that enables us to find our way through the labyrinth of voices and characters. We are dealing here with "a reading process in which the reader takes an internal position on events (as if through a witness)", rather than from an external position, "a mere camera-eye" (ibid.). This 'internal' reader position does not relate to any externally perceived character on stage: what we do perceive, in the fictional time/space, is an 'implicit' character: a lifeless object, an envelope "lying by the biscuit-box", which miraculously blossoms out before the reader's eyes, transforming itself into a representation of a living person (a "phantom", as Woolf calls it herself; 1978: 92): the sender of the pale blue envelope and writer of its contents, Jacob's mother, Mrs. Betty Flanders.

In Fludernik's words, "[t]he reader is invited to see the fictional world through the eyes of a 'reflector' character" (1993:391; the expression 'reflector' character is due to Fludernik's mentor, Franz Karl Stanzel; 1984). The letter representing Jacob's mother is such a 'reflector': it represents our 'eyes' by the way we identify, and reflect on, the letter's sender in the fictional space of the sitting room; with her, we start imagining, and worrying about, the events happening between the couple in that other fictional space, the bedroom.

The cognitive map that we are following as our guide-line through the maze of spaces and times is personified here as a letter and attributed 'reflecting' powers. At the same time, the letter symbolizes our failing ability to fully realize the chronotope's potential: like the letter, we too cannot change the course of events. Jacob's mother can write a letter, but it needs an outside reader to make that letter come alive; as long as it is lying unopened by the biscuit-box, it is powerless, both in the fictional and in the real world.

My third example of a cognitive mapping stems again from the world of poetry, this time represented by a living US author, Peter Meinke, now retired from his teaching position in South Florida, and known for a number of very accessible but at the same time profound and thoughtful collections of poems. The one I'm quoting below, 'Surfaces', is from his collection *Liquid Paper* (1991 [1970]).

Surfaces

darling
you are not at all
like a pool or a rose
my thoughts do not dart in your depths
like cool goldfish
nor does your skin suggest petals
you are not *like* anything (except perhaps
my idea of what you are like

I think you are like
what our children need to grow beautiful
what I need to be most myself)
when the moon comes out I do not think of you
but sometimes you remind me of the moon:
your surfaces are unbelievably real

This is how I feel about you:
suppose
on the surface of a rippling pool
the moon shone clearly reflected
like a yellow rose
then
if a cloud floated over it
I would hate the sky

(Meinke 1991: 54; originally published in *The New Republic* 163(13), September 26, 1970, p. 22).

Compared with the realistic/metaphysical universe that we meet in Drummond's poems, or with the post-impressionistic/surrealist prose of Woolf's short novels, Meinke's poem hearkens back to an entirely different tradition, one I would call symbolic/metaphorical, often identified with Russian poets such as Anna Akhmatova or Osip Mandelshtam. Meinke's space/time dimensions are particular to their occasional occurrence in the poem, which forms a single self-contained unit whose references are bound by the reflections and interactions of the poet with himself. Here, space and time are not realistic dimensions: they are *poetic*, 'made up', in the original sense of the word (the Greek verb *poiein* means 'to make, create'). The descriptions do not serve as illustrations of reality; they are pointers to an inner space and time, where the author collects his thoughts and feelings around the apostrophized "darling" of the first line: "you are not at all like …" etc.

What at first sight or hearing may appear strange, viz. the fact that the poet starts out with a 'negative' description of the beloved object ("darling") turns out to be the major creative ('poetic') feature of this short poem, in addition to providing us with the cognitive mappings needed to understand the poet's intentions. On the "surface" of it, Meinke's poem describes the feeling of a man in love with his wife, telling her all the things she is not, like "a pool or a rose"; he even tells her that he is *not* thinking of her "when the moon comes out". Clearly, there must be a reason for this 'negative' reflection, or else we readers may ask the author the inevitable question: "So what?" Alternatively, we might dismiss his entire poetic enterprise by telling Meinke "Thanks for letting us know". But in doing so, we would miss an important clue to understanding this poem. The cognitive mapping that is involved here turns precisely around the 'negative' character of the descriptions used. What we are faced with here is the poem's "alienating effect", also called 'bestrangement'; to quote the Russian formalist poet and poetic theoretician Viktor B. Shklovsky, who is among the first to have used this concept:

"The point of art is to make us see things as they are seen, not as they are recognized; the way to do this is to make things *unfamiliar* and render their perception difficult." (1965:14; [1971]).

Shklovsky's own term for this alienating effect is the "technique of making strange, of 'bestrangement'" *(priëm ostranenija*, often translated as 'defamiliarization', 'making unfamiliar') (ibid.). As the Danish painter/poet/sculptor Per Kirkeby once expressed it: "at intervals, the earth has to be made flat in order that we may see clearly" (1993: 14).

By telling us what is not, the poet draws our attention to what is, and does so much more effectively than if he had simply told us that his wife is like a rose, or a pool. Such objects are familiar to us, and for that reason not very exciting or illuminative: "A rose is a rose is a rose ..." – the philosophers echoing Shakespeare. So, when the poet tells his wife that she "remind[s him] of the moon", he immediately 'defamiliarizes' this reference by adding that her "surfaces are unbelievably real". Again, this defamiliarization presupposes the familiarity of the real which it negates; but also, the very reason that the poet permits himself to choose the devious path of alienation is that the 'normal' way of poetic self-expression is felt to be just *too* familiar. By reiterating his 'bestranging' expressions, the poet transforms the negative descriptions into a positive characteristic of the beloved person.

On the other hand, the 'bestrangement' presupposes the existence of a 'cognitive map' of the kind we discussed earlier. There has to be, in the readership, a willingness to go along with the poet in his, at first blush rather heavy-handed, delving deeper and deeper into the metaphorical depths of alienation. Not satisfied with simply stating that his wife is not a rose, he has to spell out that her skin "suggests no petals"; not only is she not a pool, but we are told that his "thoughts do not dart about in [her] depths like cool goldfish". The rich, metaphoric terms of poetic description are deliberately negated and turned into their opposites in a seemingly non-poetic, negative account. Through alienation, the poetic metaphors are turned into their corresponding, realistic metonyms.

As to us readers, having become accomplices to the act of alienation, we are asked to perform a 'negation's negation', in Friedrich Engels' dialectic terminology. By denying what the alienation negates, we perform a positive act of affirmation, confirming the poet's original intention of paying a poetic attribute to his wife. In the end, this negative 'defamiliarization' serves to underscore the familiar, positive aspects of a husband's feelings: his wife is not like anything familiar (read: trivial), rather, she is unique; for like the moon's, her "surfaces are unbelievably real".

It is as if the author encourages the reader not to follow any well-known cognitive paths, not to explore any recognizable cognitive "depths": the familiar and worn metaphors of "rose" and "pool" are turned around, and instead of *recognizing* the familiar, we concentrate on *seeing* the unfamiliar, bestranged, "unbelievable surfaces" and experiencing the effect they have on us. "Seeing, not recognizing", is what *ostranenije*, defamiliarization, is all about, as Shklovskij himself admonishes us (ibid.; Steffensen 1973: 137). And Reuven Tsur elucidates: "In art, it is our experience of the process of construction that counts, not the finished product. 'Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*'" (Tsur 2009: 399; emphasis in original).

In this particular case, moreover, our active identification with the text, as outlined by the cognitive paths provided by the poet, is facilitated by the real world context of the poem's original setting. At the time of its writing, the surface of the moon, in all its "unbelievable reality", had just entered our common 'story-external consciousness' (cf. Fludernik 1993:391): the first moon landing had happened in 1969, about a year prior to the poem's first publication in 1970.

As a contrast to Meinke's 'defamiliarizing' technique, let me finally quote a poem by

another US writer, the late John Updike (1932-2009), who is mostly known for his short stories and novels (among the latter, the famous *Rabbit* tetralogy). Nobody would contest my assertion that Updike is a realistic author, describing life and mores among middle class intellectuals in the Northeastern United States; yet, even his 'surfaces', like Meinke's, reveal more than they seem to. But precisely because of the easy-going, apparently unproblematic nature of Updike's writing, finding a proper cognitive guide through his work may be more difficult than initially assumed. Here is one of his poems, telling us about a father's proud presence at the graduation of one of his three children in his first marriage:

Commencement, Pingree School

Among these North Shore tennis tans I sit,
In seersucker dressed, in small things fit;
Within a lovely tent of white I wait
To see my lovely daughter graduate.

Slim boughs of blossom tap the tent and stamp
Their shadows like a bower on the cloth.
The brides in twos glide down the grassy ramp
To graduation's candle, moth and moth.

The Master makes his harrumphs. Music. Prayer.
Demure and close in rows, the seniors sway.
Class loyalty solidifies the air.
At every name, a body wends her way

Through greenhouse shade and sweet heat to receive
A paper of divorce and endless leave.
As each accepts the kiss acádemic,
Up pops a Daddy with a Nikon. *Click*.

John Updike (1973) 'Commencement, Pingree School'

One could call this short poem a purely descriptive one, were it not for the typically updikean, hidden clues that the author has distributed throughout the text. These clues constitute the cognitive map that leads us to a full understanding of the poet's intentions and the way he considers himself: an appropriately, "seersucker dressed" person among the "North Shore" society of "tennis tans" (his equals, and yet…); the map is made up by the poet's 'seeing' of the whole ceremony of commencement at an expensive, private girls' school in the South Hamilton, Mass., community. The description includes the poet himself, but at a distance, seen from the outside as a father attending his "lovely daughter"'s graduation. His mental distance from the 'tennis tans' is palpable, as is the ironic description in one word ("harrumphs") of the headmaster's speech.

The most telling of the clues is where the poet invites us to see the commencement ceremony as a 'rite of passage', a ritual in which an individual changes his or her life status; the change is often marked by humiliating or painful exercises, imposed on he neophyte by the accepting community. In this particular instance, Updike (as so often) pulls the 'death card': this commencement's rite of passage is seen as a dangerous crossing of a threshold, a jump from one existential phase to another (like the famous *Tuffatore*, the 'Diver' from the Paestum grave monument, symbolizing his transition by a plunge into the waters of the hereafter). In the poem, the girls are depicted as "moths", attracted by the burning flame of "graduation's candle", only to receive what? A "kiss acádemic" (notice the odd accent), understood as a bizarre welcome symbol, or probably more like a kiss of death, 'the kiss of the spider woman' (think of William

Hurt's immortal role in the 1985 movie of that title).

The cognitive map is thus a guide to Updike's 'story within a story': the graduation is more than it seems to be (read: a portentous event, with shades of mortality and hidden sexuality), and also less than it seems (read: the poet making a bit fun of himself, telling the readers not to take all this too seriously and certainly not to believe the poet on his word; look, he couldn't even find a suitable rhyme in the penultimate line, had to change the stress in a word, just like we do in doggerel and birthday party verse!). And the very last, throw-away line with its "Click" tells it all; it's like a postcard sent home by the most ordinary of tourists: " Been there, done the thing, got the picture".

Compared to his contemporary Peter Meinke and his predecessors Drummond and Woolf, John Updike at first blush strikes us as more 'direct', less symbolic; realistic rather than surrealist. But beware: here, as elsewhere, the cognitive path that we are following is treacherously simple because of the very superficiality of the poet's descriptions, such that initially, we are prone to discard the poem as a rather uninteresting depiction of a wholly family-circumscribed social event: "my lovely daughter's lovely graduation". While in Meinke's poem, the clues were so to speak, underlined (he tells us what his wife is not, and so on), and while Woolf, as is her wont, doesn't even bother to provide any clues, Updike uses his famous distancing irony to convey the message: the poet is not just attending a run-of-the-mill graduating ceremony: listening to the Master's "harrumphs" and the subsequent "music" and "prayer", watching the graduating seniors "swaying in rows" and "wending their ways", "gliding down the grassy ramp"; rather, he wants us to join him in the social commentary that this poem, despite its smooth melodic lines, ruggedly maintains. It is expressed through the *basso continuo* of the author's hidden voice, in his implicit critique of the North Shore tennis people, of the bridal-like outfits of the seniors, of the ceremony's "solidified air" of "[upper middle] class loyalty", all of which suggest a double-entendre, without which the poem indeed would be a banal exercise in socialite descriptivism.

7. Concluding remarks

In this contribution, I have tried to place a particular kind of producer/consumer activity involving the 'poetic act' within the contextual frame of cognitive references called the 'fictional universe'. This poetic 'total context' has been shown to be the necessary and sufficient condition for the successful implementation of the authors' and readers' poetic activities, understood as the performance of a co-creative, authorial as well as readerly, 'pragmatic act', resulting in the creation of the literary work. The examples used were taken from modern fiction and poetry; they showed that the inclusion of the reader as a co-creator of the poetic work, "present at its creation", is absolutely necessary to capture the work's workings and effects.

To clarify these processes, I have used the metaphor of the 'cognitive/pragmatic map', a concept which allows us to trace the activities in question, and see how they guide us towards the goal of understanding, and empathizing with, the poetic work.

The importance of this way of looking at the literary process is that it unites the *pragmatic* and the *cognitive* aspects that are involved in the poetic enterprise. Pragmatic,

since it shows us the need to involve the user actively in the process. Cognitive, because it demonstrates the need to involve a common author/reader mental activity, operating in both space and time, the Bakhtinian 'chronotope', realized as a cognitive mapping of places and times in which the co-creators are able to find, and define, their relationships. Poetic acting is thereby removed from the exclusive sphere of the individualistic, ego-oriented experience of the reader, and transformed into the collaborative activity of authors and their readers; the latter, as co-authors, in their turn dialectically influence the reception and performance of the literary work, even long after its contemporary, original authors and readers have left the scene.

1(school) Pingree School, South Hamilton, MA 01982

2 (school) Here is the 'official' version of the last stanza (from Updike's *Collected Poems*:
Through greenhouse shade and rustle to receive
A paper of divorce and endless leave.
As each accepts her scroll of rhetoric,
Up pops a Daddy with a Nikon. Click.

3 (verse) See comment earlier. Twenty years later, Updike changed the line to produce a more civilized poetic effect, when he revised the poem for inclusion in his *Collected Poems*.

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