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## Cognitive Poetics and Literary Theory

Cognitive poetics, the application of cognitive science to illuminate the study of literary reading, is maturing as a discipline. This paper argues that cognitive poetics is best seen as the latest development in the progressive evolution of stylistics. The endpoint of the process represents the return of rhetoric to the centre of literary scholarship, where it offers an alternative to the purely historiographic paradigm. It is argued that stylistics and cognitive poetics have been successful in providing a descriptive account of how readers construct propositional content from literary reading, but they have only recently turned their attention to a correspondingly rigorous analysis of aesthetics and emotional involvement. The paper surveys recent trends in the field, and argues that the most effective advance in cognitive poetics requires a thorough stylistic grounding to

accompany the conceptual theory: the notion of ›texture‹ is key to this. The question of whether cognitive poetics has the status of a critical theory or a method is considered. The paper concludes by arguing that cognitive poetics differs from other critical theoretical approaches partly deriving from its interdisciplinary, scientific and empirical base, and partly because of its relationship with those critical theories. Cognitive poetics is (and should be) a hermeneutic theory with an integral poetic dimension, in order to capture the interaction of meaningfulness and felt experience in literary reading.

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