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Ready for a Handbook? Cognitive Literary Studies on a Threshold

- Lisa Zunshine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015. 680 p. [Price: £ 105.00]. ISBN 978-0-19-997806-9.

Maybe the cover image tells us more about the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* than intended. Georges de la Tour's *Le Tricheur à l'as de carreau* is a painting in the wake of Caravaggio showing the three major temptations according to 17th century moral standards: gambling, wine, and lust. If one assumes that literature is a kind of gambling, cheating, and a dangerous lust in itself, the choice of cover makes sense. If not, then it's more or less a stopgap solution. It is not (yet) an independent area of research like cognitive linguistics has become. Besides that, the term ›cognitive‹ is in literary criticism often only loosely used and one might think cognitive literary studies are just the current next turn in criticism. How could one find an image representing such a blurred area? It seems to be difficult even for a publishing house like Oxford University Press. The problem of the cover image is maybe only of anecdotal interest. However, the stopgap solution of the cover image points to the question, whether cognitive literary studies are already an area a handbook could encompass? After taking a closer look at the *Oxford Handbook*, the short answer is: Cognitive literary studies is still not an area in its own right, rather the *Handbook* presents a vivid and inspiring field of diverse and often tentative approaches, which share some common notions, practices, and concepts, one could summarise as ›cognitive‹. With this I have jumped a long way ahead. Let's start from the beginning.

I.

With the publication of the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* the field of cognitive literary studies seems to have crossed the threshold and is made to appear as an independent area. The *Handbook* is definitely not the only publications in recent years mapping the field as a more or less autonomous area in the wide sea of literary studies. Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics* (2002) together with Gavins's and Steen's *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (2003), Semino's and Culpeper's *Cognitive Stylistics* (2002), Bortolussi's and Dixon's *Psychonarratology* (2003), Hogan's *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts* (2003), Richardson's and Spolsky's *The Work of Fiction* (2004), Miall's *Literary Meaning* (2006), Turner's *The Artful Mind* (2006), Auracher's and van Peer's *New Beginnings in Literary Studies* (2008), Vandaele's and Brône's *Cognitive Poetics* (2009), Leverage's et al. *Theory of Mind and Literature* (2010), Zunshine's own *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (2010), Herman's *The Emergence of Mind* (2011), Oatley's *Such Stuff like Dreams* (2011), Jaén's and Simon's *Cognitive Literary Studies* (2012), Sanford's and Emmott's *Mind, Brain and Narrative* (2012), Bruhn's and Wehrs's *Cognition, Literature, and History* (2013), Bernaerts's et al. *Stories and Minds* (2013), Wege's *Theorie und Praxis der Kognitiven Literaturwissenschaft* (2013), are all recently published books, which try to offer a kind of a chart of what the land of cognitive literary studies looks like. At least with regard to volume and variety of perspectives the *Handbook* is currently the most advanced encyclopaedic attempt to cover the field.

Most of the handbook's authors belong to the so called second generation of cognitive literary scholars like the main editor Lisa Zunshine herself.¹ While the first generation in the 80s and

90s came from a linguistic perspective based in the tradition of Russian Formalism and Structuralism, the second generation today looks from the perspective of literary studies, narratology or cultural studies. In this sense cognitive literary study is not simply the continuation of cognitive poetics. The difference between cognitive poetics and cognitive literary studies is significant and warrants caution before putting both under the same broad umbrella term. The main object in cognitive poetics was poetry and the methods used are close readings informed by findings of linguistics and the cognitive neurosciences. A shared methodology is what has formed cognitive poetics over more than two decades. In cognitive literary studies on the other hand, novels are the main object of research and a common methodology is no longer shared. The difference is clearly named by **Zunshine** in the introduction to the *Handbook*, when she writes about »resistance to unified theories« (2). In line with Ellen Spolsky's thesis about cognitive literary theory as a post-structuralist variant she stated that mind, brain, and literature are so complex and rich, no theory, no method and no methodology could capture their complexity.² Hence, criticism and not science should be the way of cognitive literary studies and only a broad variety of paradigms and approaches is appropriate. Cognitive literary criticism is, although not used, but the term more precise than »studies«, according to the editor. This is by no means a convincing argument. Cognitive poetics would argue the opposite: Because the studied object is so tricky, a controlled methodology is necessary. However, in the end the *Handbook* does not encourage a reissue of an »anything goes« approach to literary studies and is not as much anti-science, as one might expect. Post-structuralism is at best a light memory. The majority of contributions draw quite natural insights from cognitive science to sharpen their arguments and to strengthen the basic assumptions of how literature works. Sciences are a framework nobody really questions. There is a second group of articles which is closer to cognitive poetics and uses detailed cognitive linguistic or narratological insights to analyse literature. And there is a third, but small group, which runs experiments the way cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists do.

According to the *Handbook* cognitive literary studies are divided in five parts. The first part is the largest and includes historical and narratological approaches, cultural theory (here Queer Theory) and neuroaesthetics. The second part looks at the affective side of literature, film and theatre, also includes postcolonial studies, decision theory, disability studies and moral emotions. A small part three is dedicated to the concept of the new unconscious. Empirical studies of literature make up the fourth part and the last part deals with cognitive theory as a tool to understand literature. Like the cover image the categories used for the *Handbook* show an additive collection of approaches and not an already structured and coherent discipline. To give but one example: Only for a small group of scholars in the field the concept of the new unconscious is of greater importance to be a separate chapter. In this sense the *Handbook* represents the mixed state of art, - with some shortcomings, to which I will come back later.

Mary Thomas Crane uses insights from cognitive linguistics into how humans categorise the world based on bodily and cultural experience to understand 17th century writings. By showing how texts like Spencer's *Faerie Queene* are informed by identifiable cognitive paradigms, she investigates the epistemological rupture when early modern English literary works lose track with commonly held intuitive knowledge. Historical criticism and cognitive approaches illuminate each other, without using literature as just an illustration for a theoretical point made by cognitive science.

Ellen Spolsky explores why art matters for (historical) societies when she looks at how the cognitive model of learning could be used to understand historical change. Literature signals risk or impending social instability like in 16th, and 17th century plays and pleads for changes in the judicial system. In Spolsky's historical approach the cognitive insights about embodied processes that manage complex states of disorganization are homologous to works of art, which

help to overcome habitual ways of thinking. Here cognitive and literary studies make each other up.

While Crane and Spolsky used cognitive insights for a kind of background check, **Natalie M. Phillips** ran an fMRI experiment to explore the cognitive differences between two modes of literary attention: Pleasure reading and close reading. Her example was a chapter of Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* and her data suggests that close reading activates almost all brain regions which pleasure reading does not. Each mode of reading has a distinct neural signature. Phillips calls here approach ›literary neurosciences‹, an interdisciplinary collaboration within neuroscience. It is apparent how much such a scientific approach contrasts with many other articles in the same handbook.

Peter Rabinowitz expands his distinction between those readers who will actually read a text and those the author has in mind while composing the text, with the distinction between mind-writer and mind-reader. It is the exchange between the mind reading of the author and the mind reading of the reader which brings stories alive. Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is his example for his careful narratological analysis along the features of how writer and reader share emotions in the story, how complex the embedded act of mind-reading is, whether mind-readers and mind-writers switch positions or not, how many people are involved in story sharing, from what angle a story is exchanged, how transparent characters and events between writer and reader are, what kind of modal variant like fictionality complicates the cognitive exchange and how consistent characters react to other characters. His classification is in sum more narratological than cognitive.

In the reading of fiction and even nonfiction possible narrative threads often pop up, simply because there is always more to tell than told. **H. Porter Abbott** takes care of these, what he calls ›shadow stories‹, the incalculable epiphenomena of any reader's experience. What happens, when neither explicit nor implicit evidence in a text is given about certain characters and events? Abbott examines different examples to understand the narrative activity of the reader's mind, which starts before interpretation and gives readers a sense of knowing. For Abbott narratology illuminates cognitive processes.

Rhetoric and narratology have a lot in common. **James Phelan** discusses how both approaches deploy general cognitive mechanisms. Using the example of Toni Morrison *Recitatif* Phelan offers a careful interpretation neither rhetorical theory nor cognitive theory could offer alone. The ›cognitive‹ is taken as the bridge between the two approaches.

Alan Palmer analyses country song lyrics as narratives. As Palmer can show, the lyrics can only be understood by following the mental functioning of the singer/narrator. Song lyrics following the tradition of ballads invite the hearer to focus on the inner cognitive world of the singer and his or her themes such as aging, work, class, identity, love, friendship and place. To ascribe states of mind to others, singer and hearer have to share a common ground, a similar but not identical understanding of the social contexts inside which country music is written, recorded and performed. ›Cognitive‹ here means mainly the ability of mind-reading.

Blending, a cognitive concept developed by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, as a functional joining of two mental spaces that create new meaning, is an underlying mechanism for humour also used in cartoons. **Monika Fludernik** explores the concept of blending to discuss how humour is generated by blending at least two incongruous scenarios in one cartoon to elicit an implied narrative. But cartoons do not rely on the overlap or blending of incompatible scenarios – instead they rely on the clash between them, as Fludernik shows. She takes cartoons as a useful example to discuss the interplay of blending, humour, and narrative.

Fiction can represent mental states without explicitly referring to them. However, the issue is more complex. Stories often include, what **Lisa Zunshine's** contribution to her *Handbook* called ›nested mental states‹ – like we have even in many complementary phrases, e.g. »She thinks, he wants her to feel etc.« Fiction, as Zunshine points out, makes heavy use of nested mental states. Her example, Cao Xueqin's *The Story of the Stone*, is a perfect case study of how fictional narratives enrich readers' ability to understand others by their complex, nested processes of mentalizing. Indeed this is an argument for the use of good stories in schools.

Like many literary theories queer theory is commonly kin to psychoanalysis but not to cognitive concepts. **J. Keith Vincent**, though, developed a dialogue between queer theory and cognitive theory. He proposes that the cognitive approach is helpful to overcome the inside/out distinction because cognitive theory teaches us to understand how we make sense of others' minds. To understand one's mind we have to understand the mind of many people. Literature – like in Vincent's case *The Tale of Genji* – makes use of a complex layering of minds distributed to different characters and the narrator, a narrative technique to show the deindividualisation of desire which is the grammar of desire queer theory is mainly interested in.

Mind reading is the aspect most papers of the *Handbook* are interested in when talking of cognitive approaches and cognitive theory. Forming mental images while reading by recruiting more than one imagined sense at a time is explained by a variety of current cognitive theories **Alan Richardson** has done a critical evaluation on. His paper shows how conceptual metaphor, blending theory and the default mode network open up literary theoretical interest in imagination. As Richardson points out an active collaboration among literary and cognitive research promises to be of mutual benefit.

A fruitful collaboration between neuroscience and literary studies is presented by **G. Gabrielle Starr**. Her fMRI experiment on the default mode network explores what kind of rewards the production of mental images carries. Her research suggests that the interplay between one's internal representation of the self and the external world given by an art work is pleasurable. She speculates and offers first empirical evidence whether the combination of emotional and reward engagement and the production of imagery by recall interact with the default mode network in the brain to promote aesthetic pleasure.

Patrick Colm Hogan's paper thoughtfully scrutinises what literature teaches us about emotion. To do so he takes into account experimental and theoretical findings by Keith Oatley on how literature might train our spontaneous emotional response, by Martha Nussbaum and her thesis about emotional reasoning, and by Semir Zeki's theory of pleasure elucidated by ambiguity in art. Additionally Hogan's interpretation of Mirabai's love lyrics makes use of these cognitive theories to understand the poems and, at the same time, our emotional lives.

The pivotal role of faces for movies is the topic for **Carl Plantinga's** contribution. With the example of *The Silence of the Lambs* Plantinga analyses viewer's experience of facial close-ups and points to the benefits of a cognitive approach, i.e. psychological and biological knowledge, particular to the study of the human face as represented in narrative film.

Noël Carroll illuminates the aesthetic and cognitive techniques theatre uses to influence the feelings of spectators. He criticises the idea that identification and empathy with the character are the major triggers of emotion for the audience. Instead he reveals how unlikely the character's emotions and the spectator's emotions are identical and demonstrates how they differ. The critical prefocusing of viewers and not identification with the character is of paramount importance for the feelings theatres provoke.

In his second contribution **Patrick Colm Hogan** considers several approaches offered by cognitive theory to understand the psychological relation between the colonizer and the colonized. What he calls »cognitive postcolonialism« (343) offers a better grounded account of identity, which clarifies many insights of postcolonial theory. Hogan has in mind Suzanne Keen's concept of cultivating empathy through complex in-group and out-group processes, when making his claim, why one should look for more than psychoanalysis in postcolonial studies.

In the following chapter **Suzanne Keen** revisits her concept of strategic narrative empathizing and suggests literary cognitivism as an alternative to postcolonial theory. In line with Hogan's work Keen can show how writers of former colonized countries, hoping to reach a readership in the world fiction market, do not encapsulate their writing in local otherness. These novelists believe in human universals like empathy and Keen thereby illustrates why postcolonial theory should understand cognitive and emotive processes of empathizing.

William Flesch uses decision theory and game theory to analyse how poems integrate contradicting desires and divergent sequences of events. Readers want authors to make them want the outcome authors offer. The seemingly paradoxical attitude explains why we change our beliefs and preferences through literature. Literature offers incentives and exploits our desire for novel satisfactions. Fair reward and punishment are our ultimate interest in fiction and a biological component of fiction.

What many autistics with their different sensitivity to figurative language can teach us about poetry is the topic of **Ralph James Savarese's** paper. Savarese's research is especially interested in the nonsemantic aspects of poetry, the sensory knowing of autistic people like Tito Mukhopadhyay. In line with recent neuroscientific findings about the prominent role of perceptual mechanism in supporting cognition autism, it seems to be an entirely different processing system and this might explain to a certain extent the superior perceptual and more precategorical processing of speech that many autistics exhibit.

The difference between morality in fiction and in real life is evidently of pertinent importance for our understanding of the moral role of literature and film. **Margrethe Bruun Vaage** analyses antiheroes of the television series *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* to show that we rely more heavily on moral emotions when engaging in fiction than in real-life events. Her case study is the depictions of rape and murder and how our moral emotions become more evident when we read or watch fictional stories. The repulsion felt towards the rapist is stronger than the repulsion felt towards the murderer, because we as readers of fiction use more moral emotions and intuitions than abstract principles.

The reader's involvement in the moral constellation of a fictional text is possible through different types of empathy, sympathy and compassion. **Fritz Breithaupt** analyses the empathic involvement of the reader in Leopoldo Alas's *La Regenta* and Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*. What his analysis reveals, is what Breithaupt calls an »empathic sadism«, i.e. an empathy which turns the main character into an object, where the reader derives pleasure from the suffering of the characters Ana Ozores and Effi Briest.

The cognitive unconscious, i.e. the many mental processes, which are not experienced consciously, is **Blakey Vermeule's** topic. As he points out in contrast to the »old« unconscious of Freud the new unconscious looks much more civilized, but is hard to find in literature. Psychoanalysis is somehow outdated even for Vermeule and only new ways of cognitive research like Daniel Kahneman or careful reading of authors like Milton offers glimpses into the unconscious mind, when Satan finds himself becoming good almost by accident.

Jeff Smith analyses how filmmakers make use of cognitive biases, when spectators infer behaviours of characters from internal traits and attributes of characters rather than from external, situational facts, depicted in the film scenes. Emotional reactions like curiosity, suspense, or surprise could be elicited by biases like the actor-observer bias or peak-end rule. In the sense of Smith's analysis filmmakers are good folk psychologists. And again Daniel Kahneman is for Smith the social psychologist, who offers the best insights into how the judgments and inferences of spectators are influenced by the many fast routines in the head of any of us. The fast reacting cognitive processes are what make films lively and comprehensible. Film studies require learning from psychology precisely about the mechanisms ruling the understanding of characters' motivations and behaviours, Smith concludes.

In the chapter on empirical and qualitative studies of literature **Laura Otis** reports about a larger, qualitative study examining how people differ in the visual mental images they form in response to spoken or written words. Novelists inspire visualization and stimulate readers' imaginations. However, each reader has her or his own different cognitive style of visualization. Otis uses interviews with readers and writers to investigate how wide mental images differ while reading or writing, how detailed or abstract imageries are, whether readers use a more spatial or a more object style. As her research shows readers vary as much as novelist in their use of visual mental images. Some envision in great detail characters, several incline more toward spatial visualisation, some read in a very abstract manner. Each has his or her preferred mental style. The qualitative interviews were complementary to the laboratory data. Otis highly encourages more interdisciplinary work between literary scholars and neuroscientists.

›To be transported into a story‹ is one of the most commonly used metaphors introduced by Richard J. Gerrig in 1993 to capture the prototypical reading experience. Specific questionnaires were developed by Melanie Green and others to measure in detail what transportation means for readers. **Marisa Bortolussi** and **Peter Dixon** offer a critical review of some limitations of the term and pledge not to confuse the metaphor with the psychological reality of transport. Transportation is not an all-or-nothing state, rather a shifting of reader's attention focus during the course of processing a text.

In their second contribution **Marisa Bortolussi** and **Peter Dixon** go into details about what happens during the act of reading over time. Although only little is still known about the reading process over time it can be shown by experimental data how readers differ on the level of story processing, discourse processing and personal reactions. Reader-text interaction is not one story of transportation, rather it depends on the content of stories, the way stories are told and the personal experiences and memories of readers. This is why one has to analyse the text in the mind of the reader and not the text in itself to fully understand what literature means.

The last section of the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* deals with the relation of theory and experience. Good test cases to explore the relation are self-reflexive narratives, theatre plays or films from Diderot to Pirandello or Fellini. **Joshua Landy** argues that self-reflexive fiction can do something important for readers, i.e. to connect the awareness of illusion with a kind of an aesthetic redemption. In self-reflexive literature everything we believe is subject to doubt but the brain is capable to hold two or more conflicting attitudes towards the same state of affairs, be aware of it and be entertained by the competing attitudes, like children with imaginary companions are aware that these friends do not really exist but play with them regardless. It is a way of conscious self-deception.

Literature and realistic literature particularly create out of fragments of given details the impression of a fully fledged landscape, an effect Roland Barthes has called the reality effect. **Elaine Auyoung** discusses the theoretical and empirical findings on discourse comprehension which

suggests that readers make only very limited inferences out of the cues given by a texts. Following Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure, fictional worlds are not different from their analogues in the real world, yet fragmentary rather than fully determinate. As Auyong can show a cognitive approach to the reality effect complicates the very fundamental concept of how we read. Filling the gaps and building vivid imagination out of small building blocks given by a literary text, is not a precise description of what reading is. Even though readers know that all is fictional, the longing for understanding the full extent of the fictional world beyond the given text is the experience literature elicits according to Auyong.

Mark J. Bruhn offers what he calls a cognitive update on mid-twentieth-century theories of spatial form and poetic function. Any spoken or written word is only temporarily present. Poetry resists the inevitable temporal volatility of any given words by its specific word orders. Poetic words are not a simple chain of grammatical utterances; they are composed to be recognized like older writings under the surface of newly written texts. Bruhn's example for the poetic function of literature is the poetry of Wordsworth, *The Prelude* chiefly among them, a poetry able to let readers experience and reflect by the order of his words and his topic, how we as humans understand our feelings. Cognitive literary studies, Bruhn concludes, may reveal the hidden story of the mind behind today's neuroscience and cognitive studies. Wordsworth is already aware of many cognitive and affective processes – like blending – which we today reformulate in the language of neuroscience and cognitive studies.

In the last contribution **Nancy Easterlin** explores readers' preference for the unusual, rare, and new in literature, in texts like Wordsworth's ballad *The Mad Mother*. Novelty is a feature of at least modern literature and many literary theorists like Viktor Shklovsky dwell on it. Easterlin integrates findings from Russian Formalism and reader-response theory with psychological insights into how habituation is the prerequisite for readers to be focused towards novelty. Unusual or defamiliarized texts slow down the cognitive routines, as David Miall has shown, and make readers aware of a more coherent and global meaning and give a better sense of the self. In Nancy Easterlin's biocultural approach cognitive findings illuminate reader-response theories because psychology could explain the cognitive details of what is at work when we read.

II.

In sum, the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary studies* offers an encyclopaedic picture of what is today's cognitive literary studies, with some shortcomings. The *Handbook* is diverse in the objects and methods, concepts and practices, which it encompasses. From narratology to very moderate postmodern approaches, from reader response theory and Russian Formalism to experimental findings it's filled with a variety of innovative approaches. By far narratology is the most prominent analytical approach in cognitive literary studies according to the *Handbook*. And English literature is with some exception the prevalent object of the field. Literary criticism like queer theory or postcolonialism is now part of cognitive studies in literature. With this move cognitive literary studies are – unlike cognitive poetics – just complementary to commonly held notions about what literary studies is and fits smoothly into the wider area of literary criticism. By now cognitive literary studies are more cognitive literary criticism than literary studies and even less empirical psychology of literature. The days of opposites between a more scientific vs. a more scholarly approach are almost over following the main line of the *Handbook*. The prodigal son cognitive poetics is back. And indeed within one discipline there could be divergent questions and a plurality of problems. The same object – literature – could be researched for cognitive processes or for details of narrative features, for the cognitive biases writers or film makers use or for metric schemata in poems, for universal features or for idiosyncratic characteristics – so far so good.

Some irritations still remain. First of all: Most of the papers in the handbook understood ›cognitive‹ as a universal quality including the quality of personal memories of readers, which influences heavily the cognitive processes of literary reading. Additionally reading literature and understanding the arts is for most of the papers not something exceptional and unrelated to what happens when we interact with the world in real life, as David Herman and others have already stressed elsewhere.³ Not all scholars from other areas of literary studies would agree. For many scholars the object of literary scholarship is the text, the surrounding culture or the history, but not cognitive mechanisms. Cognitive processes are irrelevant for most parts of literary criticism and the understanding of processes before, during, and after reading is of no greater importance for the understanding of what makes literature unique. The cognitive feature most contributions to the *Handbook* accentuate is the quality of literature to make use and foster the ability of mentalising. Even this quality is for most parts of literary studies simply irrelevant. These scholars already presume the value of literature and would not analyse the question of what mental processes give literature its value. Roughly speaking cognitive literary studies asks quite different questions of literature than the rest of literary scholarship. It works on a different, often anthropological level, a level which is of no greater interest for most literary scholars. That is why in contrast to the mainstream in literary studies cognitive approaches form a particular field in the wide sea of literary studies. They ask different questions and this is also why parts of cognitive literary studies use other methods than commonly used. Because it's questioning what is often taken for granted, cognitive literary studies is the Northwest Passage of literary studies, not the common route and not institutionalised like cognitive linguistics. The *Handbook* diminishes the differences between the fields of literary studies.

Secondly: The *Handbook* excluded some approaches, foremost any evolutionary perspective. This makes no sense, because cognitive studies rely heavily on evolutionary assumption. By no accident have some of the contributors like H. Porter Abbott also worked on evolutionary literary studies. But for the editor the evolutionary approach from Jonathan Gottschall and others is too science-orientated. In this regard the *Handbook* is frankly programmatic. It is its goal to establish cognitive literary studies as normal scholarship with no rough edges for established humanities. The price it pays is that it offers mainly a weak form of cognitive studies, although some contributions to the *Handbook* are just cognitive psychology and even neuroscience and do not really fit under the programmatic exclusion of more science-oriented approaches. It would do well to look into the content of journals like *Poetic*, *Poetic Today*, *Psychology of Aesthetics*, *Creativity, and the Arts* or *Scientific Study of Literature*, to name only some prominent examples, to get a sense, that the field of cognitive literary studies is wider and has more methodological strength than the *Handbook* suggests. The variety of research by Barbara Dancygier, Karl Eibl, Catherine Emmott, Melanie Green, Frank Hakemulder, Arthur Jacobs, Max Louwarse, Raymond Mar, Keith Oatley, Elena Semino, Peter Stockwell, Mikkel Wallentin or Rolf Zwaan, to name again only some distinguished names, or the theoretical debates around mentalising by Shaun Gallagher, Daniel Hutto or Dan Zahavi are not part of the *Handbook*, but certainly of the field. Important issues of the field like event segmentation, overimitation, or methodological issues of brain imaging are touched only marginally. The list of missing names and methodologies could easily be longer. The field of cognitive literary studies has a strong empirical and experimental branch and includes definitely also biopoetics and other evolutionary approaches. There is no plausible reason to exclude them.

In a similar vein the limits of the strong emphasis on mentalization are only accidentally discussed. By stressing the importance of understanding other minds many approaches lost their sense for the composition of the poetic texts, for its higher symbolic meaning and the status as a work of art. The details of cognitive exchanges between reader, text, and writer tend to vaporise the literary text as an experienced whole. The role of personal memories, the importance of literature for life narratives, as well as striking techniques of foregrounding and many other

findings especially revealed by cognitive approaches in literary studies are omitted. The power of literature is occasionally in the focus and more distinct models of literary reading integrating role-taking and defamiliarization concepts are not taken into consideration.⁴ This is of course a general problem for cognitive approaches in literary studies. With a view on the wider field of cognitive approaches in literary studies like for example the work of Keith Oatley we could learn how to integrate the analysis of details in understanding literature with the overall impact of literature. A more systematic discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of cognitive literary studies would be helpful but is not a topic here.

Of course a collection of papers is always biased and has the right to be focused. But a handbook? It should be more, not a collection by accident or programmatic decision, but an overview of the area. This is not exactly the case with the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*. It offers not a systematic mapping and the articles are not written with systematic pretence. They offer fabulous insights into new and often very inspiring research of this or that scholar and provide plenty of food for thought and findings for further scrutiny. Nonetheless a map of the field would look different.

And one last point: To use cognitive concepts comes at a cost. Cognitive studies are a rapidly evolving area. Even major concepts change fast. Frameworks like the Bayesian brain or the social brain, concepts like default network or theory of mind, and terms like empathy are in a constant readjustment by the bulk of research done in cognitive psychology and neurosciences every day. To only pick out some of the terms, concepts or framework is not enough. Scholars, who make use of cognitive insights and contributed to cognitive studies in general, are obliged to track the developments in cognitive sciences. Cognitive literary studies are in danger of skimming some cognitive terms and concepts. Of course cognitive literary studies are part of literary studies but they are also part of cognitive studies and the rules of this group of disciplines are different to those in the humanities. A loose use of terms and concepts will de-professionalise literary studies at least in the eyes of cognitive scientists. On the other hand a strong use of these concepts and terms will separate cognitive literary studies from the rest of literary criticism. Cognitive linguistics and some decades ago psychology changed their disciplinary positions from the humanities to the natural sciences, naturally with gains and losses. The *Handbook* has chosen a middle course to keep cognitive literary studies in the humanities. Here lies the rub. There is no exact middle course. Each approach in cognitive literary studies has to make a hard decision where to side with every new research.

Let's try to take stock: The *Handbook* is impressive. The wealth of ideas and concepts contained within the volume certainly makes for an inspiring read. This growing area of scholarship holds out the promise of engaging with concepts and methods in ways that allow new types of knowledge formation in literary studies. Still cognitive literary studies are not yet a clearly defined field and definitely more than just the next turn. As a reader, I sometimes had the impression that the title chosen – *Handbook* – may not have been the most adequate one, since the book often reads like a catalogue, albeit of current and inspiring research. The argument advanced here is, however, that cognitive literary studies sit on the fence. The *Handbook* is the encyclopedic invitation to meditate over the course of cognitive literary studies in the upcoming years.

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Notes

¹ Cf. H. Porter Abbott, Cognitive Literary Studies: The »Second Generation«, *Poetics Today* 27:4 (2006), 711–722.

² Cf. Ellen Spolsky, Darwin and Derrida: Cognitive Literary Theory as a Species of Post-structuralism, *Poetics Today* 23:1 (2002), 43–62.

³ Cf. David Herman, *The Emergence of Mind. Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*. Lincoln 2011, 8–9.

⁴ Cf. Emy Koopman/Frank Hakemulder, Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-reflection: A Theoretical-empirical Framework, *Journal of Literary Theory* 9:1 (2015), 79–111.

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