

# Manipulating the Reader in Fiction A Stylistic Perspective

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**ABSTRACTS**



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## Making Readers 'Literary'

This paper considers some ways in which texts can evoke different kinds of responses in readers, focusing in particular on the nature of inferential processes involved in interpreting and evaluating them. This approach follows Furlong (1996, 2011) in assuming that communicators can formulate texts in ways which make it more or less likely that readers invest effort in understanding them and that this plays a role in our intuitions about the 'literariness' of texts. It claims that relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) makes useful predictions about this and considers how to deal with challenges for this approach raised by individual differences among readers. A range of texts is used to illustrate the approach but the talk focuses in particular on Eimear McBride's (2013) novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. It reports initial findings from work in interviews and focus group discussions with readers who had not previously encountered the novel. Two aims of this approach are to develop understanding of how readers respond to challenging texts like this and to explain why some readers 'give up' on them while others persevere.

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## Rhetorical strategies and the art of deception in crime fiction:

### Plot construction and reader manipulation by cognitive misdirection

Crime fiction provides researchers in cognitive stylistics with a prime example of how reader manipulation may be achieved. An author can use rhetorical strategies to cognitively misdirect readers for plot purposes. Aspects of a story may be made more or less prominent through the use of foregrounding and burying devices. Psychology research shows readers to be highly selective in focusing their attention on specific aspects of a text and not noticing other aspects (Sanford & Emmott 2012). The normal expectation of readers is that foregrounding will be used to highlight significant information and that the relatively insignificant parts of a text will fall into the background. Nevertheless, for plot purposes, the reverse may often be the case. In crime fiction, the objective is to deceive the reader about the significance of information in both the foreground and background of a text, hence creating a puzzle which can subsequently be solved in a surprising way. I demonstrate how reader attention can be manipulated by foregrounding plot-insignificant items and burying plot-significant items in the background. I will look particularly at the detective fiction of Agatha Christie (Emmott & Alexander 2010, 2014) who has been described as the 'Queen of Crime'. The research is relevant to a wide range of detective, mystery and twist-in-the-tale stories and any story which is heavily plotted (Emmott 2003).

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## Reader Manipulation and the challenge of translating Greek Markaris' *Late Night News* crime novel into English

The non-English crime genre has come to grow in currency and yet despite the popularity of, specifically European, such fiction, this is a genre that attracted relatively little critical attention and interest from the Anglophone world. Indeed, with respect to translation studies especially, '[t] here has been little research on crime fiction translation and existing studies have tended to use a corpus of crime texts to analyse translation issues which are not necessarily specific to the genre as such' (Seago, 2014).

This paper is part of a larger adaptation-related project (see Gregoriou, forthcoming 2017), and considers Markaris' Greek *Nichterino Deltio* [1995] (2009) and its Connolly (2004) translation into English *Late-Night News*. I discuss some of the source text's generic themes and stylistic features (cataphora, linguistic misdirection, red herrings), and the English translation of the book's culturally-specific items and domestication. I then draw on various hard-to-translate linguistic aspects, some of which are politeness-related, and some of which relate to the protagonist's dictionary interest. Even more so, the paper explains the ways in which Connolly's translation of particular words makes explicit what the source text deliberately left open to interpretation, which impacts on the reader's cognitive engagement with the text. I end with a discussion of the translation of story clues, and how these relate to reader manipulation.

Genre-specific, and linguistic, issues are worth investigating in relation to translation, particularly where the target language problematizes such manipulation, and the translator is challenged into maintaining such illusions as the source producer has, but in the target language this time.

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## Readers' textual processing and emotional responses to a story ending: An experimental study of a story by J.D. Salinger

The present paper presents and discusses the results of an experimental study in reader response to the short story 'It's a perfect day for bananafish', by J. D. Salinger. The approach adopted in the study combines the analysis of stylistic features in the text, paying special attention to patterns of foregrounding and backgrounding, reference and deixis, and repetition. The experiment is designed by means of a questionnaire consisting of three stages, carried out by Spanish third year students of the English degree at Universidad Autónoma, Madrid. The main objective is to explore readers' expectations regarding the ending of the story and their emotional responses to the story ending. The first stage consists in reading the short story without the final 5 lines; students are asked to provide an ending and to explain the textual clues which have led them to their conclusion. In the second stage, five possible endings are provided, and students are asked whether they would change their opinion regarding the ending. In stage three they are provided the real ending and they are asked questions regarding its (un)expected nature and their reaction to it. Because the ending involves the suicide of the protagonist, the objectives of the study are, first, to analyse the process by which readers anticipate a specific ending from the textual and contextual clues, including their own experience and knowledge, and, second, a discussion of the ethical implications of the readers' reactions to the topic of suicide as a closing to the story.



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## Metalepsis, counterfactuality and being led up the “forked” garden path: ‘manipulating’ readers in fiction

Readers of literary fiction will have expectations of how plot and characters progress based on their schematic knowledge of literary genres and authors. For example, readers of Victorian fiction are likely to expect plots that follow the literary conventions of their time of publication with endings that lead to a happy union for characters. Alternatively, the same work of Victorian fiction will have deliberate omissions, disnarration (Prince, 1998) and, what Warhol (2005) describes as the paranarratable. However, not all works of fiction follow convention and could be said to manipulate the text as well as its readers through a range of narrative techniques. One such technique is the use of authorial intrusion to create a deliberate transgression between narrative levels, called ‘metalepsis’ and defined by Genette ([1972] 1980: 234–35) as ‘any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe’ to produce an effect that is comical or fantastic. Genette [1983] 1988: 88) also identifies the ‘author’s metalepsis’ when ‘an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative’. Another transgressive narrative technique that may surprise the reader is the manipulation of the plot and characters through counterfactual storytelling or the “forked path” (Borges, 1998; Baroni, 2016) to create counterfactual divergence resulting in alternative plot scenarios. The idea - proposed by Borges ([1944] 1998) - is that all texts offer a ‘labyrinth’ of plot options and multiple possibilities, which is not too far-fetched if readers consider that characters in their storyworld are conscious and can make decisions. Both metalepsis and counterfactual storytelling as narrative techniques is explored in

this talk, with Fowles' "The French Lieutenant's Woman" as the central text under discussion, for insights that challenge and it could be argued, manipulate readers.

## References

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## Empathetic / social / relational deixis:

## What does it do and how does it do it?

This paper explores the functioning of what is sometimes called 'empathetic', 'social' or 'relational' deixis (Lyons 1977: 677; Levinson 1983: 81; Stockwell 2000: 23–46). Some deictic terms, such as 'this' and 'that', and 'here' and 'there', whilst often primarily having demonstrative or spatial meaning, may also signal empathy or sympathy, intimacy, familiarity, neutrality, detachment, joint attention, routine, desire, etc. (Grishivoka, forthcoming). As this list indicates, neither 'empathetic' nor 'social' really cover or clarify the range of possible meanings of these words. 'Relational', on the other hand, is perhaps too encompassing: arguably, all deixis is relational. This paper investigates the functioning of words within this problematical deictic category, and explores how far and in what ways the various meanings of these words are deictic.

This investigation forms part of a broader proposition: that deixis functions to convey and guide the conceptual construction of a perceptual locus within a textworld predominantly within the context of, and through collaborative integration with, a wide variety of related perspectival linguistic factors. These include, for example, verbs of perception; the focal prominence of objects and entities; the visual scope and granularity of a described setting; and the availability of paths of conceptual mental scanning, shaped by the structuring of sentences (determining the sequential mental accessing of information) (Langacker 2008; Talmy 2000).

This paper draws on 'Ninetieth Birthday' by R. S. Thomas, amongst other texts, to help investigate and illustrate this deictic category and explore the collaborative functioning of deixis more generally within perspective construction in literature.





## Positioning the Reader in Multimodal Novels

This presentation springs from a larger project which aims to develop a framework for multimodal stylistic analysis of the novel (cf. Nørgaard 2014). The project adds multimodal tools from social semiotic multimodal theory (e.g. Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001, 2002; van Leeuwen 2005, 2006) to the stylistic tool kit, adjusts tools and develops new tools where needed. Within this project, the question of how multimodal features of the novel are positioning the reader has turned out to be particularly intriguing. At this stage, my work is explorative and my presentation will revolve around a number of questions: How useful are Kress and van Leeuwen's systems of interpersonal meaning (*gaze, perspective, distance and modality*) for stylisticians who wish to understand and describe the positioning of the reader in multimodal literary narrative? How do these systems relate to the narrative perspective established by the verbal narrative? Which elements of the multimodal positioning of the reader do the systems not capture? And how may those elements be captured instead in stylistic analysis? Finally, I shall consider the extent to which the positioning and literary 'manipulation' of the reader by features such as special typography, layout and photographic images in the novel can be addressed through the concepts of *defamiliarisation* and *mimesis* (cf. e.g. Shiff 1998; White 2005).

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## Building a World from the Day's Remains: showing, telling, representing

In the meta-discourses of creative writing, the terms 'showing' and 'telling' are often used to distinguish between different kinds of narrative effect, the former having to do to some extent with placing the reader's deictic centre 'inside' the story world. Typically this will consist of presenting physical and emotional actions and the experience of the characters. Obversely, 'telling' is connected to scene-setting and other kinds of 'stage management'. Compare these two sentences which (arguably) mediate the same moment in the story world:

*The man was a carpenter, and carried the tools of his trade.*

*A saw and hammer dangled from his belt, one thumbnail was black and there were wood-shavings tangled in his hair.*

However it is clear that the distinction between these two effects is not precise in linguistic terms, and that they occur rather on a cline from diegesis to mimesis. This paper will argue that a theoretical architecture drawn from a combination of Text World Theory (Werth 1999, Gavins 2007) and stylistic descriptions of discourse presentation (Semino and Short 2007) provides us with a principled means of negotiating, deconstructing and understanding the difference between the two techniques of representation and their differing effects on the reader's processes of world building. Examples will be drawn from Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* (1989) to illustrate this distinction, and it will be argued that more nuanced understanding of the processes involved at a stylistic and cognitive poetic level will be not only of benefit to creative practitioners and critics/analysts but also to our understanding of how we construct versions of the everyday world around us. We are always, yet ineffably, narrators and re-writers of our past.



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## Manipulating metaphors: interactions between readers and 'Upon Opening the Chest Freezer'

The narrative poem 'Upon Opening the Chest Freezer' by Simon Armitage (2010) is a darkly humorous representation of marital discord: the poetic voice describes their husband's annoying habits, their decision to leave, and the farewell note they leave in the freezer for him to find. This paper will offer a cognitive stylistic analysis of the language of the poem and discuss its manipulation of readers' interpretative and emotional responses through the use of deixis, point of view and metaphor. In order to evidence the kinds of responses evoked by the poem, the paper will also draw upon reader response data - specifically, recordings of all-male and all-female reading group discussions of the poem. Reading group discussions provide a window into literary interpretation and a way of exploring the kinds of responses to be addressed in a cognitive stylistic analysis (Peplow et al 2016, Whiteley 2011). This paper will consider the positions adopted by readers in their discussions, and the way readers reiterate, elaborate and extend the metaphors of the poem as they interpret it together. It will argue that as well as providing insight into the effects of the poem, the reading group talk illustrates the flipside of literary manipulation: that is, readers' manipulation of texts for particular purposes. Analysis of the poem and the discussion data highlights the importance of remaining sensitive to the two-way manipulation inherent in reader-text interaction and the experience of literary reading.

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