

The Balzan Interdisciplinary Seminar: Literature as an Object of Knowledge

Terence Cave

2009 Balzan Prize for Literature since 1500

Balzan GPC Adviser: Karlheinz Stierle

Project Directors and Researchers: Wes Williams, Raphael Lyne (Deputy Directors); Karin Kukkonen, Olivia Smith (Balzan Research Fellows); Kathryn Banks, Timothy Chesters, James Helgeson, Raphael Lyne, Ita Mac Carthy (Balzan Research Lecturers); Miranda Anderson, Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, Patricia Kolaiti, Sabine Müller, Kirsti Sellevold, Emily Troscianko (Associate Researchers)

Affiliated Institution: St. John's College, Oxford

Period: 2010-2013

Website: <https://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk/discover/research/previous-research-centre-projects/>

Terence Cave is Emeritus Professor of French Literature at the University of Oxford, Emeritus Research Fellow of St. John's College Oxford and Fellow of the British Academy. Cave used the second half of his Balzan Prize to explore the value of literature as an object of knowledge, and more specifically, the cognitive value of literature in relation to other kinds of discourse. The research project was based at the Research Centre of St. John's College, Oxford. The word "seminar" in the title was chosen to indicate the heuristic nature of the project: the core of the work lay in discussions designed to foster a sharper awareness of the issues that are at stake and to explore new directions in the understanding of literature.

The collective work of the project was carried out for the most part in workshops and discussion groups in which interdisciplinary issues were explored and debated with the cooperation of colleagues from non-literary disciplines. The twin themes of knowledge and cognition provided a focus for the discussions. The integrity of individual research programmes was respected, but they were also used as test-cases or illustrations of the broader interdisciplinary issues raised by the project.

Two Balzan Postdoctoral Research Fellowships were established at the outset of the project, tenable for three years. The Research Fellows were expected to produce published work of the equivalent of a book-length study over the course of their Fellowship. They also assisted in the arrangement of discussion groups, workshops and other collective events. They were not permitted to take on duties external to the project (for example teaching duties) except with the agreement of the Director. The Research Fellowships were attached to the St. John's College Research Centre in Oxford, where the Fellows had offices.

Five Balzan Research Lectureships, each lasting up to one semester on a "buy-out" basis, were conferred on younger colleagues holding permanent academic positions at five different UK universities. The positions carried with them the obligation to produce at least one article-length publication during the period of leave, and (under the guidance of the Director) to arrange a two-day workshop at the end of the period of leave structured around the Lecturer's work. The Research Lecturers were expected to participate as far as their other duties permitted in the other collective activities of the project. The workshops were held in the lecturer's home institution; this arrangement helped to guarantee the wider diffusion of the project's aims and intellectual outcomes.

The project also recruited a number of Associate Researchers. This group consisted of individual researchers from various academic contexts whose work was closely related to the aims of the project. They had no specific duties, but were expected to attend workshops and discussion groups in their areas of interest.

Ten fully-funded and several partly-funded workshops, together with a number of other project group meetings, were held. These typically featured short papers and intensive round-table discussion, and numbers were limited to around twenty-five in order to achieve focus and continuity. In addition, a regular discussion group consisting of core project members and other invited participants from the University of Oxford (academic post-holders, postdoctoral researchers, and a small number of doctoral students) was established in Oxford for the duration of the project, with the aim of discussing specific topics and problems arising from the project's aim to develop a cognitive methodology for the study of literature. From time to time, visiting speakers with relevant interests were invited to give presentations to the group.

A programme of individual visits and exchange visits enabled core project participants to establish appropriate contacts in other universities, with the possibility

of reciprocation. In addition, the Director gave (and continues to give) public lectures both in the UK and abroad, and actively seeks to create an interdisciplinary network that will not only support and enhance the work of the project but also ensure that its intellectual energies are propagated beyond the lifetime of the project itself.

The first phase of the project ended on 30 September 2013, with a Methodological Colloquium entitled “Thinking with Literature” from 9-12 September 2013 at the University of Oslo, Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, and ILOS (organised by Kirsti Sellevold, Terence Cave, Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith). As a direct continuation of the project’s activities, a number of further workshops and similar events, organized by former project participants, have been held subsequently with additional funding obtained from St. John’s College, Oxford and other institutions.

Publications

- Banks, Kathryn, and Timothy Chesters. *Movement in Renaissance Literature: Exploring Kinesic Intelligence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Bolens, Guillemette. *L’Humour et le savoir des corps*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016.
- Caracciolo, Marco, and Karin Kukkonen, eds. “Second-Generation Cognitive Approaches to Literature.” Special issue. *Style* 48.3 (2014).
- Cave, Terence. *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 (paperback edition 2018).
- Cave, Terence, Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith, eds. “Reading Literature Cognitively.” Special issue. *Paragraph* 37.1 (2014).
- Cave, Terence, and Deirdre Wilson, eds. *Reading Beyond the Code: Literature and Relevance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Kukkonen, Karin. *A Prehistory of Cognitive Poetics: Neoclassicism and the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Mac Carthy, Ita, Kirsti Sellevold and Olivia Smith, eds. *Cognitive Confusions: Dreams, Delusions and Illusions in Early Modern Culture*. Oxford: Legenda, 2016.
- Smith, Olivia. *Inside the Furnished Mind: A Literary Reading of Locke’s Essay*. In progress.