

Terence Cave

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2009 Balzan Prize for Literature since 1500

For his outstanding contributions to a new understanding of Renaissance literature and of the influence of Aristotelian poetics in modern European literature.

Institution Administering Research Funds: St. John's College, Oxford
Adviser for the Balzan General Prize Committee: Karlheinz Stierle

The Balzan Interdisciplinary Seminar: Literature as an Object of Knowledge

Terence Cave is using 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 is based at the Research Centre of St. John's College, Oxford. The word "seminar" is used in the title to indicate the heuristic nature of the project: the core of the work lies 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.

Aims and scope of the project

The title of the project is designed to provide a single overarching frame for an enquiry that addresses the following:

1. The public question

The project title may be rephrased as a public question in the following form: "What are the nature and value of literature as an object of knowledge in the interdisciplinary spectrum?" Literary study remains one of the core disciplines in the humanities, but its status as an academic subject needs constantly to be reassessed and justified in an era where universities are increasingly being pressed to demonstrate the public utility of their research and teaching. The question necessarily has an interdisciplinary character, both because literary study is institutionally defined as one of a peer group of studies in the humanities and because it overlaps at many points with adjacent studies

within that group (linguistics, philosophy, history, social studies). The phrase “object of knowledge” in the project title thus refers in the first place to the academic pursuit of knowledge, of which literature constitutes one object among others.

2. A timely conceptual issue: cognitive methodologies in literary study

The potential interest of literature as an object of knowledge begins to be apparent when one unpacks and extends the phrase “object of knowledge”. In such a perspective, it is natural to explore the sense in which a literary work may be (or be presented as) a *vehicle* of knowledge or, potentially, an *instrument* of knowledge. It is also evident that, while “knowledge” is the presumed outcome of such an enquiry, the enquiry itself is a process, a particular way of thinking, and that literary works (or groups of works) may themselves be considered as vehicles or instruments of thought. One may thus replace the word “knowledge” in all three instances with “thought” (literature as an object, vehicle and instrument of thought). All of these concerns become salient when literary study is viewed within the perspective of interdisciplinary research on cognition, and it is a primary aim of the project to foster cognitive approaches to literature that are perceived as valid by colleagues in other disciplines (and the public at large), while satisfying the requirements of a proper study of literature in all its modes and forms.

3. A double-stranded project: linking the cognitive with the historical

Since Terence Cave’s personal research career has focused primarily on the Renaissance or, more generally, the early modern period, the project also has a “historical strand”. Most of the core participants within the field of literary studies are specialists in early modern culture: their task is to relate the historical study of their materials with the cognitive approaches referred to above. A key aim of the project is thus to bind together the historical and the cognitive strands and demonstrate that literary study can and must combine a general explanatory framework with close contextual reading.

Organization and activities

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

The programme is based on a core team of individuals under the general guidance of Terence Cave as project director. The project has a Senior Advisory Panel: Elleke Boehmer, Professor of World Literature in English, University of Oxford; Guillemette Bolens, Professor of English Literature and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Université de Genève; Robyn Carston, Professor of Linguistics, University College London and Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, Universitetet i Oslo; Gregory Currie, Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham; Paul Harris, Professor of Education, Graduate School of Education, Harvard; Marian Hobson, Professorial Research Fellow, Queen Mary, University of London; Michel Jeanneret, Emeritus Professor of French Literature, Université de Genève; Jim Reed, Emeritus Professor of German, University of Oxford; Karlheinz Stierle, Universität Konstanz. The function of the panel, which has an interdisciplinary character, is in the first place to provide advice on the development of the project, but several members are regular participants in its activities and guarantee its interdisciplinary character.

The task of the two Deputy Directors (Dr. Wes Williams and Dr. Raphael Lyne) is to ensure the effective continuation of the project should the Director be absent for a prolonged period for reasons beyond his control.

Two Balzan Postdoctoral Research Fellowships were established at the outset of the project, tenable for 3 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 were conferred on younger colleagues holding permanent academic positions at five different UK universities, each lasting up to one semester on a "buy-out" basis. 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.

A 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. It met about once a month to discuss specific topics and problems arising from the project's aim to develop a cognitive methodology for the study of literature. Visiting speakers with relevant interests were sometimes invited to give presentations to the group. The two Balzan Postdoctoral Fellows organized one-day workshops of their own in the final year of their tenure (2012-13). In addition, the project provided intellectual support and limited financial support for workshops on relevant topics organized by its Associate Researchers.

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. A Methodological Colloquium entitled "Thinking with Literature" was held from 9-12 September 2013 at the University of Oslo, Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, and ILOS (organised by Kirsti Sellekvold, Terence Cave, Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith). This event brought the various participants together in order to discuss methodological points of convergence between the different disciplines involved. In order to give the discussion coherence, particular methodological issues were highlighted, e.g., the value for literary study of methodologies from the experimental sciences, the relation of the historical strand of the project to the cognitive strand, and the ways in which the close reading of literary texts can be integrated within a general explanatory framework for literature.

At the end of 2013 there were still funds remaining. The money is being used to fund the start-up phase of continuation projects which will carry the work forward into the

future. Grants are being offered to a number of project participants (mainly younger colleagues and young researchers) to organise exploratory workshops with this aim in mind. Two of these ventures (one in Turku, Finland, one in Edinburgh, UK) have already led to further funding. Other activities currently in progress include a flagship publication, provisionally entitled *Relevance in Literature*, arising from the Oslo colloquium; a joint workshop with the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, University of Oslo, on “Metaphor, Imagery and Communication” (19-20 September 2014); and a workshop entitled “Renaissance Kinesis: Movement in Literature” to be held at Clare College, Cambridge (25-27 September 2014). While money from Balzan funds continues to be used, such activities will be known as “Balzan continuation projects/workshops”, and the Balzan name will be advertised wherever relevant.

Details of Workshops:

22-23 September 2011: Workshop 1 “Concepts in Literature”, St. John’s College, Oxford (organised by Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith)

9-11 January 2012: Workshop 2 “Experiments in Drama; Questions of Intention”, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge (organised by Raphael Lyne)

29-31 March 2012: Workshop 3 “Literary and Cognitive Ends”, Durham University (organised by Kathryn Banks)

11-12 January 2013: Workshop 4 “Embodied Cognition, Phenomenology and Literature”, Royal Holloway University of London (organised by Timothy Chesters)

25-26 March 2013: Workshop 5 “Historicity and Cognitive Reading”, University of Nottingham (organised by James Helgeson)

7 June 2013: Workshop 6 “Weak Implicatures, Strong Effects”, St. John’s College, Oxford (organised by Olivia Smith and Kirsti Sellevold)

25 June 2013: Workshop 7 “Cognitive Literary Study: Second-Generation Approaches”, St. John’s College, Oxford (organised by Karin Kukkonen)

3-4 April 2014: Workshop 8 “Dreams, Delusions and Early Modern Literature”, University of Birmingham (organised by Ita Mac Carthy)

Co-sponsored workshops:

12 April 2012: “Science and Literary Criticism”, St. John’s College (organised by Emily Troscianko and Michael Burke)

25-26 June 2012: “Immersion and the Storyworld”, St. John’s College (organised by Sabine Müller and Marcus Hartner)

Other meetings:

2 March 2012: Presentation of the Balzan Project to the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty, University of Oxford

14-15 September 2012: Core discussion group “Embodiment, Language, Imagination”, St. John’s College, Oxford (organised by Terence Cave)

Regular meetings of a reading group, organised by Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith (assisted by Terence Cave and in 2012-13 by Kirsti Sellevold), with participants based in Oxford, were held in the academic years 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13. The reading group activities included a number of sessions with invited speakers. Among the speakers were the following:

Professor David Herman, Ohio State University (April 2011)

Dr. Andrew Parker, St. John’s College, Oxford (November 2011)

Professor Marie-Luce Demonet, Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours (February 2012)

Dr. Alan Palmer, independent scholar (April 2012)

Professor Paul Harris, Harvard University (May 2012)

Professor Shaun Gallagher, University of Memphis (January 2013)

Professor Christopher Frith, University College London and University of Aarhus (April 2013)

Professor Gregory Currie and Anna Ichino, University of Nottingham (June 2013)

Researchers:

Balzan Research Fellows

Karin Kukkonen

Olivia Smith

Balzan Research Lecturers

Kathryn Banks
Timothy Chesters
James Helgeson
Raphael Lyne
Ita Mac Carthy

Associate Researchers

Miranda Anderson
Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei
Patricia Kolaiti
Sabine Müller
Kirsti Sellevold
Emily Troscianko

Principal publications:

Reading Literature Cognitively, edited by Terence Cave, Karin Kukkonen and Olivia Smith as a commissioned special issue of *Paragraph* (37.1, March 2014) and comprising a set of essays by eight core members of the project.

Second-Generation Cognitive Approaches to Literature, edited by Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen as a special issue of *Style* 48 (2014, forthcoming).

Karin Kukkonen, *A Prehistory of Cognitive Poetics: Neoclassicism and the Novel* (complete and under consideration for publication).

Olivia Smith, *Inside the Furnished Mind: A Literary Reading of Locke's Essay* (nearing completion).

Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitively Inflected Criticism* (complete and under consideration for publication).

A number of other publications are in progress.

Link:

<http://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk/3122/The-Balzan-Project.html>