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Connecting All with Everything: Coming from the Same Egg

Connecter tout qui vient du même œuf

Nikola Tutek

Abstract

In this article I propose an updated interdisciplinary literary theory, one which would be more suitable for holistic analyses of the modern and mostly multimodal literature than traditional research was. The updated literary theory focuses on questions of creation (authors' motivation in creation process and the choice of intermodal content), reading (how multimodal texts influence reading processes), interpretation (the way readers belonging to various cultural circles decipher the author's internal choice of intermodal content, and what external cultural connotations readers add in their interpretations), and, finally, literary theory (how literary theory influences literary production, and more importantly, how modern multimodal literature influences the development of literary theory). Most importantly, the theory provides possible ways of connecting and analyzing interacting literary and non-literary elements of meanings in (and out of) the particular cultural circle from which literature derives. All of this article's focus points are illustrated with examples from Anglophone multimodal CanLit (including Atwood, Munro, Ondaatje, and Schoemperlen), and Jean-François Pouliot and Robert Bélisle's 1979 very short film *The Egg*.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary literary research, holistic approach, Anglophone Canadian literature, multimodal literature, short story, cultural content, repeating patterns, *The Egg*

Résumé

Cet article propose une théorie littéraire interdisciplinaire qui conviendrait mieux aux analyses holistiques d'une littérature moderne et principalement multimodale. Cette théorie se concentre sur les questions de création (la motivation des auteurs dans le processus de création et le choix du contenu intermodal), la lecture (comment les textes multimodaux influencent les processus de lecture), l'interprétation (la façon dont les lecteurs appartenant à divers cercles culturels déchiffrent le choix interne de l'auteur contenu intermodal, et quelles connotations culturelles externes les lecteurs ajoutent dans leurs interprétations) et, enfin, la théorie littéraire (comment la théorie littéraire influence la production littéraire et, plus important encore, comment la littérature multimodale moderne influence le développement de la théorie littéraire). De plus, la théorie offre des moyens permettant de relier et d'analyser les éléments littéraires et non littéraires dont les significations interagissent dans un certain cercle culturel dont la littérature est dérivée et hors de ce cercle. Tous les points principaux de cet article sont illustrés d'exemples tirés de CanLit anglophone (dont Atwood, Munro, Ondaatje et Schoemperlen) et du très court métrage, *The Egg* de Jean-François Pouliot et Robert Bélisle, qui date de 1979.

Mots-clés : Recherche littéraire interdisciplinaire, approche holistique, Littérature canadienne anglophone, littérature multimodale, histoire courte, contenu culturel, motifs répétitifs, *The Egg*



1. Introduction: Towards a theory

Canadian Anglophone short prose offers an abundance of research material to those dealing with multimodality and its various aspects. In that respect, Canadian literature features short stories which contain various types of ekphrasis, different genres of illustrations and photographs, and a multitude of these and other interventions into the layout of prose texts. In addition to all that, numerous texts offer multimodality which is based on audio and tactile elements incorporated into literature either as an additional source of information or design. All the modes involved – written, visual, audio or tactile – carry their own meanings which permute through their semantic interrelations and create new layers of meaning. This is what I call the third entity of meaning, based on the meanings of every individual mode but not equal to any of them.

In order to fully grasp the phenomenon of contemporary multimodal literature,¹ in my opinion, an *updated* approach in research is needed, research that does not focus mostly on literature itself but considers the research of culture and art, psychology and sociology as equally important starting points of analyses. Such research offers insights into the creative process (authors and their motivations), and the processes of reading and interpretation.

My research so far is based on two basic tasks: 1. Exploring the comprehensiveness and unity of the cultural input from which literature derives, and 2. Determining the repeated elements in that literature that reflect the unity of cultural input. As shall be seen, both tasks serve to gather information that will show that almost everything in a certain culture is connected to literature that derives from it, and the other way around. Finally, I aim to provide a theoretical basis for further similar literary research.

My classifications and theses are exemplified by numerous instances of recurring cultural elements and literary notions in Anglophone CanLit. Mostly taken from short fiction, they provide a comparison between the features of one recurring literary notion in CanLit; I also include a 1979 National Film Board vignette, *The Egg*, in order to highlight the concept of a shared Canadian cultural space.

1) Clearly defining multimodal literature is not an easy task. What I mean by multimodal literature in this paper is literary texts which contain examples of ekphrasis, which include an illustration or a photograph within the text, or texts in which the text itself forms a certain shape (shape prose). It is important that the verbal content (the meaning of the text) in multimodal literature stand in complex post-modernist semantic interrelations with the visual content (the meaning of the visual art applied in the text). The meaning of the verbal and visual together form a new layer of meaning, which is not independently featured by the verbal nor by the visual, and which I refer to as “the third entity of meaning.” For more, see Tutek 2020.



2. Unity of cultural input

By the unity of cultural input I presume, first of all, the comprehensiveness of internal and external cultural elements that form a certain cultural circle² and play an important role in forming the worldview of the people belonging to that circle. This process goes both ways, from culture which forms individuals, but also from individuals who contribute new elements to culture. It is not difficult to note shared elements of Canadian culture, mentality and history in CanLit; these cultural elements are numerous and highly repetitive. On the other hand, the most successful features/notions/works of CanLit contributed to the formation of entirely new elements (notions or terms) in Canadian culture. One such good example is the term ‘Alice Munro Country’ (depicting parts of Ontario’s Huron County where most of Munro’s stories are set), which would make no sense to Canadians before Munro’s literary success. It is all about world creation. Munro’s stories are set in Huron County, Ontario, recreating that geographical and social reality in her short prose (thus creating a derivate version of that world). Munro’s short stories provide readers with mental pictures and notions of that derivate world, which form new visions in each reader (thus creating the second derivate versions of that world). Finally, researchers, critics and the public coined and popularized the term ‘Alice Munro Country’ to refer to both the actual settings of Ontario and the correspondent settings in Munro’s writing. In that way, real settings (such as the flat landscapes seen throughout Munro’s Ontario stories) inspire fiction, and fiction forever marks real settings. This complex process of acknowledgement, analysis and documentation is one in which culture, identity and a distinctive mental world are created.

The second aspect of the unity of cultural input is the existence of general human inspiration and shared knowledge, which leads to the fact that all human cultures share a bulk of mutual cultural elements. The core of human culture is highly repetitive, with only the sprouts carrying the most cultural differences (a pattern that repeats in everything earthly, even genetics). This is entirely logical because our human apparatus of perception – that is, the hardware – is the same, only human experience and psychology – that is, the software – varies and changes. Hence, humans have shared the cultural core from the very beginning of history, while today, in our modern globalized world, even the variable elements of other cultures are becoming easily reachable. In that respect, there is an interesting example in Alice Munro’s story “The Albanian Virgin,” in which Munro bases her detailed description of the Albanian society on the writings of Edith Durham.³ This modern process of

2) “Cultural circle” means a sense of a collection of related and shared cultural notions from the past, present and future which are common to certain distinctive groups of humans and in shared real geographic space.

3) Edith Durham (1863–1944) was a British Albanophile and author of travel books that are still highly regarded. In “The Albanian Virgin,” Alice Munro (re)used numerous cultural notions about Albanians described by Durham in her book *High Albania*, published in 1909.



cultural exchange is nothing new – its roots go back to the beginning of history – but what has changed is the quantity and the quality of cultural elements available, and the speed of obtaining these elements.

Human cultures stand in an *unbearable lightness of connectivity* in which it is impossible for any cultural element (of any culture) to be entirely disconnected (in origin, inspiration, approximation or even pure coincidence). To exemplify this, I will provide two relevant examples. As far as the core of human cultures is concerned, let us return to Alice Munro Country. Those more familiar with European literature would link Prague to Kafka, Rijeka to Polić Kamov, in much the same way Munro has come to be linked with Huron County. To connect writers and their work with existing geographies is a general human need that stems from the shared emotional and cognitive setup. As far as the sprouts of cultural differences (which are rapidly shared in the globalized world) are concerned, an illustrative example is provided by Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Though set in the Gilead of a former United States, these two novels remain intrinsically Canadian, and thematically and generically they firmly belong to the North American literary tradition. However, a few months ago, there was a wave of pro-choice protests against anti-abortion movements and tendencies in some Eastern European countries. Some of the protesters, mostly women, waved banners and signs which contained no verbal messages – just the image of the Handmaid as it was presented on the book cover design for two Atwood novels. In that way, an archetypal character from a Canadian novel becomes a symbol of the fight for female rights on the opposite side of the world.

It would be impossible to include all the cultural, psychological, historical, biological, etc., aspects of cultural exchange and connectedness in just one short paper, and that is not my aim. My aim is merely to define possible ways we can construct a holistic, multidimensional theoretical approach to explain this *cultural connectedness of everything* as it is expressed, presented, and mirrored in multimodal literature.

3. Repeating patterns in CanLit and *The Egg*

After defining and describing the two-way interrelations between interconnected cultural circles and literature, the next functional step in the research of the multimodal literature would be defining repeating patterns in this literature. These patterns are important because they mirror the most salient elements of a given culture; this is due to the fact that everything *interesting* usually gets repeated or reused. Furthermore, the patterns must be addressed on all possible levels of research: intertextuality, semantics, and multimodal (or rather *transmodal*) repetition.



CanLit, multimodal or not, displays a plethora of repeating literary patterns, and here I will provide only a short selection of examples for every level of research.

Intertextuality. George Bowering in “The French East India Company” from his collection *The Rain Barrel* mentions Michael Ondaatje as “the fellow with an odd name” (111), providing an example of a Canadian poet and writer of fiction mentioning another Canadian author (i.e. from the same cultural circle). Diane Schoemperlen in “By The Book Or: Alessandro In The New World: An Unlikely Tale Of Translation, Time Travel, And Tragic Love” (*By The Book: Stories And Pictures*) bases the main character’s knowledge and perception of the new world he found himself in on an old Italian-English dictionary printed in the US in 1890, providing an example of a Canadian author mentioning a text from a different cultural circle. Interestingly, the dictionary is a non-fiction genre, and that ensures generic hybridity to Schoemperlen’s story; furthermore, pages from the dictionary are reprinted within the story, making this story multimodal as well, and, finally, the old dictionary and the modern story are anachronous – a feature of multimodal creation which repeats in many of Schoemperlen’s stories, and even in Atwood’s illustrations for her flash fiction, such as in *Bones and Murder* (1994) and *The Tent* (2006)

Repeating semantic clusters. Motifs of *angels of unusual things* (Schoemperlen: angel of furnace/teapots/cutlery/kettles/asparagus/rhubarb/eggs/doorknobs (1998, 63); Atwood: angel of suicide/blindness/lung cancer (1995, 154)) the idea of *personal museums*⁴ (Bowering: “The French East India Company”; Schoemperlen: “Innocent Objects”; Munro: “Pictures of the Ice”; Ondaatje: *Running in the Family*; Gallant: “Speck’s Idea”; Atwood: *The Tent*, etc.).

Transmodal repetition. Motifs of jars (Schoemperlen: The Mason jar illustration in “Innocent Objects”; the motif of jars (and kitchen gear in general) in numerous short stories and as an element of book cover design. The same applies for depiction of clothes in Atwood’s illustrations, Schoemperlen’s collages, and the importance of the depiction of clothes for Munro’s short prose (a very important semantic connection between clothes and kitchen utensils as described in texts and depicted in visual arts can be found in the multimodal and repeating interrelations between Munro’s writing and Mary Pratt’s paintings).

A repeating notion in CanLit which I find very interesting and important for understanding both the culture and its literature is the creation of *personal museums*. The idea of personal museums presumes numerous important cultural features which are regarded as very Canadian. The most important are: introverted characters, fear of the outer world, survival, focus on home, home as a place of safety and peace, the need

4) With the term “personal museums,” I try to encompass all the directly and indirectly connected semantic circles that in CanLit form the cultural/emotional notion of a shelter, a refuge, a home, where objects, ideas, memories and characters’ feelings are stored and exhibited in a museumesque manner, and which typically offer fraudulent and illusory safety to literary characters.



to acquire and classify knowledge and related physical objects, establishing identity, finding one's self, solving a mystery, mending what was broken, overcoming personal damage, and attempting to open oneself towards the new. These cultural features are very typical of Canadian culture; they are probably at the core of Canadianness, and they repeat intermodally in the work of a large spectrum of Canadian writers, from older authors like Gallant to younger and very experimental ones like Schoemperlen. In the following table, I have analyzed the cultural notion of personal museums in the writing of six prominent Canadian writers, with special regard to cultural input. Cultural input in this instance refers to the cultural knowledge about Canada which is provided through the literary implementation of the notion of personal museums, but also the other way around – how literary personal museums help strengthen and build Canadianness.

In order to further describe how the notion of personal museums in CanLit stems from the shared Canadian culture, I have decided to compare that literary/cultural notion with a piece of Canadian visual art, namely, a short video. The short video is one of the Canada Vignettes,⁵ a series of short films on Canadian history and culture produced by the National Film Board of Canada. I have chosen this specific video because it is indicative of Canadian society and culture, and it stands in direct semantic interrelation (of mirroring and bridging meaning) with Canadian literature as the main output of culture. An especially important layer of meaning depicted in *The Egg* is the idea of isolation. Canada Vignettes short films were produced for roughly three years from 1977 till 1980, achieving great popularity with Canadian viewers. The short film I will talk about is a 1979 Vignette (the same year Gallant's "Speck's Idea" was published in *The New Yorker*), directed by Robert Bélisle and Jean-François Pouliot. The title: *The Egg*.

The Egg is a one-minute animated film featuring an egg against a white background. The egg moves and slightly cracks, presumably in preparation to hatch. However, two white hands appear protruding from the eggshell and they use a Band-Aid in order to repair the crack. When this proves inefficient, the hands try with white glue. But even that does not stop the eggshell from cracking, so the hands try with wooden planks which they nail on the crack using a hammer. That does not help either, so the hands mount a large quantity of planks around the eggshell. The pile of planks finally forms a sort of a shelter in the whiteness. The camera then zooms out and moves over the whiteness in which dozens of eggs in improvised shelters of wooden planks can be

5) More profound insight into NFB short films and Canada Vignettes can be found in Andrew Burke's *Hinterland Remixed* (2019). In the Introduction, the author states: "Throughout *Hinterland Remixed*, I make a series of connections between what might seem like fairly disparate cultural phenomena [...]. I argue that such associations allow for fuller understanding of culture as a heterogenous formation capable of generating vastly different reactions and responses to the world that are nevertheless bound together by the fact that they share a cultural moment" (12).



Main idea: creating personal museums/personal and family histories						
Connected ideas: focus on the inner world of characters and on family life; mostly introvert characters; introverts opening up, trying to mend personal damage						
AUTHOR	BOWERING	ONDAATJE	SCHOEMPERLEN	GALLANT	MUNRO	ATWOOD
TITLE	<i>"The French East India Company"</i>	<i>Running in the Family</i>	<i>"Innocent Objects"</i>	<i>"Speck's Idea"</i>	<i>"Pictures of the Ice"</i>	<i>The Tent</i>
PERSONAL MUSEUM	The museum is a symbol of a bad marriage	Family album as a form of a personal museum	An introvert's home as a personal museum	Antique shops and galleries dealing with significant objects	Photographs as a symbol of one's ill-fated existence	The tent -simultaneously a refuge and a storage of ideas and emotions
CULTURAL INPUT	colonization; symbol of the relationships between Canada and Quebec	adaptation, scattered roots; memory	one's home as a place of deceptive safety	troublesome identity: isolation, opportunism	the image of ice/snow/whiteness as unforgiving nothingness	survival, no safety, (self)creation

Fig. 1: The repeating notion of personal museums in CanLit.



seen. Viewers realize that the vast whiteness is filled with eggs, each one at a distance from the next, trying to prevent their shells from the inevitable: cracking and presumably hatching, which is the first step to life but also to death.

Firstly, the white background introduces the Canadian notion of the snowy wilderness that is so prevalent in Canadian arts. The crack in the eggshell might be seen as an inevitable passage of time which leads to the natural process of hatching – symbolically, the process of becoming, of determining one’s self. Then comes the unusual turn, the white arms appear, no legs, no head, just arms. This might refer to the Canadian do-it-yourself tradition which is in connection with the notion of handy, self-sufficient people apt to survive in rough environments. But white hands are trying to stop the inevitable and repair the eggshell. This is a direct association to the Canadian idea of introverted existence, and of the fear of the outer world. Also the idea of a safe shelter, a home whose safety proves illusory. Finally, hands trying to repair the eggshell also provide a spoonful of mystery and that strikingly Canadian streak of muffled irony and anguish. When the camera zooms out, other important issues emerge – those of vast wilderness, isolation, personal distance, and, equally important, the idea that all the troubles depicted by the film are shared by the entire cultural circle. The eggs are trying to remain in their shells, their safe homes, their personal museums, and in the end, seeing all the eggs aspiring to do the same thing evokes an awkward exposition in a vast white museum.

The short film *The Egg* undoubtedly stands in complex semantic interrelationships with Canadian culture and the CanLit texts listed in the table; in fact, as I will explain later, the short film summarizes a lot of CanLit in general. Or, because the film is older than all the listed works of fiction (except for “Speck’s Idea”), it would be better to say that the film summarizes a lot of shared Canadian cultural input, while all of the elements of the shared cultural input from the film are featured extensively in CanLit.

Furthermore, the film *The Egg* and CanLit also stand in the interrelationship of transmodal repetition. An illustrative example can be found in Atwood’s *Bones and Murder*, where eggs are a salient motif in both her illustrations and texts. Illustrated eggs are usually presented as symbols of life, birth, motherhood, and a source of inspiration (for example, in “The Little Red Hen Tells All,” an insightful spoof of the children’s classic). In *The Tent*, birds (also chickens) are a salient motif in both the texts and in Atwood’s illustrations. In the story “Eating the Birds,” birds (consequently eggs as well) are seen as sources of energy, and the circulation of energy is achieved through devouring these sources. Both in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*, eggs and chicken meat are singled out as important food. There is also the strong symbolism of eggs constantly left at Aunt Lydia monument in *The Testaments*.⁶

6) Atwood’s symbolism is layered. Mid-way through the novel, Aunt Lydia says, “I checked out the offerings: fewer eggs and oranges than usual” and asks, “Is my popularity slipping?” (2019, 179). Later,



As far as intertextuality is concerned, it is hard to establish such interrelation if we define intertextuality in a narrower sense as *a text within a text*. However, if we perceive video material as *visual text*, then *The Egg* could perfectly fit the intertextual interrelation with Munro's "Pictures of the Ice," in which a retired United Church minister keeps a secret, before taking blank photographs of ice, just before dying in a vast white wilderness.

Identifying repeating cultural/semantic patterns in multimodal literature and the culture it originated from is a useful, if not the basic method in determining the interrelations between the two. But how can these interrelations be established, and how can that contribute to literary theory? In order to explain the interrelations of semantic interrelations between different modes in multimodal Canadian short prose, I have focused on four points of research: 1. Creation (authors' motivation/origin of transmodal content/the sequence of creation), 2. The reading process, 3. Interpretation, and 4. Literary theory.

Creation (the author's motivation/origin of transmodal content/the sequence of creation). The question of creation deals with the author's motivation in choice of modes, and multimodal content that she or she decides to include in the creative process, as well as the origins of that content. Why did Atwood decide to illustrate her flash fiction? What are the origins of the illustration in Bowering's "The French East India Company"? What ignites authors' decisions to use specific photographs to complete their literary family histories, as in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*? Why did Munro opt for the ekphrastic descriptions of photographs of ice (basically blank photographs) in "Pictures of the Ice"? The sequence of creation deals with questions such as: Which mode came first? What inspired what? In that sense, we could ask ourselves: did accidentally found photographs inspire Frances Itani to write *Leaning, Leaning over Water*, or did she find photographs to complete already written or planned texts? Does Schoemperlen create visual collages for her stories or the other way around? Did Chagall's painting *I and the Village* inspire Munro to write "Soon" or was the creative process different and more complex than simple visual stimuli and literary response?⁷ How does Schoemperlen choose illustrated books which she will later turn into literary and visual collages? These questions, although essential for the full understanding of multimodal literature, are typically difficult to answer with scholarly certainty. Sometimes the answers are unequivocal. For example, in his story "The French East India Company" Bowering used the image of J. F. Dupleix, a French colonizer in India,

she considers that the rival Aunt Elizabeth might be "planting evidence in the form of hard-boiled eggs and oranges at my stone feet in an effort to discredit me. Even though I myself was not performing these acts of idolatry, the fact that others were performing them would reflect badly on me: it would be said that I had tolerated these acts, and I might even have encouraged them. Such aspersions might well be used by Elizabeth to lever me off my pinnacle" (209).

7) On Munro's "Soon" and Chagall's *I and the Village*, see Thacker, 225–227.



because the historical role and connotations of Dupleix fit perfectly into the main idea of the story, which, among other things, talks about the relations between Anglophone Canada and Quebec. Similarly, Ondaatje used photographs from his own family album in *Running in the Family* because this collection of short fiction is a (fictionalized) autobiography dealing with his childhood in Sri Lanka. A few of the photographs used in the texts feature Sri Lankan landscapes, edifices and trains, hence there is a clear connection between the broader realm of culture and the more specific realm of literature. Furthermore, Atwood is known for her love of illustration (hence her decision to illustrate her flash fiction), and while her flash fiction both in *Bones and Murder* and *The Tent* feature many elements of classical mythology, it is no surprise that her illustrations for these collection also feature elements of classical visual arts. Furthermore, many features of her writing and illustrating could be brought into connection with her personal experience (which, given her prominence, is well known to the general reading public – her connection with nature, owning a summer cottage, her subtle involvement in feminist matters, passion for bird-watching, etc.), and, finally, she is also very well known as a cat lover, so it does not come as a surprise that she created the graphic novel series *Angel Catbird* (2016–).

These were examples where personal and cultural motivation clearly influences literary choices and decisions. When the motivation is more personal and more uncertain, we can only speculate about the authors' creative decisions. In the case of Munro's "Pictures of the Ice," we can assume that Munro used the shared Canadian cultural topos⁸ of the icy wilderness expressed through white, blank photographs in order to construct characters and the plot. But we can only guess if such a decision was also influenced by the author's personal experience in photographing spectacular snowy landscapes, which, especially with older cameras, usually results in dull and formless photographic images. Similarly, we can only guess why Munro chose Chagall's painting to be the pivotal element of the narration in "Soon." Taking into consideration that Chagall's *I and the Village* is one of the central images in shared human culture, Munro might have encountered the painting anywhere, and at any time in her life from childhood on. But did the painting inspire the short story, or was the painting employed as a carrier of multimodal meaning in an already existing idea for the short story? We will perhaps never know.

The process of reading. This point of research is focused on how multimodality in literature influences the process of reading. A great example is Schoemperlen's "Innocent Objects" from *Forms of Devotion*, a short story which is divided into two main narrations (one of them in italics), and which contains illustrations of objects which are introduced into the text with footnotes. In that way, the reading becomes a re-

8) Of course, many Canadians will know this topos only through mediated images such as those from the famed Group of Seven.



peating circular process which takes the reader from main narration 1 to main narration 2 to footnote and the footnote text, then to the illustration and back to the main narration 1. How does that repeating circular reading process function semantically in the description of an introvert main character whose existence seems to be just a set of repeating rituals which take her deeper and deeper into her mysterious isolation? Another example would be Bowering's "Discoloured Metal," a short shape prose text, again from *The Rain Barrel*. At some point the story features blank circles in the layout of the text. These blank circles expand until they erase the entire text and we have an empty page. On the next page, the text reappears in a small textual circle (similar in size to the first blank shape), and these textual circles expand as well until the whole of the text page is restored. What semantic connotations do the blank circles, which prevent much of the understanding of the story, have? And the textual circles, which provide an illusion of understanding – what do they provoke in the reader who has to deal with them? And how do these connotations function in the description of a mysterious voyage (a circular hole in the narrator's memory) around half the world (Earth's circular form) close to the North Pole (determined by a geographical circle) in an airplane (almost circular windows), and back home (circular nature of the voyage)?⁹

In each of these examples, the reading process mirrors shared cultural experience: the frequent recurrence of introversion, lost, suppressed memories, and the existing and real fear of dystopian worlds.

Interpretation. This point of analysis of multimodal Canadian short prose is focused on how the meanings of different modes interact in creation and interpretation of the third entity of meaning. The approach is based on determining the shared and repetitive cultural contents which are typical of one cultural circle, and whose interpretation depends heavily on 1) belonging or non-belonging to that cultural circle and/or having internal or external understanding of that cultural circle; 2) belonging to geographical variations in that cultural circle; 3) belonging to different social strata of that (or another) culture regarding the level and the field of education, social class, subculture, national and racial substratum, all the way to the personal psychological and emotional constitution and settings of the individual.

The interpretation of the third entity of meaning is difficult to define and classify because it is highly personal. While it is true that certain images function as cultural

9) A revealing example in recent CanLit (although not short prose) is Atwood's *The Testaments*. Visual-textual multimodality relates to the book cover design: the illustration on the cover features a maid in a bright green gown – that is, the "green outfit of the bride-to-be" (2019, 215), the "spring green" of "fresh leaves" that show a "girl was ready for marriage" (160). This shade of green is far from the "dull green" (14) of the Marthas, who are not to marry at all in Gilead. More importantly, the tactile-visual-textual multimodality is provided by the spring green page marker in the book. The page marker, a strip of soft cloth gowns, creates a complex semantic interconnection between the reader and the literary character.



topoi in one culture, there is no guarantee that all the members of that culture will interpret these images in the same way or that they will interpret them differently than members of other cultures. What influences the interpretation of the topoi within one culture is the level of (shared) cultural awareness of the individuals belonging to different subcultures, and the level of education, just to mention the most salient among them. In that sense, images of pottery on the book covers of the first editions of Alice Munro's short prose collections are very likely to direct many Canadian readers towards family and home (in further derivation of meaning, security), towards marriage, interpersonal relationships, contemplative, and finally, feminist literature, all that even before reading the texts. However, none of this has been so, and an average Canadian reader can develop entirely different intellectual anticipations and semantic associations upon seeing images of cutlery on a cover design of short prose collections.

There is one more issue worth considering. A large part of the individual's identification with a culture happens subconsciously. Individuals intrinsically feel their belonging to a culture and their inclination towards particular topics of concern and notions – even if they do not recognize this belonging and even if they lack previous education in the matter. They simply *feel* more familiar with certain (literary) issues which were implanted into their subconscious through cultural interaction. This process of tacit recognition has a strong impact on their interpretation of literature but it is still very rarely researched.¹⁰ Furthermore, subconscious interpretations of literature might be based not so much on shared cultural identification, but more on the personal life experience of the reader. In that case, very personal and sometimes surprising interpretations might occur, and these are usually discarded by researchers or even scorned by professors. As soon as personal interpretations are created by a reader, they become realities. These collected and analyzed realities provide a plethora of interesting semantic notions both about literature and its cultural circle.

Literary theory. All human thinking is multimodal, and so is any scientific theory as a logical result of that thinking. The multimodal interrelations between literature and literary theory are also a two-way relation. For example, literary theory, and general public opinion, have formed the notion of *serious* or *high* literature. And although before the 19th century most literature, fiction and non-fiction, was illustrated, at the end of the 19th century and all the way until the 1960s or even later, illustrations were banished from *serious* fiction because both literary theory and public opinion re-

10) While this concept has not attracted the attention of many researchers, it is very much used by the American writer Stephen King. King, according to his own confession, spends a considerable amount of time analyzing the media, pop culture, and other sources in order to find what bothers the majority of his potential readers, what they fear, and what fears they can easily identify with. Based on his findings, he creates plots which become instant successes because they are “effectively translating America's private, communal, and cultural fears and serving them up” (Romano).



garded illustrations as something generically applicable mostly in children's literature and pulp fiction. It took the rebellion of avant-garde literature and then half a century of literary development to finally give birth to post-modernist attitudes towards illustrations in fiction. This example shows how literary theory can condition literary creation and how multimodal interrelations can be drawn between the two. In the last several decades, multimodal literature has seen a remarkable rise, with illustrated texts, graphic novels, shape prose, etc., being more a rule than exception. However, the other direction in the multimodal relation between literary theory and literature, that is, from literature towards its theory, has not entirely happened. Or, to be more precise, it has happened and it is happening, but it has not yet entirely formed into a concrete literary theory. I hope that my research will be a small contribution in correcting that.

It is evident that, in explaining semantic interrelations in multimodal short prose, the literary research based on four starting points (1. Creation, 2. The process of reading, 3. Interpretation, 4. Literary theory) leads to a complex interdisciplinary process which provides us with an ever-opening number of possible conclusions, some of which are, to say the least, quite speculative. This multitude of possibilities and the dubiousness of possible conclusions are both the strong and the weak point of such research. However, it is possible to determine firm theoretical grounds for such multimodal literary research, and there is a necessity to do so. In order to establish these theoretical grounds, a new (or, at least specifically adjusted) approach is needed.

The methodology of the research is based on analyses of repetitive features in literature, society (and its culture), and the psychology of individuals involved in the production, consumption, and evaluation of literature. Hence, the research is inevitably interdisciplinary. When it comes to living authors, interviews in which authors might disclose the origin of the transmodal elements they used in their writings and the reasons for that decisions can be yet another very useful method.¹¹

After analysing works of literature simultaneously with analysing the culture from which that literature derives,¹² and the reactions and interpretations of its domestic and international readerships, we get results which form a net of informational dots. The next step is to find out how these dots are semantically interrelated. And if they are not directly interrelated, how do they mirror each other? In that sense, it is important to consider the British anthropologist Tim Ingold's view that the lines between dots in anthropological studies form meshworks rather than networks, and knots rather than chains.¹³ Ingold's weaving of intricately complex meshworks of concepts

11) To provide an example: in my private correspondence with George Bowering, the author informed me that the illustration in "Little Me" from *The Rain Barrel* was a portrait of him drawn by his daughter when she was a child.

12) The danger is this: avoiding simplistic or stereotypical or even essentialist approaches.

13) See Tim Ingold (2015) *The Life of Lines*. London: Routledge.



coincides with the complexity of interconnected and often shared cultural, cognitive, and non-cognitive notions in one cultural circle and the multimodal literature that arises from it. Ingold's interdisciplinary theory in anthropology exposes the need and the hope for literary theory to develop similar theoretical instruments to thoroughly examine literary and cultural interconnections.

4. Conclusion

There is an important distinction between two groups of connections between literature and the culture from which it derives: connections which are intrinsic to both, and connections that we merely read both into literature and culture. The first group can be classified scientifically, the other, until confirmed, remain pretty much speculative. Both types of connections constitute equally important parts of the post-publishing life and destiny of fictional texts. However, in my opinion, analyses of both types of connections are underestimated in contemporary literary research, especially in multimodal literature. Such analyses should be in the forefront in order to give a more concise view of the cultural, social, and personal meaning and impact of literature, and to prepare literary theory for future challenges.

In order to make this kind of research more legitimate and popular, it is necessary to establish a scientific method that would provide grounds for data collection and analyses, and concise presentation of results. This method would be indivisible from the scholarly methods of traditional literary research, cultural studies, sociology and psychology, and, in that sense, its approach would be holistic because it would simultaneously and inseparably approach literature, the culture from which it stems, authors, and consumers of literature. Consequently, this interdisciplinary literary research method itself would be multimodal.

Human culture in general came *from the same egg*. There is no insignificant cultural information. Every new interpretation of cultural information instantly becomes a building block of culture, and it spontaneously starts forming new connotative connections in the minds of readers, theoreticians, and authors. Everything is interconnected, we just need to find out how.



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