

Introduction to Art, Literature, and the Empirical Paradigm

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Aldo NEMESIO

Introduction to *Art, Literature, and the Empirical Paradigm*

The articles published in this thematic issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* are revised versions of papers selected from presentations at the 16th Congress of the IAEA: International Association of Empirical Aesthetics < <http://www.science-of-aesthetics.org/> > (New School University, New York, August 2000). The papers of this issue of *CLCWeb* -- in the fields of theory of culture and art, literature, and new media -- represent work by scholars who study matters of culture with an approach that is inter- and cross-disciplinary between philosophy, literary study, culture study, psychology, statistics, etc. As such, the work presented here is with focus on empirical aesthetics and its connected fields of theoretical and applied work (for a bibliography of work in the field, see Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography of Contextual (Systemic and Empirical) Approaches in the Study of Literature and Culture (to 1998)" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/7>>).

Baruch Blich examines in his paper, "About Art" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/2/>>), the phenomenon of representation in art, a field of study including disciplines such as semiotics, epistemology, ontology, psychology and sociology. Blich argues that audience in theatre, cinema, or exhibition of visual arts is conditioned to inhibit a sense of realism in a process of constant and continuous use while interacting with the object(s) of observation. However, there is an apparent discrepancy between the means and ends of reality and the means and ends of art: Interpreting artistic illusion is much more complicated as well as sophisticated than our intuitive interpretation of reality. Our reactions towards what is represented on the stage is of a different kind than our reactions towards every-day reality, even though the stimuli we are faced with are of the same appearance. Knowledge of the context -- museum, theatre, cinema, etc. -- is necessary in order to interpret the signs it exhibits, but it is not a sufficient condition for identifying the aboutness of art and for grasping its denotative content. We do not compare art with real phenomena, or with what we know from reality; on the contrary, we understand a particular piece of art on the basis of established conventions we have knowledge of. According to Blich, art's reference to reality is and remains a matter of question and inquiry.

W. Ray Crozier discusses in his paper, "Literary Careers: Breaks and Stalls" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/3/>>), the literary careers of six English-language novelists who were all critically acclaimed writers, lived at least eighty years, but were among the least productive in a large sample of twentieth-century British novelists: E.M. Forster, Rosamond Lehmann, Jean Rhys, J.R. Tolkien, Rebecca West, and Antonia White. Biographical evidence shows considerable individual variation in the writers' literary production over their life span. The picture that emerges in these case studies is of writers who are highly committed to literary careers and who have spells when they are just as productive as more prolific writers. This is disrupted in various ways, sometimes for many years or for the rest of the writer's life. In some cases, this process can be understood in terms of the satisfaction gained from the project. In other cases, artists do change direction, styles, or media. Sometimes the writers have a clear sense of what the project is to be but have difficulties in working on it. These difficulties may be augmented by extra-project factors such as poverty, illness, demanding personal relationships, or the burdens of other types of disruption. Crozier suggests that his case studies illustrate the value of thinking of creative writing across the life span in terms of an artistic career with its contingencies and turning points rather than in terms of notions of slowing down or the "using up" of some fixed amount of creative potential.

Antonio Fusco and Rosella Tomassoni analyse in their paper, "A Psychological Outline of 'Yerma's Dream'" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/4/>>), society as presented in Garcia Lorca's tragedy: A rural world, based on dogmatic conventions and dominated by the need to become a part of its program. In this world, man is conceived as representing God on earth: He dominates with unquestioned and unquestionable authority, while the woman's role is limited to procreation. It is an exasperatedly sexist society, where love outside marriage is a crime punishable by torture and death. Outside of society's program -- dominated by hypocrisy, man's pseudo-sacredness, and an aberrant concept of honour -- a person becomes an outcast even without assuming the dignity of a rebel. But love is stronger than this social order and when it is not free to express itself, it can take refuge in dreaming; awake, it can turn a woman into a murderer. The

authors argue that dreams represent crucial activities in the human mind and its articulations. In the text we discover Lorca as a subtle observer of human feelings who is able to understand psychological motivations and their physical manifestations; consequently, he shows us different typologies of "repressed" love and he is able to condense very complex meanings into a few select yet powerful images.

László Halász, Károly Hantos, and Balázs Faa examine in their study, "The Reception of Art and Interactive CD-ROM" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/5/>>), some of the effects of new media in culture. The authors argue that easy access to literature, music, and the visual arts by means of CD-ROMs and the internet represent not only new venues of cultural expression and consumption but they clearly also impact culture: The new media are extensions of our capabilities and can contribute to the invention of new forms of art. A work of art is an objectified product of an artist and the receiver can interact with it symbolically through his or her imagination and emotions: As a result the work comes to a new life. In this way the receiver's mind can transform the work of art, through reconstruction, omission, addition of material, embellishment, etc. Today this form of interaction has been changed by new electronic media and what was possible only in the receiver's mind before, now can be realized on a computer screen. Halász, Hantos, and Faa study the reception of works of art presented through interactive CD-ROMs: Two groups of secondary-school students with different levels of expertise and experience in arts and the computer are tested in order to examine differences between more and less experienced groups, male and female subjects, and between different approaches to multimedia works of art.

Mariselda Tessarolo discusses in her paper, "Perceptions of Song and Video Clip" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/6/>>) -- starting from the premise that representing music through video clips has changed the way of producing and promoting songs -- the resemblance of videos and advertisement. In videos the rhythm of a song decides the rhythm of the images. The success of a music video depends on the ability of integrating audio (songs) and visual (images) stimuli. In a videotape, the producer's aim is not to tell a story but instead to affect and to excite the audience and thus emotion prevails over narration. A comparison is carried out between videos with different formats, in order to study the subjects' attitudes towards videos belonging to different categories and to see whether attitudes change when songs are listened to without images.

I thank the editor and the international advisory board of *CLCWeb* for the invitation and the publication of these articles. Readers are encouraged to engage in communication with the authors of the papers (e-mail addresses are in the authors' biographical profiles with the articles).

Author's profile: Aldo Nemesio works in textual semiotics, theory of literature, and Italian literature at the University of Torino. To date, he has published *Le prime parole. L'uso dell'incipit nella narrativa dell'Italia unita* (Edizioni dell'Orso, 1990), *I linguaggi della conoscenza. Studi letterari e comunicazione scientifica* (Edizioni dell'Orso, 1994), and the collected volume *L'Esperienza del testo* (Meltemi, 1999), and he has contributed articles to learned journals such as *Esperienze Letterarie*, *Lettere Italiane*, *L'Osservatore politico letterario*, *Paragone*, *Strumenti Critici*, *Studi italiani di linguistica teorica e applicata*, *Studi Piemontesi*, *Il Verri*, and *Versus*. His current research is in empirical research in textual studies. E-mail: <nemesio@cisi.unito.it>.