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8. Worlds from Words: Theories of World-building as Creative Writing Toolbox

Jeremy Scott

8.1 Writingandreading: creative practice and research

Creative writing has been looking at itself quite hard recently. This introspection has been prompted by its increasing popularity as an academic discipline within a higher education context and its need to justify a position in that research-led context as an object of rigorous scholarly activity (see Kroll and Harper5 2013, Sigesmund and Cahnmann-Taylor 2008, Smith and Dean 2009 and Leavy 2009). In short, creative writing is arguably in need of a sound and principled theoretical infrastructure. Previous practioners in this area have suggested poetics, broadly, and narratology, more specifically, as possible candidates for this infrastructure (see, for example, Rodriguez 2008).

The field of poetics has concerned itself with the categorization of types of literary discourse; indeed, Aristotle's collected writings on the subject were for centuries viewed as a rulebook for dramatic and poetic composition. Subsequently, much later literary and linguistic theory, particularly genre theory, narrative theory and the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and György Lukás (Leitch 2001: 88), performed a similar role, exploring the mechanics of narrative fiction from the perspective of its use of language. However, as I have suggested previously (Scott 2014), a more worthy contender for the role of theoretical underpinning for creative writing might be stylistics. To develop this argument in more detail, I wish to suggest here that cognitive poetics and that discipline's focus on processes of linguistic world-building and the mechanics of 'actualizing' readings provide the creative writing with invaluable insights into what happens when readers read.

It is hoped, then, that this chapter will be pioneering, and a survey of potentialities and directions for future exploration rather than in any sense definitive. It considers the

implications of linguistic approaches to textual analysis from, as it were, the other end of the telescope: explicitly *for the creative writer* and his or her creative practice. The central (and simple) proposal for the chapter is this: there is a remarkable facility in the mind of the reader which enables her or him to be transported imaginatively to fictional worlds which may or may not bear relation to his or her actual world: to modern Bangkok, ancient Greece, Victorian London, the mountains of Tolkien's Middle Earth, the surface of Mars. This process might sometimes be referred to in everyday terms as 'suspension of disbelief', but the cognitive poetics term world-building is more accurate and useful. This remarkable facility of human language is something that creative writers should understand and aim to exploit – and, crucially, should also be wary of disrupting unnecessarily (or, at least, be mindful of what happens when it is disrupted). It is in advancing writerly understanding of readerly sensibilities that cognitive poetics, and linguistic theories of world-building specifically, have much to offer practitioners. The writer can gain sophisticated and nuanced appreciation of the ways in which language can be used to create and manipulate worlds that exist at different cognitive, discoursal and rhetorical 'levels' and in different relationships to one another.

There are countless themes within cognitive poetics that are ripe for exploration from the perspective of creative practice. By necessity, this chapter is selective in its scope and will consider the following themes as a starting point for future debate: abstract versus concrete conceptions of world and language; relationships between language and thought and imagination and creativity (schema theory); deixis and empathy' perceived compatabilities between worlds and discourses; and avoiding inhibition of return. Overarching all of these themes will be theoretical architecture drawing on first, Text World Theory and, second, Possible Worlds Theory (although not associated directly with cognitive poetics, Possible Worlds Theory has interest and relevant points to make about the relationship between fiction and truth which shed light on other issues explored in this chapter). A final qualifying point:

the term story world will be used throughout to refer in a general sense to the overarching fictional world invoked by the text in the imagination of the reader, rather than in a strictly theoretical sense (e.g. Herman 2004 and Phelan 2004).

This chapter should not be seen as suggestions towards pedagogy, although of course these ideas could and should have such impact. Rather, its principal purpose is to connect more directly to creative practice out there 'at the coal face', and to the workings and to the workings and interactions between the creative and the critical. Stylistics and its sub-disciplines can aid creative writers involved in practice-led research in articulating rigorously the relationship between creative output and its inputs, thus developing a principled perspective on practice. Lasky (2014: 22) represents these relationships diagrammatically:

INSERT SCOTT FIGURE HERE

The central component of the diagram is the hinge between the panels (the dotted line) that allows movement between them; through exploration of the connections between these processes, it should be possible for creative writers to produce a principled reflection rooted in cognitive poetics that can underpin practice-based research. There are problems inherent here, of course. To name two: overt focus on practice and lead to an excessive and inhibiting self-consciousness; and a disassociation of creative and critical attitudes and aspects can in some instances be undesirable. However, it is hoped that at the very least, the following will lay the ground for subsequent more detailed discussion and debate.

In partial resolution of the second problem, I would like to invoke a neologism coined by the cognitive linguistic Keith Oatley (2003) which allows us not only to view the role of creative practitioner and critical analysis as part and parcel of the same entity, but also to better understand the cognitive processes that are engaged during creative practice. Oatley uses the

term ‘writingandreading’ to describe the way in which two activities, traditionally considered separate, are often intimately bound together.

> ‘Writingandreading’ is not an English world. It should be. We tend to think of the two parts as separate. Pure writing is possible. One may just write an email, careless of syntax and spelling, then press a key, and off it goes into the ether. Pure reading is also possible: one can absorb, if that is an apt metaphor, the information in a newspaper article with almost no thought except what the writer has supplied. More usually we writeandread. … A text is not autonomous. That is to say it does not stand alone: responsibility is distributed between writer and reader (2003: 161).

Oatley refers here to an essential dichotomy which lies at the heart of creative writing and the worlds that it builds: between that which is autonomous and that which is heteronomous (Howarth 2012). If the former term can be used to categorize something that can be demonstrated to exist independently of perception, then the latter refers to that which is brought into existence and validated only by the presence of an observing and sentient consciousness. Dufrenne (1973), from the perspective of literary criticism, views the matter as follows:

> …whoever grants the heteronomous existence of sentences (and thus of the literary work), must also accept all of its autonomous foundations and must not be content with pure acts of consciousness (which are sufficient to define the heteronomy of the intentional object). These supplementary foundations are, on the one hand, the subjective operations which preside over the creation of the work. On the other hand, and above all, they are ‘ideal concepts’ to which the sentences of the work refer and which are actualised in them (209-10).

However, a treatment based on cognitive poetics combined with Oatley’s writingandreading can do better. It can highlight the essential interconnectedness of the ‘sentences’ and ‘ideal concepts’ which they create, in essence by treating the heteronomous worlds formed in the act of reading and the autonomous texts which give birth to them as equivalent and

interchangeable. Creative writing as artefact, as typed or printed words on a page or screen, is autonomous. It has a physical, sensory presence as we turn its pages or, indeed, scroll through it with a mouse or a fingertip. The worlds that it creates in our imaginations are – at least intuitively – heteronomous. In philosophical terms, then, this concept is closely related to phenomenalism: the idea that physical objects, events, properties and artefacts are reducible to mental objects, events, properties and artefacts. To put this as simply as possible, and at the risk of glibness: our thoughts do not just shape out world, they *are* our world. As cognitive poetics can demonstrate, this proposal is analogous to processes of world-building from linguistic prompts as well as the ways in which such worlds take on a powerful, resonant and affective existence in the imagination. It also raises various philosophical and ontological questions. In what sense is the felt experience of a story world different from the felt experience derived from the actual world? How is it that story worlds can take on an existence of their own? We have all had the experience of being truly gripped, moved, gladdened or saddened by a poem or story; if the worlds that these texts create are 'unreal', then how do they both stimulate and simulate real emotional responses? (See Stockwell 2002: 171-3 and Oatley 1992: 18-20 for further discussion, of this as well as some theoretical propositions in response to the question).

Creative practice at its most invigorating should involve becoming both writer and reader at the same time, through the processes of writingandreading. The act of creative writing is characterized by the two activities being more integrated, or part and parcel of the same process: to write as we read, and to read as we write. This assertion is given further strength if we take into account the idea of reading as performance as formulated through reception theory. Any text constructed from language is not simply 'received' in a passive sense by its reader (Jauss 1982), but is interpreted according to individual cultural contexts

and lived experience. Cognitive poetics also asserts this via its appropriation of Schema Theory: see Bartlett 1932; Jeffries 2001; Shank and Abelson 1977, and Semino 2001).

A schema (Bartlett 1932, Shank and Abelson 1977) is a cognitive framework that helps the participant in the discourse world (in the case of creative writing, the reader) to sort, organize and interpret incoming linguistic information by activating pre-existing 'mental baggage', often dependent on cultural context and background. For example, British and Irish readers will have a particular 'pub' schema which will be activated when processing that noun, calling to mind mental representations of a bar area, beer taps, glasses, customers, the smell of food, the hum of conversation and so on. Schemas allow shortcuts to be taken when interpreting the, often complex, linguistic information provided by a text. It is this facility in the mind of the reader that writers exploit when,proving linguistic cues from which readers subsequently build worlds; from minimal linguistic input, a rich and complex text-world can be constructed cognitively through a combination of the 'top down' information stored in the relevant schema (say, the pub schema mentioned above) with 'bottom up' linguistic information from the text itself (which might impart more specific information, building on the initial schema: the pub has a thatched roof and is next to a pond, for example). The reader's perception of the world built by a text is dependent upon the ways in which that reader's package of schemas is reinforced or challenged during the act of reading (Semino 1997: 119). I am proposing a melding of schema-based conceptions of world-building (focused on reading practice) with stylistic analysis of the discourse of the text, and placing an awareness of this combination at the forefront of creative practice. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to exploring just a few of the many ways in which this could be done.

8.2 Words and worlds

One of the principal cognitive models for understanding what happens when a reader processes discourse is Text World Theory (Gavins 2007; Werth 1999), which can be aligned with the *reading* end of Oatley's neologism. 'Steam' stylistics/narratology (Carter 2010: 61) can be aligned to the *writing* end. To reiterate: creative writers should think of writingandreading as a synthesis of complementary and inseparable activities. However, I wish to demonstrate in this section that one or the other will be in the ascendency during different stages of the creative process, and that Text World Theory can help show how this happens and why.

To illustrate this notion more concretely, it will be useful to turn to a literary example. In Jorge Luis Borges's short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (2000: 72), the author posits the existence of a world, Tlön, where a language is spoken/written that does not contain nouns. Without nouns, argues the narrator, all Western thought becomes impossible. He cites the following example (the numbering is my own for ease of reference):

(1) The moon rose above the water.

This sentence is rendered in the Tlönic language as follows:

(2) Hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö.

To attempt a translation into English that is syntactically rather than semantically authentic, the narrator offers the following:

(3) Upward behind the onstreaming it mooned.

This ‘syntactic simulation’ (3) has two prepositions (*upward* and *behind*), an article, a neologistic verb-as-noun or gerund (*onstreaming*) and a past tense verb (*it mooned*). In keeping with the cognitive approach, we should posit that the syntactical simulation has a cognitive effect. To lend weight to this assertion, it will be useful to invoke the Generalization Commitment (Lakoff 1990, Langaker 1991 and 1999) which asserts that different levels of language share common features. Accordingly, there is no clear separation between syntax and semantics; in the cognitive view, syntactc structures are themselves inherently meaningful. Thus, the structures and systems of language have an impact on the way we create a text-world in response to a discoursal prompt. This effect should be of great interest to the creative writer.

What is the nature of the text-world produced by the linguistically-deviant sentence (3)? While both sentence (1) and sentence (3) cue the construction of text-worlds containing world-building and function-advancing elements, the text-world built by sentence (1) will be qualitatively different due to the schemas invoked, which will be drawn from previous readings, experiences and imaginings of that (relatively) commonplace scene. The text-world built by (3), with its deviant syntax, will be built with reference to sentence (1), which haunts the background of the ‘literal’ translation. Thus: in (3), our ‘writing’ of the sentence as we read it, as we build a world from it, is demonstrable, dynamic and obvious; in (1), it is less obvious, but the process is taking place nonetheless. We writeandread in both cases, but on a cline. 3 emphasizes the writing end of that cline, (2), the reading end.

8.3 Deixis and empathy

The ways in which a reader builds worlds in response to a piece of creative writing is also related to deictic function. As already mentioned, cognitive approaches to discourse are based on the idea that mind and body are inextricably connected, and that the centre of perception

in cognitive terms equates more or less neatly with the deictic centre, or origo. Evidence for this comes from the language we use to position ourselves in relation to the world around us, giving rise to a – often inescapable – sense of subjectivity. However, deixis is not limited to spatial descriptives, but can also refer to the position of objects and entities, and to perception, time and relation. It is deictic function that allows world-building elements in a text-world to take effect.

A further important point can be drawn from this discussion of relations between language and perception, and that is how deixis helps us to identity with the characters of a text, or, more specifically, to experience empathy. Stockwell (2002: 43) refers to this process as 'deictic projection'. In everyday discourse, we are able to 'throw' our deictic centre (in a similar way to the way a ventriloquist throws his or her voice) to occupy an external position by saying, for example, 'Look behind you!' or 'It's to your right.' Put simply, it is this deictic function of language that allows readers to empathize with characters, narrators and their situations.

It is obviously desirable to shy away from making too many hard-and-fast pronouncements about what constitutes 'good' writing, but I would argue with some confidence that the creation (or simulation) of empathetic engagement is as close as we can get to one (see Keen 2010 for a principled account of the significance of empathy in the study of the novel). Readers are more likely to empathize with autonomous objects (such as fellow human beings) than with heteronomous notions or concepts. Through its proposal that readers conceptually project to the contextual locus of the speaker of deictic cues in order to comprehend them, Deictic Shift Theory (e.g. Gilbraith 1995) offers a model of how the deictic references determining contextual coordinates are processed by readers, how they render the deictic centre of the text autonomous (making 'concrete' the simulated actions,

perceptions, experiences etc. of the narrator of character), and how this contributes to readers' conceptualization of the world of the story.

Deictic Shift Theory accounts for the psychological and physical processes whereby our own deictic centre (both spatial and ontological) can be transposed to form an imaginative structure that we construct both conceptually and orientationally. Our deictic centre, or *origo*, is then used within this imaginative structure to orient ourselves. Merleau-Ponty (1962: 112) called this process 'a summoning of the body's freedom from immediacy.' In creative practice, the writer should be mindful of levels of engagement, or freedom from intimacy, and where on the scale of empathetic engagement the reader will situate him- or herself in relation to the text through deictic shifting. Of course, it should be mentioned too that some creative writing will deliberately alienate the reader, or attempt to defamiliarize his or her reading experience (see section 8.5).

8.4 Compatibility: real worlds and fictional worlds

If the previous section explored how discourse is related to or 'attached' to real world objects, and, accordingly, how readers build worlds in response to it, then this section concerns itself with the ontological nature of worlds built from words, their status as fiction, and the ways in which exploration of these questions can be brought to bear on practice. The previous section drew on Text World Theory, a model designed to account for discourse processing. Here, Possible Worlds Theory (Bell 2010; Dolezel 1998; Ronen 1994; Ryan 1992) in relation to world-building will be called into service due to its connection with truth-conditional semantics, which provides the creative writer with a way of thinking explicitly about the status as 'truth' of his or her created, imaginary world as well as the relationship between it and the context (actual world) in which the creative practice takes place.

To call a spade a spade is to state that which is true and verifiable in its own terms (in other words, those of the world in which it is uttered: the actual world). To call a spade a rake raises obvious questions about the relationship between signifier and signified in the sentence; in semantic terms, the truth conditions of the sentence are called into question. However, what happens if a sentence is written or uttered, but the match to actual world conditions is unsuccessful? This is the case in the sentence above, rephrased as 'a spade is a rake'. Of course, we can quite easily conceive of a situation in which a rake might be used as a spade (they are similar enough in function; more on this notion shortly) – and this is precisely the point. Human language, uniquely (as far as we know), can be used to refer to worlds that are other than the world that is; i.e. to abstract conceptions of worlds that are not based in the current 'reality' of the discourse situation. However, that reality is conceived in Possible Worlds Theory as the sum of the imaginable rather than as the sum of what exists physically. The centre of this system is known as the actual world (AW), while the conceivable worlds within it are non-actual possible worlds (APWs). Crucially, for the purposes of this section: for a world to be deemed possible, it must be linked to the AW by a relation of accessibility, which refers to the various ways in which the APWs are connected/linked to the AW. On the basis of this model, we can define a proposition as necessary if it is true in all worlds linked to the AW (including the AW itself); as possible if it is true in only some of these worlds; as impossible (e.g. contradictory) if it is false in all of them; and as true, without being necessary, if it is verified in the actual world of the system but not in some other possible world.

This is the essence of how fiction works. Reality has a modal structure that is made up of a world that is actual, and then an – in principle – infinite number of possible worlds. Fiction, then, is a particular version of reality where a world treated as actual is circled by a number of other worlds which are non-actual. Fiction arises through what Ryan (1984, 1991)

describes as recentering; the implied reader's frame of reference as used for locating notions of possibility and truth shifts from the AW to a possible world. Crucially, however (and I would argue that this point is of great relevance to creative writers), these worlds must be familiar enough, similar enough, to the AW (the context of the discourse situation) to be recognizable. The point is: the further we stretch the gap between the world of the story and the AW, the more difficult it becomes to maintain that essential contract between reader and writer.

Ryan (1991: 32-3) has established a typology of fictional worlds based on consideration of their possibility in relation to fictional genre. Taking as a starting point the already-outlined assumption that 'possibility' means accessibility from the world which stand at the centre of a given system, Ryan defines the characteristics of each world type in terms of accessibility relations linking the actual worlds to the worlds projected by various types of fictional text. In the following quotation, TAW standard for 'Textual Actual World' (the world upon which the reader's frame of reference has been re-centred).

> In decreasing order of stringency, the relevant types of accessibility relations from AW involved in the construction of TAW include the following:
>
> a) *Identity of properties:* TAW is accessible from AW if the objects common to TAW and AW have the same properties.
> b) *Identity of inventory:* TAW is accessible from AW if TAW and AW are furnished by the same objects.
> c) *Compatibility of inventory*: TAW is accessible from AW if TAW includes all the members of AW, as well as some native members.

d) *Chronological compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if it takes no temporal relocation for a member of AW to contemplate the entire history of TAW. (This condition means that TAW is no older than AW, i.e. that its present is not posterior in absolute time to AW's present. We can contemplate facts of the past from the viewpoint of the present, but since the future holds no facts, only projections, it takes a relocation beyond the time to regard as facts events located in the future.)

e) *Physical compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if they share natural laws.

f) *Taxonomic compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds contain the same species, and the species are characterized by the same properties. Within F, it may be useful to distinguish between a narrower 'F' stipulating that TAW must contain not only the same inventory of natural species, but also the same type of manufactured objects as found in AW up to the present.

g) *Logical compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds respect the principles of non-contradiction and of excluded middle.

h) *Analytical compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if they share analytical truths, i.e. if objects designated by the same words share the same essential properties.

i) *Linguistic compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if the language in which TAW is described can be understood in AW.

Moving from the top of the list downwards, it can be seen that the first categories describe non-fictional work (TAW is identical with AW). As we move further down the scale, the distance between AW and TAW increases. For example, science fictional novels begin to violate (c), and also (d)-(f) (they often feature different artefacts, different time frames and even different natural laws; their space ships can travel faster than light, say). Once we reach (g) and (h), worlds become logically impossible. Contradictory states of affairs would be admissible, as is the case in Robbe-Grillet's nouveau roman *La Jalousie* (1969), where the principal character is described simultaneously and without any intended irony as both dishonest and honest. He is a high-ranking employee of an old commercial company and also a customs official. The company is performing very well. The company is heading towards bankruptcy and fraud. And so it continues. It is difficult to make firm assertions about such a text's status as fiction, let alone 'truth'. Once we reach (i) on the scale, we are in the realm of nonsense verse and experimental sound poetry; the lack of any correspondence to the AW leads to a lack of any coherent and sustained process of world-building in the imagination of the reader. Sentence 2 from the Borges short story as discussed in 8.3 is a good example of discourse from a world occupying point (i) on the scale.

The lessons for the creative writer are twofold. First: the writer should be wary of the moment of arrest at which the world of the story (and, much less explicitly, the poem) becomes too incompatible, too at odds with, the implied reader's understanding of how the actual world operates. As Ryan's scale shows, this is *not* to inhibit the creation of science fiction or fantasy worlds (these particular possible worlds have an internal coherency of their own). Rather, creative writers should look to avoid story attributes such as character actions, dialogue, imagery, narrative registers which, as far as the reader is concerned, do not accord with or follow from the premises of the fictional world created. For example: a character does something which does not chime with our understanding of her or him from the rest of the

story (character actions can surprise, of course, but should not stretch credulity); a narrator uses language that does not match the reader's understanding of his or her sensibility; a metaphor is created using a source domain that comes from something outside (or not integral to) the TAW of the poem, or a narrator leaves epistemological gaps in her or his mediation of the story world that the reader is unable to fill due to incomplete or incompatible schema. When this moment of arrest happens, the crucial processes of world-building are interrupted and the vital contract between creative writer and reader (the will to suspension of disbelief) is broken. Ryan's typology provides creative writers with a useful and principled scale with which to test the relationship between narrative or poetic discourse and the world of the story and allows us to describe rigorously the degrees of compatibility between the two. It should be useful both editorially (i.e. in terms of rereading and rewriting work after the first draft) when looking for inconsistencies, and also, I would argue, in the midst of creative practice, where deliberately invoking incompatibility might give a piece of work new energy and a new direction (Borges's 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' takes this concept to a highly entertaining and thought-provoking extreme).

To attempt a summary of the notion of accessibility and its pertinence for creative practice, I would like to make use of another aspect of Ryan's work: the Principle of Minimal Departure (Ryan 1980). This principle proposes that when readers construct fictional worlds, they work from an underlying assumption that the two worlds (AW and TAW) share the same properties and attributes unless they are told explicitly otherwise. In other words, this assumption can only be overruled by the text itself; as Semino writes, 'we still assume that everything else matches the world of our experience' (1997: 64). If a poem describes a brown polar bear, then the TAW built in response will contain an animal that resembles the reader's conception of a polar bear (a 'polar bear schema' will be invoked) in every aspect apart from its colour. The statement 'polar bears have four legs and live in the Arctic will of course

remain true in the TAW but the statement 'polar bears have wings and breathe fire' will be false in both worlds, *unless it is specified as true by the text.* This is the Principle of Minimal Departure in essence: readers will default to their understanding of the actual world and will only depart from this understanding if made to do so by the writer.

Second, and to reiterate: language creates possible worlds when the truth conditions surrounding an utterance are not matched in the actual world. This relatively simple concept shows us how fiction 'works' and, as argued, might serve as a reasonable definition of creative writing. It is up to the creative writer to act as a guide through these worlds, however small, however complex, keeping the reader's engagement and interaction with the text in mind at all times. Herein lies the fundamental relevance of theories of world-building to the creative writer: it is in the appeal to a reader that a piece of writing stands or falls.

8.5 Avoiding inhibition of return

As already argued, creative writing requires a reader (and that reader may well be the writer), and it is in the successful activation of readers' schemas that creative writing comes to life (just as, from the perspective of the writer, it is the activity of writingandreading that characterizes the process of creativity). To invoke the famous (infamous?) creative writing dichotomy between showing and telling, or mimesis and diegesis (see Scott 2014: 16-20), it is the former process that exploits and makes use of the reader's capacity to imagine most effectively. If mimesis can be defined as an artistic representation of reality (Auerbach 1946), then language that is less overtly descriptive and proscriptive fulfils this function best by engaging the reader's imagination more actively. A simple example will demonstrate this effect. Take the following sentence:

> The man sat in the armchair by the fire reading a book.

A world will be built in the imagination in response to this sentence. In this world, what age is the man? How is he dressed? What kind of material is the armchair made of? What colour is it? What time of day is it? What kind of book is he reading? Is it dark or light in the room? The answers to these questions are, for me at least, along the following lines: elderly, in a suit, leather, red, evening, old and hardback, dark. The building of the world is also to some extent cumulative, in that once I 'have' the man as old, many of the rest of the (unwritten) world-building elements fall into place. Of course, none of this information is supplied 'bottom up' from textual cues, but comes from schemas. The point is that the sentence could have been written as follows:

> The old man sat in the red leather armchair by the fire one evening wearing a suit and reading an old hardback book in the dark.

However (arguably) this sentence commits the sin of being 'over-written', and is overtly diegetic and descriptive. Too much information is given, and the reader's own capacity for imaginative engagement is mistrusted. Put simply: this is why the creative writer should aim to rely on mimesis over diegesis – sufficient 'space' is left for the reader's imagination to respond to the text. The mimetic function of literary discourse leaves enervating space for the reader's imagination to respond to those foregrounded features of the text by invoking schema to build worlds (bearing in mind the strictures discussed in section 8.4). If the language of the text is mostly diegetic in orientation, that process is to some extent already complete. The writer has done all of the imagining on the reader's behalf. There is less (although never no) need for readerly schema to be activated, disrupted, reinforced or preserved, and thus less space for vibrant and invigorating engagement with the text. The text is positioning itself too far towards the reading end of the writingandreading cline. To put this

another way: given that in Carter and Nash's (1990) assertion that we 'see' though language into the story world beyond, it is important for the writer to decide whether or not she or he wishes that language to be foregrounded (the reader 'looks at' the discourse) or whether it is the story world beyond that should be the focus (the reader 'sees through' the discourse). Of course, many narratives will move backwards and forwards along the writingandreading cline. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is a good example of a novel that, arguably, moves at some point through every possible position along that cline. In addition, it is perfectly possible to conceive of a situation where the writer might wish to emphasize diegetic effect (as in the second example above) for artistic purposes.

In addition, emphasizing the mimetic orientations of narrative discourse during creative practice can help to avoid *inhibition of return,* a concept drawn from cognitive science:

> A literary text uses stylistic patterns to focus attention on a particular feature, within the textual space. The precise nature of those patterns will vary according to circumstances, but attention will only be maintained by constant renewal of the stylistic interest, by a constant process of renewing the figure and ground relationship. This is because attention is typically caught by movement (in the visual field); in fact, elements in view that remain static are swiftly lost to attention: literature is literally a *distraction* that pulls attention away from one element onto the newly presented element (Stockwell 2002: 18).

The 'movement' we look for in a piece of creative writing is a movement of the readerly imagination, a dynamism that is the result of schema being activated, reinforced, disrupted and changed. It should be noted too that schema disruption, in the terms of Possible Worlds Theory, comes about as a result of some degree of incompatibility between the AW and the TAW. If mimetic orientations are at the forefront, then a common problem of beginning creative writers will be avoided: overwriting, or overwrought descriptive language. Resisting

the temptation to *tell too much,* to set the stage too meticulously, is essential if the reader's imagination is to remain engaged and wanting more.

8.6 Summary: suggestions and speculations

It is hoped that this chapter might point the way towards a principled and rigorous reflection on creative practice based on linguistic conceptions of world-building. Given the myriad ways in which cognitive poetics has shed stark and revealing light on the mysterious imaginative processes involved in reading, it would be an insular writer indeed who refused to engage with critical theory that has so much to say about the target of her or his work. The summary and suggestions that follow are intended to prompt further research, exploration and debate in this direction. It is suggested that creative writers would benefit from:

A. Generally, and as an overarching ambition: setting the notion of writingandreading at the centre of the creative process (indeed, as a definition of *creative* writing), with a focus on the ways in which the autonomous features of language can transform into the heteronomous story worlds that inhabit readers' imaginations and the fact that the acts of writing and reading can be viewed as interchangeable. Awareness of what happens when readers read should be a prominent factor in creative practice.
B. Being mindful of the insights of Schema Theory, and the ways in which creative writing can reinforce, disrupt or modify schemas.
C. Considering the extent to which Deictic Shift Theory and deictic projection (Stockwell 2002: 43) account for and enhance the extent to which a reader empathizes with characters and their situations. The appropriateness of the term 'empathy' in this context is also in need of more detailed consideration.

D. Using Text World Theory to interrogate and itemize the internal coherency of individual text-worlds; e.g. ensuring a consistency and acceptability of point of view, checking how much a character knows or does not know about another character or situation, or tracking the progression and consistency of narratives with complex structures. Text World Theory might also be put to service in revealing how multiple text-worlds interact with one another and how this interaction can be used, for example, to enhance themes or emphasize dramatic irony. It should also help creative writers understand the complex but fundamental relationship between discourse, imagination and the worlds that are built in the interaction between the two.

E. Using Possible Worlds Theory to monitor narrative momentum (minimal departure), accessibility and to avoid inhibition of return. Possible Worlds Theory also accounts for the relationship between fictional worlds (TAW) and the actual world (AW) in strict linguistic terms, allowing rigorous reflection on the relationships between fiction and truth. It is not sufficient to dismiss narrative fiction as simply stories that are not 'true'. Possible Worlds Theory poses challenging questions about, and offers constructive ways of exploring, the complex relations between the worlds of fiction and the 'real' world.

F. Using Schema Theory to monitor the merits and contextual appropriateness of diegetically- versus mimetically-oriented narrative discourse, bearing in mind that the disruption and modification of schemas is one of the key processes that lends dynamism and momentum to narrative fiction. This is also relatable to Possible Worlds Theory in that schema modification comes about through a mismatch between AW and TAW.

This chapter has been an extended appeal to creative writers, particularly those who work in an academic context, to consider engaging with these principled critical approaches to linguistic world-building and the relationship between writing and reading. Even if the relevance of this framework is rejected, then it is hoped that some energy can be found in the disagreement. To summarize the notion as far as possible, I would like to turn to Bertrand Russell:

> We have a number of experiences which we call 'seeing the sun'; there is also, according to astronomy, a large lump of hot matter which is the sun. What is the relation of this lump to one of the occurrences called 'seeing the sun'? (2011: 117)

The 'lump of hot matter' is the artefact; 'seeing the sun' is its writingandreading. Both, I would argue, should sit firmly at the heart of the practice and meta-discourses of creative writing.

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