

Introduction

The Framework of Ideas

As show-cased in the pages which follow, the approach to literature as communication has local institutional origins within the English Department of Åbo Akademi University.¹ At the same time, the continuities with scholarship world-wide are substantial. Seen in a longish historical perspective, the approach represents one of the ways of continuing to re-examine the nineteenth-century liberal humanist assumption that literature operates at the level of the universal and addresses itself to human beings who are basically always and everywhere the same. In fact to see literature as communication is to some extent compatible with the emphasis in late-twentieth-century postmodern commentary on the difference between one sociocultural formation and another. But then again, the approach is also in key with types of scholarship which have been moving in a post-postmodern direction, as one might put it, by subjecting postmodern notions of sociocultural difference to careful scrutiny.

Although the world as a whole is still very dangerously fragmented by systematic injustices and ideological conflicts, there are also many places where at the grass-roots level the so-called culture wars of the mid-1990s now seem rather distant. It could be, then, that hesitations about postmodern notions of difference are increasingly fuelled by scholars' own personal experience. Certainly much recent scholarship in the humanities and social sciences has been suggesting that the identity

¹ For the fullest theoretical introduction to the approach, see Roger D. Sell, *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism* (Amsterdam, 2000). The approach is applied to five canonical and two less well known authors in Roger D. Sell, *Mediating Criticism: Literary Scholarship Humanized* (Amsterdam, 2001). References to discussions in article format will be found in later footnotes. Connections with the Åbo Literary Pragmatics Project and the Åbo ChiLPA Project (Children's Literature, Pure and Applied) will be clear from Roger D. Sell (ed.), *Literary Pragmatics* (London, 1991); Sell, "Literary Pragmatics", in Jacob L. Mey (ed.), *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics* (Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 523-36; and Sell (ed.), *Children's Literature as Communication: The ChLLPA Project* (Amsterdam, 2002).

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scripts offered by feminist, queer, ethnic, religious, and postcolonial commentary have sometimes been too hard and fast, in that they allow positional variables a too strongly determining influence, under-emphasizing the extent to which people who ostensibly share one and the same formation might actually differ from each other, and even be internally divided, and correspondingly over-emphasizing the difficulties which people of one formation might have in interacting with people of an ostensibly different one. Even at the height of the culture wars K. Anthony Appiah, speaking as a gay, black male in the United States, was complaining that “[i]f I had to choose between the world of the closet and the world of gay liberation, or between the world of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Black Power, I would, of course, choose in each case the latter. But I would like not to have to choose”.²

In reconsidering the stronger forms of sociocultural determinism, scholars have gone back to theoretical basics, pointing out that Saussure, though he saw *langue*, not as a function of the individual speaker, but as a product that is assimilated by individuals within society, described *parole* as a decidedly individual act that is wilful and intellectual.³ There is now a fairly widespread sense that, no matter whether the structured system be that of the psyche, language, society or culture, human beings *operate* it, and are not to be conflated with it. Film critics, for instance, in forming an impression of some particular film-maker’s complete *oeuvre*, on the one hand see many features as generic—that is, as part of the general production culture of the film industry—but on the other hand insist on their own ability instantly to distinguish it from the *oeuvre* of anybody else. Their sense of both the generic and the personal is captured in the way they refer to a film-maker as an *auteur*, a term sometimes now borrowed into literary criticism, precisely as a compromise between the liberal humanist “author” and Barthesian talk of “the death of the author”.⁴ Cheryl Walker, similarly, has argued that even

² K. Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction”, in Amy Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 149-163, esp. 163.

³ See e.g. Raymond Tallis, *Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism, Irrationalism, Anti-Humanism and Counter-Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 228.

⁴ E.g. Ian A. Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (London, 1994), pp. 35-44.

though authorship can involve formations that are typical of the culture as a whole, it can also carry the patterns of ideation, voice and sensibility of a particular individual, a duality which she examines by means of “persona criticism”, a persona being at once *more* personal than the endless intertextuality examined by poststructuralists and *less* personal than an original author as seen by liberal humanists.⁵ Derek Attridge actually speaks of “idioculture”: that is, of widespread cultural norms and modes of behaviour *as embodied in* a single individual. As he explains, “[a]lthough a large part of an individual’s idioculture may remain stable for some length of time, the complex as a whole is necessarily unstable and subject to constant change; and although one is likely to share much of one’s idioculture with other groups (one’s neighbours, one’s family, one’s age peers, those of the same gender, race, class, and so on), it is always a unique configuration.”⁶ In line with all these developments, the literature-as-communication approach sees the human being as most certainly a social being, but as an individual as well: a social individual.⁷

Another central concept is of course “literature”, where the approach adopts a definition that is nominalistic and circular. Literature is taken to be a body of texts to which readers have awarded the literary cachet. It is a social construction that is already in operation, then, and the starting-point for research is not speculation as to the property or properties which texts have to exhibit in order to qualify for this distinction, but rather an interest in the communicational dimensions of the texts already belonging to the category. That this line of enquiry itself offers an insight into how these texts have actually come to acquire such status is an extra bonus. Of which, more below.

As for “communication”, the approach makes a distinction between communicational activity of two main types, the coercive and the non-coercive, except that the distinction is not absolute because communicators, including literary authors, tend to alternate between the two. Coercive communication corresponds to the theoretical model of most traditional work in the fields of semiotics, linguistics, rhetoric, and

⁵ Cheryl Walker, “Persona Criticism and the Death of the Author”, in William Epstein (ed.), *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* (West Lafayette, 1991), pp. 109-121.

⁶ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London, 2004), p. 21.

⁷ Sell, *Literature as Communication*, pp. 145-158.

literary and cultural studies, where one communicant is thought of as sending a message to the other, who interprets it in the light of a context that is also implied by the sender. So the sender is more active, the receiver more passive, the communication uni-directional, and the context singular. A very great deal of the communication which actually goes on in the world is predominantly of this type, especially in the case of speech and writing that is deliberately and strongly persuasive, or that presupposes a power imbalance in favour of the party who “sends the message”. When communication is less coercive, by contrast, the parties think of each other more as human equals, and are basically comparing notes about something as seen from their different points of view. Non-coercive communication, then, distributes agency more evenly, and is bi-directional and bi-contextual. Communicants each discuss whatever it is they are comparing notes about from within their own life-world, and the very difference between their life-worlds is what makes the process interesting and valuable, even if the two life-world contexts also have to overlap in order for the communication to get started in the first place. The most obvious overlaps are in terms of the actual means of communication being used, plus the existential basics of human life in general: the facts of life and death, primary and secondary needs, relationships with other people, bondings and tensions within a larger society. These common denominators, realized in widely different forms in different cultures, serve as a springboard for the flights of empathy into human otherness which are the very essence of non-coercive communication. As the result of such a process, the area of overlap between the two different life-worlds can actually expand, so that communication is communication in the term’s etymological sense: it is *community-making*. Not that a community is the same thing as a consensus. On the contrary, descriptions of societies, cultures, sub-cultures and communities which represent them as strongly homogeneous are possible only at a very high level of abstraction. The more concrete the description, the more diversity becomes apparent within the grouping, not only between one individual and another, but within a single individual. In fact a community’s strongest bond can be an agreement to dis-agree and to live in a fair amount of uncertainty.

The distinction the approach makes between coercive and non-coercive communication is frankly value-laden, and reflects judgements at work within society itself. Not to put too fine a point on it, to claim

that most human beings do not find coercive communication less rewarding than non-coercive would be disingenuous, and to suggest that research should not deal with such matters would undermine the legitimacy of scholarship as a responsible activity of broad human interest. In these assumptions the approach is strengthened by Habermas's account of communication as a form of action involving an ethical pragmatics,⁸ which also helps to explain why several of this collection's articles speak of non-coercion as communication of a genuine form. Non-coercive communicants do not try to dominate the human other and eliminate its difference, but rather acknowledge that difference and seek to enter into egalitarian communion with it. Seen this way, then, difference, without which there would really be no *need* for communication, does not deterministically reduce the chances of mutual understanding and cooperation. Instead, the social individual is credited with enough imagination, empathy and responsibility to negotiate lines of sociocultural demarcation, and sometimes even to find in the human other a stimulus to change.

By the same token, the approach's account of community is post-postmodern. Because community-making is here less a matter of arriving at an agreement than of comparing notes and trying to understand the other, the number of people who can be in communion with each other is indefinitely large, and the larger that number the more heterogeneous the community will be. Viewed in this light, both liberal humanist universalism and postmodern divisiveness seem somewhat mistaken. Although human beings certainly can communicate universally, this is not because they are all the same. And although there certainly are real sociocultural differences to be taken into account, these do not prevent communion. As far as literary communities go, the approach finds that the liberal humanist idea of a universal canon, and the postmodern idea that there are many different and mutually incompatible canons, are both half-truths, for it can envisage very large communities, including literary communities, in which the self can embrace a wide range of others in a spirit of dialogical give-and-take. Such dialogical communities, though

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vols. 1 & 2* (Boston, 1984, 1987). See Roger D. Sell, "Gadamer, Habermas, and a Re-humanized Literary Scholarship", in Smiljana Koma and Uroš Mozetič (eds), *Literary Criticism as Metacommunity* (Ljubljana, 2007), pp. 213-220.

constantly under threat from more coercive modes of communication, have in practice formed themselves in innumerable kinds of context throughout the whole of human history, and some of them have for many centuries grown up around the discussion of literary texts.⁹

One of the legitimating roles of scholarship can be to mediate between different life-worlds so as to promote the genuine communication which leads to communities that are large and heterogeneous. Literary texts themselves can point the way here, for the mediation they bring to bear is often very powerful, showing it as a social function which can be profitably undertaken no less in the diachronic than in the synchronic dimension, helping readers truly confront the challenge of both the past and the present. Just as important, mediation can be called for at many different levels, both more private and more public, and no less within the field of cultural interchange than within that of high-level international diplomacy. In fact these last two are so closely interrelated that if scholars within both the Western world and the world of Islam had been able to do more to help people within their respective cultures understand each other's sensitivities, then the whole Rushdie affair could perhaps have been avoided, and we might even have been spared the latest war in Iraq. On the one hand, the mediating literary scholar tries to prevent the arrogant presentism by which here-and-now readers may be tempted to silence there-and-then authors by re-writing them in their own image or imposing their own values. On the other hand, the scholar also tries to combat the historical or cultural purism by which here-and-now readers undervalue their own response in the belief that the significance of an instance of language use is defined by, and confined to, the exact circumstances of the original communicational situation. The pay-off of such mediational efforts comes if and when the scholar's own readers find themselves entering into an empathetic dialogue with the otherness of literary authors.¹⁰

⁹ Roger D. Sell, "Postmodernity, literary pragmatics, mediating criticism: Meanings within a large circle of communicants", Fotis Jannidis *et al.* (eds), *Regeln der Bedeutung: Zur Theorie de Bedeutung literarischer Texte* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 103-27.

¹⁰ Roger D. Sell, "Literary Scholarship as Mediation: An Approach to Cultures Past and Present", in Balz Engler and Lucia Michalcak (eds), *Cultures in Contact* (Tübingen, 2007), pp. 35-58.

As this already implies, the approach does not see the bi-directionality of genuine communication as dependent on a feed-back channel. We can be in genuine communication with people we shall never see or make direct contact with. Most obviously, a dead person's last will and testament demands of survivors a response that is ethical in a full sense, and there is even a whole corps of lawyers specially devoted to interpreting such documents, a professional role that is closely analogous to that of a mediating literary scholar. Dialogical communication does not have to be literally in the form of a dialogue; as the result of participants' coerciveness, much ostensible dialogue is entirely undialogical in spirit. Communicationally, the crucial point is not a matter of the number of people who are actually speaking or writing words, but of whether the words that do get used fully recognize the human autonomy of listeners or readers, and of whether listeners or readers are fully responsible in their turn.

This reciprocity perhaps needs to be underlined. Even in the case of Shakespeare, most of whose texts exist in variant states, and whose intentions have for four centuries been so intricately entangled with the intentions of so many other agents (not only ordinary readers, but actors, producers, designers, critics, scholars, politicians, journalists, other authors—the list is really endless), there nevertheless remains a sense that he was a particular human being whose wishes, insofar as interpretation can deduce them, need to be taken into consideration if communication with him is to remain even-handedly genuine. As will already be clear, to say this is not to claim that an author meaning can be distinguished which disallows the responses of other people. Yet the difference between the case of Shakespeare and that of border ballads, for instance, should be just as clear. Ballads, which can be thought of as having welled up anonymously within the folk, call for an interpretative focus that is altogether less personalized. Unlike some neo-Marxist and poststructuralist criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, the literature-as-communication approach does not sweep the responsibilities of writers and readers under the carpet by assimilating a literate tradition of authorship to oral transmission.¹¹

¹¹ See Roger D. Sell, "Henry V and the strength and weakness of words: Shakespearean Philology, Historicist Criticism, Communicative Pragmatics", in Gunnar Sorelius (ed.), *Shakespeare and Scandinavia: A Collection of Nordic Studies* (Newark, 2002), pp. 108-41.

A certain reciprocity is at work even when the communicational process we are involved in is coercive. In order to have any chance of success, all communicators have to observe a whole range of prevailing conventions, not least in matters of knowledge and opinion, in stylistic, genre- and text-type expectations, and in norms of politeness. Such conventions, which affect literary communication at least as much as non-literary, belong to the area of overlap between one person's life-world and another's, and when the overlap here is insufficient for entirely smooth communication we may be dealing with a culture clash. At the same time, though, some deviation from the conventions may be not only possible but half-expected, and can be a major source of communicational dynamism. The general point is that all communication is co-adaptational: if I adapt to you and your life-world, then you may adapt to me and mine; our intentions may meet half-way. From this point of view, the main difference between genuine and coercive communication is that the co-adaptations of genuine communicants are less cynically motivated and more creative.

Among the conventional expectations involved in literary co-adaptation are current ideas about what constitutes literature. During the Renaissance and well into the eighteenth century the concept of letters, polite letters or literature embraced a wide range of different genres, including, for instance, learned works, travelogues and biography. From the nineteenth century well into the twentieth, literature was basically specialized to poetry, drama and novels, and the time's universalist aesthetics tended to idealize literature as Literature with a capital "L", and to discuss it in terms of pure Imagination or Art, as something impersonal and a-historical. Then in postmodern theory, literature was radically historicized, even to the extent of levelling out distinctions between literature and non-literature, or, to say this the other way round, of making the concept of literature even broader than it was three or four hundred years ago. At the watersheds between these major periods, the literary co-adaptations under way made for author-reader relations that were exceptionally challenging. But even within one and the same period, every new literary work can both confirm and modify preconceptions about the genre to which it belongs, about the difference between politeness and impoliteness, and indeed about the world in general.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a particular link was often made between literature and fictionality. Fiction was sometimes thought of as one of literature's defining properties—sometimes almost as a peculiar property. Discussion of the sincerity of Elizabethan sonneteers was ruled out of court, and Fielding was held to be inferior to Henry James because he himself intruded into his own texts, whereas James's more dramatic presentation was said to be closer to pure art. Some of the texts regarded as literary have always been non-fictional, however, and fiction is *not* peculiarly literary. Still more to the point, fiction can be communicational. Both in literature and elsewhere, an “untrue” story is something about which people may compare notes, whether (as in Aristotle) in terms of its mimetic dimension (“Is this what real life is generally like?”), or (as in Sidney) in deontic terms (“Is this what real life ought to be like?”), or in terms of fantasy and heuristics (“Doesn't this interestingly challenge our sense of the way things are and/or ought to be?”). Also, a communicational narratology offers ways of distinguishing between a fiction which is coercively didactic and one which encourages the growth of a large and heterogeneous community, not by answering questions but by raising them. Even a novelist as rumbustiously full of himself as Dickens arranges constellations of characters and events in such a way as to invite readers to make up their own minds.¹²

The Present Collection

Such preparedness for genuine communication can only improve an author's chances with readers, even if it attracts no contemporary comment, and even if it would seem to be in contradiction with the period's more explicit criteria for literature. In the first article collected here, Roger D. Sell points out that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commentators often praised the poetry of Wordsworth for meeting their requirement that literature be universal and impersonally ideal, but sometimes also blamed it for personal impurities, complaining

¹² Roger D. Sell, “Blessings, benefactions and bear's services: *Great Expectations* and communicational narratology”, *European Journal of English Studies* 8 (2004) 49-80.

that the poet's own appearances within the writing were either bullying or fussily preachy and banal. Their rather rigid distinction between the ideal and the personal meant that there was no middle ground where they could have discussed the self-expressive and autobiographical dimensions of Wordsworth in terms of that particular author's relationship with particular types of reader. Unremarked, and in ways that we shall therefore never be able to demonstrate, genuine communication was presumably taking place all along, contributing to the formation of a reading community that was very large and heterogeneous. With the historicizations of postmodern approaches to Wordsworth, criticism at last began to get closer to what must have been happening. The only drawback here was that the facts of sociocultural formation were sometimes seen as actually restricting Wordsworth's interests and appeal. Sell's emphasis, by contrast, is on the generous friendliness of Wordsworthian communication. Wordsworth acknowledges not only his readers' otherness but his own inner divisions and uncertainties, in a poetry which is pleurably democratic in spirit, and which may bring to mind the companionability of Cowper in *The Task*. As an example of communicational good-will, this is something from which our world today could greatly benefit.

The starting-point in the next article, by Juha-Pekka Alarauhio, is the omission of *Empedocles on Etna* from Arnold's collection of 1853. Arnold now felt that *Empedocles* had conceded too much to modern doubt and despair, and had retreated into the kind of solipsistic subjectivity for which he also criticized the Romantics. That is why, in his two short epic poems, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, he developed modes and motifs which are more bracingly Homeric, with a strong emphasis on action. Even here, though, the self-deceptive dangers of subjectivity are very much in evidence, and the real antithesis to solipsism is not so much action as genuine communication. "Action," says Alarauhio, "by offering scope for the kind of stamina and worldly engagement promoted by Arnold *père* at Rugby, does stand a better chance than self-withdrawal and suicide of actually improving human life, and an epic poem may well be more generally beneficial than a lyrical one such as *Empedocles on Etna*. But ignorant action, action based on failures of understanding and empathy, can wreak the most terrible havoc ... [and] the greatest tragedies [... may actually be] afflictions within human relationships, between both individuals and

entire groupings.” The fatal confrontation of father and son in *Sohrab and Rustum* and the automated violence of the gods in *Balder Dead* are above all the result of communicational disasters, and in holding these up for contemplation Arnold is inviting his readers to participate in, and to promote in society at large, a communication which is less dangerously coercive, and which is ultimately the most constructive form of action.

Gunilla Bexar, too, in discussing the difference in tone between John Mitchel’s *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (1860) and Liam O’Flaherty’s *Famine* (1937), registers a binarism of coerciveness and non-coerciveness. Even if Mitchel argues that the British saw the Irish Famine as a chance to wipe the Irish people from the face of the earth, his book purports to be an exercise in history-writing. He was filled with an honest sense of moral outrage at the fate suffered by his fellow-countrymen, and his work was of seminal importance for nationalist discussions of the Famine. But as Bexar shows, he drove his thesis too hard, in terms not only of his adopted tone but of his handling of factual evidence. As a result, he was always divisive, and is now no longer credible. O’Flaherty, by contrast, though also strongly nationalist in sentiment, and though addressing the public not as a historian but a novelist, comes across as truer to history. His novel shows a fascinating tension between his own intrusively nationalistic comments on the story and the story itself. Sometimes his coerciveness does try to win the upper hand, but readers are likely to end up believing, not the teller but the tale, which to the extent that it does suggest reasons for the tragedy shows a large degree of negative capability. Several different lines of explanation seem to emerge and develop alongside each other, some of them not at all flattering to Irish social and religious history. The novel’s readers, while empathizing with many kinds of character and their different points of view, and also with the nationalist narrator, are free to draw or—for that matter—to refrain from drawing their own conclusions.

Inna Lindgrén discusses Kipling’s *Plain Tales from the Hills* as a case of emergent literature. Kipling is writing from within, and for the benefit of, the community of Anglo-Indians, but is at the same time inviting the attention of readers in Britain. Thanks to certain recurrent motifs and character types, his stories partly reinforce the Anglo-Indians’ sense of their own identity, and also partly present this to readers elsewhere in the world as something deserving attention and even respect. His extraordinarily rapid success on the Anglo-Indians’ behalf

can be traced in London reviews of the book's first three editions (Calcutta 1888 and 1889, and London 1890), and neither the faint praise of the more patronizing British critics, nor Indian critics' dislike of his association with the Empire, could prevent his rise to international status, a process which also put the Anglo-Indian community still more clearly on the map. Yet by becoming a world author he also became a less distinctively Anglo-Indian one and, *pari passu*, the Anglo-Indian community started to seem more like other communities. As soon as a literature and its community have asserted their distinctiveness, communication begins to take place across the newly established line of difference, which thereby becomes more fuzzy.¹³ In this particular case, the community which emerged has in any case subsequently lost its political foundation as well, and is one with which very few readers will now be either willing or able to identify at all. Today, Kipling's readership is heterogeneously global. He is admired *in spite of* his community of origin.

Jason Finch seeks to mediate between present-day readers and Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908), drawing particular attention to the novel's main setting in Surrey. While Forster provides a fair amount of explicit loco-description, much of the writing is more loco-allusive, and assumes that readers will be as familiar with the location and its sociocultural and political overtones as the author himself. Whereas the novel's first reviewers clearly did have this kind of first-hand knowledge, mid-century academic critics increasingly did not, and saw Forster in liberal-humanist terms as a writer of universal importance whose local attachments were of no intrinsic interest. When postmodern critics re-historicized Forster without dealing with his locations, the need for Finch's kind of detailed cultural-cum-geographical explication became still more acute. What he shows is that in Forster place is more than just a background. In one sense the novel's themes may be universal enough, but they would not carry exactly the same inflection if the setting were any other. By way of corroboration, Finch also draws on some of Forster's *non-fictional* writing about Surrey, showing that for him the county was peculiarly a place which raised the ethical problems

¹³ Cf. Roger D. Sell, "What's Literary Communication and What's a Literary Community?" in Sonia Faessel and Michel Pérez (eds), *Emergent Literatures and Globalisation: Theory, Society, Politics* (Paris, 2004), pp. 39-45.

associated with ownership. Ultimately, Forster is ideologically ambiguous: sometimes his values are close to socialism; sometimes he seems more like a specimen of bad-tempered gentry, desperately clinging on to his own patch of earth. Although his touch in *A Room with a View* is wonderfully light, even here there is a certain tension, and some satire, to which an understanding of the Surrey milieu can perhaps make present-day readers more alert.

Finch's article would not have been necessary if, in the cultural memory of some present-day readers, the Surrey assumed by Forster's writing had not been non-existent or at least rather dim. The Åbo interest in community-making very much includes the ways in which literary texts draw on, extend, and re-shape what a culture or sub-culture *remembers*, whether consciously or unconsciously, and whether in terms of belief, knowledge, value, institution, practice, skill, image, or artefact.¹⁴ This has led to fruitful collaboration with the English Department of Oulu University, where the many ways in which the past can be re-surfaced in the cultural production of the present is a main concern of Anthony W. Johnson and his colleagues.

The article by Mirja Kuurola, for instance, draws attention to two historical types of discourse which are partially re-surfaced in Caryl Phillips's novel *Cambridge*, set some time between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1834. One of the discourses is that of Cambridge himself, an early black Briton, who having achieved both his freedom and a fine mastery of the English language is then subjected to slavery in the West Indies and in the end taken to court for the killing of a white plantation manager. The other discourse is that of Emily, daughter of the absentee owner of the plantation, who crosses the Atlantic to see it for herself. Cambridge's narrative is close to those written by blacks who really did achieve their freedom, and who came to think of themselves as virtual Englishmen, even if they dared not emulate a native Englishman's freedom of speech. Emily's narrative is in ideological contradiction with that of Cambridge, in that it continues to valorize the European at the expense of the exotically non-European. As Kuurola sees him, Phillips is performing a mediating function here, between the early-nineteenth-century colonial

¹⁴ Roger D. Sell, "Literature, Cultural Memory, Scholarship", *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 21 (2005) 349-364.

past and the postcolonial present, and in this way urging postmodern readers within a large and culturally heterogeneous society to introspection. In the past, the two discourses he highlights could only cross paths, as it were, and never meet to become one. But are there, today, no longer any parallels to this situation? The novel, in other words, is not re-surfacing discursual memories just for the sake of it, or merely to explore the roots of different ethnic groupings. The memories are Phillips's way of trying to promote an ever wider community in the present.

The articles mentioned so far are arranged in the chronological order of the authors they discuss. Ben Jonson, the author dealt with in the last article of the collection, lived from 1572/3 to 1637, but Anthony W. Johnson's interest is in the way cultural memories of him have lived on into our own time, still very much affecting interpretations of his work. The approach here is imagological, distinguishing a considerable number of different images of Ben Jonson that have come down to us, some of them more historically based, some more fanciful. The article traces how they arose in the first place, how they continued to develop over the years, and how at any given point of time they interrelate with each other, one or more of them gaining a stronger social currency while others become more secondary, and some of them apparently contradicting each other. To describe this phenomenon Johnson borrows the term "imageme" from the national imagology of Joep Leerssen, an imageme being "the bandwidth of discursively established character attributes" concerning a given nationality, and in Johnson's extension a given author, and tending to take the general form "Nation X is a nation of contrasts", and in Johnson's extension "Author X is an author of contrasts".¹⁵ Another of his suggestive terms is "avatar", used to describe any fragment of Ben Jonson's imageme that is fairly stable and operates within the culture fairly independently. All in all, it is hard to see how the article could more helpfully mediate between Ben Jonson as an early-modern writer and readers today, precisely because what it highlights is not unbridgeable gaps but continuities, both obvious and less obvious. Thanks to its effortless and richly entertaining erudition, it gives the

¹⁵ Joep T. Leerssen, "The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey", *Poetics Today* 21 (2000) 267-292, esp. 279.

strongest possible sense of a large and diverse literary community whose life has been sustained across four centuries.

Signing Off

So much, then, for literature as communication in general, and for the present collection. Looking ahead, plans are afoot for more work on particular authors, for a large project on mediation, for exploring further implications for literature in language education,¹⁶ and for further cross-fertilizations with linguistics and cultural studies. Most immediately, Ashgate is about to publish Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson (eds), *Writing and Religion in England, 1558-1689: Studies in Community-making and Cultural Memory*, another instance, this, of the collaboration between Åbo and Oulu, and one in which colleagues from elsewhere in Scandinavia, and from Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia, have also participated. Other scholars who would like to join the circle of discussion are warmly invited to get in touch.

Roger D. Sell

¹⁶ Earlier work in this area includes Roger D. Sell, "Reader-learners: Children's novels and participatory pedagogy" in Sell, *Children's Literature*, pp. 263-290, and Charlotta Häggblom, *Young EFL-pupils Reading Multicultural Children's Fiction: An ethnographic case study in a Swedish language primary school in Finland* (Åbo, 2006).