

Bralci in branje kot interakcija z literarnimi besedili

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Koncept branja kot interakcije med bralcem in besedilom nam omogoča, da preučujemo nekatere manj znane razsežnosti procesov branja in literarnega izkustva. Pozornost usmerja na bralčeve dejavnosti pri branju in na bralčev lastni delež pri mentalni predstavi besedila. Takšen koncept branja pomaga tudi pri razumevanju branja elektronskih besedil.

Ključne besede: branje / bralci / recepcijska estetika / literarno izkustvo / interakcija / digitalna literatura

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Opis branja kot procesa bralčeve interakcije z besedilom je danes običajen tako v literarni teoriji, posebej v teoriji bralčevega odziva, kot tudi v psihologiji branja. Ker vključuje oba, bralca in besedilo oziroma literarno besedilo, nam takšna konceptualizacija branja omogoča, da se osredotočimo na različne razsežnosti te interakcije: na bralčevo vlogo pri tvorjenju pomena v procesu branja, ki ga razumemo bodisi kot besedilni svet ali pa kot mentalno predstavo besedila, na sam proces branja in na potencial besedila, da med branjem poraja različne pomene. Ko se posvetimo posameznim razsežnostim – od bralčeve dejavnosti med linearnim branjem tiskanega besedila do izzivov različnih oblik digitalnih besedil – lahko razumemo, zakaj branje velja za najkompleksnejšo obliko človeškega jezikovnega obnašanja. Na neki način lahko predvidevanjem o kompleksnosti procesa literarnega branja sledimo vse do prvih študij britanskih kritikov bralčevega odziva v zgodnjih dvajsetih letih 20. stoletja.¹

Zanimanje za bralca se je porodilo s prizadevanji za prepričljivejši zagovor pomembnosti literature kot nosilke posebne moči komunikacije. Da bi predstavili argument za takšno moč, so razvili koncept bralčeve interakcije z literarnim besedilom kot posebne oblike komunikacije med avtorjem in bralcem, pri kateri se pisateljevo umetniško izkustvo prenese na bralca. Takrat je bilo več avtorjev² prepričanih, da je sporazumevanje v samem temelju književnosti: »Kajti karkoli je že literatura, vsekakor je

komunikacija: brez komunikacije ni literature.« Dokler je kritike zanimalo le preprosto sporočanje literarnih izkustev v abstraktnih pogojih, najpogosteje ne da bi jih dodatno estetsko³ opredelili, se je tak prenos zdel neproblematičen. Ko pa so se lotili podrobne obravnave dejavnosti bralcev v interakciji z besedilom in lastnosti njihovih literarnih izkustev ter pogojev prenosa umetnikovih izkustev v bralčev um, so se pojavili številni problemi, in opisi zapletenosti procesa branja kot jezikovnega prenosa umetniških izkustev so postali težje predstavljeni.

Že leta 1921 je Percy Lubbock govoril o problemih literarnega izkustva kot o »senčni in fantazmagorični obliki« knjige, ki

se topi in premika v spominu; celo v trenutku, ko je obrnjen zadnji list, je velik del knjige, njene fine podrobnosti, že nejasen in dvomljiv. [...] Skupek vtisov, nekaj jasnih točk iz megle negotovosti, to je vse, kar lahko na splošno posedujemo v imenu knjige. Izkustvo branja je nekaj pustilo za sabo in te ostanke imenujemo z imenom knjige. (Lubbock 1)

Prav tako je opazil, da bralci med branjem knjigo pogosto obravnavajo kot del življenja, ki jih obkroža, saj izbirajo dele, ki jih najintenzivneje zadevajo. Ustvarjanje te vrste je po njegovem vsakdanja praksa:

[N]enehno sestavljamo skupaj svojo razdrobljeno izkustvo bližnjih ljudi in v mislih oblikujemo njihove podobe. Na ta način ustvarjamo svoj svet; delno, nepopolno in zelo naključno, a stalno vsakdo obravnava svoje izkustvo kot umetnik. (Lubbock 7)

Na podlagi vzporednosti med procesom branja in dnevno dejavnostjo nepopolne zaznave in razumevanja se je Lubbock začel spraševati, kako s pozornejšimi načini branja literarnega besedila premagati to splošno lastnost branja, ki bralcu ponuja tako nezanesljivo osnovo za pogovor o literaturi.

Bralčeva težnja k izbiranju posameznih besedilnih podatkov v skladu z njegovimi lastnimi zanimanji ni edini dejavnik, ki omejuje besedilni potencial. Vernon Lee obravnava v pogosto ponatisnjenem eseju *The Handling of Words* prenos literarnih izkustev od pisatelja k bralcu kot boj med pisateljevim mišljenjem in čustvovanjem ter bralčevim mišljenjem in čustvovanjem (Lee 65). Poskuša odkriti, zakaj je pisatelju tako težko prepričati bralca, da sprejme njegove besede. Odgovor odkrije v bralčevem drugačnem umu. Pisatelj naredi knjigo ne le iz vsebine svojega lastnega uma, ampak tudi iz vsebine bralčevega uma, zato vpliv literature temelji na večji ali manjši podobnosti med tema umoma. Pisatelj mora ugotoviti, kako manipulirati s »posameznimi vtisi, posameznimi idejami in čustvi v bralčevem umu, ki so tam shranjena brez pisateljevega delovanja« (Lee 1).

Vernon Lee pisateljem priporoča, naj ne nizajo svojih opisov po redu, ki je domač njim, ampak naj se raje potrudijo upoštevati bralca in možnost, da bodo bralčeve lastne misli in čustva motila tujost avtorjevih misli (64). Neogibno odvisnost rezultatov branja od bralčevega predhodnega izkustva in vednosti poudari s primerjavo bralčevih lastnih pomenov in razumevanja besedila z zvoki strun klavirja, na katerem lahko pisatelj/pianist igra le na tipke. Tako tudi zastavi vprašanje o neogibni razliki med tem, kar pisatelj ponuja v besedilu, in tem, kar bralec dobi iz besedila kot literarna izkustva. Poskusi opisov tega, o čem govorijo bralci, ko razpravljajo o literarnem besedilu, in vprašanja o pomembnosti njihovega lastnega prispevka pri branju vedno znova privlačijo kritiško pozornost.

Obrat k bralcu v sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja

Vprašanja o pogojih in lastnostih bralčeve interakcije z literarnim besedilom v procesih sestavljanja besedilnega pomena so raziskovalci literature začeli ponovno zastavljati v sedemdesetih letih, ko je bralčeva interakcija z besedilom postala osrednja problematika. Zanimanje za bralčevo ustvarjalno vlogo pri nastajanju besedilnega pomena je spodbudilo nastanek številnih del o bralcih in branju, ki so priznavala pomembnost vloge bralcev. Poglejmo si nekaj na bralca usmerjenih opisov. Stanley Fish takole piše v predgovoru k študiji *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Presenečen nad grehom: bralec v zgubljenem raj): »Pomen je dogodek, nekaj, kar se ne zgodi na natisnjeni strani, kjer smo navajeni iskati, ampak v interakciji med tokom tiska (ali glasu) in bralčevo-poslušalčevo dejavno posredovalno zavestjo.« (Fish x)

Wolfgangu Iserju se v delu *Bralno dejanje* zdi najtežje pri obravnavi bralčeve interakcije z besedilom opisati prav »dogodek branja«:

Branje je dejavnost, ki jo usmerja besedilo in jo začne bralec, na katerega potem povratno učinkuje to, kar je obdeloval v tem procesu. To interakcijo težko opišemo že zato, ker literarna veda v tej točki ne ponuja kaj dosti trdnih smernic in ker je ta dva pola seveda veliko lažje analizirati kot pa dogajanje, ki se odvija med njima. (Iser 249)

Iser kakor že pred njim Vernon Lee poudarja vlogo predhodne vsebine in izkustva bralčevega uma pri opomenjanju besedila:

[T]ekstna struktura sproža niz predstav, na podlagi katerih se besedilo prevaja v bralčevo recepcijsko zavest. Vsebina takšnih predstav se obarva z zalogo izkustev vsakokratnega bralca, ki predstavlja referenčno ozadje, s pomočjo katerega lahko sprejemamo in obdelamo tudi tiste predstave, ki jih še nismo izkusili. (Iser 67)

Stein Haugom Olsen v delu *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Struktura literarnega razumevanja) trdi, da morajo biti bralci, da bi lahko razumeli literarno besedilo, sposobni uporabiti svoje zunajbesedilno poznavanje življenja za prepoznavanje podobnih predstavitev situacij v literarnih besedilih:

Splošna lastnost literarnih del je, da prikličejo bralčevo poznavanje neliterarnih razsežnosti sveta. Da bi razumel literarno delo, mora biti bralec sposoben prenesti razločevanja in pojme iz običajnega življenja v literarna dela. (Olsen 96)

Videti je, da načinov, na katere bralci uporabljajo zunajliterarno vednost in izkustva v svoji interakciji z besedili, da okrog njih zgradijo »scenarij, besedilni svet, zbir stanj zadev, v katerem postane besedilo smiselno« (Enkvist 7), ni mogoče zajeti z odgovorom na vprašanje, »kaj so vsebine bralčevega uma« in kako prispevajo k razumevanju. Samoumevno se zdi, da si bralci lahko sebe predstavljajo v situacijah, zelo drugačnih od tistih, v katerih so, in da lahko ustvarijo vtise zaznav, ki bi jih lahko imeli, in se delno zavejo, kakšne pomene bi morali videti v njih, vendar si je očitno težko predstavljati, kako se vse to uresniči. Številne raziskave eksperimentalno preučujejo širok razpon različnih osebnostnih značilnosti in besedilnih lastnosti, ki jih lahko obravnavamo kot dejavnike vpliva na bralno interakcijo z besedilom. Tako empirična raziskava Randa Spira (Spiro 313) kaže vlogo bralčevega prejšnjega znanja pri več stopnjah branja: pri bralčevem sprejemanju posameznih delov zgodb, pri izboru tega, kaj si bo zapomnil, pri vpeljevanju tujih elementov in izkrivljanju obstoječih, pri končnem oblikovanju koherentne semantične predstave besedila. Poznejše raziskave poskušajo zajeti še več posebnih razsežnosti branja. Dva skupna projekta Douglasa Viponda in Russella Hunta (Vipond in Hunt; Hunt in Vipond) razpravljata o možnostih različnih načinov literarnega branja, ki jih povzročijo spremenjena bralna nagnjenja ali zanimanja. Opisujeta tudi neposreden vpliv tovrstnih spreminjajočih se odnosov na kakovost branja in vrednotenja. Te analize temeljijo na obsežnem raziskovalnem delu z dejanskimi bralci in so podprte z veljavnimi empiričnimi dokazi ter ponujajo nekatere nove vpoglede v proces branja. A čeprav prispevajo k bolj realistični sliki bralčeve interakcije z besedilom, še vedno ne morejo zadovoljivo odgovoriti na vprašanje o bralčevi dejanski idiosinkratični rabi znanja pri interakciji z besedilom.

Preučevanje posameznih besedilnih lastnosti, tj. besedilnih elementov, ki spodbudijo bralčevo izgrajevanje sveta okrog besedila in podrobnosti tega sveta v bralčevi domišljiji, na prvi pogled obljublja boljše rezultate, kadar sledi linearnosti bralčevih interakcij. Napredek na področju lingvistične in analize diskurza odpira nove poglede in omogoča lingvistično anali-

zo tistih lastnosti besedila, ki sprožajo različne odzive, in struktur, ki organizirajo bralčevo zaznavo posameznih elementov besedila (gl. Fowler), ter ponuja zanimive odgovore na vprašanje, kako literarno besedilo deluje kot posebna oblika družbeno sprejetega govornega dejanja (gl. Pratt; Ong). Tovrstne študije razkrivajo tudi pomembne razsežnosti družbene ukoreninjenosti bralnih interakcij z besedilom, različne vplive na interakcije in uvajajo novo smer analitičnih raziskav, ki podpira intenzivno samorefleksivnost branja. Precejšna kritiška skrb velja preučevanju posameznih lastnosti literarnih besedil, ki pri bralcih povzročajo razne oblike doživljanja.

Marisa Bortolussi in Peter Dixon poskušata podrobneje analizirati bralčevo procesiranje pripovedi v svoji empirični raziskavi *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (Psihonaratologija: Izhodišča za empirični študij literarnega odziva) (gl. Bortolussi in Dixon). Njuna analiza bralčeve interakcije s pripovedjo temelji na interdisciplinarni uporabi gledišč naratologije, literarne vede, lingvistike, epistemologije in odkritij, ki jih prinašata kognitivna psihologija in raziskovanje procesiranja diskurza, ki je osnovano na obširnem eksperimentalnem delu s prirejenimi besedili in poskuša ugotoviti vpliv posameznih besedilnih lastnosti na poskusne bralce. Njuna raziskava, ki preučuje posamezne besedilne učinke na bralce, dosledno razlikovanje med terminom »lastnost besedila«, ki se nanaša na vse, kar je mogoče v besedilu objektivno identificirati, in terminom »bralska konstrukcija«, ki označuje bralsko izkustvo kot dogodke in predstave, ki nastajajo v umu bralcev, vključno z različnimi vrstami subjektivno konstruiranih mentalnih predstav. Zavračata pogosto predpostavko, da je avtorjevo nameravano sporočilo nedvoumno kodirano v besedilu in da je bralčeva naloga v tem, da preprosto dekodira to sporočilo; besedilo, nasprotno, pojmujeta kot spodbudo, na katero se bralci odzovejo.

Bralni odzivi so lahko predmet poljubnega števila vplivov bralčevega mentalnega profila ali bralnega konteksta. V devetih letih svojih raziskav sta se Marisa Bortolussi in Peter Dixon prizadevala sistematično preučiti te vplive z opazovanjem dejanskih bralcev med branjem. Pri tem se zavedata dejstva, da se interakcija bralcev z besedilom spreminja z značilnostmi posameznih bralcev, z naravo besedila in s kontekstom branja. Zato sta prepričana, da zahteva odgovor na osrednje vprašanje, kaj bralci dejansko naredijo z besedilom, obsežne empirične dokaze o tem, kako te spremenljivke delujejo, kakšna je interakcija med njimi in kako se sestavljajo, da določajo interakcijo bralcev z besedili. Njuno obsežno eksperimentalno delo prinaša mnoge zanimive odgovore na vprašanja o različnih podrobnostih bralne interakcije z besedilom, recimo na vprašanje, kako bralci uporabijo svoje predhodno znanje, pričakovanja in prepričanja pri interakciji z besedilnimi lastnostmi karakterizacije, kako pripisujejo različ-

ne poteze literarnim osebam, kako oblikujejo koncepte pripovedovalcev, pripovedne perspektive in prostorske percepcije pripovednih prizorišč. Ne zanemarjata dejstva, da uma ni mogoče neposredno opazovati, tako da kompleksnosti mentalna bralna izkustva ne morejo biti predmet empiričnega opazovanja, pač pa jih lahko spoznavamo samo z določeno mero abstrakcije. Da bi dosegla takšno abstrakcijo, si zamislita skrbno skonstruiranega statističnega bralca.

V tej zvezi velja omeniti, da tudi kognitivna lingvistika uporablja rezultate bralčeve interakcije z besedilom, ki jih psihologija koncipira kot »mentalno predstavo besedila«, ki navadno zadeva zadnjo fazo razumevanja, na kateri se iz besedila pridobljeno znanje integrira s prejšnjimi shemami in postane uporabno za bralca. Lingvisti sicer poudarjajo, da morajo bralci opraviti kompleksno sklepanje o besedilu in sestaviti dodelane modele situacij, ki združujejo podatke iz besedila z znanjem bralcev iz resničnega sveta in omogočajo zanimive vpoglede v semantične procese dejavnega konstruiranja pomena; vendar se v obravnavah branja le bežno dotaknejo narave in oblike takšne mentalne predstave besedil (gl. Kintsch in van Dijk).

V zadnjih desetletjih poskušajo različne raziskave procesa branja na nove načine razrešiti staro vprašanje o čustveni udeleženiosti bralcev pri branju. Na to vprašanje odgovarjajo z novimi analizami različnih čustev, ki lahko spremljajo branje. Razpon teh raziskav sega od motivacije bralcev za branje in ohranjanja zanimanja med branjem do različnih poskusov opisovanja in analiziranja posameznih posebnih čustev, ki spremljajo branje ali so njegov rezultat. Odzivi bralcev na literarno besedilo navadno vsebujejo nekaj čustev, ki jih spodbudi njihovo izkustvo besedila: »Smejal sem se«, »Jokal sem«, ali celo »Strah me je bilo« (Gerrig 179), čeprav gre za čustvene odzive na situacije, o katerih bralci vedo, da niso resnične. Opisi tovrstnih spontanov odzivov lahko vključujejo tudi druga pozitivna čustva, kakršna so občudovanje, navdušenje nad formo besedila in užitek v njegovi lepoti, pa tudi različne negativne odzive. Sposobnost literarnega besedila, da izzove (nekaj) čustvenih odzivov, se zdi samoumevna, in čustveni odziv velja za naravni del razumevanja. Vsi se strinjajo, da morajo bralci uporabiti svoj obstoječi psihološki profil, nagnjenja, zanimanja, vrednote in denimo predsodke, vendar so načini, na katere literarno besedilo nagovori čustva bralcev, in narava tako povzročenih čustev manj jasni. Čustva še vedno veljajo za premalo definirana in ne dovolj preučena. Noël Carroll (»Art« 191) misli, da je čustvena udeležba bralcev pri pripovednem besedilu praviloma rezultat osnovnih čustev, kakršna so strah, jeza, groza, čaščenje, napetost, usmiljenje, občudovanje, ogorčenje, strahospoštovanje, odpor, žalost, sočustvovanje, navdušenje, zaljubljenost ali veselje. Verjame, da čustva ne le držijo bralca »prilepljenega na zgodbo«,

ampak imajo tudi pomembno funkcijo osredotočanja bralčeve pozornosti. Organizirajo tako njegovo pozornost na dogajanje kakor način, kako dojema posamezne dele besedila. Drugi avtorji opozarjajo na pomembno soodvisnost bralnih čustev in spoznavanja ter na vsenavzoče kognitivne podtone čustev (gl. van Peer 218).

Med čustvi, ki se porajajo med branjem, največ pozornosti pritegne ta napetost in empatija. Napetost običajno opisujejo kot čustveno stanje. Več avtorjev vidi v njej odziv bralcev na pripovedne situacije, v katerih je izid, ki bralce intenzivno zanima, negotov, saj tok dogodkov kaže dva logično nasprotujoča si možna rezultata. Eden je moralno pravilen, a neverjeten, drugi pa je moralno napačen ali slab, a zelo verjeten. Besedilo mora spodbuditi bralca k oblikovanju (moralnih) preferenc glede alternativnih izidov; na drugi strani se od bralcev pričakuje, da oblikujejo pričakovanja na osnovi svojega zunajbesedilnega znanja, vrednot, posebnih moralnih sodb in pravil literarnega žanra (gl. Carroll, »The Paradox« 84; Brewer 107; Vorderer 248). Zaradi pogoste uporabe posameznih moralnih premislekov je bralna interakcija z besedili zelo raznolika. To velja tudi za empatijo. Sposobnost vživljanja v položaj druge osebe je prva empirično analizirala razvojna psihologija. Pri branju je ta sposobnost odvisna od individualnega nagnjenja bralcev, da se čustveno odzovejo na druge ljudi, to pa je vzrok za velike razlike med bralci, saj so nekateri ljudje bolj empatični kakor ostali. Suzanne Keen (4) opisuje empatijo kot nadomestno spontano sočustvovanje, ko nekdo opazuje čustveno stanje drugega ali bere o takšnih stanjih. Sposobnost občutiti empatijo pripisuje možganskemu sistemu, ki v zrcalnih nevronih zazna čustva in tako avtomatično sproži občutek skupnih čustev. Ko občutijo empatijo, bralci čutijo, o čemer verjamejo, da so čustva drugih ljudi. Po Keenovi empatija vključuje čustvo in spoznavanje in je istočasno vir bralčevega ugodja. Različna čustva, ki izhajajo iz ugodja med bralno interakcijo z besedilom so bila predmet številnih raziskav, ki so precej različno opisovala ugodja branja (Nell; Gerrig). Razlike v čustvovanju so še večje zaradi uporabe bralčevega lastnega zunajbesedilne vednosti in izkustva. Te razlike imajo pomembno vlogo pri zaznavanju besedila in ubesedovanju literarnega izkustva kot zasebnega mnenja ali kritiške ocene.

Četudi je bila interakcija bralcev z besedilom predmet stotin raziskav in knjig ter obsežno eksperimentalno opazovana, ne moremo trditi, da jo zadovoljivo razumemo. Očitno je, da morajo bralci okoli besedila zgraditi besedilni svet (ali primeren mentalni model), v katerem je besedilo smiselno in ga je mogoče interpretirati. Vendar so načini, kako to poteka, precej idiosinkratični in manj znani. Podobno tudi ne vemo zagotovo, katera razlikovanja in pojme mora biti bralec sposoben prenesti iz običajnega

življenja v branje in kakšna so v resnici čustva, ki spremljajo branje posameznih bralcev. Ko pripovedi niso več obravnavali zgolj kot vir zabave, so jo začeli preučevati interdisciplinarno. Psihologe zanimajo kratkotrajni in vseživljenjski spoznavni, družbeni in čustveni učinki bralčeve »izpostavljenosti«¹ pripovedi. Preučujejo različne razsežnosti čustev, ki se porajajo bralcem pri interakciji s fiktivno pripovedjo pred in med branjem ter po njem (gl. prvo stran v Mar idr.).

Vpliv različnih stilističnih lastnosti besedila na bralce preučujejo tudi eksperimentalno, vendar se ugotovitev individualnih analiz ni mogoče posplošiti na vse oblike interakcije bralcev z besedilom. Vprašanje, kakšni procesi redukcije podatkov so potrebni, da bi dosegli razumevanje pri linearnem branju, je še vedno predmet spora med kognitivnimi lingvisti. Prav tako se kritiki še zmerom soočajo s problemom, kako razložiti razlike med natisnjenim besedilom in »besedilom«² v bralčevi glavi. Čeprav je proces linearnega branja pogosto predmet fMRI preiskav, rezultati tovrstnih slikanj niso mogli sprejemljivo razložiti razlik med bralci.

Raziskovalci vse bolj spoznavajo, da je bralčeva interakcija z besedilom vselej asociativen proces, ki je kot tak obogaten s spominom. Ta obogatitev izvira precej bolj iz avtobiografskega, epizodnega spomina, kakor iz preverljivega, semantičnega spomina, povezanega z besedilnimi podatki. Posamezno razumevanje je torej odvisno od tega, koliko časa je bralec pozoren na posamezen opis in kako učinkovito so taki opisi povezani z bralčevimi lastnimi spominskimi strukturami. To, kakšno vrsto znanja uporabljajo bralci pri branju, je odvisno od specifičnosti njihove lastne situacije in izkustva. Ko se soočajo z literarnim besedilom, očitno najdejo bolj ali manj ustrezne odgovore na vsa tovrstna vprašanja, vendar se načini, na katere uporabljajo svojo vednost in izkustva ter na katere čustvujejo, izmikajo posplošitvam. Psihološke raziskave branja omogočajo vsaj delne odgovore na ta vprašanja. Nedvomno je bilo dokazano (Brooke 361), da so v bralčevi mentalni predstavi besedil (oziroma v besedilnem svetu) podatki, ki jih vsebuje besedilo, in bralčev lastni prispevek iz individualnega znanja, spomina in izkustva tako kompleksno prepleteni, da vira posameznih sestavin mentalne predstave niti strokovnjaki za branje ne morejo z gotovostjo ugotoviti. Tako nas iskanje gotovosti glede bralčeve interakcije očitno vodi do neskončne subjektivnosti branja, ki je odvisna od preveč kompleksnih dejavnikov, da bi jih mogli posplošiti. Eksperimentalne raziskave (*Reader Response*; Miall in Kuiken) lahko osvetlijo nekatere razsežnosti literarnega branja, ne gre pa pričakovati, da lahko razložijo vse razsežnosti interakcije živih bralcev z literarnim besedilom ali njihovo takojšnje in neposredno literarno izkustvo, tj. izkustvo pred poskusi njegove ubeseditve z različnimi interpretacijami.

Izzivi elektronskih besedil

Tehnološki napredek zadnjih dveh desetletij omogoča nastajanje novih form besedil in novih zvrsti literature na elektronskih nosilcih, ki zaradi vse pogostejšega vključevanja vizualnih predstav prinašajo temeljite spremembe pri bralčevi interakciji z elektronskim besedilom. Sprememba od medija strani in knjige, utemeljenega na tisku, do ekrana kot prevladujočega medija komunikacije v novi informacijski tehnologiji povzroča velike premike v logiki predstave sporočil. Tradicionalno organizacijo pisanja, ki ji vlada logika časa, sosledja elementov v času in njihovih časovnih razporeditev, je nadomestila organiziranost podobe, ki ji vlada nasprotna logika prostora, tj. sočasnost vizualnih elementov prostora v prostorsko organizirani razporeditvi (Kress 2). S preprostim vključevanjem vizualnih predstav novi mediji – medmrežje, svetovni splet, CD-ROM-i in računalniški RAM-i – oblikujejo novo področje za pisanje, organizacijo in predstavo besedila. To radikalno preoblikuje tiskano knjigo in od bralca zahteva zelo drugačno interakcijo. Bolter (12) opisuje te medije kot nov, sodoben prostor pisanja, ki uvaja možnost t. i. hipertekstov. V šestdesetih letih, še preden je hipertekst dejansko vzniknil, je Theodor H. Nelson (nav. po Landow 4) opredelil hipertekst kot »nesosledno pisanje«, kot razvejano besedilo, ki bralcu dovoljuje izbire in ga je najbolje brati na interaktivnem zaslonu. Danes nam hipertekst pomeni informacijski medij, ki kombinira besedne in nebesedne podatke: besedila, sestavljena iz kosov besedila, t. i. vozlišč (*nodes*, *lexia*), in iz vizualnih informacij, zvoka, animacij, videa in drugih oblik podatkov, ki so v binarnem kodu in povezani z elektronskimi povezavami. Hipertekst vabi bralca k nelinearni, natančneje, večlinearni/večsosledni interakciji. Vse predstavljene sestavine takega besedila nosijo pomen in so del sporočila, ki naj bi bilo razumljeno istočasno. S svojo digitalno tehnologijo in spremenjenimi razmerji med uporabo jezika, figuralne predstavitve in zvoka novi elektronski teksti/hiperteksti ustvarjajo nove pogoje za doživljanje pomena in podatkov ter omogočajo nove načine bralčeve interakcije z digitalnim besedilom. Enosmernost nadomeščajo z večsmernostjo in zahtevajo interaktivnost.

Hipertekst prinaša tudi stalno nedokončano in nestabilno besedilnost, omejevanje avtoritete besedila in globoke spremembe v razmerju med avtorji in njihovimi bralci. Sestavlja diskretne enote besedila in različne vizualne predstavitve in poleg tega uporablja povezave za opredelitev razmerij med posameznimi elementi besedila. Povezave lahko opravljajo različne funkcije: strukturo naredijo pregledno, omogočajo opombe, vrnejo uporabnika/bralca besedila na osnovni dokument ali ga predstavijo na druge spletne strani. Uporaba povezav spreminja bralčevo interakcijo s hipertekstom: bralno dejanje postane dejanje izbiranja različnih sestavin hiperteksta.

ksta, njihovih posameznih kombinacij in dolžine ter kakovosti pozornosti do vseh teh elementov. Tako morajo bralci ustvariti svoje lastne individualne poti skozi hipertekst in se soočiti z nešteti možnostmi izbire poti, ki jim pravimo tudi verige (*chains*) ali sledi (*trails*). V tem smislu je bralna interakcija zelo drugačna od linearnega branja. Pri branju linearnega romana se pričakuje, da bralec pozabi na proces branja in si predstavlja dogodke in junake, medtem ko mora biti pri interakciji s hipertekstom pozoren na proces, s katerim je besedilo predstavljeno in obnavljano na zaslonu, da lahko nadaljuje z odločanjem in izbiranjem naslednjega zaslona. Bralec je vabljen, da z izbiranjem različnih povezav »krmili« skozi besedilo. Tako je osnovna operacija avtorstva dobesedno prenesena z avtorja na bralca, ki postane sekundarni avtor: »Pri branju hipertekstne fikcije bralec ne le poustvari pripovedi, ampak ustvari in iznajde nove pripovedi, ki si jih primarni avtor ni niti predstavljal.« (Liestol 98)

Uporaba digitalne tehnologije je tudi globoko spremenila načine ustvarjanja in branja literarnih besedil, kar je pripeljalo do pojava novega žanra elektronske književnosti. Ta se razvija v različnih smereh in že obsega različne vrste hibridnih pripovedi in interaktivnih besedil, na primer kombinacijo pripovedi z videom (*vook* in *nook*), ki jih lahko beremo le na e-bralnikih. Čeprav je količina elektronske literature še omejena, so ustanove za podporo njenega razvoja že dejavne. Organizacija za elektronsko literaturo (*The Electronic Literature Organization*) ima poslanstvo, da »spodbuja pisanje, založništvo in branje literature v elektronskih medijih« (Hayles 3). Elektronska literatura po definiciji izključuje tiskano literaturo, ki je bila digitalizirana, in vztraja na »digitalno rojenem«, tj. digitalnem objektu prve generacije, ki je bil ustvarjen z računalnikom in (navadno) namenjen branju na računalniku ali e-bralniku. Kljub temu je odbor za elektronsko literaturo predlagal bolj odprto definicijo, saj govori o »delu s pomembno literarno razsežnostjo, ki s pridom uporablja zmogljivosti in kontekste, kakršne omogočata samostojni ali z medmrežjem povezan računalnik« (prav tam). Prvi zvezek zbirke elektronske književnosti *Electronic Literature Collection* ponuja brezplačno uporabo približno šestdesetih besedil za izobraževalne namene in jasno kaže hibridno naravo e-literature: tretjina besedil nima prepoznavnih besed, skoraj vsa imajo pomembne vizualne komponente in mnoga imajo zvočne efekte (Hayles 4). E-literatura se širi in razvija v več oblik interaktivne fikcije, med katerimi so hipertekstni romani ali kratke zgodbe, hipermedijske pripovedne oblike, ki preoblikujejo filme ali televizijo, hipermedijski digitalni performansi, interaktivna ali kinetična poezija. V Evropi organizira promocijo in raziskave elektronske literature program ELMCIP (Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice: <http://elmcip.net/>) pod okriljem organizacije

HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area). Raziskovalni projekti ELMCIP želijo razširiti definicijo e-literature, da bi poleg hiperfikcije in hiperpoezije vključevala različne prakse, osnovane na besedilu, programirane in omrežne medije, na novih medijih osnovane pripovedi, interaktivne instalacije in druge oblike umetnosti, zavestno proizvedene kot e-literatura in oblikovane s pomočjo instalacije, osnovane na besedilu, performanse in druge medije. Različne oblike e-besedil se razvijajo in spreminjajo: tako so *e-mail* romane, priljubljene v devetdesetih, nedavno nadomestile različne oblike e-besedil, izhajajočih iz mobilnih tehnologij, denimo kratka fikcija za mobilne telefone (Hayles 11). Vsa ta besedila so odvisna od bralčeve dejavne interakcije, saj bralec z uporabo povezav priključuje nove segmente besedila, natančneje, nove zaslone; zato bralce pogosto imenujejo kar »uporabniki«, »zaslonarji« (ang. *screeners*) ali celo »interaktorji«.

Bralčeva interakcija z e-literaturo ima eno skupno lastnost z linearnim branjem: temelji na pripravljenosti in sposobnosti bralcev, da izberejo tiste razsežnosti svojih življenj, ki jih lahko relevantno povežejo z besedilom. Pri branju besed znotraj posameznih blokov pripovednega besedila oziroma vozlišča lahko bralec uporablja konvencionalne, linearne bralne navade. Zaradi interakcije s povezavami pa je branje zelo drugačno, proces dejavnega izbora in oblikovanja poti povzroča razvoj drugačnih bralnih zanimanj in precej drugačnih čustev. Ko bralec zapusti okvir posameznega besedilnega bloka ali vozlišča, mora začeti upoštevati nova pravila in spremenjeno izkustvo, saj mora določiti svojo individualno pot skozi besedilo z izbiranjem med razpoložljivimi povezavami. Izkustvo elektronske literature je vsekakor drugačno od linearnega branja, saj se mora bralec stalno odločati, katere povezave naj izbere, da bi priklical naslednji zaslon, naslednji odsek zgodbe ali podobe; vrstni red teh sestavin v celoti besedil, shranjenih v računalniku, ni vnaprej določen kakor pri linearnem besedilu. Shranjena gradiva hiperteksta omogočajo nešteto poti; z izbiranjem in kombiniranjem elementov, ki obstajajo v prostorskih in nelinearnih aranžmajih vozlišč in povezav, bralci hipertekstov z interakcijo ustvarjajo svoje lastne poti. Z bralčevega stališča je vsako branje hiperteksta v obliki posebne poti linearno, saj se mora bralec premikati od prizora do prizora, se z aktiviranjem povezav sosledno ravnati po poti izbranih elementov besedila. Skoraj nemogoče pa je, da bi dva bralca ustvarila enaki poti skozi isti hipertekst. Ker z izbiranjem individualne poti vsako branje določa zgodbo hiperteksta, je mogoče reči, da hipertekst nima zgodbe in da obstajajo samo različna branja (gl. Bolter 125). Ikonični primer elektronske literature, pripoved Michaela Joycea *afternoon, a story* (popoldne, zgodba) (gl. Joyce) s 539 pripovednimi segmenti in 950 povezavami, je bil predmet mnogih branj znanstvenikov (Bolter 124 isl.; Hayles 59 isl.),

ki so dokazali neizčrpne možnosti branj; vsako branje je z izbiro različnih možnih poti proizvedlo drugačno zgodbo. Spreminjajoče se besede in podobe ustvarjajo neomejene možnosti sestavljanja: literarno delo postane podobno glasbenemu inštrumentu (Hayles 121) ali dogodku posebnega bralčevega sodelovanja. E-besedila vabijo k različnim ravnam sodelovanja med bralcem in besedilom. Ali bo to povzročilo nove predstave o književnosti? Vprašanje, kakšna naj bi bila interakcija neznanstvenih bralcev z elektronsko literaturo, še ni postalo predmet razprav, četudi je že več ameriških univerz uvedlo predmet »Elektronska literatura«.

Žanr e-literature bo z rastjo bo nedvomno zastavljal mnoga nova vprašanja: najpomembnejše bo verjetno zadevalo vlogo jezika, kadar je ta podrejen logiki prostorske organizacije zaslona in ima le delno vlogo v multimodalnem sporočilu. Razprava o mogočih vplivih digitalnega branja na človeške možgane odpira bolj zaskrbljujoča vprašanja: ali bo čedalje krajši razpon pozornosti, ki se pojavlja z e-branjem, onemogočil mlajšim generacijam bralcev, da bi razvili globino misli in sposobnost empatije, kakor ju spodbuja linearno branje (Carr 220); ali bo imel prehod od beročih možganov na vse bolj digitalne (Wolf 14) trajen vpliv na povezave v človeških možganih? Med vsemi temi in podobnimi vprašanji je nekaj gotovo: interakcija bralcev z literarnimi besedili in e-literaturo bo ostala v središču kritiškega preučevanja opomenjanja med literarnim branjem. Ko se bodo bralci družbeno spremenili in postali digitalno gibljivi ter medsebojno povezani, bodo načini interakcije med njimi in besedili zastavila nova vprašanja o tem, kako in zakaj se odzivajo na različne oblike e-besedil.

OPOMBE

¹ Na področju bralčevega odziva je bilo objavljenih toliko raziskav, da bo moj pregled literarnega branja kot interakcije s tekstom zelo selektivna predstavitev tistih, ki omogočajo orisati smernice te razprave.

² Gl. npr. Abercrombie, *An Essay*; Drinkwater; Cruse. I. A. Richards je v knjigi *Principles of Literary Criticism* razvil sofisticirano teorijo o »znanstveno usmerjeni« psihološki vrednosti literarnega izkustva, pozneje pa jo je opustil v študiji *Practical Criticism*, ki je temeljila na poskusih in je kmalu postala najvplivnejše besedilo v poznejšem razvoju raziskav bralčevega odziva.

³ Tedaj so bili mnogi avtorji, ki so izhajali iz teorije »kontinuiranosti literarnega izkustva«, prepričani, da so literarna izkustva tesno povezana z vsem drugim izkustvom in da ne tvorijo ločene kategorije izkustev.

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Readers and Reading as Interaction with Literary Texts

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The concept of reading as the interaction between the reader and the text makes it possible to examine some less studied dimensions of the reading process and the literary experience. It centres attention on what the readers do when they actually read and on their own contribution to the mental representation of the text. Such a concept also helps to understand the reader's interaction with the electronic texts.

Keywords: reading / readers / reception theory / literary experience / interaction / digital literature

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To describe reading as the process of the reader's interaction with texts is common practice in both literary theory, especially in reader-response criticism, and psychology of reading. By including both the reader and the text, or the literary text if that be the case, such conceptualisation of reading makes it possible to focus on different aspects of the interaction, the reader's part in producing meaning in the process of reading conceived as either textual world or the mental representation of the text, the process of reading itself, and the potential of the text to generate various meanings, if read. When attention is paid to individual aspects of the reader's activity during linear reading of print-based texts and the challenges of different formats of digital texts, it is easy to understand why reading is now considered to be the most complex form of human linguistic behaviour. In a way, the anticipations of the complexity of the processes of literary reading can be traced to the earliest studies of some British critics in the 1920s.¹

The interest in readers first started with the endeavours to construct a more persuasive defence of the importance of literature by claiming for it a distinct communicative power. In order to present a persuasive argument for such a power, the reader's interaction with literary texts was conceptualised as a special form of communication between the writer and the reader in which the writer's artistic experience was transferred to

the reader. The fundamental belief: 'For evidently, whatever else literature may be, communication it must be: no communication, no literature' was shared by a number of authors² of the time. As long as the critics were interested simply in communicating literary experiences in abstract terms, most frequently without additionally qualifying them as aesthetic³, such a transfer seemed to be unproblematic. However, when they turned to a detailed discussion of the activities of readers in interaction with texts, the qualities of their literary experiences and the conditions of the transfer of artist's experiences into the reader's mind, there appeared numerous problems, and the complexity of the reading processes as a linguistic transfer of artistic experiences started to seem less easy to conceptualise.

As early as 1921 Percy Lubbock spoke about the problems of literary experience as 'the shadowy and fantasmal form' of a book which

melts and shifts in memory; even at the moment when the last page is turned, a great part of the book, its finer detail, is already vague and doubtful. [...] A cluster of impressions, some clear points emerging from a mist of uncertainty, this is all we can possess, generally speaking, in the name of a book. The experience of reading it has left something behind, and these relics we call by the book's name. (Lubbock 1)

He also came to observe that in reading readers tended to treat a book as a piece of life around them by selecting elements that struck them the most. Creation of this kind is, in his view, daily practice:

[W]e are continually piecing together our fragmentary experience of the people around us and moulding their images in thought. It is the way in which we make our world; partially, imperfectly, very much at haphazard, but still perpetually, everybody deals with his experience as an artist. (Lubbock 7)

The parallel between the process of reading and the daily activities of imperfect perception and understanding lead Lubbock to search for the possibilities of overcoming this common feature of literary reading providing the reader with such an unreliable basis for talking about literature in more attentive ways of reading literary texts.

The reader's tendency to choose individual textual clues from literary texts in accordance with their own interests is not the only factor limiting the potential of what texts have to offer. In her frequently reprinted essay *The Handling of Words*, Vernon Lee perceives the communication of literary experiences from the writer to the reader as a struggle between the thinking and feeling of the writer and the thinking and feeling of the reader (Lee 65). She tries to find out why it is so difficult for writers to persuade the readers and manipulate them to accept writers' words. She

believes the answer lies in the reader's different minds: 'The writer makes his book not merely out of his own mind's content, but out of the reader's mind too, so the impact of literature depends on the greater or lesser similarity of their minds. The writer has to find out how to manipulate 'single impressions, single ideas and emotions stored up in the Reader's mind and deposited there by no act of the Writer's' (Lee 1). She recommends that writers should not follow their descriptions in the order that is familiar to themselves, but rather endeavour to consider the reader and the possibility that the unfamiliarity of the author's thoughts could be distracted by the reader's own different thoughts and feelings (64). She emphasises the inevitable dependence of the results of reading on the reader's own previous experience and knowledge by drawing a parallel between the readers' own meanings and understanding of texts and the sound of the strings of a piano on which the writer/pianist can only play/press the keys. In this way, she also raises the question of the inevitable difference between what is offered by the writer in the text and what the reader gets out of it as literary experiences. The description of what exactly readers talk about when discussing literary texts and the question of the importance of the readers' own contribution in reading will continue to attract critical attention.

The turn to the reader in the 1970s

The questions about the conditions and qualities of readers' interaction with literary texts in processes of assembling textual meanings were reopened by numerous writers of criticism in the 1970s when readers' interaction with texts became the critical preoccupation. The interest in the reader's productive role in the construction of meaning has led to a vast body of scholarship about readers and reading recognising the importance of the readers' part in reading. Let us just have a look at some selected reader-oriented descriptions. In his preface to *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, Stanley Fish observes: 'Meaning is an event, something that happens, not on the page, where we are accustomed to look for it, but in the interaction between the flow of print (or sound) and the active mediating consciousness of a reader-hearer.' (Fish x)

The event of reading seems the most difficult concept of the reader's interaction with texts to be presented by Wolfgang Iser in his *Act of Reading*:

Reading is an activity that is guided by the text; this must be processed by the reader who is then, in turn, affected by what he has processed. It is difficult to describe this interaction, not least because the literary critic has very little to go on

in the way of guidelines, and, of course, the two partners are far easier to analyse than is the event that takes place between them. (Iser 163)

Like Vernon Lee previously, Iser emphasises the role of the pre-existent content and experience in the reader's mind in the production of textual meaning:

[T]he structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness. The actual content of these mental images will be coloured by the reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed. (Iser 38)

In *The Structure of Literary Understanding* Stein Haugom Olsen states that in order to understand literary texts readers must be able to use their extratextual knowledge from daily life to recognise similar presentations of situations in literary texts:

It is a common feature of literary works that they invoke the reader's knowledge of non-literary aspects of the world. To understand a literary work a reader must be able to transfer distinctions and concepts from ordinary living to works of literature. (Olsen 96)

The ways in which readers use extraliterary knowledge and experience in their interaction with texts to build around them a 'scenario, a text world, a set of states of affairs, in which that text makes sense' (Enkvist 7) seem to elude a detailed description of 'what elements in the contents of the reader's mind' and in which ways contribute to their understanding. It is taken for granted that readers can imagine themselves in situations very different from the ones they are in; they can create images of the sensations they could have and become aware, in part, of the meaning they should see in them, but it is obviously difficult to conceive how all this comes true. Countless studies are devoted to an experimental examination of a wide range of different personal characteristics and textual features that could be considered factors influencing readerly interaction with texts. Thus for instance empirical research of Rand Spiro (313) suggests the role of the reader's prior knowledge at several stages of reading: in receiving individual parts of stories, in selecting what is remembered, in the attribution of alien elements and distortion of existent ones and, of course, in the final formulation of the reader's coherent semantic representation of the text. Later research tries to include even more specific aspects of reading. The two joint projects of Douglas Vipond and Russell Hunt (Vipond and Hunt; Hunt and Vipond) discuss the possibilities of different modes

of literary reading as resulting from changed readerly attitudes, or rather interests. They also describe the direct impact of such changing attitudes on the quality of reading and evaluation. Based on extensive research with actual readers and substantiated by valid empirical evidence, such analyses offer new insights into the process of reading and contribute to a more realistic picture of readers' interaction with texts; however, they still cannot satisfactorily answer the questions about the reader's actual idiosyncratic use of their knowledge in interaction with texts.

The examination of individual textual features, i.e., of the elements in the text that provoke readers' world-building around the text and the details in the built-up world in the reader's imagination, at first seems to promise better results when it follows the linearity of readers' interaction. Advances in linguistics and discourse analysis have opened up new vistas for linguistic analysis of textual features triggering various responses and structures organising readers' perceptions of individual text items (see Fowler) and provided interesting insights into the functioning of literary texts as a special form of socially agreed speech acts (see Pratt; Ong). They have revealed important dimensions of the social embeddedness of readerly interactions with texts, the various influences on such interaction, and a new orientation in analytical studies supporting intense self-reflection about reading. Examination of individual properties of literary texts that are responsible for the various experiential states of readers continues to attract critical attention.

A more detailed analysis of such features is attempted in the project by Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon in their empirical study of the reader's processing of narrative, *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (see Bortolussi and Dixon). Their analysis of the reader's interaction with narratives is based on an interdisciplinary use of insights of narratology, literary studies, linguistics, epistemology, and findings of cognitive psychology and discourse processing based on extensive experimental work with manipulated texts aiming to establish the impact of individual textual features on experimental readers. In order to scrutinise individual textual effects on readers, the study maintains a strict distinction between the use of the term 'textual feature' as referring to anything in the text that can be objectively identified, and 'reader's constructions' for readers' experience as events and representations happening in the minds of readers, including various kinds of subjectively constructed mental representations. They reject the frequent earlier assumption that the author's intended message is unambiguously coded in the text and that the reader's task is simply to decode this message; on the contrary, they view the text as a stimulus to which the readers respond.

Readerly responses are possibly subject to any number of influences in the reader's mental makeup or of the reading context. Thus in the nine years of their experimental research Bortolussi and Dixon have endeavoured to examine such influences in a systematic manner by observing actual readers as they read. Perfectly aware of the fact that the readers' interaction with texts vary with the characteristics of individual readers, the nature of the text, and the context in which the reading takes place, they are sure that the answer to the central question: 'What do readers actually do with the text?' requires a large body of empirical evidence on how these variables operate, how they interact, and how they combine to determine the readers' interaction with texts. Their massive experimental work provides several interesting answers concerning various details of readerly interaction with texts, as for instance how readers use their prior knowledge, expectations, and beliefs in interacting with the textual features of characterisation, how they attribute different traits to characters, how they form concepts of narrators, narrative perspective and spatial perceptions of narrative venues. They never lose sight of the fact that the mind cannot be directly observed, which is why the complexities of the mental reading experience are not amenable to empirical observation and individual literary experiences are only knowable with a certain measure of abstraction; to achieve such an abstraction they imagine a carefully constructed statistical reader.

In this connection it is worth mentioning that cognitive linguists are also interested in the results of the reader's interaction with texts that in psychology are conceived of as 'the mental representation of the text', which usually means the final stage of comprehension at which acquired knowledge from the text can be integrated into previous schemas and becomes usable to the reader. Though emphasising that readers must carry out complex reasoning with respect to a text and construct elaborate situation models which integrate information from the text with readers' real-world knowledge and provide interesting insight in the semantic processes of reader's active construction of meaning, linguists dealing with reading have had little to say about the nature and shape of such mental representations of texts (see Kintsch and van Dijk).

In recent decades, various studies of the reading process have tried to resolve in new ways the ancient question of the reader's emotional involvement in reading and to provide answers to this question with new analyses of the various possible emotions accompanying reading. Such studies may range from the reader's motivation for reading, sustaining the interest while reading, to various attempts to describe and analyse particular emotions accompanying reading or resulting from it. Readers'

responses to literary texts are usually believed to include some emotions engendered by their experience of texts like: 'I laughed', 'I cried' and even 'I was frightened' (Gerrig 179), though this means having emotions about situations readers must know to be unreal. Descriptions of such spontaneous responses may also involve other positive emotions such as admiration, fascination with the text's form and delight in its beauty, and include various negative responses. The capacity of literary texts to elicit (some) emotional responses is taken for granted and having emotional responses is considered a natural part of appreciation. It is commonly agreed that readers must bring with them their existent psychological makeup, attitudes, interests, values, prejudices and so forth; however, the ways in which literary texts address the emotions of readers and the nature of emotions elicited in that way are less clear. Emotions are still regarded as underdefined and insufficiently known. Noël Carroll ('Art' 191) believes that the readers' emotional involvement with narrative texts is generally promoted by the garden-variety emotions: fear, anger, horror, reverence, suspense, pity, admiration, indignation, awe, repugnance, grief, compassion, infatuation, comic amusement and the like. He believes that emotions not only are responsible for keeping the reader 'glued to the story' but also have an important function of focusing the reader's attention. They organise the reader's attention in terms of what is going on and the way in which the reader attends to individual parts of the text. In Carroll's view, emotions shape the way in which the reader follows the text and organises perception. Other authors emphasise the important relationship between readerly emotions and cognition and the omnipresent cognitive overtones of emotions (see van Peer 218).

Of the emotions arising during reading, suspense and empathy have attracted the most attention. Suspense is usually described as an emotional state. Several authors view it as the reader's response in narrative situations in which the outcome that concerns the reader intensely is uncertain when the course of events points to two logically opposed outcomes. One of the alternative outcomes is morally correct but improbable, whereas another outcome is morally incorrect or evil, but highly probable. The text must encourage the reader to form some (moral) preferences about alternative outcomes; the readers, on the other hand, are expected to form anticipations by using their extratextual knowledge, values, in particular moral judgments, and genre conventions (see Carroll, 'The Paradox' 84; Brewer 107; Vorderer 248). Because of the frequent condition of the use of individual moral consideration the readers' interaction with texts varies a great deal. This is also the case with empathy. The ability to take another person's perspective was first analysed empirically in developmental

psychology; in reading, it depends on the reader's individual disposition to emotionally react to other people, and this is the reason for considerable differences among readers, since some people are more empathetic whereas others feel little empathy, if at all. Suzanne Keen (4) describes empathy as a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect either in witnessing another's emotional state or when reading about such states. She attributes the capacity to experience empathy to the human brain's system for automatically sharing feelings by registering them in mirror neurons. In experiencing empathy, the readers feel what they believe to be the emotions of other people. In Keen's opinion, empathy involves emotion and cognition and is at the same time a source of the reader's pleasure. The various emotions resulting in pleasure during readerly interaction with texts have been the subject of numerous studies with rather varied descriptions of the pleasures of reading (Nell; Gerrig). Differences of emotions are enhanced by the inclusion of readers' own extratextual knowledge and experiences. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that such differences play an important role in textual perception and all verbalisations of literary experiences, in both private opinions of taste and critical evaluations.

Though the reader's interaction with literary texts has been scrutinised in hundreds of studies and books and extensively examined experimentally, it is premature to say that it has been adequately understood. It is obvious that readers have to build around the text a textual world (or an appropriate mental model) in which the text makes sense and becomes interpretable; the ways of building such textual worlds, however, are rather idiosyncratic and less known. Similarly, we cannot say with certainty what distinctions and concepts from ordinary living the reader must be able to transfer to reading and what the emotions accompanying reading are really like for individual readers. When literary narrative is no longer regarded as primarily a source of entertainment, it becomes a subject of interdisciplinary examination. Psychologists and cognitive scientists are interested in the cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes of 'exposure' to narrative in the short term and over one's lifetime. Various aspects of emotion occurring during readers' interaction with narrative fiction are examined before, during and after reading (see the beginning of Mar et al.).

The impact of various stylistic features of texts on readers has been experimentally examined, yet the insights based on individual analyses cannot be generalised to all forms of readers' interaction with texts. What data reduction processes are necessary in linear reading to achieve comprehension remains unsettled among cognitive linguists. And critics still face the problem of explaining the differences between the text on the page and the 'text' in the reader's head. Though linear reading processes

have been recently a frequent subject of fMRI examination, the insights from such imaging have not resulted in an acceptable explanation of such differences.

More and more researchers have come to realise that the reader's interaction with texts is always an associative and therefore a memory-enriched process. The enrichment derives from autobiographic episodic memory rather than from verifiable semantic memory related to textual information. The individual comprehension therefore depends on how long the reader's attention focuses on individual descriptions and how effectively such descriptions are related to the reader's own memory structures. The kind of knowledge that readers use in reading depends on the idiosyncrasies of their own situation and experience. When confronted with literary texts, readers obviously find more or less successful solutions to all such questions, but the ways in which they use their knowledge and experiences or have emotions seem to defy generalisations. Psychological research into reading provides at least partial answers to such questions. It (Brooke 361) has proved beyond doubt that in the reader's mental representations of texts (or in textual worlds) the information provided by the text and the reader's own contribution from the individual store of knowledge, memory and own experiences are intertwined in so complex ways that the source of individual items in the mental representation cannot be traced with any certainty even by reading specialists. So the search for certainty concerning readers' interaction seems to lead us to infinite subjectivity of reading depending on factors too complex to be generalisable. Experimental research on reading (*Reader Response*; Miall and Kuiken) can shed some light on partial aspects of literary reading but it is hardly expected to explain all the dimensions of living readers' linear interaction with literary texts or describe their immediate prediscursive literary experience, i.e., experience prior to the attempts to verbalise it in various interpretations.

The challenges of electronic texts

The technological development of the last two decades has made possible the production of new forms of texts and new genres of literature on electronic platforms that have introduced profound changes in the reader's interaction with electronic texts due to their ever more frequent inclusion of visual representation. The change from the print-based media of the page and book to the screen as the dominant medium of communication in the new information technology has introduced profound changes in the logic of the representation of messages. The traditional organisation of

writing governed by the logic of time, of sequence of the elements in time and their temporal arrangements has been replaced by the organisation of the image that, by contrast, is governed by the logic of space, by the simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organised arrangements (Kress 2). The new electronic texts: with easy inclusion of visual representation Internet, web, CD-ROMs and computer RAM constitute a new field for recording, organising and presenting texts that radically refashions the printed book and calls for a very different interaction on the part of the reader. Bolter (12) describes these media as the new contemporary writing space that introduces the possibility of the so-called hypertexts. In the 1960s, long before its actual emergence, hypertext was described by Theodor H. Nelson (qtd. in Landow 4) as 'nonsequential writing', a text branching and allowing choices to the reader, best read on an interactive screen. Now hypertext is used to describe an information medium that combines verbal and nonverbal information: a text composed of blocks of text, also called nodes (*lexia*), and of visual information, sound, animation, videos, and other forms of data, all presented in binary codes, connected by electronic links and inviting nonlinear, or rather multilinear/multisequential interaction by the reader. All the presented components of such texts bear meaning and are part of the message to be comprehended simultaneously. With its digital technology and the changed relationship between the use of language and figurative presentation and sound, the new electronic texts/hypertexts create new conditions for experiencing meaning and information and introduce new ways of readers' interaction with digital texts by replacing unidirectionality with bidirectionality and introducing interactivity.

They also introduce perpetually unfinished and unstable textuality, reduced authority of the text, and profound changes in the relationships between the authors and their readers. Besides combining discrete units of text and various visual presentations, hypertexts use links to define relationships between individual textual elements. Links can perform different functions, ranging from making the structure transparent, providing possibilities of footnotes, returning the user/reader of the text to the basic document, to moving the user/reader to other websites. The use of links changes the reader's interaction with hypertexts: the act of reading becomes the act of choosing and deciding among various components of the hypertext, their individual combinations, and the span and quality of attention paid to each of them. Readers thus have to create their own individual paths through the hypertext and face countless possibilities of choosing different paths, also called chains or trails. In this sense readerly interaction with hypertexts is very different from linear reading.

In reading a linear novel, the reader is expected to forget the process of reading and to see the events and characters, whereas in interacting with a hypertext the reader must pay attention to the process by which the text is presented and renewed on the screen in order to continue deciding about and choosing the next screen. The reader is invited to 'navigate' the text by choosing different links. In this way the basic operation of authorship is literally transferred from the author to the reader who becomes a secondary author: 'In reading hypertext fiction the reader not only recreates narratives but creates and invents new ones not even conceived by the primary author.' (Liestol 98)

The use of digital technology has also brought about a profound change in the ways literary texts are created and read, leading to the emergence of a new genre: electronic literature. This genre is developing in different directions and so far includes various kinds of hybrid narratives and interactive texts, for instance the combination of narratives with videos into vooks and nooks that can only be read on e-readers. Though the body/amount of electronic literature is still limited, the institutions supporting its development are already active. The Electronic Literature Organization has the mission to 'promote the writing, publishing and reading of literature in electronic media' (Hayles 3). By definition electronic literature usually excludes print literature that has been digitalised and insists on the 'digital born', i.e., a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer or e-reader; the committee of the Electronic Literature, however, has opted for a more open definition of electronic literature as 'work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer' (ibid.). The first volume of *Electronic Literature Collection* offers free use of some sixty texts for educational purposes and clearly shows the hybrid nature of e-literature: a third have no recognisable words, virtually all have important visual components, and many have sonic effects (Hayles 4). Electronic literature is proliferating and developing into several distinguishable forms of interactive fiction: hypertext novels or short fictions, hypermedia narrative forms that re-fashion films or television, hypermediated digital performance, interactive or kinetic poetry. In Europe electronic literature promotion and research are organised by ELMCIP (Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice: <http://elmcip.net/>) under the auspices of HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area). The ELMCIP research project seeks to expand the definition of e-literature, so besides hyperfiction and hyperpoetry it includes also current diverse text-based practices, programmable and network media, new media based narratives,

interactive installations and other forms of artwork consciously produced as E-literature, shaped through text-based installation, networked art, performance and other media. Various forms of e-texts develop and change, so the email novels that were popular in the 1990s have recently been replaced by various forms of e-texts dependent on mobile technologies such as short fiction delivered on cell phones (Hayles 11). All these texts depend on the reader's active interaction by the use of links to bring up new segments of text, or rather new screens; that is why readers are frequently referred to as users, screeners and even interactors.

The reader's interaction with electronic literature shares one characteristic feature with linear reading: it rests on the readers' willingness and ability to select aspects of their lives which are relevantly attachable to the text. Also, in reading the words inside individual blocks of narrative texts or nodes the reader may use conventional linear reading habits. The interaction by links makes reading very different, the processes of active choice and design to find the path necessarily result in the development of different readerly interests and rather different emotions. Leaving the frame of an individual text unit or node will result in the obligation of the reader to follow new rules and changed experience, since the readers have to determine their individual path through the text by choosing among available links. The experience of electronic literature is certainly different from linear reading because the reader must constantly make decisions as to which link to choose to bring up the next screen, the next segment of the story or image, the order of which is not predetermined as in linear texts by the total of computer-stored materials. The stored materials of a hypertext make possible countless paths through them: in interacting with a hypertext readers create their individual paths by selecting and combining the elements existing in a spatial and nonlinear arrangements of nodes and links. From the reader's point of view, each reading of a hypertext as a special path is linear, in the sense that the reader must move from episode to episode by activating links and follow the path of chosen elements of the text sequentially. It is, however, next to impossible for any two readers to be able to create identical paths through the same hypertext. Because each reading determines the story of a hypertext by choosing an individual path through it, it is possible to say that the hypertext has no story; there exist just various readings of it (see Bolter 125). For instance, the iconic example of electronic literature Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story* (see Joyce) with its 539 narrative segments and 950 links has been subject to several different readings by scholars (Bolter 124 *sq.*; Hayles 59 *sq.*) testifying to inexhaustible possibilities of readings, with each reading producing a different story through choosing various possible paths. Shifting words and

images create an infinite number of possible combinations; a work of literature is thus like an instrument to be played (Hayles 121) or an event of specific instance of the reader's singular interaction. Electronic texts thus invite different levels of interaction between the reader and the text. Will this result in a different model of literature? How the non-scholarly readers are to interact with electronic literature has not yet been discussed though several American universities have already introduced courses on electronic literature.

As it grows, the genre of e-literature will certainly raise lots of new questions: perhaps the most important one concerns the role of language when it is subject to the logic of the spatial organisation of the screen and, accordingly, has only partial role in the multimodal message. The discussion of the possible impacts of digital reading on the human brain opens even more disturbing questions: will the ever-shorter span of attention developing with e-reading make it impossible for the younger generations of readers to develop depth of thought and the capacity of empathy as stimulated by linear reading (Carr 220)? Will the transition from a reading brain to an increasingly digital one (Wolf 14) have a permanent impact on the circuits of the human brain? Amid these and similar questions one thing is certain: Readers' interaction with literary texts and electronic literature will remain in the centre of critical examination of the processes of meaning making in literary reading. As readers become social in new ways, digitally mobile and interconnected, the ways in which they interact with texts will call for new answers to the questions of why and how they respond to what forms of e-texts.

NOTES

¹ So many studies have been published in the field of reader response that my overview of literary reading as interaction with texts will be a very selective presentation of those that make it possible to chart the trend of this discussion.

² See, e.g., Abercrombie; Drinkwater; Cruse. In his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I. A. Richards constructed a sophisticated theory of the 'scientifically oriented' psychological value of literary experience only to be abandoned in his later experimentally based study *Practical Criticism*, which was soon to become the most influential text in the later development of reader-response studies.

³ The belief that literary experiences were continuous with all other experiences and did not form a separate category of experiencing was shared by many authors at that time within the theory of 'continuity of literary experience'.

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