Discussion, Public Lecture and Workshop by

Professor Michael Toolan
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**Discussion:**

**Current and emerging research topics in literary and linguistic studies**

- **Date:** Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2009
- **Venue:** OEM1018, OEN Hall Building (Main), Ho Sin Hang Campus, HKBU
- **Time:** 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

**Abstract**

I would like to initiate a discussion on what I think are currently influential trends and areas of focus, in either literary or linguistic studies. But this will be very much a sharing, not a showing or telling—and quite partial and limited. But the kinds of categories and trends I will suggest we ponder are likely to include this disparate gathering: literary biography; digitization and open-access to archives, early magazines and journals, letters, canonical texts, new economic criticism and literary/cultural economies; revivals of the ethics-aesthetics nexus; globalization and hybridities; the role of the Institutes for Advanced Studies in the Humanities; translation and adaptation studies; electronic literature; multimodality and multimodal analysis; cognitive poetics; reading groups; and cyberstudy.

**Public Lecture:**

**Darwinian Narratology**

- **Date:** Friday, Dec. 11, 2009
- **Venue:** RRS905, Sir Run Run Shaw Building Ho Sin Hang Campus, HKBU
- **Time:** 3:30 – 5:00 pm

**Abstract**

In this talk I discuss the at least indirect (if not direct) influence, on literary narratives of the past 150 years, of Darwinian ideas about things happening (evolving) without an overarching narrative plan or design. At the very least, we see in 20th century literary narratives the noticeable persistence and even growth in the invoking of coincidence, contingency, sheer good luck and bad luck—which are often frowned upon in traditional narrative theory (including the ancient Greeks) as lacking unity, coherence, logical connection, 'strong' causation—in literary story or the 'thread' of narrativity. Versions of accident and unforeseeable happenstance are strikingly prominent in much fiction in recent years (evident even in Darwin's contemporaries (George Eliot, Dickens, Hardy), then reaching first the modernist novel, and certainly becoming epidemic in the postmodern novel. But I am particularly interested in the 'spread' of unplanned progression (more casual than causal) to the usually much more constrained and 'carefully wrought' genre of the short story, using several recent stories by Alice Munro as sources of exemplification. I am especially interested in the language in which these 'not very purposive/causal' narratives are articulated, how the seemingly purpose-less unrolling of events is textualised.

**Workshop:**

**How do literary texts generate reader emotions? A stylistic approach**

- **Date:** Thursday, Dec. 17, 2009
- **Venue:** OEM1018, OEN Hall Building (Main), Ho Sin Hang Campus, HKBU
- **Time:** 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

**Abstract**

A major attraction and effect of literary works, noted since antiquity, is that they often cause readers to be moved, to feel empathy or 'immersed' or involved, to a degree beyond how much real and everyday reported events affect them. And this, despite the fact that the reported situations are fictional (the 'quality of the evidence' may be a factor).

Are there particular elements or strands in literary texts (e.g., in short stories), isolatable with the aid of linguistics or stylistics, which are especially instrumental in the creation of reader emotional involvement? Can proposed 'hotspots' of emotional engagement (such as the textual projections of individuals' consciousness via desire modality and evaluating mental process verbs, and such individual predicates as feel) be falsifiably demonstrated, by testing reader responses? Workshop materials will include at least one short story (McGahern, 'All Sorts of Impossible Things')

**Bio-statement**

Michael Toolan teaches and researches in Stylistics and Narrative Analysis at the University of Birmingham, where he is currently Head of the Department of English. He is editor of the Journal of Literary Semantics.

~ All Are Welcome ~

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