Cognitive Poetics: Blending Narrative Mental Spaces. Self-Construal and Identity in Short Literary Fiction

Gabriela Tucan
West University of Timişoara

Abstract

The present study seeks to explore some of the major assumptions made by cognitive linguists regarding language in an attempt to see how various language processes can participate in the emergence of literary meaning. Also, this is an attempt to bridge the gap between linguistics and literary studies. For that purpose, linguistic work with a cognitive orientation can open the floor to one highly debatable question in critical literary theory: the question of interpretation. The primary step in order to meet my objectives is the presentation of a model of analysis that investigates the processes of meaning formation in literary texts – the theory of blending seems to be extremely suitable for an account of meaning formation. I believe that my article can profit substantially from the wide array of instruments provided by the blending theory in order to understand the nature of the reader's mind while reading literary (short) stories. The study of the basic mental operation of blending is motivated by the general relationship of cognitive poetics and narrative theories. To this end, I will be extensively making use of the blending framework in order to address its narrative implications in two of Hemingway's already canonical short stories – *Big Two-Hearted River* and *Soldier's Home*. What I hope to demonstrate is that the conceptualization of the narrative mental spaces in these two short stories always has counterfactuality available and uses it as a valuable mental resource. Also, I will try to show that conceptual integration/ blending plays a central role in the self-construal of characters' identity.

1. Introduction

The turn to cognition in the humanities in the 1990s and the subsequent "disciplinary migration" (Herman et al., *Narrative Ubiquity*) into the social sciences and other research domains has had radical consequences for literary studies. There is of course one major claim that changes the nature of literary studies: if literature is understood as a product of the human mind, then literary creations are grounded in our general cognitive abilities. This means that literary studies need to develop new tools for understanding the complexities of language and cognition, strongly anchored in the minute architecture of our bodies and brain. It is evident that the change of status of literary studies has implications for the broad area of literary criticism, for the studies of stylistics or narratology, and cognitive poetics. While we should bear in mind that each of these disciplines has its own individual goals and research methods, they have all contributed to the cognitive study of literature. Indeed, literary scholars have been making systematic efforts in this sense and have shown real interest in the challenging disciplinary boundaries for the

study of cognition. Many literary critics and theorists have been attracted by intriguing cognitivist methods, and by related topics and principles that dominate today's academic arena. Their commitment to revolutionize the field primarily derives from the belief that literature has much to offer in the dialogue between sciences. In truth, literature can make an essential contribution to the understanding of our mind. The investigation of the structures emerging when we produce and comprehend stories can be integrated in research programs on cognition. Literary studies can ultimately give us an insight into human cognition and mental work.

The literary critics' turn to cognitive science derives in large part from their increasing dissatisfaction with post-structuralist limitations in the approach to meaning and interpretation. Bound almost exclusively to theoretical concerns, constructionists, deconstructionists, new-historicists and other post-structuralist critics find the text "guilty of crimes of class, patriarchy, or race, or declared indifferent to human concerns as the inhabitant of a world of pure language" (Miall 327). In contrast, cognitive poeticians and rhetoricians take the opposite research direction by moving away from the theoretical framework that defines post-structuralist studies in literature. Their approach is more humanistic and pragmatic in the sense that the reader is now recognized as "embodied intelligence", which means that readers are considered real embodied people who undertake intriguing narrative processes of comprehension, ready to be discovered. Grown out of a "spreading dissatisfaction with the more bleakly relativistic and antihumanist stands of poststructuralism" (Richardson and Steen 1), the new interdisciplinary reorientation sets a new goal for the new science of cognitive poetics: the rethinking of literature from a cognitive standpoint and the call for literary studies to lead the way to new revelations of mind.

In his groundbreaking work on the study of English, *Reading Minds*, Mark Turner is one of the first critical figures to voice criticism of contemporary literary world – he defines it as an "ungrounded and fragmented" (3) field, arguably reserved only for specialists. The critic thus proposes a reconsideration of the main claims of the theoretical critical field in light of the newer lines of research coming from cognitive sciences:

> The neglect of contemporary critical theory to analyze literature as the expression of everyday capacities and to help us understand those capacities cuts it from the full human world, making it a special world, simpler than the human world, smaller and marginal, exhilarating as a magic kingdom contained within its own walls, often viewed derisively as an exclusive Disney World for literary critics. (4)

The approach Turner offers in his cognitive rhetoric seems to be motivated by the general need to move literary criticism to a newer stage where language, literature and mind work together. This continuity between literary language, the 'natural' or ordinary language, and our conceptual resources allows us to understand the inner details of our imagination and our soaring creative abilities. Above all, literature should be regarded as a 'system' disclosing, through language use, our complex conceptual capacities. And if we come to an intimate understanding of this system, we will eventually begin to see the ground of our thinking and language.

This leads to the conclusion that literature and literary criticism cannot be separated from our everyday human life, as in literary works we use the same conceptual schemas and connections as we normally employ in commonplace utterances. The complex consequences of a cognitive analysis of literary texts arguably disclose a massive amount of commonplace conceptual knowledge. Nevertheless, by claiming that literature is

grounded in ordinary conceptual patterns, cognitive poetics does not aim to reduce literary language to everyday speech or make them homogenous. Rather, the aim is to make literature "human", as nicely put by Turner (*Reading Minds* 246). Without a proper understanding of the common conceptual ground for both everyday speech and literary pieces, literature would be far too complicated to decipher:

> It is only by being constituted upon commonplace conceptual patterns that provide most of the meaning to literary texts that literary texts can be for us something other than impossible questions, opaque challenges, bizarre and mute anomalies. (246)

Essentially, literature exists because both writers and readers bring to the text our ordinary linguistic skills and conceptual structures in order to construct meaning. It is due to this existing repertory of linguistic knowledge and conceptual thoughts that literature becomes possible. It is therefore hard to imagine literature alone, independent of everyday language or ordinary concepts conventionally embedded into language. Without this basic condition (the sharing of language and conceptual resources), literature would fail to make sense. The only difference between ordinary speakers and great writers is one of degree, not of essence: writers' language mastery allows them to investigate new aspects of language and refine conceptual patterns or conventional resources.

2. Cognitive poetics – the turn to embodied cognition

If cognitive poetics promises to bring to the fore the sense-making operations performed by the human mind within the human body, bearing a unique physical and cognitive architecture, it suggests that meanings can be explained with reference to general principles of linguistic operations. This ties literary studies in with cognitive linguistics. One central assumption in cognitive linguistics is that a large number of the meanings we construct are motivated by our bodily experience. In this sense, the cognitive theory of "embodiment" (see Johnson; Lakoff; Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors We Live By* and *Philosophy in the Flesh*) explicitly summarizes this view: our conceptual categories and structures, the meanings of words and linguistic contexts, are constructed on the basis of experience, under the restraints imposed by our bodies. What cognitive linguistics proposes, in essence, is an analysis of the human ability to understand and create meanings. One of the major consequences of such an account of language is the increased importance given to imagination and to the exploration of the roots of human creativity. In truth, much of the work of cognitive linguistics provides a firm basis for the investigation of language and the other immensely complex realities of cognition.

In this article I seek to explore some of the assumptions made by cognitive linguists regarding language in an attempt to see how various language processes can participate in the emergence of literary meaning. Also, this is an attempt to bridge the gap between linguistics and literary studies. For that purpose, linguistic work with a cognitive orientation can open the way to one highly debatable question in critical literary theory: the question of interpretation. But cognitive poetics chooses to take a different pathway – the goal is not to describe the interpretations of particular texts, but to explain our very capacities to interpret and understand. True, we typically ignore the way such interpretations are reached. My interest, nonetheless, in the emergence of literary meaning is not only motivated by a purely linguistic approach. I argue that a host of distinct faculties of mind participate in the emergence of meaning, and therefore we specifically need to ana-

lyse the various cognitive processes derived from the work of those mind faculties. In order to understand and explain the richness of a meaningful story, one needs to gradually discover the cognitive processes that lead to the final construct, i.e. the story. In formulating my thesis, I have found much inspiration in Barbara Dancygier's concept of stories as "linguistic artefacts" (195). If texts carry meaningful insights, she argues, there have to be linguistic phenomena which drive the literary meaning, but they require a language theory that can account for the formation of emergent meaning. Cognitive linguistics seems to be the right tool to address the question of how we engage our minds to create meanings for stories. If the main objective of cognitive linguistics is the elucidation of meaning patterns, I believe it can be successfully tested in an ample literary context. Literature can benefit from such an approach with the focus on form and meaning, as cognitive linguistics promises to uncover the cognitive mechanisms underlying language. Such a cognitive enterprise does not, however, rely only on words and sheer syntax, as it also relies on the reader's ability to evoke cultural frames or on our mind's dynamic capacity of blending narrative spaces, among other modes of interaction with the text:

> Finally, the story is the final result of several modes of interaction with the text – reading the words, activating the frames, searching for correlates in one's experience, making cross-space connections, blending narrative spaces, establishing identities, constructing tentative scenarios, storing them in memory, revising them as new events are narrated, responding emotionally, et cetera. (Dancygier 54)

Thus it has become increasingly important to stimulate cross-disciplinary dialogue for cohesive cognitive theories of meaning formation (see Gerrig; Emmott *Narrative Comprehension* and "Reading for pleasure"; Emmott et al.; Herman, *Story Logic*). In this sense, I believe, cognitive linguistics can provide the basic support for the major claims of general cognitive theories.

In sum, I propose a cognitively oriented mapping of literary texts. The primary step in order to meet my objectives is the presentation of a model of analysis that explores the processes of meaning formation in literary texts. This model is mainly illustrated with the instruments of cognitive linguistics. However, the model I introduce is not reduced to basically linguistic details, but will be supplemented with the findings of recent narratology that has moved in the direction of cognitive explanations (see Fludernik; Jahn, "Frames, Preferences" and "'Speak, friend, and enter'"; Abbott; Herman, *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*). The cross- fertilization of linguistic research in the area of cognitive science with a narrative analysis will produce evidence that the goals of literary, linguistic, and cognitive studies are largely shared.

3. The theory of blending – preview

With respect to the complexities of driving meaning in literary narratives, the theory of blending seems to be extremely suitable for an account of meaning formation. As I have already shown, in order to recuperate the final meaning of a text, we need to go through a multilevel process. But the final meaning does not seem to arise by deciphering the linguistic details of the text and then simply adding these linguistic constructs. I claim that the emergence of meaning is mediated by particular cognitive mechanisms that can account for the overall understanding of a narrative discourse. Conceptual blending opens

the door to address the complexities and particularities central to the issue of meaning in literary narratives.

Conceptual Integration or Blending (see Fauconnier and Turner, "Conceptual Integration Networks" and *The Way We Think*) makes use of Fauconnier's theory of Mental Spaces, and can thus further account for the on-line processes of meaning construction in the course of reading literary texts. In short, this theory assumes the dynamic quality of meaning: "[meaning construction is] a dynamic process whereby linguistic units serve as prompts for an array of conceptual operations and the recruitment of background knowledge" (Evans and Green 162).

The current research into applying the theory of blending to literary texts has been fuelled by the invaluable exploration of blends in non-literary forms (see Fauconnier and Turner, "Mental Spaces" and *The Way We Think*; Fauconnier *Mappings in Language* and *Mental Spaces*; Turner, "Conceptual blending and counterfactual argument"). The cognitive study of blending demonstrates the crucial role it has played in human evolution in the development of the thinking mind. Recognized as a general mental capacity, conceptual integration seems to be decisive for human thought, as it manifests in an infinite diversity of human endeavours or domains of activity: art, literature, linguistics, mathematics, political sciences, theology, psychoanalysis, film, and everyday action:

> There is no other way for us to apprehend the world. Blending is not something we do in addition to living in the world; it is our means of living in the world. Living in the human world is 'living in the blend' or, rather, living in many coordinated blends. (Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think* 390)

Blending may explain, for instance, how humans are able to run hypothetical mental scenarios, advance alternative hypotheses, lie or imitate, delude or deceive. It is, in fact, the key to human imagination or creativity and to how humans work on meaning. Precisely, Fauconnier and Turner's general research program seeks to demonstrate that humans are now "cognitively modern beings" (xvi) due to the development of this unique human capacity for conceptual blending.

> We argue that conceptual blending underlies and makes possible all these diverse human accomplishments, that it is responsible for the origins of language, art, religion, science, and other singular human feats, and that it is as indispensable for basic everyday thought as it is for artistic and scientific abilities. (vi)

The crucial claim of conceptual integration has been prompted by the observation that we often construct meanings that do not seem to derive from available conceptual or linguistic structure. How is that possible? Particular conceptual areas (called "mental space", "frames", or "input spaces") can be activated by various prompts (e.g. linguist or visual) and integrated into a new emergent structure, i.e. the blend. While the blended space relies on the material recruited from the input spaces (in a relation of source and target), it can only become fully coherent by selecting the *relevant* elements from the two inputs to create the new emergent structure. If the blend is still connected to its input spaces, it has, nevertheless, its own logic, and contains information that does not appear in either of the input spaces. The cognitive work done to construct blends, mostly invisible to conscious activity, shows how new knowledge can be produced in creative and dynamic ways.

The theory of blending involves a four-space model: two input spaces, one generic space that accumulates generic information about the two inputs, a blend in which information from the two input spaces is combined and refined. This theory has emerged as a broader theory of conceptual metaphor, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their groundbreaking study *Metaphors We Live By*. If theorists of conceptual metaphor assume that projections from one space to another are "direct, one-way, and positive" (Turner, *The Literary Mind* 60), theorists of conceptual blending argue that concepts may blend in more than one direction. The input spaces project properties to the blend, which does not mean that the projection can only go from source to target, as in the case of metaphors. Another particular trait of conceptual blending is that the blended space can project back to the input space, which can be now considered the target. However, this backward projection does not always happen. Plus, in some other cases, the resulting blend may project back to more than one input spaces, i.e. a multi-directional blend. In effect, conceptual metaphor relationships may be seen as instances of the more complex conceptual blends. Another feature of blended spaces would be that the emergent structure that results from the blend is free from the restraints of the input spaces, meaning that the blend is not a simple combination of the projected properties. Conceptual blending theory can work for ordinary literal contexts, but also for more sophisticated literary works, and more specifically, it can help us understand our response to the literary effects of the text: "one of the most remarkable things about blending theory and other cognitive approaches is that they reveal to us the subtlety of our ordinary reactions to literature and arts" (Hogan 114). Indeed, without projecting elaborated blends when reading (whether consciously aware or not), the experience of literature would make little sense to us and we would fail to address key questions regarding our reading abilities.

4. Conceptual blending – links with literary texts

The analysis of blending as applied to literary texts can prove to be extremely useful, with respect to several issues: as reading involves the construction of short-term interrelated mental spaces, an accurate description of the interplay between different types of mental spaces will account for the literary effects of stories. Second, the representation of mental narrative spaces do not only emerge from 'real'/ 'factual' information in the storyworld, but they can also be generated by what is 'not real' in the story, for instance the number of mental spaces created by the characters' wishes, dreams, unrealized hypotheses, or alternatives that are only considered but never realized.

I believe that my article can profit substantially from the wide array of instruments provided by the blending theory in order to understand the nature of the reader's mind while reading literary stories. Blending narrative mental spaces can ultimately uncover the dynamics of the mind while performing exceptional imaginative exercises. As mentioned by Fauconnier and Turner, "the next step in the study of mind is the scientific study of the nature and mechanisms of the imagination" (*The Way We Think* 8).

The study of the basic mental operation of blending is motivated by the general relationship of cognitive science and narrative theories. In this respect, cognitive science can offer a different but complementary line of analysis for explaining the production of meaning in literary studies. If narrative theories are concerned with dynamic aspects of meaning formation, the crucial insight of blending theory can offer new theoretical grounds to explaining human thought and imagination in acts of reading. What I want to

focus on specifically is this 'invariant' mental operation of blending in order to prove that it may be "the central engine of human meaning" (Turner, *Cognitive Dimensions* 21) in reading literature, and that evidence for this can be found in the analysis of two of Hemingway's short stories. As suggested by Turner in his *Cognitive Dimensions*, the ability to perform blending may have been the key mechanism to our developing advanced mental behaviour. My purpose is to demonstrate that this is also facilitated by the mental exercises we perform in reading literary works:

> It [blending] is part of us, … [of] all cognitively modern human beings, beginning very far before written history and stretching indefinitely into our phylogenetic future. Blending is basic, not exotic. (21)

5. Blending narrative mental spaces in Hemingway's short fiction

In the critical studies on Hemingway's short fiction, critics comment on the multitude of textual meanings, but never stop to reflect on how they have been able to arrive at those meanings. In other words, to reflect on how they have been able to solve the riddle of the text, given the small amount of textual information. How have they been able to extract the meaning when a large amount of information has been left out from the text? As many critics have shown, Hemingway's short fiction poses questions focusing on abstract concepts, such as nothingness, death, emptiness, failure, and so on, concepts that are generally difficult to grasp. Yet, competent readers succeed in extracting the meaning and expressing it in most articulated critical responses.

I am interested in evaluating Hemingway's short fiction as 'an act of the human mind', and therefore my main assumption is that without an accurate investigation of the nature of the language used in these short stories, and without an understanding of the possibilities and limitations imposed on language by the human thought, Hemingway's critical reception would go on accumulating diverse interpretations, but it would fail to account for the nature and source of such critical responses. In fact, at this level competent readers should seek answers to how short fiction is conceived of and should *see* beneath 'the tip of the iceberg'. As literature is seen as probably the highest expression of language use, the result of this critical endeavour would help us understand the manifold ways in which language functions and the intricate ways in which mental connections are performed:

> Language, as we use it, is but the tip of the iceberg of cognitive construction. As discourse unfolds, much is going on behind the scenes: new domains appear, links are forged, abstract meanings operate, internal structure emerges and spreads, viewpoint and focus keep shifting. Everyday talk and commonsense reasoning are supported by invisible, highly abstract, mental creations, which … helps to guide, but does not itself define. (Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces* xxii-xxiii)

In fact, what I am suggesting here is that one needs to investigate 'what is going on behind the scenes' in Hemingway's short fiction, an attempt that seeks to explore the connections between cognitive poetics and literary criticism. It is to connect criticism to a cognitive aspect: we need to see how readers build dynamic concepts, how they structure different image-schemas, and how they construct mental spaces and establish connections between them, and finally we need to look at conceptual structures, such as metaphors or metonymies. Ultimately, the use of varied conceptual connections or pat-

terns should be part of a continuous exercise in which competent readers are able to engage.

6. Cognitive poetics analysis – applying blending to Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River* and *Soldier's Home*

For the present purpose I will be extensively making use of the blending framework in order to address its narrative implications for how readers are able to reason about narrative events that might have happened, but did not, in Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River* and *Soldier's Home*. The appeal of these two short stories comes from the complex relationships between the unrealized mental narrative spaces that always hint at the way in which the 'reality' of the story could have turned out. In this respect, the cognitive work done by the reader is to contemplate upon the rich virtuality of the various mental spaces set up in the course of reading.

The point of departure will be an incursion into the structure of the characters' mind and the effect of characters' mental functioning. More specifically, I will look at the wide pool of mental spaces created in the mind of the characters and will try to explain their ability to create rich parallel mental scenarios. Before further developing the argument, I should probably elaborate in more depth on the concept of "cognitive mental functioning", as captured in Alan Palmer's analysis of fictional minds (322-348). The theory of the thinking mind (or of the cognitive mental functioning), alongside with its structures and activities, as developed by cognitive sciences, is concerned with the dynamic processing of information. At this point, the findings of cognitive scientists can be applied to narrative communication, which, in its turn, can offer insightful information for further strengthening the theory of mind. Therefore, the notion of cognitive mental functioning can benefit from two areas of research: the mental life of the actual individual or of the created figure in the literary texts:

> Narrative can help organize humans' understanding of the world. Debatably, the cognitive strategies enabling interpreters to discern and monitor participant roles and relations in stories have the same provenance as – are fundamentally continuous with – those used to make sense of participant structures in social situations generally. (Herman, *Story Logic* 121)

Cognitive mental functioning can, thus, be applied to narrative communication, as defined in classical narratology – with its four significant levels: the author, the reader, the narrator, and the storyworld participant. First, the author engages in cognitive work of processing fictional or factual information so as to produce a verbal text with its correlated story and text world. The reader processes the text in order to produce complex mental representations of the storyworld. On the next level, there are the other selves of the real author and reader – "the implied author" (Booth) and "the implied reader" (Iser). The implied author manipulates the information in the text in specific ways so as to create particular reactions, feelings, or attitudes in the implied reader. At the text level, the narrator is supposed to comment on the storyworld or reflect on the relationship between participants. The fourth level, that of the storyworld participants, captures the totality of individuals interacting, and forming their own mental representation of what they perceive in the storyworld; they can make inferences, formulate possibilities, reflect on past happenings, or they can construct their own virtual world. In essence, they can "engage in any conceivable cognitive activity" (Margolin 273).

However, it should be noted, as Uri Margolin clearly points out, that models and concepts developed by cognitive science (empirically tested on actual minds) can be applicable to literary minds on the condition that we are aware of "the confines of a make-believe world" in which we are operating. Here, we should *pretend* that storyworld participants are sufficiently human-like and may exist outside the text that actually creates them by semiotic signs and terms (273). Starting from this premise, storyworld participants perform actions on the basis of the cognitive analysis taking place in their fictional minds. With the powerful framework of cognitive science, narratology can use concepts and categories drawing on the broader discipline of the thinking mind, with the purpose of mapping out the myriads of fictional minds, and also with the more promising purpose of advancing new theories of reading.

Drawing on the theory of fictional minds and cognitive mental functioning and their relevance for the whole research in cognitive studies, I advance the claim that a new theory of reading can be constructed. The attribution of cognitive mental functioning to storyworld participants can be essential if we wish to investigate a large repertory of cognitive operations at work. In the case of Hemingway's short stories, to ignore the characters' fictional minds would probably mean to deny the richest source of the storyworld, i.e. the rich part of the storyworld when characters fantasize, delude, consider alternatives, and hypothesize. Put differently, it would mean to ignore one essential cognitive capacity – the characters' mental capacity for advanced conceptual integration. In truth, Hemingway's characters show the powerful ability to create mental alternatives and to blend these mental spaces with other mental scenarios prompted by their 'actual world'.

In *Big Two-Hearted River* and *Soldier's Home,* Hemingway's characters have the extraordinary capacity to operate mentally on the unreal, to run simultaneous mental scenarios, and to perform off-line cognitive simulations. They always build mental spaces, connections between them, and blended spaces. They do this because it gives meaningful insight to the complicated narrative world in which they live. This constant feature of the characters has something to do with their inner inclination to fantasize and imagine mental spaces that are counter to what they actually experience. In some cases, characters build alternative worlds or counterfactual spaces that seem to be the product of a narrative mind that is not confined to the rather restricted mental space projected by their actual world. In the case of *Soldier's Home*, many of the characters prefer to live in blended spaces, emerging from both actual and counterfactual elements. It appears that only in this rich blended mental space may characters be *fulfilled.* Therefore, contrary to the largely-shared critical point of view that sees Hemingway's characters as trying to escape or seeking isolation and privacy, it may be said that short story characters only partially retreat from the textual actual world, as they need private moments to build complicated mental blends that give them a more comprehensive view of the world and also of themselves.

It is this last point that I would like to further dwell on, namely the characters' extraordinary capacity to construct a counterfactual image of themselves – what may be seen as the 'counterfactual other'. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning from the start that the counterfactual other has nothing to do with the related topic of duality treated in literature or with the schizophrenic personalities in specialized medical cases. By contrast, the characters' counterfactual self proves the fact that there is much creative potentiality in the minds of the characters. True, because they live in blended spaces, they are able to reinvent themselves creatively and imaginatively. They have this double vision of what they truly are and also of what they might be like or of how they could evolve in a

counterfactual world that offers them the possibility to fabricate their most creative self. It is this counterfactual other or self that can comfortably accommodate their wishes, dreams, or fantasies.

6.1. The creative blend of identities – *Big Two-Hearted River*

In many of Hemingway's short stories, readers will come across one recurrent image: characters examining their reflection in a mirror, a glass, or another reflecting surface. This is also the case of *Big Two-Hearted River* where readers can witness the main character Nick Adams looking down into "the clear, brown water, coloured from the pebbly bottom" (143). He watches the trout in the water for a long time, then again later he turns back and looks down the stream, and finally the narrator notices that "it was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout" (143). This image becomes increasingly more significant in the context of the story: Nick takes this solitary journey after his traumatizing war experience, which has changed him dramatically and has intensified his fears, disillusionments, and feelings of sudden loss. With this emotional burden on his troubled mind (heightened by the obsessive repetition of the physical weight of the heavy pack on his shoulders: "It was too heavy. It was much too heavy. … He walked along the road feeling the ache from the pull of the heavy pack"; 144), Nick sees his reflection in the "the glassy convex surface of the pool" (144). But he is likely to get a rather distorted image of himself through the surface that is "pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge" (144), and also because of the gravel and sand that is raised by the current. So, even if Nick Adams sees himself in the water, he will probably not be able to recognize all the details of his face. At this point, readers get two representations of the character: the 'real' Nick Adams taking the fishing trip and the other Nick whose reflection can be glimpsed in the undulating stream. Most probably, when he looks into the water from the bridge where he stands, Nick gets an incomplete view of his whole body. However, he may see his face more clearly; and this is not surprising, as usually in pictures, photographs, or paintings we point to the face of the represented figure and notice "That's Mona Lisa" or "That's my best friend". What we normally do in such cases is to construct a mental network in which the whole body of the individual is mapped into his/ her most salient part – the face. In the blend, the face (projected from one input) and the body (projected from another input space) are fused, and the face becomes the individual's personal identity. The mental link that connects part-whole (face-whole body), coming from two separate inputs, will transform the individual into a 'unique' being in the blend. The outer-space part-whole relation, known as a 'vital relation', gets compressed by blending into 'uniqueness'. Other types of outer-space connections between the input spaces may be compressed in the blend into uniqueness, such as Cause-Effect, Time, Space, Identity, Change, etc. (Fauconnier and Turner, *The* Way We *Think* 88-102).

In *Big Two-Hearted River,* the part-whole relation is compressed in the blend into a Unique being. The Nick Adams in the blend is different from the Nick Adams in the actual world, and this distinction is revealed by the fact that his features reflected in the water do not correspond to the ordinary representation of himself, which may be the reason why he barely recognizes himself in the reflecting water surface. Clearly, the distorted image that slowly emerges in the water is far from being the representation of the character in the actual narrative world. Indeed, in the text's actual world, Nick Adams actively engages in very practical activities: he sets up his camp in the forest, fishes with

confidence, cooks dinner. Nick's intense physical activity and total engagement with immediate action show that he takes increasing satisfaction from the accomplishment of minute tasks, with little apparent significance; physical activity and ordinary sensations can bring satisfaction:

> Inside the tent the light came through the brown canvas. It smelled pleasantly of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. He had made the camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in a good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry. (148)

Nevertheless, his intensified focus on the present moment and insistence on exciting positive motion can also signal out the fact that the character is likely to try to keep his mind and thoughts under control. He may try to forget his distorted image in the water, in the same way in which he tries to ignore the threatening presence of the swamp, or at least to delay the confrontation with the dangers and fears arising from that place. This may be the reason why the character concludes, through the narrative voice: "In the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today" (161).

These present circumstances will serve as the material anchor for constructing more elaborate mental spaces that will finally blend and construct the character's creative self. It is true that this place teeming with physical activity may appear to protect the character, but he is not completely safe. The following images show that Nick Adams is at all time aware of potential dangers: the sight of the burned-over country, heavily destroyed by the war, the sooty black grasshoppers, the physical pain after one day's walking uphill, the mist rising from the swamp, the shock given by the freezing cold stream. To some extent, these recurrent images prove that Nick's psyche is still in the course of healing. But again, humans or human-like figures never inhabit one single mental space, so Nick will start to elaborate on the material anchor so as to create a more comfortable counterfactual mental space. By contrast, in this space Nick Adams only preserves those features that will give him the necessary disposition to renew his burnt self: the features of a fertile country – "a long undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again" (145), he remembers Hopkins, a dear war companion, and then makes coffee "according to Hopkins", and he also remembers the plans they had made together to go fishing in summer and cruise along the north shore of Lake Superior. Unfortunately, "they never saw Hopkins again" (150); the sorrow caused by this missing person is immediately replaced by honour, as the simple thing of making the coffee in the way Hopkins would have done is "a triumph" for him. The fact is that Nick Adams lives in neither of these two spaces (the material space or the counterfactual mental space), but he inhabits the blended space. In the blend, Nick Adams is a unique being that has features from both inputs: he is excited and threatened, isolated and close to his companions, dejected and joyous, energetic and lethargic. It may be that the reflection Nick sees in the water is exactly this impossible blend, his mixed troubled self. The clear disanalogy between the inputs showing Nick's distinct selves has been projected to the blended space which presents a unique Nick Adams that has not yet had the time to get used to his new blended self.

Big Two-Hearted River has Nick Adams as the focalized consciousness: it presents Nick's hiking trip away from the town Seney and toward the river in his short postwar history – "Nick felt happy. He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back to him" (144). In this very private fishing journey, the mature Nick wishes to escape the realities of the complicated world he has met during the Greco-Turkish War or of his unstable life immediately following World War I, so he tries *not to think* or simply to ignore the fear that accompanies the sight of the 'dark swamp'. In *Big Two-Hearted River* (Part I & II), after a hard hiking trip up the hill, Nick finds a safe place to camp, but this temporary 'home' he has made for himself is surrounded by the threatening swamp that is stretching all along the railway tracks. Consequently, the character is always aware of potential fears and threats: "Across the river in the swamp, in the almost dark, he saw a mist rising" (149) or "Out through the front of the tent he watched the glow of the fire, when the night wind blew on it. It was a quiet night. The swamp was perfectly quiet" (150).

Admittedly, the image of the 'dark swamp', present in many of Nick-narratives or even in non-Nick stories, will, indeed, indicate a rich psychological history of the author-character, probably richer than his actual history. At this point, as stated by Moddelmog, our main interest is Nick's psyche (20). True, many critics have associated the physical swamp with Nick's 'mental swamp', the potential source for many negative experiences, such as fear of marriage or fatherhood, disaster, death, or different losses, which eventually outline the image of a very troubled way of seeing the world, and also the character's desire to escape or, rather, a desire not to enter a troubled world in which ideals, companions, freedom, or love have been lost and gradually replaced with violence, fear, death, senselessness, and disillusionment.

6.2. The blend of frames and self-construal – *Soldier's Home*

The reader of *Soldier's Home*, with *Big Two-Hearted River* as a point of reference, would have a strong indication of the main character's 'mental swamp', even if the central character is not Nick Adams, but Harold Krebs. However; Harold Krebs can be seen as Nick's alter ego. As in *Big Two-Hearted River*, *Soldier's Home* shows the impact of the war on Harold's traumatized psyche, an ex-soldier who returns to his home town and community later than his companions. Critics have signalled out the character's sense of loss and disillusionment, and his inability to integrate back into a community that does not really try to understand the changes that have occurred in the soldier's mind. Hence, Harold's inner turmoil that he shares with Nick Adams in many of Nick narratives. It may be said that both these characters – Harold Krebs and Nick Adams – serve as a sort of a prototypical character for Hemingway's short fiction: a character that has been traumatized by the war, who has to deal with many unresolved conflicts, and who is finally doomed to a meaningful retreat. Nevertheless, the fact that in stories similar to *Soldier's Home* or *Big Two-Hearted River* critics have extensively commented on the sense of a continuing traumatizing story of a character who will always try to escape proves that critics may not have explored sufficiently the variety of mental spaces that can be developed starting from the story itself, as "for any story, we can develop a great variety of mental spaces" (Turner, *The Literary Mind* 132).

For instance, if we focus on the 'soldier's home' (the 'actual' world of the character), then we may understand the critics' affirmation that this place is a reversed home, forcing Harold Krebs to look for another place where he can escape from fear, disillusion-

ment, and a sense of loss. What I am suggesting here is that we should also see the other narrative mental stories triggered by the actual experience of the ex-soldier. First, the story of the soldier develops the large mental space of the contacts between the ex-soldier, the community, and his family. True, Krebs does not actually 'live' in his 'home'/ community; he feels rejected and neglected by the people in the community who do not want to hear his stories about the war. It is only when he fabricates more exciting war stories or when he attributes to himself things that happened to other soldiers that people truly listen to him, so: "Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it" (87). To Krebs, coming home is not a time for the greetings of heroes, but a time when the lies he has to tell are the only form of communication with a community that has lost interest and respect. This constant need to fabricate exaggerated war stories or to tell untrue stories literally gives the character physical nausea which reappears, for instance, every time when he acknowledges his family's insensitive behaviour towards him: "Krebs felt sick and vaguely nauseated" (93). Given the features of this place, it is no wonder that Harold Krebs does not want to inhabit this 'home' and wishes to escape, but we should remember that "we do not live in a single narrative mental space, but rather dynamically and variably distributed over very many" (Turner, *The Literary Mind* 136). That is why we should further look into another narrative mental space inhabited by the character – an alternative mental space created by Harold's inclination to fantasize, delude, or consider alternatives. As in many of Hemingway's Nick narratives, the incompatible mental spaces clash: while in the 'actual' world *nothing* is really happening to Krebs (readers will get the feeling of an unsettling world), in his alternative mental space *everything* is happening. Harold Krebs constantly sets up counterfactual mental scenarios, and he does not do this only by a simple matter of making minor changes in his actual world. Counterfactual thinking shows the character manipulating his identity and dispositions. The scene when Krebs sits on the front porch, as if safe from involvement and risk, is extremely revealing for this point. The reader sees Harold sitting and watching the young girls as they are walking on the opposite side of the street. In the lengthy description of this scene, Hemingway repeatedly uses two verbs: "he liked" and the negative form "he did not want", which I find illuminating for the clear disanalogy between the two mental spaces (the mental space triggered by the actual world and the alternative counterfactual mental space). The character's alternative mental space makes room for his desires:

> He *liked* to look at them, though. There were so many good-looking young girls. Most of them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast. They all wore sweaters and shirt waist with round Dutch collars. It was a pattern. He *liked* to look at them from the front porch as they walked on the other side of the street. He *liked* to watch them walking under the shade of the trees. He *liked* the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He *liked* their silk stockings and flat shoes. He *liked* their bobbed hair and the way they walked. (88, emphasis added)

It may be the insistence on minute details, such as the pattern of the sweaters, or the almost physical sensation given by the touch of the silk stockings or the shade of the trees that outline a mental space very rich in sensations and accommodating the character's desires. However, this is a place that will never become real in the physical world of the story. It seems that the mental contemplation of a world that cannot come true is

enough for Harold Krebs, which is apparent in the following indirect thought presentation:

> He *did not want* them [the girls] themselves really. They were too complicated. There was something else. Vaguely he wanted a girl but he *did not want* to have to work to get her. He would have liked to have a girl but he *did not want* to have to spend a long time getting her. He *did not want* to get into the intrigue and the politics. He *did not want* to have to do any courting. He *did not want* to tell any more lies. (89, emphasis added)

The tension between his desires and what he is able to deal with is, in fact, the tension between the two mental spaces: first, there is the mental space where he is not accepted, hence the fear of relationships and avoidance of commitment (he *did not want* to have to do with anything required by the community's standards); second, there is the other alternative mental space where the character's counterfactual thinking fabricates a world in which he can communicate with the community members and his family, and where he feels fully integrated and accepted.

However, the character does not *live* in either of the mental spaces. He lives in the blend of the two spaces. Given the disanalogy between the mental space projected by the soldier's home and the other counterfactual mental scenario with respect to the character's actual world, it is only the blended space that can absorb the incompatibilities from these two spaces. Here one should notice the character's intricate cognitive mental functioning that does not live in one single mental space, but is rather dynamically distributed over many others. It seems that Harold Krebs lives in the *impossible* blend, a *conflicted* space that involves a wide range of mental operations: projecting elements from the existing input mental spaces, blending and integrating them in the activated blended space. This blended mental space is probably the most robust and "realistic",[1] and it is also central to the way we think. True, in the formation of the blend, we take elements from both input spaces, but the blend contains new information that is not contained in either of the inputs. This new, additional structure in the blend gives rise to complex operations that serve to illuminate unexpected aspects of novel emergent meaning. The contrast between the input spaces is compressed in the blend: the lies about war Krebs has to tell in order to be listened to by the community and the desire to tell the outright truth of how he had been "badly, sickeningly frightened all the time" (88) by the war are accommodated in the blend – here *nonevents* become actual. It is only in the blended space where Harold can be honest and tell people what has really happened to him at wartime, and his family is now genuinely sympathetic to him and takes a real interest in his life as a soldier. From the outside, or rather from the 'actual' input, this event has the characteristics of a gap, as there is no corresponding action for such an event (in fact, people "did not want to talk about the war at all"; 87). Nevertheless, this event inherits particular features from the counterfactual space in which Krebs openly talks about the fear of war and explains how he really felt at that time.

Interestingly enough, in the blend *nonevents* become events. Indeed, humans have an advanced mental ability to build a rich and wide-spanning pool of *nonevents* that serve as

[1] In Turner's view, blended spaces are the most "realistic" as they signal the fact that life, like meaning, is never contained in any one mental space, but it involves mental operations that run over many activated mental spaces: "life is never contained within a single story space or even a collection of such spaces whose corresponding generic space tells us everything we want to know. The real is in the blend" (Turner, *The Literary Mind* 136).

the building blocks for our cognition. Harold Krebs is no exception. He activates facts from both inputs and only recruits potentially useful aspects that he chooses in order to be activated in the blend. In the end, Harold Krebs develops a contradiction in the blended space– the blend is counterfactual with respect to the settled input – he builds a preferred mental space that is *false*. However, the 'falsity' of this space is irrelevant to reason as long as the compressed elements in the blend can cast new light on the input spaces. In other words, the process happens as such: the inner-space *counterfactual/ false* compression in the blend decompresses into *true* outer-space relations between the inputs. The structure in the inputs is preserved but the counterfactual blended scenario operates over this structure; a process that is known as backward projection, i.e. the emergent structure in the blend is projected back to the input spaces. Put differently, the inputs are modified by the blend. By 'unpacking' or disintegrating the blend, the blended elements are separated and then projected back to the inputs. In the blend created by Harold Krebs, his states of mind, dispositions, and desires are sympathetically shared by his family and community, as they seem to think and feel alike. As a matter of fact, similarities can be exploited to build a blend, but it is also true that these similarities are projected back to the inputs to reveal dissimilarities or disanalogies. By performing such a mental operation, elements from the two mental inputs will be altered by blending. In the case of Hemingway's short story, the fortunate Harold Krebs in the blend, at peace with himself and the world around him, acknowledged as a war hero, is projected back to the input space, in which he experiences the community's indifference and harm. The disanalogy between the inputs becomes increasingly more powerful, and for that matter intensely more painful, while this will eventually have an affect on he character's disposition and identity. Blending delivers new insight into Harold's identity.

To justify, it may be said that from an identity perspective *Soldier's Home* is a radical double-scope identity blend, as it brings sharply different aspects of the identity of the main character. In double-scope networks, both inputs contain different frames. In the first input the HOME frame, normally connected with peace and harmony, is ironically reversed into an unfriendly place in which Harold feels dejected and unfulfilled, which may contribute to the split in his identity. In the second input, the other distinct frame relating to VISION provides Krebs the space for physical contemplation (the scene when he watches girls walking on the other side of the street), but also the space for imaginary contemplations (as in his fantasies, dreams, and wishes). In this alternative input, Harold's identity is markedly changed, according to how he would like to be in a counterfactual world. In sum, the blend of identities gives rise to a considerable psychological transformation of the character that will be projected to his 'actual' self and identity. At this point, the reader deals with a character whose identity has been blended and de-blended by creatively operating over a series of mental spaces – a character that has learnt more about his 'actual home' – a place which has now become too narrow and unaccommodating, hence Harold's decision to further live in the blend, as "he wanted his life to go smoothly" (93).

To conclude, it is worth pointing out that the readings of this story as a story of forced escape would only show Harold Krebs as a character who constantly avoids commitment and responsibility. By contrast, by reading the short story with a cognitive framework, readers will discover a character with systematic capacities for running complex mental operations. Harold Krebs' decision to live in the blend has much to say regarding his intricate and creative mental life.

7. Concluding remarks

The cognitive interpretation of *Soldier's Home* and *Big Two-Hearted River* leads us to define one general principle of how interpreters are able to construct mental representations of Hemingway's stories – namely, the conceptualization of the mental spaces arising from the storyworld always has counterfactuality available and uses it as a valuable mental resource. True, the analysis requires the construction of a network of counterfactual spaces. Interpreters always start from one input space that corresponds to a present or actual narrative situation, but they should also build another desired mental space, accommodating the characters' wishes, alternative scenarios, or unfulfilled plans. Interestingly enough, far from being impeded by the straight incompatibility between the two input spaces, blending actually operates over these incompatible spaces. In effect, blending operates effectively over the clash produced by the disanalogy between the inputs so as to activate the blended space. As I have argued in this article, readers do not establish mental spaces, connections across these spaces, and finally blended spaces for no good reason. They perform such mental operations because, in this way, they can discover the immensely complicated identities of the characters. As I have already pointed out, conceptual integration plays a central role in the construal of identity; therefore, a close analysis of the bends and turns of blending when performing acts of reading can prove useful for an insightful exploration of the characters' intricate narrative pathways.

What is remarkable is that readers run blends of identity and shift frames in order to construct *blended characters*. As they inhabit the blend, characters can acquire unexpected mental capacities and deliver new insights. The blend of identities simultaneously requires several major mental abilities – activating conflicting stories that emerge in the minds of the characters, blending them together, and finally interpreting the values of the emergent blended story. Interpreters are invited to evaluate and valorise the intrinsic qualities of the blend, while always being aware that this newly created mental space is manifestly false. Indeed, interpreters and characters alike are able to mentally inhabit parallel stories (often at odds one with another) at the same time, and still able to remain unconfused. At this point, cognitive sciences address two remarkable research questions that can make us better understand the cognitive mechanisms activated during acts of reading: the first question deals with aspects of the evolution of the human brain, allowing humans to call to mind stories that run counter to our present circumstances. Despite the high risks for confusion, we are able to 'escape' from the developing story and plunge mentally into a story we remember without mistaking present events for situations that take place in the story of the past. How is it possible to stay tuned to surrounding circumstances and activate simultaneously another story that will not necessarily serve the understanding of the present story? And the second question tries to explain another puzzling mental feat of interpreting the 'falsity' in the blended space and evaluate its consequences for the story we presently inhabit. How can it be that falsity can yield new emergent meaning that will throw light on our present circumstances? These types of challenging questions expand our narrative thinking, and set the scene for further interdisciplinary work. And here cognitive poetics has certainly much to offer.

To this end, I have tried to make cognitive poetics not simply an applied form of cognitive science, but a discipline in its own right. Our great challenge is to explore its workings in the "country of the mind" (Stockwell 174).

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