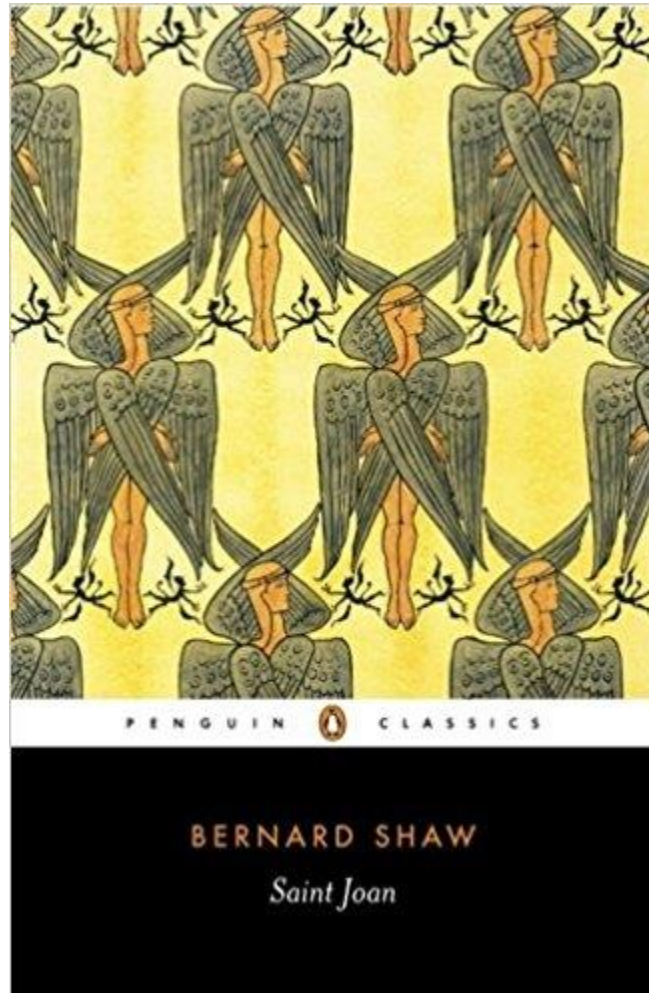


**Cognitive Approach for Comprehending the Art of Drama
with Special Reference to *St. Joan***

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Abstract

Interpretation of texts is a cognitive activity. Cognitive science, which concerns thinking process, leads to the criticism of literary text. The application of Cognitive science in Literature and Performance studies is still a nascent school of thought. A trusting relationship is built up between the audience and characters on the stage through the process of developing empathy. When this empathy is evoked, the audience respond as they would do the corresponding

situations in real life. Drama arouses aesthetic interest from the education it imparts and it is possible to foster aesthetic cognition and sensibility by viewing drama. G. B. Shaw expresses his point of view through various characters and he fixes the audience's attention on exactly the detail, opinion or emotion he wants to emphasize in the play *St. Joan*. This is the success of the play *St. Joan*.

Keywords:

Mirror neuron: A neuron that fires both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another. Thus, the neuron mirrors the behaviour of the other, as though the observer were itself acting.

Sensory motor skills: Activity involving both sensory & motor co-ordination in nerve centres.

Embodied knowledge: It is action oriented and consists of contextual practices. It is more of a social acquisition as how individuals interact in and interpret their environment which creates this non-explicit type of knowledge. In general, information our bodies know and use without conscious thought. Executed as routines, habits and tasks.

Introduction

Enormous thought goes into the production of texts and perhaps even more into interpreting them. Cognitive scientists, have much to learn from literary criticism, which examines the text in depth. Literary Criticism concerns the meanings of, in, and evoked by literary texts. Cognitive science concerns thinking, and extracting and evoking meanings, while reading and writing requires thinking. Hence, there is a wide expanse of ground common to literary criticism and cognitive science. We should explore at length what the author intended when in the process of writing down certain words and explore what interpretations of that sequence of words are consistent with the syntax and semantics of the language. (ie. of the community that uses it).

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The still nascent application of Cognitive Science to literature and performance studies has demanded that scholars use this methodology by using ‘embodied knowledge’ acquisition such as sense-perception, emotional responsiveness, memory, intuition and imagination. It will bypass the need for verification via logical analysis. By ‘embodied knowledge’, Rokonitz appeals to ‘primary emotions’ and ‘affective states’ which are the pillars of cognitive analysis of literature and performance studies. She studies ‘mirror neurons’ and the interpretation of actions via mirrored motor processes; the generation and manipulation of concepts through a reciprocal relation between sensorimotor information and abstract conceptual process; the empathetic simulation of other’s emotions.

Empathy and Emotion

Empathy is frequently augmented by a conscious rational sympathetic identification with the object of one’s empathetic response. For Rokonitz, ‘embodied knowledge’ serves as the primary epistemic ground for developing trusting relationship and sees it as one of the primary strengths of live performance. “Drama presents the tangible actions of living bodies on stage to living bodies in the audience. In addition to and by no means instead of the intellectual simulations of the narrative argument and its linguistic dimensions, dramatic performance arouses and co-opts both performers and audiences embodied receptiveness, often opening new avenues for communication and encouraging trust.” (Rokonitz, 3)

In drama, as in music, emotion is usually evoked not by talking about happiness or sadness. Some of the basic ways of accomplishing this are obvious enough. Create a character, describe a character’s behaviour in such a way to secure audience’s empathy with him or her and expose the character to events of the kind that produce emotions in those experiencing them and those observing them. If this is done skilfully, one may expect readers or audience to respond as they would do the corresponding situations in real life.

Audience

Audience watching a play is cognitively active and always engaged in figuring it out. Grasping a play doesn’t differ in principle from any other cognitive activity. At one end of the creation process stands the dramatist who projects the various aspects of the world in symbolic

scenes and acts unique to the play. At the other end stands the viewer who tries to decode the art work symbols based on hypotheses that he raises and which are based on flexible schemes he has in mind. Drama arouses aesthetic interest and it stems from the education it imparts to the viewer. This approach to the theory of drama is the assumption that it is possible to foster aesthetic cognition and sensibility by viewing drama.

Different Arts Require Different Kinds of Intelligence

It seems that the developmental cognitive process described by Parsons is common to all arts. However, different arts require different kinds of intelligence. To understand a song needs linguistic intelligence whereas painting and drama need spatial intelligence. Drama needs kinetic intelligence in addition to spatial intelligence as Scenes and Acts changes. Therefore, an artistic design like this requires the development of different cognitive abilities for different arts in the frame work of the general process of artistic cognitive development.

Bernard Shaw's Point of View in Drama: Revealed through His Characters

Literature provides a lens through which readers look at the world. Point of view is the way the author "see and hear" what is going on. Skilful authors can fix their reader's attention on exactly the detail, opinion or emotion the author wants to emphasise by manipulating the point of view of the story.

G. B. Shaw expresses his point of view in *St. Joan* through various characters. Shaw's definition of a miracle is expressed through the words of the Archbishop. La-Tremoille asks the Archbishop the definition of a miracle for which he answers that it is an event which creates faith. La-Tremoille questions how it could be differentiated from frauds. The Archbishop gives the distinct answer that frauds deceive whereas an event which creates faith doesn't deceive. Bluebeard and Charles switch their roles, Bluebeard pretending as Charles and Charles saying that if the maid doesn't pick him out, he would have nothing further to do with her. The miracle was performed when Joan picked out the king from the crowd.

Through Shaw's point of view we get a really good picture of Charles. In a light and funny scene in which the plot to fool Joan fails and the mood of mirth still persists, Joan asks

Charles whether he is scared of Duke La-Tremouille and he answers in the affirmative and says that he pretends to be the commander of the army. Charles states that whenever he finds a friend he could care for, La-Tremouille kills him. Charles goes on to tell that he is a quiet and sensible person and he is against fighting because he doesn't want to kill anybody. He only wants to be left alone as he never wanted to be King. It was thrust upon him. It is Shaw's view point that we hear through Joan's words when she does the hard task of coercing the weak-willed Dauphin to accept Kingship at Rheims Cathedral. At last, he is ready to take the risk.

When Shaw makes a nobleman say that the Jews generally give value and when they make you pay, they deliver the goods and it is the Christians who want something for nothing it is Shaw's personal opinion about Christians that is being expressed. According to Bishop Cauchon, witchcraft and heresy are sins which could be forgiven "except only this sin; for it is the sin against the holy ghost and if she doesn't recant in the dust before the world, and submit herself to the last inch of her soul to her church, to the fire she shall go if she once falls into my hand."

Shaw expresses his viewpoint about religion through the words of the Earl of Warwick, "As a travelled man, I know that the followers of Mahomet profess great respect for our Lord and are more ready to forgive St. Peter for being a fisherman than your lordship is to forgive Mahomet for being a Camel driver." In scene 4, the Earl of Warwick, Richard de Beuchamp, the Chaplain John de Stogumber and Bishop Cauchon express their own view points by accusing Joan for bringing her to the stake. There is a resonance from the Bible when the Chaplain ends the scene with the note, "It is expedient that one woman die for the people." G. B. Shaw quotes from the New Testament, Gospel according to St. John Chapter 18- Verse 14, "Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." The cognitive power of Shaw is superb as this quotation occurs only in St. John's Gospel. St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke have omitted it in their gospels.

Conclusion

In the final Epilogue, Shaw makes his point clear when he opines through the words of Ladvenu that after a period of 25 years that a great wrong is set right before all men. Joan

appears in a dream and tells him, “It is the memory and the salvation that sanctify the cross, not the cross that sanctifies the memory and the salvation. I shall out last the cross, I shall be remembered when men will have forgotten where Rouen stood.” (Shaw, 116) Shaw expresses his opinion about the war when he makes the soldier from hell say that hell was a treat compared to the French wars. When the executioner himself steps forth to say that he could not kill the maid and she is up and alive everywhere, we are able to read the mind of G. B. Shaw. Through Dunois, Shaw states that St. Joan is the soul of France. Shaw speaks through St. Joan when he draws the curtains down with the last words, “O God, that madest this beautiful Earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? O Lord, how long?” (Shaw, 124). Here Shaw takes the position of the omniscient point of view of the author.

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