solution of a real grammatical problem.

I have touched upon only a few of the topics that Pinker treats in his rich and thought-provoking book. He is never boring, even when very abstract matters are up for discussion. In addition to his masterly presentation of some of the essentials of Chomsky's linguistic theories, his use of genetics and brain science throws new light on many aspects of language. As I have myself tried my hand in this field, by writing a book (in 1984) on Language and the Brain (in Swedish), I know something about the difficulties of presenting these matters to the general public. The fact that I agree with Pinker on most points, both in regard to linguistics and in regard to science in general, has of course not been without influence on my high appreciation of his work. To put it simply: this is the kind of book that I should have been very proud of having written myself.

THE ELF PROJECT

The Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (*högskoleprovet*), is a test aimed at ranking candidates who wish to obtain a place at university. Candidates can take the test twice a year. In the spring of 1992, the National Agency for Higher Education decided to replace one of the six subtests with an English reading comprehension subtest. The new subtest was introduced on the grounds that English is an international *lingua franca* and that it is important for Swedish university students to be able to read textbooks in English. The task of constructing the test was entrusted to the Language Teaching Research Unit, Göteborg University, where a project (the ELF project) was set up.

The English reading comprehension test consists of a number of items based on non-fiction texts representing various domains, e.g. economics, history, medicine, science. Items are constructed by a group of test writers working for the project. The Department of Educational Research of Umeå University is responsible for the try-out and for integrating the subtest into the total test. Every trial run is followed by comprehensive and thorough statistical analyses. Statistical and other data are submitted to the test writers, who modify the test items, if necessary, and then present the first draft of the test. On the basis of this preliminary version a national reference group elaborates the definitive test. Research focuses on different aspects of validity, in particular gender differences as a function of testing method.

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The Deconstructed Arrow of Time: Returning to the Past in Contemporary British Fiction

Dwelling on "the extratemporal" (Ricoeur 1985:144), that is, dealing simultaneously with different historical settings and swiftly shifting the time perspective, has become something of a fashion mode in British literature in the 90's. Provided there is no interference with "the logic and causality of temporal sequence" (Lodge 1992:205), experimentation with the time dimension can be perpetrated with success. It has been confirmed that the very act of reading involves a certain freedom in respect of temporal boundaries, since "like Janus, the reader is always looking backward as well as forward" (Martin 127) in order to comprehend the author's line of thought. The use of "external analepsis" (Martin 124), i.e. the supplying of a background prior to the starting point of a story, is one way of extending the time dimension. Blending the past with the present means moving one step further in the direction of an effectual "suspension of time" (Ricoeur 1985:144). The "temporal elements" (Ricoeur 1984:59) within a narrative can be manipulated without disturbing the cohesion, since parallel actions may skilfully be kept apart, while at the same time being made complementary.

Doubtless the development of literary theory has left its mark on the production of literature today. Writers who have concentrated on writing about the academic world, the "university novelists"[1], seem to have amalgamated theoretics into their own creative work. Their works bear the stamp of post-modernism, their subjects implying an extra awareness of what is taking place on the literary scene.

By alluding to, and using, thoughts and ideologies of the past, writers can efface the boundaries of time and reassert the influence of history. The approach used by David Lodge in *Nice Work* (1988) can be termed "academic" in that it severs "mimesis" (Ricoeur 1984:xi), the depiction of contemporary reality, from historical reference. At the core of this work, which is unequivocally set in the 1980's, lies a profound knowledge of literary theory as well as a deep familiarity with the 19th century "industrial novel." By quoting the responses to industrialization of Dickens, Gaskell and Brontë, Lodge is in fact launching an attack on contemporary society. In the present-day action several motifs are borrowed from the industrial novel, such as the visit of an uninitiated person to a factory, individualist solutions to extensive social problems and the doctrine of female mollifying influence.

The confrontation between the main characters, Robyn Penrose and Victor Wilcox, which illustrates the clash between the academic world and the world of industry, is accentuated by the fact that Robyn is an expert within the field of socially oriented fiction from the previous century. David Lodge calls this presence of history "foregrounded intertextuality" (Lodge 1992:208) and he achieves it without manipulating the time-scheme in the story. In tying a bond with the social values of the past, Lodge helps bridge over "the generalized absence" (Culler 95), the void that separates us from the Victorians. The blending of 19th century fiction and modern issues can be seen as part of a "deconstructive" (Culler 95) process which highlights the essence of Victorian thinking.

The choice of an archaic mode of writing (cf. Hotho-Jackson 115) is another means of filling a temporal abyss. A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) is written partly in the form of a literary pastiche. In attempting to restore something which is assumed lost, an imitative representation of this kind appears as metaphorical of bygone days.

In *Possession,* too, the characters are absorbed into a world of literary history and dogma. Unlike David Lodge, however, A.S. Byatt does not, 'deconstruct' earlier novels by re-using their themes in an anachronistic context. In Byatt's work there are two stories running parallel with a century between them, the one concerning the unravelling of the secrets of the other. The combination of contemporary narrative and nostalgic replica creates a tension and, at the same time, an urge for reconciliation.

Paying due respects to her Victorian forerunners, A.S. Byatt playfully adjusts her style: the contemporary part of the action is often handled with 19th century convention, while the love story of the dead poets, Ash and La Motte, is decribed with the explicitness of our own century. Also, Byatt experiments by viewing the past from the angle of the present, viz. in the reflection made by Ash as he watches the figure of his beloved: "He thought of her momentarily as an hour-glass containing time" (Byatt 278).

In this novel the link with the past is elaborated through an expressed desire on the part of the contemporary heroine, Maude Bailey, to investigate the true history of Ash and La Motte. Her professional interest in their correspondence develops into a veritable search for "the Other" (cf. Lacan 262), a missing counterpart which would supply her existence with a deeper meaning. Only in disclosing her ancestry, her personal connection with the Ash-La Motte romance, can true happiness be achieved. In other words, the concept of the novel as metaphor holds good in analytical terms also: it shows that no present without past can secure hopes for the future.[2]

A similar plot is presented in Maureen Duffy's *Illuminations* (1991). This, too, is a university novel, with the action partly set in the present day. It exposes a large body of epistolary text, some of which is authentic. The main character Hetty Dearden, a historian, is transfixed by her 8th century text: "Words, letters, symbols, small scratchings on a page, have warped her time by a thousand years" (Duffy 25).

History is the over-all theme in the work, with Hetty's participation in a history conference in Germany as a central and unifying event. Probing into the past is indeed the common aim of the conference delegates. The preoccupation with the influence of the past upon the present suggests an "invagination" of themes (Culler 198), functioning at different levels of the story. The themes are shown to be embedded within each other. Thus, through references to Nazism, the superordinate theme of history evokes a political theme. The subject is both wartime and present-day Germany and the standpoint is one of absence of movement in time. Furthermore, like in *Possession*, studying the past is tantamount to a theme of self-exploration. As Hetty penetrates "deepening refractions and layers of time" (Duffy 15), she experiences a curious affinity with a young nun, whose existence is separated from hers by a millennium, and she is ushered towards an insight into her own sexual inclinations: "Past and present were bound in a silken web" (33). Hetty is united in a lesbian relationship with another conference member, Helge Ebbesen, a political activist, whose surname can be traced back to a family name in Hetty's research material. The novel ends on a confirmatory note, with an understanding of "where things come from." In analytical terms, the story emanates into the discovery of a "name of a father" (cf. Lacan 67), which, after ten centuries, is quite an achievement. Finding the link with the past is a means of finding one's identity.

The works discussed so far are united in their academic setting and reliance on literary heritage. In *Illuminations*, as in *Possession*, the outcome is a firm anchorage of the present in its past. However, returning to the past can be compulsive and prove unsavoury. In Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991) the subject is the wartime offences of the Nazis. The title refers to an acknowledged symbol of the passing of time (cf. Ricoeur 1984:67-68) which Amis reverses by telling the story backwards. The action moves in the opposite direction, each incident indicating what might have preceded it. The result is a gradual disclosure of 'analepsis' which is certainly more difficult to anticipate than its counterpart for the future.

The theme of guilt is conscientiously developed through the rendering of the evil doings of an Auschwitz doctor. The reader is first of all confronted with the aftermath, then with the climactic atrocities and finally with initial minor offences. This procedure could well be considered "deconstructive" (cf. Culler 86), since what is linear and taken for granted is dismembered and scrutinized for the sake of finding a hidden fallacy.[3]

By challenging the fundaments of chronology, Amis creates a temporal vacuum. Inevitably, moving back through a person's memories is an acute way of making the past close in on the present. As H.G. Wells once put it: "Time is only a kind of space" (Wells 6).

That time can be made controllable through the unlimited freedom of thought seems to be the basic assumption of Penelope Lively's novel *City*

of the Mind (1991). This work has as its central consciousness "the mind" of a successful architect, Mathew Halland, who drives through London absorbed in a world of memories. The ticking of his car-clock marks out the passing of chronological time, yet he is himself immersed in the timelessness that characterizes a city in which every era has left its imprint: "He sees that time is what we live in, but that it is also what we carry with us. Time is then, but it is also our own perpetual now (Lively 8).

Again we learn of the dependency of the present upon the past and that any attempt at denying history would prove illusory. Impressive as they may seem, the Dockland tower-blocks cannot efface the soul of the ground they have been built on. Flashbacks to previous generations constitute an ample part of the story, endowing locations with perenniality and evoking a notion of "mythic time" (Ricoeur 1988:105).[4]

Lively's novel is united with most of the works mentioned in its nostalgic yearnings, but it is alone in expressing an apprehension of the future. It is the over-optimistic attitude of the 1980's that is being questioned: "the initial excitement had given way to a sort of weary cynicism" (Lively 132).

All works referred to express a desire to recapture the past and assimilate it. In symbolical terms, they can be seen as attempts at filling the void, "the distentio" (Ricoeur 1984:20), between what is now and what has been. The retrospective urge stretches back, not only to the Victorians, but over centuries, as though the sense of belonging to a millennium increases the closer one gets to leaving it.

Certainly, these writers owe a lot to nostalgic forces, but the influence of modern literary theory can clearly be recognised. In fact, the tendency to disregard temporal boundaries suggests an attempt at "deconstructing" the very concept of time. An intriguing thought, for, indeed, in these narratives, 'time' is treated as a malleable component and not as "a privileged authority" (Culler 130). The notion of deconstructive literary theory implies the upsetting of an established hierarchy within the text. Here, the time-scheme is upset in order to enhance the quality of experience. According to Jonathan Culler: "A deconstruction would involve the demonstration that for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite, absence" (Culler 95). In dealing with different historical settings simultaneously, these writers are juxtaposing "presence" and "absence" in the temporal sense. It is therefore possible to consider their preoccupation with past and present in the light of deconstructive literary theory.

In seeking the causes of this time-oriented trend in British literature, one can refer to Italian writer Italo Calvino's visions of the role of literature in the future. In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino professes that in an age of increasing velocity, literature alone can slacken the pace and offer deepened experiences through allowing for digressions. (cf. Calvino 55-56). Perhaps this is a case in point. Does it not seem that, in anticipation of

the century to come, there is a proneness for reader and novelist alike to look back and relish any deviation made from the set course of the arrow of time?

Notes

[1] Some of the best-known university novelists are, apart from the writers dealt with in this article, Kingsley Amis and Malcolm Bradbury.

[2] The influence of the past on the present and future is discussed from a medical point of view by the Swedish professor of medicine D.H. Ingvar in a collection of essays (*Tidspilen* [The Arrow of Time], 1991).

[3] Interestingly, playwright Alan Ayckbourn uses the idea of reversed chronology in his play *Time of My Life*, 1991.

[4] According to Paul Ricoeur, "mythic time" emerges from a mediation between "lived time and historical time" (105).

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