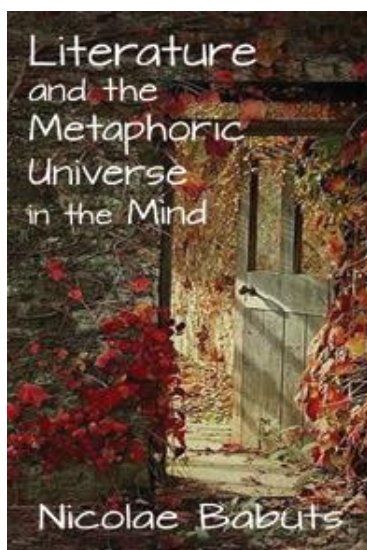


# RSAA JOURNAL

Romanian Studies Association of America



Transaction Publishers, 329 p., September 2015 (ISBN: 978-1-4128-5687-4)

## Book Review By Mirela Roznoveanu

Whenever I finished an article or a book, a question always came to my mind: how much was I able to convey to my reader? What would be the degree of understanding between what I had in mind, I wrote down on the paper, and finally landed in my readers' mind? And how did I do it? In which cells of my brain the secret behind my text had been hidden? Many times my parallel second thinking watched on the side whatever I elaborated.

As proved by the twenty-first century psychology (note 1), the self cannot exist outside the narrative function, without storytelling. The inability or impossibility to tell a story translates in sickness; language and subsequently storytelling are somehow part of human biology.

This is not the case with images and sounds.

(cont. pages 2 –7 )

**Mirela Roznoveanu** is a literary critic, and writer who moved to the U.S. in 1991 where she has continued her writing career. She had been a tenured faculty member of the NYU School of Law (1996–2013) and from 2005-2015 she had been the Editor in Chief of *Globalex* <http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex> .

Her book *The Civilization of the Novel: A History of Fiction Writing from Ramayana to Don Quixote* received the 2008 Award of the Romanian Society of Comparative Literature and the 2008 Award of the Romanian Academy.





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During a conversation, a famous painter cognitive theory of literature, literary theory, asked me to describe in words or a drawing his philosophy, quantum physics, and neuroscience, painting I've seen in an exhibition and I couldn't. I a conclusion of his precedent books on this realized that one can live a normal life without theoretical territory: *Mimesis in a Cognitive* being able to draw or to sing. It seems that the *Perspective: Mallarmé, Flaubert, and Eminescu.* difference between literature, music and painting Transaction Publishers, 2011; *Memory,* is that the receptor can remember word by *Metaphors, and Meaning: Reading Literary Texts.* word a poem, can retell in detail a piece of prose Transaction Publishers, 2009; *The Dynamics of the* fiction, but cannot say what it was drawn on a *Metaphoric Field: A Cognitive View of Literature.* just viewed painting of Hieronymus Bosh for University of Delaware Press - Associated example, or to account the just listened University Presses, 1992. Beethoven sonata's score. I have tried myself many times and failed.

Many questions were buzzing in my head while reading the present treatise: is our inner universe able to create a replica of reality through literature? Is the surrounding reality really known to us? Is our memory faithful to the world and to us? Is literature truly able to succeed in its ambition "to override the material identity of reality and substitute a transfigured facsimile, a metaphoric universe, for the one that science struggles to understand?" (p. 231)

The fruit of a lifetime work (n. 2), *Literature and the Metaphoric Universe in the Mind* is a polemic book conceived at the crossroads of a

The cognitive approach to literary studies and the interdisciplinary foundation assert from the beginning (taking into account scientific experiments) that the physical reality, the outer universe, what is outside of our inner self can be known and expressed through 'the function and workings of memory'... 'through its symbolic identity in memory' (9). As the cognitive theory recently advanced, 'the use of metaphoric language is (...) an essential part of our mind.' (47)

Metaphors 'are created in flashes of insight by memory from dynamic patterns or remnants of dynamic patterns in memory.' (48)



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These dynamic patterns integrate language and information in a back and forth process of incorporation and reformulation of the outside and inside reality.

How is the writer's vision – the 'symbolic identity of the real' – born? It seems "events and images, all data including language, coming in from outside and the images and language, feelings, and values already inside are integrated in units that represent our interpretation and hark back to the dynamics of the outside reality." (49) The root of the metaphors is the language and the creative impulse, while the "metaphoric thought is mnemonic in its essence".

Memory appears as the sine qua non of the creative meaning, its drive being to integrate language and information. And the core part of memory and mind is the metaphoric language. Vision or thought (the writer's vision and thought – the 'symbolic identity of the real') and language, both integrated, are creating meaning. Having a built in function that interpret reality, the consequence of interpretation being the metaphor, memory's main task is to preserve and retrieve. In Babuts' words even 'the self is

structured as a memory, is a function of memory, and functions as a memory'. (32) The mnemonic essence of the self constitutes the base of 'the creation of memory and memory is the creation of self'. Because 'the self is structured as a memory [and that] there is no identity and self without memory.'" (45) In a scientific formula, the self is a 'decision-making entity that gathers the input of several networks of neural architecture to integrate the messages from the outside with its mnemonic potentials to create new knowledge.'" (45)

Babuts breaks up with metaphor's conceptual view. From his point of view "a metaphor is a mnemonic event, not a category, and the language has a crucial role in its creation"; "the coherence of textual communication is founded on the integration of language and perceptual images." (56-57) In his powerful words, "A metaphor is neither the outcome of categorical thinking nor the consequence of a collusion of linguists to distort the use of language, to produce deviation from the norm: it is rather the consequence of the function of memory to



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interpret reality and gain insight into the world. Aided by perception and by a coding process that stays faithful to the messages it conveys, memory creates an inner vision of the world, a transfigured vision, but one that corresponds strategically to the outside world. The difference is that the inner vision of the world contains not only data from the afferent signals but also the interpretation that comes from the efferent [‘conducted or conducting outward or away from nerves, the central nervous system etc. n.a.] signals and from the metaphoric function.” (105)

The author brings here the science proved neural integration, as one of the memory’s fundamental functions: ”And since human imagination is a function of memory, metaphor is a mnemonic creation.” (61)

How do we create art then? What is the root of inspiration? It seems that ”one image acts as a trigger to retrieve the other with which it has mnemonic affinities. But the aim is not to target one of them. It is to have them interact and from this interaction to have them gain new values and a new luminosity.” (83) Memory, imagination, and metaphor are the main players

in this scenario: ”imagination created the metaphor, imagination as a built-in function of memory, and thus created the world – or rather our interpretation of the world.” (87)

The metaphoric universe of a book or poem represents the artist’s vision of the world and the reader re-creates this metaphoric world in his memory. How? The scientific experiments proved that within the mind there are metaphoric fields; under a creative drive they might convert into objects of art. I see then the ‘creative drive’ as a powerful and rich memory, augmented with extraordinary metaphoric fields, able to create original metaphoric thought and metaphoric language during the process of integration of the inner and the outside worlds expressed through the language.

The reading process is a sort of collision of a huge magnitude. The writer and the reader have in common language, feelings, beliefs - products of memory -based on individual experiences, and each individual experience is filtered through memory. When two metaphors trigger each other they create through memory a new meaning, which is the personal vision of the observer of the world.



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If the metaphoric fields from an author's mind create a metaphoric universe, then the metaphor becomes the "way that enables the poet to communicate his deep insights into the heart of the real". (142) Metaphors, philosophy etc. reflect the mnemonic world of the author.

In what consists then the greatness of an author or of a literary work? "The literary power is mnemonic in its nature and relies on integration and on the ability of the metaphoric function of memory to connect dynamic patterns and have them create the metaphoric new world in the mind." (149) The outside concrete world activates memory and imagination. The process is called 'transfiguration', which means acquiring more sense and more meanings, or "the retrieval of a past perceptual moment into a spiritual one emancipated from time." (158). And this mnemonic universe shaped through perceptual messages has an ontological relation to the physical surroundings.

But how is the mnemonic universe created in the minds of humans? Through metaphors that are crucial "to the formation of the inner universe for they unite vision and language and create dynamic patterns modulated by their

clauses or sentences" and in this process they acquire value according to the needs of the person's mental universe. (154-155). **The self** (a decision making entity based on the workings of memory) is structured as a memory manifested in consciousness, as a spiritual entity – not physical – having an ontological status; consequently, **memory** defines the self. (197)

The existence of the human **self** and of the outside **reality** are phenomena of a cosmic reality. (198) The **meaning** and the **vision** of literature (and of art in general) are based on the self and reality. "The faithfulness of memory interpreting the outside world" has been scientifically proved by the neuroscience: the same neuronal assemblies that code for perceptions are activated during the creation of images and also has been proved that integration is the most important operation of memory, through which it creates meaning. (199) Babuts grants language a paramount role as unifying factor in the creation of a vision about the world, not through words but "through dynamic patterns expressed in sentences" – the real units of meaning. (200)



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It is grand to see metaphors as essential tools in defining the complexities transferred from the outside world to the inner universe! Babuts strongly affirms throughout the book that “literature whose foundation is metaphoric and dynamic is very well suited to represent reality even if at first blush it creates the opposite impression” because the universe within the author is a reflection of the outside world, of the physical universe, a transformation of it. (202) If reality exists independently from us, we – the observers - are the ones to give it a meaning and memory is the one assigning meaning while perceiving and interpreting reality.

Consciousness (a spiritual entity) is the essence of the mind uncoupled by any neuronal mechanisms. Mind and brain are different entities interacting, working together but they cannot be reduced to one another not only because they are ontologically different but also because they represent two distinct functions: the neurobiological assemblies (brain) are messengers, and the mental images and dynamic patterns they convey represent the message (mind). The two functions are part of a coding process: “the assemblies of neurons carry

images and messages, and they themselves are not images and messages. (...) These inner and outside messages “constitute our mental universe”, our mind, and they are immaterial as demonstrated by science. (229-230) Is then consciousness, as the essence of the mind, independent of the fate of the body? “The provisional answer is that we do not know. Because consciousness, even though it is not material, unfolds in time, cannot escape the fate of all entities that are subject to time. So logically the answer is no.” (231)

All the way through this erudite book I have been impressed with the depth and the repercussions of Babuts’ polemic with those who deny the existence of the self in poetry, with the deconstructionists, postmodernists and so many en vogue speculations interested mainly in being new at any price. This present book is one of philosophical questions and answers about the universe, art, human beings and the place of art in the universe at this stage of our knowledge. I myself defined in the *History of the novel from Ramayana to Don Quixote* (published in the Romanian language) the object of art from the point of view of quantum physics and discussed



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it through prose fiction produced in different cultural civilizations over a few thousand years. Babuts' theory of the crucial role of memory (installed at the center of interpretation) and metaphor in the creation of literary work confirmed and verified through poetry and fiction by Alfred de Vigny, Balzac, Camus, Anouilh, Coleridge, Eminescu, Baudelaire, Blaga, Hesse, Proust etc. ascertain that this kind of interdisciplinary approach has to be continued. His analyses are memorable. The understanding of the production of the work of art through the cognitive approach to literature, neuroscience's

disciplines and quantum physics confirms that the matter of the universe exists on different levels of manifestation that could be understood in their cosmological unity.

**Notes:**

1. Jerome Brunner. *Making Stories, Law, Literature, Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
2. Nicolae Babuts is emeritus professor of French at Syracuse University and author of *Mimesis in a Cognitive Perspective and Memory, and Meaning*, as well as many other books and articles.

<http://asfaculty.syr.edu/pages/lang/babuts-nicolae.html>