John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference

2012, 23rd Annual JWP Conference

Apr 14th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

A Schema-Theoretic Approach to Agreement and Disagreement in Literary Interpretation

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Oral Presentation O13.2

A SCHEMA-THEORETIC APPROACH TO AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT IN LITERARY INTERPRETATION

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In this paper I undertake explain how we come to agree or disagree about interpretations of literary texts. The foundation for my argument is schema theory, a cognitive theory of memory structure, which I use to demonstrate how each of us develops an overall interpretation of a given story or poem. I consider how schema content is formed through cultural and individual experiences, then suggest several patterns of schema usage that occur as we read and lead to a unique interpretation. Finally, I discuss how schematic learning experienced when we discuss literature with others affects whether we agree or disagree with them. In order to support this argument, I draw from my own empirical research, consisting of undergraduate English students reading and responding to a set poem. I also draw from important figures in cognitive theory such as David Rumelhart, Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier, and Patrick Colm Hogan.