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Margaret H. Freeman

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ARTICLE

Blending: A Response

Margaret H. Freeman, *Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts, USA*

Abstract

This response to the five articles in this special issue on blending focuses on how the power of blending as a basic human cognitive ability not surprisingly extends into all aspects of human creativity, illuminating such literary forms as narrative perspective, character and identity formation, and poetic styles, as well as reader reception and response or cultural development and transmission. In their extension of earlier studies of blending in poetry to drama, film, and prose narratives, these five articles reveal the possibilities of a broader scope for blending theory in literature. However, if blending theory is to succeed in modeling the human mind, it must also account for intentionality and feeling. In the second section of this article, therefore, I explore Susanne K. Langer's idea that literature creates the semblance of felt life, an idea that raises the possibility that form-meaning blending includes the iconic notion of form as feeling. Using Per Aage Brandt's cognitive-semiotic elaboration of Fauconnier and Turner's blending model and Masako Hiraga's model for metaphor-icon links in language, I suggest the possibility of constructing an aesthetic theory of literature that would reveal the central and crucial role that literature (and all the arts) play in human consciousness and feeling.

Keywords: *blending; cognitive poetics; cognitive semiotics; conceptual metaphor; iconicity*

Animated cartoons, children's literature, comic verse drama, detective fiction, the short story genre, and the novel are all subjects for the selection of articles in this special issue on blending. One of the most notable features of the emergence of cognitive linguistics (and the theory of conceptual integration, or blending) is its embrace of literary as well as conventional language. Unlike linguistics as practiced in the 20th century, notably by the Chomskian school, the principles that underlie cognitive linguistics – the embodied mind, meaning-generated syntax, the encyclopedic underpinnings of language production and reception, to name just a few – enable the practitioner to integrate the many strands of human experience into an understanding of human language. And as the arguments of these five articles show, the theory of conceptual blending is particularly powerful in revealing the ways in which the embodied mind articulates the many dimensions of human experience, whether physiological, biological, psychological, social, cultural, political, and so on, through language.

In the middle of the 20th century, a debate raged between linguists and psychologists over the question of whether or not language distinguishes the human species from other animals. Situated in the experiments of teaching language to chimpanzees, and constrained by the then-current understanding of



language and cognition, the debate became acrimonious and ugly. The psychologists claimed that chimpanzees had broken the language barrier; their experimental results were vehemently rejected by the linguists. Finally, research grants dried up and the question was laid aside as unresolvable. By the end of the century, two cognitive scientists, Keith Holyoak and Paul Thagard (1995), decided to revisit the old debate. Using fresh perspectives provided by the new approaches in cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, they examined the earlier experimental data and determined that indeed there was a barrier between human and animal species. That barrier was not language *per se*, but the conceptual capabilities for abstract reasoning or systems mapping that underlie language and without which language as we know it would not be possible. Meanwhile, cognitive linguists, by refocusing their attention on the conceptual groundings of language production and expression, were developing detailed explanations as to what those conceptual abilities consisted of (see Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1998; Langacker, 1987, 1991; Fauconnier, 1994; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; and Talmy, 2000 for seminal treatments). It turns out that what Holyoak and Thagard called 'systems mapping' is what enables the phenomenon of double scope blending.

Blends come in many shapes and sizes. Simplex blending is not beyond the scope of animals; intelligence in general is measured by the ability to achieve blending. Anyone who has watched a border collie on command fetch one sheep from the flock for the shepherd's inspection can recognize the ability of the dog to relate the name Flossie to that one particular sheep. Human capacity for representation, however, goes much further, as Mark Turner's article in this volume shows. Using as his examples the vital relations of representation and compression, Turner traces the singularity of human cognitive capabilities that enable us to both produce and appreciate the creativity of art forms such as animated cartoons and film versions of children's literature. The theory of blending enables us to perceive and articulate the extremely complex integrations that both children and adults easily and unconsciously manipulate in following the adventures of Winnie the Pooh and his friends. Whether they actually undertake complex blending in the process of understanding (Gibbs, 2000) or simply adopt entrenched procedures is not the point here: what is humanly significant is that they can do it at all.

Blending might also provide us with the tools for explaining how cultures develop and change through time. Vera Tobin explores the reception history of Arthur Conan Doyle's literary creation, Sherlock Holmes, and in so doing shows how blending can become culturally entrenched within a discourse community. Using the same vital relations of representation and compression, Tobin traces the different ways in which naive and ironic believers apply blending in their varying responses to the Sherlock Holmes stories. Several issues and questions arise from her analysis which lend themselves to further enquiry: the relation of life to art and art to life; the relation of author and narrator; the role of viewpoint and intentionality; the constraints on domain choice and motivation; the need for

empirical testing and evaluation. All these are concerns familiar to the field of literary studies; the suggestion that blending theory can contribute, even if only partially, to these concerns is one worth pursuing. To take just one example: just how naive are naive believers? What role does the recognition of a blend as a blend play in enabling readers to distinguish between immersion in the life of literature and 'real life'? An intriguing example of Tobin's argument that simplification and bleaching accompanies the routinization of entrenched blending occurs in the phrase 'gospel truth', which raises problematic issues for understanding what kind of cognitive blending so-called naive believers are performing. When 18th and 19th century readers described their reading experience of literary tales as 'ripping yarns, but also as gospel truth' (here Tobin is quoting the literary historian Jonathan Rose), does that really mean they confused literature with life? By the 20th century, the word 'gospel' had been bleached into a simple intensifier ('I really am telling the truth'). Even in this modern form, the phrase is restricted to that which is told, not that which exists (one cannot say 'the swans fighting on the river were the gospel truth'). It refers to something 'as true as the gospel', which indicates the existence of truth implicit not truth explicit, and begs the question of 'literal truth'. So we come full circle to the original conundrum of literature – the telling of stories – as a false but true representation of life.

The fact that blending can be a multi-participatory event within a discourse community, as Tobin shows in her discussion of the 'Sherlockians' who play at believing that Holmes was a real-life historical figure, also underlies Virginia Woolf's short story, 'Lappin and Lapinova', as Elena Semino's article reveals. Blending theory, Semino argues, is superior to other analytical theories that could be applied to the story because it captures, as possible-world theory cannot, the fusion of the fictionally real and the fictionally fanciful in Ernest's and Rosalind's relationship, and successfully characterizes, as unidirectional metaphor theories cannot, Rosalind's creative attempts to cope with her married life. Semino shows how Rosalind's intramental representation of Ernest as rabbit and herself as hare becomes intermental as Ernest participates in elaborating the blend. The collapse of this intermental discourse marks the collapse of the marriage. What Semino's blending analysis shows is that the collapse is not one of cause and effect. The collapse of the shared story does not cause the collapse of the marriage: the shared story *is* the marriage, as the two are compressed in the blend. Rosalind's inability to decompress her identification of self with hare leads to her increasing inability to experience life except as hare. Rosalind's failure is the antithesis of Cyrano de Bergerac's success in Edmond Rostand's play. Cyrano's success, Eve Sweetser argues in her article, lies in his ability to control not just his own capacities for form-meaning blending in his use of language, but to manipulate and control those of others too, to make Art Life. Rosalind's failure stems from her lack of control, her inability to distinguish Art from Life. Whereas Cyrano is able, in blending terminology, to perform backward projection, to distinguish between himself in the blend and himself

outside the blend, Rosalind has no such split perspective. Living in the blend may produce naive or ironic believers, but it can also create mental instability.

It seems an ironic paradox that one needs to split the self in order to unify the self. But as Sean McAlister shows in his article on trauma and identity in Helen Weinzwieg's novel, *Basic Black with Pearls*, the capacity to conceive oneself as both subject and self is a necessary aspect of the unified self. Again, mental space representations give us a language in which we can articulate and understand the paradox. Grounded as we are in our own reality space, we can nevertheless create unreal spaces in which we can make an identity connection with the representation of our self in those spaces. If we fail to decompress or do what Turner and Fauconnier call backward projection, we will be trapped, as Rosalind is, in the blend, or, in the case of Weinzwieg's protagonist-narrator Shirley, be unable to recognize the identity connectors that link the subject to the various split selves. According to McAlister, this phenomenon occurs in victims experiencing trauma. The disorientations experienced by Weinzwieg's narrator in her traumatic state are reflected in the disorientations McAlister finds in the narrative itself. Although the existence of an unreliable narrator was documented in literary studies many years ago (Booth, 1961), McAlister shows how blending theory can identify the processes by which the reader comes to recognize the narrator's unreliability. In Weinzwieg's novel, these strategies involve the representation of Shirley's 'claimed' and 'unclaimed' experiences through representation and compression signified by the linguistic triggers of tense and pronoun usage. But unreliability can come in many shapes and forms. Whether blending theory might enable readers to discern similar or different patterns in other unreliable narratives (Kazuo Ishiguro's novels are a case in point) remains to be determined.

One important consequence of Turner and Fauconnier's theory of blending is the discovery that blending, like Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor, is neither novel nor conventional. That is, neither blending nor conceptual metaphor are unique properties of everyday or literary language. Rather, they are cognitive strategies without which we could not produce language at all – at least, the kind of language that enables communication and aesthetic effects to occur. Blending, like conceptual metaphor, cannot in itself account for the differences we perceive between the communicative and the aesthetic, between the literary and the common. We need to look more closely at the ways in which blending occurs in literature and conventional language use if we wish to account for our perceptions that the two are indeed different.

In her article on Edmond Rostand's verse drama, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Eve Sweetser confronts this question directly. By identifying what she calls poetic blends, Sweetser highlights what has been long appreciated in literary studies: the relation of content and form. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, as Sweetser notes, meaning arises from the blend of form and content in all domains of language: syntax, morphology, phonology, and so on. Form-content blending therefore in itself cannot account for the distinction between literary and

conventional texts. However, Sweetser's intensive analysis of the way form-content blending interacts with the poetic devices of meter and rhyme in Rostand's verse drama raises an intriguing possibility: that the same elements that allow blending to occur trigger the capability to create an association of the formal qualities inherent in artistic production. Furthermore, when these formal qualities are themselves blended – the relation of form to form – iconicity results (Hiraga, 2005). And it may very well be the case that the degree of iconicity in a literary text may determine its degree of poeticity. Certainly, Sweetser's discussion of *Cyrano de Bergerac* as the *poète exemplaire*, the author and producer (in a blend with Rostand) of the play itself, suggests possible criteria for evaluating artistic production, the creation of what Sweetser calls 'artistically right Form-Meaning blending'. It also does something more: it raises the suggestion that artistic performance leads to the enhancement of life as ultimately meaningful.

As these five articles show, the power of blending as a basic human cognitive ability not surprisingly extends into all aspects of human creativity, illuminating such literary forms as narrative perspective, character and identity formation, and poetic styles, as well as reader reception and response or cultural development and transmission. In their extension of earlier studies of blending in poetry to drama, film, and prose narratives, these five articles reveal the possibilities of a broader scope for blending theory in literature. Nevertheless, as Reuven Tsur (1992, 2003) has cogently argued, blending as defined by Fauconnier and Turner is not the whole story in literary production. In fact, he makes a case for the disruption of the forces that blending purportedly exists to achieve. Cognitive stability and economy, clear-cut categorization, and human-scale reasoning are, he claims, precisely those aspects that poetic devices are designed to unsettle, blur or delay. Clearly, much more needs to be done in exploring the literary dimensions of conceptual integration and blending theory. Literary critics might think it folly to attempt to model literary creativity, which is so utterly individualistic and unique even in its use of conventional forms, but to ignore literary creativity is to fail to account for an important dimension of human cognitive processing. Tsur's stated aim in cognitive poetics is precisely the attempt 'to find out how poetic language and form, or the critic's decisions, are constrained and shaped by human information processing' (Tsur 1992: 1). If blending theory is to succeed in modeling the human mind, it must also account for intentionality and feeling.

Studying human life in all its messy ramifications is complicated by the fleeting quality of lived experience. Art, however, as Susanne K. Langer (1953, 1967) has noted, in its ability to create form symbolic of human feeling, captures that experience in forms that may be analysed and interpreted. It may well be that some of the questions that still vex blending theory, such as which cognitive processes and criteria are involved in the ability of humans to select the 'best' mappings from all possible ones to achieve 'successful' integration, may be illuminated by studying literary texts. A comparison of the protagonists' blending

activities in Sweetser's and Semino's studies is, as I have already suggested, a case in point. Langer's idea that literature creates the semblance of felt life raises the possibility that form-meaning blending that gives rise to iconicity includes the notion of form as feeling. A simple example may suffice.

In creating the symbol of a feeling, the poet may select words that are charged with meanings and associations linked to the dynamic process of feeling, when conceptual and emotional processes join forces in harmony. Langer (1953: 215–16) discusses the following Chinese poem by Wei Ying-wu, as translated by Witter Bynner, as an example:

‘A Farewell in the Evening Rain’
to Li Ts’ao
Is it raining on the river all the way to Ch’u?–
The evening bell comes to us from Nan-king.
Your wet sail drags and is loath to be going
And shadowy birds are flying slow.
We cannot see the deep ocean-gate–
Only the boughs of Pu-kou, newly dripping.
Likewise, because of our great love,
There are threads of water on our faces.

Even in translation, the poem creates a subjective feeling of sadness at the departure of the beloved, as if the poem itself is weeping. The repetitions of images denoting water – raining, river, wet sail, ocean-gate, dripping – culminate in the final image of tears expressed directly as ‘threads of water’. Anything in the poem that might distract from the creation of the symbol of sentience, such as where, why, when or even with whom the traveler is going is omitted. The objectification or impact of human feeling is achieved through the subjectification or action of nature. As Langer notes, with the choice of the word *likewise*, ‘the apparently simple description builds up to the confession of human feeling which is treated, by a master stroke of indirectness, as a mere simile to the external events that really serve only to prepare it.’

Although at first it appears that the poem is expressing a simple simile to the effect that the rain on the river is analogous to the tears on the faces of the lovers, a blending analysis shows that much more is going on. Questions of intentionality and feeling or emotional response are still largely unexplored territory in blending theory. The question for blending theory is whether it is possible to model the cognitive processes involved in form as feeling that exist in literary texts and especially poetry. One interesting development along these lines is Per Aage Brandt's (2004) modification of the original four-space blending model along the lines of a dynamic semiotics (see Figure 1).

By adding a base space, naming the input spaces as ‘presentation’ and ‘reference’ spaces, and including relevance schemas, Brandt has shown how blending theory may be extended to add the natural, cultural and spiritual

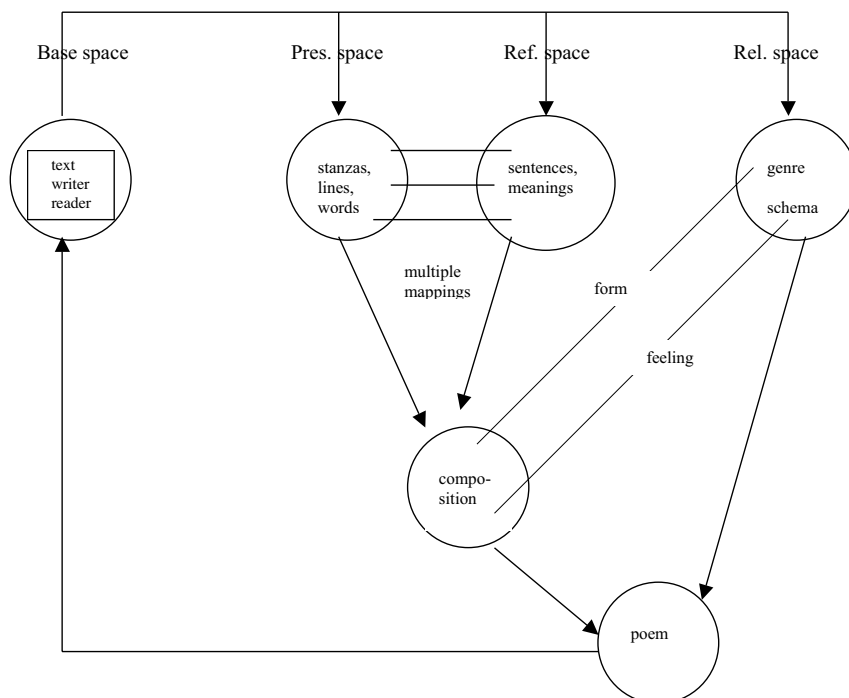


Figure 1 (Based on Brandt, 2004)

domains to the mental domain that are all necessary components of our human experience. Applications of Brandt's model to literature (Brandt and Brandt, 2005a, b; Oakley, 2005; Steenberg, 2005) have already proven insightful and illuminating. Another development is Masako Hiraga's (2005) work on iconicity and metaphor, in which she provides a blending model that relates form to meaning (see Figure 2).

I suggest that Hiraga's diagram may be seen as the elaboration of the 'form' connection from Brandt's relevance space to the composition space. If this is correct, then a similar diagram might be created for the 'feeling' connection, with mappings relating form to feeling. In other words, Fauconnier and Turner's original blending model, Brandt's elaboration, and Hiraga's form-meaning model are steps toward creating an architecture of literary creativity. Each domain or space contains within itself its own composite structure, much as do the cells, molecules, and nuclei of biological organisms. When, for example, attention is focused on literary interpretation, the base domain of the reader is profiled (in Langacker's sense), with its corresponding natural, cultural, spiritual and mental domains arising from the reader's own embodied experience. These may or may not overlap with those of the author's. Similarly, the distinction between author and narrator within the domain of the text may be seen as the setting up of domain spaces for the narrator that may or may not overlap with those of the

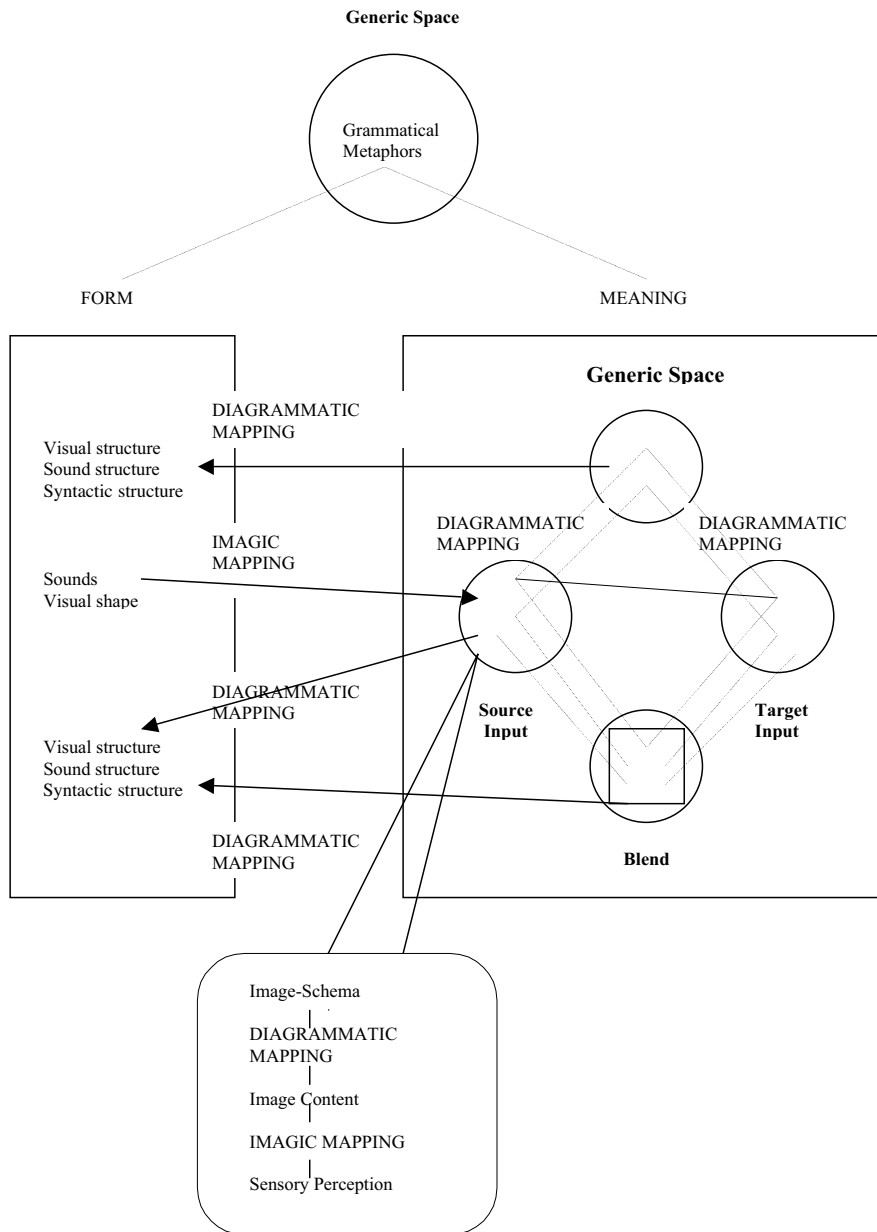


Figure 2 Metaphor-icon links in language (Hiraga, 2005: 51)

author. The complex blendings of a literary text (Freeman, 2005) suggest one way the architecture of literary creativity might be constructed. In the following discussion of Bynner's translation of Wei Ying-Wu's poem, I explore ways in which both Brandt's and Hiraga's models might be combined and elaborated to understand the cognitive processes that inform poetic creativity.

The title of the poem itself sets up the dominant themes of the poem: the conceptual ideas of DEPARTURE ('Farewell'), DEATH ('Evening'), and SADNESS ('Rain'), together with the interactive scene between two participants, the speaker and addressee ('to Li Ts'ao'). The poem includes all of Brandt's domains: the natural world of the river in the rain and the flying birds, the cultural world of the towns and the evening bell, the spiritual world of the two lovers, and the inner or mental world of the speaker. The form of the translation comprises eight lines, divided into four balanced sentences of two lines each. The first half of the poem is in the form of an address to Li Ts'ao, first as a question, followed by descriptive commentary. The second half moves from address ('you') to inclusion ('we'). The final two lines set up the simile ('Likewise').

Sound and motion dominate the first four lines, sight and stasis the second. The deictic schemas of going and coming set up in the opening sentence are brought into tension in the second, as potential movement away is obstructed or hindered, as indicated by the choice of terms 'drags', 'loath', 'slow'. The only motion, by contrast, in the second half of the poem is not movement away but movement down as in the dripping of the boughs and the threads of water. The contrasts in these last two sentences lie in what is seen and unseen, with the suggestion of the vast unknown territory of death in the image of 'the deep ocean-gate'. Both imagistically and diagrammatically, the poem creates an iconicity of form, feeling, and meaning.

The poem is formally framed in its first and last lines by the parallelism of rain on the river and water on the faces of the lovers. The latter is not simply a metaphor for tears, though it is that too. It also reflects the image of the rain on the lovers' faces, linking them to the natural domain of the previous lines. Just as the dripping boughs of Pu-kou are surface manifestations of the 'deep ocean-gate', so are the 'threads of water' the surface manifestations of the participants' love. Thus the 'threads of water' become the 'symbol of sentience', which Langer (1953: 40) notes is what emerges as the result of the blendings of tones, colours, words etc. within the literary text. The poem captures in its entirety the felt moment of departure, the suspension of movement in the existential statement, 'there are threads', as the lovers respond to the emotions of imminent separation.

From the quality of the translation alone, I would guess that the original Chinese poem is fully iconic, with every element of image, character, and sound together creating a pattern to establish the form-in-feeling that achieves the semblance of felt life. All successful poetry achieves this semblance and may thus be said to be iconic, not as representation or imitation but as an illusion of vital life.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of blending theory as it is being developed and expanded is the way in which it is moving toward a unification of various

strands of research in different disciplinary areas, from Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931–1958) work on the significance of index, icon, and symbol and Susanne K. Langer's (1953, 1967) work on the importance of form in the mind feeling in philosophy to Antonio Damasio's (1999) work on emotion and consciousness and V. S. Ramachandran's (1998) work on culture and the brain in neuroscience. As blending theory begins to incorporate these and other cognitive linguistic studies, such as Langacker's (1987, 1991) work on foregrounding and deixis, Talmy's (2000) work on fictive motion, Lakoff, Johnson (1980, 1998), and others' work on conceptual metaphor, and Nänny and Fischer's (2003) work on iconicity, it promises to enrich our understanding of literary creativity.

The integration of such interdisciplinary research belies the often-heard complaint from literary scholars that nothing new is added by theoretical considerations to what they – as specialists within their discipline – already know. Seemingly, these scholars fail to recognize the truth that Langer (1988: 99) noted when she wrote that 'the theory of art is really a prolegomenon to the much greater undertaking of constructing a concept of mind adequate to the living actuality;' that literary texts, in Fauconnier's (1997: 125) terms, 'as data. . . have a status comparable to laboratory experiments in physics'. What is missing from current literary criticism is any attempt to construct an aesthetic theory of literature that would reveal the central and crucial role that literature (and all the arts) play in human consciousness and feeling. As Brandt and Brandt (2005a, b) note, and as these five articles show, explorations of blending in literature can contribute to the creation of such a theory.

Notes

- 1 Literary scholars unfamiliar with blending theory might do well to start with the special issue of *Cognitive Linguistics* on conceptual blending, edited by Seana Coulson and Todd Oakley, and especially their opening essay on 'Blending Basics', in volume 11 issue 3/4 (2000), pages 175–358.
- 2 Sivan Te'eni (personal communication) notes that in Chinese, there is no separate word for mind and feeling; they are the same.
- 3 By 'spiritual', Brandt means the communicative interaction of shared thoughts and feelings. No religious connotation is implied.
- 4 In this necessarily abbreviated commentary, I assume that readers will recognize the literary symbolism involved here, and I disregard the otherwise valid questions concerning intentionality on the part of the writer or interpretation on the part of the reader, as well as the commonalities and differences between Western and Eastern cultures. I am also taking the position (shared by Brandt and Brandt) that cognitive processes of comprehension can be constructed from stable meanings arising from the text itself.

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Address

Margaret Freeman, Myrifiel Institute for Cognition and the Arts, 23 Avery Brook Road, Heath, MA 01346-0132 USA. [email: freemamh@lavc.edu]