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# The Liberation of the Icon: A Brief Survey from Classical Rhetoric to Cognitive Stylistics

**Peter Verdonk**

## Summary

The inextricable link between classical rhetoric and poetics manifests itself in the different emphases that their theoretical principles have received through the centuries. Thus, due to a complex of political and sociocultural factors, the late classical period and the Middle Ages placed all emphasis on the ornamental component *elocutio* (the ancestor of stylistics), while the Renaissance fully restored the logical components *inventio* and *dispositio*. Next the Romantics expectably revolted against rhetoric because by then it had again been reduced to a set of artificial stylistic prescriptions. Surprisingly, our century has witnessed a revival of rhetoric in its full scope. However, the most remarkable fact in this chequered history is that neither rhetoric nor poetics has ever given the reader any role in the process of meaning production. This situation remained unaltered through the centuries and even the influential literary theories formulated in the first three decades of our century perpetuated this passivity of the reader. Similarly, this century's major formalist linguistic theories ignored the reader in the process of signification. As a true interdiscipline, the "new stylistics" of the sixties followed suit by also disregarding the reader. At long last, the seventies witnessed the rise of literary and linguistic theories which get involved in real world contexts in which meanings are negotiated between speaker/writer and listener/reader. Modern stylistics also changed tack and switched from a formalist approach to a wide range of sociopragmatic and cognitive approaches.

## Opsomming

Die onlosmaaklike band tussen klassieke retoriek en poetika manifesteer homself deur die verskillende beklemtonings wat hulle teoretiese beginsels deur die eeue ontvang het. Die laat-klassieke periode en die Middeleeue het aldus as gevolg van politiese en sosio-kulturele faktore al die klem geplaas op die ornamentele komponent *elocutio* (die voorvader van die stilistiek), waar die Renaissance die logiese komponente *inventio* en *dispositio* ten volle in ere herroep het. Daarna het die Romantici, soos te wagte, in opstand gekom teen retoriek omdat dit teen daardie tyd rereduseer is tot 'n klomp kunsmatige voorskrifte. Verrassend genoeg het ons eeu 'n herlewing van retoriek in sy volle omvang beleef. Die mees uitstaande feit in hierdie wisselvallige geskiedenis is egter dat nóg retoriek nóg poetika ooit aan die leser enige rol toegeken het in die proses van betekenisproduksie. Die situasie het onveranderd gebly deur die eeue en selfs die invloedryke literêre teorieë wat in die eerste drie dekades van ons eeu

geformuleer is, het hierdie passiwiteit van die leser voortgesit. Die belangrikste formalistiese linguistiese teorieë van hierdie eeu het ook die leser geïgnoreer in die betekenisgewingsproses. As 'n ware interdissipline het die "nuwe stilistiek" van die sestigerjare hierdie neiging voortgesit deur ook die leser buite rekening te laat. Uiteindelik was daar in die sewentigerjare die opkoms van literêre en linguistiese teorieë wat betrokke geraak het in regte wêreldkontekste waarin betekenisse tussen spreker/skrywer en luisteraar/leser onderhandel word. Moderne stilistiek het ook van koers verander en van 'n formalistiese benadering oorgeskakel na 'n wye verskeidenheid sosio-pragmatiese en kognitiewe benaderings.

Keywords: rhetoric; poetics; reader; New Criticism; Practical Criticism; Russian Formalism; Prague Circle; pragmatics; cognitive stylistics.

In the late seventies I was asked to teach a refresher course in English grammar to advanced literature students at the University of Amsterdam. Because neither the students nor the teacher, for that matter, particularly liked the idea, I tried to sweeten the pill by having a closer look at the grammar of some early modern poets such as Eliot, Cummings, Yeats, Auden and a few others. At the time I did not know that by teaching the grammar of poetry, I was following in the footsteps of a two-thousand-year-old tradition.[1] For in the training schools for rhetoricians in classical Rome the critical reading of poetry was the business of the grammarian. He was responsible for the preliminary training that was compulsory for admission to the higher school for rhetoricians. It was here that the sons of the well-to-do citizens in Rome were moulded into orators for the public debates in the Senate, for the law courts and for all kinds of ceremonial occasions where people had to be either praised or censured.

Indeed, right from its genesis, the ancient art of persuasive speech has had a close affinity with literature. Aristotle (384-322 BC), the father of rhetoric in the Greek-speaking world, and his inheritors Cicero (106-43 BC) and Quintilian (c.35-c.100 AD), the best-known exponents of Latin rhetoric, frequently emphasised in their handbooks that the reading of poetry was crucial for the making of the perfect orator.[2] Apparently, they held the view, like many do now, that in some ways literature is a persuasive discourse too. Actually, centuries before rhetoric made its entry into the culture of the ancient Greeks as a theoretical system, forceful eloquence had been the hallmark of their literature from its very beginning. In the great Homeric epics, verbal agility was invariably put on a par with physical prowess and, unsurprisingly, the oratory of the epic heroes was in later centuries a favourite object of study in the training schools for rhetoricians. If these literary instances of oratorical power are a reflection, as some classical scholars have claimed (Lawson-Tancred 1991: 2-5), of a natural inclination of the ancient Greeks to verbal assertiveness and competition, this may well account for their later fascination with the theory of rhetoric and perhaps even

more with its practical application in the political and judicial institutions of the dawning democracies in the Greek city-states of the fifth and fourth centuries BC.

The relationship between rhetoric and poetics was definitely a matter of cross-fertilisation, for if the rhetoricians spiced their oratory with expressive images from poetry, the classical poets and their commentators in their turn frequently tapped the theoretical resources of rhetoric. For instance, in his famous handbook *De Oratore* (55 BC), Cicero expresses the view that the ideal orator is he whose style succeeds in "winning over, instructing and stirring men's minds" (1942a: II. 285). In response, we hear the echo of these aspirations in Horace's verse essay *Ars Poetica* (c. 20-23 BC), in which the ideal poet is described as having "blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader" ([1929]1991: 479).

The basic concepts from rhetoric which were incorporated into poetics can be primarily traced back to the three compositional tasks of the orator. The first of these was *inventio*, by which the classical rhetoricians did not necessarily mean the ability to think up something entirely new, but rather the intellectual skill of the orator to search for a persuasive content and argumentation in the arsenal of knowledge and experience he had personally built up. If this source ran dry, there were always the rhetorical handbooks which contained almost endless lists of themes (Cicero's *topica*) and commonplaces (*loci communes*) with which an argumentation could be constructed.[3] This view of *inventio* is entirely in line with the classical literary tradition, in which an effective transmission of received wisdom is of greater importance than inventiveness in the modern sense of the word, i.e. originality of content. Pope's neo-classical dictum "What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*" in his *Essay on Criticism* ([1711]1965: 143-168) is the very epitome of this cultural tradition (Baker-Smith 1990: 993). The second compositional task was *dispositio*, the strategic arrangement of the chosen content and argumentation. The orator's third task, *elocutio*, was concerned with the effective wording or style of a particular line of thought. From this it follows, by the way, that the modern study of style does not have its roots in poetics but in classical rhetoric. Obviously, the orator also had to deliver his conception. Therefore two further tasks were imposed on him: *memoria*, the technique of how to learn his oration by heart, and *actio*, which referred to the actual delivery of his speech.[4] Though this description of the compositional and performative tasks of the orator is necessarily brief, it will be noted that, in somewhat anachronistic terms, classical rhetoric is essentially pragmatic because it provides a communicative framework for the interaction between a speaker, an utterance (including the speaker's intended persuasion) and an audience.

After the fall of the western Roman Empire in the latter half of the fifth century, rhetoric apparently went underground, because after some four centuries of political chaos and intellectual darkness, it surfaced again in the medieval and early Renaissance universities in Western Europe. The links with classical antiquity appeared not to have been severed entirely, because the Church had preserved the ancient studies and had adapted them in some degree to their educational programme. Thus, rhetoric became part of the Seven Liberal Arts curriculum, consisting of the Trivium (rhetoric, grammar, logic) and the Qua-drivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy).

Since there was no longer scope for public speeches in institutions of government and justice at that stage of political history, rhetoric shifted its interest to literature, thereby once more showing its well-nigh inseparable link with poetics. It seems unique to Western culture that for some two thousand years there was only one monopolistic literary discipline and that its theoretical concepts were the only available tools for the composition and analysis of literature. Be that as it may, rhetoric finally lost its attraction during the Romantic Period because by that time it had cast off all its classical characteristics of logic and systematicity. It had become focused entirely on *elocutio*, or style, which because of its prescriptive artificiality was rejected by the Romantic poets, who aspired to creative freedom, spontaneity and emotional engagement.

Surprisingly, in the latter half of this century, which after all has witnessed a general decline in classical studies, we have seen a revival of interest in rhetoric. As we have observed earlier, the full scope of classical rhetoric provided a threefold communicative framework comprising the interaction between a speaker (or writer), a discourse and an audience (or reader). It is this communicative triangle that happens to fit in with some recent developments in literary studies and in linguistic subdisciplines such as pragmatics, text linguistics, discourse studies, and argumentation theory. This list should have included stylistics, but I have singled it out because as a typical interdiscipline it has benefited from shifts of emphasis in both linguistic and literary theories. Since these changes are most evident in the role of the audience (or reader), it will be the pivotal point of the following brief overview.

Though, as we have seen, rhetoric in its widest scope is definitely audience-directed, it is remarkable that its huge theoretical apparatus does not mention a single word about the possibility of an active role of the audience in the process of meaning production. The audience was only the passive object of the intended persuasive effects of the text. This situation remained unaltered when the Renaissance humanists and writers rediscovered Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, and, in point of fact, throughout the following centuries things remained as they had always been. Interestingly, it has been suggested that perhaps the

reason for this ready acceptance of the classical ideas about the relative weakness of the listener or reader lies in the corresponding power of the Word in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which cast the listener or reader in an equally submissive position (Bauschatz 1980: 266).

It may be amazing but even the most influential literary theories formulated in the first three decades of this century perpetuated this passivity of the reader. In Russian Formalism, the Prague Linguistic Circle, Practical Criticism and New Criticism, the formal autonomy of the text was fully maintained and there was no role for the reader in the activation of meaning.

Between the 1930s and 1970s the ideas of New Criticism probably exerted the greatest influence on English and American literature, including modern English and American stylistics, and even in present-day critical and educational practice this influence is still manifest. As we have seen, the New Critics regarded a literary text as an autonomous artefact signalling its own intrinsic meaning, which was therefore recoverable from its internal verbal structure only. The literary text was, as it were, to cite the title of a book by a well-known New Critic, locked up in a verbal icon (Wimsatt [1954]1967). In his poem "Ars Poetica", the American poet Archibald MacLeish, who had finely tuned antennae for the literary critical trends of his time, very aptly summed up the idea about the text as "object" in his dictum "A poem should not mean/But be" (1935: 123). How persistent but also attractive this idea is, is illustrated by the fact that only recently a well-known critic of a Dutch weekly wrote in a review of Graham Swift's *Last Orders*: "The book is, before it is about something" (Paul 1997: 67-68).

But also the most important linguistic theories of this century did not accommodate listeners or readers of texts as co-producers of meaning. For both structuralism, which set the trend from the twenties to the sixties, and Chomsky's generative grammar, which took over the linguistic throne in the sixties, saw language as an autonomous system of formal relations divorced from its natural environment of actual communication.

Reverting our attention to the development of stylistics, we see that, after its emergence as an offshoot of Saussurean linguistics, it gradually gained acceptance on the European continent in the first half of this century. When in the 1960s stylistics reached the academic scene in Britain and the USA, its introduction was no doubt inspired by the ideas of Practical Criticism and New Criticism, which through their preoccupation with the text had created a favourable climate for the analysis of literary texts in terms of their verbal forms only, without regard to their external context. Indeed, stylistics at the time was dominantly formalist and it happily embraced the close reading techniques from Practical Criticism and New Criticism as well as the concepts of defamiliarisa-

tion and foregrounding from Russian Formalism and the Prague Circle. In brief, the British and American pioneers of stylistics also left the reader out in the cold.

It was not until the seventies that postformalist theories were advanced in which the literary text was no longer seen as an autonomous object, but as a discourse, that is, as a contextualised sociocognitive interaction in which meaning is not unidirectional but rather a matter of negotiation between speakers or writers on the one hand and listeners or readers on the other. The verbal icon was liberated and the text came out to enter a free exchange of signification to which also readers were assumed to contribute. It was the heyday of Roland Barthes, who heralded the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism, of Wolfgang Iser's reader response criticism, of Umberto Eco's model reader, and Stanley Fish's affective stylistics.[5]

Round about the same time there was a similar development in linguistics. For linguistic models were constructed which centred on the question of how meanings are negotiated in a contextualised sociocognitive interaction. Broadly speaking, the study of meaning in such a nonlinguistic context belongs to the domain of pragmatics. However, due to the great complexity of these contextual factors, pragmatics has come to intersect with a number of other areas of study including discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, speech act theory, and cognitive linguistics. It is precisely this new emphasis on the pragmatic perspective of language in use that has revived classical rhetoric. Clearly, this revival does not involve the formal study of its vast Greek and Latin terminology so that we should not be surprised if the term rhetoric is nowadays used rather flexibly to suit current ideas in modern linguistics and literary theory.

Being a true interdiscipline, stylistics once again climbed on the bandwagon, switching from a strictly formalist approach to pragmatic, sociopragmatic, rhetorical and cognitive approaches. Accordingly, many stylisticians now view literary texts as part of a complex social and cultural process, that is, as discourses, and although the formal structure of the text remains the object of close attention, a shift in focus has occurred to the perspective of the reader. One of the possible answers to the question of how the role of the reader as an animator of meaning could be described is offered by what is now commonly called schema theory. Here I shall give a very brief account of this theory[6] and later apply it to one of Philip Larkin's poems.

Psycholinguistic research and experiments with artificial intelligence have shown that in an interactive relation with a text, readers interpret the discourse they consequently derive from this, with the help of pre-existing knowledge structures, which are commonly referred to as schemata. Readers have built up these cognitive patterns in the course of their personal and social lives about all kinds of experiences and things in the world around them. As a result, readers

can formulate certain expectations about the discourse they are interpreting. They can categorise the information it contains, quickly digest familiar information, fill in less explicit or missing information, and add, when needed, new information to their existing reservoir of knowledge.

Two other terms which are also frequently used to refer to pre-existing knowledge structures are frame and script. For example, our average store of experiential knowledge about TREES,[7] in the sense of woody plants which can live for many years, may contain such elements as root, stem or trunk, bark, branches, twigs, leaves, the colour green, and perhaps even castle (in the sense of the leafy head of a tree), and probably many other features or qualities typical of trees. Such a complex of features or qualities of a particular phenomenon is also known as a frame. If subsequently our schema of the GROWING PROCESS OF TREES is activated, it will contain a temporal or logical order, for instance, the trees begin to develop new buds, these buds swell, open up and put out leaves, new shoots grow, annual rings are formed, then the leaves whither again and fall from the trees, and so on, until the next cycle of the same events. Such a sequence of events has a kind of narrative structure and is therefore also called a script. In this paper I shall only use the term schema, because the terms frame and script sometimes overlap and an attempt to distinguish between these terms would lead me too far afield.

It is evident that we have numerous knowledge schemata at our disposal, for example, we have common assumptions about all kinds of aspects of time and place, about people and their behaviour, about our body and its parts, about social and cultural phenomena, about abstract concepts, etc.. Of course, many of our schemata such as those about men and women, and about various socio-cultural and historical events, will be slanted ideologically. Furthermore we have cognitive units for all sorts of linguistic phenomena such as the expected order of phonemes, words and syntactic structures. If, for example, we see a definite article, we expect the next constituent to be a noun (possibly premodified by an adjective) and next a verb, and so on. As a result, we can distinguish two strategies of reading and interpretation which support and propel each other: one moves from larger to smaller parts, the so-called top-down strategy, and the other from smaller formal details to larger portions, the so-called bottom-up strategy.

From what I have said about them so far, it will be obvious that our cognitive schemata are far from being static structures. They are actually to a very large extent flexible and adaptable, in that they can be confirmed, dismantled, re-organised, reinforced or renewed. In cognitive stylistics, therefore, it is assumed that, in particular, literary texts have the potential of inducing readers to adjust or revise partly or entirely their existing schemata. In fact, being culturally

conditioned, readers expect this discourse genre to shed a new light on their common assumptions. These adjustments or revisions, however, are likely to be temporary or to be stored as subschemata, which may or may not influence readers when they return to the humdrum things of their everyday lives and have to fall back again on their socialised and generally accepted schemata.

Added to this, we must realise that these schema revisions motivated by the reading of literary texts undoubtedly vary in detail from reader to reader because their individual experiences will be different. This variety, though, will not result in interpretative chaos, because in spite of the uniqueness of our personal experiences, most of our cognitive schemata are largely filled with conventional perceptions and representations of what we regard as our reality. To make all this a bit more concrete, I propose that we make a brief literary excursion into a poem by Philip Larkin:

The Trees

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

(Larkin: [1974]1979: 12)[8]

We treat the poem as a discourse, that is to say, as a particular language utterance produced by a speaker at a certain moment, in a certain context and situation, and intended to be heard and interpreted by a listener, who in this case happens to be a reader. In literary analyses this reader is often construed as a model reader or ideal reader. But I shall not follow that line here, because such a constructed reader would ultimately be a clone from my own schemata. So whenever I use the term reader or readers, my mind is on myself. This does not mean, however, that my reading will be solely subjective. In part it will also be intersubjective because, as we have seen, many components of my schemata will be shared by other readers. In other words, there will always be a considerable

convergence on what is contextually relevant between readers with more or less the same sociocultural background.

Schema theory also implies that the moment readers recognise the genre of a discourse, such as for instance a letter or a newspaper report, they will immediately activate their prestructured knowledge about the appropriate structure and style conventions of the genre involved. This reader has recognised Larkin's text as a poem, and will therefore call up the schema associated with this discourse genre. It will include the knowledge that the language of poetry is highly self-involved, which is most evident in its connective phonological tissue, in its spatial arrangement in lines and stanzas, in semantic phenomena like imagery and figures of speech, and in parallelistic patterns on all levels of language organisation.

In this particular instance, I have also built up a schema of the supposed historical and psychological personality of the poet Larkin, which has been recently enriched by the publication of Andrew Motion's authorised biography in 1993, eight years after Larkin's death. This biography contains no less than five references to "The Trees" (Motion 1993: 371, 395, 421, 445, 488), but with one exception, to which I shall refer later, I will make no use of this contextual information, at least not consciously.

We shall now move on to the poem itself. The very first word in the title is the definite article "the". Evidently, it does not refer to trees mentioned earlier in the discourse or to something unique which is common knowledge and therefore already shared by speaker and listener, like "The sun sets in the west". All the same, informed readers will not be surprised because in literary discourses the definite article is quite often the very first word. The rhetorical effect is that readers get the feeling that they share their knowledge schema, which has thus been activated, with that of the narrator or, as in this case, with that of the poet's persona. As a result readers are drawn as it were into the discourse, they feel a degree of involvement, and they are therefore encouraged to further explore not only their prestructured knowledge of "trees" but also to call up any other related cognitive structures. Besides, it produces in readers the sensation that the poet's persona wants his experience and emotions to be absorbed into the reader's world. Interestingly, this deictic function of the definite article appears to provide evidence that readers do make use of cognitive schemata in their interpretation of discourses.

The first line "The trees are coming into leaf" is likely to confirm the reader's corresponding schema about the beginning of a yearly repeated event in nature. However, knowing the discourse genre of poetry, the reader may be expected to transform these bare facts into a metaphorical message for humankind, particularly because this message is suggested, though not explicitly expressed,

in the second line "Like something almost being said". Clearly, this line necessitates an adjustment or even a complete revision of the reader's schema about THE GROWTH OF TREES, for trees coming into leaf are not supposed to be able to speak. It is only natural, though, that readers still want to know the message of the trees, and searching through their mental knowledge stores, and perhaps simultaneously renewing them, they are likely to produce their own version of the content of the message.

In the third and fourth lines we find the same discursive process as in the first two lines. The third line "The recent buds relax and spread" confirms the reader's existing schema of a particular natural phenomenon, though the verb "relax" in this context seems deviant or foregrounded and may well lead to a slight adjustment of the relevant schema. However, the fourth line "Their greenness is a kind of grief" requires a drastic revision of the reader's experiential knowledge and therewith presents a challenge to metaphorisation. At this point the reader may tentatively infer that the silent message of the trees is an annually repeated reminder of the fact that this ritual of nature implies a paradox. For, on the one hand, there is the promise of new life and continuity as expressed in the phrase "their greenness", and on the other hand, there is the sense of finiteness and mortality, which is alluded to in the qualified phrase "a kind of grief". Since according to cognitive linguists, metaphors are the foundation of the human conceptual system, many readers may well feel inclined to relate this disquieting paradox to the human condition, in particular to the cycle of birth and death.

There is no more space in this paper, to continue this cognitive and metaphoric excursion. Now it only remains for me to draw your attention to an interesting meeting point between schema theory and the ideas on foregrounding and parallelism originating from formalist literary theories. Foregrounding and parallelism were seen as the essence of poetry, but at the time that formalism was fashionable, they were never related to the active role of the reader in the negotiation of meaning. Recent publications (among others, Cook 1994; Semino 1995,1997) have pointed out that schema theory might fill this void, by hypothesising that notably through the foregrounded or unorthodox formal aspects of poetry the cognitive schemata of readers are activated, interconnected and completely or partially revised.

For an illustration of this process we shall return to the poem. Here we see that the schema in which the reader's knowledge is stored concerning cyclic events in nature is likely to be stimulated by the cyclic *abba* rhyming pattern of all three stanzas. This CYCLE schema is naturally associated with a MOVEMENT schema, and for this the reader finds formal and therewith cognitive support in the repetitive patterning of present participle forms such as "coming",

"being", "looking", and "unresting", which characteristically express a sense of movement, particularly in terms of progress and continuity. Another schema which will be activated under the influence of the CYCLE schema is one pertaining to the concept of REPETITION or RENEWAL. This schema will in particular be triggered off by the high frequency of the semantic notion of "repetition" in words such as "again", "yearly", "new", "written down in rings of grain", "every May", and of course "Begin afresh, afresh, afresh" in the second and third stanzas. This cognitive concept of REPETITION will be stimulated even further by the repeated echoes of the same sound patterns in "greenness"/ "grief", "written"/ "rings", and by the ambiguous contrast between "still" and "unresting" in the line "Yet still the unresting castles thresh".

This brings me to further evidence for the working of cognitive schemata, namely the way in which readers notice ambiguities and respond to them. In conformity with the activated schemas of TREES and their GROWING PROCESS, readers are likely to interpret the word "grain" in the phrase "rings of grain" in the first instance as "the natural circular patterns of lines in the wood of trees", thus the annual rings of growth. Likewise, prompted by their expectation roused by the phrase "the unresting castles", readers will initially interpret the verb "thresh" as "move violently". But because the words "grain" and "thresh" both appear at the end of two successive lines, they are likely to catch the reader's eye long enough for calling into action a totally different schema, namely that of GRAIN WHICH HAS RIPENED AND, THEREFORE, IN THE CYCLIC COURSE OF THINGS HAS TO BE HARVESTED AND THRESHED. Readers familiar with poetic discourse are intellectually and emotionally sensitive to such rich ambiguities, and will include in their interpretations the extra layers of meaning generated by them. Actually, if they fail to register this particular ambiguity, they would miss the restatement of the poem's central paradox that growth, continuity and fulfilment inevitably involve transitoriness and mortality.

The last poetic convention I shall touch on very briefly is that readers acquainted with this genre of discourse will usually be susceptible to the rhetoric of the poet's persona. This reader has the impression that a subconscious polemic between the persona's split personalities produces a tension in the poem between, on the one hand, his wonder at the vitality of nature, and on the other, his deep conviction that all life is finite. But these two contradictory emotions are not in balance, because the fervent exhortation at the end of the poem "Begin afresh, afresh, afresh", which is already somewhat hedged in by the preceding comment clause "they seem to say", is drowned out by the persona's acute sense of human mortality. So in the end this reader experiences the poem as a lament about human existence.

I think this is the most suitable moment to come back to the only exception I said I was going to make to the nonactivation of my knowledge schema about Larkin's biography. As it happens, this contradictory response of the poem's persona to nature's yearly renewal appears to correspond with a similar ambivalent attitude of the supposed historical personality of the poet to having written this emotive lyric. For in an attempt at self-protecting irony, Larkin scribbled underneath the manuscript of this poem the scathing comment "Bloody awful tripe" (Motion 1993: 372).

## Notes

1. For the following brief outline of the relation between rhetoric, poetics and stylistics, I benefited from Leeman and Braet (1987), Nash (1989) and Preminger (1975: 702-705).

2. The following handbooks provide a fascinating overview of the extremely high standards set for the classical training as a rhetorician: *Ad Herennium* (anon: 1954); *De Oratore*, Books I-III (Cicero 1942a, 1942b); *Institutio Oratoria*, Books I-XII (Quintilian 1920, 1921a, 1921b, 1922).

3. Through the centuries the concept of *inventio* in poetics has been interpreted in many different ways. See Preminger (1975: 401-402) for an overview.

4. For a discussion of the *memoria technica*, see Cicero, *De Oratora*, Book II.lxxxvi: 350-367. For a very detailed description of the ideal delivery of an oration, see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book XI.iii., pp. 40-184.

5. For a clear overview of the development of the role of the reader, see Fowler, 1996, pp. 233-255.

6. For this brief summary of schema theory I have greatly benefited from Cook (1994); Forrester (1996); Fowler ([1986]1996); and Semino (1995).

7. It has become common practice to write schemata in capital letters.

8. My reading of the poem corresponds to a large extent with that of Petch 1981: 90-91.

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