

CENTER FOR COGNITIVE SCIENCE

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Wednesday, November 14, 2001

280 Park Hall
North Campus
2:00 pm –3:30 pm

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“Emotions and the Cognitive Psychology of Fiction”

Fiction is typically highly structured. The goal of its writers can be thought of as offering materials to a reader (or audience member) so that they can construct and run cognitive simulations. Though such simulations run on minds rather than on computers, the analogy is close. Like computer simulations, fictions have aspects that correspond to (a) real-world models and (b) instructions as to how to compute over these models. In literary theory these aspects have been called *fabula* (the story world, or event structure) and *siujhet* (plot, or discourse structure). I will discuss two further aspects. One is the suggestion structure, which is based on priming and other such devices; it sets up resonances with the reader and prompts her or his own emotions and memories. The other is the realization: the enactment, or inner performance, of the fictional piece in the mind of reader as she or he runs the simulation in a way that—if the fiction is successful—involves the emotions. I shall present empirical evidence for some of these claims. This evidence includes demonstrations that people do indeed experience emotions when they read short stories, and that these emotions shape their understandings of, and reasoning about, the stories.

**Refreshments will be available
Everyone is welcome to attend!**

For information please call the Cognitive Science Office at (716) 645-3794 or check
http://wings.buffalo.edu/cogsci/html/2001_fall.htm