

## Thinking through Images: Cognising the World of Emily Dickinson

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### ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to approach the poetry of Emily Dickinson through some of the principles of cognitive literary studies. In the first part the focus is placed on the first approaches to literary cognition in Slovak literary theory and on the nature of cognitive literary studies. The second part is a reading of some of the poems of the nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson from the point of view of traditional criticism as well as cognitive literary studies, with a particular emphasis on the way the writer cognises the world around herself. Her poetic vision is presented as iconic expressions of mental experiences aimed at gnomic compression of the final image. She is characterised as a poet who “thinks through images” and her poetry as a fusion of the conceptual and figurative search for the truth.

### INTRODUCTION

The second half of the twentieth century is in literary studies most frequently associated with the emergence of a number of critical theories expanding significantly our view of literature and literary processes and subjecting a literary work to the operation of all kinds of literary and extraliterary forces and tendencies. Some of these approaches are direct responses to previous opinions regarding the place and function of literature in society, other ones grow out of new times and sensibilities. Whatever their names, particular points of departure or methodologies, they all seem to oscillate within the “literary-extraliterary” dichotomy, that is, as the meaning of a literary work is concerned, each approach may be classified as having a tendency to see it as a result of literary (language, style, composition, figurativeness) or extraliterary (philosophical, social, political, ideological, ethnic, gender, cultural) criteria.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, this is nothing new, since various approaches to what one could call, maybe somewhat simplistically, “the nature and function of literature”, can also be found in the history of literary studies, beginning with Plato’s crediting poets with divine inspiration, through Aristotle’s “early structural” approach locating the source of poetic power in human pleasure in imitating things, medieval religious leanings, up to the nineteenth-century Romanticism’s mythological and symbolic aspirations.

There is no doubt that cognitive literary studies could be ranked among the extraliterary approaches to the study of literature, with all their potential pros and cons. The

“extraliterariness” as the most respected source of aesthetic meaning is almost omnipresent in all kinds of current approaches to the study of literature. Most of them, however, seem to differ from what cognitive literary studies claim, since most current, some would say postmodern, literary scholars, would approach reality through relativistic eyes – maintaining that the absolute citationality of the linguistic sign, as emphasised by Derrida and his followers,<sup>2</sup> is the most important feature of literary texts. A majority of these postmodernists or poststructuralists then took opportunity to use the semiotic nature of the linguistic sign for the enforcement of ideological claims. There is no doubt that, alongside their ideologising, they also managed to overthrow not a few dogmas. However, what has been once considered a strong point – the assumed absolute relativity which was to serve as an instrument to destroy traditional orthodox philosophical and literary principles, has become a drawback. A dramatic example of the degeneration was the so-called “Sokal Affair”<sup>3</sup> that exposed this language as being rather a pure rhetoric in its classic, sophisticated manifestation (*doxa*) than a knowledge based on the supporting evidence of facts derived from a serious study of reality, be it even a literary reality.

The supporting evidence of facts and reality are perhaps the most important conditions on which cognitive literary scholars draw in their analyses of the language of literature, putting forth basic questions which go straight to the core of literary imagination. Is it possible to speak about cognition with regard to literature? If yes, what type of cognition would it be? Does anything like “literary cognition” exist? The answers are often complex as well as, surprisingly, simple. In the past (that is, before the emergence of cognitive literary studies) they seemed not to pose any problem for Slovak literary scholars, since the majority of Czech and Slovak monographs, textbooks and papers on literary theory, even dictionaries of literary terms, in defining literature rather automatically mention – among many other ones – the cognitive function of literature, seeing literary works as the sources of cognition, or knowledge. It could be said that there has been a general consensus that “Belles-lettres provides certain knowledge of life, in other words, it brings certain information” (Hrabák 14)<sup>4</sup>.

Although the cognitive function has generally been mentioned as one of the functions of literature, its clear definition is not so frequent. In some cases it seems that critics saw it as obvious and thus not worth of a detailed analysis, knowing “that the literary (and, after all, every) work of art is a specific understanding of reality” (Hrabák 19).<sup>5</sup> Some other scholars, however, tried to explain this function of literature in a more analytical manner. Vlašín’s *Slovník literární teorie* (*Dictionary of Literary Theory*) explains the cognitive function of literature as its ability “to portray and make accessible the objective extraliterary reality which is in everyday life distorted by illusions, conventions and various taboos” (122).<sup>6</sup> The close relationship between scientific and literary cognition was analyzed in detail also by D. Slobodník in his book *Vedecké a literárne poznanie* (1988).<sup>7</sup> Although the book is written under a strong influence of the then and there dominant (“the only allowed”) ideology of Marxism-Leninism, it still brings some new insights and fresh ideas (including the introduction of the systematic use of the phrase “literary cognition” into Slovak literary theory). These are, however, just brief, fragmentary and indirect discussions of cognition

in literature. A more detailed and systematic preoccupation with the problem was offered only by the linking of literary studies with the studies in human cognition through various cognitive sciences.

Cognitive science is one of the very few sciences whose “date of birth” can be exactly localised, since it emerged as a result of the *Symposium on Information Theory* held at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* in Cambridge on 11 September 1956. As hinted above, its aim is to search for “detailed answers to questions such as: What is reason? How do we make sense of our experience? What is a conceptual system and how is it organized? Do all people use the same conceptual system? If so, what is that system? If not, exactly what is there that is common to the way all human beings think? The questions aren’t new, but some recent answers are.” (Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* xi). Cognitive science thus became the major interdisciplinary initiative marking the convergence of linguistics, computer science, psychology, neuroscience, philosophy of mind, and anthropology.

Due to its interdisciplinary character, cognitive science inspired the establishment of many new interdisciplinary scientific movements (e.g. cognitive philosophy, cognitive psychology, cognitive anthropology), cognitive literary studies being just one of them. During the recent 30 years, however, they have emerged as a group of interdisciplinary literary critical approaches aiming at the explanation of literary phenomena through some of the procedures of such cognitive sciences as philosophy of mind, cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, neuropsychology and cognitive neuroscience, cognitive anthropology, evolutionary biology, informatics, artificial intelligence, and, in last decades, almost “skyrocketed” to popularity, due to the necessity (as some scholars claim) to respond to the postmodern/poststructuralist relativism and interdisciplinary studies (e. g. new historicism, gender studies, and cultural criticism)<sup>8</sup>.

### EMILY DICKINSON

Cognitive literary studies have nowadays become a complex “mixture” of various approaches and methodologies, often conflicting, drawing on various cognitive sciences and emphasising various aspects of the literary process. Of the vast complexity of approaches, in our further discussion of Emily Dickinson’s poetry we will try to use some insights of perhaps “the most cognitive” of the cognitive theories, that is, the theory of cognitive metaphor as initiated especially by Lakoff and Johnson. However, before approaching her poems from the cognitive point of view, we will provide a short introduction to her “world” through a “traditional” discussion of three of her poems, in order to illuminate not only the new procedures, but also to compare with what has been here so far, and thus maybe arrive at a brief assessment of cognitive literary studies in the context with other approaches to the study of literature.

Since the publication of the so-called Johnson edition of Emily Dickinson’s poems there have been many attempts to grasp her poetry from many different points of view. In *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, for example, authors look at different aspects of her poetry – historical, biographical, cultural, feminist, cognitive, dialogic, trying to contextualise and “update” her criticism within the framework of current critical

approaches. However, whatever new approach one might adopt, it is secure to say that “Dickinson has never been what one might call the theorist’s exemplary poet” (Perloff 31), or to agree that “In her symbolic language Dickinson could enjoy the creative liberty of mind that transcends all ideology and all stereotype, not least stereotyped gender restrictions” (Hagenbüchle 24). The reasons for her “nonconformity” are surely complex, but one would definitely be of a very high importance – she was a strong individualist, revolting, consciously or subconsciously, against the culture she grew up in. There is an agreement among literary scholars that it was the culture of the collapsing Puritan world which brought an air of an emergence of something new. Emily Dickinson did not already believe in the old religious tenets, but did not see anything else instead either. Her response was thus not programmatic, but individualistic, using the language of ambiguity and indeterminacy as a means of her ontological searches.

Another fact which may have contributed to the uniqueness of her poetry was her way of life. Since she spent almost all of it in her father’s house, she could not (and did not want to) smooth her poetry by participating in intellectual discussions or other group activities of the day. The poems “materialised” on the scraps of paper during her solitary walks and meditations, being a kind of manifestation of the poet’s existential anxieties. This is the most natural reason for their formal irregularities and fragmentariness; they were lived out by-products of intense spiritual activities, or, as Hagenbüchle has rightly noted, “processual”.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, there have always been critics<sup>10</sup> who claimed that the fragmentariness and formal “irregularities” occurring in her poems are signs of her poetic deficiency as well as publishers who tried to “formalise” her poems. Gradually, however, the number of critics who, on the contrary, saw this as a sign of her modernity has prevailed and nowadays she is even considered to be a literary inspiration for contemporary postmodern artists. As Fathi has put it, “Poets affiliated with modernism, postmodernism, and trends in contemporary poetry denoted by a host of other terms, have cited Dickinson as a literary precursor. Today, one finds many ‘Dickinsonians’ developing poetries of indeterminacy, negation, ellipsis, syntactic difficulty, and back-grounded narrative.” (77).

There is no doubt that not all of her poems show high level of complexity of form and thought. The fact that she kept writing poetry from her young age up to her death must have had influence upon its quality. The first poems were simpler, “girlish” ones, but the older she was getting, the more demanding her poetry was becoming, with an increasing level of “departure” from the contemporary intellectual and artistic milieu. Hagenbüchle in his highly illuminating essay provides, from the structuralist point of view, quite an exhaustive list of features of Dickinson’s poetry which make her so unique and impossible to be labelled by any theoretical movement: thinking in alternatives, elusiveness of meaning, the search for self, exploration of the symbolic power of language, its liminal or threshold quality, difficult writerly style based on semotactic indeterminacy, complex semantic shifts subverting the Victorian culture, the arrow of meaning, crossing the frontiers, and venturing into the wilderness.

The complex character of her poetic world results from the complexity of her reliance on the material world. In spite of the claims by many critics that she was not pri-

marily a mimetic writer,<sup>11</sup> things were absolutely crucial to her. No wonder; her lived world was not extensive, in terms of her moving in many places and visiting cities, but intensive in its deep touch with things which surrounded her. She saw the world through them. This seeing, however, was not only a traditionally romantic perception through “powerful feelings”, or “a series of ecstatic assertions, an abandonment to excess verging on mental unbalance” (Peterson qtd. in Deppman 84), but a highly focused attempt to think of what she saw, and to invite the reader to participate in this, highly difficult, intellectual enterprise. The word “thinking” is thus one of the crucial concepts for Dickinson’s poetry which requires an intelligent reader able to interpret what she thinks, to interpret the meaning of her words. According to Deppman, “she provides far fewer ‘ecstatic assertions’ than careful sequences of ideas and images, not so much ‘abandonment to excess’ as thoughtful production of, and reaction to, extreme states of being” (85). But the poet is no traditional formal thinker either, since what she expects from the reader is not a usual interpretive exercise, but a truly cognitive effort to “decipher” the meaning through images. Allen Tate hits the nail when he says that she “sees the ideas, and thinks the perceptions” (220). His analysis of Dickinson’s “figurative thinking” is based on her poem “Because I could not stop for Death –”, or as he claims, “one of the perfect poems in English” (218):

Because I could not stop for Death –  
 He kindly stopped for me –  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
 And I had put away  
 My labor, and my leisure too,  
 For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove  
 At Recess – in the Ring –  
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –  
 We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –  
 The Dews drew quivering and chill –  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
 My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed  
 A Swelling of the Ground –  
 The Roof was scarcely visible –  
 The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis centuries – and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the Horses’ Heads  
 Were toward Eternity –  
 (Dickinson, p. 350)

According to Tate, every image in the poem “is precise and, moreover, not merely beautiful, but fused with the central idea” (219). The poem is one of her attempts to present what is unrepresentable through rational thinking, the idea of death. She does it through images - of the driver, the carriage, playing children, the setting sun – which play into a complex picture of the approaching end, of the finitude. This relatively simple picture of loss is, however, complicated by the last stanza in which the idea of plenitude was introduced. The death is contradistinguished to eternity, or “the idea of immortality is confronted with the fact of physical disintegration. We are not told what to think; we are told to look at the situation” (220), which cannot be resolved, only perceived.

Another, an even more illustrative poem about thinking through images is “Of Death I try to think like this –”

Of Death I try to think like this –  
 The Well in which they lay us  
 Is but the Likeness of the Brook  
 That menaced not to slay us,  
 But to invite by that Dismay  
 Which is the Zest of sweetness  
 To the same Flower Hesperian,  
 Decoying but to greet us –

I do remember when a Child  
 With bolder Playmates straying  
 To where a Brook that seemed a Sea  
 Withheld us by its roaring  
 From just a Purple Flower beyond  
 Until constrained to clutch it  
 If Doom itself were the result,  
 The boldest leaped, and clutched it –  
 (Dickinson, p. 648)

According to Deppman, in the poem thought attempts to control the presencing of death through a series of images follow “a pattern of earth, still water, running water, and then, after a leap of thought through time and memory, the sea and an image of a child leaping over a brook to clutch a flower” (5). The presenting of the unrepresentable is again done through images evoking ideas laid out for the reader. The two stanzas contain two different situations. In the first stanza the persona likens death to a brook, making it a border, an invitation for the infinity, the plenitude (of sense, which means no sense) symbolised by the flower of the mythological Hesperia, the end’s beginning, the return to immortality through death. The second stanza is based on the same images (*a* brook and *a* flower – this time with indefinite article, which strips them of the generic nature of *the* brook and *the* flower from the first stanza), but now from the poet’s childhood, and thus more individual, intimate for a single human being. The poem thus shows a tendency from the general to the particular, from the objective to the subjective. On the thematic level, the subjective-objective tendency of death is paralleled with the poem’s final semantic irresolution. “Of death

I try to think like this –” means there may be other ways to think the presencing of death. The “menaced not to slay us” and “Decoying but to greet us” are other examples of the poem’s indeterminacy of meaning.

One of Dickinson perhaps most anthologised poems is “There’s a certain Slant of light” which is frequently considered to be the expression of her transcendental sublime. The poem does not address death directly, as the two previous ones, but concentrates on the perception of a sublime moment in which her being has glimpsed its fullness.

There’s a certain Slant of light,  
 Winter Afternoons –  
 That oppresses, like the Heft  
 Of Cathedral Tunes –  
  
 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –  
 We can find no scar,  
 But internal difference,  
 Where the Meanings, are –  
  
 None may teach it – Any –  
 ’Tis the Seal Despair –  
 An imperial affliction  
 Sent us of the Air –  
  
 When it comes, the Landscape listens –  
 Shadows – hold their breath –  
 When it goes, ’tis like the Distance  
 On the look of Death –  
 (Dickinson 118)

The thinking-provoking image here is that of a synaesthetic perception of a strange heavy-sound-light whose otherness changes the world around, evoking the imminent presence of the divine. This presence is promising as well as hurting for the poet just as the presence/absence of death. It metonymically points to the difference within the common, to the substantial (which means also the painful and the terrifying) within the everyday. It is one of the poems in which Dickinson comes closest to Emerson’s transcendentalist idea of nature as the place of the sublime, a means of transcendence towards Divinity. Given for a slight overemphasis, the poem may also be taken as a metaphor of Dickinson’s work in which she was obsessed with the search for the fullness of meaning in the materiality of her world.

The “thinking through images”, as we have tried to demonstrate on the three above poems by using traditional approach to the poetry of Emily Dickinson is, naturally, a *conditio sine qua non* for cognitive literary studies, since its main hypothesis is that the human cognition as such is largely based on mechanisms of metaphorical mapping (Lakoff and Johnson). However, there are also other features which make her work lend itself relatively easily to cognitive criticism. As mentioned above, one of the maxims of cognitive literary studies is that signifying processes are based on the “materiality” of human signifying processes. The language was not given to us by a

transcendental authority, the God, but is a natural function of the processes occurring within the human brain. Such proximity of the literary to the material can be found throughout the whole work of Emily Dickinson. Perhaps the best way to illustrate it is to use her own words describing what poetry means to her: “If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?” Dickinson almost never loses herself in free-floating abstractions, as, perhaps, her contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne does. Even if one has a feeling that she uses abstract words, it frequently turns out that they are the products of metonymical shifts. Cognitive literary scholars have used this peculiar quality of Dickinson’s material and scientific leaning for the analysis of several of her poems. In the following, we will try to comment on some of these analyses, especially the ones by Margaret H. Freeman who has turned out to be Dickinson’s most prolific “cognitive” commentator.

In her study “Metaphor Making Meaning: Dickinson’s Conceptual Universe” Freeman sets out to characterise Dickinson’s conceptual world through which she structures the metaphorical world of her poems. She starts by characterising her time and place (the breaking of Puritan New England resulting in the shakeup of orthodox religious beliefs and the rise of new scientific discourses), to justify the shifts in Dickinson’s perception of reality. This is, in fact, not different from Tate’s identification of reasons for the uniqueness of Dickinson’s imagination. However, while Tate arrived at his concept of “thinking through images”, Freeman identified the shifts in cultural paradigms, as well as the materiality of life around her, open to the scientific leaning of the poet’s mind, as the main reason for Dickinson’s not modelling her conceptual universe on the traditional LIFE IS A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME metaphor which suited very well to her Calvinist upbringing. “From the details of nature in its annual cycles, the circumference of hills that surround the valley in which the town of Amherst lies, and, ultimately, from the discoveries of the new science, Dickinson transformed the metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME into that of LIFE IS A VOYAGE IN SPACE.” (11). Freeman goes on to explain how the religious “journey through time” aimed at salvation in afterlife could not hold for Dickinson affected by the changing paradigm and new scientific discoveries.

A similar metaphorical structuring may be demonstrated on the poem “Because I could not stop for Death –”. If for Tate the poem’s effect was achieved by a cluster of images (the carriage, the rider, children setting sun, gazing grain), in cognitive analysis the poem’s effect rests on the key image of driving, passing, i.e., the movement, leaving behind the things of this world. Besides setting this basic concept, Freeman does not, however, discuss other stylistic or semantic subtleties. We all know that “life is a journey” from the beginning to the end, but in between these two extremes, there are other phenomena our life is filled with, such as pleasure, love, suffering, etc.

A more sophisticated analysis of Dickinson’s poems is offered by Freeman in her article entitled “Momentary Stays, Exploding Forces: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to the Poetics of Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost” in which she compares

the two great American poets. We will concentrate again on the poem which we have tried to interpret above through a traditional, i.e. non-cognitive, approach – “There’s a certain Slant of light”, commenting primarily on the differences between the cognitive and non-cognitive analysis, not on the differences between the poetics of Dickinson and Frost. In her analysis, Freeman herself demonstrates the two approaches when, at the beginning, she divides the poem into two parts, the first one consisting of the first and the last stanza, while the second part consisting of the two inner stanzas. She claims that the “outer” stanzas are subjective, subjecting the human agency to the inhuman qualities of the light, while in the “inner” stanzas we learn about the objective qualities of the light. So far the analysis is insightful, depicting the human condition with the interiority of meanings facing the objective and threatening force of nature. When, however, Freeman decides to incorporate the language of cognitive linguistics, we get back to the mechanical schemas of cognitive models. Here is what she arrives at using cognitive science terminology:

The poem exists as a whole, framed by its opening and closing lines: ‘There’s a certain Slant of light [...] On the look of Death -’. But inside that frame, iconically representing the frame of the CONTAINER schema of the human being in the inner stanzas, the damage has been done, not visible, but internal, an affliction of ‘Despair.’ We are made one with the ‘certain Slant of light’ which, as it comes and goes, leaves us, through the operation of the CHANGE schema, with the intimation of our own mortality. (13).

Freeman is, of course, right when she approaches the poem through the CONTAINER schema, since Lakoff and Johnson classify CONTAINER metaphors as parts of the *ontological metaphors*, which appear “through our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies)” and provide “ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (23), and there is no doubt that Dickinson is primarily an ontological poet, concerned with the exploration of her experiences with physical objects. Moreover, container metaphors are based on the inner-outer division, the basic one in linguistics being the LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS FOR MEANINGS, which is, in turn, part of the so-called CONDUIT metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson in this respect refer to Reddy who observes that linguistics (simplistically – the language about language) is structured by the “IDEAS (Or MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS. LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS. COMMUNICATION IS SENDING.” metaphors (qtd. in Lakoff and Johnson 13). It has to be stressed, however, that these metaphors do not structure language in its totality, as objectivist theories would claim, but just partially.

The acknowledgement of the cognitive metaphors’ only partial structuring of human communication is, in our opinion, where the true contribution of cognitive linguistics’ theory of metaphorical structuring for literary theory lies. If we look at the above poem, for example, we clearly see that there is the inside-outside, subjective-objective schema involved, as it is in most Dickinson’s other poems. The CONTAINER in this case seems to be the light which bounds the scene, makes it different from ordinary, everyday scenes. It affects us, forces us to look at things in a different way, to see them both as things in themselves (“We can find no scar”)

and as things for ourselves (“internal difference”) throwing us to the “affliction” of existence within “differences”, “despair”. It is a figurative CONTAINER of our humanity, of our human condition as well as an image, a figure causing us to think of something other. However, this “cognitive” analysis may be taken as providing just a basic framework, a slant of light”, in which other aspects of the work could take on a unique meaning.

The CONTAINER schemas are very frequent in Dickinson’s poetry (see, for example, the poems “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –”, “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain”, “I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –”, “I found the words to every thought”, etc.). They fit into her basic existential predisposition of a person deeply obsessed with the meanings, which, however, cannot be found on the surface, but deep inside. In her search, she disposes of the superficial, of the unnecessary, and uses language in its emblematic and gnomic capacities to arrive at that inner meaning, which, as in the above poem, is frequently threatened with death, or nothingness. The inside is also frequently associated with the force she had to keep in (as a result of her life in the Puritan society requiring the observance of Calvinist tenets she, consciously or subconsciously, disagreed with), releasing it only through her poetry (“On my volcano grows the Grass”).

The third poem, “Of Death I try to think like this –”, shows the same CONTAINER schema, only this time the inside is more directly associated with death, which is “The Well in which they lay us”. The whole outside (most importantly the brook, which “seemed a Sea” in the second stanza) is a figurative expression of the border between life and death, with the exception of the “Flower Hesperian” and the “Purple Flower” which symbolise eternity, attained only through crossing the border of death. The basic CONTAINER schema is complicated by the PASSING schema, and even more by the PASSING IN TIME movement which is, in this case, reverse, since the second stanza is a flash-back to the (poet’s?) childhood. The movement to the past thus gives a peculiar air to the whole poem, hinting that death (or eternity) waits on both ends of our life.

In addition to the poems discussed above, there are many other poems in the Dickinson canon which could demonstrate other aspects of cognition as put forth by cognitive sciences. One such aspect is the materiality of reading, as Sabine Sielke has demonstrated in her analysis of Dickinson’s poem “The Brain – is wider than the Sky –”, in which Dickinson is baffled by what we would nowadays call the “mechanisms of cognition”, that is, the ability of the brain, as a material thing, to become mind, subsuming the world within itself.

The Brain – is wider than the Sky –  
 For – put them side by side –  
 The one the other will contain  
 With ease – and You – beside –

The Brain is deeper than the sea –  
 For – hold them – Blue to Blue –  
 The one the other will absorb –  
 As Sponges – Buckets – do –

The Brain is just the weight of God –  
 For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –  
 And they will differ – if they do –  
 As Syllable from Sound –  
 (Dickinson 312)

We will not follow Sielke's sometimes highly technical language on neurophysiological-literary processes, for even without that it is clear that the poem is a reflection on the miraculous difference between and unity of the signifier and the signified, that is, materiality and spirituality, a constant theme in Dickinson's work.

To conclude our reflections on Dickinson through a prism of cognitive literary studies, it has to be said that, as Dickinson's work shows, this new approach to literary studies has without any doubt shed a new light on the nature of meaning not only in literature, but in other sciences as well. Its usefulness lies especially in the fact that, among the proliferation of the generally ungrounded political, ideological, cultural, and other critical babble of today, it has turned our attention to something solid, justifiable, or, as Donald C. Freeman has claimed ("Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Theory"), falsifiable. It has, however, also shown that, excluding the exaggerations of the so-called "theory", there still remain considerable differences between the literary and scientific view of the world. What cognitive literary theory claims in its elaborate scientific language, can still be more easily analysed using traditional, that is pre-ideological, language of literary theory.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> To denote this dichotomy, René Wellek in his *Theory of Literature* uses the term "extrinsic" for the study of literature through methods of other sciences and "intrinsic" for the study of literature through its own methods (1985).
- <sup>2</sup> See Derrida, Jacques. *Limited Inc.*
- <sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the "Sokal Affair", see Freeman ("Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Theory").
- <sup>4</sup> "Krásná literatura sděluje určité poznání života, jinými slovy přináší určitou informaci." (Hrabák, *Úvod do studia literatury* 14). Translated into English by AP.
- <sup>5</sup> "... že je literární (a vůbec každé umělecké) dílo specifickým poznáním reality." (Hrabák, *Poetika* 19) Translated into English by AP.
- <sup>6</sup> "... díla zobrazovat a zpřístupňovat předmětnou mimoliterární skutečnost, kterou v běžném životě zkreslují iluze, konvence a různá tabu." (Vlašín 122) Translated into English by AP.
- <sup>7</sup> *Scientific and Literary Cognition*
- <sup>8</sup> See the previously mentioned study by Donald C. Freeman "Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Theory: Towards the New Philology" (1998) which was probably the first work introducing ideas of cognitive literary criticism and the concept of cognitive metaphor to Slovak literary criticism. Its Slovak translation by S. Pokrivčáková was published in 1997 as "Kognitívna metafora a literárna teória: cestou k novej filológii" in the journal *Rak* (Freeman 1997).
- <sup>9</sup> In this respect Hagenbüchle maintains that "Thomas H. Johnson's standard edition creates a false impression since his editorial decisions [...] tend to erase what is a crucial feature of Dickinson's poetry: its processual quality" (15).
- <sup>10</sup> The attempts to "discipline" her poems started already during her lifetime: "By 1866 she had seen at least ten, very probably more, of her poems in print. The *Republican* had printed most of them, and in most of the printings Dickinson had seen alterations of her poems. According to her, such editorial interference dissuaded her from conventional publication." (Smith 11).

<sup>11</sup> According to Hagenbüchle, Dickinson does not describe facts, but rather moves metonymically to describe their effects, concentrates on the symbolic power of the facts: “Starting out from real-world facts, the directional arrow moves the reader towards a symbolic realm with an attendant increase in meaning. Even the simplest poem testifies to this movement from facts to living symbols.” (33).

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**MYSLENIE PROSTREDNÍCTVOM OBRAZOV:  
KOGNITÍVNE SKÚMANIE SVETA EMILY DICKINSONOVEJ**

**Kognitívna literárna veda. Emily Dickinson. Poézia.**

**Cognitive literary studies. Emily Dickinson. Poetry.**

Štúdia je pokusom priblížiť poéziu Emily Dickinsonovej prostredníctvom niektorých princípov kognitívnej literárnej vedy. V prvej časti sa dôraz kladie na prvé pokusy o definovanie poznávania v literatúre a podstaty kognitívnej literárnej vedy. Druhá časť je interpretáciou, z hľadiska tradičnej, ako aj kognitívnej kritiky niektorých básní tejto americkej autorky 19. storočia s dôrazom na spôsob, ktorým autorka poznáva svet okolo seba. Jej poetická vízia je prezentovaná ako ikonické výrazy mentálnych zážitkov so zameraním na gnómickú kompresiu finálneho obrazu. Je charakterizovaná ako poetka, ktorá „myslí prostredníctvom obrazov“ a jej poézia ako spojenie konceptuálneho a figuratívneho hľadania pravdy.

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