

Contamination between Stylistics and Cognitive Poetics: an analysis of *Lord Randal*

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Abstract

The present essay focuses on the contamination of methodologies in the field of literary analysis. More specifically, a model of analysis resulting from the encounter of stylistics and cognitive poetics will be presented in order to demonstrate that the application of hybrid methodologies can lead to a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of literary works; pivotal works by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (*Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 1981) and Peter Stockwell (*Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 2002) will constitute the basis of the model at issue. After briefly illustrating the model itself, an example of quantitative and qualitative analysis will be provided; the object of study will be *Lord Randal*, a traditional ballad that can be defined as endemic across Europe. In fact, attestations can be found in many European languages, although the plot often presents minor differences. The final part of the essay will briefly discuss the mechanisms behind empathy in the above-mentioned ballad.

1. *Lord Randal*

Lord Randal is a popular ballad in dialogic form that narrates the story of a young man poisoned by his lover. The poem displays a dialogue that takes place between a "handsome young man" and his mother. Despite the situation being extremely moving (Lord Randal is indeed confirming to his mother that he has been poisoned), feelings and emotions are never described clearly. In fact, as Göller (1988: 213) affirms, the ballad is characterised by a detached tone and indirectness; however, "emotions are [...] evoked on the part of the reader" (Göller 1988: 213) and, I suggest, this happens because of the emphatic processes realised through language, which will be here investigated. The poem, composed by an anonymous author who divided it into 10 stanzas of 4 lines each, has a rich history: not only are there versions dating back to the 13th century, but there are also versions in many European languages [among them: Italian, Hungarian, German, Danish and Swedish (Taylor 1931: 105)]. The best-known and most studied version of *Lord Randal* is the A variant, that is the English one, dating back to 1710, and extensively analysed by Taylor in 1931. However, the above-mentioned variant is not

the earliest. In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, MacSweeney (1918) provided a detailed editorial history of the Scottish ballad object of study, affirming that:

[t]he ballad is first referred to in a quodlibet printed on a broadside containing the repertoire of a singer called Camillo, who, judging by the date on the sheet, sang it at Verona in 1629. Later in 1656 the ballad was referred to in the Crusca by Canon Lorenzo Panciatichi⁶ who together with the academicians present was tempted to commit the error of trying to 'improve' the ballad (MacSweeney 1918: 326).

Thus, the first attestations of the ballad seem to be in Italian territory.

The name of the protagonist is widely debated; in fact, several versions display different names (among them: Terencè, Teronto, Tyranty, Tyranna, Tyranting, Tar(r)anty, Durango and Dorendo). However, the literary Lord Randall seems to have been inspired by the story of the Ranulf family (Bronson 2015: 191). "The historical Ranulf, or Randall III, sixth Earl of Chester, who died in 1232, was divorced and left no heir, but was succeeded by his nephew John, whose wife was supposed to have tried to poison her husband" (Bronson 2015: 191).

As regards its intended audience, the ballad is not restricted to a specific age group. Indeed, despite the fact that *Lord Randal* narrates a terrifying event, it was adapted for different audiences: throughout the centuries it was addressed to adults, young people and also pre-school children (Göller 1988: 216). For instance, in a German version called *Großmutter als Schlangenköchin* ('Grandmother as a Snake Cook'), the protagonists are a little girl and her grandmother, not a man and his lover as in the most famous version, which is undeniably unsuitable for the youngest audiences (Göller 1988: 216). However, when comparing different variants of the ballad, it becomes clear that the *Randal nucleus* is always retained and only some details vary (Göller 1988: 212).

Furthermore, Taylor (1931) has widely discussed the elements of the A text (1710) that are the result of contamination as well as the correct order of the stanzas. According to the scholar, the order of the stanzas of the A text is incongruous (Taylor 1931: 105); in fact, "it seems scarcely probable that the hero should have met his true love while he was hunting and have dined with her", and, as it emerges from an attentive analysis of the B and G texts, the hero had probably been courting or wooing (Taylor 1931: 105). The presence of the dogs seems nonsensical and it appears that the presence of the "greenwood" is born from a contamination process; in fact, the texts that are not related to the A text never refer to the "greenwood", a peculiar element of English ballads, which, for this reason, could have been absorbed by *Lord Randal* (Taylor 1931: 106).

However, the philology of the texts is still debated; thus, the A text, which is the most famous and studied version, will be analysed as it has been transmitted to us since "ballads come into existence through and after oral transmission. It is therefore no use to search for archetypes or originals" (Göller 1988: 212). Concisely, *Lord Randal* has been both contaminated and contaminating, as is common in the ballad genre. Surely the

⁶ On September 24th, 1656, a canon named Lorenzo Panciatichi read a paper in the Crusca on *Cicalata in lode delta Padella e della Frittura* ('A Cricket's song on the frying pan and on fried food') and quoted parts of *Lord Randal*. From this quotation it has been concluded that the ballad originated during the 16th century at the latest (Göller 1988: 210).

paths of these processes are difficult - if not impossible - to trace, but the observation of the empathic processes in any of the variants might be riveting.

2. Methodology

The theme of contamination is strictly bound both to the nature of the literary work object of study - as underlined in the previous paragraph - and to the methodology. In fact, the aim of the present paper is to emphasise how the hybrid methodology resulting from the encounter between stylistics and cognitive poetics can lead to a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of the mechanisms behind empathy and literary works in general.

Empathy is central in the present study since it is relatively unexplored both in psychology and literary critique. Studies in the philosophy of empathy distinguish between two main types of empathy: cognitive and affective empathy. The latter, which is not the focus of the present essay, involves both a cognitive and an affective process: as a matter of fact, its fundamental characteristic is “affect on the part of the empathizer” (Maibom 2017: 2). On the other hand, the first “denotes the ability to ascribe mental states to others, such as beliefs, intentions, or emotions. This may be done by reflecting on how events, behavior, and psychological states co-vary, or by putting oneself in the position of the other to ‘see’ what one would think, feel, etc.” (Maibom 2017: 1)⁷.

Most genres of literary fiction (novels, poetry and so on) create possibilities of experience using language as a medium: they are able to “produce a complex layering or interrelation of experiential perspectives” (John 2017: 306), which can be compared; and, thus, they are strictly bound to empathy since they can be considered as attempts to experience other lives. As a matter of fact, the majority of readers don’t concentrate on the author’s experiential perspective, which is manifested by the language used, but on the literary work itself (John 2017: 307) and on the possibility of walking in the shoes of the characters⁸. However, this process needs to be completed by the reader because it is “not fully under the control of the [literary] work”⁹ (John 2017: 312).

I argue that the mechanisms behind empathy can be successfully investigated thanks to the hybridisation of methodologies. In the present essay the possibility to unite the tools of traditional stylistic analysis¹⁰ and the ones of cognitive poetics is considered and, thus, the statement that cognitive poetics is a mere evolution of stylistics is refuted¹¹. The model here presented tries to address the criticisms around

⁷ Cognitive empathy may involve affect; however, it is not necessary (Maibom 2017: 2).

⁸ It is fundamental to emphasise the possibility to identify/empathise with any character, even though, as readers, we do not share their desires or opinions (John 2017: 309). This is a matter strictly bound to cognitive phenomena, style and awareness of the non-existence of the fictional dimension, which leads readers to “a relaxation of the self’s control of perspective” (John 2017: 315).

⁹ Cognitive poetics tries to understand what happens in the mind of non-professional readers and the reasons behind the popularity of certain literary works, which are aspects that have been widely neglected in the academy (Stockwell 2007: 145-146).

¹⁰ With the term *traditional stylistic analysis* is intended the stylistic analysis as described by Leech and Short (1981/2007).

¹¹ Concerning the debate, see Stockwell, 2007.

cognitive poetics, which state that it neglects “the stylistic texture of the literary work” (Stockwell 2007: 146).

Data were collected using the model Leech and Short proposed for the analysis of prose (1981/2007), which involves the examination of lexical and grammatical categories, context and cohesion, figures of speech and “features which are foregrounded by virtue of departing in some way from general norms of communication by means of the language code” (Leech and Short 2007: 61-64). However, the interpretation of the data, partially gathered using #LancsBox, needs to rely on other approaches that recognise the importance of the literary context. Thus, the methodology will involve the analysis of the above-mentioned features as well as various elements from cognitive poetics.

Since this study is aimed at understanding the mechanisms behind empathy¹², the cognitive analysis will focus only on the following features: foregrounding¹³ (Stockwell 2005: 14), deixis¹⁴ (Stockwell 2005: 43), roles within the reading process [*i.e.*, real author, extrafictional voice, implied author, narrator(s), character(s), narratee(s), implied

¹² In the last few decades, the process undergone by the reader to be able to walk in any character’s shoes has been an object of attention; however, any study that tried to deal with this issue has underlined its trickiness (John 2017: 312).

¹³ “Foregrounding” is strictly bound to the aspects of literary works that are considered more important than others. As a matter of fact, it “can be achieved by a variety of devices, such as repetition, unusual naming, innovative descriptions, creative syntactic ordering, puns, rhyme, alliteration, metrical emphasis, the use of creative metaphor, and so on” (Stockwell 2005: 14). In other words, foregrounding is realised through deviations from “the expected or ordinary use of language” (Stockwell 2005: 14).

¹⁴ The term deixis derives from the Greek δείκνυμι (“pointing”, “showing”) and it refers to the elements of language that help the recipient of any message to orientate (among them: demonstratives, personal pronouns, adverbs of time) (Wales 2001: 99). When discussing deixis, understanding the concept of “origo” is fundamental; the origo, also called the “deictic-centre” or “zero-point”, indicates who is producing the utterance, when and where. Concisely, the origo helps the reader to orientate within the text, understanding “the uses of words in context” (Stockwell 2005: 46). When discussing literature, six categories of deixis can be outlined: perceptual deixis, indicating the perceptive participants in the text through personal pronouns, demonstratives, definite articles and so on; spatial deixis, indicating where the deictic centre lies through spatial adverbs, locatives, verbs of motion and so on; temporal deixis, “locating the deictic centre in time” (Stockwell 2005: 46) mainly through temporal adverbs and locatives concerning time; relational deixis, indicating any relationship among “authors, narrators, characters and readers” (Stockwell 2005: 46); textual deixis, including any reference to paratextual elements; and compositional deixis, indicating “aspects of the text that manifest the generic type or literary conventions available to readers with the appropriate literary competence” (Stockwell 2005: 46).

reader, idealised reader and real reader (Stockwell 2005: 42)]¹⁵, deictic shift theory¹⁶ (Stockwell 2005: 46) and text world theory¹⁷ (Stockwell 2005: 136). Furthermore, when needed for the interpretation, the methodological framework will be enriched by concepts from Searle's model¹⁸ (1969; 1975).

3. Analysis

Lord Randal is characterised by an extremely simple and informal language, in which evaluative terms are almost absent. In fact, the only term completely classifiable as evaluative is the adjective "handsome", often uttered by the mother. Despite the above-mentioned absence, the ballad is emotionally intense, as the terms "true-love", "sick", "son", "mother", "died", "poisoned" and "hell and fire" suggest. Furthermore, the collocations "make my bed" and "gat your leavins", which are often used in the colloquial language, underline the strong relationship between mother and son (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23). As shown even by the listed collocations, the ballad is characterised by archaic terms, which were certainly of common usage when the ballad was written.

¹⁵ The real author is the flesh-and-blood person who wrote the literary work; the extrafictional voice is constituted by the information and the impressions that the reader has about the author, mostly derived from the author's writing, literary criticism and historical accounts about them; the implied author is "a TEXTUAL construct, created by the real author to be the (ideal?) image of him- or herself, and also created anew by the reader; and who may or may not intrusively address the reader directly; and whose opinions and POINT OF VIEW as NARRATOR may or may not coincide with those of the author" (Wales 2011: 204); the narrator is whoever tells the story; and, characters are the persons in the literary work (Stockwell 2005: 42). The real reader is the person who reads the literary work; the idealised reader includes all the possible readings of the literary work; the implied reader "is rather a complex concept, hovering between the real reader of the text at any one moment of time, and the image of an IDEAL READER (q.v.), who would properly and completely understand the meaning and significances of a text. The implied reader is basically what the textual RHETORIC itself implicates or involves" (Wales 2011: 204); and, the narratee is the addressee of the narrator(s) (Stockwell 2005: 43).

¹⁶ Deictic shift theory (DST) affirms the possibility of the reader to (metaphorically) enter the literary work and take a cognitive stance: readers can see things from the perspective of the narrator or the character: "[t]his imaginative capacity is a deictic shift which allows the reader to understand projected deictic expressions relative to the shifted deictic centre" (Stockwell 2005: 47). DST is strictly bound to the roles within the reading process, among which the reader moves through motions called *PUSHes* and *POPs*; in other words, a deictic shift occurs every time we immerse in a plane of the world of the text (**PUSH**), and every time we emerge (*i.e.*, **pop** out) from a plane of the world of the text (Stockwell 2005: 47).

¹⁷ Text world theory is characterised by an astonishing complexity; however, for the present analysis, only its key terms (discourse world, text world and sub-worlds) are relevant. Discourse worlds involve "face-to-face" interaction among two or more discourse participants (such as, author and reader or two speakers in a conversation); the text is used by participants to create the text world "which consists of world-building elements and function-advancing propositions. World-building elements constitute the background against which the foreground events of the text will take place" (Stockwell 2005: 137). Sub-worlds, instead, are flashbacks, flashforwards, predictions, beliefs, views of the characters and so on. For a categorisation of sub-worlds, see Stockwell 2005: 140-141.

¹⁸ Searle (1975: 354-361) proposes a taxonomy of illocutionary acts; he distinguishes between five categories: assertives (*e.g.*, statements, descriptions, and predictions), directives (*e.g.*, orders, requests, and direction giving), commissives (*e.g.*, promises, oaths, and bets), expressives (*e.g.*, greetings, congratulations, and thanks), and declarations (*e.g.*, excommunications, hirings, and declarations of war).

1 'O where ha you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where ha you been, my handsome young man?'
'I ha been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

2 'An wha met ye there, Lord Randal, my son?
An wha met you there, my handsome young man?'
'O I met wi my true-love; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'im wearied wi huntin, an fain wad lie down.'

3 'And what did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?'
'Eels fried in a pan; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi huntin, and fain wad lie down.'

4 'And wha gat your leavins, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha gat your leavins, my handsome young man?'
'My hawks and my hounds; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

5 'And what becam of them, Lord Randal, my son?
And what becam of them, my handsome young man?'
'They stretched their legs out an died; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi huntin, and fain wad lie down.'

6 'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man'
'O yes, I am poisoned; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

7 'What d' ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?'
'Four and twenty milk kye; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

8 'What d'ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?'
'My gold and my silver; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, an I fain wad lie down.'

9 ' What d' ye leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your brother, my handsome young man?'
'My houses and my lands; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

10 'What d'ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?
 What d' ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?'
 'I leave her hell and fire; mother, mak my bed soon,
 For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

(*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23)

The most relevant semantic fields, which are formed by a few elements because of the restricted lexical diversity, are those of animals (“milk kye”, “hawks”, “hounds”, “eels”), wealth (“milk kye”, “gold”, “silver”, “houses”, “lands”) and domestic hearth (“son”, “mother”, “pan”, “sister”, “brother”). Nouns, including the proper ones, represent about 22% of the tokens. The majority of them are concrete; the only proper noun is “Randal”, which is always pronounced by the mother of the protagonist and preceded by the honorific “Lord”. Only two substantives can be specifically classified as negative, that is “hell” and “fire”.

Adjectives represent about 20% of the tokens¹⁹. The majority of them are classifiable as possessive adjectives: “my” (37), “their” (1) and “your” (10). Every adjective, except for “four and twenty milk [kye]” and “fried”, is repeated at least twice. The adjectives “young” and “handsome”, indicating physical qualities of the protagonist, are regularly present every four lines. It is also relevant to mention that the majority of adjectives are referred to the protagonist of the ballad (“my”, “handsome”, “young”, “wearied”, “poisoned” and “sick”). Comparatives as well as superlatives are absent and there is a marked preponderance of attributive adjectives; in fact, there are only 13 predicative adjectives [“wearied” (5), “poisoned” (3) and “sick” (5)] and they all have a negative connotation.

Verbs are around 19% of the tokens and many of them are recurrent because of the repetition of some lines.

Verb phrase	Tense	Occurrences
“Have been”	Present perfect	3 (l. 1, 2, 3)
“Mak”	Imperative	10 (l. 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27,31, 35, 39)
“Am/'m”	Present simple	11 (l. 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 23, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40)
“Wad lie down”	Present conditional	10 (l. 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40)
“Met”	Past simple	3 (l. 5, 6, 7)
“Did (she) give”	Past simple	2 (l. 9, 10)
“Gat”	Past simple	2 (l. 13, 14)
“Becam”	Past simple	2 (l. 17, 18)

¹⁹ The term “token” is often considered a synonym of “word”. Nevertheless, this simplification may induce a belief that tokenisation is an absolute concept and that there is one and one only tokenisation possible. Instead, depending on the decisions, the results vary. A token can be defined as “an instance of a sequence of characters in some particular document that are grouped together as a useful semantic unit for processing” (Manning *et al.* 2008: 22).

"Stretched out"	Past simple	1 (l. 19)
"Died"	Past simple	1 (l. 19)
"Fear"	Present simple	2 (l. 21, 22)
"D' (ye) leave / leave"	Present simple	9 (l. 25, 26, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39)

The most-used verb is "to be" (14), followed by "to make" (10), "to lie down" (10) and "to leave"²⁰ (9). The verbs in the past simple are the ones with the least number of occurrences (11).

Adverbs are rare in *Lord Randal* (around 5%) and can be classified as follows:

Adverb	Type	Occurrences
"Where"	Adverb of place	2
"Soon"	Adverb of time	10
"Fain"	Adverb of manner	10
"There"	Adverb of place	2

Every stanza, except for the sixth, contains a repartee between mother and son. More specifically, the first two lines contain an interrogation addressed from the mother to Lord Randal: the question is repeated, but the epithet used by the woman varies. The first two lines of each stanza aim at obtaining information from the addressee. However, in the sixth stanza, the first two lines (l. 21, 22) provide relevant information about the feelings of Lord Randal's mother and, thus, are classifiable as expressive speech acts according to Searle's model (1969; 1975): "O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son! / I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

Also, the last line of every stanza contains information about Lord Randal's state of mind; however, no performative verb introduces the statement. It is also worth mentioning that while stanzas one to five share the same conclusive line, that is "For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23), stanzas six to ten contain the variant "For I'm sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23). Furthermore, in the ballad, sentences without verbs are present: they are uttered by Lord Randal as answers to his mother's questions (l. 11, 15, 27, 31, 35).

Sentences are brief and straightforward, and their medium length is 10.8 tokens. Coordination is preponderant; in fact, only one causal preposition is present and it is repeated in two variants at the end of each stanza: "mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down", "mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

²⁰ While the verb *to leave* is present in the stanzas between the seventh to the tenth, the verbs *to make* and *to lie down* occur one time per stanza.

The most recurrent complex noun phrases are “Lord Randal my son” and “my handsome young man”: they are repeated throughout the text and have a vocative function; only one other complex noun phrase is present and it contains multiple adjectives: “four and twenty milk kye”. It should also be noticed that Lord Randal uses the noun “mother” as a vocative, while his mother uses the above-mentioned noun phrase (“Lord Randal my son”), containing the term of address “Lord”, which may seem inappropriate in a moving private situation such as the one delineated in the poem.

In the ballad only six determinative articles and one indeterminate article are present (“in a pan”). The first determinative article precedes the noun “greenwood” and is located in the third line. The other instances of “the” always precede the substantive “heart”, which is repeated five times from the sixth stanza on.

The only conjunction present within the ballad is “and” (25 instances); four interjections [“o” (3) and “yes” (1)] are also present and they are always located at the beginning of the line. Negations are absent, while pronouns are widely used. In fact, they represent about 14% of tokens. Personal pronouns can be classified as follows: 3 third person feminine pronouns (two subject and one object); 16 singular second person pronouns (9 in the form “ye” and 7 in the form “you”), 21 first person singular pronouns (subject) and 3 third person plural pronouns (1 subject and 2 object). Furthermore, there are 16 interrogative pronouns: 12 instances of the interrogative pronoun “what” and 4 instances of the interrogative pronoun “wha”, which corresponds to the modern *who* (OED Online 2021). The following auxiliary verbs are also present: “to do” occurs 10 times and it is always used to ask questions [“d” (8), “did” (2)]; “to have” occurs 3 times in the form “ha”; and “will” occurs 10 times in the archaic form of “would” [“wad”] and is used to express the present conditional.

The ballad is rich in repetitions; in fact, the noun phrases “Lord Randal my son” and “my handsome young man” are present in every stanza. Furthermore, the final line of each stanza, which is present in two different variants [“For I’m wearied wi’ huntin’ an’ fain wad lie down”, “For I’m sick at the heart an’ I fain wad lie down” (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23)], is also repeated. Thus, every stanza varies from the previous and the following ones only in some details, that is the question of the first and second line and the first part of the third line, where Lord Randal briefly answers his mother. In the following stanzas the recurring elements, which constitute a refrain (Aviram 1994: 253), are displayed in italics.

*‘An’ wha met ye there, Lord Randal my son?
An’ wha met you there; my handsome young man?’
‘O I met wi my true-love; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I’m wearied wi’ huntin’ an’ fain wad lie down’.*

*‘And what did she give you, Lord Randal my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?’
‘Eels fried in a pan; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I’m wearied wi’ huntin’ and fain wad lie down’*

(English and Scottish Popular Ballads 1904: 22-23).

Particularly interesting is also the repetition of the noun “true-love”, which is firstly used by Lord Randal (l. 7) and, then, after the shocking revelation about the poisoning, by his mother (l. 38). The adjective “poisoned” is meaningfully repeated 3 times in the sixth stanza, which differs remarkably from the others:

'O I fear you are *poisoned*, Lord Randal, my son!
 I fear you are *poisoned*, my handsome young man.'
 'O yes, I am *poisoned*; mother, mak my bed soon,
 For I' m sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

(*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

Furthermore, two climaxes are present: the first one in the transition between Lord Randal's tiredness and his sickness of heart (“For I'm wearied wi' huntin' an' fain wad lie down”; “For I'm sick at the heart an' I fain wad lie down”); and the second in his bequeath²¹, where his goods are listed from the least to the most valuable (“four and twenty milk kye”, “my gold and my silver”, “my houses and my lands”).

Among the metaphors, “eels fried in a pan” (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23) is particularly relevant; in fact, according to Aviram (1994: 254), eels can be considered a phallic symbol and their being in a container would confirm this reading since the pan can be considered a symbol of the female reproductive system. Göller (1988: 214), however, formulates another widely discussed hypothesis, whereby the eels are seen as similar to snakes, can be considered an evil symbol and, thus, could be associated with both the devil and poison. In this case, eels would be part of the terms that have a negative connotation (*i.e.*, “sick”, “died”, “poisoned”, “hell and fire”, “wearied”). Furthermore, the alliteration of the sounds “m” and “w” is also present (“mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down” (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23)).

As previously discussed, the ballad is rich in coordinative conjunctions, including 25 occurrences of the conjunction “and”, a fact that will be further discussed in the data interpretation section. It is also in the dialogic form; however, direct speeches are not introduced by declarative verbs since no narrator is present. In fact, Lord Randal's words can be distinguished by the ones of his mother only thanks to the repetition of the already discussed noun phrases with the function of the vocative (“Lord Randal my son”, “my handsome young man”, “mother”).

4. Data interpretation and cognitive analysis

The poem is characterised by a simple vocabulary that should not be seen as denoting insignificance. In fact, such simplicity can be the result of a considerable effort, and it is particularly apt for the narration of an event within a poem (Aviram 1994: 247). One of

²¹ The nuncupative testament is considered a relevant feature of the ballad genre. Other peculiarities of the genre are the simple rhymes, the obligatory epithets, the reliance on dialogue, and the dramatic nature of the narrative; their aim was to make the ballad easier to remember: as it is well known, ballads were transmitted orally, were accompanied by music and were a form of entertainment particularly appreciated by the lower social classes (Bold 2018).

the peculiarities of the ballad is that it “has held with extraordinary tenacity to its stanzaic pattern: the first half of the stanza is a question repeated with only a change of address; the second half an answer, addressed to the questioner, and a premonitory assertion of desperate illness” (Bronson 2015: 46). Thus, when the regularity, peculiar of the ballad genre in general, is abruptly interrupted, the phenomenon strikes the reader vehemently:

‘O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal my son,
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man.’
‘O yes, I am poisoned; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I am sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down’

(*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23)

Here, regularity is interrupted by the interjection of the first line (*i.e.*, “O”) that indicates the involvement of emotions. Indeed, the presence of the above-mentioned interjection united with the repetition of the verb *to fear* and the adjective “poisoned” leads the anxiety to a growth that began when the reader learned about the destiny of the “hawks and hounds.” Furthermore, the interjections “O yes” in the following line shock the reader because they confirm that Lord Randal has been poisoned but, at the same time, the reasons are not made explicit. Furthermore, in the same stanza, the reader notices a climax; in line 24, Lord Randal does not say he is tired because he has been hunting, as he asserted in the previous stanzas, but he states he is tired because he is “sick at the heart” (Göller 1988: 213). Thus, it is possible to affirm that the poisoning that leads Lord Randal to his death is the emotional focus of the ballad because it is the only moment in which the feelings of the “handsome young man” and his mother emerge, albeit indirectly. As a matter of fact, the poisoning is foregrounded not only thanks to the above-mentioned features (*i.e.*, interruption of regularity, presence and repetition of the verb *to fear* and of the adjective “poisoned”, the death of the “hawks and hounds” and the presence of the interjections “O yes”), but also thanks to the fact that the lines “mother, mak my bed soon, For I’m wearied wi’ huntin’ and fain wad lie down” were repeated (and thus, foregrounded) in the whole ballad²². It should also be noticed that the two protagonists always exercise self-control, despite the tragic events taking place. In fact, the protagonists of the dialogue never directly reveal the killer’s name, to whom they refer using the third person singular pronoun and with the substantive “true-love”, which has an extremely positive connotation.

Furthermore, the dialogue has both an aesthetic and a logical function. In fact:

[t]he mother grows suspicious at the young man’s remarks on his rendezvous. She asks leading questions and her suspicions become certainty: her son has been poisoned. The innuendo of the first lines is thus not simply explained or correlated by further facts; rather the hearer takes part in a process of recognition through the medium of the mother (Göller 1988: 212).

²² As Bold (2018) affirms, ballads are characterised by the so-called incremental repetition: generally, the stanza is repeated but information is progressively added.

In other words, the mother investigates the facts, firstly helping the readers to imagine what happened and then letting them really understand.

Lord Randal's answers are incredibly brief and often do not contain a verb; thus, they can be considered a sign of the will of the young man to communicate as little as possible to his mother. The poem, being a ballad, is characterised by the insistent repetition of some lines, which helps for memorising (Aviram 1994: 248). Among the repeated terms, the most evident are "lord" and "my son", where the honorific "lord" indicates a distancing while the possessive adjective "my" emphasises the emotional involvement (Göller 1988:213). Thus, the above-mentioned terms can be considered in contrast with each other. Since the question-answer model is repeated and each question is similar to the related answer, they can also be considered an example of parallelism (Göller 1988:231).

Another noteworthy climax is constituted by the items that Lord Randal will bequeath to his relatives. They are ordered from the least to the most valuable and each one presents a hidden meaning: "Four and twenty milk kye" to his mother, a symbol of maternity, gold and silver to his sister, which could be given as a dowry, his houses and his lands to his brother, in order to make him a member of the aristocracy, and "hell and fire" to his true love (Donahue 2008; Palmer 1984). Interestingly, only the answer about his bequeath to his lover entails the subject and the verb; these could be denotative of his anger with his killer.

Particularly relevant is the repetition of the coordinative conjunction "and" that gives a specific rhythmic pattern to the ballad. In fact, it is present both in the lines pronounced by Lord Randal and in those uttered by his mother. However, even in this case, regularity is interrupted in the sixth stanza – which constitutes a turning point in the poem. Indeed, from the seventh stanza onward, namely the stanzas containing the bequest of Lord Randal, the conjunction "and" is substituted by the interrogative pronoun "what." In other words, the foregrounded element changes: firstly, it corresponds to the coordinative conjunction "and", then to "I fear", which is present only in the sixth stanza, and finally to the interrogative pronoun "what".

Also particularly interesting is the use of personal pronouns. In fact, the dialogue is rich in first singular pronouns with the role of subject (none of them has the function of object). Only three third singular feminine pronouns are present, two functioning as subject of the verb "to give", which presents the second person singular pronoun as object, indicating that the action has its effect on Lord Randal. Instead, in line 39, the subject indicates Lord Randal and the object is his true-love: "I leave her hell and fire." Thus, Lord Randal will bequeath her a terrible inheritance, punishing her but continuing to consider her his "true love", as the sobriquet suggests. Instead, the third person plural pronoun is referred to the hounds and hawks of the Lord, who have met his same fate.

The second person singular pronoun is used 16 times by the mother: thus, it can be considered another element that gives rhythm to the ballad. It should also be noticed that the second person singular pronoun is always referred to Lord Randal, who - being brief and not asking questions of his mother - can thus be considered reluctant to provide more information. The third person singular masculine pronoun is never used.

Another element that scholars have widely discussed is the presence of eels, which can be considered as a metaphor for the male genitalia (Aviram 1994: 258) or evil (Göller 1988: 214). Depending on the reading, some elements within the ballad change their meaning. Among them, the most salient element is the phrasal verb “to lie down” that acquires the meaning of “to die” in the reading by Göller (1988) but, in the reading by Aviram (1994: 258), acquires - together with “hell and fire” - a peculiar meaning that is strictly bound to the English Renaissance; in this case, “hell and fire” would indicate passion and lust and the verb “to lie down” would acquire a sexual connotation.

The acquired data can be further interpreted by examining them through cognitive poetics, which enables us to understand why the reader takes the side of a specific character. The title of the ballad draws the reader’s attention to the main character, Lord Randal, who, using a metaphor from cognitive psychology, is perceived as being under the spotlight. Thus, the reader immediately looks for Lord Randal when approaching the text and instantly finds him in the first line. In fact, his role as a figure²³ is immediately evident. The attention drawn to the character from the title that the ballad has acquired stays on it until a new character, his mother, is presented. Introduced through a vocative, she gets the spotlight and the reader’s attention only for a few seconds, since her character has not been developed by the author. The same process takes place for Lord Randal’s sister and brother, who are introduced in the second half of the poem, where he makes his will. Despite only getting the spotlight for a few moments, his mother has a crucial role in the poem: she asks questions to her son, allowing the description of the events. Furthermore, it is relevant that the eels get the role of a figure; in fact, they are foregrounded within the eleventh line and have the function of being a trajector while the pan is the landmark²⁴. Lastly, in the conclusion of the ballad, his “true-love” gets for the attention of the reader, also thanks to the repetition of the above-mentioned noun phrase, which is also present in the first part of the ballad.

When considering the roles within the reading process, the situation is atypical. In fact, being an anonymous ballad and having only information about possible “sources”, we cannot consider other literary works written by the author or observe the different extrafictional voice(s). However, the peculiarity of the ballad is the continuous variation of the roles of the narrator and narratee. In fact, the first two lines of every stanza are pronounced by Lord Randal’s mother and he is the narratee, while the third and fourth line present the opposite situation (thus, there is a “personal” deictic shift within every stanza). It is also interesting to point out that, in the first part of the ballad, the stanzas between the first and the fifth, both characters are collocated in their present; still, they discuss past events except for the last part of the fourth line of every stanza, which is said by Lord Randal and refers to their present. Instead, there is a

²³ Gestalt psychologists were the first to introduce the notions of *figure* and *ground* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Basically, “[i]n most narrative fiction, [...] characters are figures against the ground of their settings” (Stockwell 2005: 15); and, focusing on the above-mentioned notions, it is possible to understand the importance of each character (concerning figure and ground, see Stockwell 2005: 12-26).

²⁴ If considered within the image schema, “the element that is the figure is called the trajector and the element it has a grounded relationship with is called the landmark” (Stockwell 2006: 16).

preponderance of verbs in the present simple in the stanzas between the sixth and the tenth. To summarise, from the first to the fifth stanza, there is a continuous temporal deictic shift: in every stanza, the reader submerges in Lord Randal's past (so there is a PUSH) but, in the second half of the third line, the reader emerges from it and is brought to the present (so there is a POP). However, the POP of the fifth stanza is final because, from that moment on, the reader does not enter new worlds but stays in the current text world (*i.e.*, in the narrative level of the story), that is, in the moment in which the conversation between Lord Randal and his mother takes place.

Relational deixis can be labeled as atypical if the close relationship between the characters is considered; in fact, the presence of the noun "mother" and of the noun phrases "my son" and "my handsome young man" indicates a close relationship between the characters. On the contrary, the noun phrase "Lord Randal" contrasts with the above-mentioned elements and denies the presence of such a strong relationship. As a matter of fact, as stated previously, the term of address "Lord" may seem inappropriate in a moving private situation such as the one delineated in the ballad. Furthermore, within the text, there are deictic elements that denote the degree of emotional involvement of the characters. One of them is surely the possessive adjective "my", which is present in the words of Lord Randal's mother, or, more precisely, in the noun phrases that have the function of vocative and are repeated in the first two lines of every stanza. In fact, the above-mentioned possessive adjective clearly shows a very high level of affection by the mother, who suffers with her son. Despite the fact that readers don't focus much on her suffering in their first reading of the poem, a closer reading finds her pain as a relevant element of the ballad. Thus, we can affirm that the mother's suffering has an effect on the reader who sees the reflection of Lord Randal's great pain on his mother. In fact, the reader perceives Lord Randal as the most suffering person because the events affect him and the reader finds relief only when the protagonist bequeaths "hell and fire" to his true-love: this seems a fairly obvious point, however - from a linguistic point of view - it is the result of foregrounding.

In conclusion, the reader is likely to empathise with both Lord Randal and his mother, but more with Lord Randal for the following reasons:

- both characters occupy the role of speaker; however, the mother is not the subject of the sentences she pronounces (except for the ones in the sixth stanza).
- Both are deictic centres to the same extent (20 lines are pronounced by Lord Randal and 20 lines by his mother). However, the questions are posed to Lord Randal, who continuously reiterates the need to lie down, helping the reader to understand that a tragic event is about to happen.
- Lord Randal and his hounds and hawks are the patients of the negative action of his "true-love", who has the role of agent, antagonist and sole organiser of the deceit of which Lord Randal is a victim.
- The temporal deictic shift concerns an event in Lord Randal's past (and not in his mother's).
- The mother's language shows overall a strong relationship with her son.

For the combination of the above-mentioned circumstances, it is possible to affirm that while the reader could unconsciously decide to empathise more with Lord Randal, they could empathise too also with his mother, who is inevitably afflicted by the events.

The present essay tries to present a close reading of *Lord Randal*, a ballad endemic across Europe, as a *case in point* in methodological contamination. The traditional stylistic analysis (as defined in Leech and Short, 2007) allows the collection of a large amount of (mostly) quantitative data with the scientific method, which correctness can be verified by other researchers analysing the same dataset. Its interpretation can be enriched by cognitive poetics, a relatively young branch of linguistics, born in the 1980s, which involves the interaction between literary studies and cognitive sciences²⁵ (Boezio 2011: 19). In other words, the hybridisation of methodologies gives a solid scientific basis to the interpretation of the literary work object of study, including both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis.

The issues concerning the methodologies united in the present essay are mainly related to human errors and differences among categorisations. As a matter of fact, it is possible to mechanise only some processes (*e.g.*, counting any part of speech, individuating sematic fields²⁶, calculating the medium length of sentences and phrases and thus their complexity etc.), while some observations depend on the knowledge of the scholar analysing the literary work object of study. For example, Leech and Short (2007: 61) only list eight kinds of attributes concerning adjectives (physical, psychological, visual, auditory, colour, referential, emotive, and evaluative), thus, providing a partial list, which may be difficult to complete both for native and non-native speakers²⁷; furthermore, some rhetorical figures may be complex to individuate and the effectiveness of the whole cognitive poetic analysis depends closely both on the knowledge and the punctiliousness of the interpreter.

In conclusion, the hybridisation between traditional stylistic analysis and cognitive poetics may be a further step towards a “scientific” interpretation of literary texts and of the mechanisms behind empathy; however, despite the help of the new technologies, humans make mistakes, thus, it is possible to affirm that the hybrid methodology here presented can surely help to investigate literary works and the empathic processes but it would strongly benefit from the development of new software and tools.

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²⁵ *Cognitive sciences* (OED Online n.a.) are a group of disciplines that aim to study human and artificial cognitive processes; among these are neurosciences, artificial intelligence, psycholinguistics, anthropology, cognitive psychology.

²⁶ The UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) is a software developed for the automatic semantic analysis of text [concerning the application of USAS, see Deegan, Short, Archer, Baker, McEnery, Rayson (2004)].

²⁷ The same issue can be found concerning the analysis of nouns, verbs and adverbs within Leech and Short’s seminal work (2007: 61-62).

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