

## 6 Scripts and schemas

### Preview

Why do people read literature? Why do people write literature? These questions have been cogitated by philosophers, literary critics, writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers for as long as literature has existed. As we have already seen in examples in previous chapters, often literary texts are about themselves as texts: as much about writing and reading as they are about the apparent subject-matter. Different motivations for reading have been suggested, ranging from an appreciation of realism to a value placed on escapism. You hear people praising a book because it reflects something to them of their own lives, has a character they can identify with, or is written out of real experience and therefore seems to be authentic in a way that is admirable and engaging. Alternatively you hear people praising a book because of its depth of imagination, the richness or exotic nature of the characterisation, or the intricate plotting or surrealism or absurdity of the events.

Both of these opinions, and all points between, rely on a view of the literary experience that presents a world, a rich setting beyond the words on the page. The text interacts with the reader's mental faculties, memories, emotions and beliefs to produce a sum that is richer than the parts: the text is actualised, the reader is vivified, by a good book.

In order to understand what is going on here, we need to be able to understand how exactly texts interact with readerly experience. We need to address the difficult question of *context* in relation to literary texts and reading, and we need to develop a principled idea of context that does not simply ascribe particular readings to some vague sense of 'background knowledge'.

As a first step in this direction, one of the earliest applications of an approach from cognitive science to literature was **schema theory**. This was originally developed as a means of providing computer programs in artificial intelligence research with a contextual 'knowledge' that would enable them to process language. Several different frameworks have been proposed over the years, with different terminology and with slightly different aims, but I will gather them together here under the general term 'schema theory'. Since there are many examples of schema theoretical applications to the literature of the

last two centuries, and schema poetics does not depend primarily on stylistic form, I will present an analysis of literature from the Anglo-Saxon period.

## Links with literary critical concepts

*Context, contextualisation, defamiliarisation, experience, fictionality, historicism, history, imagination, literariness, literary worlds, readerliness, realism*

Many of the shifts in critical theory and ‘crises’ in literary theorising revolve around the thorny question of how much textuality, how much readerliness, and how much history should be brought into literary critical discussions. One of the advantages of formalist approaches to literature is that analysis is easily visible and cited evidence is apparent and demonstrable on the surface of a text. Of course, absolute formalism has to explain how meanings can be generated without readerly or other contextual input. What is satisfying at the level of pure description is not very satisfactory as a general account of literary understanding.

By contrast, approaches that have focused on readers reading have been accused of being psychological studies rather than literary study as such. Either they emphasise individual idiosyncrasy, or they treat groups of readers as sources of ‘data’ rather than interpretations. At the other extreme, critical approaches grounded in historical contexts can be seen as being more interested in history than the literature itself, treating a literary text as no more than an archaeological artefact, and engaging in a sort of slapdash poor-man’s history, where claims can be made about the past while evading the disciplinary rigour and evidence required in genuine historical study.

All of these solutions represent different views of what counts as relevant and appropriate context. In fact, none of them is either fully contextualised or entirely decontextualised. Furthermore, they address in different ways and mainly implicitly the real questions, which are not whether context is important but how is it important and how is it used. Given the vast amount of historical context that is potentially available, and the hugeness of the imagined experience of the author and the contemporary society, and given the massive encyclopedic knowledge carried around in the heads of readers, how can we decide which bits of context are used and which are not, in a principled way? That is the ground of schema poetics.

## Conceptual dependency

The main obstacle to artificial intelligence is the fact that language exhibits **conceptual dependency**. That is, the selection of words in a sentence, and the meanings derived from sentences, depend not on a dictionary-like denotation of these strings of words but on the sets of ideas and other associations that the words suggest in the minds of speakers and hearers. Often, both speaker and hearer are familiar with the situation that is being discussed, and

therefore every single facet will not need to be enumerated for the situation to be understood. Similarly, human eyes looking at a set of visual patterns will link elements together or see shapes and features that are derived from previously encountered experiences. In the visual field, the context brought by viewers to disparate objects is called a *frame*. In the linguistic field, the conceptual structure drawn from memory to assist in understanding utterances is a schema that was first called a **script**.

For example, I live in Britain and have a 'going to the pub' script which I will need when I finish this chapter later on today. Until it occurred to me to use this as an example just now, the 'going to the pub' script was not at the forefront of my mind. Later on, I will go not to the pub down the road but to a pub in the countryside not far from here, where I have never been before. However, I know that when I get there I will know exactly what to expect and what to do. My pub script has elements that I expect to see (a bar, a person behind the bar, tables, beer pumps, bottles, glasses, and so on). Besides these objects, my pub script includes procedures that I can use in order to get a drink. I know that I have to go and stand at the bar. I know what form of words to use and what the other person will say. I know how to reply to the various questions I am asked. I understand how to pay for the beer there and then, and I know where I am allowed to sit, the sorts of behaviour that are appropriate, and so on.

Of course I was not born with this knowledge: my pub script has been learned from experience. Neither is it a static script: I have expanded it and refined it through experience of a range of different sorts of pubs – pubs that are also restaurants, pubs that have adopted the continental European practice of having waiting staff, pubs that have only bottled beers, pubs that shade into bars, cafés, nightclubs, social clubs, working men's clubs, Labour clubs. And I have had to apply my pub script adaptively to a range of situations – in beer tents, at private parties, at barbecues, buying a beer on an aeroplane, on a boat on the Danube, in a bar in Tokyo, in a late-night drinking den in Liverpool, at a Basque festival by catching cider in a glass from an enormous vat with a pinhole in the side, and so on. All of these are examples of different **tracks** through the pub script.

It should be apparent from these examples that a script is a socioculturally defined mental protocol for negotiating a situation. Miscues in script application can explain the confusion caused to the French family waiting in an English pub to be served at their table, or expecting to pay as they leave rather than there and then, or my confusion when I seemed to have paid for an empty glass at the Basque festival.

Scripts such as the pub script are **situational** scripts. We use these to negotiate commonly experienced events such as being in a restaurant, taking the bus, or weeding the garden. Additionally, we have scripts that are **personal**, such as what to do and say in order to be a complaining passenger, a husband or wife, or how to talk to someone you have never met before. Lastly, we have **instrumental** scripts such as how to light a barbecue, how to switch on the computer, how to read, and so on.

Knowing which script to draw upon in a particular situation depends on **headers** that instantiate the script. In terms of written discourse, headers can be of four types:

- **precondition headers** – these are references that act as a precondition for the application of a script ('Peter fancied a beer').
- **instrumental headers** – references to actions that are a means toward the realisation of the script ('Peter walked down to the pub').
- **locale headers** – references to the setting in which the script usually applies ('Peter stood at the bar').
- **internal conceptualisation headers** – references to an *action* or role from the script ('Peter ordered a beer').

Of course, some of these elements can also display prototype effects, such that 'Peter fancied a beer. He walked down to the Ferry Inn' is more likely to instantiate the pub script than 'Peter fancied a packet of peanuts. He sat at an outside table'. It also seems to be the case that at least two headers are required for a script to be activated: 'Peter fancied a beer. He got one out of the fridge and carried on typing' represents a **fleeting script**.

A script consists of **slots** that are assumed to pertain in a situation unless we are explicitly told otherwise: **props; participants; entry conditions; results; and sequence of events**.

In any particular script, these slots are filled with specific items (respectively, beer glasses, a barman, walking into a pub, getting a drink, ordering and being served, for example). This can explain why 'but' in the following sentence seems natural: 'Peter walked into the pub, but the place was deserted'. Compare this with the oddity of, 'Peter walked into the pub, but there were people in there, and beer pumps and glasses'. The application of schema theory can thus contribute to our understanding of textual **coherence**.

Scripts develop out of **plans**, which are generalised conceptual procedures such as 'socialising' or 'getting a drink'. When a plan becomes routine in experience, it becomes a script. Plans and scripts arise out of higher level **goals**, which are very general aims and objectives carried by individuals, such as satisfaction goals, achievement goals, preservation goals, and so on. Plans and goals are the conceptual tools we use to negotiate new situations.

It should be pointed out that scripts, plans, goals and their contents are not fixed structures but are assembled in the course of discourse processing. Their configuration is dynamic and depends both on the stylistic input and the particular experiential base of the reader.

## Literary schemas

Schemas have also been used to explain bundles of information and features at every level of linguistic organisation, from the meanings perceived in individual words to the readings of entire texts. Literary genres, fictional

episodes, imagined characters in narrated situations can all be understood as part of schematised knowledge negotiation. One of the key factors in the appeal of schema theory is that it sees these knowledge structures as dynamic and experientially developing. In general, there are three ways in which a schema can evolve:

- **accretion** – the addition of new facts to the schema
- **tuning** – the modification of facts or relations within the schema
- **restructuring** – the creation of new schemas

For example, for readers who have only a passing familiarity with science fiction, the SF schema typically has slots such as: spaceships, rayguns, robots (props); scientists, explorers, aliens (participants); extraterrestrial settings or time or space travel (entry conditions); apocalypse, or its cunning avoidance (results); and space battles or laser shoot-outs (sequence of events). As people read more SF, their schemas accrete extra features, such as the time-dilation effects of faster-than-light intergalactic travel, or ‘warp’ engines, or positronic brains, and so on. In the 1960s, there was a perceptible shift in science fiction from outer space to ‘inner space’, and a concern for psychological, biological and social science fiction, that represented a tuning of the SF schema for many readers. New sub-genres within SF later appeared, such as ‘cyberpunk’ or ‘feminist SF’ – for some critics this involved tuning their schemas further, for others it represented a thorough restructuring of the schema.

Schema theory has been used to revisit the issue of literariness and literary language. It is argued that most everyday discourse is **schema preserving**, in that it confirms existing schemas. Where the confirmation is stereotypical, as in much advertising discourse, this is **schema reinforcing**. Sometimes surprising elements or sequences in the conceptual content of the text can potentially offer a **schema disruption**, a challenge to the reader’s existing knowledge structure. Schema disruptions can be resolved either by **schema adding** (the equivalent of accretion above), or by a radical **schema refreshment** – a schema change that is the equivalent of tuning, above, or the notion in literature not so much of defamiliarisation as ‘refamiliarisation’. Clearly, this is not a definition of literariness as a whole, but a definition of ‘good’ literature, or literature which is felt to have an impact or effect. The types of schema management can be summarised as follows:

- **knowledge restructuring** – the creation of new schemas based on old templates.
- **schema preservation** – where incoming facts fit existing schematic knowledge and have been encountered previously.
- **schema reinforcement** – where incoming facts are new but strengthen and confirm schematic knowledge.
- **schema accretion** – where new facts are added to an existing schema, enlarging its scope and explanatory range.

- **schema disruption** – where conceptual deviance offers a potential challenge.
- **schema refreshment** – where a schema is revised and its membership elements and relations are recast (tuning, defamiliarisation in literature).

This view of schema theory in a literary context points to three different fields in which schemas operate: **world schemas**, **text schemas**, and **language schemas**. World schemas cover those schemas considered so far that are to do with content; text schemas represent our expectations of the way that world schemas appear to us in terms of their sequencing and structural organisation; language schemas contain our idea of the appropriate forms of linguistic patterning and style in which we expect a subject to appear. Taking the last two together, disruptions in our expectations of textual structure or stylistic structure constitute **discourse deviation**, which offers the possibility for schema refreshment.

However, if we are going to isolate the literary context in this way, why not short-circuit the argument and simply raise the possibility of a ‘literature’ schema that comprises these deviations? One branch of schema theory suggests exactly this. A literary schema would not be an ordinary schema but a higher-level conceptual structure that organises our ways of reading when we are in the literary context. It is thus a **constitutive schema**, rather like a plan or a goal in terms of early schema theory. Any ordinary schema can appear in a literary context, but once there it is treated in a different way as a result of literary reading. It is this reading angle that ‘re-registers’ the original schema and processes it in terms of literary factors.

A literary schema for fiction, for example, is based on **alternativity** when compared with the organising principles of our other world schemas (more on worlds in Chapters 7 and 10). Measuring the divergence from our everyday expectations of text schemas and language schemas in literature is a matter of narratological and stylistic analysis. The degree of deviation from our sense of reality in world schematic structure can be measured on a scale of **informativity**, on the basis of three orders of informativity:

- **first-order informativity** – normal, unremarkable things are schema preserving or reinforcing.
- **second-order informativity** – unusual or less likely things encountered in literary worlds develop schematic knowledge by accretion.
- **third-order informativity** – impossible or highly unlikely things represent a challenge to schema knowledge as schema disruption. This can result in schema refreshment or radical knowledge restructuring if the challenge necessitates a wholesale paradigm shift, a change in worldview.

Second- and third-order occurrences are assimilated into existing knowledge by **downgrading**, which is a motivation search through schema knowledge for a resolution: an attempt at schema preservation in the first instance. Downgrading can be either **backwards** into the memory of the previous text,

or **forwards** in anticipating what will happen. For example, at the beginning of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), Joseph K. is arrested without having done anything wrong. This anomaly (second-order, I would suggest) cannot be downgraded backwards as it occurs in the first sentence of the novel. The reader's only option is to read on for an explanation in an attempt to have the anomaly downgraded forwards. Of course, no downgrading ever appears, and the anomaly has eventually to be downgraded **outwards** by recognising that the alternative world of a literary schema (Kafka-esque metaphysical absurdism) is in operation.

More radically, Greg Egan's short story 'The Infinite Assassin' begins:

One thing never changes: when some mutant junkie on S starts shuffling reality, it's always me they send into the whirlpool to put things right.

(Egan 1996: 1)

There are various disruptions of language schema here: what is 'S', 'the whirlpool', and 'shuffling reality'? In the world schema, who is 'me' and why is he being sent 'to put things right'? These second-order anomalies are quickly joined by third-order elements, as the story outlines people, cars, buildings and even people's clothes, hair and faces all shifting and changing, appearing and disappearing in front of the narrator's eyes. Only by the end of the story can I downgrade all this by discovering that 'S' is a drug in which hallucinations generate breaks between alternate parallel universes, and the narrator is an employee of 'The Company' with an infinite number of parallel personalities. In every parallel universe, he has to kill the drug-dreamer in order to regularise every local universe again. Clearly, new physical properties of the world schema are required here, but this is not allowed to present a radical shift in worldview as soon as the reader realises that the story is constituted by a science fiction track within the literature schema.

## Discussion

Before proceeding, you might like to discuss the application of schema theory in the context of literary reading. Here are some possible questions to think about and discuss:

- There is a problem of regression underlying schema theory: that is, where do schemas ultimately come from? Schank and Abelson (1977) posit plans and goals as increasingly abstract motivations, but it should be pointed out that their model was intended for *computer programming* not human psychology. In applying it to human minds, we are faced with questions such as: Where do babies get their schemas? Could there be a schema for schema construction that generates all other knowledge? What are the psychological mechanisms by which unfamiliar experiences are assigned to different schemas?

- There is a more practical methodological problem when schema theory is applied to literary reading. It is not easy (indeed sometimes it seems quite arbitrary) to reach a *principled* decision as to which level of schema is being used in a particular situation. Do I have a pub schema, or is it really just a track through my more general restaurant/bar schema? Or is this in turn simply a specific part of my transaction schema? Alternatively, might I not have separate schemas for country pubs, town pubs, Irish pubs, gastro-pubs, or theme pubs? When I read or see *Macbeth*, do I have a Shakespearean play schema, or a court politics schema in operation? Or in fact, do I accrete a *Macbeth* schema, and can every literary text be said to generate its own specific schema?
- What do you think of the distinction between schema reinforcement and schema refreshment? Does it offer a convincing means of understanding ‘literariness’ as opposed to closely related modes such as advertising, travel writing, religious sermons or parables?
- Schema poetics is essentially an approach to the *conceptual* organisation of literature and readers’ minds. Other than the consequences of different language schemas in operation, it should then be possible to sketch schematic readings of translated works without any problems (unless there are large cultural issues at the level of world schema, of course). However, the headers and slots within schemas and the tracks through schemas can also be discussed in terms of their *stylistic* and *narratological* features. How far do you think schema theory can be assimilated with stylistics? You might consider two parallel translations of a text in order to help you come to a conclusion.

### Cognitive poetic analysis

Here is the opening of the 156-line poem which is usually called ‘The Dream of the Rood’ (‘rood’ meaning ‘cross’), written down in the ninth or tenth century. In the translation, I have tried to preserve the sound of the vocabulary as closely as possible, though Anglo-Saxon grammar allows great flexibility which makes it difficult to keep the word-order exact:

Hwæt, ic swefna cyst secgan wylle,  
hwæt mē gemætte tō midre nihte,  
syðþan reordberend reste wunedon.  
Pūhte mē þæt ic gesāwe syllicre trēow  
on lyft læðan lēohte bewunden,  
bēama beorhtost. Eall þæt bēacen  
wæs  
begoten mid golde; gimmas stōdon  
fægere æt foldan scēatum, swycle þær  
fife wæron

Listen, and I will say the best of visions  
which came to me in the mid-night  
while chatterers lay in bed.  
I thought that I saw a wondrous tree  
held high aloft, wound round with light,  
the brightest of beams. All that beacon  
was  
arrayed in gold; gems stood  
fair at the earth’s corners, and there  
were five too



uppe on þām eaxlgespanne. Behēoldon þær engeldryhta feala fægere þurh forðgesceaft; ne wæs ðær hūru fracodes gealga, ac hine þær behēoldon hālige gāstas, men ofer moldan, and eall þēos mære gesceaft.	upon the axle-span. Beheld by legions of the lord's angels, fair through all creation; this truly was not a criminal's gallows, but it was beheld by holy ghosts, men over the land, and by all this glorious creation.
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Unless you are very familiar with Anglo-Saxon (or 'Old English'), you are likely to find this poem bewildering, firstly because any language schema you possess is unlikely to offer you more than a bare understanding of the language of the poem. Even with my gloss to help you see the roots of words such as 'will', 'night', 'tree' and 'ghosts', your language schema probably does not include other words such as 'scēatum' or 'syllicre', grammatical word-endings, and some odd symbols (þ and ð, both versions of the sound 'th', and æ; and the vowel lengthening marks over ā and ē, for example).

Any text schematic knowledge you possess (again, unless you have studied this literature) is likely also to be insufficient. If you can read the text correctly out loud, you might notice the heavy alliteration across each line and perhaps also notice that each line falls into two halves, but would you recognise this pattern as the characteristic feature of Anglo-Saxon literature? You might even be tempted to read all sorts of stylistically significant meanings into the strange word-ordering, unless you know about Anglo-Saxon inflectional grammar and simply ascribe the grammatical flexibility to the demands of half-line alliteration. Would you recognise this patterning as a consequence of a 'literary' tradition that was primarily oral and memorised, and only committed to writing late in the period? Would you recognise some of the phrases from the poem from what might be a popular earlier shorter poem, or realise that these echoed some runic phrases carved onto a stone cross at Ruthwell in the Scottish borders around the year 700? Would you think that the poet had cleverly reworked some popular material into a full and complex narrative and surrealistic world, embedded in layers of dream-vision and mystical revelation? Perhaps only if you were an Anglo-Saxon listener.

This leads us to the first issue in schema poetics: whose schema is to be used? We cannot talk of 'the schema of the poem', since schemas belong to people not texts. I will offer a schematic reading that, inevitably, is my own modern one, but I will return in the Explorations at the end to the question of recreating a contemporary schematic reading of the poem.

An exploration of the world schema dimension might get us some way initially. The poem is structured into the sort of narrative embedding that is familiar to modern readers (not very dissimilar to that of *Wuthering Heights*, for example). The speaker is compelled to describe a dream in which they see a vision of a fantastically bright and decorated tree. It becomes clear in the description that this is the cross on which Christ died, with the speaker giving an account of his own sense of fear, sinfulness and guilt. Then the cross speaks

directly through the narrating speaker, describing how it was torn from its roots from the forest's edge and forced by enemies to hoist up criminals. This central part of the poem, over 94 lines, is spoken in the first person by the cross. It describes how it was used as an instrument of God when Christ climbed up onto it, and it shares the wounds and pain of the humiliation. Then:

Feala ic on þām beorge gebiden hæbbe	Again and again on that hill I lived through
wrāðra wyrda: geseah ic weruda God pearle þenian; þýstro hæfdon	cruel events: I saw the God of warriors terribly racked; darkness had
bewrigen mid wolcnum Wealdendes hræw;	wreathed with clouds the Lord's corpse;
scírne scīman sceaðu forðēode, wann under wolcnum. Wēop eal	sheer radiance overcome by shadow, dark under clouds. All creation
gesceaft,	wept,
cwiðdon cyninges fyll: Crīst wæs on rōde.	lamenting a king's fall: Christ was on the cross.

These most famous lines express the most forceful alliteration in the poem. The cross goes on to describe how men came to carry the body away and lament the death; Christ was placed into the tomb and the cross was buried in a pit. Christ's resurrection is not described directly at first, but in terms of the cross being dug up and adorned with gold and silver. The cross ends by rejoicing in the fact that it was chosen for the task and it enjoins the dreamer to repeat the vision to others. The narrative then pops up a level back to the dreamer who emphasises the salvation available to those who rely on the symbol of the cross. The poem ends with a worshipful prayer:

Se Sunu wæs sigorfæst on þām sīðfate,	The Son was victorious from that journey,
mihtig and spēdig, þā hē mid manigeo cōm,	mighty and successful, when he came with many,
gāsta weorode, on Godes rīce,	a company of souls, to the kingdom of God,
Anwealda ælmihtig, englum tō blisse	the almighty Ruler, to the bliss of the angels
and eallum ðām hālgum þām þe on heofonum ær	and all the saints that in heaven till then
wunedon on wuldre, þā heora Wealdend cwōm,	had lived in glory, when their Ruler came,
ælmihtig God, þær his ēðel wæs.	almighty God, there where his home was.

First, there is the third-order anomaly of a speaking tree to be reconciled with world schematic knowledge. Downgrading backwards, the anomaly is part of a dream account. Downgrading outwards, the literary rhetorical figure of

'personification' is familiar enough for it to be easily recognised, but this action immediately cues up a literary schema for the analysis of the poem (as well as the cues provided by the layout and language). It seems to me that the blend of conventional dream schema and conventional literary schema allows a twofold angle to be maintained throughout the poem. This pattern of complementary dimensions is the major strategy perceived in my interpretation, as I will illustrate below.

The most obvious schematic knowledge required is the schema of Christ's death (properly a narrative script, familiar from 'scripture'), and the schema of the central tenets of Christian faith. It is not until the ninth line, however, that an explicit header ('engeldryhta feala') might invoke these schemas. This is an internal conceptualisation header, but the religious cues which quickly follow it ('forðgesceaft' and 'hālige gāstas') might make the reader re-evaluate the dream-vision opening as a precondition header for a spiritual revelation.

However, what follows is not a simple re-telling of the passion of Christ, a schema reinforcement by simple repetition. The story is recounted with a radical shift in point of view from that of the synoptic gospels. Placing the cross as both instrument and witness offers a potential schema disruption that at least holds the possibility of a defamiliarised if not variant interpretation of the crucial event in Christianity. (If sustained, this might even be seen as the grounds of a heresy). How this disruption and higher-order informativity is resolved is the rhetorical brilliance of the poem.

It seems to me that giving the tree a first-person voice in the text evidently encourages a schematic reading that equates the tree with the idea of a human individual. The individual tree, unremarkable in the forest, is chosen to be an instrument of God's plan: like Christ on the eve of the crucifixion, it describes how it did not want to be placed in this role, but accepts its fate stoically. As Jesus is God made man within the Christian schema, so the tree is vivified and made flesh, given a voice, consciousness, wilfulness and freewill. It is both chosen and given a choice.

The humanised aspects of the cross are what generate most of the vivid images in the poem, and this further serves to create a strong identification between the dying man and the instrument of his death. At the crucifixion, it is the cross, rather than the body of Jesus, that experiences the wounds ('þurhdripan hī mē mid deorcan næglum; on mē syndon þā dolg gesiēne, / opene inwidhlemmas – they drove through me with dark nails; in me still the wounds are seen, / open evil gashes'). The personification allows an identity to be created between seeing something and being an active part of it. There is a combination of both instrumentality and witnessing throughout the poem.

It is interesting to compare the points at which the schema of Christ's passion and the poem's narrative diverge. A prominent consequence of the shift in viewpoint to the cross is in the agency and wilfulness of actions. The cross, an instrument, is passive throughout: enemies cut it down, hauled it on their shoulders, set it on a hill, and many enemies secured it there. However, these enemies are not active when it comes to Jesus: he 'efstan elne micle, þæt

hē mē wolde on gestigan – he hasten[ed] with great courage, that he wanted to climb up on me'. The enemies' actions are mediated through the cross: it was raised up, and it raised up the Lord of heaven. The usual roles of active and passive from the gospel schema are refreshed here, primarily as a consequence of the shift in viewpoint.

Overall in the cross' speech, then, there are reversals judged against schema expectations along the dimensions of active and passive, participating and observing, instrument and witness, inanimacy and a manifestation of human faculties, wilfulness and acceptance. These blends of binaries are paralleled in the various slots of the schema: a prop (the cross) becomes a participant alongside Jesus, and his enemies, friends and angels, and yet the cross remains an accepting recipient of all the other participants' actions. Its only action is its account, its witness to its experience, yet it is narratologically the central participant in the poem. An identity is created in the core of the poem that equates witnessing and evangelising with Christian duty and its redemptive consequence.

The final third of the poem is often regarded as a sort of 'tacked on' Christian litany of faith. The cross pops out from its biblical experience to address the dreamer directly twice, beginning both lines 78 and 95 with, 'hæleð mīn se lēofa' (my beloved man), in order to emphasise that its act of witness is now enjoined on the dreamer too. A conventional statement of judgement day and redemption follows. The vivid humanised imagery is replaced by abstract terms, long rambling sentences, and a close repetition of the Christian creed of heavenly salvation. However, this conventionality is important in a discussion of the poem's schema poetics. Given the highly unconventional schema disruption which has preceded this point, schema preservation by this sort of catechism rehearsal appears more like a reassuring schema reinforcement. There is, though, a final rhetorical shift that the poem allows which makes it more than just a restatement of Christian ideology.

The narratological pop back to the level of the dreamer effects a shift back to a real personal and human viewpoint, and we are given individual hints of this person. He is probably an old man, alone:

Nāh ic rīcra feala  
frēonda on feoldan, ac hīe forð  
heonon  
gewiton of worulde drēamum

I do not have many powerful  
friends on earth, but onwards from  
here they  
have departed this world of dreams.

And he prays for his death in order to join them in heaven, where the Lord's people are seated at a feast. He prays that the Lord will be a friend to him, and ends with the passage quoted previously (p.84), closing the triumphant return of Christ and the angel armies from the harrowing of hell with a simple and domestic homecoming: 'þær his ēðel wæs'.

At the end, then, we get a shift of the act of witness to the dreamer, now

awoken and telling the poem to the listening audience. His vicarious dream participation in the story of the cross has compelled him to become a witness like the cross, and that act is the poem itself. The personal details emphasise his human reality in our world, and the homely details further reinforce a schema of familiarity and domestic warmth. However, all this reality is in fact a 'world of dreams'. It is heaven, redemption and salvation that are real and true. Though this is a schema reinforcement, it is one which asserts the truth of mysticism and spirituality. It manages it not by the usual downgrading of unreal elements into a familiar resolving schema, but by an **upgrading** of the familiar world into an anomalous and mystical dream state, over which the abstractions of the vision of salvation are the incomprehensible reality.

The potential schema disruption in the first part of the poem is resolved not by a schema refreshment but by a powerful act of schema reinforcement. Unusually, this is negotiated by a radical point-of-view shift, accompanied by other aspects of schematic and discourse deviance as set out above, and an act of conceptual upgrading in order to participate in the Christian schema that is the necessary consequence of the poem. The abstractions are not simply made concrete (such as through personification), but are presented with a sensitivity to individual consciousness: the poem directs the listener to listen and see and feel and call to mind familiar homely comforts. The overall effect is to map transcendental concepts into the schema of the individual's personal sense and life: a reinforcement of the Christian schema in the strongest and most personally relevant terms.

## Explorations

- 1 Schema poetics is a good way of accounting for the fact that different readers produce different interpretations of the same text. You could use schema theory to track the readings made in two published critical studies of a literary text. You could also examine the rhetorical means by which each critic claims that their reading is the more convincing, appropriate or just.
- 2 You might explore whether the notion of *genre* is represented by schemas. Taking a genre that you know very well, compare your own schematic understanding of its typical slots with someone who is not so familiar with the genre. You can use this to account for differences in your interpretations and evaluations of texts within the genre.
- 3 In a play, the staging presents a world that can be very rich in schema headers. The audience has to take account not only of the schema cues offered by the set, but must also keep a projected track of the knowledge schemas carried by each character, and finally try to assimilate all of this into the literary schema which they imagine best represents either the author or director or both. You might try to draw this out of a particular performance (it will be easier if you have a video of the play). On a more theoretical level, you might consider what is the schema theory status of

a theatre audience. Individuals might respond differently to the same play, but is there any sense of a group or collective consciousness: an audience schema?

- 4 Schematised differences in literary presumptions, allusions, genres and other socio-political audience expectations can be used to account for historical variations in readings. Do you think it is possible to reconstruct the schema of the contemporary readership or audience of the original text?
- 5 Take a story in which something very unexpected happens. Spy thrillers, crime fiction and science fiction are good places to find this. Can you account for the sense of surprise and the effect of the 'twist' in schema poetic terms? How does the narrative set the reader up for the surprise?
- 6 A criticism that has been levelled at schema theory is that in a dyadic (two-person) exchange, it only accounts for the behaviour and expectations of one of the participants. In a pub schema, for example, it cannot predict which one of many different possible appropriate things the barman might say. Since, in the literary context, authorial intention is inaccessible, this might not be such a problem for schema poetics, where the focus is on the reader. However, schema theory in general has addressed this question by emphasising the dynamic nature of reading as a negotiation through a mental space (see next chapter). Applying this to literary reading, it might be necessary to follow the process of schema accretion in stages through a text-reading, rather than focusing on one moment. You could try this by tracking the schema instantiation offered by the beginning of a novel, and then follow its development at key points in the narrative.

### Further reading and references

The original psychological model of schema theory was proposed by Bartlett (1932) and developed for artificial intelligence by Schank and Abelson (1977) and Schank (1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1986). Alternative terms for 'scripts', which I have gathered as *schemas*, include the terms 'frame' (Minsky 1975, 1986; Tannen 1984; and Fillmore 1985) and 'scenario' (Sanford and Garrod 1981). For a critique, see Edwards (1997).

What I have called *schema poetics*, the use of schema theory in literary discussion, is accessible through the work of Rumelhart (1975, 1980, 1984; Rumelhart and Norman 1978; see also Thorndyke 1977, and Thorndyke and Yekovich 1980). Schema reinforcement and refreshment, and arguments about literariness, come from Cook (1994; see also 1989, 1992). I have assimilated Rumelhart's and Cook's terms, as suggested by Semino (1997: 159).

Semino (1997) also demonstrates a schema poetic analysis of modern poetry. Culpeper (2001) applies schema theory to drama and characterisation. Tsur (1992: 207–43) applies schemas to poetry. Cockcroft (2002) connects schema theory and classical rhetoric. Other examples of schema poetics include Freundlieb (1982), Mandler (1984), Gladsky (1992), and Müske

(1990). The orders of informativity and the idea of literature as a constitutive schema are from de Beaugrande (1980 and 1987 respectively). Abelson (1987), Lehnert and Vine (1987), Meutsch and Viehoff (1989), Miall (1988, 1989) and Spiro (1980, 1982; Spiro, Bruce and Brewer 1980) have all discussed schema poetics.