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**Imperfect Blending for Intended
Readers's Mental Spaces:
A Cognitive Approach to
Reception**

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Imperfect Blending for Intended Readers's Mental Spaces: A Cognitive Approach to Reception

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Abstract

There is no uncontaminated or pure culture. Peter Stockwell (2002) states that it is common to see how a text relies heavily on another single identifiable text, through direct citation or through the transposition of plot into a different world. Literary texts lift characters, plots, settings and themes out of their original environments and place them into new blended spaces where an emergent structure develops independently. Hence the structure of the blend allows new insights to appear as well as a new understanding of the elements of the input spaces. The aim of this paper is to claim this to be an imperfective process in the sense that, as De Mulder and Brisard (2007) claim for the imperfect tense within the framework of Langacker's cognitive grammar, blending presents the designated situation—characters, plots, settings and themes—as a “virtual reality” situated with respect to a centre of conceptualization, or second ground, different from that of the actual reader. The designated situation is to be located in the past, but also the centre of conceptualization from which the situation is being conceived. Examples taken from reception in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* will be used to support this claim.

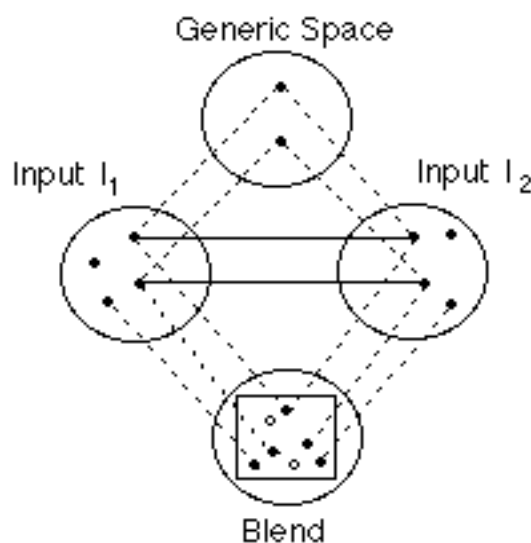
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The act of reading implies an open-ended invitation to the reader to join the author in the co-creation of the story by filling in the holes that the text leaves open. The reader's act of understanding is not always dependent on what is found in the actual text—or co-text—in so many words, but on the total context in which those words are found—and are found to make sense, through an active, pragmatic collaboration between author and reader (Mey: 2005). This is not always easy, especially in the case of literary texts which extend the readers' all-too-limited experience and intensify the encounters between conflicting voices or world-views that occur in ordinary language by intentionally and consciously intersecting various discourses, including ones that do not usually interrelate.

If following Fauconnier and Turner's model (2002: 47) when trying to depict the cognitive scenario in the reader's mind, we can say that at any moment in the construction of the conceptual network, the structure that inputs seem to share is captured in a generic space which, in turn, maps onto each of the inputs. Conceptual blending has a fascinating dynamics and a crucial role in how we think and live. This operates largely behind the scenes. Almost invisibly to consciousness, it choreographs vast networks of conceptual meaning, yielding cognitive products which, at the conscious level, appear simple. Blending is a process of conceptual mapping and integration that pervades human thought. As explained in Figure 1, a mental space is a small conceptual packet assembled for purposes of thought and action. A mental space network connects an array of mental spaces. A conceptual integration network is a mental space network that contains one or more "blended mental spaces". A blended mental space is an integrated space that receives input projections from other mental spaces in the network and develops emergent structure not available from the inputs.

Figure 1. Blending Theory. Fauconnier and Turner's model (2002).



The aim of this paper has been said to claim blending to be an imperfective process in the sense that, as De Mulder and Brisard (2007) claim for the imperfect tense within the framework of Langacker’s cognitive grammar, it presents the designated situation—characters, plots, settings and themes—as a “virtual reality”, as situated with respect to a centre of conceptualization, or a second ground, different from the actual reader. In the temporal uses of the imperfect tense, it is not only the designated situation that is to be located in the past, but also the centre of conceptualization from which the situation is being conceived. According to the authors, imperfectivization, with present events and with non-present situations, is a virtualizing operation at the level of a predication’s profile, whether or not it creates a virtual ground. At the same time, this operation adds to the profile an epistemic sense of the necessity of a situation, of its structural character (on analogy with perceived structural nature of “natural” states), thus construing it in a way as “more real” than situations profiled as actual. In that sense, according to the authors:

1. The “plane” of actual reality, including the ground, constitutes the *base space*. [actual = real + specific in time]
2. The *focus space*, or profile, is where content is currently being added.
3. The *viewpoint space* is the one from which other spaces are currently being built or accessed (“viewed”).

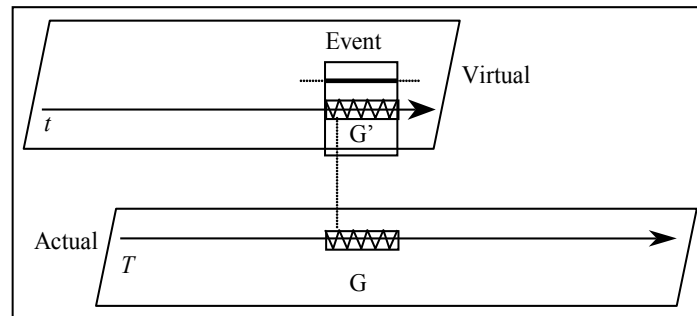
In imperfective uses of the simple past, some form of imperfectivization takes place that effectively imposes an internal perspective on a past situation (event or state). This isn’t the same as saying that it imposes a progressive or durative interpretation. An internal perspective on a non-present situation requires a second, virtual ground which constitutes or defines the past space that is being built. The fact that there is a past space with such uses, next to the base space of the original ground, is evidenced by the requirement of a definite time point in the past, a peg on which to hang the past viewpoint or ground with which the designated situation’s made to coincide. As shown in the examples below, this peg is provided by space builders like “yesterday/once/then”:

1. Internal viewpoint. *Yesterday I ate spaghetti*. [event]
2. Virtual ground, virtual situation. *I once liked reading novels*. [state]
3. Actual situation instance fully coincident with virtual ground. *Then we entered the city. The square was deserted*. [anaphoric]

What remains, in other words, of the configuration typical of temporal uses of the English past tense is the idea of a mental construction of simultaneity between a shifted, non-actual ground, and the situation constituted by adopting

that shifted perspective. As revealed in Figure 2, there's no longer an understood perfect correspondence with an actual past state of affairs.

Figure 2. Imperfectivization. De Mulder and Brisard's model (2007).



These premises in mind, the following lines will be devoted to the analysis of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601), taking this play by the English bard as an example of text in which tradition, as part of the intended readers' previous knowledge, is updated and placed into new blended spaces where an emergent structure develops independently. In the case of *Twelfth Night*, this clearly refers to a virtual, imperfect, reality, different from that of the actual readers because Shakespeare consciously uses the play as an excuse to show the imperfectiveness of comedy, a genre he would later on deconstruct and demythologize. Just like De Mulder and Brisard (2007) explain for the imperfective, this example of blending involves a designated situation located in the past, where the centre of conceptualization from which the situation is being conceived is equally located.

Various critics divide this comedy by Shakespeare into various types of plots and/or subplots. There is, first, the group centring on the ducal nobility of Illyria: this group consists of Duke Orsino and his attendants, who open the play, and the Countess Olivia, who is the main topic of discussion of the opening scene. Then there is the group of ship-wrecked personages centring on Viola and Sebastian, the twins, and their friends. Both Viola and Sebastian are, of course, later absorbed into the nobility of Illyria. Then there is the merry group of pranksters, gullers, and tricksters, led by Sir Toby Belch and Maria; this group also includes Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Fabian, and Feste, the Clown. Through Feste, all of the groups are connected by his free movement from one group to another as he is equally at home singing for Duke Orsino, or proving Lady Olivia to be a fool for so excessively mourning for her brother, or in planning a trick with Sir Toby (Roberts: 1982).

The apparently miscellaneous and varied characters of *Twelfth Night* are connected by an elaborate pattern of similarities and contrasts. Malvolio the steward is contrasted with Cesario the servant. Sir Toby the dissolute knight is contrasted with Malvolio the ambitious commoner, Sir Andrew the inept suitor

is set off against Sebastian the eligible bridegroom, Olivia the reclusive sister is paralleled with Orsino the reclusive lover, and Antonio's intense male friendship is paralleled with Viola's feminine devotion. But the unity of *Twelfth Night* is also one of feeling, the feeling of prolonged and either painful or absurd frustration. Until the last scene the desires of none of the characters seem likely to be fulfilled: it is impossible that the steward should ever become the Count, Sir Andrew is an inadequate suitor for the warm-blooded Olivia, the Countess can never bring her brother back to life, nor can she marry the entrancing Cesario. Orsino's importunate demands on Olivia are never gratified and Antonio is apparently betrayed by the man for love of whom he has risked his life. The prevailing situation is one of immobility in which desire can neither be satisfied nor abandoned. This uncomfortable tension is released only by the arrival of Sebastian who, in marrying Olivia, makes it possible for some of the characters to fulfil their hopes but permanently ruins the ambitions of others (Wilders: 1980).

It is not hard for Shakespeare's readers to update these plots and characters. The earliest mention of *Twelfth Night* occurs in the diary of John Manningham, a barrister of the Middle Temple, which is now in the British Museum. Under the date 2nd February, 1602 he noted:

At our feast we had a play called *Twelfth Night, or What you Will* much like the *Comedy of Errors*, or *Menechmi* in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practice in it to make the Steward believe his Lady widow was in love with him, by counter-feiting a letter as from his Lady in general terms, telling him what she liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel, etc. and then when he came to practise making him believe they took him to be mad. Yet the main plot of the play Shakespeare apparently took from the tale of Apolonius and Silla, which was one of the stories in Barnabe Rich's *Farewell to the Military Profession*, though similar tales are not uncommon. The theme of Apolonius and Silla is that a maid in love will go to any lengths to win her man, but in *Twelfth Night* the stress is laid rather on the love of sister for brother, genuine as Viola's for Sebastian, sentimental as Olivia's for her brother's memory.

James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin point out that the required previous knowledge of the sources is not a real problem for the readers of vernacular literature:

A larger knowledge of ancient writings, a shaper perception of their formal beauty, and an emphasis on style and elegance helped to shape a new aesthetic ideal that attained its fullest expression in the vernacular literatures. In France and Spain and England the sonnets of Petrarca and the lyrics of later Italian poets were models often as closely followed as the odes and elegies of the ancients. (1978: 27)

Referring to this same idea, Chaudhuri states that Renaissance readers lived in a time when old and new traditions were in change:

Renaissance man can live simultaneously in two worlds widely separated in date but equally subject to change, extension and expectation, the state of unconcluded becoming that we attribute to the present. He is shaped by two parallel operations of process, two developing contexts of thought and writing widely separated in the calendar, while intervening "Middle Ages" recede into the background. The three part chronology of classical, medieval and Renaissance was devised in the Renaissance itself: a rare instance of an age happily defining its own time-referents and having them accepted by posterity. This permitted a very real though profoundly unchronological linkage of the first and third elements, mental proximities that have nothing to do with distance in space or time. (1995: 27)

Not in vain, Helen Cooper states that it is the Elizabethans who show the fusion of traditions at its most complete:

Traditions derived from the Classical eclogue and its medieval reinterpretation, from *bergerie*, from contemporary Italy and France. In the early seventeenth century the traditions began to separate again, as the idyllic romance or drama or lyric that owed almost nothing to the Middle Ages parted from moral or satirical poems and eclogues. (1977: 145)

Readers were perfectly familiar with the characteristics that Antonio Rey Hazas sets for the Byzantine novel: long voyages, shipwrecks separating young couples of lovers who remain chaste till they finally reach their expected happy ending to put an end to a love pilgrimage which proves the couple's physical and spiritual virtues (1982: 100). The tortuous, desperate search for the beloved; commonly taken for dead, often missing, but always in an almost permanent physical separation, allows many unrelated secondary stories to belong to the main plot. Similarly, devices such as homosexual love and disguise are common in these secondary stories. Juan Montero points out in his note 47.221 (1992) that the travestism of a man into a woman is common in the Renaissance *novella* where lovers usually disguise of women to approach their beloveds. The author explains that the use of travestism in pastoral can be due to Boccaccio. In his *Ninfale Fiesolano*, Africo follows Venus' advice to disguise himself of a woman. Montemayor uses it himself in his third eclogue, where Floriano disguises of a woman to be allowed to stay closed to Felisa. Honoré d' Urfé also makes use of the disguise in *L' Astrée*, where Astrée lives with Céladon in Alexis disguise. Corydon already feels a homosexual attraction for young Alexis in Virgil's Eclogue II. In Book I in Jorge de Montemayor's *Diana*, a shepherdess called Ismenia passes herself off as a man to make fun of the shepherdess Selvagia. Also, Thomas Lodge's Phoebe is infatuated with a shepherd called Ganimedé who turns out to be Rosalynde in disguise. Rosalynde also travesties in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

This is a common practice in the Renaissance. What is really interesting in the case of *Twelfth Night* is that this actualization of previous, background knowledge, and the consequently imperfect blending necessary for such an actualization, is openly presented as imperfect, in the sense of non-real, virtual. The formal structure of the play follows the guidelines of Renaissance poetic theory, with four clear movements in the development of dramatic action: *protasis*, presentation of the situation and the relationships between the characters; *epitasis*, where the argument or arguments develop or intersect; *catastasis*, in which the knot is entangled to the extreme, and finally the *catastrophe*, that leads tragedy to fatal results and comedy to happy endings.

The internal symmetry is obtained by manipulating space, so that the first two days are initiated in the court of Orsino, providing the courteous nature of the whole work, the action then shifts to Olivia's house and its surroundings, where the final scene takes place. The only three scenes with a different setting, or a less defined setting, are located in the mid-*protasis*. Curiously enough, they go right in the middle of the scenes that introduce those characters that link the two houses, Orsino's and Olivia's, as well as the two social classes and groups of characters in the comedy: Viola and the captain, on the one hand; Sebastian and Antonio, on the other. The treatment of time is more arbitrary in the work and inconsistencies have caused much discussion among critics. The interval between *the protasis* and the three consecutive days in which the action takes place is only three days, as we are told early in the fourth scene of Act One. However, both Antonio and Orsino say it has been three months, while Antonio tells us that the three days that the action has taken place, were actually one (Conejero: 2006).

Many authors like Harley Ganville-Barker, director of *Twelfth Night* in 1912, have claimed these scenes to be "escandalously ill-arranged and ill-written, the despair of any stage manager". However, for Giorgio Melchiori, the abolition of the time dimension which is effected through these inconsistencies unites with the vagueness of the space dimension—Illyria—to project the action outside the both space and time into a third autonomous dimension which is that of fancy (Melchiori: 1982). And this of course goes quite in the light of that virtual, imperfect reality in which plot and characters, usually proceeding from the past literary tradition, are projected.

Melissa Croteau's (2010) words are self explanatory in this sense. *Twelfth Night*, written in 1601, is the last comedy Shakespeare composed before his comedic offerings become "problematic". The three comedies that follow *Twelfth Night*—*Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*—reveal an unwillingness to invest further in the structures of the comedic genre and, indeed, a desire to deconstruct or demythologize theatrical comedy. According to the author, *Twelfth Night* is a mature comedy on the cusp of Shakespeare's shift to the cynicism of the problem plays, and the fissures of the imminent rupture in comedic sensibility are evident throughout. It should not be surprising that the author highlights the idea of imperfectiveness in the actualization of common places in Renaissance comedy as a previous step towards its deconstruction.

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