



The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language

By Mark Turner

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The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language By Mark Turner

We usually consider literary thinking to be peripheral and dispensable, an activity for specialists: poets, prophets, lunatics, and babysitters. Certainly we do not think it is the basis of the mind. We think of stories and parables from *Aesop's Fables* or *The Thousand and One Nights*, for example, as exotic tales set in strange lands, with spectacular images, talking animals, and fantastic plots--wonderful entertainments, often insightful, but well removed from logic and science, and entirely foreign to the world of everyday thought. But Mark Turner argues that this common wisdom is wrong. The literary mind--the mind of stories and parables--is not peripheral but basic to thought. *Story* is the central principle of our experience and knowledge. *Parable*--the projection of story to give meaning to new encounters--is the indispensable tool of everyday reason. Literary thought makes everyday thought possible. This book makes the revolutionary claim that the basic issue for cognitive science is the nature of literary thinking.

In *The Literary Mind*, Turner ranges from the tools of modern linguistics, to the recent work of neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio and Gerald Edelman, to literary masterpieces by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Proust, as he explains how story and projection--and their powerful combination in parable--are fundamental to everyday thought. In simple and traditional English, he reveals how we use parable to understand space and time, to grasp what it means to be located in space and time, and to conceive of ourselves, other selves, other lives, and other viewpoints. He explains the role of parable in reasoning, in categorizing, and in solving problems. He develops a powerful model of conceptual construction and, in a far-reaching final chapter, extends it to a new conception of the origin of language that contradicts proposals by such thinkers as Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker. Turner argues that story, projection, and parable precede grammar, that language follows from these mental capacities as a consequence. Language, he concludes, is the child of the literary mind.

Offering major revisions to our understanding of thought, conceptual activity, and the origin and nature of language, *The Literary Mind* presents a unified theory of central problems in cognitive science, linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy. It gives new and unexpected answers to classic

questions about knowledge, creativity, understanding, reason, and invention.

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Editorial Review

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Turner, a professor of English with a passion for cognitive studies, proposes new and intriguing interpretations of the workings of the mind and the evolution of language and grammar. "The literary mind is the fundamental mind," he states, then launches into a complex explanation of how thoughts take the form of stories, or parables, and how parables are the vehicle for comprehension and organization of experiences. Turner illustrates his definition of the parable--stories with an associative purpose--as the most basic habit of mind in discussions of the tales of Shahrazad and the novels of Proust, but he also dissects such subtle properties of parable as its illumination of space and time. He concludes by rejecting the notion of grammar's being inherent in the genetic code, as theorized by Noam Chomsky, and declares, instead, that parable is the wellspring of grammar. Recommended where literary theory has an audience. *Donna Seaman*

Review

"Written in a crystal-clear style, Turner's book is a triumph of objective literary studies and an example of intelligence, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage." -- *Modern Philology*.

"A lucid and engaging introduction to a complex field nobody can afford to ignore. Turner's ideas . . . could well prove useful in the lab as concepts to guide research." - *Discover Magazine*.

"Turner provides a deeply thoughtful meditation . . . Throughout, Turner manages his complex argument in clear, fluent prose entirely accessible to undergraduate as well as more advanced readers." - *Choice*.

"By blending neuroscience and literary history in *The Literary Mind*, Turner has created a story of his own, certain to set billions of neurons firing....[An] audacious and remarkable book. "--*Toronto Globe and Mail*

"Turner argues his case with brilliance and tenacity. I for one am convinced."--*Philosophy and Literature*

From the Publisher

Named an Outstanding Academic Book of 1997 by *Choice*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brian Paige:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information today can get by anyone in everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider while those information which is inside the former life are difficult to be find than now's taking seriously which one works to believe or which one the particular resource are convinced. If you receive the unstable resource

then you obtain it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen throughout you if you take The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language as your daily resource information.

Gene Lyons:

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Debra Shortt:

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Pamela Bost:

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