Discussion:

Why do people value some literary works?
Why do some people make literature?
Why do people consume literature?

Reading:

**Why do people value some literary works?**


Please many & please long. A prediction that people will be able to do the self-stimulation thing. Will be able to "make sense," "make it fit."
Greatness "in" the work? Rejected.
Stock marker analogy. An attempt to predict the behavior of others who are basing behavior on their predictions of others. Infinite regress.
Many things in life (beauty, glamor, charisma) present same problem.
What is literary "greatness"? I don't know. Could anybody have predicted Casablanca?

**Why do some people make literature?**


I. Issues.
   a. Is all creativity the same? Scientist and artist? Unite unrelated ideas. Fair amount of agreement about that.
   b. Compulsivity. Medium gets involved with identity, corticolimbic pathways.
   c. Recurrence of psych'l themes suggests early involvement of identity.
   d. Style within a period, genre, etc. CODES AND CANONS.
II. Creativity and madness
III. Creativity = regression.
    = divergent thinking.
IV. Creativity and brain structures:
   1) right hemisphere.
   2) wider interconnection of modules
   3) reduced frontal lobe inhibition. [hence less locus coeruleus, less norepinephrine]
V. Creativity and neurotransmitters
   Less norepinephrine! = less arousal
Less frontal lobe activation = less locus coeruleus - less nor epinephrine

VI. Outward creativity. Creativity and value. Behaviorist view.

VII. Ultimate mystery. How can one person's identity make something somebody else can re-create their identity on?

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**Why do people "do" literature?**

Tooby and Cosmides, "Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds?" Handout. 22 pp.

I. 6.7 All features of cognitive architecture are either adaptations, byproducts, or noise. Cp. Pinker later that all features are adaptations.
   1) 7.9 Fiction is human universal.
   2) 8.1 Seems intrinsically rewarding, no utilitarian payoff.
   3) 8.9 Some systems treat as real; some not. Emotion systems vs. action systems.
   4) 9.5 We have evolved pretense & that allows us to enter fictions.
      Pretend play. Panksepp confirms. All mammals do this.

II. What is adaptive/evolutionary purpose of all this? 3 possible answers (as in I above):
   1. Fictions contribute to survival+repro.
   2. Fictions are accidental and functionless byproduct.
   3. Fictions are the result of genes that spread by chance (noise).

III. 13.5 The properties T&C assign to fictions.

IV. 13.9 We find rewarding things that are adaptive (either to outer world, body, or brain). The key assumption of ev psych.
   Every psychological adaptation has its own aesthetic (nnh- I think they mean aesthetic pleasure).
   16.8 "Natural selection . . . seduces you into devoting your free time to these improving activities by making them gratifying."

V. Why are aesthetic activities "improving"? I.e., why do they confer ev advantage? They teach us scope syntax -- how to "decouple" sets of representations. We decouple "disorganizing" inputs. (nnh: are they saying that fiction is ev'ly advantageous because it mixes real facts in?)
   Probably not. They are saying we learn from Cordelia's vs. the sisters' demonstrativeness and drop the medieval aspects. 23.9 The **Lord Jim** example.

VI. Art becomes social.


Interesting that the arg becomes materialism (everything is cause-effect) vs. "human" and "consciousness". Only algorithms! Spolsky very observant.

Spolsky argues for a more flexible view: bottom-up (algorithm) plus top down.

See my comments on Spolsky in Why Literature? She makes good points.
Arts & Entertainment:
- Status: Art is for the elite, what does this say about Pinker's psyche?
- Key passage: 524mid: "attainments of fitness" give us pleasure (nnh: "make sense") plus knowledge of cause and effect to attain fitness. Not very clear.
- 525.9. Arts are "nonadaptive by-products." Wrong to say they are adaptive as Tooby & Cosmides do.
- 527.4 "Pips of microsatisfaction"-- he is describing a self-stimulating system.
- *** "Horace: Literature is "To delight and instruct." Aut prodesse aut delectare.
- *** Note that Pinekr is stuck with problem of making the art itself do the instructing. NNH solves that by saying it is thinking about & discussion of the art that does the instructing, not the art itself.

Music: I'll confess I didn't quite understand this and didn't take the trouble to. Pitches organized in three different ways: grouping; metrical; "reductional" - essentials and ornaments.
- Music is "auditory cheesecake."

Stories & movies: People enjoy fictions (n.b. -- theorists have real trouble with lyrics) because they enjoy life. nnh: life as a self-stimulating system.
- 541.2 Novels work like experiments. 543.7 Fictions supply us with a mental catalogue of problems we might face. Query!

Visual arts: "repleteness." Can this be understood as self-stimulation? Nancy Aiken, Biological Origins of Art: we start with fear.

Laughter: noisy; contagious; involuntary. A kind of aggression. Koestler: incongruity; resolution; indignity. Jester gets audience to accept a resolution of incongruity against its will (?).
- Humor is anti-dominance. We laugh to show that we do not intend to dominate.

Religion and Philosophy.
- Attempts to deal with difficult problems, e.g., consciousness (= "sentience"), free will, the self.
- False approaches (he says) 1) religion; 2) mysteries are "irreducible"--forget about it; 3) there are no problems ("meaningless"); dissolve into e.g. scientific problem capable of solution.
- Attempts to deal with problems that (he concludes) are simply insoluble. Maybe our minds are not of the kind to solve these problems. (Chomsky does this with certain linguistic issues; does not suggest it in cosmic terms.) Seems to be settling for #2 above.
- He hasn't really answered the question he posed himself: why do we keep trying to answer these?


- Note how this discussion of ev psych very quickly gets into basic questions (Spolsky vs. Tooby-Cos, Pinker vs. Menand, p. 417.1-2).
Why do conservatives like the idea of an unchanging human nature?


1. Explains evolution.
   Mutation. Environmental change. Genetic drift. By-products. Cautions on 194-5 that will lead to his debunking of the ev psych explanation of literature.

   a. No fossil record of functions.
   b. The political results! 198.9. Conservatism as belief in hierarchy. Trollope. 191.8
   Sociobiology: a conservative doctrine. Why?
   c. Just-so stories. Attempting to imagine life as a hunter-gatherer.
   d. Something's being universal does not show it is biological; it could be social.

3. Levels of explanation
   a. 4 levels from inorganic matter to society. Temporal.
   b. Transition from any level to next higher marked by an emergent property that is causally dependent on the lower level. Objects to mind/brain for same reason one would not speak of brain/atoms in head. See his diagram 204.1 for relation between basic and emergent structures.
   c. Higher levels (structures) project downward to organize lower levels. (Cp. Spolsky.)
   d. Therefore need to know a lot about higher-level structure before you can use higher level to interpret lower level.

4. Problems with ev psych explanation of literature
   a. Hits Pinker out of ball park. 211.1-4.
   b. 213.7 The ev psychers try to explain high-level structure by low-level structure without understanding the high-level structure.
   c. 215.9 Universal story structures reduces to a nonliterary issue: emotion prototypes.
   216.2 Hogan buys into the virtues of simulation idea. Yes, simulation is good, but that doesn't justify fiction because we do simulation in all sorts of non-literary circumstances.
   d. 194.6; 195.2; 216.9 Ev does not produce functions; it produces mechanisms (which Hogan & nnh say can be combined, enlarged, modified, whatever, into functions). Panksepp's SEEKING is such a mechanism. Hogan very good here.

Holland, "Why Literature?" Online. 27 pp.

1. What is literature? A convention not to act.

2. Do we inherit literature? Argument--
   All cultures do it. Arg works for language, maybe music.

3. Ev psych critics: their argument?
   All cultures do it.
   Literature is a Good Thing -- various ethical claims.
   Lit is biologically/evolutionarily beneficial. It does things for our brains. T&C: 1) ability to simulate. 2) decoupling; scope syntax. Lit as play. Counterfactual abilities.
Therefore it must be an inherited adaptation.

4. Anti ev psych claims--
   Arg rests on literary convention, not literature as such.
   Also, not a simple turn on turn off.
   And is it a Good Thing? Ethical claims doubtful.
   "Bookish"
   Museum guards / English depts / Nazis

5. Genes - you need to say more to make a genetic argument. Protein - the word throws people.
   Otherwise it's a Just-So story.
   Mere fact of universality not enough.
   Problem of timetable.
   Baldwinian evolution
   Is reading a fiction different in its moral effect from reading a newspaper?

   Pleasure from fiction does not accord with its supposed ev function.
   Literature gives pleasure -- that's all we need to say.

   What is pleasure in a brain sense?
   Hogan: distinguish mechanisms from functions. Very powerful point.

7. Summary of book. Use this to review for exam.

8. Ethical function of literature comes from thinking about it -- from criticism.

Questions answered (?) in this sessionc--
   What can we say about the brain's role in judging literature?
   What can we say about the brain's role in creativity?
   Why do all human cultures, so far as we know, do literature? Are we genetically programmed to do so? Or is there a simpler reason?
   What finally does literature do to or for our brains? Why do we do it?
   What is pleasure?