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Preface: Cognitive Literary Studies

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Cognitive Literary Studies (CLS) is one of the most fiercely contested and rapidly changing areas in the humanities. Its greatest challenge and, at the same time, most fruitful endeavour, is its interdisciplinary scope, which aims at combining a wide range of different approaches from cognitive psychology, narratology, philosophy, and (empirical) aesthetics. Due to the import of key concepts from the cognitive sciences, however, CLS has been facing several objections, such as the lack or inadequacy of empirical testing or, more significantly, the fallacy of premature definitions. As apparent in the recent proliferation of approaches that investigate the role of simulation and theory of mind in reading fiction, for instance, the complex ›baggage‹ of some of the concepts transferred from cognitive psychology tends to get lost in translation. In fact, the cultural and historical connotations of the term cognition have become so wide-ranging that it hardly seems a suitable foundation for a whole discipline. The greatest task of CLS, therefore, is to acknowledge these varieties, to address methodological, theoretical, and conceptual challenges, and to carefully but courageously map the multiple dimensions of the field. The contributions to this special issue take up this challenge and tackle the CLS-minefield. Having emerged from a seminar on »Brain Drain or Brain Gain? The Future of Cognitive Literary Studies« at the Anglistentag 2015 and been refined in the process of editing this special issue, they provide novel and deliberately controversial insights into an on-going debate to spark off new theoretical and methodological arenas for the future of CLS.

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