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The Structure of Response: A Repertory Grid Study of a Poem

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Abstract. Responses to one poem, Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," were studied using repertory grid technique. Twenty-one undergraduate students of English literature participated. A significant commonality in response was found within the grids, suggesting that for this group of readers a number of invariant features in the poem were determining response. The grids also brought to light individual differences in approach to the poem, which were explored during interviews with each student. Grid technique thus offers a method for mapping the boundary between individual and common features in literary response.

A major tradition in literary studies has argued that a literary text offers one correct reading which all well-informed and sufficiently sensitive readers can be expected to discover. Recent arguments have undermined the authority of this approach: Fish (1980, p. 13), for instance, finds the authority of the text secondary to that of the interpretive community in determining a given reader's response. One recent reader of Fish has taken him to imply that any reading of a literary work is acceptable (Eagleton, 1983, p. 85). Behind this debate lies an obvious but important theoretical point. To what extent does a given literary work constrain individual readings? Does a work's structure as a whole, for example, tend to determine the way in which its parts will be understood? Or is the work open at any point to influences originating outside the boundary of the text? Clearly, texts cannot be divorced from the language and culture in which they are written and read; but it might be postulated that a work of literature is distinguishable from other types of discourse by its possession of a structure of meaning internal to the text, and that this tends to direct the responses of all competent readers.

To be specific: two or more elements within a text may be amenable to a variety of interpretations, according to the disposition or experience of individual readers; for example, I may enjoy Donne's attitude toward women, my neighbor may detest it. But if, despite such response differences, interpretations of particular elements in the poem show systematic relationships to each other across all readings, it may be argued that the text exhibits an internal structure that is determining response.

In studying this question Groeben's (1980) distinction between text *meaning* and text *sense* is helpful. We may postulate that a given work has a

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determinate structure of meaning: this interpretative hypothesis Groeben calls the *text sense*. The hypothesis can be tested; as Groeben notes,

The investigator retains control over theoretical interpretation by assembling data through intersubjective discovery of individual subjective receptions ("concretizations") of readers. The subject (the reader) is not an object, but rather a medium whose processing activities make observable data as a foundation for the conception of literary theories. (1980, p. 347)

Groeben lists a number of techniques for examining text meanings, but none is particularly suited to the question posed above: the problem of examining whether responses to a text exhibit a determinate internal structure. For the present study a technique derived from Kelly's (1955) personal construct psychology was used: the repertory grid. The technique itself is content-free: it does not prescribe any text sense in itself, rather it provides a medium for elaborating an individual reader's response, while allowing different readings of the same text to be compared. The method which was used to elicit a grid from a reader is described below.

The Repertory Grid and Literary Response

The basic constituents of a grid are *elements*, drawn from a specific domain, and *constructs*, through which an individual compares and contrasts elements. Thus, in clinical use, elements might be the significant people in a patient's life; in thinking about them, he might see his father as *detached* and his mother as *warm and involved*. These two terms define the endpoints of a *construct*, a way of describing people on a specific dimension, which could be used for categorizing all the people the patient knows. Constructs, according to Kelly, structure all our thought, giving meaning to experience and providing us with a basis for making predictions about the world. Constructs are particular to the individual: each has a personal construct system where constructs are interrelated in ways which are also unique to a greater or lesser degree.

In completing a repertory grid an individual makes a set of judgments about a group of elements using his or her constructs. A common method, used in the present study, is to rate elements on each construct, using a 5-point rating scale. The quantitative data that result can be analyzed to reveal which elements are seen as similar or different, and what relationships between constructs are in operation.

The grid is readily adapted for use in studies of literary response. O'Hare (1981), for example, used grid technique to examine the effect on response of stylistic modifications to a range of poems. Grid technique also offers a method of exploring the extent to which individuals agree or differ in their experience of literary texts. Applebee (1975, 1976), in research on children's responses to stories, was able to show an increasing measure of

agreement with age on a variety of grid measures (although Applebee did not undertake to look at individual differences within the overall pattern of agreement).

Some theoretical implications of the personal construct approach can be brought out by comparison with a structuralist method of analysis. Both assume that the dimensions along which the content of discourse is structured consist of a set of contrasts. A structuralist reading leads to an image of levels of meaning that stand in opposition. This feature, central to structuralist analysis, is derived from a basic principle of linguistics: as Culler puts it, "the reduction of the continuous to the discrete is a methodological step of the first importance" (Culler, 1975, p. 14). From this initial step, as Barthes (1970/1975), for example, makes clear, a structure of meaning is extracted which makes oppositions an essential aspect of the text. They are the frame for the variations and substitutions of local meaning, the free play of signifiers. This theoretical presupposition regarding oppositions stands in the way of any organized or unified reading.

A personal construct framework, on the other hand, allows for mediation between the various levels, in which significant aspects are both highlighted and diffused across a text but partake in a synthesized and coherent pattern of meaning. Rather than separate poles of significant oppositions standing as the basis for the play of meaning within a text, the constructs fall into significant groupings, so that several continua of opposites become defined in distinction from one or more others (this is easier to see in the tree diagrams of the constructs for a grid than it is to describe). Such linking and discrimination of constructs enables each element to be located within a reading of a text as a whole.

The cognitive assumptions lying behind the grid in this respect make it readily amenable to the student trained in traditional methods of reading, accustomed to look for relationships in a text. It makes no assumptions, however, about the validity of the constructs being deployed; a construct system does not imply either a "metaphysics of presence" (Culler, 1975, p. 19) in the text to which it is applied, or an essential unity in the text. To read a text as a whole does not imply that it *is* a whole. Some of the grids analyzed in the present study, for instance, exhibited readings in which certain textual elements were little integrated into the overall structure of meaning, for reasons which the students concerned were sometimes able to articulate persuasively. But other unifying elements of the text were apparent: the grid allowed these to emerge from the unconscious responses of a number of students, as I describe below.

The Text: Intrinsic Structure

The poem for the study, Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," was chosen partly because it has been found accessible by readers with little or no

previous experience of poetry of Coleridge's period (the poem was written in 1798), but mainly because it contains a fairly clear set of contrasting elements through which the argument of the poem moves. It was hypothesized that certain elements of the poem are related in a way which is internally coherent, and that this coherence would be reflected in readers' responses regardless of individual differences. The primary hypothesis regarding the poem is this: that response to the poem is determined by a contrast of negative and positive elements, establishing systematic relationships between different parts of the poem.

The poem as a whole can be divided into three main sections. In the first the poet describes himself sitting thinking at midnight in his cottage, accompanied only by his sleeping baby. It is frosty and still. His thought is interrupted by his awareness of the silence outside, a silence underlined by an owlet's cry heard twice. His eye falls upon a film of ash fluttering on the grate of his fire; he recalls that such a film is said to foretell the arrival of a stranger. This initiates the second section, a reverie in which he remembers his school days. Here he was unhappy, having been sent away from his birthplace in the countryside to London. He recalls a similar film on the grate at school, and how he yearned for a visit from his aunt or sister. In the third section his thoughts turn to the sleeping child and he envisages a future for it in which it will grow up in the country, at one with nature. Nature is described as God's language.

The poem can be seen as moving from a view of nature at the beginning from which the poet is excluded, through to an imaginative realization of what a life in participation with nature would mean. This implies a set of negative and positive elements: the frost, the owlet, the "hush of nature" outside, all arouse negative feelings in the poet to some degree, enforcing his sense of isolation and disrupting productive thought by a threatening silence. The disruption of thought and of his participation in nature is embodied most clearly, however, in the memory of school: here the poet describes himself as isolated, brooding on what he has lost, unfitted for thoughts of school work, and overlooked by a stern teacher. The sense of disturbance at the outset thus anticipates the account of the school; more specifically, the unsettling but impersonal symbol of the owlet's cry anticipates the hostile forces embodied in the school.

It was predicted, therefore, that readers responding negatively to the owlet's cry would also show a marked negative response to the school. The other negative elements, by contrast (the frost and the hush of nature), both contain a potential positive meaning, since they represent a nature which will be seen in participatory terms later in the poem. But the film on the grate is the principal agent for discovering the source of the negativity in the poet's experience: it prepares both for the references to the birthplace and the sister (memories predating the early isolation), and for the envisaged

future at one with Nature, which resolves the isolation in theory (not necessarily in practice for the poet himself: the poem is inconclusive on this). It was expected that the film would thus be seen as a positive element, related to the birthplace, the sister, and the language of God.

Four specific hypotheses were formed on the basis of this reading of the poem's intrinsic structure:

1. That the ratings for two of the negative elements, owl's cry and school, would be systematically related;
2. That the ratings for the film of ash on the grate would similarly show relationships to the rating of birthplace, sister, and language of God;
3. That there would be lower mean ratings for the four negative elements than for the four positive elements;
4. That significant differences between all the elements would be found, in which school would attract the lowest mean ratings and language of God the highest.

An implication of the first hypothesis is that students not responding in negative terms to the elements owl and school, would be less likely to understand how the argument of the poem relates to the positive elements near the end, particularly the language of God. Thus, an inverse relationship was also expected between these particular elements: the more negative the rating of the owl, the higher the positive rating of the language.

Another aspect of response to the poem, following from this view of its structure, was that different types of construct would discriminate the elements differently. For example, the negative aspects of the frost or hush of nature in the first section are perceptual rather than evaluative: they are cold and harsh, but can nevertheless be read as potential parts of a positive view of nature attained later (the frost is explicitly viewed in a participatory way in the last few lines of the poem). In analyzing the grids, therefore, an interaction between type of construct and element was predicted. For this reason a list of constructs was given to participants in which several constructs of each type were included, in order to broaden the range of constructs that participants might wish to use.

Method

Sample

The participants in the study were students of English literature enrolled in a three-year B.A. Combined Studies course at the College of St. Paul and St. Mary, Cheltenham. Seven first year, six second year, and eight third year students participated. A copy of the poem, Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," was given to all students unfamiliar with it a week in advance of the grid elicitation.

Instrument

The elements of the poem were chosen to represent significant aspects of its internal structure: eight elements in all. These were (1) frost, (2) owlet's cry, (3) film (of ash), (4) hush of nature, (5) school, (6) birthplace, (7) sister, and (8) language of God.

Since eight constructs were to be chosen by each participant, to form the grid, a form was prepared containing an 8 by 8 array of cells, with space adjacent to each row and column to enter the names of elements and constructs. A five-point rating scale was used. The list of eight elements from the poem was given to each student together with a list of 15 possible constructs:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| passive—active | blindness—insight |
| mundane—sacred | hard—soft |
| severe—tolerant | stasis—movement |
| anxiety—happiness | enduring—momentary |
| closed—open | restless—calm |
| restraining—facilitating | aridity—potentiality |
| conscious—subconscious | silence—noise |
| cold—hot | |

All participants were obliged to use the same elements, but they were informed that they were free to devise constructs of their own or to use any of those on the list. All participants used one or more constructs of their own; one used none of the supplied constructs.

Procedures

Grids were elicited in the following way. Students began by selecting any two contrasting elements and describing the difference between them by use of a construct. The second of the two elements was then contrasted with a third; this new contrast was described by means of a second construct. This procedure was repeated until all eight elements had been employed and eight constructs produced. During this process, ratings for each element pair were entered in the grid to indicate the contrast under the new construct chosen. When this was complete, the student then went back over the grid to enter ratings in the empty cells, thus rating all the elements on all the constructs. The grids took an average of 40 minutes to complete.

Completed grids were analyzed with the help of a computer program devised by the author, deriving from McQuitty's (1960) algorithm. The program makes a hierarchical cluster analysis of construct and element ratings, on the basis of which the grid is reorganized to bring together the most similar rows and columns. A printout of each subject's grid was prepared, showing the element and construct labels also reordered according to the

results of the analysis. Tree diagrams of the element and construct relationships were drawn to facilitate discussion at the interview. A sample printout is included later in this report (Figure 2)

Results

Between-subject comparisons of grid data were possible in several ways. Examination of the construct poles of each student's grid had suggested that for most of the constructs there existed a negative and a positive pole. I therefore asked each student in their interview to comment on the positive-negative salience of their constructs. Most of the students reported that their constructs could be seen in this way. Where this was not directly the case, the constructs were still being deployed in such a way that negative and positive discriminations were being made in accord with the hypotheses described above, so that *language*, for example, was receiving high ratings on the majority of constructs relative to *school*.

The mean ratings for elements on all constructs were compared by a one-way analysis of variance, after reversing ratings so that a high rating represented a positive rating. A highly significant difference was found, $F(7,140) = 10.1, p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis of pairs of element groups, using Tukey's HSD test, showed a clear pattern of contrasting values in operation. Among these the most marked distinction, as expected, was the preponderance of negative ratings given to *school* in contrast to the predominantly positive ratings given to *language* ($p < .01$), but *frost* and *hush of nature* were also significantly low in relation to *language* ($p < .01$). Mean ratings of each element are shown in the upper part of Table 1.

Table 1
"Frost at Midnight" Grids: Mean Ratings of Elements

A. Mean Ratings of Elements on all Constructs (21 Grids)								
	1 frost	2 owl	3 film	4 hush	5 school	6 birth	7 sister	8 lang
<i>M</i>	2.62	3.14	3.12	2.89	2.49	3.09	3.61	3.78
<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.51	0.58	0.66	0.8	0.65	0.69	0.58
B. Mean Ratings of Elements Classified by Type of Construct (17 Grids)								
	1 frost	2 owl	3 film	4 hush	5 school	6 birth	7 sister	8 lang
Perception	1.89	3.38	2.93	2.26	2.71	2.77	3.75	3.44
Evaluation	3.17	2.99	3.0	3.45	2.26	3.27	3.39	3.90
Motion	2.42	3.62	3.47	2.11	2.74	2.5	3.29	3.35

The overall division of the elements into negative and positive groups was also supported by the results. The mean ratings of the four negative and four positive elements were compared for all the grids: a consistent difference was found which was highly significant, $t(19) = 4.5, p < .001$.

The predicted systematic relationship between certain elements (hypotheses 1 and 2 above) was tested by Pearson correlations of mean ratings for the elements concerned. The expected relationship between the negative elements was strongly confirmed: *owllet's cry* and *school* yielded a positive correlation of $r = .67, df = 19, p < .001$. Thus, readers aware of the negative implications of the first element also rated *school* negatively. Such readers also rated the last element, *language*, more positively: this element showed a significant negative correlation with *owllet's cry*, $r = .48, df = 19, p < .05$.

The expected relationship between the positive elements, however, was not obtained: *film* showed no significant correlations with the other positive elements. The meaning attributed to *film* in developing the positive aspects of the poem was thus not supported by the response data.

The grids were then analyzed for the discriminating effects of different types of construct. Constructs were classified according to five types: perceptual, evaluative, emotional, reference to temporal features, and reference to motion or absence of motion. Of a total of 168 constructs, emotional and temporal yielded only 14 and 10 items respectively, and were dropped from further analysis. Of the three remaining types, there were 33 perception constructs (such as *hard-soft, silence-noise*) 47 evaluative constructs (such as *mundane-sacred, restraining-facilitating*) and 26 motion constructs (such as *stasis-movement, passive-active*). Seventeen of the 21 grids contained examples of one or more of these three types of construct. Mean ratings for each elements according to type of construct were obtained. A two-way analysis of variance of the data from these 17 grids was carried out, in which both factors were within-subject: 8 elements, and 3 construct types. A significant main effect was obtained for element differences, $F(7,112) = 4.35, p < .001$, but the constructs in themselves showed no difference, $F(2,32) = 1.98$. As expected, however, a significant interaction effect was obtained, $F(14,224) = 2.49, p < .005$. Thus elements were being rated differently according to type of construct. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed the main difference between constructs occurring between perception and evaluation; no significant differences were found between motion constructs and the other two types of construct. The mean ratings classified by construct type are given in Table 1. A diagram corresponding to this is offered in Figure 1.

As data were available from three different-year groups, who might be presumed to differ in the complexity of their responses to the poem, a check of differences between year groups was also made. One Year 1 and two Year 3 grids were randomly discarded to produce three equal groups of six grids

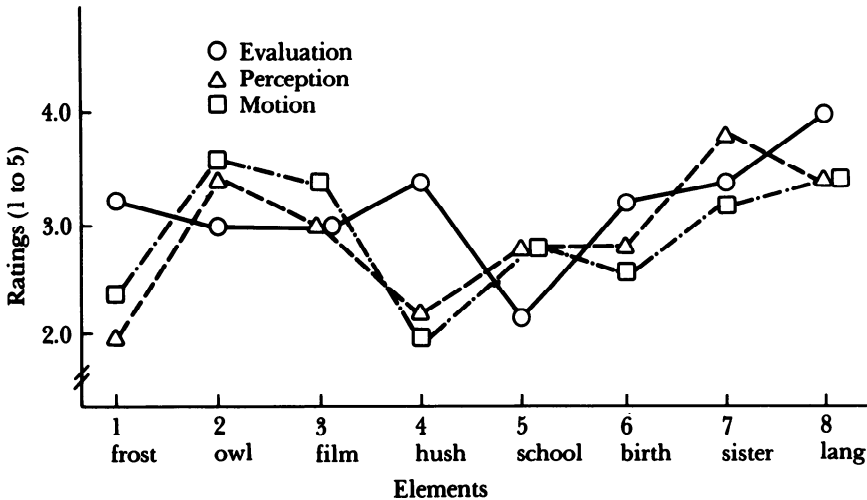


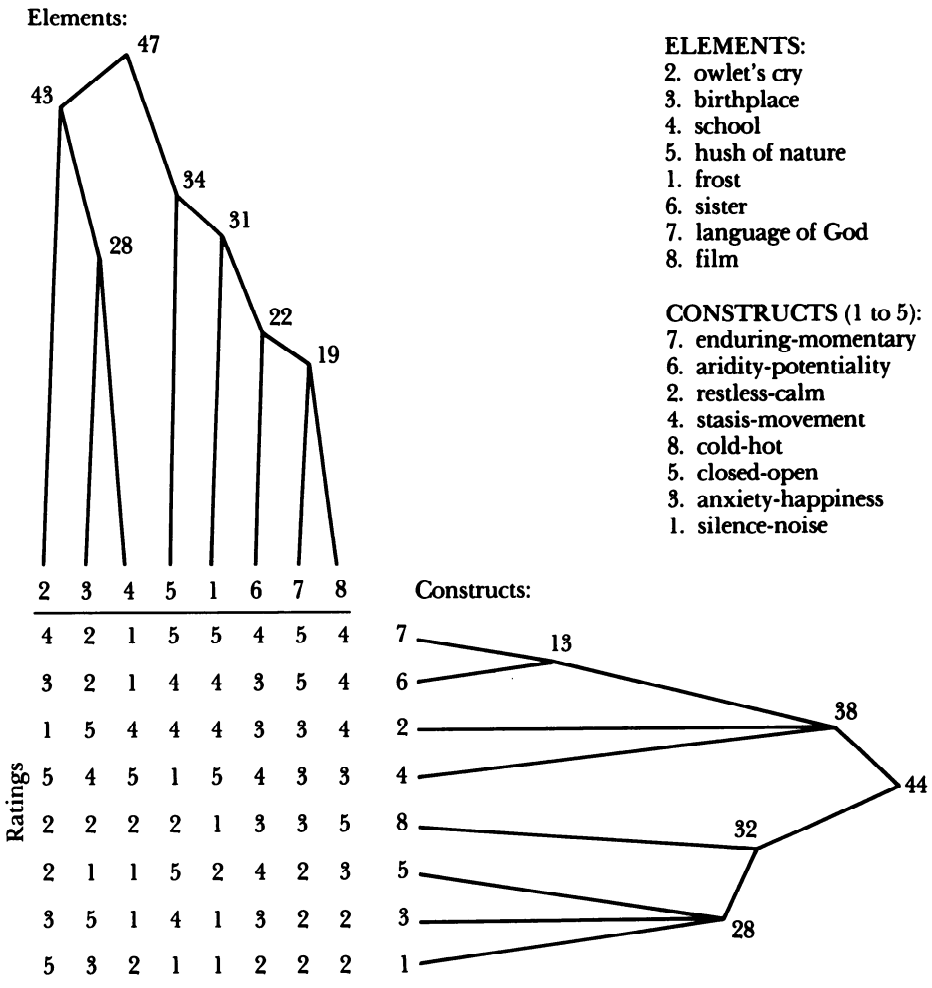
Figure 1. Mean ratings of elements of poem on three types of constructs: perception, evaluation, and motion

for analysis. A two-way analysis of variance of mean ratings of each element, classified by Year Group was carried out. If year of student was a significant factor in response, an interaction effect would be obtained between Year Groups and elements. A small interaction effect was found, but it indicated only a trend in the expected direction: $F(14,105) = 1.58, p = .1$. Similarly, a test of the mean ratings of the four negative and four positive elements by Year Groups showed an interaction effect of the same order. The ratings show a clear trend, however, towards an increased discrimination of negative from positive elements from Year 1 to Year 3 students: the means for Year 1 are almost identical: Negative = 2.94, Positive = 3.2, but for Year 2 they are 2.68 and 3.34, while Year 3 means are 2.61 and 3.66. While the smallness of the data set, once it is divided in this way into year groups, reduces the power of the analysis, the trend obtained suggests that further investigation of the development of response across three years of degree-level study might be illuminating.

Individual Responses

Each of the findings described above could be supported by evidence from the transcripts of the discussions with individual students. In this section, however, two aspects only will be illustrated: (1) one student's discovery of the negative structure in the poem, compared with the responses of other students whose responses to negative elements were determined by previous attitudes, and (2) an unusual but coherent reading of the poem showing the productive effect of a student's distinctive attitude to memory.

Each interview, which lasted up to 45 minutes, was structured around the pattern of response apparent in the grid. An example of the analysis of a grid is shown in Figure 2; it is the printout used during the interview with Sarah (described below). In the interview significant similarities in the elements, as shown by the tree diagram, were discussed first, together with any major groupings of elements; then the same procedure was applied to the construct patterns. Finally the response to all eight elements in their original order in the poem was presented and related to the student's perception of



Note. For the analysis of grids by construct types, construct 2 in this grid was reversed to match construct 4.

Figure 2. Tree diagrams of construct and element relationships

the poem as a whole. The students were encouraged to confirm or question the pattern that had emerged from the analysis of the grid, and to discuss their reading of the poem in the light of it. The interviewer made no judgments about the interpretation, except for such comments as “that’s an interesting reading.”

Responses found in the grid indicated very wide individual variations in readings of the poem. Some of the major differences in interpretation concerned the relation of the present to the past in the poem. The different uses of images of the past tended to receive little attention in the grids of several students. For example, analysis of Sheila’s grid showed that *school* and *sister* had received similar ratings on all the constructs except one, a finding that she was ready to defend:

Interviewer: Another of the pairs of elements is 4 and 1. You felt that there was quite a lot in common with the school and the sister?
 Sheila: Yes. They both seem to be the things that went from his childhood. He’s thinking of his sister coming now, but—my ‘sister more beloved,/My playmate when we were both clothed alike’—it’s all the same field. It’s his past.

The only major distinction made by Sheila was that the sister was *beloved* while the school was *hated*.

On several occasions the interviews revealed some of the extrinsic determinants of a particular reading of the poem. For example, two students realized during their interviews that they had imported their own attitudes to school into the poem, and that these might be in conflict with the references to the school in the poem. In this instance, the students’ pre-existing views led them to misread the poem to some degree.

The interview with Andrew, by contrast, was of particular interest, since the intrinsic relation of the two negative elements *owlet’s cry* and *school* became explicit during the discussion. In this way he saw emerging an important aspect of his response about which he had been unconscious at elicitation, but which helped to explain his understanding of the poem. Andrew also explained that he felt himself to be a very slow and unsatisfactory reader of poetry, since it took him several weeks and many re-readings before he came to any degree of understanding of a poem. Yet the elements of a complex response to the poem were present in his grid.

Interviewer: 2 and 4 [*owlet’s cry* and *school*] to some extent go together . . . (Andrew noticed at this point that he had assumed the persona of the poem was a woman; he continued to talk of it as ‘she’.)
 Andrew: With both the *owlet’s cry* and the *school* I felt a sense of instability. She wasn’t happy at *school*, and the *owlet’s cry* seemed to invade something that was peaceful and tranquil to her, in the way that the *school* invaded her happiness at home, because she often thought about being back at home with the people she liked when she was at *school*, so both tended to interject into her happiness.

He then explained why the *owllet's cry* had nevertheless been rated as *facilitating*:

Andrew: I think I was probably relating it more to the poem, actually, than to the theme of the poem, inasmuch that because of this cry, it motivates the rest of it, the progression of the poem. The background is there—it interjects into it. So that it's facilitating in that way.

Thus Andrew arrived at a complex view of the symbolic role of the *owllet's cry* in anticipating the central disturbance recorded by the poem, that of the *school*. As he remarked, these were aspects of his response that he had been unaware of while reading the poem and completing the grid. It was a remark that many of the students made during the interviews.

Another more complex instance of an attitude to the past was that of Sarah, who made several discoveries about her response as the interview went on. It was noticed that two of Sarah's constructs, *aridity-potentiality*, and *enduring-momentary*, come closely together, implying that what is enduring is for her associated with aridity (her grid is shown in Figure 2). But then, looking at examples of the use of this set of constructs, *birthplace* and *school* were both described as arid and enduring. Why was the *birthplace* described this way?

Sarah: Maybe it's because he's sad at the time. There's a sadness in the poem. It is really quite a sad poem, I think, isn't it?—positive at the end. And he's looking back—and I think it's always sad looking back, especially when you were happy. He's looking back to his birthplace when he was happy—and he's sad now.

Interviewer: So it's the fact that he's remembering it that's arid?

Sara: I always think of memory as sad.

Interviewer: How interesting!

Sara: Yes, actually that does make sense to me now. I always find reflection sad. It's going back—especially when he was happy then. He seems to be unsure of himself now.

By contrast, *frost*, *hush of nature*, *film*, and *language* were all rated as *momentary* elements. It began to emerge in the discussion that *momentary* was a dominant value in her response.

Sara: I think that's how I'd accept the whole poem, actually. Maybe it's just the actual action of the poem—just him sitting down there, thinking things. Just moments of things, flitting past. That's maybe why I've put those in, because I saw them as just ideas, passing through his head. They did seem just to take place in moments, moments of him sitting down in a dark light.

Interviewer: So that just the memories last a short time—the language of nature, or whatever it might be. That's also momentary, because it's a thought?

Sarah: Yes.

Interviewer: Rather than a reality?

Sarah: Yes. You know, unlike Wordsworth, when he's going about in his boat. Maybe because that's active, and this is passive. He's just sitting there.

Near the end of the interview Sarah felt that she had made useful discoveries about her response, remarking that "A lot of the things I saw in it, I didn't realize the way I was thinking." At the end of the session I asked whether the sketch of her response to the poem made sense as a whole:

Sarah: It does seem to make sense—I wouldn't have put it down like that, if you'd asked me for a reading of the poem, I don't think.

Interviewer: Not without doing a grid about it?

Sarah: No. That's just because I wouldn't have thought of those things. And it does make sense. I can see why I put certain things down.

Interviewer: So would this offer a basis for developing your understanding of the poem in new directions?

Sarah: Definitely. It's surprising actually.

Interviewer: What has surprised you particularly here?

Sarah: I think it's the thing about the momentary thing—that I see the memory as momentary.

Interviewer: It's something you weren't aware of as you were reading the poem and responding to it?

Sarah: No. I thought I saw it as a positive thing, but that's maybe because once you've read it once through you know what you're thinking of the end when you're reading it through again.

In this way Sarah found that one construct value, that of the *momentary*, together with an unconscious attitude towards memory, had influenced her view of the poem as a whole. Her reading turned out to be somewhat unusual, but within its own terms it proved to be a flexible and consistent one and to do justice to the main features of the poem.

Conclusion

The *text sense* of "Frost at Midnight" postulated at the outset of this study was supported in each of its aspects, except for a relation between positive elements that had been envisaged. The grids showed that a consistent set of discriminations between positive and negative elements was made in response to the poem, that type of construct was a significant variable in judging particular elements, and that a systematic internal relationship between certain negative elements existed despite individual differences in response. A trend towards the postulated text sense was also found across the three year groups of students participating, from Year 1 to Year 3. Discussions held with individual students were cited to illustrate (a) aspects of the statistical findings summarized above, and (b) to show the use of grid technique and feedback to raise students' awareness of their processes of response. Some further implications of repertory grid technique for research in literary response will now be mentioned, together with the relation of grid theory to other research methods.

The positive-negative ordering of elements in the grid and the classifying of responses by type of construct offer two measures of structure that may be operative in literary response. Repertory grid provides a rich source of data for studying both the subjective and common features of response, and the framework of personality theory within which it was devised by Kelly contains numerous other suggestive lines of inquiry for research on literary response. For example, comparison of individuals' construct systems across domains of experience, such as literary response and ordinary daily experience, may help to reveal more of the individual determinants of response.

One preliminary finding in my own research has been the greater proportion of responses made at the negative construct pole in response to literature, compared with other domains. If the mean negative and positive ratings for each grid are calculated and expressed as a percentage, the mean negative score for the "Frost at Midnight grids is 46.7 percent. In other domains the balance of negative to positive, known as the Golden Section (Rigdon & Epting, 1982), has been established as falling within 34 percent to 43 percent. Literary response may thus fall outside the normal Golden Section range. Another feature of recent grid research has been a finding that more extreme ratings used on a construct tend to indicate a greater self-concept involvement (Leitner, 1983). Both aspects suggest further methods for examining the role of individual experience in literary response using repertory grids.

As shown in the present study, repertory grid offers a research tool for studying both individual, subjective aspects of response, and aspects common to a group of readers. Where response features show a systematic internal relationship, this may be held to demonstrate invariant features of the text independent of any reading. In this respect the "autonomy" of the literary text may still have some theoretical validity, against recent arguments which have insisted that the notion be jettisoned (Eagleton, 1983, p. 47; Culler, 1981, p. 121). Whatever pre-existent structure of concepts and affects the reader brings to the text, the text itself may require their reorganization into significant sets of relations that serve the argument it contains. Such invariant features, revealed by grid method, may be set alongside other methods for mapping text structure in terms of lexical, grammatical, or phonemic aspects (such as de Beaugrande, 1978), text grammars (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978), or schema-theoretic approaches (Bellezza & Bower, 1982). Repertory grid technique is also distinguished, however, by its content-free nature and its responsiveness to an individual's construct system. It differs in this respect from semantic differential, with which it has sometimes been classified (Bannister & Mair, 1968, offer a critique), where content in the form of verbal scales is supplied by the investigator (Hansson, 1985). Repertory grid is thus especially suitable for empirical studies of response, allowing specific hypotheses to be formulated and tested.

In conclusion, the grid appears to organize response to a text in ways that correspond with the normal processes of the competent reader, while serving to articulate the response and to raise readers' awareness of how and why they respond as they do. As a mirror of the reading process the grid obviously captures only a small part of what must take place, but it would appear from the data on "Frost at Midnight" to be a part that leads to many of the central issues of the poem being considered. Since the grid allows the boundary between subjective and common factors of response to be mapped in some detail, it opens the way to sophisticated empirical research on the interaction between a literary text and its readers.

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