Meetings of minds:
Dialogue, sympathy, and identification,
in reading fiction[☆]

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Abstract

Any one work of literature reaches only a very few minds among the whole human population, and yet when a real meeting occurs of reader with a book, or reader with an author (via a book), it can be profound. I describe the phenomena of meeting, and their relation to personal reflection in theoretical terms, drawing on Bakhtin's (1984 [1963]) proposals of the novel as a place of dialogue. The intensity and type of such meetings varies with the degree to which a reader takes a spectator role, or identifies with a protagonist. I present empirical studies, which show how particular kinds of minds connect with particular kinds of short stories, and I discuss how in such places as reading groups, meetings among friends are affected by reading novels. © 1999 Published by Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

George Eliot said that: 'The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist is the extension of our sympathies ... extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot' (Pinney, 1963: 270). From Eliot comes the idea that is the subject of this paper: the intention of art, and particularly literary art, is not so much to describe, or inform, or instruct, as to allow meetings of minds.

In contrast to 'artist' one can consider 'scientist', or perhaps 'writer of non-fiction', whose intention is to change the reader's beliefs in a certain way. A belief is

something that can alter to correspond to something in the world. In the better kind of non-fiction, the author has laboured over evidence to bring his or her beliefs into correspondence with the world. Reading such an author's book, then, tends to allow some of the reader's beliefs to come into correspondence with the author's and, via this intermediary, to some aspect of the world.

This does not mean that the reader is without questions. One of the joys of reading non-fiction is to have one's own thoughts and ideas stimulated, to have questions started up. Nonetheless the aim of this kind of writing is consensus of belief in relation to some aspect of the world, for instance the belief that vitamin C is necessary to human health. To this end, the writings of scientists typically undergo peer-review before being admitted to the scholarly literature – reviewers who are expert in the field consent to publication only when conclusions on specific research questions are warranted by the evidence presented.

So, although in the physical and social sciences there is always controversy, we can say that consensus is the goal. By contrast art strives for something quite different, which I call meetings of minds.

Although changes of beliefs that derive from non-fiction can be profound, for instance the changes provoked by Darwin's evidence of evolution and his theory to explain it, I concentrate here on works of literary art. Such works reach only a very few minds among the whole human population. Yet, when a real meeting occurs of a reader with an author or character (via a book), it can be as profound, perhaps even more profound, than a change of scientific belief.

This meeting of minds that I discuss here has some characteristics of meeting friends. But it also has characteristics that are unlike ordinary meetings. To explain these I need first to say some things about the structure of fiction.

2. Narratology and the structure of fiction

For nearly a hundred years, narrative has been recognized as having the distinct aspects of *fabula* and *siuzhet*, often translated respectively as 'story' and 'plot'. Roughly speaking, story is what happens and plot is how the story is told.

In English, the terms 'story' and 'plot' are too close in meaning, so I will adopt the terms of Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981): 'event structure' (the structure and events of the story world) and 'discourse structure' (the arrangement of the author's discourse). In this paper I will consider mainly two forms of fictional narrative: textual fiction as in novels and short stories, and dramatic fiction as in plays and films.

In the event structure of most fictional worlds a day lasts 24 hours, and if A happens in 1997, and B in 1998, then A comes before B. But in the discourse structure things can be different. So, James Joyce's *Ulysses* is supposed to take place in a day, but it will typically occupy the reader for longer than 24 hours. And though in the event structure A comes before B, in the discourse structure B may come before a flashback to A.

Different manipulations of the discourse structure, then, give rise to different kinds of psychological effects and genres. In the genre of the suspense story, for

instance (Vorderer, 1996), time in the discourse structure can move fast to begin with, so that a few pages cover several months or years, but once a believable threat has been applied to a likeable protagonist, discourse time is slowed down, so that many pages of discourse represent a few hours in the event structure. The effect is to have the reader turning the pages fast to attain relief from the suspenseful anxiety that the story has produced.

2.1. Mimesis as simulation

Since classical times there has been the idea that the structure of the story world relates to that of the natural world, and Aristotle (c. 330 BC) used the term *mimesis* to describe this relation.

The term *mimesis* has become problematic, however. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century a favourite metaphor was the mirror (Abrams, 1953), as in Shakespeare's phrase 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature', (1600, *Hamlet*, 3, 2, 22). Even nowadays the most frequent English translations of *mimesis* are: 'copy', 'imitation', 'representation'. But now that we know what extraordinarily elaborate and dedicated procedures are needed for scientists to bring beliefs and writings into correspondence with the world, and now that video and film can copy and represent life far more accurately than any writer, any easy correspondence between fictional text and the world is implausible.

To help solve this problem, I have offered the idea (Oatley, 1992, 1994) that what Aristotle really meant by *mimesis* was not any relation of direct correspondence between pieces of text and pieces of the world. Instead he meant something closer to what we now mean by simulation.

Whereas computer simulations run on computers, literary simulations (drama, short-stories, novels) run on minds, in the imagination, or like a kind of guided dream (Oatley and Gholamain, 1997). And whereas non-fiction including science rests firmly on a correspondence theory of truth – that is why it includes the elaborate social process of warranted evidence, peer refereeing, and so forth – simulation rests on a coherence theory of truth.

A computer simulation is a model of objects, their attributes, and the interactions among the objects. The whole simulation is useful if it runs successfully, within its own limits and depending only on its own mechanism. If it can do this, it demonstrates that just these interactions of parts can be responsible for the behaviour of the whole that it generates.

A literary simulation also models objects, their attributes, and the interactions among the objects in the story world. Here, the objects almost invariably include human agents. The simulation works if a reader or spectator can get the whole thing to run – to imagine the story world with its people, and to become absorbed in it.

2.2. Why narrative does not copy the world

Why is it inappropriate to think that fiction might copy or imitate the world? The reason is that, if in fiction the elements of the story world were only those that cor-

responded to the observable natural world, then no-one would be able to understand them. Here is a demonstration of this slightly surprising truth.

Many writers agree that the aspect of the natural world that is most indigenous to the novel or drama is human conversation. Here is an example, taken from Oatley (1994).

A complex new photocopier had been delivered to a Psychology Department so Steve Draper, Charles Button and I recorded some of the conversations that occurred around it. Our only intervention was to give people (such as the one named Xavier in this excerpt) the goal of finding someone (whom we call Yolande) to show him how to use the new copier. Apart from this everything flowed naturally. Except for numbering the utterances and naming the speakers this is an exact verbal transcript of part of a natural conversation.

(1) Xavier: Could you show me how to do the photocopying?
(2) Yolande: Double sided?
(3) Xavier: Eh. Yer. I want to do, to do double sided.
(4) Yolande: Uhm, I don't know, some or ...
(5) Xavier: Sorry, what do you do here?
(6) Yolande: This one. But, eh, some turn the other way round. You must have it.

After utterances (1) to (3), this conversation is incomprehensible to readers of the transcript, though it was understood by the speakers. This is not unusual in human conversation. When we are in ordinary conversations our understandings of the words are derived in part from the words themselves, but in part from our knowledge of the relationship with the other person and our engagement in it, of our joint concerns and joint history, of the furniture of the immediate environment, and so forth. A transcription omits all such things.

So what would we have to do to make copied conversation comprehensible from a text? We would need to novelize it. In the following I have done this, preserving as many of the uttered words as I could, and making each paragraph correspond to each utterance in the transcript.

(1′) 'Could you show me how to do the photocopying?' asked Xavier.
(2′) Yolande knew that Xavier must be able to do straightforward copying, he must want to do something more, perhaps learn advanced features of this irritating machine, recently delivered to the Psychology Department, which she had spent a good deal of time learning how to operate. Xavier only had one piece of typed paper in his hand: maybe he wanted her to use it to show how the machine did different kinds of copying. 'You want to do double-sided?' she asked.
(3′) 'Yes, I want to do double sided', said Xavier.
(4′) 'It's more complicated than you might think.'
(5′) 'Sorry. What do you do here?' asked Xavier, pointing to a button. He wanted to get started.
(6′) 'You press this button, but usually you have to think about how many copies you want, and whether you have got single or double-sided originals, and some-

times you have to worry about whether the copy on the second side will come out the right way round.'

To novelize this incident, I had to offer contexts, for instance of the agents' goals and plans, and offer a discourse structure to help you, the reader, construct the working model of events so that your simulation would run. We may forget that fictional texts that are self-sustaining in this way, and designed not to be performed orally but to be read silently, are of rather recent origin (Thomas, 1992). Such texts supply both words that point to the story world and directions to help interpret these words.

2.3. Components of a simulation

Let me now reiterate the distinction between *fabula* and *siuzhet*, event structure and discourse structure. For a literary simulation to run, we need one set of elements that correspond to events and objects in the story world, and a second set that consists of directions to the reader about how to run the simulation. Exactly these two types of element are present in simulations that run on computers.

Look, for instance, at this fragment of a program I wrote, following Sharples et al. (1989) in the language Pop 11, as a prototype for students to augment in an artificial intelligence course. The program simulates a conversation partner who can answer questions about the shortest routes between locations in the down-town Toronto public transit system. In this fragment, two variables are declared by the command 'vars'. Then these variables ('traveltime' and 'changetime') are given values that correspond to the average number of minutes to travel between stops, and the average waiting time for a train or streetcar. Then comes the start of the declaration of a procedure 'setup ()', built as a list of lists, of subway and streetcar stops in Toronto, each joined by 'connects' to indicate which stop directly connects with which other.

```
vars traveltime, changetime;
2 → traveltime; 5 → changetime;
define setup ();
[[[BloorSubway spadina] connects [BloorSubway st george]]
[[BloorSubway st george] connects [BloorSubway bay]]
[[BloorSubway bay] connects [BloorSubway bloor yonge]] etc., etc.
```

One set of elements corresponds with the world, and can be seen in the list of lists over which the program computes. There are names of lines (e.g. 'BloorSubway') and stations (e.g. 'st george') that correspond to names of lines and stations in the real Toronto. But other elements exist only in the computer-world. They activate processes to make the simulation run; they include declaring variables (e.g. 'vars traveltime'), the operator for assignment '→', the definition of a procedure, the list of lists, etc.

2.4. How the mind runs a simulation

On what part of the mind does the reader run the story-simulation? Narrative is based on the actions of human agents, who have intentions that meet vicissitudes. These vicissitudes prompt emotions. The human simulation of narrative therefore runs on the human planning processor. In most of ordinary life, this planning processor is indeed used for planning, for example: 'I'll send my friend a birthday card (intention), but to do that, first I need to buy a card and then a stamp'. Although, in this mode, we run the planning processor forwards, arranging actions in planful order from the current state towards a goal, in order to accomplish intentions, we can also run it backwards, taking an ordered set of actions and inferring someone's plan and intention. This is what we do when, in affection or gossip, we discuss the actions of our friends and acquaintances.

In reading narrative we run the planning processor both ways. We read the actions of a protagonist, running the planner forwards, not so much predicting as understanding the range of possible outcomes that can result from actions. And we run it backwards, inferring from trains of action the coherent set of goals and patterns of habitual planning that compose what in the theory of fiction is called 'character'.

Both narrative fiction and games allow human participants to take, as it were, rides on goal-and-plan structures that are not those of real life. When we take such rides, we experience the emotions consequent to adopting the goals and engaging in the action sequences that are afforded.

3. Types of fictional meeting

Fiction does not mean something untrue; it means something made. It has a similar etymology to poetry (which also means something made). So, according to the theory I am proposing, fiction is literary simulation that has distinctive methods, characteristics, and effects, which allow the fictional simulations to run. Although in the last thirty years some of these methods have been appropriated in certain kinds of non-fiction journalism (Wolfe, 1975), it has been within fiction that they were developed, and it is within fiction that they are most at home.

It is within these methods also, that we can begin to understand what kinds of meetings of minds can occur. Bakhtin (1984 [1963]) has suggested that the novel is the very place of dialogue, both among characters and between the reader and the characters, or between the reader and author. If this is true, the novel, in its deepest meanings, is about meetings and their emotional and intellectual consequences for us. Such meetings are in some ways like those that occur in everyday life. But in other ways they are unlike: some aspects are selected and some exaggerated, while others are not included or are attenuated. It is a different experience to meet James Joyce in *Ulysses* than it would have been to meet Jim Joyce in the pub.

3.1. Reader as spectator: Meeting by observing

The simplest theory of the reader is of reader as spectator. The reader becomes an unobserved observer in scenes of the lives of characters in the story world. He or she stands in their bedrooms, hovers at their dining tables, drives with them in their cars.

As compared with the novel, film tends to favour the spectator role. In Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear window*, for instance, we members of the audience become veritable voyeurs. At the same time, in the genre of how-to books on writing fiction, of all the advice offered, the most frequent is 'show, don't tell'. In the more explicit of such manuals, the aspiring writer is told that if she or he does not write prose that makes the reader seem to be watching a movie, then only failure lies ahead. This advice bears little relation to what many successful novelists do. Nonetheless it implies a strong commitment to the idea of reader as spectator.

Film is indeed the longed-for time-machine, or rather the time-and-space-machine. The cinema lights go down, and there one is, an intimate observer, attentive but invisible. Note that in the discourse structure of film – how different from our own real lives – the camera and microphone are always at exactly the right spot, at exactly the right moment, with exactly the right angle, so that we can observe just the transaction that is essential to the plot.

As compared with the meetings of real life, then, in our meetings in fiction from the spectator stance we come to know something of the characters but we do not affect them. The meetings are one-way affairs, in which we have no influence. This passivity is perhaps part of the easy charm of movie-going: here is social life without obligation, meeting without responsibility. But at the same time we certainly feel emotions in our meetings with characters of the story world, perhaps most especially the emotions of sympathy.

3.2. Identification: Meeting as merging

A second kind of meeting is of a reader identifying with a protagonist, or with a narrator, as described by Oatley and Gholamain (1997). Whereas film tends to favour the role of spectator, novels and short stories are equally hospitable both to the spectator role and to identification. In identification the reader takes on the protagonist's goals and plans. The reader then also experiences emotions when these plans go well or badly.

Point-of-view in fictional technique is the most direct means of varying the extent of the spectator role as compared with identification. For instance, the use of third-person narrative favours spectating; first-person narrative favours identification. Stream of consciousness, as used for instance by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway*, allows the reader into the very most intimate moment-by-moment sequences of a character's thoughts, and is a further means of identification, although this mode is also supported in many other ways.

By contrast, film directors have to work harder to simulate the viewer walking through the story world: but there are examples, for instance the eight-minute-long tracking shot at the beginning of Joseph Altman's film, *The player*. This and other

identificatory techniques do occur and can be effective, but they are a lesser part of the repertoire in comparison with spectator techniques.

The meeting of identification is a species of empathy, in which we do not merely sympathize with a person, we become that person. But again there is a contrast with ordinary life, in which we remain steadfastly ourselves, while the person we meet, and with whom we empathize, remains himself or herself.

3.3. Varying the degree of spectating and identifying

In spectator narratives there is usually a protagonist, with whom we can identify to some extent. In addition, there are always possibilities to identify with an actual narrator, with an implied narrator, with an author, or with a director.

Similarly, even in the most fully identificatory novels, there are almost always spectator opportunities as the protagonist interacts with other people in the story world. At the same time there is the additional opportunity to identify with the author of a work, or with the author's representative within the discourse structure.

Properly, then, we might say that there is a spectrum that runs from observation to identification. Different narrative techniques can be used to favour one or the other, in the work as a whole, or at particular moments with a work.

This spectrum is comparable to the important scale of aesthetic distance proposed by Scheff (1979). This scale runs from overdistanced (the reader with a spectator stance keeps emotional issues of the story events from encroaching on the self) to underdistanced (the identifying reader experiences emotions as happening directly to the self, so that if these emotions are intense they can feel overwhelming). At an aesthetic distance that is optimal, the reader both experiences emotions, and can reflect upon them, in order to assimilate their meanings.

3.4. What psychological effects are afforded by fictional simulation?

Among the products of the meetings in fiction are emotions, memories, and thoughts. Emotions occur in a number of ways. In the spectator role they occur when the reader is sympathetic towards characters in the story (Tan, 1996). In identification with a protagonist, emotions occur as the protagonist's plans meet vicissitudes (Oatley, 1994). Autobiographical memories are prompted by reading (Scheff, 1979) and these too are associated with emotions. In addition, reading can prompt reflective thought (Cupchik and László, 1994).

Insofar as a writer affords only one mode of experiencing a story – a relatively pure spectator role or a total immersion in identification – then correspondingly the reader's (or viewer's) experience will be shallow. Most of our great writers encourage a moving back and forth along the spectrum of aesthetic distance, identification with different characters in turn (e.g. in Dostoyevsky's *The brothers Karamazov*), or identification with a character and then a view from the exterior perspective of the narrator (e.g. in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). In more recent novels, modernist techniques achieve similar effects, for instance, of first allowing the reader to become immersed in the story, and then revealing some piece of the literary machin-

ery of the text, or even having the author confront the protagonist (e.g. John Fowles in *The French lieutenant's woman*).

3.5. Associative structure: Third structural element in narrative and third point of meeting

Alongside the story structure and discourse structure is another, which spans both text and reader. In the text it is represented by the set of metaphors, metonyms, and other figures the writer uses. For the reader it is the set of associations – the emotions, memories and reflective thoughts, prompted by these figures. It takes place in Winnicott's (1971) space-in-between self and other, which starts off as the space which opens as we first become separate from our mother (or other caregiver), and which grows into the space of human culture that retains to some extent this primordial connection to the loved other. It also represents Vygotsky's idea that alongside the causal line of development of any plot there is a wavy and circuitous line like a kind of melody that accompanies the reading (Kozulin, 1990). Indeed this musical idea is implemented in film scores. Vygotsky thought that catharsis occurred when the aesthetic experience of reading overcame the form of the plot, in the dialectical relationship between them. In computation it may perhaps be indicated by the notion 'side effects' which are effects that are important but not directly specified by statements of the computer language.

To explain this in a bit more detail, metaphor and metonymy stand, as Jakobson (1988) argued, at the two poles of language. I use metonymy (strictly using the name for a thing itself) to include synecdoche (using the part for the whole or vice versa) and prosopopeia (taking an imaginary agency or abstract concept as a person). The two great literary tropes of metaphor and metonym, then correspond respectively to miniature *mimeses* and to the juxtapositions and slidings of words across concepts, or as Lacan has proposed (Lacan, 1966; Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986), to the psychical mechanisms that support them of condensation and displacement. At issue here is the stream of effects that runs alongside any reading, and that works partly in primary process, of associations, biases, priming, prefiguring.

Here is an example from the famous opening of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the first sentence, from the Garnett translation, indicating the figures used.

Happy families[1] are all alike;[2] every unhappy family[3] is unhappy in its own way[4].

1. 'Happy families' – metonym of the type prosopopeia. In European folk theory happiness inheres in the individual person; so there is a displacement of the emotion to the families as such.
2. 'All alike' – hyperbole. Not all happy families are alike.
3. 'Every unhappy family' – antithesis, contrasting with happy families, and combining with a further hyperbole in the term 'every'.
4. 'Own way' – own is a metonym (prosopopeia) since strictly only people can own; way is a metaphor for type, the source of which is travelling, a road, a path – specifically a path through life.

Corresponding to these figures are the side effects in the reader, partly via the unconscious, prompting associations and biasing interpretations. Here is some of my associative structure to this sentence.

Happy families all alike – unhappy each in its own way. My family not particularly a happy one, unhappy in its own way, perhaps, but not so unhappy exactly, a bit too earnest really, father undemonstrative, mother apt to be disapproving, so I would feel a kind of constraint fall over me when I would enter the door. Then I tended to avoid, and that was sad. So this is to be about unhappy families? Will other memories of my family be aroused?

So in the associative structure, not only does Winnicott's (1971) space-in-between open up, but a ground is provided for the most personal meetings with the text and with oneself, as well as literary foreshadowings that reach forward to succeeding episodes.

To summarize then we have three types of structure, as exemplified in the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina*:

1. Story structure: 'Families'. This is a book about families, and family.
2. Discourse structure: 'Happy families are all alike ... in its own way'. Assertion, a speech act addressed directly by the writer to the reader; the reader starts up a simulation that involves families, happy and unhappy.
3. Association structure: Metaphor, metonym, and hyperbole, select and prompt in an only partly conscious way associations, such as memories of an only partly happy family life, emotions such as a kind of sadness at not having done more to make my family happy, priming patterns to bias the interpretation of the next piece of text.

4. Empirical data on meetings between reader and the text

Over the past seven years my research group and I have been collecting data about how readers become connected to texts. One method, in which we can begin to trace empirically some of the associative structure, is used in most of our studies. It combines a method of emotion diaries that we have developed with a method devised by Larsen and Seilman (1988) who had readers mark the text when memories were elicited during reading.

In our studies, each reader reads a short story and while doing so jots in the margin an E when he or she experiences an emotion, an M when an autobiographical memory comes to mind, and a T if some train of thought occurs that does not directly paraphrase the text. We take these Es, Ms, and Ts to be measures of readers' engagement with the text – measures of the personal part of the associative structure discussed in the previous section.

Here is a result from our first study using these methods, done in collaboration with Angela Biason (Oatley, 1996). In this study 59 high-school students read one of two short stories about adolescent identity. One by Alice Munro was called 'Red dress'. It is about a girl who goes to a school dance, fearing she looks dreadful in the

dress her mother has made for her, and fearing that she will be a wallflower. The other, by Carson McCullers, called 'Sucker', is about a boy whose cousin lives with him like a younger brother. The protagonist, who has largely ignored the younger boy, starts to treat him better when a girl to whom the protagonist is attracted starts returning his attentions.

We randomly assigned students to read one of the stories, and asked them to mark Es and Ms in the margin as they did so. After reading we asked them to give some details of the emotions and memories they had indicated. All the students had both emotions and memories during their readings of the story. All, therefore, connected themselves to the text in a personal way – achieving a meeting, not just analyzing it.

The numbers of emotions that the students experienced are shown in Table 1. If we take the number of these emotions as a measure of identification with the protagonist, the girls were significantly more involved than the boys, and were equally able to identify with either a female or a male protagonist. This relates to a widely reported finding that more women than men read fiction, particularly fiction that concerns relationships. Narrative forms that engage more men are the spectator sports.

Table 1
Mean numbers of emotions reported by male and female high-school students (numbers of students are in parentheses) reading a story with a male protagonist ('Sucker') and a female protagonist ('Red dress')

| | Story | | |
	Sucker	Red dress	Combining both stories
Males	4.88 ($n = 17$)	2.88 ($n = 17$)	3.88* ($n = 34$)
Females	6.77 ($n = 13$)	6.67 ($n = 12$)	6.72* ($n = 25$)

* Main effect of gender in analysis of variance at $p < 0.02$

In a more recent study, Gholamain and Oatley (in preparation) asked subjects who were members of reading groups, to read another story by Alice Munro – 'Bardon bus', which is about a middle-aged woman who recounts the loss of a personal romantic relationship. In this study, we collected Es, Ms, and Ts, then categorized the most significant of the memories prompted by the story on a scale of aesthetic distance derived from Scheff, (1979, discussed above).

Here is an example of an overdistanced memory from this study:

A divorce: beginning, middle, and end.

Now an optimally distanced memory:

I remember one day receiving a letter from a young man whom I had known briefly (and had quite liked). I had not heard from him since we graduated from high school. The letter arrived at a time when I was feeling quite alone and unhappy and unsure of what I wanted to do with my life. I had a four month old

baby and was living again with my family having been away from home for a year. In the letter this young man expressed an interest in how and what I was doing and professed a 'fondness' that he had held for me in school. The tone of the letter made it quite clear that he wanted and hoped to become a part of my life. I felt overjoyed, my hope renewed. I can remember to this day the sensation of my heart swelling and the feeling that all would turn out well in the end. And yet, these feelings were tempered by the reality of the changes that had occurred in my life, namely the addition of a child.

Now here is an underdistanced memory:

Painful, long drawn-out pain, feeling no self-worth, self-loathing, extreme loneliness, desperation – breakup of a relationship/marriage – being told you weren't good enough, no longer loved despite what you did.

The overdistanced memory might be called purely intellectual; it is without emotions or any substantial connection to the person's life. The underdistanced memory is raw and unanalysed – all emotion and no reflection. The optimally distanced memory integrates thought and emotion, and it does so in a meaningful way that connects the remembered event to the self and current life.

After they had finished reading, we also asked each participant to give a paragraph of overall response to the story. We categorized these responses into three types following a system derived from literary criticism, according to Bogdan (1992). A distanced response was one in which the readers only responded in an over-intellectual way making remarks, for instance, about the style of writing. An Autonomous response combined emotional implications for the readers' own lives with some critical judgment, or reflection, on the story. A kinetic response was one in which the reader responded largely emotionally, liking or disliking the story, or feeling what a character felt, but without much judgment.

Table 2
Observed frequencies for categories of reader-response by category of memory (cells with equivalent values on the both variables are emphasized)

| Type of reader-response | Category of memory | | | |
	Overdistanced	Optimal	Underdistanced	Totals
Distanced	**17**	3	2	22
Autonomous	5	**14**	3	22
Kinetic	0	3	**8**	11

Table 2 shows a result from this study. There was a close association between the classifications of people's overall responses to the story and their most meaningful autobiographical memories that had been prompted by their reading. This associa-

tion was significant (Fisher exact test = 31.6, $p < 0.0001$). The result confirms Holland's (1975) theory that when reading, people recreate in their response to literature (as indicated in their overall responses) the structure of their own habitual attitudes to the ordinary world (as indicated in their memories).

In this same study, we found that Main's (1995) three categories of adult attachment, avoidant, secure, and preoccupied with relationships, were also strongly and significantly related to the three styles of overall responses that subjects gave to the story. Here again the implication is that the kind of meeting that one habitually has in adult life, derived from early attachment patterns, is recreated in one's meetings in literature.

Our suggestion is that to derive insights from a story one should ideally both experience an emotion and reflect on it thoughtfully. Here the meeting can be productive. To be avoidant means that one has habitually distanced oneself from involvement in personal meetings and tended to avoid emotions. For people who have this distancing habit in life, and who recreate it in reading literature, perhaps the ideal story should therefore be emotionally up-close, and underdistanced, so that they can experience some of the emotions they avoid in ordinary life. To be preoccupied with relationships means one experiences passionate relationships, and correspondingly overwhelming disappointments with people do not live up to expectations. Since in stories there are typically more events that are intense than in most of everyday life, this means an increased risk of being overwhelmed when reading. For such people ideal narratives would perhaps be more distanced, so that the emotions can be thought about, not just felt.

In addition to the above studies, we have asked people to read excerpts from short stories by James Joyce (Vorderer et al., 1997; Cupchik, et al., 1998). We found that descriptively dense (more distanced) excerpts and emotionally intense (less distanced) excerpts, as well as instructions to the readers to take either a spectator role or to identify with story characters, resulted in distinctive effects on readers' involvement, and meaningfulness. Taking a spectator role biased readers towards emotional memories, whereas identification biased readers towards fresh emotions.

5. Cultural implications for affiliative relationships in reading

Studies of narrative in the postmodern era have been much concerned with relationships of power and hegemony in writing and reading (e.g. Bal, 1997), and some such analyses have been illuminating. But they neglect the fact that, starting with the introduction of printing, new relationships have been made possible for many people beyond their own worlds – relationships that are affiliative.

Writing is only half an act. The full act is writing and reading. Not only has narrative fiction provided an artistic medium that is unique in its access for people of many different origins, including women and members of minority groups, but the process of reading, which is its complement, is one of interpretation.

The metaphors of reader response, and of reception theory, do indeed convey the idea of a hegemonic relationship between a writer who is powerful and reader who is passive. But contradicting this, we know from cognitive psychology that interpre-

tation is active. Interpretation of fiction offers not just the possibility of choosing how to read a text, and of creativity (Barthes, 1975), it also allows a choice of what to read, and it enables an affiliative joining of reader and author, or reader and characters. Moreover, as any text becomes a shared cultural object it becomes surrounded by a penumbra of interpretations, of so-called criticism. Here again, in textual form, we have not just writing, but a plurality of writings-and-interpretations.

One of the exciting developments during the last century, which seems, if anything to be gaining pace, is the formation of reading groups – groups of people who meet every few weeks to discuss a book they have read. Here then is another kind of meeting, with friends, around a shared cultural object which, during a reading, has become personal. Long (1986, 1987) found that in reading groups, although selection of books was partly dependent on cultural authority and commercial promotion, it was also partly resistant to such forces. Moreover, in their discussions of books, members of the groups typically offered a wide range of interpretations of what they had read. They also often explicitly rejected ideas of kinds that are dear to post-modern analysts. Long found that members often described their discussions as 'playful'. They actively constructed meanings together, sometimes in joint streams-of-consciousness, based on such issues as character, identifications, and the moral qualities of the books as they related to the members' own lives.

In this post-modern age too, meetings of new kinds are spawned by electronic media. Not only do authors canvass fans over the internet about drafts of their next novel, but people take part in narrative-like games in which they meet others interacting in the same game space (Murray, 1997).

The traditional novel still has a place because the kind of meeting it affords is different both from the everyday kind and from those so far occurring in cyberspace. It still involves the otherness of an independent mind, of writer or story character. In addition it involves that special kind of meeting, which can be involved but not too involved, potentially transforming of self but not too much so. Occasionally, when story structure, discourse structure, and associative structure occur in special configurations, meetings of literature can occur at the right aesthetic distance, so that we experience important emotions (our own, not those of the characters). On such occasions, as well as experiencing intimate and specific emotions we can think about them, perhaps even understand them for the first time.

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