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A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative

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Abstract

A taxonomy of emotions of literary response is presented. Some emotions occur as readers confront a text: they depend on curiosity as new material is assimilated to schemata, or on dishabituation as schemata accommodate. Further modes of emotion arise if readers enter the world of a story: they arise as a writer represents eliciting patterns of emotion and the reader responds with sympathy as story characters face these patterns, from personal memories of emotion, and by identification with characters' goals and plans. Based on cognitive theory and literary criticism, a theory of identification in fictional literature is presented, derived from Aristotle's concept *mimesis*. The usual translations, 'imitation' or 'representation', are misleading: *mimesis* means something closer to 'simulation', as in computers. Fictional simulations run on people's minds. For them to run successfully readers (a) adopt a character's goals and use their own planning procedures to connect actions together meaningfully, (b) form mental models of imagined worlds, (c) receive speech acts addressed to them by the writer, and (d) integrate disparate elements to create a unified experience. In providing materials for these functions, great writers allow readers to respond creatively, to feel moved emotionally, to understand within themselves some of the relations between actions and emotions, and sometimes to undergo cognitive change.

1. Introduction

1.1. The sorcery of the writer

George Eliot opened her first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, like this:

> "With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertook to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you ..."

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By what sorcery does the writer enable the reader to understand unseen worlds and to experience emotions about what goes on in them, while perceiving mere traces of ink on a page? My discussion here mainly concerns writing and reading of novels, but it also applies to plays and films.

1.2. The emotions that occur during reading

Modern cognitive understandings of emotions generally draw on the work of Frijda (1986). Typically an emotion is triggered by a noticeable event, and at its core is a change of readiness for action as the significance of this event is evaluated in relation to the person's concerns. The process typically includes a conscious feeling such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, or disgust. Often there are physiological accompaniments like the heart beating faster, expressions like smiling or tears, and emotional thoughts that come involuntarily to mind.

Oatley and Duncan (1992) found that people asked to write details of distinctly noticeable emotions in structured diaries recorded about one such incident a day in everyday life, although this underestimates their frequency. About 7% of these everyday emotions arose from reading, watching television, and the like. In other studies, adapting the technique of Larsen and Seilman (1988), Axelrad (1993) and Biason (1993), who worked with me, found that adults and adolescents reading short stories by James Joyce, Alice Munro and Carson McCullers, could readily mark the margins of texts where emotions occurred while reading a story, and could later describe these emotions, say what caused them, and rate their intensities. Emotions occurring while reading were similar to those of ordinary life. During reading they were typically experienced at around the midpoint of a scale of intensity, ranging from 0 = barely noticeable to 10 = the most intense ever experienced, and sometimes towards the top of this range.

In this paper, I first present a taxonomy of the emotions that arise from reading and drama, and then a theory of identification in fictional narrative. Both the taxonomy and the theory are based jointly on literary criticism and cognitive psychological theory. Interrelating these two areas seems to me necessary for understanding emotional responses to literature. At the same time it is problematic because although there is a general understanding of what a cognitive psychological approach is, literary theory is more extensive and more heterogeneous. I have therefore selected certain ideas in literary theory that are suggestive for psychological approaches.

1.3. A taxonomy of the emotions of reading

At the top level of the taxonomic tree of emotional responses to literature one may distinguish between a person remaining outside a work of art or entering into it. The image in the first case is of a person and an object – person and book, person and cinema screen. The image in the second case is of a reader entering the world created by the artist, as Alice enters the world through the looking glass.

Separating outside from inside there is what Goffman (1961) has called a semi-permeable membrane, that surrounds each kind of social interaction: parent and child, conversation with a friend, buying something in a shop, as well as each kind of game like tennis, chess, monopoly which are simulated types of social interaction. Goffman's metaphor of the membrane can be extended to reading; as Booth (1988) has pointed out, reading is best thought of as an interaction between reader and author, or between reader and a story's characters. The membranes that surround social interactions are semi-permeable because one imports some but not all of one's own characteristics into the world within. We experience ourselves differently in each microworld. For literary art, emotions from outside the membrane arise as a reader confronts a text: the pleasures of reading, the satisfaction of curiosity, surprises that render things unfamiliar. The emotions arising inside the world of the narrative include those evoked by the plot or by characters in the story.

Properly speaking this first distinction in the taxonomy, outer or inner (see Fig. 1) is a continuous dimension rather than a dichotomy. In the theory of art an objective, outer attitude is referred to as aesthetic distance (Bullough, 1912).

In this taxonomy other distinctions are not sharp either. The branches in the diagram of Fig. 1 do not indicate states that exclude each other; they indicate different modes of emotional experience, regions that can be reached within the terrain of literary genres. Many great works of literature derive their effects from enabling several modes to come into play, including those of retaining one's identity outside the text and losing it within the text. They can either allow the reader to occupy both positions simultaneously, or pass quickly between them, as I explain below.

2. Emotions experienced from outside the membrane of the text

2.1. Theories of literary art

Psychologically, emotions that arise from outside a text can be discussed in terms of arousal and of mental schemata. The reader has a set of mental schemata; in reading some of these are invoked, and they may also be challenged. In the literary world there is a four-part ensemble: writer – text – real world – reader (Abrams, 1953). As Abrams has pointed out, literary theory in the last 200 years has focused on writer and text, and art has become understood as the artist's expression of emotions in different media, or as Langer (1953: 40) has put it as "... the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling". How, then, does a writer's creation affect the reader? This question has typically been answered in the way suggested by John Stuart Mill, who said that eloquence and poetry are both expressions of feeling, but whereas "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*" (1966: 423 [1833]; emphasis in original).

Reading is not telepathy – words are the vehicle for communication. Tolstoy (1925:173 [1898]) put the artist's role like this.

> "To invoke in oneself a feeling which one has experienced and, having evoked it in oneself, then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling – this is the activity of art."

By a description in a novel, or by a metaphor and a context of implication in a poem, emotions and thoughts can be prompted in the reader much as they were created by the author. Tolstoy proposed that appreciation of art in this way does not require special training or sophistication. Emotional connections are made by verbally mediated contagion; words allow the reader to feel what the artist was feeling. It is often argued that the true artist represents what is finest in expressing a particular emotion: so that there occurs, as Shelley (1962: 207 [1840]) has said "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own".

In one of the first empirical studies of literary judgement Richards proposed that transmission of such states from mind to mind involves four kinds of meaning: sense, feeling, tone, and the intention of the writer. As we understand a piece of literature in these four modes with their ramifications and interconnections, emotions and attitudes are prompted.

> "When we have the poem in all its minute particulars as intimately and as fully present to our minds as we can contrive – no general description of it but the very experience itself present as a living pulse in our biographies – then our acceptance or rejection of it must be *direct*." (Richards, 1929: 302, emphasis in original)

Though Mill's idea of overhearing is suggestive, we still need to know how the transmission occurs from the mind of the artist to that of the reader. T.S. Eliot's answer was that an author imagines events and these are re-imagined by the reader.

> "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." (Eliot, 1953: 107–108 [1919]; emphasis in original)

Those brought up on the classics of psychology may see in these ideas the proposal of Lipps (1900) that aesthetic experiences are based on empathy *Einfühlung*, in which the beholder or reader projects some aspect of him- or herself into the work of art. Looking at the columns of a Greek temple we might feel the stresses that would be involved if we were holding up the roof, and project these onto the building. A cognitive psychologist thinking about the "objective correlative ... the formula of that *particular* emotion" might move in one of two directions. One would be to suppose that arousal is first provoked by discrepancies between the reader's schema and that implied by the work of art (Berlyne, 1971; Gaver and Mandler, 1987; Cupchik, this issue). In many works of art discrepancies

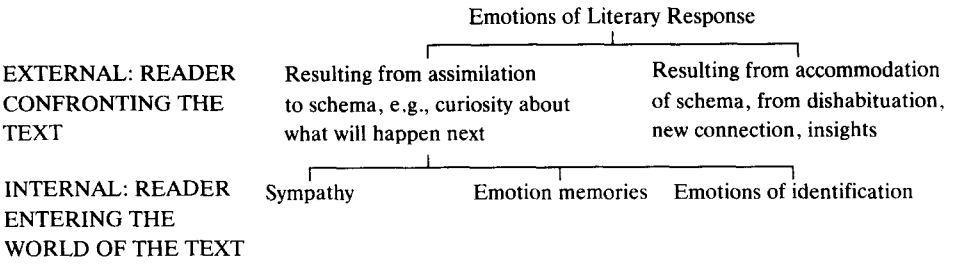

Fig. 1. A taxonomic tree of five different kinds of emotions that occur in literary response.

or tensions set up in one part are resolved in another, and cognitive elements allow the arousal to be recognized meaningfully. An alternative move would be via appraisal theories of emotion (Frijda, 1986; Roseman et al., 1990). In research on appraisal, subjects rate vignettes or autobiographical episodes on a set of features: whether an event is new, whether it fulfils a goal, whether it is controllable, and so on. Patterns of appraisal might be responses to the 'formulae' of particular emotions. According to this idea, a piece of representational art re-presents a pattern, a formula; the reader or viewer reacts to this pattern much as he or she would to the same pattern in ordinary life. In analyses of arousal from outside the membrane of the text we can make the next distinction in the taxonomy. Borrowing from Piaget and Inhelder (1969) the reader invokes a schema as she or he reads, and we can distinguish reading by assimilation to a schema from reading in which a schema accommodates or changes (see Fig. 1).

2.2. Assimilative processes: The Grisham effect or 'What will happen next?'

A writer can invoke a schema and appeal to the reader's curiosity. Incompleteness can provoke arousal, and the reader becomes engaged in assimilating new elements to the schema until completion and relief occur. This idea can be applied to all art including music (Meyer, 1956). It can also be applied to some non artistic pursuits such as computer games (McDowell and Mandler, 1989). In narrative it is generally the plot which first invokes a schema and then provides elements for assimilation to it.

A number of critics (e.g. Todorov, 1977) describe a dual structure in novels, an event structure and a discourse structure. The event structure is the set of happenings in the imaginary world of the story. These happenings occur with a particular order and timing. But simply saying 'this happened, then that, then the next thing', does not make a story. A story depends on creation of a discourse structure in which just some events are selected from the flux of possible happenings, and presented at rates, in orders, and in ways, that are not the same as the event structure. In a story of suspense, weeks in the event structure might be covered in a few lines at the beginning of the story, then the discourse structure is slowed relative to the event structure to maintain suspense. Or in a psychological novel an earlier event is presented as a memory, after a later one, to illuminate its

meaning. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) have experimented with varying the discourse structure while keeping the event structure constant. Readers judged texts that produced suspense or surprise followed by resolution to be stories. Texts that did not have this pattern were not seen as stories.

Curiosity about what happens next can be somewhat external, but more often it is combined with an internal mode. So far as I know all novels that depend on a plot combine it with another mode. The thriller, for instance, is a genre based on assimilation to a plot-based schema with the subordinate mode of identification with a protagonist in the world of the story (see Fig. 1). A good example is Grisham's thriller *The Pelican Brief* (1992). Although it involves identification it comes close to being a pure assimilative text. An explosion on page 127 tells us that the protagonist, Derby Shaw, is in mortal danger. Grisham successfully combines curiosity about what will happen next with anxiety about Derby's predicament (the thrill in the thriller). Relief of these emotions does not occur until page 436.

Nell (1988) studied people who read at least one book a week for pleasure. He made recordings from the autonomic nervous systems and facial muscles of these subjects as they read books of their choice. He found high physiological arousal, but subjects also reported a trance-like satisfaction. Nell discusses the kinds of books that are typically read for pleasure, usually light fiction. Best-seller lists indicate successful examples of such books. By contrast books read for work scored higher on indices of reading difficulty. Although high arousal was also registered when people read difficult passages, such passages ranked low as preferred reading and scored low in satisfaction.

Most suspense novels make no pretensions of doing anything other than providing a pleasurable experience of the kind that Nell describes. *The Pelican Brief* leaves a few episodic memories of the plot and characters but apart from adding a bit to one's mental model of the ways of lawyers and government officials, it leaves little other residue in the mind. Nothing much happens to prompt insights or reflections. You are aroused by curiosity and anxiety; then you experience relief, but you will scarcely be moved by any personal meanings (Cupchik, this issue, discusses the distinction between arousal and meaningful emotions). When you put the book down you will be much the same person as when you started.

2.3. Accommodative processes: The Amis effect or 'Making things strange'

A different process occurs when a writer aims for accommodation of schemata. Modernists, with their aversion to plots, try to deny readers easy assimilation of events to schemata; they work to prompt accommodation. The person most closely associated with this idea is the Russian formalist, Schlovsky (1917). He argued that the purpose of art was to make the habitual strange. By presenting the ordinary so that habitual responses are difficult, the world may be seen afresh, not passed over, not taken for granted. In the theatre Brecht worked to prevent the audience getting lost in the play and merely experiencing emotions (Gray, 1961). He too sought to make things strange so that people would be prompted by discrepancies

to change the world for the better. Many novelists work hard at dishabituation. Here, for instance, are some lines about Los Angeles, from Martin Amis's *Money* (1985: 168).

> "Over boiling Watts the downtown skyline carries a smear of God's green snot. You walk left, you walk right, you are a bank rat on a busy river. This restaurant serves no drink, this one serves no meat, this one serves no homosexuals. You can get your chimp shampooed, you can get your dick tattooed, twenty four hour, but can you get lunch? And should you see a sign on the other side of the street flashing BEEF – BOOZE – NO STRINGS, then you can forget it. The only way to get across the road is to be born there."

Most readers will have a habitual response to city-scapes. Here Amis makes the city unusual: 'a smear of God's green snot' suggests disgust at the pollution. We know Los Angeles is for cars, but Amis offers a hyperbole of the impossibility of crossing the street on foot. The arousals produced by dishabituation are also occasions for invoking associations and reflections, prompting new and unfamiliar structures of meaning: 'over boiling' reminds us of the urban troubles of Watts. 'God's green snot', as Lodge (1992) suggests, might prompt an echo of James Joyce's 'snot green sea' itself a satire on Homer's epithet 'wine dark sea'. Each sentence in this passage does similar work, with odd perceptions and coarse jokes – and most of all incongruous juxtapositions which do not allow easy assimilation of this material to a schema, but which make new connections and shock current schemata into new shapes, even if temporarily.

In such analyses the important construct is arousal mediated by discrepancy between what is expected and what is presented. This idea has led to work in experimental aesthetics (Berlyne, 1971). Moreover, Cupchik and Laszlo (1994) have shown empirically that passages that promote assimilation have different effects on the reader from those that promote accommodation. Suspenseful passages invoke what Bruner (1986) has called the landscape of action, and promote curiosity. They are read fast as the reader tries to satisfy this curiosity, and assimilates events to the plot-schema that the writer has set up. By contrast, reflective passages are read more slowly: they invoke a landscape of consciousness, and involve subjects in making more associations.

3. Distinguishing art from non-art

One might argue that novels that are merely plot-based and assimilative are not art – they merely pass the time. It is hard to discuss the nature of art without referring to some canon. But if we could do so, we might argue that in artistic writing, but not in (say) thrillers, there is a creative emotional exploration by the artist and that the reader too can be creative in interpreting the text (Barthes, 1975).

A good statement of this idea is by Collingwood (1938). He argued that art proper is the expression of emotion in a particular medium, and such expression is the essence of creative response to situations that are problematic. By contrast use of technique for arousing emotions is quite different. He says there is a term for

the techniques of deliberate evocation of specific emotions, though it is usually applied to cultures other than our own. This term is 'magic'. In our society too such techniques abound: producing warm feelings towards other members of our community or hostile feelings towards members of other communities, inducing preference for a politician, prompting an inclination to buy a particular product. Such ordinary magic is not pseudo-science, but pseudo-art. Thriller writing is a form of such ordinary magic, it involves using words and actions in a preconceived plan to have a calculated emotional effect. Though as George Eliot hinted in the quotation with which I began this article, art too has magical properties, it has something else. According to Collingwood it is that art is a creative production by the author, not just technique. For psychologists both art and technique-based magic are of interest. Techniques for allowing people to pass the time pleasurably, or to induce thrills, are not in any sense bad – but according to Collingwood they are not art.

If Grisham's novel *The Pelican Brief* is entertainment not art, what about Amis's *Money*? It does produce emotions of dishabituation, of surprise, and we may see things and people in a new way. Money is satire – a genre based on the emotion of contempt. The twist of this novel is that the contempt is directed also to the narrator. Although such contempt may be the heartfelt feeling of an author, a protracted sneer however wittily expressed scarcely qualifies as art. The reason, I think, is that there is little sense of the emotions of the writer being creative in such a way as to allow the reader also to construct creative emotional responses: the best the reader could do is to join in with this contempt. Perhaps this is because accommodations of schemata that are produced build on a pre-existing capacity to view the world and other people with disdain. Accommodation of schemata is therefore partial: some elaboration of a satirical view may occur – but nothing that enlarges our view of ourselves or others.

With both assimilative and accommodative narrative we can start to explain the pleasure of reading in terms of the Aristotelian idea that happiness is the result of being wholeheartedly engaged in an activity (Oatley, 1992). The emotions of pleasure can be thought of, then, as derived from the arousal and engagement of assimilation or from accommodation, or from both. But although readings in which material is assimilated to a plot, and/or in which accommodation occurs by dishabituation may both be important in literary art, neither is necessary. According to Collingwood, only literature that has involved the writer in a creative emotional act is art proper.

Like all distinctions between art and non-art this one can be challenged. What it does, however, is allow fruitful interactions between literary criticism and psychology, because emotions, creativity, and interpretation are all processes that are now beginning to be understood psychologically (Averill and Nunley, 1992; Johnson-Laird, 1993). Just as there is value in understanding science as a method for making progress towards empirically testable truths, there is value in understanding art as involving creativity in the domain of emotions.

One aspect of profound emotions in everyday life – of the happiness of falling in love, of the grief of loss, of the anger at injustice – is that such emotions can

provoke reflection on ourselves, and can change us. Because emotions occur with the unexpected, when we do not have practiced responses, they prompt us to go beyond skills we have already mastered: they challenge our creativity. Whether we respond in a habitual way or creatively depends on us, as Averill and Nunley (1992) have shown. Art proper is produced when an artist goes beyond stock responses to express an emotion creatively in a particular medium (words, paint, music, or life). Emotions are potentially transformative for us as readers when we too can respond creatively.

A work of literary art can prompt the reader, as Miall (1989) has put it, to go beyond the schema given. When this occurs in a way that is moving and promotes self-reflection, then perhaps a successful piece of art has occurred, and has been communicated. According to this idea art proper does not have to be arcane, but the emotions that occur do have to allow creative responses in the reader, just as the artist produced the work out of a creative response in herself or himself.

4. Emotions inside the membrane of the narrative world

Let us now move to emotions that occur inside the semi-permeable membrane of the story world. Such worlds are distinctive, each with its own people, its own history, its own rules and structure. The worlds inside literary membranes are like our familiar world, but also unlike it. Murders, betrayals, involuntary passions, losses, impossible conundrums are much more frequent. In the ordinary world such events are the stuff of psychiatric breakdowns: yet we enter literary worlds with expectations, often fulfilled, of beauty and of pleasure. To experience emotions in this way, the reader must enter through the pores of the membrane. With each new book or drama it is as if he or she comes to live (in part and for a limited time) within one of these sequestered worlds.

As entrants into such worlds, in them but not of them, we can experience emotions in three main ways, in terms of sympathy, memories, and identification. I will describe each as a distinct psychological process, although the processes can overlap.

4.1. George Eliot's idea of sympathy as the link to the reader

Sympathy, literally means 'feeling with'. Here a reader does not so much have communication with the author as with the literary characters, or perhaps with the implied narrator in a novel. In sympathy a mental link is made to another person.

George Eliot proposed the idea of sympathy not only as the main means of transmission of emotions between people but as the goal of art: "The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies" (Pinney, 1963: 270). As a reader of *Middlemarch* (Eliot, 1871–1872), for instance, your sympathy comes to rest first with one character then another – and by these means your emotional understandings are extended. Those aspects of the self that are imported through the membrane are enlarged by understandings of people in the imagined world and then, perhaps, also of people in the ordinary world.

The psychological characteristics of sympathetic and empathetic emotions were explored in the 18th century, as 'moral sentiments' by Adam Smith (1759), who wanted to know what kind of glue holds society together. Scheler (1913) argued for sympathy as a distinct process of fellow feeling in response to a state that we recognize in another person. He and others have distinguished it from empathy, which is dependent on a kind of inner imitation of the mental state of others, or on projecting ourself into the other's position. More recent work indicates that it may be difficult to separate these two states, which develop in the first few years of life and perhaps provide bases for morality (Dunn, 1988). There is no doubt that sympathetic emotions are powerful, but how might the transmission occur via the medium of print? The sympathetic theory is an extension of Frijda's (1986) general theory of emotions, and it has been expounded by Tan (in press, and in this issue). According to this theory the reader is a witness in a scene, but unable to affect the action in any way. Also, you can leave the scene, put down your book, move back outside the membrane, and go back to your own life. My image of this idea is that reading a novel is like becoming an invisible person within the events of the imaginary world, perhaps with special knowledge that none of the characters have. As Tan says, your emotions are not exactly like those of any of the characters, and hence there are possibilities of irony and other effects. On the basis of the theory of sympathy, the problems of the writer in relation to the reader can be summed up as T.S. Eliot describes: the writer creates 'objective correlatives', images, predicaments, as they occur to characters in the story. According to this theory responding to art is not much different from responding to events in real life. In life formulae for emotions are presented, in art they are re-presented: the same processes occur when you see the events in a film happening, as if you were among a group of people in a street or in a house. If some emotionally significant event happens – a fight starts or someone is kissed – you are liable to feel a sympathetic response. Although you do not know these people, the feeling can be quite powerful. First you respond to the emotional formulae as they are re-presented, and secondly because the events are not really happening to you, because you are inviolable in the imagined world, your emotional response is mainly of sympathy with the characters to whom the events are happening.

As well as explicit characters, another presence in many novels is an implied narrator. Some authors, e.g. Trollope (1857) in *Barchester Towers*, reserve positive sympathetic responses for this personage who maintains a more or less god-like view of characters in the narrative: the bad are elaborately wicked, the good are gullible. The implied narrator remains above it all, and recruits readers' sympathy to his view. By contrast, George Eliot used her narrators differently. When she spoke of extending our sympathies, she intended this to be productive of change in ourselves: we come to understand others and their plights from perspectives other than our own.

4.2. Stanislavski and emotion memories

In Stanislavski's book *An Actor Prepares* (1936) the narrator is the young Stanislavski when he first trained as an actor. He is taking classes with a well-known

director – also himself but 40 years later when he was Director of the Moscow Arts Theatre. Chapter 9 is entitled 'Emotion memory'. The Director observes that when actors begin rehearsing a new play their performance often has verve, as they recognize the shock of the situation their character is in. But as rehearsals continue, though the lines are remembered well, the performance may become dead, merely behavioural. At this point, Stanislavski makes his famous recommendation for actors to draw on memories of emotions from their own lives that are comparable to those of the characters in the play, and to use these memories as raw material for their performances.

Emotion memories are not just recalled: they are relived. In art an emotion in the present is mediated by reliving an emotion from the past. It is not a long step from Stanislavski's formulation for actors to the idea that audiences and readers can also experience emotions mediated by memories. Now the role of the objective correlatives is not to provide formulae for eliciting emotions, but to provide cues for memory. One might argue that reliving emotions excludes creativity because the emotions are old, but bringing them forward in time and applying them to new contexts can be creative, a process of analogy. In science Dunbar (1993) has found that what he calls 'regional analogies' from one situation to another are highly important in creating new concepts.

The idea of memory-mediated emotional responses to literature has been worked out in engaging detail by Scheff (1979), who links it to psychotherapy and ritual. He argues that a primary basis of psychotherapy and drama is the cathartic re-experiencing of emotions that had been suppressed or repressed. He proposes that if we feel desperation and longing at the plight of Romeo and Juliet, it is based on a memory of a love of our own. An original event can be re-experienced, but with a difference. The literary vehicle allows us to experience it at a best aesthetic distance – this distance is the continuum between outer and inner modes, indicated in the taxonomy of Fig. 1. At the right distance an emotional event that was overwhelming can be recognized, experienced, assimilated; or an event from which we had cut ourselves off in pain can come alive, so that its significance and ramifications can be comprehended, connections made, so that integration with the self can occur.

4.3. Flaubert and identification

The idea of identification in writing can be attributed to Flaubert who said: "Madame Bovary is me". Was Flaubert trying to put off inquirers wanting to find who had been the model for Emma Bovary? Yes, in part, argues McCarthy in her introduction to *Madame Bovary*. He was also declaring his own theory of writing. He made explicit his identification with his characters: on a day when he had been writing the episode of the horseback ride in which Rodolphe seduces Emma in the woods (Flaubert, 1964: 159–162 [1857]) McCarthy reports that he wrote in a letter:

> "What a delicious thing writing is – not to be you any more but to move through the whole universe you're talking about. Take me today, for instance: I was man and woman, lover and mistress; I went riding in a forest on a fall afternoon beneath the yellow leaves, and I was the horses ... and the red sun beating on their half-closed eyelids which were already heavy with passion." (ibid.: x)

Then McCarthy connects Flaubert's identifications as he wrote and the reader's identifications when reading. When Emma and Charles Bovary arrive in the little town of Yonville-l'Abbaye to which they have moved, they are joined in their meal at the Golden Lion by Monsieur Homais, the town pharmacist, and Léon, who lodges with him. The four converse, and Charles mentions that Emma doesn't like gardening but prefers reading. Léon answers.

> "... is there anything better, really, than sitting by the fire with a book ... The hours go by. Without leaving your chair you stroll through imagined landscapes as if they were real, and your thoughts interweave with the story, lingering over details or leaping ahead with the plot. Your imagination confuses itself with the characters, and it seems as if it were your own heart beating inside their clothes."
> "I know exactly what you mean!" she said. (ibid.: 96–97)

So: both authors and readers experience such identifications. Emotions, 'your own heart beating inside their clothes', are mediated by a psychological process in which the reader (or writer) takes on characteristics of the fictional character. Though children start to enjoy stories as soon as they can understand language, not until age three or four do they know what an intention is. Elizabeth Lee (Lee and Astington, 1994) has shown that for three-year-olds, when a story character has a goal of which they have personal experience, they can adopt this goal and identify with the character – not until age five can they adopt goals of which they have no direct experience.

Laplanche and Pontalis (1980) point out two everyday meanings of identification: Meaning 1 is recognition, and Meaning 2 is imitation. In Freud's idea of identification a person learns of an action and identifies (Meaning 1) a reason or desire for it in him- or herself. Then, by a kind of unconscious inference from this desire, he or she also becomes drawn towards the same kind of behaviour or attitude, imitating it (Meaning 2) and becoming like the person who was the model for the identification. Freud (1904) described identification at the theatre. Being a member of an audience:

> "... does for adults what play does for children ... The spectator ... is a 'poor wretch to whom nothing of importance can happen,' who has long been obliged to damp down, or rather displace, his ambition to stand at the hub of world affairs; he longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his own desires – in short, to be a hero. And the playwright and actor enable him to do this by allowing him to *identify himself* with the hero." (Freud, 1985: 122 [1904]; emphasis in original)

Freud was interested in how this process allowed audiences to experience vicarious satisfaction of infantile desires long since hidden – infantile in that once each of us *was* the centre of our world.

5. A psychological theory of identification in literary narrative

I have presented five modes of emotional response to literature, which are somewhat distinctive, which in different genres can be provided for singly or in

combination. As well as assimilation and accommodation which can occur while the reader remains outside the literary world created by the artist, there are three modes that arise within the membrane of the literary world. For these three, psychologists have proposed distinct theories: Tan (in this special issue) has proposed a theory of response to the formulae of different emotions and experiencing sympathy for characters in the story, Scheff (1979) has proposed a theory that literature allows emotional memories to be re-experienced at the best aesthetic distance, and Freud (1904) has proposed a theory of identification. I have argued previously that identification is the main process of eliciting emotions in narrative, but I now believe it is one of the modes outlined in this article. Empirical questions about whether these modes are really different theories in competition or are distinctive modes of literary response that tend to be elicited by different genres have yet to be answered. In sections 5.1 to 5.4 I extend my previous theory (Oatley, 1992) of identification. I do this because it is less developed than the theories of two other modes by Tan and by Scheff, and because I believe identification has an important characteristic, not shared by these two, of basing emotions on goals, plans and action. To develop this theory, I need first to clarify some concepts from the European philosophy of art.

5.1. Metaphors for art

In the history of European literary criticism the concept of *mimesis* from Aristotle's *Poetics* has arguably been more important than any other. Translated into English Aristotle's term *mimesis* usually becomes 'imitation', or 'representation'. Abrams (1953) shows how the central metaphor of art as imitation was a piece of technology, the mirror. (Notice that this is the metaphor chosen by George Eliot in the quotation in the first paragraph of this essay.) Abrams argues that during the nineteenth century the metaphor of the mirror, in which the world could be seen, was displaced by other metaphors such as the lamp which illuminates what had been obscure. But let me make another argument: by the beginning of the twentieth century the imitation theory had lost credence because of the invention of a newer technology, photography. Despite the widespread use of the metaphor of the mirror in artistic theory, it only sustained its fertile suggestiveness because mirrors produce reflections, but no objects. So art could have a mirror-like function, but one that produced actual objects such as paintings, sculptures, novels. With photography it became clear that re-presentational objects could be produced mechanically with close imitative correspondence between original and copy. This suddenly raised the question of what a realistic artist might be doing.

Darwin's (1872) book on emotional expression was one of the first to use photographs for a scientific purpose. It was written partly in answer to a book by Bell (1844), which contained Bell's own drawings of emotional expressions. Although Bell was a famous anatomist, it was to Darwin's book that people turned to see how emotional expressions look. Here as elsewhere photography helped the demise of the ancient idea that art could be understood as imitating the real world. Simultaneously the more modern romantic idea that there is a distinctive poetic or

artistic truth with its own important domain separate from scientific truth, began also to sound feeble.

5.2. *Mimesis as simulation*

'Imitation' and 'representation' are somewhat misleading ideas of what is involved in *mimesis* as described by Aristotle. At the risk of being anachronistic I propose that what Aristotle really meant by *mimesis* was something different. We can come closer to this meaning by considering a new technological metaphor, the computer. Aristotle's notion was that a play is not so much an imitation – it is a simulation of human actions. Actions are displayed by actors in the theatre and – more importantly – the play must run on the minds of the audience, as a computer simulation runs on a computer (Oatley, 1992). Minds have this potentiality for simulation, for making models of the world (Craik, 1943). Novels and plays work by guiding the simulation process. The core of this simulation is identification with one or more characters: the central process is that the reader runs the actions of the character on his own planning processes, taking on the character's goals, and experiencing emotions as these plans meet vicissitudes. So according to this theory the performance of a play or the text of a novel is a simulation just as a computer program can be a simulation; and in order to work the simulation must be run. Literary simulations run on minds of audiences or readers, just as computer simulations run on computers.

'Imitation' and 'representation' are too empirical as translations of *mimesis*. They imply copying, and it is just this sense that photography, photocopying, video recording have appropriated. They imply one-to-one correspondences between the movements and speech of (say) an actor and real life. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle makes it clear that this is not essential to *mimesis*. He discusses great drama as being composed in poetic verse, though no-one ever spoke in this way in real life. He writes of a day compressed into the few hours of a play's performance. And he asks: is it such things as the costumes that make a play moving (as if such correspondences might be the cause for the effectiveness of drama)? No, it is the plot which is "... the heart and soul, as it were, of tragedy ... it is the *mimesis* of an action and *simulates* persons primarily for the sake of their action" (1970: 28; my substitution of the new translation of *mimesis*).

In *mimesis* there is, of course, some imitative correspondence with the real world, but the more fundamental point is that this is in the service of the larger structure in which the whole of a work of art coheres and allows a relationship to be set up with the audience. Aristotle makes it clear that what the play achieves is a focus on the essentials of a problem. For any simulation to work, non-essential correspondences are excluded, to explore more effectively how essentials interact. In a play the focus is on the coherence of the narrative and on its relation to the hearers. The primacy of correspondence theories of truth in empirical science gives way to the primacy of coherence theories in simulations. As Aristotle put it: "A poetic *mimesis*, then, ought to be ... unified and complete, and the component events ought to be so firmly compacted that if any one of them is shifted to another place, or removed, the whole is loosened up and dislocated" (1970: 32).

5.3. Literary representation of conversation

In order to see how literary objects are not primarily imitative, let us consider conversation. Lodge (1992: 18) writes: "A narrative style that faithfully imitated actual speech would be virtually unintelligible, as are transcripts of recorded conversations". Here is a transcript of the first exchanges of a purposeful conversation recorded on audio-tape in which John had been asked to enlist Mary's help in showing him how to operate a complex photocopier.

"John: Could you show me how to do the photocopying?
Mary: Double-sided?
John: Eh. Yer. I want to do, to do double-sided.
Mary: Uhm, I don't know, some or ...
John: Sorry, what do you do here? [points to buttons]
Mary: This one. [Selects Duplex 2.] But, eh ... some turn the other way round. You must have it."

This is from Oatley et al. (submitted). We gave John the goal of asking Mary how to work the copier, but apart from this there is nothing unusual in this conversation. Everything else, we believe, flowed naturally. John actually did not know how to do double-sided copying. Writers avoid imitating many aspects of such conversations: 'Eh, yer, uhm', the needless repetitions ('to do, to do'), and the failures to form grammatical sentences. Note, moreover, that after the first three utterances, this real conversation is incomprehensible from the transcript. Let me write it as it might occur in a novel.

"Could you show me how to do the photocopying?" asked John.

Mary knew that John could do straightforward copying. He must want to do something more, perhaps learn how to use all the features of this irritating machine that had recently been delivered. John only had one piece of paper: 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.

"Yes, I want to do double-sided," said John.

"It's more complicated than you might think."

"Sorry. What do you do here?" asked John, wanting to get started.

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

I have preserved as many words from the transcription as I could, and I have made each paragraph correspond to each utterance in the transcript. Notice how the simulated (novelistic) version does not really imitate. Instead I depicted – as Aristotle says – the essentials of human action, which include characters' goals and interpretations. Also I had implicitly to address speech acts to you, the readers, so that you too might understand them (Todorov, 1977).

The passage about operating the photocopier implies only minor emotional issues. Here is an example from *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy, in which profound emotions of the characters are the focus. The conversation occurs as Karenin and Anna go home in their carriage after a visit to the races: he accuses her of showing despair when one of the riders fell – a display that might give rise to unseemly talk.

> "Perhaps I am mistaken," said he. "I that case I beg your pardon."
> "No, you were not mistaken," she said slowly, looking despairingly into his cold face. "You were not mistaken. I was, and cannot help being in despair. I listen to you but I am thinking of him. I love him, I am his mistress, I cannot endure you. I am afraid of you, and I hate you ... do what you like to me." (Tolstoy, 1980: 212 [1877])

Anna's utterance is, as one might say, too literary for a real conversation. And, although in real conversations non-verbal indications, emotional expressions, glances, corrections and so on, help mediate the relationship between the conversants, the relationship between writer and reader is different. The writer must provide words that need to be said for the sake of the plot, for the motives and characterization of the speakers, for the relationship between them, and at the same time must address the reader who is not part of the conversation.

A skilled artist, such as Tolstoy, carries all such considerations forward simultaneously. As to the plot, the conversation in the carriage comes at the end of Anna's years of forbearance with her husband, and her deceit in her affair with Vronsky. She has seen her lover fall from his horse and almost be killed. She overcomes her reticence in an outburst. As to motives and character, Karenin is excessively polite when angry because he fears losing control. Anna is passionate, throwing everything away in this moment. As to their relationship: Anna's words, 'I hate you', give notice to her husband that her commitment to him is ended. As to the relationship with the reader: Tolstoy has contrived that the reader is thoroughly identified with Anna at this time.

Anna's words in this simulation are a distillation of what needs to be said in these circumstances in a form that will engage the reader. Written text was never the imitation of speaking (Olson, 1993). And, just as the statements of computer languages and the nodes in connectionist networks do not exist in real brains, so Anna's words have no existence in the world of real conversations. They never occurred, probably never could. But in the simulation they are effective. These few words, indeed, are the fulcrum around which the novel turns. They end its first part about Anna's affair with Vronsky, and they begin the second part about the dissolution of her marriage and her severance from the society that had sustained her.

5.4. A new mimesis

In ordinary life we have purposes and use our planning processors to decide what to do. When reading a novel or watching a drama we can take on a character's goals. We connect actions into meaningful sequences by entering them

into the same planning processors. Then, remarkably, we experience emotions as these plans meet vicissitudes. The emotions do not just mirror those of the character. Though the plan is simulated, the emotions are our own. Some emotions may be of sympathy and memory (as discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2). Others (section 4.3) are set up by the impact of events on the goals and plans of the character with whom we identify. Thus, plans that meet success, the finding of friends, falling in love, tend to elicit happiness, injustice provokes vengeful anger, separation and danger elicit anxiety, reunion after separation elicits tears, what is despicable provokes contempt, the idea of intercourse provokes sexual feelings. All but the last of these correspond to the basic emotions proposed by Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987, though with the modification that when reading tears flow most freely at a reunion rather than at an initial loss, perhaps because initially sadness is inhibited by anxiety whereas with relief sadness can be experienced). There is a genre for each of these basic emotional themes, romances for feeling happy and overcoming difficulties, action stories for feeling anger, thrillers for feeling anxious, weepies for sadness, satires for contempt, as well as erotic stories for sexual arousal. Great art (e.g. tragedy) tends also to depend on such emotional themes.

Of the three modes of emotional response that arise from within the world of narrative it is not difficult empirically to demonstrate those involving memories, and in this area Scheff (1979) has proposed the leading theory. Readers, however, also experience emotions that they do not identify with memories (Axelrad, 1993; Biason, 1993), and according to the argument of this paper these are emotions of sympathy and identification. Empirical distinctions between these types are more difficult, and to my knowledge have not yet been made, though I think they can be made. Tan (in this issue) has proposed a theory of reader sympathy mediated by representations of the formulae for emotions. By contrast, for the theory of identification as simulation I propose that mediation is by four kinds of cognitive elements, without which the reader will not be able to run the simulation successfully.

Adopting the goals of a protagonist. Following a plot requires that actions be run on our planning processors. This is the basic modality of simulation. For the same reasons that enjoying a game is based on adopting a goal that the game affords (e.g. to win against an opponent) together with an outline script and resources for accomplishing it, so the essence of enjoying a plot-based story is to take on the goals and plans of a character. A plot is the working out of such plans in the story world.

Writing that enables the reader to enter the world of the story may focus on what will happen next, or in classical tragedies on the theme of how the outcome of human actions can be only imperfectly known, or in a novel on how a protagonist moves from ignorance to understanding. However much the idea of plot is rejected by some writers, the core of narrative is "the vicissitudes of human intentions" as Bruner (1986: 16) has proposed. And, as he has also proposed, understanding a story of human intentions involves a specific mode of thinking with its own rules and characteristics that relates events to goals and plans – as I

would say a mode that depends on identifying with a character, or with several characters in turn, and simulating their sequences of action on our own planning processes.

An imaginary world. The second aspect of the simulation is creating a mental model of an imagined world. The element that supports this part may correspond to what Bruner calls the paradigmatic mode of thinking, about things and how they work. The writer prompts such thinking by giving concrete details: vague descriptions won't do. García Márquez has put it in terms of the relationship of writing novels to journalism which he regards as an indispensable part of his technique: "I remember particularly the story about the character who was surrounded by butterflies ... when I was writing about this I discovered that if I didn't say the butterflies were yellow, people would not believe it" (García Márquez, 1981: 324).

Speech acts to the reader. The third element is the relation of the author to the reader, recognizable for instance as speech acts which intersect the narrative stream. Todorov (1977) gives an example from Proust: "He lavished upon me a kindness as superior to Saint Loup's as the latter's to the affability of a tradesman". The first clause, up to 'kindness', describes an event in the story world. The rest of the sentence, however, is a speech act inviting the reader to imagine the affability of a tradesman. Without such elements narrative would be dull, and need have no relation to the reader. With speech acts of the kind that Todorov points out, we do not just assimilate each new action to the plan we are running, there is the possibility of the speech acts leading to mental repercussions, and of the mind restructuring aspects of itself.

Potential for constructive integration of disparate elements. Finally, the reader or member of the theatre audience must become an integrating centre of different streams of information, and the text must make this possible. The image I like is that of Japanese Bunraku (Inoura and Kawatake, 1981), in which the characters are puppets slightly larger than half life-size, each held by three puppeteers who appear on the stage dressed in black cowls. A chief puppeteer holds the puppet's torso and right arm, and manipulates the emotional expressions of its face. One assistant puppeteer operates the left arm and the other operates its legs. Meanwhile the poetry of the script is read by a narrator who sits at the side of the stage with an open book. The puppets' costumes and the stage settings are colourful and striking, and the plays are accompanied by music. This form of drama was an important part of a humanistic renaissance in Japan, comparable with the European renaissance, with plays being written by great poets. It was the main medium for which Chikamatsu, 'the Japanese Shakespeare', wrote. Members of the audience have to integrate disparate elements: the actions of the puppets, the partly hidden forces that control them, the metrical poetry read by the narrator, and the music. These could all seem to be highly formal devices, but the plays are compelling and emotionally moving, treating themes of power, revenge, adultery and so forth. They were popular with the new city-dwelling audiences of merchants in the eighteenth century as the country emerged from feudalism. Like other narrative forms they allow members of the audience to create a seamless and compelling experience.

Reading a novel has a similar quality: we as readers create the characters and their world from hints and cues, mere ink marks on a page. Here too there are disparate elements. Barthes (1975) describes five such components as different modes of interpretation: hermeneutic, semantic or thematic, symbolic, action-related, and cultural. Readers can then become writers of the understandings that they create as they read, criss-crossing among these modalities. Though constrained by the text, each reading is different because the construction and the threads of meaning picked up at each point can vary. Many novels too, as Bakhtin (1984) has shown are not vehicles for a single authorial voice judging and disposing, which we readers simply either accept or reject, but are composed of several voices, distinct centres of consciousness, each on a similar level to the author's though not such as to be lost in an indefinite relativism. As a way of exploring what is involved in this kind of simulation I have written a novel (Oatley, 1993) which has three distinct voices, each telling of a different approach to the same set of events. It is, of course, the reader who makes the synthesis.

Even film, seemingly the most realistic of media, is not realistic in any simple sense. Films are composed of establishing shots, groups, shots of a single person's action, close-ups, and so on, some from positions we could never be in. As Miller (1990) has described, the film editor allows shots to be linked by the integrative construction of each viewer, who follows a protagonist's actions as plans, and creates three-dimensional mental models of possible worlds built up from the camera positions. Some effects are those of a witness within a scene, as Tan suggests, but the act of integrative construction makes this witnessing unlike what happens to a single observer in real life.

In some genres not much creativity is needed. In others the writer provides creative possibilities for each reader to be a writer of the particular narrative that he or she understands. As Bruner has put it: "The *great* writer's gift to a reader is to make him a *better* writer" (1986: 37, emphasis in the original).

At the centre of any narrative reading or drama, then, is a constructive, imaginative, act. It is synthetic and can be contrasted with the analytic activities of science. Within this integration, particularly with literature that is art rather than merely magic, there is the possibility of insights for the reader, as new connections are made that are seeds of cognitive change, that might make a difference to us. As Aristotle argued in *Poetics*, audiences are moved by great drama: in tragedy they experience pity and fear, which undergoes *katharsis*. As Nussbaum (1986) has pointed out this term of Aristotle's is invariably mistranslated: it means not purgation or purification (the usual translations implying something wrong with emotions) but clarification – coming to understand one's emotions in relation to the characters in the play, and to oneself.

Although the other modes of emotional experience that I have described no doubt play their parts, I argue that the emotional effects of literature are seldom fully achieved or understood without the postulate of something like the reader adopting a character's goals and running a simulation based on action in an imagined world – with the subject matter of human intentions and their vicissitudes. The primary issue is not exact correspondence with the real world as

implied by the theory of imitation, but integrative coherence among disparate textual elements and between the construction from such elements and the reader's own self, emotions, and consciousness.

6. Conclusion

In this article I have outlined five modes of emotional experience that arise from reading. I have discussed one of these in more detail, identification based on *mimesis* as simulation. If we maintain ourselves outside the text, perhaps concentrating on a mental model of the imagined world, emotional modes deriving from assimilation and accommodation can occur – curiosity followed by relief, and the surprises of dishabituation. If we enter into the fictional world further kinds of emotions occur. We may witness events and experience sympathies and antipathies, we may be stirred by reliving emotion memories, and we may experience emotions that derive from identification with one or more characters as we adopt their goals, run their actions on our planning processes, and discover these plans meeting vicissitudes.

Just as computer simulation is regarded by cognitive scientists as the indispensable core of understanding perception, language, and problem solving, so literary simulation, which runs on minds rather than on computers, might also be seen as central to the cognitive psychology of reading plot-based narratives. And, despite the weight of opinion against admitting mere fiction into the circles of consideration by psychologists, fiction and the emotions that derive from it can also allow the reader to approach important kinds of truth for those aspects which affect our personal attitudes and values. Fictional narrative is a kind of sorcery, yes; but if we do not understand its bases our understanding of selfhood, of mind, and of culture, will be incomplete.

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