

Forms of Self-Implication in Literary Reading

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Abstract Literary reading has the capacity to implicate the self and deepen self-understanding, but little is known about how and when these effects occur. The present article examines two forms of self-implication in literary reading. In one form, which functions like simile, there is explicitly recognized similarity between personal memories and some aspect of the world of the text (A is like B). In another form, which functions like metaphor, the reader becomes identified with some aspect of the world of the text, usually the narrator or a character (A is B). These forms of self-implication can be differentiated within readers' open-ended comments about their reading experiences. The results of a phenomenological study indicate that such metaphors of personal identification are a pivotal feature of expressive enactment, a type of reading experience marked by (1) explicit descriptions of feelings in response to situations and events in the text, (2) blurred boundaries between oneself and the narrator of the text, and (3) active and iterative modification of an emergent affective theme. The self-modifying feelings characteristic of expressive enactment give it a fugal form, manifest as thematic developments that move toward saturation, richness, and depth. The results of an experimental study suggest that expressive enactment occurs frequently among individuals who remain depressed about a significant loss that occurred some time ago. Together with the phenomenological study,

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this research suggests that expressive enactment is a form of reading that penetrates and alters a reader's understanding of everyday life, especially following a personal crisis.

1. Introduction

In *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1983 [1817], 1:81) argued that the most unequivocal manifestation of poetic genius is the capacity to combine deep feeling with philosophical contemplation and to elicit comparable feeling and contemplation in the reader. The primary vehicle for this effort is figurative language, especially symbol. According to Coleridge, a symbol presents and accentuates similarity between the beholder and the object beheld—but without explicit comparison.¹ Through this quasi-comparative sense of similarity and difference, the poet and analogously the reader are (1) awakened “from the lethargy of custom” and directed toward “the loveliness and the wonders of the world” (*ibid.*, 2:7), (2) enabled to increase the “vivacity . . . of the general feelings and of the attention” (*ibid.*, 2:66), and (3) moved from sterile self-consciousness toward a “dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth” in their “inner nature” (Coleridge 1957–1990 [1772–1834], 2:2546). An abiding question for Coleridge was how the reader's engagement with symbolic forms enlivens external appearances, modifies feeling, and reshapes the self.

Aspects of this question have been developed further in more recent phenomenological accounts of aesthetic experience. Coleridge's concern with transcending “the lethargy of custom” and restoring “vivacity” to feeling and attention is continuous with the Russian formalists' concern with defamiliarization (Erlich 1981 [1955]: 179; Steiner 1984: 55–56): through stylistic variations, familiar objects are, in Viktor Shklovsky's (1965 [1917]: 18) phrase, “made strange,” thereby enabling recovery of “the sensation of life.” However, less attention has been afforded Coleridge's concern with the “dim Awakening” of truths within the reader's “hidden nature.” But there are important exceptions. For instance, Roman Ingarden (1985 [1937]: 113–14),

1. This comparative and combinatory aspect of symbolic diction contrasts with the explicitly marked similitude of simile and allegory. However, as argued by Wolfson (1997), Coleridge contrasted the quasi-comparative sense of presence and absence within symbols (illustrated by “as if”) with *both* the double presence of the terms that comprise simile (illustrated by “like”) and the dissolution of absence within identity that is characteristic of a copy (but not of an imitation). Wolfson's analysis indicates that Coleridge was attuned to the issues subsequently raised (and overstated) in de Man's (1983) critique of Romanticist “organicism.” Also, the tension between sameness and difference, and between presence and absence, links Coleridge's analysis of engagement with symbol to Derrida's (1982 [1972]) discussion of the magnetizing effects of metaphor.

generalizing from his studies of literary reading, suggested that aesthetic experience begins with a “preliminary emotion” that “interrupt[s] . . . the ‘normal’ course of our life [such that we] begin to occupy ourselves with something which, while not appertaining, seemingly, to our life, enriches it, at the same time, and confers upon it a new sense.” For Ingarden, this newly conferred sense is felt, but it lacks urgency, as though the reader’s sense of self, including attendant feeling and memory, is required to “concretize” the world of the text but is not simultaneously challenged there. Mikel Dufrenne, in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1973 [1953]), goes further. He affirms the capacity of art “to exile and uproot us from those habits which are the embodiment of the superficial self, and to bring us face to face with a new world, which demands a new outlook” (ibid.: 408). Feeling is the vehicle of this exile, and since feeling is “a mode of being in the subject which corresponds to a mode of being in the [aesthetic] object,” reading puts the depth of a reader’s sense of self directly “into question” (ibid.: 376–77).

These authors’ seminal discussions of the transformative potential of literary reading emphasize not only its capacity to deepen understanding of self and world but also its implications for the way we live, especially the way we reconcile ourselves to the real (ibid.: 555). But how, more precisely, does literary reading exert such effects? How and when does it implicate the self and penetrate everyday life?

2. Self-Implication and Self-Modifying Feelings

To investigators of reader response, the suggestion that literary reading is self-implicating is perhaps overly familiar. However, the approach taken in the project reported here is concerned with a form of self-implication that contrasts with most of its predecessors. In general, studies of reader response affirm that differences among readers influence their engagement with literary texts—even though the differences with which they are concerned vary considerably. First, reader response criticism has tried to articulate the conventions and competences of the “ideal” (e.g., Culler 1975) or “implied” (e.g., Iser 1974) reader who is immanent in the text. Within this approach, features of the text are used to discern and portray a purely hypothetical reader. Second, studies of reading reception have examined conventions and competences within “interpretive communities” (e.g., Fish 1980), especially those shaped by historical discourses and ideologies (e.g., Jauss 1982). This approach, while grounded in the activities of actual readers, nonetheless remains concerned with the conventions and competences that influence reading, rather than with the sense of self that

may influence its course. Third, studies of reader personality (e.g., Holland 1975) and gender (e.g., Radway 1991) have examined the activities of actual readers to show how their sense of self influences the course of reading. However, they have been primarily concerned with the influence of enduring character traits—and less with the influence of fluctuations in the sense of self that occur during adult life. Moreover, because of their concern with stable personality characteristics, investigators in this tradition have seldom addressed changes in the sense of self that may occur through literary reading.²

In contrast to these various approaches, we examine how the sense of self, as manifest in the activities of actual readers, is both implicated and modified during literary reading. We propose that feeling plays a distinctive role in this self-implicating and self-modifying process. To clarify this possibility, it is important, first, to distinguish feeling (the bodily sense, within awareness, of all experienced affect, including emotions, moods, and attitudes) from affect (the discrete changes in facial expression, posture, gesture, and arousal that sometimes accompany intense emotions, moods, or attitudes) and from emotions (discrete and innate psychobiological reaction patterns, such as occur in anger, sadness, and fear, independently of awareness). Emotions and affect, in the sense defined, are less likely to occur during reading than are the subtle and fugitive feelings that are not so readily named. Second, it is important to keep in mind that feelings during reading occur within four domains, each of which has different functions (Miall and Kuiken 2002). It may be useful to distinguish these domains in relation to the origins—and lingering effects—of readers' felt involvement in the reading experience:

1. Readers may experience *evaluative feelings* toward the text as a whole (e.g., the overall pleasure, enjoyment, or satisfaction of reading a poem or short story). Evaluative feelings emerge early within the reading event, with gradual adjustment throughout (Davis and Andringa 1995), but they may affect readers' moods—and their readiness to reread the text—for some time afterward.³
2. Readers may also experience *aesthetic feelings*, that is, the heightened interest (Miall and Kuiken 1994; van Peer 1986) prompted by formal

2. Holland's psychodynamic approach also contrasts with the phenomenological one that we have adopted. This difference has both theoretical and methodological implications that will not be considered here.

3. There is evidence that narratives, in either cinematic or written form, can induce mood changes (see Gerrards-Hesse et al. 1994 for a review). Such research indicates that evaluative feelings—perhaps in combination with narrative feelings—persist long enough after reading to affect task performance and social behavior.

components of a text (e.g., being struck by an apt metaphor, intrigued by an ironic description, captured by the rhythm of a verse).⁴ The structure of relationships among these defamiliarizing components of a text can have a cumulative effect during reading that may linger afterward as sensitivity to the evocative intricacy of similar expressive forms.⁵

3. *Narrative feelings* may be evoked in response to the setting, characters, and events in the imagined world of the text (e.g., sympathy with portrayed suffering, empathy with a character's motives). Within the reading event, shifting perspectives (van Peer and Pander Maat 1996) and narrative turns (Brewer and Lichtenstein 1981) complicate these feelings, but narrative feelings may also provide a lasting sense of a shared or affirmed social understanding.⁶
4. Readers may experience *self-modifying feelings* that restructure their understanding of the text and, simultaneously, their sense of themselves. Readers commonly *recognize* settings, characters, or events as familiar (e.g., a story event is reminiscent of something they have directly experienced or have read before). But, at times, they also find themselves participating in an unconventional flow of feelings through which they *realize* something that they have not previously experienced—or at least not in the form provided by the text. At these times, the imaginary world of the text is not only unfamiliar but disquieting. One aspect of this disquietude is the possibility that the shifting experience of the world of the text may be carried forward as an altered understanding of the reader's own lifeworld.

4. Aesthetic feelings in this sense do not reflect the "psychological distance" sometimes attributed to them (cf. Berleant 1991). Not only is interest per se a form of "involvement," but the captured attention that it reflects may provide a psychological space within which to reflect on intensely engaging narrative and self-modifying feelings (cf. Kuiken et al. 1996). Some of the classic discussions of aesthetic "disinterestedness," from Kant (1951 [1790]) to Stolnitz (1960), are compatible with the conception of aesthetic feelings considered here.

5. Although aesthetic feelings (e.g., interest) have been empirically differentiated from evaluative feelings (e.g., pleasure; Cupchik and Gobotys 1990; Russell 1994), the persistence of aesthetic feelings has not, to our knowledge, been studied. Perhaps the closest approximation has been research in which presentation of an artist's work facilitates subsequent discrimination between additional instances of that same artist's work and instances of another artists' work involving the same subject matter (cf. Gardner and Lohman 1975; Hill and Kuiken 1975). If style evokes aesthetic feeling, such discrimination plausibly depends upon the sense that the style of an unfamiliar painting has the "feel" of paintings by a particular artist.

6. Although narrative feelings are most frequently discussed by object-relations theorists (e.g., Holland 1975), the effects of empathy, identification, and their associated narrative feelings have not been systematically examined in empirical studies. A recent study of "character invasion" in actors (Neuringer and Willis 1995) is methodologically suggestive, and important initiatives are offered also in the present volume (Andringa; Charleton).

Because these sources of feeling combine and interact, there is often confusion about their role in the reading experience. For example, evaluative feelings may in part be a response to the emergence and resolution of narrative feelings of suspense (Brewer and Lichtenstein 1982); the interpretive complications of aesthetic feelings may instigate self-modifying feelings (Miall and Kuiken 1995); and so on.

However, the distinction—and the relations—between narrative and self-modifying feelings require particular attention. Narrative feelings are often self-implicating in that they evoke reflection on the reader's personal strivings—and the scripted⁷ feelings, thoughts, and actions of events that instantiate those strivings (Klinger 1995; Emmons 1996). Personal strivings per se are experienced as felt imperatives about what we want to or should become (Higgins 2003), but we know them most intimately in their scripted form. In fact, their characteristics and connotations are often not explicitly known—even to ourselves—until they become manifest during script-disrupting personal and interpersonal predicaments. However, they may also become the object of reflection during moments of solitude, as when they are remembered while reading similarly scripted literary texts.

Feeling plays a critical role in such remembering. There is robust evidence that feelings, such as might emerge during literary reading, facilitate recall of events that embody similar feelings (Singer and Salovey 1988; Kuiken 1989).⁸ Thus, an event with a particular, conventionally “objective” setting, characters, and action sequence may prompt recall of a personal memory involving an “objectively” quite different setting, characters, and action sequence, *if* both events possess a similar feeling substrate. This effect is not restricted to momentary feelings (e.g., an isolated moment of melancholy); affective script theory (Tomkins 1979) proposes that seemingly different events may evoke each other in memory by virtue of the progression of feelings that is common to them.

This claim has two implications. First, the scripted progression of feelings embodied in a literary text may remind readers of similarly scripted events that instantiate their personal strivings. To this extent, within the framework introduced here, reading becomes self-implicating. Second, because affectively similar events can be “objectively” different, they may bring

7. By scripted feelings, thoughts, and actions, we mean those embedded within a recurrent narrative pattern.

8. These research findings are reminiscent of Coleridge's (1985 [1803]: 516) conclusions after reflecting on Hartley's associationism: “I hold, that association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of Feeling, than on Trains of Ideas. . . . I almost think, that Ideas *never* recall Ideas, as far as they are Ideas—any more than Leaves in a forest create each other's motion—The Breeze it is that runs thro' them / it is the Soul, the state of Feeling.”

together scripted events that are conventionally (nonaffectively) quite different. As Gordon H. Bower and Paul R. Cohen (1982: 329) point out, such boundary-crossing associations can become the source of affective similes and metaphors. These affective similes and metaphors may well contribute to the emergence of self-modifying feelings.

Were the preceding proposals accepted at face value, that would still be only a beginning. Self-implicating reflection does not yet account for the proposed self-modifying character of literary reading. Self-modifying feelings emerge within the generativity of aesthetic experience, a notion that is already offered in Immanuel Kant's portrayal of aesthetic "reflection." By revisiting Kant's discussion, we may begin to articulate what is required to move from self-implication to self-modification. Reflection is generative, first, in that it is a search for concepts to subsume particulars presented in the aesthetic object. As Kant (1951 [1790]: 15) argued in the *Critique of Judgment*: "Judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal . . . be given, the judgment which subsumes the particular under it . . . is *determinant*. But if only the particular be given for which the universal has to be found, the judgment is merely *reflective*." Second, reflection is generative in that its activity produces aesthetic feeling, that is, the "lively" satisfaction found in the "play of both mental powers (the imagination and the understanding) when animated by mutual agreement" (ibid.: 54). Third, reflection is generative in that, as emphasized in Jean-François Lyotard's (1994) reading of Kant, aesthetic feeling guides the temporal unfolding of experience: "We linger over the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself" (Kant 1951 [1790]: 58).

Within the generative reflection of aesthetic experience may be found self-modifying feelings. The search for concepts that potentially subsume narrative particulars will sometimes involve self-relevant concepts, especially those that represent personal strivings. The aesthetic feelings that mark accord between imagination and understanding will sometimes enliven these poignantly self-relevant moments. And the generativity of aesthetic reflection may at times challenge the reader's sense of self within a succession of decentering and recentering moments.

These theoretical possibilities have usually been discussed independently of direct examination of the experience of actual readers (cf. Iser, Dufrenne). The present challenge is to determine whether self-modifying feelings—and their enduring consequences—can be identified, *in vivo*, within readers' concretely reported experience. To further that objective, consider the following account of an exceptionally engaging reading experience. Joseph Gold (1990) comments on his reading of David Lodge's novel *Out of*

the Shelter, a story about a boy named Timothy who grows up in England during World War II. Gold calls attention to a passage in which Timothy awakens to a deafening explosion and sees his mother momentarily frozen in fear—and then hurled on top of him by a second explosion. Timothy, worried for himself, also senses his mother’s fear for him and her despair about their impossible situation. Reflecting on this passage, Gold (*ibid.*: 176–77) says:

I lived through World War II in London, England, and experienced raids night after night, first in the Anderson shelter dug in the yard, and later in a shelter that was a table of steel inside the house. Mostly I have kept the experience to myself. I don’t mean the events—they are well known; I mean the felt experience, the terror, anxiety, frustration—how it came through the senses. I think that I buried a lot of it inside me somewhere. Sometimes one has to wait forty years or longer to find expression for one’s life. Lodge’s novel, which is founded on personal experience by a writer about my age, was just such an experience for me when I read it recently. I was strongly moved by it, but more, I was grateful for it. The expression, the novel, sometimes gives a shape, a form, to experience that we recognize as our own. The novel is then a gift, a creating of the reader’s reality, existence, history. The pieces of my past, my life, that were lying around in a puzzling mess—unexpressed, unformed, vaguely felt—were gathered together and given recognizable and storable shape. This is a priceless gift—a gift to the reader of part of the reader’s life. Now I can say, if you want to know some of how it felt to be me as a twelve-year-old in England in 1944 and 1945, read *Out of the Shelter*.

Gold’s account leaves little doubt that this was a self-modifying experience. It points, in a preliminary way, to the processes by which we as readers of literature can be “strongly moved” to give “a shape, a form, to experience that we recognize as our own.” And yet, in Gold’s case, that recognized form resists articulation; to convey it to others, he still asks that they read *Out of the Shelter*.

The impact of such expressive events is testimony to their personal significance. But if engagement with the world of the text “for its own sake alone” marks aesthetic experience (Stolnitz 1960: 35), are such personally significant associations a diversion, or are they aesthetically “relevant”? It has been difficult to move discussion of this issue from value-laden declaration to close examination of the processes that mark aesthetic experience.

3. The Aesthetic Relevance of Self-Modifying Feelings

One of the ten “critical difficulties” identified by I. A. Richards (1930) in his study of response to poetry was the relevance of personal associations,

memories, and images. Although he was particularly concerned with the “intrusion” of these personal elements upon the “autonomy” of the text’s “meaning” (ibid.: 236), the issue of relevance remains pivotal when considering, as we do here, what constitutes self-implicating reading that remains faithful to—even though not fully determined by—the text. Although empirically problematic, Wolfgang Iser’s (1978) theoretical idiom provides some direction by marking the inevitable recurrence of transitional “blanks.” While recognizing the absorbing dynamics of a reader’s transient identification with an author’s, narrator’s, or character’s perspective, Iser also emphasizes the periodic “negation” of such direct forms of self-implication. “Invalidation” of the reader’s current identification “situates the reader halfway between a ‘no longer’ and a ‘not yet’” (ibid.: 213). Within that temporal transition, that “blank” moment between one identification and another, the possibility of changing the reader’s sense of self emerges.

While Iser’s proposal emphasizes the temporal course of self-implication in literary reading, the forms of self-implication proposed in studies of reader response often are static: the vocabulary of identification and empathy is used to refer to a momentary state, usually without attention to state fluctuations.⁹ To that extent, the blanks between shifting perspectives, the transitions in reader understanding, are not examined. In contrast, Iser, like Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), suggests that absorption in the perspective of an author, narrator, or character is more plausibly a moment within a dialogic sequence of identifications—a sequence that may be the crucible for self-modifying feelings.

Even within the momentary states that collectively constitute dialogical progressions, there may be an analogous transition. Ted Cohen (1999) has argued that the momentary state of a reader’s absorption within an author’s, narrator’s, or character’s perspective can become self-modifying when the reader *metaphorically* identifies with that figure. Cohen has in mind a mode of identification resembling dramatic enactment: a figure in litera-

9. Psychologically oriented investigators often study empathy as a more or less stable predisposition, a characteristic of the person that can be assessed using questionnaires (e.g., Batson et al. 1986). When they observe it as an activity through which another person is understood, it is usually graded on a continuum, as though changes over time or differences between people were a matter of degree (e.g., Bohart et al. 2002). These assumptions have been regularly taken up in studies of literary reading (e.g., Oatley and Gholamain 1998). Within the psychodynamic tradition, the situation has been rather different. Although classic discussions of aesthetic engagement typically made the assumption that the protagonist or the author is the primary and continuing locus of audience identification (e.g., Freud 1962 [1908]), object-relations theorists have more frequently examined multiple and qualitatively shifting patterns of identification within aesthetic experience (cf. Wollheim 1993).

ture may be brought to presence, as in method acting, through the embodying experience of the reader. Within this mode of reading, the embodied self is present but subsidiary within a performance that enlivens and extends, rather than merely mimics, the character's demeanor in the world of the text. As in metaphor, the relation between reader and character during this mode of reading is not symmetrical: reading as though "I am (character X)" has quite different force than reading as though "(Character X) is me." The reader's move from sensuously present reader to sensuously present character is, in this sense, a transition without a (symmetrical) return. Within the moment of emerging metaphoric identification, the possibility of changing the reader's sense of self also emerges. Within that transition, argues Cohen, there is an opening for self-modifying feelings.

The preceding comments articulate the framework within which we believe the question of aesthetic relevance should be addressed. As difficult as it may be to identify self-modifying feelings within the experience of literary reading, that is nonetheless where the challenge resides. Elsewhere we have presented preliminary evidence that aesthetic feelings initiate the reinterpretive effort within which self-modifying feelings emerge (Miall and Kuiken 1995, 2002). Within that reinterpretive effort, self-modifying feelings reflect a search for concepts, including *some* that are self-relevant, that potentially subsume narrative particulars. Within that effort, newly emerging aesthetic feelings *sometimes* mark accord between self-relevant forms of imagination and understanding. Within that effort, feeling *sometimes* challenges the reader's sense of self in a series of decentering and recentering moments.

4. The Empirical Study of Self-Modifying Feelings

According to Coleridge's description of the creative imagination at work, "we *become* that which we understandly behold and hear, having, how much God perhaps only knows, created part even of the Form" (Coleridge 1957–1990 [1772–1834], 2:2086). Coleridge's account anticipates the articulation of several forms of self-implication, variously called identification, empathy, sympathy, fusion, and resonance, which purportedly release the expressive potential of the text. Despite definitional diversity (Oatley and Gholamain 1997; Zillman 1994; Barnes and Thagard 1997), these forms of self-implication invariably involve the sensed understanding of another's experiential perspective. But they differ according to whether (1) the act of understanding is voluntary or involuntary; (2) the act of understanding involves affect, cognition, or overt activity (e.g., communication); (3) the resulting understanding involves perceived similarities between self and

other; (4) that understanding involves not only the possession of similar feelings but also feelings directed toward the other (e.g., concern); and (5) the other is an actual person, a fictional character, or a personified inanimate object. Given these complexities, the forms of self-implication involved in literary reading have understandably proved resistant to coherent empirical study.

4.1. Preliminary Studies of Two Forms of Self-Implication

In perhaps the earliest systematically empirical study of aesthetic self-implication, Edward Bullough (1908) identified several types of response to simple color patches. He (*ibid.*: 456) suggested that one type of resonance occurs when the feeling tone of a personal memory imparts “life and significance” to the color. For example, one respondent reflecting on an orange colored patch was reminded of a medicine once taken and, according to Bullough, was capable of “fusing the emotional memory with the present color-impression” (*ibid.*: 455). Bullough’s discussion suggests that in this type of resonance (1) the act of understanding is voluntary, (2) the act of understanding entails cognitive and affective engagement, (3) the resulting understanding involves affective similarities between self and other, (4) that understanding can be grasped independently of reactive feelings, and (5) the other can be a personified inanimate object.

Bullough (*ibid.*: 457) also reported that a second type of resonance occurs when the “interpenetration of subjective states with the objective colour” is a source of “character” attributions. For example, one of his respondents “exteriorized” the stimulating “physiological” effects of a scarlet-colored patch, “translating” those bodily states into attributes of the color itself. Thus, the scarlet patch was perceived as active, vital, and energetic. Bullough was concerned here with those “aesthetic qualities” that involve the metaphoric attribution of human feelings (e.g., solemn, joyful) and dispositions (e.g., bold, restrained) to a visual work of art (cf. Hermeren 1988). Bullough suggests that this type of resonance differs from the first in that the act of understanding has a voluntary cognitive component but an involuntary affective component.

Although neither Bullough nor his successors studied these forms of resonance in response to literature,¹⁰ Steen F. Larsen and Uffe Seilman (1988; see also László and Larsen 1991) have studied what they call “resonance,” which seems very like Bullough’s first type of “fusion.” In both cases, resonance occurs between explicitly recalled personal memories and some por-

10. The basic features of Bullough’s typology were replicated with color combinations (Bullough 1910), musical tones and intervals (Myers 1914, 1922), and geometric forms (Feasy 1921). Valentine (1962) has provided a review of this work.

tion of the world of the aesthetic object. Implicit in the Larsen et al. investigations is the notion that resonance depends upon deliberately articulated similarities between memory and text. However, they have not systematically examined this aspect of memory via their self-probed retrospection technique¹¹ (Larsen and Seilman 1988), and their conception of resonance remains unarticulated.

Attributions suggestive of Bullough's second type of resonance have played an important role in analyses of literary tropes (e.g., *personification* is commonly defined as when a nonhuman object is given human qualities; cf. Paxson 1994), but comparable analyses have not been systematically undertaken in readers' in vivo accounts of their reading experience. Qualitative studies of literary reading using the self-probed retrospection technique may provide the means to identify more clearly this, the preceding, and perhaps other types of self-implication in literary reading. By closely reading the "text" of what people say about their experience, by articulating how they weave personal memories into their understanding of literature, and by systematically (even numerically, if appropriate) documenting recurrent patterns of self-implication over the course of reading, we may be able to understand better how self-implicating feelings become self-modifying feelings within the aesthetic experience of literature.

4.2. The Figurative Form of Self-Implication: Readers' Similes

To this end, consider again Bullough's first type of self-implication, involving the explicit articulation of affective resonance between personal memories and the aesthetic object. Whereas Bullough was studying response to simple visual patterns, resonance in the same sense is regularly evident in our studies of readers' comments on their reading experience. One person provided the following example while reading "The Wrong House," a short story by Katherine Mansfield, which we have employed in several of our empirical studies (e.g., Miall and Kuiken 1994). The study in which this person participated involved a modified self-probed retrospection technique, and this respondent marked and commented on Mansfield's description of a story setting in which "the houses opposite looked as though they had been cut out with a pair of ugly steel scissors and pasted on to the grey paper sky":

I could actually see the street and the houses. So there was great imagery there . . . it reminded me of the street that I lived on when I was young. We lived in a small

11. In the self-probed retrospection technique, the reader marks passages that have evoked autobiographical memories. Then these marked passages—and the associated memories—can be systematically examined.

town in southern Alberta . . . and the houses looked like that; they looked like they had been cut out with ugly steel scissors.

As this example affirms, the personal memories evoked during reading often capture similarities between aspects of a personal memory and aspects of the world of the text. In this case, the comparison is explicit (“the houses looked like that”), which suggests that this reader’s expression can be understood on the model of a simile (A is *like* B; my experience of the street in my home town is *like* the narrator’s experience of the street in the story). In fact, the reader’s simile is the primary evidence of self-implication in this commentary. Also suggestive is that the similarities captured in the simile include the feeling tone of the memory and textual description. The affective connotations of dwellings “cut out with ugly steel scissors,” the intimations of isolation and separation, are attributed both to the memory and to the story setting. As implied by the reader’s simile, memory and story are symmetrical partners in a comparison (“A is like B” is equivalent in meaning to “B is like A”).

4.3. The Figurative Form of Self-Implication: Readers’ Metaphors

Readers of “The Wrong House” sometimes report a form of self-implication analogous to character attributions in the second type of resonance that Bullough found in his study of response to colors. In the following example, the reader was commenting on Mansfield’s description of a moment in which the protagonist, Mrs. Bean, realizes that men on a funeral coach are disembarking and approaching her door: “‘No!’ she groaned. But yes, the blow fell, and for the moment it struck her down. She gasped, a great cold shiver went through her, and stayed in her hands and knees.” Our reader comments:

It just makes you realize that . . . your own mortality is something that can make you unable to think clearly. . . . While you think you still are alive and well and able to take care of yourself and help others, somebody else has decided that you can’t. And then [at times like this] you don’t think that it’s their problem, [but instead] that you somehow have been mistaken all this time and that it’s time for you to give in and end everything, whether you’re ready to or not. . . . A passage like this makes you realize that some day, perhaps something like that will happen to you and scare the hell out of you because you know how close it could be for you.

This reader’s style is suggestive, especially her use of the pronoun “you” to speak inclusively but still personally (e.g., “it just makes you realize”). While spelling out what Mrs. Bean is like in this scene (e.g., she was “unable to think clearly,” she is realizing that “it’s time . . . to give in”), this reader is

also implicitly referring to herself as a person of the same kind. Just as Bullough's participant implicitly refers to her own bodily feelings when attributing activity, vitality, and energy to the color scarlet, this reader implicitly refers to herself in her description of Mrs. Bean. She is entertaining the possibility that she is the same kind of person as Mrs. Bean.¹²

Although similarity is somehow at stake, this reader is not simply comparing Mrs. Bean and herself. She identifies Mrs. Bean and herself as members of the same inclusive class, but they are not situated in the same way within that class. The pronoun "you" has a slight externalizing "otherness"; the description enlivens and extends her experience of the world of the text; and, in this way, she is brought to presence while the reader remains implicated but subsidiary. Mrs. Bean (but not the reader) is made to exemplify the class, somewhat as a robin (but not a crow) exemplifies "bird." Comparison between Mrs. Bean and the reader, in this context, is asymmetrical, that is, "A is B" is not equivalent in meaning to "B is A." To say, as this reader seems to do, "I am Mrs. Bean" is not equivalent to saying, "Mrs. Bean is me." Such asymmetry affirms that, rather than comparison through simile, this reader is engaged in a metaphor of personal identification (Cohen 1999).

The significance of metaphors of personal identification can be explicated using Sam Glucksberg and Boaz Keysar's (1990) interactive theory of metaphor. They propose that a metaphor is a special case of class inclusion, as suggested by the analysis of simple metaphors such as "My job is a jail." In simple nominal metaphors, a noun can be used to represent—through exemplification—a class that is temporarily understood to include both the metaphoric vehicle and topic. So, in the metaphoric context, "jail" exemplifies an ad hoc class that also includes "my job," that is, a class that more generally includes confining, oppressive things. Such metaphoric reference endows "my job" with attributes of this ad hoc class within the constraints of reference to "my job" (e.g., my job is not a building).

Similarly, in our interpretation, the reader's metaphoric identification of herself with Mrs. Bean creates an ad hoc class exemplified by Mrs. Bean but also including herself. This metaphoric self-reference implicitly endows the reader with attributes of the ad hoc class exemplified by Mrs. Bean (e.g., those who are "unable to think clearly," who realize that "it's time . . . to give in," and so on) within the constraints imposed by the reader's own self-understanding (e.g., that she is not old like Mrs. Bean). It also opens the way for modifying feelings by prompting her to consider whether she possesses the previously unarticulated attributes of individuals in this class. Examina-

12. Bullough's account of this implicit reference to self in color attributions is inferential. In our example, implicit reference to self in the generalizing pronoun "you" is a conventional understanding of that linguistic expression.

tion of the concluding passage in our reader's reflections substantiates this possibility: she is made to "realize" that "something like that will happen to [her] and scare the hell out of [her] because [she will] know how close it could be."

4.4. General Comments on the Figurative Forms of Self-Implication

Theories of how literary reading implicates the reader quite frequently invoke empathy as the reader's point of entry into the world of the text (cf. Ingarden 1973 [1968]: 203; Kreidler and Kreidler 1972: 271–75; Halász 1996). The reader purportedly enlivens his or her understanding of the narrator, a character, or even a fictional reader by imaginatively "feeling into" their embodied perspectives on the world of the text. But the preceding examples of readers' figurative forms of self-implication suggest that empathy occurs in two forms with rather different implications for the reading process. First, resonance between personal memories and the world of the text can occur in the figurative form of a simile. Such resonance depends upon the explicit and deliberate recognition of similarities between memory and text world, perhaps especially the recognition of similarity in feeling tone. Within literary reading, enlivenment in this form is an accentuation of what we have called narrative feelings. Second, resonance between personal memories and the world of the text can occur in the figurative form of a metaphor. Such metaphors of personal identification depend upon an interaction between memories and world text that is not only self-implicating but also self-modifying. Enlivenment in this form is enactive (Wilshire 1982), taking on the embodied perspective of a textual other (implicitly, "I am A"), and it is expressive just in the sense that it carries forward—rather than merely matches and externalizes—a freshly felt, freshly conceived sense of self (Gendlin 1997 [1962], 2003).¹³

5. Forms of Resonance In Vivo: A Phenomenological Study of Expressive Enactment

Out of context, it is difficult to imagine how the preceding forms of resonance function within the overall reading experience. To address this issue,

13. Although elaboration is not possible in the space available, the present account owes much to Gendlin's formulation of how the felt sense of a lived situation can be "carried forward" metaphorically. Although he does not, to our knowledge, retain the term "expression," we have chosen to do so. With the supposed death of the subject, it might be expected that this term would simply suffer asphyxiation and fade away as well (Terada 2001). But because of efforts such as Gendlin's, there is compelling reason to revisit, redevelop, and extend some of the less easily pilloried accounts of feeling expression and aesthetic experience (e.g., Collingwood 1958 [1938]).

we will report selected results from a phenomenological study of responses to Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (Coleridge 1985 [1797–98]). In this study, designed to identify different types of reading experience, one type was marked by (1) the emergence of aesthetic feelings as well as explicit descriptions of feelings in response to situations and events in the poem; (2) blurred boundaries between self and other, suggestive of metaphors of personal identification; and (3) active and iterative modification of an emergent affective theme. We have called this kind of reading experience *expressive enactment*.

After reading the poem three times during one week, each of 40 readers¹⁴ chose five passages they found striking or evocative and commented on each, yielding 198 commentaries. Numerically aided phenomenological methods (Kuiken et al. 1989; Kuiken and Miall 2001) were used to (1) comparatively examine these commentaries, identifying and paraphrasing recurrent meaning expressions (called constituents); (2) create matrices reflective of the profiles of constituents found in each commentary; (3) create clusters of commentaries according to the similarities in their profiles of constituents; and (4) systematically examine each cluster to ascertain its distinctive attributes. Our analysis of commentaries on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" revealed six clusters (with sixty-six, thirty-one, fifteen, twenty-nine, thirty-three, and twenty-two members), but we will concentrate on fifteen instances of the type of reading experience we have termed expressive enactment.¹⁵

5.1. Expressive Enactment: Felt Involvement

The majority of commentaries in this cluster included descriptions of reader feelings in response to situations and events in the poem. Although the articulation of such narrative feelings was a prominent feature of this (and one other) cluster, what distinguished this cluster from all others was the elaboration of visual and kinesthetic imagery in ways that provided a sense

14. Forty-one volunteers (30 women and 11 men; mean age = 23.3 years), responding to announcements in classes and on bulletin boards, participated. Ten percent of the participants were first-year undergraduate students, 15 percent were in their second year, 31 percent were in their third year, and 26 percent were in their fourth year. An additional 10 percent were graduate students, and 10 percent were not then attending university. Of these participants, 13 percent were minoring in English and 33 percent were majoring in English. One participant was dropped from the study because of missing data.

15. This study is one of the most exhaustive of its kind. However, as with reader response research in general, it routinely requires replication with different texts and different readers. In fact, without further studies of this kind, it is extremely risky to speculate about how common—or uncommon—expressive enactment is among readers of literature. Moreover, it should be emphasized that expressive enactment is only one type of reading; the other types, not described here, may be important for other reasons than are focal in the present paper.

of enlivenment, or what we have called aesthetic feelings. Often in relation to the setting, but also in relation to character descriptions, readers vividly sensed the presence of the world of the text *and* responded feelingly to it, as in the following example:

Passage No. 4: *The many men, so beautiful! / And they all dead did lie: / And a thousand, thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I.* (Lines 236–39)

Commentary: I . . . picture a pulsating, a living sea full of . . . full of living wet and slimy creatures. . . . It makes me think of ponds . . . or oceans I've walked through . . . brushing against things that are slimy . . . the repulsiveness of that feeling. Participant 24, commentary 4 (notated here and throughout as P24[04])

5.2. Expressive Enactment: Metaphors of Personal Identification

Commentaries in this cluster were *less* likely than those in other clusters to refer explicitly to autobiographical memories and *more* likely to indicate that the reading experience involved resonance between the reader's feelings and those embodied in the poem. Thus, in ways more subtle than explicit comparison of text and memory, participation in the world of the text provided a context for reflection on concerns and values in the reader's own life. Specifically, there was evidence of blurred boundaries between the reader and narrator, as though they were temporarily identified as members of the same class. The expressive form previously associated with metaphors of personal identification (e.g., use of the pronoun *you* to speak inclusively but still personally) was evident here, too, as in the following example:

Passage No. 4: *I watched their [the water snakes'] rich attire: / Blue, glossy green, and velvet black, / They coiled and swam and every track / Was a flash of golden fire.* (Lines 278–81)

Commentary: Visually, this one is extremely appealing. With the colors, the blue, the glossy green, the velvet black, the golden fire, the way that they move and coil, I visualize it like the way the northern lights roam across the skies. This is a very spiritual experience and maybe shows the power of nature. And, he can be a spectator, he's not part of it but just . . . it would be absolutely awe inspiring to see this. Once again it's somewhat threatening because this is something he's never seen anywhere else, would never see in the normal world. So it's got a supernatural aspect to it. So in a way you would be feeling kind of cursed and haunted, but on the other hand, maybe you're being given a gift that very few people have ever received. It sounds a bit strange but my mother is into quilting, and I can just see these colors and swirling shapes and stuff making an absolutely beautiful quilt even though it wouldn't be something. . . . I guess it would be in motion; you could move it when you move it around to make it look like it's mov-

ing. That's the visual aspect of this passage. Despite the potential threat of this situation, I can see it also being kind of peaceful, as sort of an out-of-body experience, that you would be so amazed by what is going on around you, that you lose yourself in it. You don't think about it, you don't relate it to yourself, [you] just forget about who you are and what you're doing there, and get so caught up in what is happening around you. Po2(o4)

In this commentary, except for two simile-like references (e.g., "I visualize it *like* the way the northern lights roam across the skies"), the reader persistently explicates the Mariner's experience in association with the pronoun "you" (e.g., "*you* would be feeling kind of cursed and haunted" but "maybe *you're* being given a gift"). In doing so, the reader subtly performs the demeanor of the Mariner while tacitly remaining a member of the class of persons that he has come to exemplify.

5.3. Expressive Enactment: Modification of an Emergent Affective Theme

Commentaries in this cluster seemed to portray a search for resemblances, grounded in feeling, that could facilitate progressive realization of the expressive potential of the poem. This occurred at three levels, each of which is evident in the preceding example.¹⁶ First, readers attempted to freshly contextualize a meaning that had been defamiliarized by the text. For example, the reader's suggestion that the scene with the water snakes is "extremely appealing" is elaborated in a simile that compares the movement of the snakes to the "northern lights as they roam across the sky." We have previously documented the temporal unfolding of this type of response to foregrounded passages in a literary text (Miall and Kuiken 1995).

Second, within a commentary, reexpression of a theme that the reader had grounded in textual imagery was occasion to modify that theme, often expressing it more intricately and intimately than before. For example, in the preceding commentary, the reader returns to the image of the snakes, comparing it to the "colors and shapes" of a "moving quilt." Whereas the initial comparison involves two entities within the same broad conceptual domain (water snakes and northern lights, both natural objects), the second involves entities from very different domains (water snakes and homemade quilts). Thus, the second comparison suggests a loosening of the boundaries that normally separate conventional categories, highlighting in a novel way the movement and color of the initial image. Transition from the initial comparison to the second signals an increased sense of intimacy; comparison of coiling water snakes with roaming northern lights is changed to a

16. This particular commentary is the cluster prototype, i.e., it possessed more of the features within the expressive enactment profile than did any other commentary.

comparison of those same coiling snakes with the swirling colors in a hand-made—and humanly moved—quilt.

Third, across commentaries, we found reexpression and modification of a central theme in the reader’s experience of the poem. The reader providing the present example returns in each of her commentaries to a particular affective theme. To begin, in her first commentary, she refers to the danger of enchantment:

Passage No. 1: *He holds him with his glittering eye—/ The wedding guest stood still, / And listens like a three years’ child: / The mariner hath his will. / / The wedding guest sat on a stone: / He cannot choose but hear.* (Lines 13–18)

Commentary: I like it because it appeals to me because of the . . . just knowing that stories do have that kind of power. There’s also an element of threat to it, like an enchantment, but there’s also an element of danger because he’s not there because he wants to be. He feels he has no control. I relate to this just because I have been known to get caught up in books or in stories. I love listening to stories, so I know that they do have just about that kind of power. You don’t want them to end; you have to hear what happens. Curiosity is so completely aroused. Po2(01)

Here the reader views stories as entailing the threat of being caught up in something from which “you” are powerless to escape. Moreover, it is a threat in which the reader herself is at least distantly implicated (“caught up in books or in stories”). The same threat is revisited in her second commentary—but now in response to a different passage:

Passage No. 2: *The ice was here, the ice was there, / The ice was all around: / It cracked and growled, and roared and howled, / Like noises in a swound!* (Lines 59–62)

Commentary: I just like the image, the feeling of nature being alive, like it’s ice but there’s more to it, that there’s a spiritual force. There’s again a threat . . . the feeling of being surrounded. It’s like a completely alien world that we’re not used to being in . . . of being surrounded by ice with no living thing around. It’s hauntingly beautiful and powerful but very frightening. Po2(02)

The nature of the threat and the reader’s familiarity with this theme in her life (and in her present engagement with the poem) are, as affirmed in Po2(04) above, progressively modified across successive commentaries.

5.4. Further Comments on Expressive Enactment

In moments of expressive enactment, readers revealed active modification of the affective connotations of a theme evoked by poetic images successively taken from different passages in the poem. And although other forms of self-implicating expression (e.g., simile-like comparisons) were

present, metaphors of personal identification were the distinctive form of self-implication within commentaries in this cluster. Compatible with the modifying potential attributed to metaphor, expressive enactment involves rich evidence of self-modifying feelings within literary reading.

An additional observation adds significance to these self-modifying feelings: although not an explicit finding from our phenomenological analyses, the transformations observed in our prototypical reader's commentaries attain existential inclusiveness (Kuiken 1998), that is, the representation of human universality and temporal continuity within the constraints of mortality. The human universalizing force of the pronoun "you" has already been documented as marking expressive enactment in general. And there is evidence of temporal extension in the use, consistent across these reader's commentaries, of present tense verbs in conjunction with this pronoun form (e.g., "*You don't* want them to end" in her first commentary Po2[01]; "*You don't* think about it" in her fourth commentary Po2[04]). However, in her fourth and fifth commentaries, there is movement toward explicit mention of the constraints of mortality. In her fourth commentary Po2(04), considered earlier, she returns to the affective theme considered in earlier passages, but the fear considered there is more pointedly expressed: "you would be feeling kind of cursed and haunted." The possibility of being captivated by something and powerless to escape it remains focal; what has changed is that the fear is of a fateful curse. It is perhaps not coincidental that, following her commentary on the Mariner's transformation, this reader selects as striking or evocative a passage in which the Mariner opens himself to the one "curse" from which we are powerless to escape. Speaking again of "this threat"—in the enactive form of a metaphor of personal identification—she says:

Passage No. 5: *Like one, that on a lonesome road / Doth walk in fear and dread, / And having once turned round walks on, / And turns no more his head; / Because he knows, a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread.* (Lines 446–51)

Commentary: I'm just going to share the emotion of being alone in the dark with this threat. . . . Loneliness is being, having no one around to help you, feeling like you're the only person, there's nobody else that's near enough to do you any good . . . no point in trying to get away from it, it's your fate . . . a reminder that everybody dies. Po2(05)

In contrast to this reader's previous commentaries, here she begins by referring to the loneliness of inescapable mortality (hers? the Mariner's?). She articulates in an impassioned (though not profound) way what it is to be alone in the face of this "frightful fiend." Moreover, the "you" in the commentary appears not only to encompass the narrator and herself;

it becomes a universal “you.” The Mariner’s world becomes that of the reader’s, and through expressive enactment, the reader realizes in both feeling and thought an inclusive human verity.

6. The Fugal Form of Expressive Enactment

The reader’s path to this point is not a straight line. Instead, it seems to possess a rhythmic form in which the meanings and connotations of a theme are repeatedly modified. Through these augmenting, combinatorial, and even conflicting modifications of a theme, readers are attempting, in the words of Ingarden (1985 [1937]: 114), to “sate [themselves] with the quality in question, to consolidate possession of it.” These variations on a theme are sometimes experienced in a pulsing temporal pattern that, to use a musical analogy, has the structure of a fugue. This fugal structure is, we suspect, the avenue by which literary reading enters the reader’s life.¹⁷

To demonstrate this fugal structure, the following are synopses of one person’s comments on her experience of Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” This reader participated in a study in which individuals who were recently bereaved read the poem twice and, following their second reading, commented on passages that they identified as especially striking and evocative. Although she does not in all details provide a prototypical example of expressive enactment, she does speak with the characteristic attunement to feeling; she does periodically use the pronouns “you” and “we” to speak inclusively but still personally; and she repeatedly returns to a theme in the poem that, through its successive variations, is gradually woven into the imaginative life that accompanies her grief and into her reflections about the loss of her grandfather and father.

Although a musical fugue generally consists of a series of variations and developments with no fixed number of either, this exemplar of our musical analogy includes five distinct developments:

Variation No. 1: Identifying a preliminary mood, a thematic meaning that is vaguely felt—as though there is something “more” to understand

Commenting on the moment in the poem at which the Mariner stops the Wedding Guest on the way to a wedding feast, the reader wonders what the Wedding Guest can gain from stopping to listen to the Mariner, and, analogously, what

17. Holland (1992: 25) also uses a musical analogy to describe theme variations within readers’ experience. However, unlike Holland, we do not presume that themes so varied pertain to the reader’s individual or cultural identity. The sense of self with which we are concerned is rather more vulnerable to change. In fact, unlike Holland, we use the musical analogy, the more specific implications of comparison with a fugue, to articulate that process of change.

she might “glean” from the stories of older people who are approaching death, such as from her grandfather before he died. But, she adds, turning back to the poem, besides “trying to decipher . . . what he has to offer,” the Wedding Guest “wants to get away . . . he feels like he’s talking to a ghost or to a skeleton, or to a man who has died and come back to life.” “There is that aspect to it,” she says, and pauses briefly before going on.

Variation No. 2: Identifying broadened and figuratively “dislocated” connotations of the theme

The reader next comments on the passage in which the Mariner is leaving the harbor, embarking on his ill-fated journey through the South Seas. “Below the kirk, below the hills . . . merrily did we drop below, below, below,” she says, quoting the poem but amplifying its echo and adding, “off they go, off they go.” “It’s about separation,” she says, adding that to “shore him up [during this journey] . . . the Mariner has within, that is, within the ship, and so, metaphorically within himself . . . a crew . . . his backup people.” But, she adds, they go through these “*deathly experiences . . . transformational experiences*” that might “*overcome them.*” The theme underlying the first commentary, its reference to a figure, transformed in death, who offers storied advice for living, is repeated and varied here. Through her temporally dislocated (the passage she is discussing precedes that describing the crew’s deathly transformation) and metaphoric use of the Mariner’s crew, the reader continues her concern with figures, transformed in death, who nonetheless offer support during danger.

Variation No. 3: Identifying broadened connotations through “symbolic” correspondences

In her next commentary, the reader keeps this theme alive by modulating the category of figures transformed in death to include figures made unworldly by evil possession. Referring to the passage in which the Mariner tells the entranced Wedding Guest that he killed the albatross, the reader says, “*It’s the Wedding Guest’s sense that the Mariner is other than a fleshly, regularly human guy. . . . [He is a] cursed man . . . perhaps a man possessed by this . . . evil spirit.*” Rather than a story from which to glean “advice,” the Mariner’s tale, she suggests, becomes a confession of inexplicable wrong, of how a crossbow, which, in her words, “symbolically” alludes to “the cross of Christ,” becomes a tool in the Mariner’s “execution” of the innocent albatross. She goes on to compare the Mariner’s unrelieved and now confessed guilt with her own, concerning administration of a lethal anesthetic to her cancer-ridden grandfather.

Variation No. 4: Articulating incongruous personal connotations

The reader resumes her concern with figures transformed in death during commentary on the episode in which the feminine figure of the “*Night-mare LIFE-*

IN-DEATH” appears on the skeleton ship with her companion “DEATH.” The reader puzzles over her initial misreading of this passage as DEATH-IN-LIFE rather than LIFE-IN-DEATH. DEATH-IN-LIFE, for her, suggests people who are dead to life, to “sexuality and sensuality.” But, she concludes, LIFE-IN-DEATH, even her physical appearance, suggests that “there is life to death, that one gains life going through the process of death.” She dismisses the Christian sense of “life after death,” concluding instead that death itself is a “process” involving a “time in life” that, as in the case of her dying grandfather, “takes on a life of its own.” However, the difficulty of seeing “death in the face of one who is dying but is not quite dead” moves the reader to acknowledge that this “in between time” is “awful”—even though for the Mariner facing these apparitions of DEATH and LIFE-IN-DEATH hope changes “not to despair . . . but essentially awe.”

Variation No. 5: Articulating existential connotations of the incongruous complexity of the thematic meaning

This reader’s final commentary is in response to a passage describing the Mariner’s inability to pray, his “heart as dry as dust.” The reader speaks here of her own inability to pray at her physically abusive father’s funeral. She describes how, even after cremation, “the fleshiness of [her] father,” of his “life’s body,” could still be felt “on her person,” as she put it. It’s a feeling of “palpable weightiness” and “prayer doesn’t help.” She then relates *a dream in which her father “becomes animated,” like the dead crew of the Mariner’s ship, and appears in a “frightening and revolting” image in which he is covered with stitches and tumors.* She adds that the image of his actual untended and physically abused body “is very much on my mind lately.” It is, she says metaphorically, “the albatross around my neck,” the sign of a faith that has “not quite taken hold.”

We are not proposing that these particular developments are representative but rather that this fugal form characterizes the modifications of a recurrent theme during expressive enactment. While readers will vary in the number of developments and in the particular modifications that characterize each, the core regularity is that, as in the musical fugue, these thematic developments move toward a certain kind of saturation, richness, or depth. In literary reading, such saturation includes (1) the persistence, albeit in transformed understandings, of a thematized felt meaning; (2) moving beyond conventional “symbolic” understandings of that thematized felt meaning; (3) moving beyond simple to more intricate and intimate personal understandings of that thematized felt meaning; and (4) the articulation of temporally and humanly extended convictions about that thematized meaning, convictions that the reader may otherwise be reluctant to endorse. This fugal movement toward increasingly intricate and intimate personal understandings and this progressive articulation of initially vague and inexpressible convictions constitutes the entry of the literary text into the reader’s life.

Readers who engage in this fugal form of reading are able to say afterward: “I became sensitive to aspects of life, my own and others’, that I usually ignore.”

7. Self-Modifying Reading during Personal Crises

Not all readers engage in this form of reading; in fact, in our phenomenological study of expressive enactment, only a minority do (24 of 198 commentaries, distributed among nine of forty readers). One possibility, of course, is that expressive enactment is just one of several reading strategies, each of which reflects historically relative and institutionalized reading practices. However, that proposal does not explain why some readers manifested expressive enactment in one or two of their commentaries while others manifested it more consistently. Another possibility is that this approach to reading is more deeply tied to particular life circumstances than theoretical discussions of historically relative and institutionalized reading practices would allow. What if, for example, expressive enactment, with this fugal form, occurred with greater regularity among individuals who are psychologically predisposed by experiences of loss, death, and bereavement? Perhaps expressive enactment is dependent upon the opening—or closing—of experiential windows during such seemingly inevitable life crises. Perhaps the psychological rhythm of this type of reading experience is periodically lost or regained. We have conducted an experimental study that lends some credibility to this proposal.

7.1. *Reading and Personal Crises: Study Design*

In this study, forty-eight participants¹⁸ were selected on the basis of responses to a questionnaire concerning their histories of loss resulting from death, physical separation, or deterioration of a significant relationship. Three groups were formed: minor and temporally remote loss (e.g., loss due to a deteriorating relationship more than two years before participation), significant but temporally remote loss (e.g., death of a close friend more than two years before participation), and significant and recent loss (e.g., death of a parent within the preceding year). In a laboratory session, participants read “The Daydream” by Coleridge, a poem that describes reminiscences of and yearnings for the narrator’s absent wife. During a second reading of the poem, participants marked any passages that they

18. Participants were forty-eight introductory psychology students (thirty-eight women and ten men), fulfilling part of a course requirement. Although age was inadvertently not recorded, these young adults are usually between eighteen and twenty-four years old.

found striking or evocative. Then they completed a Reading Experience Questionnaire, which asked about their reactions to each marked passage. Finally, participants completed the Grief Questionnaire (Jacobs et al. 1987), which asked about their continuing reactions to the designated loss.

Using the Reading Experience Questionnaire, several scales were created to assess readers' response: (1) changed understanding of the poem (e.g., regarding its point); (2) feeling resonance (e.g., of the experiencer's feelings with those in the poem); (3) self-directed reflection (e.g., about one's own feelings); (4) memories external to the reading experience (e.g., of events from literature, movies, or other art forms); and (5) shifts in self-perceptual depth (an increased awareness of feelings usually ignored).

Among these scales, two plausibly reflect the concepts that have been focal in the preceding discussion: feeling resonance and self-perceptual depth. The former scale may reflect the accentuation of feeling that occurs during explicit comparison of personal memories with the world of the text (self-implicating similes). Also, it may reflect the accentuation of feeling that occurs when the reader is enactively subsumed in a class exemplified by an affectively nuanced character description (metaphors of personal identification). On the other hand, the self-perceptual depth scale may *distinctively* reflect the shifts in readers' sense of self that we have associated with metaphors of personal identification—and, by implication, with expressive enactment and the fugal form of reading. The empirical validation of this proposal is a future project; its face validity motivated the present research design.¹⁹

7.2. Reading and Personal Crises: Results

The results were compatible with our projections. They suggest that feeling resonance and self-perceptual depth through reading were not associated with depression about a recent loss but rather with depression about a loss that occurred two or more years before. Specifically, we found that, among readers who reported a significant *recent* loss, the *more* depressed the person was, the *less* she or he reported feeling resonance and shifts in self-perceptual depth during reading. In contrast, among readers who reported a significant *remote* loss, the *more* depressed the person was, the *more* she or he reported feeling resonance and shifts in self-perceptual depth during read-

19. A similar scale has been repeatedly used in studies of impactful dreams (Kuiken and Sikora 1993; Kuiken and Nielsen 1996), i.e., dreams from which people awake with a sense that they have been changed, that they are sensitive to aspects of their lives that they typically ignore. Its validity also has been established in studies that compare “nightmares” with “existential dreams” (Busink and Kuiken 1996) and assess the effects of the impactful dreams that occur during bereavement (Kuiken 1993).

ing. In the minor remote loss condition, depression was not reliably related with feeling resonance and self-perceptual depth. And in analyses of the other three scales based on the Reading Experience Questionnaire, this pattern was not evident.

7.3. Reading and Personal Crises: Conclusions

If we are justified in relating our phenomenological efforts to the findings found and replicated in these experimental studies, it seems that the metaphors of personal identification, expressive enactment, and fugal form of reading by which literature enters life are *less* likely to occur among people who are depressed because of a *recent* significant loss. During the initial period following loss, which tends to be characterized by psychological numbness and derealization, depression may somehow preclude the saturation, richness, and depth that emerge from this manner of reading. In contrast, such depth in reading is *more* likely to occur among people who remain depressed about a temporally *remote* significant loss, an unresolved loss that nonetheless has become, with the passage of time, more accessible and acceptable.

Literary reading during bereaved depression may be especially engaging and especially likely to penetrate life when it is not too directly reminiscent of the pain associated with a reader's loss. This possibility is consistent with the results of a second experimental study, in which we compared bereaved readers' responses to Coleridge's "The Daydream" with their responses to another of his poems, "Recollections of Love," which does not include loss-related themes. With "The Daydream," we replicated the pattern found in the first study. However, with "Recollections of Love," we found that those who were depressed about a recent significant loss were more deeply implicated by their reading than those who remained depressed about a loss that occurred some time before. The poem-specific pattern observed in these studies is of interest not only for what it says about how reading enters life; it also helps to explain why bereaved depression is a painful period of change and growth during which people carefully navigate among reminders of their loss (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2001).

8. Conclusions

In recent years, grief, mourning, and the viability of elegiac forms has been the focus of intensive study (Ramazani 1994; Sacks 1985; Zeiger 1997). Although the issues are diverse and their discussion engaging, this discourse regularly ignores the readers whose concrete reading experiences are, at least in part, at stake. Without denigrating close reading of the relevant

literary texts, discussion of mourning in the life and work of the author, or examination of historical shifts within poetic voices of loss and trauma, these analyses sometimes seem conspicuously removed from the lives of everyday, actual readers. For example, when poets are presented as though they have “remade the elegy” for people who “need elegies that, while imbued with grief, can hold up to the acid suspicions of our time” (Ramazani 1994: x), the basis for these hypothetical needs and suspicions seems partly in the text and its “implied” readers and largely in the mind of the scholar. The result is inadvertently, but perhaps ironically, the individualization of a collective concern: scholars’ individual needs and suspicions sit in for the verifiably shared—or, more likely, verifiably diverse—concerns of actual readers.

By more closely examining actual readers’ reactions to texts that echo loss, lack, and absence, some theoretical issues can be revisited and perhaps reformulated. For example, when is mourning impossible? When is the author—and analogously that author’s reader—beyond the mnemonic poesy that is traditionally conceived as providing consolation (Zeiger 1997)? Our study suggests that one aspect of the answer for the reader is this: when the loss is so recent that it *somehow* forecloses the temporal projection of possibilities. Within that recency, the possibility of remembering “then” or anticipating the “future,” although embodied in the elegiac text, cannot be carried forward within the experiential rhythm of expressive reading. The reader, in Jacques Derrida’s words from *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1989 [1986]: xxiv), is “almost no longer able to say anything, to begin, recommence, and continue”; the “affliction of hardly’s hardship,” the psycho-ontological pain of “saying,” is not created but accentuated and given force.

We might also ask how the psycho-ontological pain of “saying” becomes differently manifest during later phases of mourning. Does the still grieving reader poignantly carry forward the pain of “hardly,” as Derrida does in *Memoires*? Or if not, what *is* carried forward within successive moments of expressive enactment—even when they do not console? Addressing such issues may require close study of poetic forms of elegiac expression, not in isolation but in conjunction with the qualitative changes that occur throughout the phases of grief. Rather than the mnemonic *fort und da* of Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* (1958 [1917]), other forms of closeness and distance, presence and absence, may become accentuated within the fugal form of reading reported by actual readers. In our experimental study of grief and reading, feeling resonance, but neither personal memories nor direct self-reflection, accompanied self-perceptual depth. Perhaps, then, conditions for the possibility of mourning through reading are less mnemonic than affective, and, if so, that finding provides a quite different guid-

ing thread for the articulation of mourning within literary theory—to the extent, at least, that theory is concerned not only with implied but with actual readers.

In fact, rather than recollection per se, the *manner* of recollection during reading seems pivotal in our studies. Whether personal memories are explicitly and comparatively considered, as in personal similes, or implicitly and enactively evoked, as in metaphors of personal identification, may determine the regenerative potential of reading. At times, within certain windows of opportunity, even reading anti-elegiac poetry, with its stern resistance to consolation (e.g., Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath), may serve a regenerative rather than consolatory elegiac function. More precisely, even anti-elegiac poetry may afford regenerative remembering or saying, with the attendant self-modifying feelings, within the experiential context characterized here as expressive enactment.

For several reasons, the experiential complex that defines expressive enactment seems crucial. First, expressive enactment involves defamiliarization and the elaboration of visual and kinesthetic imagery in ways that provide enlivenment, or what we have called aesthetic feelings. Other evidence (Miall and Kuiken 1995) suggests that aesthetic feelings initiate the reinterpretive effort within which modifying feelings emerge. Second, we have presented evidence that, within expressive enactment, readers repeatedly revisit defamiliarized themes in ways that express those themes with progressively greater intricacy and intimacy. To that extent, “simple” narrative feeling becomes self-modifying feeling.

The phenomenological effort through which we identified expressive enactment—and articulated the role of self-modifying feelings—represents an attempt to reawaken interest in the notion of aesthetic experience. Discussions of aesthetic experience have become passé because the necessary and sufficient conditions for defining such experience have proved elusive (Weitz 1956). However, the analytic insistence on necessary and sufficient criteria for aesthetic experience is itself presumptive. The empirical phenomenological methods by which we identified expressive enactment enable the articulation of categories of experience in which (1) each instance of the category has a large but unspecified number of attributes; (2) each attribute is an attribute of many instances of the category; and (3) no attribute in the array is an attribute of every instance of the category (Kuiken and Miall 2001). Expressive enactment qualifies as an experiential category in this sense, and its array of more or less characteristic attributes identify it as aesthetic experience within a tradition that gives priority to subtly generative forms of self-implication (van Gerwen 1995).

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