HOW FEELINGS MATTER FOR READING

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From Aristotle to now, when people talk about literature, they talk about their feelings. Consider the experience of one nineteenth-century reader:

> Before leaving New York, I bought Bulwer's new novel, "What will he do with it?" —which I soon finished. I could not have made a more agreeable selection of a travelling companion. With that in my hand I could not think myself alone, for did I not admire and revere the noble character, the splendid talents, and generous impulses of Guy Darrell? Did I not love the sweet face of Sophy, and admire and adore that noble woman, Caroline Monfort, pity and admire the sweet simplicity, the noble generous devoted love and manful struggles against adversity, of poor Waife—noble "gentleman Waife?"[1]

This reader, George Dashiell Bayard, describes his reading experiences in terms not of a plot summary, the author's artistry, a moral message, or the novel's language. Instead, for him, reading is feeling, as his verbs underscore: "admire" (three times), "revere", "love", "adore", and "pity". Such emotional links are

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[1] S.J. Bayard, *The Life of George Dashiell Bayard* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1874), p. 140.

so vivid for Bayard that they turn the book into a person, an "agreeable . . . travelling companion".

For many years and for different reasons, neither cognitive psychology nor literary criticism had good ways to analyze Bayard's response. In cognitive psychology, the metaphor of the mind as a computer kept feelings to the side as noise to be filtered out or left to social psychologists. Early cognitive psychology continued a longstanding bias against feelings for supposedly interfering with higher-order processes like generalizing, reasoning, and decision making.[2] For literary criticism, emotions like Bayard's were a relic of impressionistic older criticism that academic scholarship renounced for scholarly respectability. Close analysis of figurative language pushed emotional responses to the side.

Yet within the last thirty years, advances have been made in both fields in the study of feelings. Affect theory has become a busy area within literary criticism, though it is less a unified field than a bundle of interests and approaches.[3] Within cognitive psychology as well, feeling has come to life. New technologies like fMRI fueled some of this interest, because they allowed new answers to the question of whether different feelings had distinct and generalizable hemodynamic traces in the brain. For psychologists, the distinction between feeling and cognition no longer appears as absolute as it once did: "Affective reactions, in the form of emotions and moods, exert a far-reaching and

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[2] M.W. Eysenck and M.T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook, 4th ed.* (East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2000), p. 489.
[3] See, for example, R. Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the 'Death of the Subject'* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001); E. Kosofsky Sedgwick and A. Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003); M. Gregg and G.J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

largely functional influence on cognition."[4] This quotation foregrounds two issues that will be important throughout this essay: first, finding a workable set of terms to define the array of human phenomena that can fit under the wide umbrella of "feelings"; second, recognizing that feeling's relevance to reading involves not only feelings that arise during reading but also the feelings that readers bring to the reading experience and those that they take away from it.

Despite the common interest in feelings in psychology and literary scholarship, the disciplines have not interacted. This essay is meant to begin such an interaction by introducing literary scholars to cognitive work on feelings in general and then by focusing on reading. This is a large, complex topic, and this essay will do little more than sketch the terrain, but we hope that it will open a path for more detailed investigation.

While it is difficult to generalize about feelings in literary criticism, core issues have involved how conscious or unconscious feelings may be, and how people evaluate the feelings. Marta Figlerowitcz outlines major topics:

> I can become angry at or attracted to another person without knowing that my attitude toward her has changed. This is to experience an affect un- or preconsciously. I can also be aware of my anger or attraction and weight it as a potentially reliable phenomenology, as a potentially true indication of what this other person is like and how I should treat her. This experience is what most theorists understand under the term *emotion*. Or I can attend to my anger or attraction without believing that the perspective

4 J.R. Huntsinger and S. Schnall, "Emotion-Cognition Interactions" in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Psychology,* ed. D. Reisberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 571–84; p. 581.

it gives me is reliable, focusing primarily on these feelings' movement within me.[5]

She describes three options: unconscious feelings, feelings taken as accurate information about the world and feelings analyzed for their own sake. Awareness is always the central issue. For literary critics, what matters is whether subjects are aware of feelings and, if so, what happens to that awareness. Such concerns lead to questions about how art can register feelings barely understood by those experiencing them, how responses to literature create knowledge about the literary text, and how literary texts, especially the lyric, invite feelings freed from function or use.

While psychology is not indifferent to topics raised by literary criticism, its focus on generalized mental systems leads to different emphases. Literary critics are more used to a certain fuzziness in the description of feelings, one that acknowledges how complex feelings often are and how difficult it can be to describe them precisely. For psychologists, good experiments require clarity about the object of investigation, and psychologists respond to this need for clarity by generating categories. Concerning feelings, there are four different categories that psychologists employ: affect, emotion, mood, and personality. While literary critics focus on awareness, key distinctions for psychologists are duration and specificity. To move from affect to personality is to move from the briefest to the most enduring of the categories and through varying degrees of specificity. As in any field, terms are up for debate, and psychologists sometimes use "affect" to describe the entire range of feelings. I, however, will follow Clore and Robinson in using it as a term that may come closest to what Figlerowitcz means by "uncon-

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[5] M. Figlerowitcz, "Affect Theory Dossier: An Introduction", *Qui Parle* 20, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2012), pp. 3–18; p. 5.

scious" emotion: it is an automatic positive or negative reaction to a stimulus and arises from a basic attraction / withdrawal polarity. Affective responses happen so quickly that they may be hardly registered by the subject. Emotions, in contrast, are conscious states that require the recursive appraisal both of external events and of somatic reactions to them (heart rate, sweating, breathing speed).[6] It may be a challenge for literary critics to accept that emotions involve appraisal, since emotions in art have traditionally been presented as a "spontaneous overflow," in Wordsworth's famous formula, an eruption that seems to exceed rational thought.[7] Yet what counts as appraisal varies significantly between literary criticism and psychology. For literary critics, appraisal is a labor-intensive, time-consuming activity that takes hours or days. For psychologists, the appraisal of stimuli that leads a subject to an emotional state takes longer than the automatic processing of affect, but it still can happen quickly, within seconds. In that time, the appraisal may involve both conscious and unconscious elements, a combination that can help explain why the same stimulus can lead to different emotional responses in different people.[8]

For psychologists, mood differs from emotion in that emotions have a specific trigger, and take a specified form (e.g., anger, joviality, fear). Mood, in contrast, is more diffuse, does not necessarily have a specific trigger, and may be longer-lasting. Events in a work of literature may induce passing emotions, but the overall experience of reading may also produce a mood less easy to charac-

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[6] G.L. Clore and M.D. Robinson, "Five New Ideas about Emotion and Their Implications for Social-Personality Psychology" in *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology,* eds. K. Deaux and M. Snyder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 315–336; p. 325.

[7] W. Wordsworth, "Preface (1802) to *Lyrical Ballads", William Wordsworth: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 595–615; p. 598.

[8] For a discussion of appraisal theory, see C.A. Smith and L.D. Kirby, "Putting Appraisal in Context: Toward a Relational Model of Appraisal and Emotion", *Cognition and Emotion* 23, no. 7 (2009), pp. 1352–1372.

terize than minute-by-minute emotional experience. In addition, psychologists also explore a phenomenon that literary critics rarely take up: a reader may come to read a book with a pre-existing mood, and that mood, quite apart from the book, may deeply affect the reading experience.[9]

Finally, personality is treated as a stable collection of traits characterizing individual behavior. One well-known model, the Five Factor Theory, measures individuals on a scale of five key traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These traits are less as causal factors in how people behave than general trends in their reactions to events. The point is not to divide everyone into only one of these categories. Instead, people have a distinctive combination of them, and each trait can be measured on a scale from low to high.[10] Although literary scholars may be quick to scoff at this theory because it seems so reductive (and not all psychologists like the Five Factor Theory either), its point is not to provide an exhaustive description of any individual. Instead, it offers a rough means of differentiating many individuals from each other that, however clunky it might seem, offers considerable nuance because of the many different combinations that can result. It can be especially useful when thinking how people evaluate what they have read and the aesthetic judgments that they make about it, a large topic beyond the bounds of this essay.

The distinctions I have made among affect, emotion, mood, and personality are not absolute, and psychologists disagree among themselves about where to draw the line between them. Yet, as I have noted, they point to key issues in the study of

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[9] C.M. Bohn-Gettler and D.N. Rapp, "Depending on My Mood: Mood-Driven Influences on Text Comprehension", *Journal of Educational Psychology* 103, no. 3 (2011), pp. 562–577.
[10] For an overview, see T.A. Widiger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Five Factor Model of Personality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

feeling: duration and specificity. Reading is interesting in relation to these factors because reading can be a means either of prolonging a feeling (reading a sad book when you are in a sad mood) or of shortening it (reading a funny book to cheer oneself up). Similarly, reading can sharpen an unspecific mood into a focused emotion but can also produce an overall mood that does not quite cohere into an easily identified emotional state. The subject of feeling draws attention to reading as a process in time: reading can interact with pre-existing feelings, in addition to generating feeling during the reading process. It also can leave the reader with a variety of feelings that, again, can change with time. In some cases, memory of the reading experience may be enough to allow the reader to recreate those feelings. In all cases, the specificity associated with those feelings is highly variable, arising from complex interactions between reader, text, and context.

Beyond duration and specificity, two other factors key in psychological analysis of feeling are valence and arousal. Valence involves whether a feeling is pleasurable: it moves on a scale from extremely pleasurable to extremely displeasurable. Arousal, in contrast, involves the degree of activation associated with the feelings; some feelings produce a powerful physiological response (such as anger), while others do not (such as bemusement). The poles of valence and arousal create four possible combinations:

Feeling Scale

	Strong	
Displeasurable	**Displeasurable - Strong**	**Pleasurable - Strong**	Pleasurable
	Displeasurable - Weak	**Pleasurable - Weak**	
	Weak	
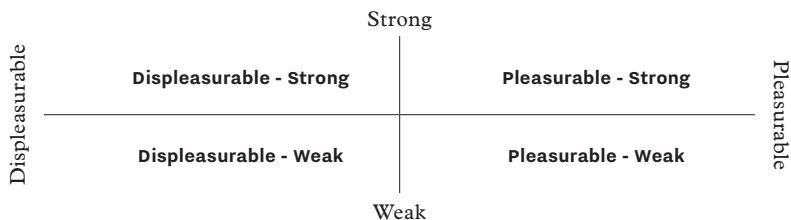
Within a quadrant, different emotions can be located at different points, so that they are closer to or further away from other quadrants. Such an option gives flexibility and nuance to the system of valence/arousal.[11] For literary criticism, I find this model helpful because it organizes the wide array of feelings to allow comparisons among different texts or among moments within the same text. It also characterizes different manifestations of the same feeling: for example, melancholy can be a strongly displeasurable emotion or a weakly pleasurable one, depending on the situation.

Duration, valence, and arousal become further complicated when we move from feelings in general to feeling in relation to literary reading. It is possible to read many texts without any feelings at all, such as a road sign or the instructions on a box of detergent. But, as I have noted, literary reading has long been distinguished by its association with strong feelings, e.g., readers cry at death scenes, feel their hearts race during ghost stories, or turn the pages more quickly to find out if the hero can rescue the heroine. The challenge is to figure out how feelings, when they do occur, interact with the more neutral cognitive processes necessary for comprehension.

Feelings can matter for a reading experience before, during, and after the actual act of reading. Psychologists distinguish the mental processes that happen during reading ("online processes") from the final memory representation that remains after reading ("offline product"), although (again) the distinction between the two is not absolute: the "offline product" is not a static construct but one subject to constant revision over time and one that will look different depending on the reasons for remembering a text. Although they are only occasionally con-

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[11] See I.B. Mauss and M.D. Robinson, "Measures of Emotion: A Review", *Cognition and Emotion* 23, no. 2 (2009), pp. 209–237.

sidered by psychologists, I would also add "pre-reading" processes to the understanding of reading generally and the role of emotions in reading. In much writing about emotion and reading, the assumption is that emotions stem purely from the reading experience itself, as if reading happened in a vacuum. Yet readers read with goals, attitudes, and expectations, and those may affect emotional reactions during the reading process.[12]

Although some psychologists have assumed that readers' choices would be guided by a search for emotional equilibrium (if you are too excited, you will read to calm yourself down; if you are sad, you will read to cheer yourself up), considerable evidence disputes this assumption.[13] Readers just as often want reading to reinforce their feelings, especially negative ones.[14] When students are assigned books to read, their attitudes toward reading, unsurprisingly, have significant effects on how well they comprehend what they read: an enthusiastic attitude toward the reading event predicts higher degrees of understanding. Catherine Bohn-Gettler and David Rapp analyzed the differences between readers in happy, sad, and neutral moods when they read excerpts from *Scientific American*.[15] Although this experiment did not look at literary reading, the results are suggestive: readers in an emotionally-valenced mood, either happy or sad, were more similar than neutral readers. Happy and sad readers paraphrased more and remembered more important details in the text. This may suggest that coming to reading with a valenced mood, even with a text largely devoid of strong emo-

[12] P. van den Broek, R.F. Lorch, T. Linderholm and M. Gustafson, "The Effects of Readers' Goals on Inference Generation and Memory for Texts", *Memory & Cognition* 29, no. 8 (2001), pp. 1081–88.
[13] D. Zillmann, "Mood Management through Communication Choices", *American Behavioral Psychologist* 31, no. 3 (1988), pp. 327–340.
[14] M.B. Oliver, "Tender Affective States as Predictors of Entertainment Preferences", *Journal of Communication* 58 (2008), pp. 40–61.
[15] See Bohn-Gettler and Rapp, "Depending on My Mood".

tional content, can itself matter for the reading.

Feelings during reading intersect with the processes of comprehension. Comprehension is a large, complex topic apart from any consideration of feeling. The core puzzle in comprehension involves relating memory and understanding. Limitations of human memory mean that, after having read even a short passage, readers will have a verbatim recollection of almost nothing that they have read. Faced with this huge loss of information, skilled readers develop strategies to remember what they consider important; in traditional narratives, for example, they may track location, time, protagonists, goals, and motivations. These, rather than a verbatim reproduction of the text, become part of a reader's long-term memory representation. In addition, as they read, readers bring to the experience many things not explicitly mentioned in the text: they draw on background knowledge to explain events described elliptically in the text and to connect earlier and later parts of the text. Such inferences, if they are important, may also become part of a long-term memory representation, even though they themselves are not in a text. Processes like inference generation exist on a continuum from those performed so many times that they happen automatically and with little effort (such as recognizing that the letter combination "s-k-y" spells "sky") to those that require considerable effort, such as following the dialogue in late Henry James.[16]

So, the question about feelings is how they enter these processes. A point of debate has centered on how active the reader is, with positions ranging from those advocating for highly active readers to those positing minimalist readers who do enough only to make sense of what they are reading at a local level. In response to this debate, an important experiment showed that

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[16] For an overview of the comprehension process, see A. Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), pp. 83–109.

readers do indeed make inferences about character feelings and do so without an unusual amount of cognitive effort, a finding that seems intuitively obvious but made an important intervention in a larger debate about what readers do while reading.[17] Since then, psychologists have done a considerable amount of work around the ability of readers to recognize and understand the feelings of characters.[18]

Yet understanding characters' feelings is not the same as experiencing feelings, although the first may be a precondition for the second. Researchers have noted that characters are not the only source of readers' responses: readers can respond to aspects of the work itself, such as its style or overall tone. In an important article, Raymond Mar and his associates detailed the varying kinds of feelings that can be present in literary reading, including sympathy (feeling sorry for characters), identification (feeling that you are in the character's position), empathy (feeling the same emotion as a character), and remembered feelings (feelings in the novel that call up autobiographical memories).[19] David Miall has gone so far as to argue that emotional responsiveness is the distinguishing characteristic of literary reading.[20] Yet research suggests that the picture is more complicated. For example, one experiment showed that readers had a diminished emotional response to a narrative with foregrounded literary

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[17] M.A. Gernsbacher, H. Hill Goldsmith and R.R.W. Robertson, "Do Readers Mentally Representing Characters' Emotional States?", *Cognition and Emotion* 6, no. 2 (1992), pp. 89–111.

[18] See H. Komeda and T. Kusumi, "The Effect of a Protagonist's Emotional Shift on Situation Model Construction", *Memory and Cognition* 34, no. 7 (2006), pp. 1548–1556; H. Komeda et al., "Beyond Disposition: The Processing Consequences of Explicit and Implicit Invocations of Empathy", *Acta Psychologica* 142 (2013), pp. 349–355; and M. de Vega, "The Representation of Changing Emotion in Reading Comprehension", *Cognition and Emotion* 10, no. 3 (1996), pp. 303–322.

[19] R.A. Mar, K. Oatley, M. Djikic and J. Mullin, "Emotion and Narrative Fiction: Interactive Influences Before, During, and After Reading", *Cognition and Emotion,* 25, no. 5 (2011), pp. 818–833.

[20] D.S. Miall, "Emotions and the Structuring of Narrative Responses", *Poetics Today* 32, no. 2 (2011), pp. 323–348.

devices compared to a version of the same narrative without those devices. The conclusion was that those devices induced a more analytical mindset in readers, whose feelings were more engaged by the less overtly literary version of the text.[21] In some cases, foregrounded literariness may be as much a barrier to emotional response as a catalyst for it.

Two phenomena about feelings and reading have received attention, especially in the work of Richard Gerrig. The first is what Gerrig calls "participatory responses", such as when readers watching a character about to make a bad choice may think, "Don't do it!". Such responses go beyond a simple inference because they do more than just retrieve information from background knowledge. Instead, they involve readers taking the fiction seriously enough that they wish to intervene in it: strong reader feelings are a prerequisite for participatory responses and act as a sign of emotional engagement. Gerrig has shown that they are widespread in the reading of fiction.

The second is what Gerrig calls "anomalous suspense". Here, Gerrig is interested in how generic expectations affect reader feelings. For example, when reading a standard piece of genre fiction, one can expect that the protagonist will get into dangerous scrapes and that he or she will survive them. If one were to imagine perfectly rational readers, they should not feel any suspense during the hero's scrapes because they know that, in the end, the hero will triumph. Similarly, perfectly rational readers should not, upon rereading even the most suspenseful work, feel any suspense in light of their knowledge of how everything turns out. Yet Gerrig showed readers did indeed feel suspense even when reading short narratives that made the outcome of well-known historical events (the presidency of George Washington,

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[21] A. Mangen et al., "Empathy and Literary Style: A Theoretical and Methodological Exploration", *Orbis Litterarum* 73 (2019), pp. 471–496.

the stardom of Elvis Presley) seem briefly questionable. After reading such narratives, it took readers significantly longer to verify the historical version of events than it did for readers who had not read suspense-inducing stories.[22] What is most provocative about Gerrig's findings is that feelings like anomalous suspense have the power to reduce a reader's access to background knowledge: strong engagement with a story can, at least temporarily, make it harder to know what you know. Both participatory responses and anomalous suspense can contribute to reader engagement with a text, although engagement, like feeling, is a large term with multiple possible causes.

To help put findings like those of Gerrig and others in a larger perspective, Catherine Bohn-Gettler has proposed such a framework in PET, which stands for Processes, Emotions, and Tasks. Bohn-Gettler makes the point with this framework that the relation between reading and feelings varies along three major axes:

- cognitive processes: emotions may affect higher order, top-down processes differently than more automatic, bottom-up processes;
- emotions: positively valenced emotions may work differently from negatively valenced ones, and arousal likewise may have varying effects;
- tasks: readers can have completely different feelings about the same text depending on their goals in reading it and the actions they expect to be able to accomplish through reading.[23]

Within literary criticism, affect theory has neglected processes and tasks: feelings are often imagined in a self-sufficient

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[22] R.J. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Experience of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[23] C. Bohn-Gettler, "Getting a Grip: The PET Framework for Studying How Reader Emotions Influence Comprehension", forthcoming, *Discourse Processes*.

bubble. Bohn-Gettler's framework complicates this by reminding us of key elements that need to be considered when investigating feelings in reading.

In terms of processes, previous research suggests an important distinction between negatively and positively valenced emotions. One might assume, in general, that positive emotions would be better for cognitive tasks than negative ones. In many experiments, psychologists have found that positive emotions do indeed foster certain tasks, such as finding creative solutions, generating inferences, remembering behavior in narratives, and learning categories. Yet positive emotions are not always the best: a positive emotion has the potential to induce a false sense of mastery, leading people to think that they performed a task better than they have. As it turns out, negative emotions have cognitive value as well. They have been associated with better accuracy, more care in responding, and less reliance on rules of thumb (as opposed to reasoned arguments). At a broad level, positive emotions seem to foster wide-ranging creativity and innovation, whereas negative ones foster careful local analysis.[24]

To understand how these broad trends might relate to reading specifically, Bohn-Gettler and I performed an experiment in which we altered previously existing short stories to provide happy, sad, and neutral versions of each story. Participants (n = 114) read one happy, one sad, and one neutral story. They read them in three different conditions: a control condition, in which they read at their own pace; a dual-task condition, in which they recited nonsense syllables ("ba be bi bo bu") at the rate of one syllable per second, while they read; and a think-aloud condition, in which they spoke their thoughts after reading each

[24] K. Fiedler and S. Beier, "Affect and Cognitive Processes in Educational Contexts", in *International Handbook of Emotions in Education*, eds. R. Pekrun and L. Linnenbrink-Garcia (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 36–55

clause of the story. In the control condition, reading the stories had a significant effect on the readers' emotions: reading the happy story produced more positive affect and joviality than the neutral story, and reading the sad story produced less positive affect and joviality than the neutral story as well as greater sadness than the happy or neutral stories.

The point of the dual-task condition was to explore how cognitive load affects processing. The brain's capacity for cognitive processing is limited: the more activation that is used for certain resource-demanding processes, the less is available for other processes. So, if participants had to perform a simple task like reciting nonsense syllables, it potentially could affect their emotional response. As it turns out, it did. As expected, those who read the sad story felt sadder than those who read happy or neutral stories. But there was no difference in positive affect or joviality for those who read happy stories and those who read neutral stories, as there was in the control condition. A similar finding occurred in the think-aloud condition: the sad story produced greater negative affect and sadness than did the happy or neutral stories, but there were no differences for positive affect. The point is that the tasks we imposed upon readers (nonsense syllables and thinking aloud) diminished the happy-making effects of the happy story. Only the sad-making effect of the sad story survived. The results suggest that sad reader emotions may be less susceptible to cognitive load than happy ones. Sad stories make sad readers, no matter what, whereas happy stories make happy readers only if the readers can concentrate fully on the story.

The dual-task condition also produced significant differences depending on emotional tone. Admittedly, the task that we asked participants to perform (reciting nonsense syllables) was an obviously artificial one. But its purpose was to explore an

aspect of reading not often acknowledged in literary scholarship: readers often read while they are distracted, either by their environment or by other tasks that they need to perform. Such distractions put a strain on the mind's cognitive capacity because, as I have noted, the mind is capable of only so much processing at a given moment. So, the question of how feelings affect reading under conditions of cognitive load is a genuine one, however artificial the experimental task may have been. When the reader was distracted, happy stories were easiest to read, followed by the sad and neutral stories.[25]

Such results connect with a larger negativity bias that psychologists have found. Egidi and Gerrig gave readers stories that, for the most part, were neutral but then had either happy or sad endings. They found that readers read the sad endings more slowly. Reading time is often used in psychology as a behavioral measure of a psychological process. The challenge is knowing just what process it is measuring. Egidi and Gerrig suggest that slower reading times indicate either that the sad endings were read more carefully by readers or that they were harder to read, in the sense that it took more effort for readers to integrate the sad ending into their mental representation.[26] Bohn-Gettler and I had a similar but not identical finding: we found that sad stories had slower reading times only in the dual-task condition, which meant that readers were under increased cognitive load. Yet, as Bohn-Gettler's PET framework stresses, different findings may arise from different processes, emotions, and tasks. In the case of Egidi and Gerrig, the task was somewhat different from that in our experiment. Their readers had a positive

[25] C. Bohn-Gettler and A. Elfenbein, "Emotional Tone and Text Processing", Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Text and Discourse, Chicago, July 2014.

[26] G. Egidi and R.J. Gerrig, "How Valence Affects Language Processing: Negativity Bias and Mood Congruence in Narrative Comprehension", *Memory & Cognition* 37, no. 5 (2009), pp. 547–555.

or negative mood induced before they read the stories, whereas the readers in our experiment did not. In addition, their stories were mostly neutral: only the conclusions of the stories were sad or happy. Our happy and sad stories, in contrast, had a marked emotional valence from the beginning. As a result, the negativity bias that we found only in the dual-task condition may have been present for their readers because of the mood induction manipulation and the different tone of the endings, which were not present in our experiment.

The bigger point is that, in both experiments, sad stories stood out as having more marked effects on cognitive processing. These findings may help to explain why readers often find that sad stories feel more meaningful and important to them than happy ones. On the face of it, the propensity for sad stories seems counterintuitive: people should want to increase pleasure and decrease pain. Why, in such a case, would people submit themselves to unpleasant experiences in literary reading, often an activity associated with leisure time and choice? The answer is that sad stories invite greater effort. It may be that people interpret this greater effort as enabling a more meaningful experience and accomplishing a difficult task is more rewarding than accomplishing an easier one.[27]

The distance from feeling that once helped cognitive psychology and literary criticism to cement their places as academic disciplines is no longer as necessary as it once was, and this development has allowed both disciplines to explore new questions about what it means to be human. As a literary scholar, what I find most valuable in the psychological study of feeling is the ability to find key points that allow for the comparison of emotional experiences. In literary scholarship, the assumption

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[27] R.B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice, 4th ed.* (Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), p. 79.

has tended to be that, although all readers have feelings, each reader's experience is irreducibly unique. Part of the attraction of the affective turn for literary scholar may be the challenge of trying to evoke in language the tangled complexity of individual feelings. Valuable as that endeavor is, psychology offers an alternative perspective that opens possibilities for understanding feeling on a larger scale: the historical role of feelings, their collective effect on a group or community, and varying feelings that readers may have in different historical periods about the same text. Categories like duration, specificity, activation, and valence can provide powerful conceptual tools for literary scholars as they strive to incorporate the complex welter of feelings aroused by reading into their analyses.

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