

Beyond Text Theory

Understanding Literary Response

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Abstract

Approaches to text comprehension that focus on propositional, inferential, and elaborative processes have often been considered capable of extension in principle to literary texts, such as stories or poems. However, we argue that literary response is influenced by stylistic features that result in defamiliarization; that defamiliarization invokes feeling which calls on personal perspectives and meanings; and that these aspects of literary response are not addressed by current text theories. The main differences between text theories and defamiliarization theory are discussed. We offer a historical perspective on the theory of defamiliarization from Coleridge to the present day, and mention some empirical studies that tend to support it.

Introduction

To understand readers' responses to a literary text, it is not sufficient to apply approaches and methods devised for non-literary prose. Literary texts exhibit significant deviations from non-literary prose, both at the local level of phonemics and grammar, and at the global level of organization and structure. To examine these stylistic deviations and account for their psychological effects, we regard defamiliarization as a phenomenon that is central to literary experience: it is the hallmark of literariness. Briefly, by defamiliarization we mean a process during which a reader uses prototypic concepts in a context where their referents are rendered unfamiliar by various stylistic devices; the reader is required to reinterpret such referents in non-prototypic ways, or even to relocate them in a new perspective that must be created during reading.

We also suggest that defamiliarization is an aspect of the reading process that is grounded in feelings. In response to stylistic devices, feelings influence a reader's departure from prototypic understandings. This process can be demonstrated by an example. In the opening lines of Roethke's poem "Dolor" (van Peer, 1986), two closely related metaphors offer views of common office items that challenge prototypic conceptions of them as functional objects of the work place:

I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils,
Neat in their boxes, dolour of pad and paperweight.

Both metaphors, by attributing "sadness" and then "dolour" to inanimate objects, require readers to create an alternative meaning that is at once conceptually novel and affectively enriched. Also in these lines, feeling connotations of the phonemic and metrical features support the metaphorically initiated shift in meaning: the alliteration of [p] that both reinforces the orderliness of the objects and creates a muffling restraint in the sound; the unusual succession of three dactylic feet in the first line, which is responsible for the sensation of falling towards the stress on "pencils." These and

other stylistic features of Roethke's poem (see Van Peer, 1986, pp. 78-82) present novel and richly felt aspects of otherwise familiar office items.

Our approach to understanding literary comprehension thus calls for a model with a number of features not found in most modern theories of text comprehension. We argue that, without major modification, text theories (as we will call them) cannot be extended to the study of literary texts, such as short stories or poetry. While some features of literary texts overlap with normal texts, their special style suggests that they inhabit a universe whose laws are distinctive. Despite two millennia of theories about what those laws might be, from Aristotle to the present day, we are still a long way from grasping what actually happens when a reader understands a literary text, or whether literary texts perform specific functions that set them apart from other texts. Moreover, the empirical study of these questions has only just begun; we have seen just a handful of studies in the last ten to twenty years -- a few in Europe, somewhat more in North America. Many of these, however, are concerned with literary education rather than the process of the reader's response to literature (Klemenz-Belgardt, 1981).

We are especially concerned with the relations between defamiliarization, feeling, and personal perspectives and meanings. Although these relations have received almost no empirical study, we believe they are fundamental to the distinctively literary mode of comprehension. Our approach has led us to formulate some principles that build on a tradition initiated by the Romantic theorists at the beginning of the 19th Century, especially Coleridge, and continued by the theorists of the Russian Formalist group and the Prague Linguistic Circle in the earlier part of the 20th Century. In this tradition, a significant role is given both to defamiliarization and to feeling. We see our research as an extension of this tradition: at its centre is the elaboration of a theoretical and empirically testable model of literary response, guided by the work of these several generations of literary theorists. The main purpose of the present paper is to discuss some of the central contrasts between text theories and defamiliarization theory, in the hope that workers in the text theory tradition will modify and develop their tools of analysis to take account of the distinctive problems of understanding literary response.

Text Theories: the Example of Kintsch (1988)

One of the scholars whose work in the text theory tradition has been highly productive and whose theory continues to evolve is Walter Kintsch. In this section we briefly examine his most recent proposal, the Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1988). This will provide a specific theoretical example with which to compare our claims about the distinctive processes of literary understanding. Our comparison will indicate that a complete theory of literary understanding should include several major features not dealt with in Kintsch's theory. At the linguistic level, we will show that stylistic properties distinctive to literary language such as phonemic or grammatical deviation must be taken into account. At the conceptual level, the local and global meanings mentioned by Kintsch must be supplemented by affective, imaginal, and personal meanings that readers bring to a literary text, prompted in part by their response to the stylistic features.

Kintsch's model of text understanding was developed partly in response to problems with top-down approaches based on scripts, frames, or schemata. Such approaches, Kintsch notes, are neither smart enough nor sufficiently flexible (cf. Miall, 1989). In contrast he proposes a bottom-up process, a construction system that generates a number of potentially relevant elements, and an integration system that strengthens appropriate elements and weakens or discards inappropriate ones. An interpretive structure is generated as it is needed. The model presupposes that meaning is represented in an associative network of propositional elements, containing both positive and negative connections between its elements (p. 164). His current model, however, differs significantly from earlier conceptions (e.g., van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983), as he notes: "It does not require that the right, and only the right, proposition always be formed. Instead, the construction rules for building propositions can be weakened, allowing for the formation of incomplete or

'wrong' propositions." The latter are then weeded out "on-line" as comprehension proceeds (p. 166). Thus, where in the previous model "a single proposition was formed, a whole cluster is generated now" (p. 180). This certainly provides more promising ground for considering literary comprehension, where it is apparent that specific textual features are often the focus of several (often conflicting) interpretations (cf. Empson, 1930/1961).

However, the several interpretations that emerge during readings of literary texts are not always those "immediate associates and semantic neighbors" that constitute the "core meaning" of concepts (Kintsch, 1988, p. 165). Rather, stylistic features of literary texts engage the reader in a manner that often evokes less "immediate," less familiar, and less prototypic meanings. This process of defamiliarization involves feelings in a way that is not characteristic of non-literary texts -- even non-literary texts that explicitly refer to emotion (e.g., a newspaper account of an angry argument). Stylistic features of literary texts invite a kind of felt engagement with the text that alters the interpretive possibilities available to the reader. Moreover, the feelings thus invoked are sustained and directed by a systematic and hierarchical use of stylistic features: this appears to be one of the hallmarks of literary texts, as we will mention in greater detail below. The nature of the process can be clarified by brief consideration of how two typical literary features, metaphor and alliteration, engage the reader and facilitate defamiliarization.

Perhaps the most common stylistic feature of literary texts is metaphor. In Lakoff's (1987) account, "natural" metaphors are those in which the source domain involves bodily experienced "kinesthetic schemas" (e.g., the container schema, with its interior, boundary, and exterior elements, is originally grounded in bodily experienced interiority, boundedness, and exteriority). When metaphorically transferred to a more abstract target domain (e.g., visual space), these kinesthetic schemas make salient some analogous aspects of the target domain (e.g., things go "out" of view). Kinesthetic schemas are involved in non-affective expressions, as in the container metaphor for visual space, but they are also pivotal ingredients of affective metaphors (e.g., when a person lets "out" her anger). Thus, when Roethke refers to the "sadness" of pencils, not only is that mood directly evoked, but so is the implicit kinesthetic schema that universally roots sadness in postural drooping. Implicitly, the sadness of pencils metaphorically transfers that droopy sense to those inanimate office objects. We suggest that many literary metaphors engage the attentive reader by activating such kinesthetic schemas.

This subtle bodily involvement in metaphors is echoed in another common element of literary style: alliteration. In fact, Fónagy (1989) has presented evidence that alliterations also may function as natural metaphors in the sense intended by Lakoff. For example, the sense that [k] is "harder" than [l] is dependent upon the kinesthetic and tactile schemas that are involved in their articulation. We suggest that many phonemic features engage the attentive reader by activating such articulatory schemas. In Roethke's passage, for example, the stoppage and release of the repeated plosive [p] metaphorically evokes muffling restraint -- and elaborates the metaphorically presented droopy inertia of the sad pencils.

Such stylistic devices (e.g., metaphor, alliteration) engage the reader's feelings and evoke less prototypic, more personal meanings. We suggest that, to the extent that feelings are self-referential, stylistically initiated involvement in a literary text will prompt personal readings; interpretations more likely will reflect individual variations in perspective and history. In response to Roethke's lines, for example, some readers will elaborate the "sadness of pencils" by remembering youthful impatience with lethargic pencils, pads, and paperweights; other readers will elaborate the meaning of these lines by recalling adult desk-weary discouragement and malaise, etc. Such diversity challenges Kintsch's model since the resulting text interpretations will not be among the "immediate associates and semantic neighbors" that constitute the "core meaning" of a concept.

This challenge to Kintsch's model should not be misunderstood; we are not arguing that the model is simply wrong; rather, his model fails to address the regularity with which readers' responses to stylistic features involve defamiliarization, feeling, and personal variations in interpretive response.

The generality of such reactions is suggested by evidence (e.g., Lakoff, Fónagy) that reactions to certain stylistic devices are dependent upon "natural" kinesthetic schemas. And, for an adequate theory of literary response, assessment of the generality of these reactions is no less daunting -- and no less important -- than determining the generality of the constructive or integrative processes proposed in text theories (e.g., Kintsch, 1988).

Although not simply wrong, Kintsch's model is limited in a way that should not be underestimated. If stylistic devices engage feelings and if feelings evoke imaginatively enriched personal perspectives and memories, literary response offers different kinds of "information" than the propositional representations discussed in Kintsch's model. Kintsch explicitly acknowledges that the representation of feeling, imagery, and personal memories is "less well understood" and hence difficult to integrate with his model of propositional representations (pp. 165-6). But, by not integrating feeling, imagery, and personal meanings into his framework, the model fails to address matters that are pivotal in understanding literary response.

To develop an adequate theory of literary response, it does not help to graft a speech act theory of style onto Kintsch's (1988) model. Although Kintsch's (1988) recent discussion did not mention style, van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) previously presented a view in which style provides supplementary information about the interaction context (e.g., speaker status) or about the speaker's evaluation of textual referents (e.g., statement importance). But this view remains limited because it fails to articulate how affective, imaginal, and personal reactions to style influence literary comprehension.

Similarly, to develop an adequate theory of literary response, it would not help to graft a hedonistic aesthetic theory onto Kintsch's (1988) model. Some text theorists (cf. Giora, 1990, but not Kintsch, 1988) suggest that stylistic devices capture attention, maintain interest, and add aesthetic appeal. This view is reminiscent of the aesthetic proposals of Berlyne (1971), according to whom stylistic complexity modulates interest, pleasure, and preference. But such an approach is limited because it envisages this component of response only as a supplement, avoiding articulation of how affective, imaginal, and personal reactions to style influence literary comprehension.

We can conclude this section with an example from Kintsch's article that highlights our concerns. In his first example ("Mary bakes a cake"), constructive "proposition building" involves assigning the roles of agent to *Mary* and object to *cake* and then checking that Mary is a person (p. 166). The immediate associative net for this sentence (shown in Kintsch's Figure 2) includes propositions to the effect that Mary likes to eat cakes, that baking means heat, and that baking can also apply to bricks, squash, or the action of the sun. Certain of these links will become weaker and disappear as text interpretation proceeds, while more relevant propositions are strengthened and elaborated. If this sentence were encountered in a literary context, however, several other forms of representation might become important in the construction process. The phrase "bakes a cake" contains both assonance in the [a] vowel and alliteration with the [k], which gives it an internal rhyme (phonemic representation). The metre of the sentence, with two trochees and the final stress on cake, also creates a potentially poetic effect (metrical representation). The hard feeling of the [k] sound, the tightly sequenced internal rhyme, and the sentence's metrical symmetry invite interpretive possibilities that would be ignored in a non-literary context. The feelings that mark engagement with these stylistic features may suggest, for example, the excessive "symmetry" of domestic activity and an image of Mary as instantiating a self-enclosed, even imprisoning, domestic stereotype. Alternatively, these stylistic features may prompt memories of situations in which such "symmetrical" domestic activities were as reliable and familiar as a mother's consistent warmth and care. Despite their individuality, such stylistically initiated and feeling-guided interpretations are affectively stronger and imaginatively richer than any of the mundane propositional links that Kintsch nominates. The example is, of course, artificial and exaggerated. Nevertheless, we propose that readers of actual literary texts rather often create representations as rich and as powerful as these in response to the moment by moment stylistic details of a short story or poem. A theoretical context in which text understanding can only involve prototypic propositional representations would seriously

misconstrue the nature of literary response. However, the generalizability of such text models to the literary domain is accepted by such authors as Schmidt (1982) and van Dijk (1979). Moreover, van Dijk, for example, and more recently Halász (1989), explicitly reject the position that literary comprehension is distinguished by response to style, dismissing the claims of the Russian Formalists and the Prague Linguistic Circle (an issue to which we will return).

In conclusion, we are arguing that a text theory, such as that of Kintsch (1988), must be supplemented at several different levels for an approach to literary response to have any chance of success. Such a theory must systematically describe the defamiliarizing effects of literature, take account of the feeling components of response to style, and explain how individual variations in literary comprehension come to be formed.

Defamiliarization Theory and Text Theory: Background

The general outline of an alternative to text theories has already been suggested in our discussion of Kintsch (1988). However, it is useful to embed this alternative historically in literary theory and simultaneously to articulate how it contrasts with text theories. The origins of defamiliarization theory may be found in the Romantic period, especially in Coleridge's (1817/1983) proposal that the purpose of literature is to overcome the automatic nature of normal, everyday perception. One aim of the poetry that he and Wordsworth wrote, he said, was

to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (Vol. II, p. 7)

Poetry thus overcomes custom, it defamiliarizes, and it restores feelings that were blunted or decayed. A similar position is presented in one of the founding documents of Russian Formalist criticism, the essay "Art as Technique" by Victor Shklovsky, published in 1917. Habitualization, said Shklovsky (1917/1965), devours life. He quotes a passage from Tolstoy's diary that shows Tolstoy suddenly becoming aware that he has been moving about his house like an automaton. Art exists, Shklovsky continues,

that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (p. 12)

Shklovsky and his co-workers underscored the significance of the literary device, by which was meant a range of features, many of them linguistic, that characterize literary texts and that initiate defamiliarization. The project of classifying these features and accounting for their effects was taken up in the following decades by the Prague Linguistic Circle, among whom the most influential members were Jakobson and Mukarovský.

But Shklovsky's essay already anticipates one of the major differences between theories in this tradition and modern text theories. In this essay Shklovsky attacked the notions of Herbert Spencer, a philosopher who also published a book on style in 1872. In a passage that Shklovsky cites, Spencer claimed that successful style has the effect of "economizing the reader's or the hearer's attention" and presenting ideas so "that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort" (Spencer, 1872, p. 11). On the contrary, Shklovsky argued: the function of style in literature is to challenge familiar economies of comprehension and to enrich perception.

Modern text theories are based on a postulate similar to Spencer's: that the function of style is to economize comprehension. In general, text theories describe a resource-limited system in which cognitive structures (e.g., story grammars) or procedures (e.g., integrating processes) economize comprehension by deleting irrelevant propositions, inferring relevant propositions, and building macro-propositions. The economizing effects of these structures and procedures per se are substantiated by an impressive body of empirical studies that range from word recognition to story recall. However, whether the stylistic features of literary texts also have economizing effects is the issue that separated Shklovsky and Spencer and which separates contemporary text theory from defamiliarization theory. According to defamiliarization theory, literary texts reverse the economizing effects of story grammars, schemata, etc. The distinctive stylistic variations in literary texts *complicate* comprehension by challenging the familiar, prototypic concepts that readers initially apply to the text (see Table 1, where we list this and the other main contrasts between the theories that we will be discussing).

TABLE 1
Contrasting Aspects of Text Theory and Defamiliarization Theory

Aspect	Text Theory	Defamiliarization
Basic Thesis	Style economizes comprehension	Style complicates and enriches comprehension
Exemplary Texts	Minimal stylistic variation in Essays, Stories	Maximal stylistic variation in Stories, Poems
Responses to Style	Stylistic features are transformed into familiar prototypic concepts	Stylistic features engage feelings, cause defamiliarization, and evoke non-prototypic concepts
Subjective Emphasis	Discussion value	Strikingness
Mnemonic Resources	General world knowledge	Personal perspectives and memories
Integrative Strategy	Building macro-propositions	Affective amplification
Outcome	Theme or gist	Alternative perspective on world, self
Reader Differences	Incidental	Fundamental

Text theories and defamiliarization theory also differ in the typical discourse examples that are selected for study. In text theories, which deny special characteristics to literary texts, exemplary texts are those that present a normal sequence of narrative or expository propositions. Such texts, usually simple stories or short essays, may be understood as a complex of more-or-less coherently related propositions. The economies by which irrelevant propositions are deleted, relevant propositions inferred, and macro-propositions built, dominate theories of comprehension in this domain. On the other hand, in defamiliarization theory, where the special characteristics of literary texts are acknowledged, exemplary texts are those that present complexes of propositions using various literary devices. The meanings of these texts, such as short stories or poems, are understood

only when literary devices such as alliteration, metaphor, etc., are taken into account. Within this domain, economies of comprehension do not dominate; rather it is the effects of stylistic devices on defamiliarization, feeling, and individual variations in interpretation that are critical.

The two approaches also provide contrasting descriptions of how readers respond to literary devices. In text theory, both literary and non-literary discourse are regarded as amenable to the same interpretive processes (van Dijk, 1979, p. 151). Features such as literary devices are regarded as "surface structures" that are transformed into propositions and then subjected to the same interpretive operations (deletion, inference, construction) as other propositions (van Dijk, 1979, p. 149). In contrast, in defamiliarization theory, literary discourse presents different interpretive possibilities than nonliterary discourse, precisely because literary devices evoke feelings, defamiliarization, and an enriched mode of response. Coleridge (1817/1983) speaks of these effects in pointing to the interconnected nature of features in poetic diction. Given that metre has been used, this "not only dictates, but of itself tends to produce, a more frequent employment of picturesque and vivifying language, than would be natural in any other case" (Vol. II, p. 65). Moreover, he adds, metre "tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention" (p. 66). Similarly, Mukarovský (1977) remarks,

When used poetically, words and groups of words evoke a greater richness of images and feelings than if they were to occur in a communicative utterance. A word always expresses a richer meaning in poetry than in communication. (p. 73)

Common stylistic devices, such as alliteration or assonance, help to create this effect, and hence enrich the meaning of individual words. As Mukarovský puts it:

the linking of words through euphonic resemblance causes the meanings of words connected in this way to be reflected in one another, to be reciprocally enriched by clusters of images which are not proper to any of them if used outside of this given euphonic association. (p. 75)

One of the central functions of literary language is thus to loosen, or to put in question, the normal relationship between the diction of the text and the referents of the words used. This is the *poetic function* to which Jakobson (1987) refers: The Poetic Function "deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects." (p. 70).

Following Mukarovský (1932/1964, p. 19), we refer to the literary devices that evoke these distinctive interpretive processes as foregrounding (*aktualisace*). As indicated in Table 2, foregrounding includes departures from normal language use at the phonemic level (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), at the grammatical level (e.g., ellipsis, repeated phrase structure), and at the semantic level (e.g., metaphor, oppositions). Table 2 also draws attention to a feature noted by van Peer (1986) and others: in comparison with normal language, foregrounding devices attract attention either because they deviate from the norm as single occurrences (such as a metaphor) or because they create a pattern of recurrences or parallels (such as alliteration). But, Table 2 does not capture the full complexity of foregrounding because, as Mukarovský points out (and as we mentioned earlier), foregrounding actually occurs in a structured form: in literary texts, it is both systematic and hierarchical (Mukarovský, 1964, p. 20). In other words, a literary text will characteristically deploy the same set of foregrounding devices and, at the same time, be dominated by one device in particular (such as a pattern of alliteration or an extended metaphor). Structured foregrounding, we surmise, is one of the features that not only distinguishes literary from non-literary texts, but also helps forge the sense of a particular text's unique identity. Kintsch's (1988) account suggests that at the situation level the meaning of a text dissolves into a larger network of propositional representations (p. 163). We maintain, however, that structured foregrounding enables a literary text to retain its identity and uniqueness for readers, an identity that readers often discern but cannot clearly explain.

TABLE 2
Types of Foregrounding Classified by Level and Type

	deviation	parallelism
phonemic	consonance metrical deviation enjambment	assonance, alliteration metrical repetition rhyme: at line-ends, internal
grammatical	inversion ellipsis	phrase structure repeated syntactic repetitions
semantic	unusual words metaphor, simile metonymy oxymoron, irony	recurrent words or synonyms oppositions arguments ('as', 'so', &c)

Apart from a study by van Peer (1986), and some related work on narrative features (called *discourse evaluations*) by Hunt and Vipond (1986),¹ foregrounding has received little experimental attention, perhaps because foregrounding has been dismissed as an intrinsic feature of literary texts. According to Schmidt (1982), for example, a reader processes a given text as literature only as the result of a set of extrinsically given conditions. Schmidt states that "the surface text is not aesthetic in itself until a participant judges it as such" (p. 49), and he regards attempts to locate attributes of literariness in the surface features of a text as an "ontological fallacy" (p. 90). This rejection of a long tradition in literary theory and analysis seems premature, especially since foregrounding offers a range of potentially significant features for empirical study. For example, that foregrounding occurs more frequently in literary texts than in ordinary texts can be demonstrated statistically (e.g., Dolezel, 1969). Also, the generality of readers' responses to foregrounding has yet to be determined empirically. Thus, we will continue our contrast of text theories and defamiliarization theory, but now with more detailed consideration of how readers actually respond to foregrounded text.

Text Theory and Defamiliarization Theory: Empirical Relations

Since foregrounded expressions depart from normal language use, their novelty captures and holds the reader's attention. In a story we have studied, for example, the first sentence reads: "One of the first places that Julia always ran to when they arrived in G--- was the Dark Walk." In the words "Dark Walk" both the capitalization and alliteration may be expected to capture and hold readers' attention. Recently, we documented the correlation between foregrounding and the duration of attention (Miall and Kuiken, 1994). We divided the short story that includes the sentence about the "Dark Walk" into segments of about one sentence in length. The story, "The Trout" by Sean O'Faolain, consists of 84 such segments. We analysed each segment for foregrounded features (phonemic, grammatical, and semantic) and from these counts derived a foregrounding index for each segment. We then presented the story, segment by segment, to a series of readers on a computer screen; while they read the text at their normal speed, the computer recorded reading times for each segment. After controlling for individual differences in reading speed, for gradual increases in speed, and for segment length, we found a significant correlation between foregrounding and mean reading time, $r(82) = .45, p < .001$. Granted the usual qualifications regarding correlation and causation, these data are consistent with the hypothesis that foregrounding captures and holds readers' attention while they reinterpret a defamiliarized text segment.

Of course, this same correlation might be expected by text theorists because of the time necessary to transform stylistic features into propositional form. According to defamiliarization theory, however, attention is held by foregrounded text because the readers' feelings are engaged by these stylistic variations and because prolonged attention allows feeling guided formation of non-prototypic

conceptions of the phenomena referred to in the text. For example, the foregrounded features of a phrase like "the Dark Walk" evoke feelings that suggest alternative meanings. The unusual capitalization may suggest that Julia is not just visiting a favourite place but an honoured, "named" place; at the same time, the metaphoric potential of *dark*, and perhaps the hard [k] alliteration, offer a hint of something ominous. In these ways the walk to which Julia ran in O'Faolain's story becomes multi-faceted -- semantically enriched but ambiguous in a way that the reader will find striking.

Thus, as Coleridge and Shklovsky anticipated, the momentarily held attention, the feeling engagement, and the suggestion of alternative interpretations prompts interpretive suspense -- at least among readers attuned to the presence of foregrounding (a question we take up further below). This expectation contrasts with that provided by text theories according to which the duration of attention to foregrounded passages allows transformation of the foregrounded text into explicitly discussable propositional form. From this perspective, momentarily held attention, transformation of foregrounding into propositions, and further interpretation of these propositions should result in greater clarity about the meanings that can be recalled and discussed with others. We were able to compare these expectations in our study of the O'Faolain story by examining ratings that different groups of readers made of the story segments. After the timed first reading, one group of readers reread the story to rate segments according to how striking they were. We found that, as expected from defamiliarization theory, mean strikingness ratings correlated with foregrounding, $r(82) = .37$, $p < .01$. This finding, incidentally, confirms two previous reports (Hunt and Vipond, 1985; van Peer, 1986).

According to defamiliarization theory, the elaboration of richly ambiguous interpretations in response to foregrounding is guided by feeling partly because of kinesthetic components of natural metaphors (Lakoff, 1987), kinesthetic and tactile components of phonemic articulation (Fónagy, 1989), and so forth. Moreover, the elaboration of interpretations is also guided by feeling in that less familiar, less prototypic interpretations are more likely to involve personal perspectives and memories. In general, then, readers' responses to foregrounded text are likely to involve affect. Confirmation of this hypothesis was obtained from another group of readers who rated story segments for the extent to which they evoked affect: we found that mean affect ratings correlated with foregrounding, $r(82) = .35$, $p < .01$. As Shklovsky noted, stylistic devices in literary texts "emphasize the emotional effect of an expression" (Shklovsky, 1917/1965, p. 9).

Also after the first reading, another group of readers rated the segments for discussion value, i.e., how much discussion would be required to convey to others the meaning of a segment. No significant relationship between foregrounding and discussion value was found, $r = .11$, suggesting that an immediate discursive account of stylistic meanings is not available to readers of a literary text. The observed relationship between foregrounding and strikingness but not between foregrounding and discussion value substantiates a distinction we make between the interpretive suspense that occurs in response to foregrounding and the uncertainty or confusion that accompanies failure to elaborate an explicitly discussible text interpretation. Generally, text theories emphasize the reader's *uncertainty* about explicitly recallable meanings, whereas defamiliarization theory emphasizes the reader's affective experience of the *ambiguity* presented by multifaceted meanings.

Given the structure of foregrounding in literary texts, we propose that, as reading continues, the affective meanings associated with foregrounding provide the basis for interpretive integration. Perhaps, somewhat as in mood-congruent remembering, readers will begin to relate passages that offer similar affective meanings. Experienced readers will also begin to anticipate the recurrence and development of certain affective meanings, perhaps only as imprecise intuitions at first, but increasingly explicitly as these recurrences accumulate (for some preliminary evidence of these processes, see Miall, 1989, 1990).

Because affect guides reinterpretation and interpretive integration, the response to foregrounding in

literary texts will also involve the reader's repertoire of mood congruent, affectively significant personal memories; it will, in other words, implicate the reader's self-concept (Larsen and Seilman, 1988; Miall, 1986). In a think-aloud study of the O'Faolain story, we have obtained some preliminary evidence that foregrounded passages evoke personal memories. For example, the highly foregrounded second sentence of the story, which describes the "Dark Walk" as "almost gone wild, a lofty midnight tunnel of smooth, sinewy branches," elicited this memory from one of the readers:

I like this sentence . . . it provokes a feeling of eeriness. One can almost just imagine . . . a pathway with trees hanging over. It reminds me of . . . a pathway through the bush at my parents' farm. It's wide enough to drive through but the trees are hanging over and the grass is tall and it's very natural, like grown wild.

Defamiliarization and Literary Response

Readers thus notice foregrounded passages in literary texts: they take longer to read such passages, they find them striking, and they rate them as affectively involving. From the evidence of our own and previous studies, it is possible to put together a sketch of the interpretive processes that are distinctive to literary response. First, it seems clear that most readers, though aware that they are reading a literary text, attempt to understand the text using prototypic concepts: this enables the text to be located within some existing domain of the readers's understanding. A bottom-up process of word and sentence interpretation takes place, with several prototypic propositions being activated, much as Kintsch's (1988) model suggests. At the same time, however, responses to foregrounded passages challenge the adequacy of readers' immediate, prototypic understandings. The feelings engaged in response to foregrounding guide alternative interpretations: these feelings offer an avenue to a rich set of alternative meanings that may be more persuasive than the prototypic propositional structure. Even if not immediately persuasive, readers may gradually begin to relate passages that offer a similar feeling, perhaps as a result of the recurring patterns of foregrounding that are found throughout the text (termed *parallelism* by Jakobson, 1987, p. 82). Thus, the reader begins to anticipate the likely meaning of the text. At first that meaning may be present only as an imprecise feeling, but, as it becomes more defined, it will go beyond any of the prototypic conceptions that initially were applied (see Miall, 1989, 1990, for more detailed accounts; cf. Meutsch and Schmidt, 1985, who refer to changes in "frames of reference").

As mentioned earlier, response to foregrounding of the kind we have outlined depends upon the assumption that all readers are sensitive to foregrounded features. Van Peer (1986, p. 120) provides evidence that such sensitivity appears to be independent of literary training or experience: his readers noted the presence of foregrounding in poetry whether they had received academic training in stylistics or had had no university level teaching in literature. This is an issue that requires further empirical study. With regard to the bodily or kinaesthetic components of response, called for in our conception of the effects of phonemic and metrical features of style, it seems likely that readers will vary in sensitivity: individual differences that are known to exist in other sensory modes, such as visual or aural imagery, are also likely to exist here. In principle, however, we expect some commonality among responses to a literary text, since foregrounding often seems to occur in a highly clustered form: a given passage will contain features at all three levels (phonemic, grammatical, and semantic). Thus, a reader who is relatively insensitive to phonemic foregrounding, for instance, will still respond to features at the other levels. It is also probable that across longer sequences of a literary text, readers respond cumulatively to features that they would not be able to recognize and isolate singly. As Coleridge noted (1817/1983) in speaking of metre (but his remarks seem generalizable to other aspects of foregrounding): its effects on the reader "are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate influence" (Vol. II, p. 66).

We argue, therefore, that readers will in general find foregrounded text striking and respond

affectively to the foregrounding in texts. As a result, readers will also generally relate the same passages across a text, impelled by the parallelism of foregrounding. However, because defamiliarization involves feeling, readers may then vary considerably in the individual perspectives and memories they bring to bear on the text. Thus readers often differ markedly in the meanings they report. In this respect the differences between readers are at least as significant as their commonalities. The emotional power of literary texts, facilitated by their defamiliarizing properties, speaks especially to what is individual in the reader. We read literary texts because they enable us to reflect on our own commitments and concerns: to discover better what they are, to reconfigure them, to place the ideas we have about our aims and identity in a different perspective. The differences between readers are thus not incidental to literary response; they are fundamental.

In conclusion, we have argued that understanding response to literary texts requires a different approach: theories developed in studies of normal prose are too limited for the purpose, even where these are supplemented by attention to affective elements of structure, plot, or content (e.g., Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1982; Lenhert and Vine, 1987; Hidi and Baird, 1986). But we also suggest that studying literary response offers the opportunity to explore the functions and processes of feeling, and to do so with a richness and complexity, and with an ecological validity, that is perhaps unavailable elsewhere. Research in this field may cast light not only on readers' responses to literary style, but also on the little understood means by which the distinctive language of literature fosters changes in the way we understand our personal life-worlds.

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Note

1. Hunt and Vipond (1986) described *evaluations* as features of a narrative that stand out against the "locally established norm" of the text; they are said to invite the reader to share the narrator's "beliefs, values, and attitudes." The term *discourse evaluations* refers to stylistic features. Although this term thus corresponds quite closely to our sense of the term *foregrounding*, we see foregrounding as having wider implications. First, we argue that foregrounded passages often stand out not just against a "local norm" but against the "norm" of all nonliterary uses of language. Second, readers may respond to foregrounding in other ways than to construct values: They may reflect on sensory qualities of the language in itself; they may reconstrue a familiar referent; they may evoke images, recall autobiographical memories, or consider the relation of this text to other texts. But perhaps more important, when considering the position of Hunt and Vipond, we would

suggest that literary texts seem to call for the construction of values less often than they challenge familiar perspectives, values, and assumptions.

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