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Summary

Difficulties in understanding and accounting for literary reading in three different disciplinary contexts – literary theory, psychology, and education – lead us to consider changes in fundamental assumptions. Specifically, the hypothesis that such reading is better understood as a social transaction than a cognitive process is suggested by recent research whose methods allow for pragmatic aspects of reading processes to be observed. Offering readers actual published texts rather than experimenter-constructed artifacts and conducting "discourse-based interviews" allows some readers to engage in reading differently than is usually observable in experimental situations. This has important implications for all three disciplinary contexts.

Zusammenfassung

Schwierigkeiten des Verstehens und Erklärens literarischen Lesens im Rahmen von drei verschiedenen Disziplinen – Literaturtheorie, Psychologie, Pädagogik – führen zu Überlegungen, grundlegende Annahmen zu verändern. Neuere Untersuchungen mit Methoden, die es ermöglichen, pragmatische Aspekte von Leseprozessen zu beobachten, begründen vor allem die Hypothese, solches Lesen eher als soziale Transaktion denn als kognitiven Prozeß anzusehen. Bietet man nämlich Lesern Texte in ihrer tatsächlich veröffentlichten Gestalt und nicht als für Experimentierzwecke präparierte Artefakte an, und führt man "diskurs-orientierte Interviews" durch, so stellt man fest, daß manche Leser anders damit umgehen, als es gewöhnlich in Experimentieruntersuchungen der Fall ist. Daraus sind wichtige Schlußfolgerungen für alle drei Disziplinen zu ziehen.

PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF LITERARY READING (1)

Russell A. Hunt

There are three disciplinary contexts – literary, psychological, and educational – in which it is, I believe, particularly important to consider the reading of literature as an activity which people perform, like other language activities, in order to participate in immediate social situations and processes. Such a view can be contrasted with a more traditional model of literary reading as a private, individual, aesthetically pure act, disconnected from practical social considerations and everyday life. Considering the potential analogies between someone's reading of a story or novel or poem and her everyday uses of written (and oral) language offers, I contend, some important new perspectives from which to think about literature, and about each of these three disciplinary contexts. And it is not of course, merely coincidence that they also happen to be the three contexts out of which my own personal involvement with research into reading, and specifically the reading of literature, arose.

One way to illustrate the connections between such a way of thinking and those contexts might be to describe some of the problems I have encountered in each area, and to suggest some of the ways in which the analogizing of literary understanding with other social uses of language seems helpful in dealing with those problems. The three contexts, then, are (1) literary theory and criticism, (2) the psychological study of reading and language learning and use, and (3) educational theory and practical pedagogy. My own understanding of each of them has undergone in recent years what Kuhn (1970) might have called a "paradigm crisis," in which previously accepted fundamental tenets

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came into serious question. I think my experience is, if not typical, at least not uncommon, and that a description of it may have some general relevance.

1. In the realm of literary theory and criticism, it has seemed to me in recent years increasingly difficult to justify to myself either of the two kinds of activity in which, as a practicing literary scholar, I found myself engaged. One is the continuing production of new interpretations of canonical works and writers (e.g., Hunt, 1975), a practice which survives in the face of devastating attacks, dating from at least as early as Susan Sontag's first salvo in 1963 (Sontag, 1966). Jonathan Culler has remarked, for instance, that "there are many tasks that confront criticism, many things that we need if we are to advance our understanding of literature, but if there is one thing we do not need it is more interpretations of literary works" (1976: 246). Even more recently, skepticism about the role of interpretation has been expressed by Terry Eagleton (1983) and even, as Newton (1986) points out, by as conservative a figure as E. D. Hirsch (1982).

The second practice is the continuing elaboration of literary theory as an end in itself, a complex and often brilliant intellectual exercise, but one which I (and, of course, many others) have questioned as abdicating "responsibility to what might be called the social question of the humanities" (Goodheart, 1983:468), if not as self-regarding and self-indulgent (cf. Lentricchia, 1983; Eagleton, 1983; Mitchell, 1986; Kamuf, 1986; Hunt, 1987, in press b).

In both cases a central argument is that in practice these are essentially circular and self-perpetuating activities: one new inter- pretation seems not to build on and correct another, but simply to offer yet another alternative; one new theory does not cause among responsible practitioners, as a new scientific theory might, a "para- digm shift" (Kuhn, 1970), or even a rethinking of other, inconsistent ideas; rather it seems simply to engender more alternative theories. More immediately and practically, it seemed to me that these activi- ties offered nothing to my own teaching practice; perhaps even more ˆ seriously, I saw them as fostering an attitude toward literature as a special and different kind of language, a set of texts (in the case of

interpretive criticism) or practices (in the case of theory) which had no practical consequences whatever, which existed in the realm of purely aesthetic experience and purely intellectual contemplation. Such a view of literature might conceivably be accurate, but I preferred not to accept it, especially after I discovered Mary Louise Pratt's convincing argument (1977) that "literary" texts did not differ from other texts in any linguistically definable way. Since reading that book, if not before, I have been actively interested in discovering alternative approaches to understanding literature and literary experience.

2. This interest in alternatives led me - as such interests have led many other literary scholars (e.g., Schmidt, 1983; Harker, in press) - to consider what other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology or social psychology might have to offer to an attempt to understand the nature of literary experience. It turned out, however, that the kind of work which dominated such fields often concerned the reading of fragmentary or trivial or synthetic texts (isolated words flashed by a tachistoscope, or "reading test texts," or "stories" written to embody certain arbitrary characteristics) in peculiar circumstances (with one's head locked in a frame and an infrared beam bouncing off one's eyeball, or off a CRT in a reading lab, with instructions to remember as much as possible). Such work, like traditional literary interpretation, continues, in spite of attacks by figures like Beaugrande (1980, 1987) and Bleich (1984).

The fundamental problem with such work from my own perspective has been that it has seemed to concern itself with a kind of reading which was unrelated to my central concern - the sort of reading my students were doing or which I myself was doing. It was focused on creating mechanical processes which might emulate the logic of reading (e.g., Gough, 1972; La Berge & Samuels, 1974, 1977), or it was concerned with how text structure affected what people remembered (e.g., Meyers, 1975), or it concerned how people processed, understood and remembered artificially constructed or simplified "stories" (e.g., Rumelhart, 1975; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; van Dijk, 1980), or, as Kintsch & Vipond (1979) point out, with evaluating texts for "readability." It seemed so rare as to be unheard of for this empirical

work, valuable as it might be, to concern itself with the reading of authentic, whole texts in non-laboratory situations (Hoppe-Graff & Schell, 1988). As Beaugrande (1987:56) observes, "So far, most psychologists who have used texts rather than word lists or isolated sentences have preferred non-literary samples of narrative and expository discourse"; and, as Larsen and Seilman (1987) observe, the texts which psychologists synthesize are usually "lousy stories." Such work was easily caricatured as studies of the processing of what I have called "textoids" (Hunt, in press a). And while it offered me some interesting analogies to things it seemed my students or I might be doing, I was not convinced that the reading it was focused on wasn't a fundamentally different activity from the kind of reading I was interested in.

3. At the same time, I was becoming aware of work on reading being done in the context of concern for education and learning. And even though this work often seemed more relevant to my own concerns (this was especially true in the case of Frank Smith (1982) and Kenneth Goodman (1982), it tended to be most often focused on reading that occurred among young and learning readers and in school situations, and on reading in order to learn facts and information or, at best, to write formal interpretive essays on literature (e.g., Purves & Rippere, 1968). Again, it seemed to me that such motives for reading, while related to the situation in which my students found themselves, might help us understand only reading done in the artificial context of school. It seemed to me at least plausible that the classroom context was as inauthentic, and produced a reading as different from "real" reading, as what might occur in reading laboratories.

It was against this conceptual background, then, that my colleague Doug Vipond (in collaboration with whom all my work in reading study has been done) began to attempt to find out more than seemed known about what happens when people read literature. Our basic research question could be phrased as having three components: What do (1) actual people do when they read (2) literary texts in (3) authentic or "naturally occurring" situations? We wanted, in general, to avoid what we saw as the typical methodological weaknesses of the three contexts I have described.

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Further, we were convinced that the basic research strategies had to be empirical. We wanted, not the results of introspection into our own reading processes (though we have done that) nor the results of abstract theory building (though we've done that as well), but rather observable data that might be subject to intersubjective verification. We also wanted our studies to reflect what readers did with authentic texts in "naturally-occurring" situations – that is, it was our attempt to generate real readings – and not professional readings, or "student-style" "learn from text" tasks.

At first we used traditional experimental and quantitative (statistical) strategies. Our earliest studies (e.g., Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Hunt & Vipond, 1986) involved, for instance, more than 250 readings of short stories (primarily John Updike's "A & P"). We used various strategies in an attempt to discover what was going on behind the silence of our readers. We tape recorded, coded, and quantified oral protocols. We taped readers explaining, during the reading, their choices between various "branches" of the text in which alternative continuations were presented. We taped, coded, and quantified protocols from retrospective interviews (particularly from responses to "probes," or things we told readers had been said about the stories by other readers). We kept records of the time it took readers to read various sections of the stories. We used various devices to ascertain what readers noted while reading and remembered after reading.

The basic findings from this reasonably traditional sort of research led us to posit three different modes of reading. It seemed to us that each of our readings could be categorized as predominantly guided and shaped by one of three sets of purposes or intentions. We have described these categories elsewhere at some length (Vipond and Hunt, 1984; Hunt & Vipond, 1986), so here I will merely sketch them.

> (1) information-driven reading: when this mode of reading is dominant, the reader's overriding purpose is to acquire information from the text. It is similar to what Rosenblatt (1938) has called "efferent" reading, in that the reader's intention is to ⌐ "carry something away" from the text.

(2) <u>story-driven</u> <u>reading</u>: in a situation where this mode is dominant, the reader's overriding purpose is to be engaged in a story-world, to imagine the world as fully as practicable and to treat its characters and events in a way parallel to how those characters and events would be treated were they real. The readers of romances described by Radway (1984) seem normally to engage in this kind of reading.

(3) <u>point-driven</u> <u>reading</u>: in a situation dominated by this mode, a reader's central purpose is not to identify and remember facts, nor to live through the vicarious experience; rather it is to be engaged with the text as discourse, in a way which seems to be very similar to how, in conversation, we seem to attend to oral stories (cf. Labov, 1972; Polanyi, 1985; Tannen, 1984). We expect the discourse to be, in Labov's terms, "pointed"; we think that the teller probably has a comprehensible reason for uttering this discourse, and that that reason will probably be socially relevant. Accordingly, we treat information and events as subordinate to such purposes, and look for shared "evaluations" (Labov, 1972; Polanyi, 1979) embedded in the text by an intending author.

This work also led us to believe that which of these three modes is predominant in a given instance of reading (or at given moment during a reading) is not a matter that is determined in a simple way. Rather, it is the outcome of a complex <u>transaction</u> (in the sense defined by Dewey and Bentley, 1949; see also Vipond & Hunt, 1988) between three kinds of influence. It is not, that is, simply a matter of what the <u>reader</u> "decides," or, less directly, a function of the reader's habits, background, expectations and knowledge. Nor is it a matter of a <u>text</u> determining how it must be read or even – as Eco has proposed – telling you that "you cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it" (1979:9). As Rosenblatt (1969, 1985) has suggested, each transaction with text is in important ways unique, occurring not only between one reader and one text, but also in one unique situation. Some ways in which the three influences might transact with each other (and thus prevent us from ever understanding any one specific instance of one of them outside the context

of its relations with specific instances of the others) can be illustrated briefly, adapting the idea of "affordance" from James J. Gibson's (1979) theory of "ecological" perception.

1. First consider the text. It would seem, for instance, that a text such as a telephone book or a copy of Books in Print must have characteristics that push readers toward reading it in an "information-driven" way. But the only way we can know that it has such characteristics is that people in fact usually do read it in such ways – in practice, that is, it appears to "afford" such reading. It is, however, clearly conceivable that a certain reader in a certain situation might read the telephone book for other reasons than to take away a number – read it for evidence of the aims and intentions and values of the telephone company, for example, or read part of it which had been "framed" as a "found poem" (and thus as presented or authorized by someone other than the telephone company). Or consider, at the other end of the spectrum, a modernist text such as Italo Calvino's If on a Winter Night a Traveler – or even an almost traditional John Updike story like "A & P." Such a text may "afford" a reading whose aim is to "make contact" with a speaker or author in an immediately social way, to share evaluations and understandings with that real or imagined person; but, obviously it can also be read for a vicarious experience of an imagined story world or – as Louise Rosenblatt (1938) first pointed out – efferently, as a source of facts and propositions and information to be acquired and remembered. What the text "is," above the level of black marks on a white page, is determined by how it is read, which is a function of the reader and the situation.

2. Similarly, it might be expected that a given reader, as Norman Holland (1976, 1985) or David Bleich (1975, 1978) have argued, unilaterally determines the nature of the transaction in any given instance, bringing to bear on the experience her own preceonceptions, expectations, abilities and habits as a student, a habitual reader, a habitual non-reader, a professional, or whatever, pretty much regardless of the nature of the text. Yet it can be observed, in practice, that some texts actually are usually read in certain ways, and that some situations do affect the ways in which readers act. Investigation of the ways in which readers' concepts of literature and views

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of themselves as participants in the social systems organized around literature affect their reading (e.g., Meutsch and Schmidt, 1985; Meutsch, 1987, in press) also make clear that a reader's activity is profoundly affected by her social position and role.

3. And finally, the situation - both the larger social situation and the immediate physical and social context (the classroom, the laboratory, a testing situation, a living room; a text is issued by an institution or offered by a friend) - plays a role in the way a reader will act in reading. But, again, this role is not a simply defined one: situations which an observer might think of as "the same" will be perceptually constructed by different readers in radically different ways, and will thus affect the reading of different texts in different ways.

All of this can be understood as merely an attempt to stipulate as many consequences as possible of saying that any instance of reading is, and thus can only be comprehended as, a transaction. The process of generalizing about reading is, as we came slowly to understand, far more complex than we had expected. But as we struggled to understand our results, the pattern I have just described emerged as a conceptual frame which seemed to us to begin to account for them.

It was clear, however, that the broad categories of reading we identified, and the general patterns we saw among the entities we had identified as fundamental, all might be subject to a great deal more analysis. If there were differences between what a reader was doing when she was driven mainly by the desire to acquire information and when her intention was to participate in construction of evaluations and points, what - specifically, operationally - were they? If which of these she does is subject to the influence of the situation, what elements of situations might be salient to which readers and which texts? We decided that the most immediate question had to do with the nature of point-driven reading, which seemed to us to be the kind of reading typical of readers engaged successfully with "literary" texts. Thus our new question became: can we refine the notion of "point-driven reading"? In what way is it, for example, personal or social in the sense which might be suggested by the analogy with conversa-

tional listening? This question was not one we had been eager to ask.

For one thing, it was one which it seemed to me implicitly questioned many assumptions of the literary theory with which I was familiar. There was reason to think reading should not be personal in this sense, reason based not only on the assumptions of the New Criticism I had grown up with, but also on those of deconstruction and most other current literary theory, which have argued that literature is separate, aesthetic, private, and irrelevant to "authorial intention" (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954) and thus not to be seen to be seen as a social transaction in this sense.

It was also one which ran counter to some fundamental assumptions of psychological reading research, which offered reason to hope it wouldn't turn out to be social in this sense, partly because language processing must be separable from immediate social circumstances and goals (or else it becomes impossible to study by traditional psychological means).

And finally, it seemed to contradict some of the traditional assumptions of educational research and practice, which assumed that reading was a set of decontextualized cognitive skills, and learning was a process of acquiring information and "facts" which existed somehow "out there," prior to and separate from the educational context.

In spite of this, it seemed to us we were driven inexorably to investigate the possibility that when readers were reading texts they deemed "literary," – or, as Schmidt (in press) describes it, participated in the social system organized around literature – they were often reading in ways that could be closely analogized to the way they might participate in a conversation. And indeed, the more we thought about the question, the more it seemed we could focus it precisely by looking at specific aspects of conversational interaction. To what extent can we say that a point-driven reader is acting as though she were in a conversation? Can we say it at all? What does it mean and ⌐ entail to say it? Does it mean that she is engaged in a pragmatic transaction with another person? that she makes the same assumptions,

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employs the same comprehension strategies, and embraces the same social goals - that, in other words, she's trying to do the kinds of things that sociolinguists tell us (and that we know intuitively) participants in conversation are trying to do - to "make contact," to share what Labov and Polanyi call evaluations, to say "I think this is funny, I think that is bizarre, I think this is surprising and that is appropriate and that is outrageous"? Is that what these readers seemed to be doing? Were such readers sensitive to evaluations? Did they impute motives to a hypothetical "author"? Did they attempt to create and negotiate situationally relevant points?

In an attempt to explore these questions we were forced to come up with what was for us a new, more "ecologically sensitive" research strategy. Such "naturalistic" strategies are commonplace, of course, in many other areas of investigation, as Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Guthrie & Hall (1984) have pointed out. We decided to work with a greatly reduced number of readers, and try to put them in situations which were far less controlled and structured, and to examine the readers' activities and statements for regularities and patterns in the areas with which we were concerned. As Rubin (in press) has phrased it, we were prepared to trade control for regularity. Another consideration is one Andringa (in press) has explained elegantly: it seemed that if we were interested in literary reading, it was contrary and inconsistent to continue to insist on statistically "averaging down" to a mean, when what we were really concerned with was the creative, the individual, the unique.

So, for the purpose of unpacking the concept of "point-driven reading," we limited our readers to fifteen. In an attempt to get as wide a range of readers as was available to us, we chose five university freshmen, five good senior students, and five faculty members. The faculty members were drawn from various departments within the university -- not including literature departments, because while the sort of "professional" reading that often characterizes such readers is clearly of interest, it poses problems we preferred to postpone. We asked each of these readers to read four complete texts. Each was interviewed over a four hour period (divided into two hour sessions, separated by a few days). In each case, the reader read a text, had a

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conversation with our interviewer about it, and then read another. At
the end of the two-part session, they talked about the the whole
experience and went back to the individual texts for final comments
and wrapup. We attempted to make the physical situation as comfort-
able for the readers as possible by giving them an upholstered chair
and incandescent lighting and so forth, and by handing them the text
so that it was in their possession; further, our interviewer busied
himself with other work in another corner of the room while they read.
The interview itself was only semi-structured; the interviewer simply
tried to get the reader to say as much about the reading as possible
(for a fuller description of this study, see Vipond, Hunt, Jewett &
Reither, in press). The sessions were tape recorded and transcribed,
and then read and reread, by the participants and the interviewer as
well as the experimenters, looking for patterns among readers and
within readings - and particularly, on the experimenters' parts, for
evidence of the kinds of engagement which it seemed to us might typify
"point-driven" reading.

Two aspects of the method seem worth commenting on at some length
here. First, the texts - we discovered that this was even more im-
portant than we had had expected - were not presented as dot-matrix
printed "experimental texts," or on computer screens, or even as
photocopies; the readers were handed the actual publications in which
the texts had appeared, e.g., a commercially published book that some-
one might buy on a paperback rack (as opposed to an artificial text
that some university professor has chosen and possibly tampered with).
We used four texts. One was an unsigned "Talk of the Town" essay from
The New Yorker (McPhee, 1987); in this case the interviewer handed the
readers an actual July 6, 1987 issue of the magazine. Two others were
recently-published short stories by an author who taught on our campus
and lived in the local town (Thompson, 1986); in this case the readers
were handed a copy of Leaping Up, Sliding Away. The fourth story was
a parodic metafiction by Ursula Le Guin (Le Guin, (1982); readers were
handed a paperback copy of The Compass Rose.

Offering our participants the texts as they appeared in their ⌒
original venue was consistent with our general and longstanding
commitment to using "authentic" texts (as opposed to textoids), and

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was conceived of as a way to "advertise" that authenticity. It had, however, some methodologically interesting consequences. One of the strongest and most consistent kinds of distinctions we found between more and less pragmatically engaged readings is that the more engaged (or point-driven) readers tended to take aspects of the physical context – particularly, the nature of the actual publication – into account as likely to be relevant to the reading, while other readers seemed to assume that such concerns were unlikely to be relevant. They tended, that is, not to use the cues provided by the venue when thinking about matters such as the author, the date, the occasion, or the genre of the piece. Had our study presented these texts as uniform, unidentified, homogenized and disconnected examples of text – pamphlets printed by computer, for example, of the kind we have used in other research – it is clear that what turned out to be one of the most important differences between these kinds of readings could not have been observed.

This has, we believe, profound methodological implications for the study of reading – and not just for the study of "literary" or "aesthetic" reading. If, in constructing the reading occasion, the experimenters inadvertently block out of possibility important kinds of activities, they shouldn't be surprised that all their readers seem to do the same things. As Anne Freadman (1987) has pointed out in another context, a "pretend" tennis match does not afford the employ-ment of strategies and activities that a real one does.

Another methodologically important element of the strategy we used was the "discourse-based interview," a strategy devised by Odell and Goswami (1982; Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983) in order to study the tacit knowledge of writers. In it, the writer of a letter is shown her original expression along with one or more alternatives prepared by the researchers, and asked whether she would be willing to substitute the alternative for the original, and if not, why not. Often, in discussing reasons for their preference, writers reveal a knowledge of purpose and context that might otherwise go unnoticed – that might, specifically, go unnoticed by a writer in a "think-aloud ⌒ protocol," where what is articulated is primarily what comes to focal attention (Paré, 1988).

We adapted this strategy to the study of reading by offering readers several sets of alternatives to the original text, what we call "branches." The first branch was always the original sentence, and the other two were either paraphrases of the original or else semantically-altered versions. In our previous work, we had asked readers to pick the original, or choose the "best" or most appropriate one from among such branches, and while this strategy had been useful, it did not produce much explorative or revelatory talk from our readers. Arriving at such evaluations, it seems, tends to impose closure on discussion. Rather, they were asked something like, "Suppose alternative B were in the text instead of A. Would that make a difference to your reading?" We found that readers did tend to respond at greater length, and to explore their own views with greater openness. We also found that it afforded, from some readers at least, a kind of talk about texts which allowed deeper explorations than we had previously found attainable.

In general, then, we tried to create a situation which afforded (but did not – could not, of course – compel) point-driven reading. The readers were chosen to be a range, some of whom presumably were used to reading in such a way; the situation was, as far as possible, one which did not powerfully afford information-driven reading; and the texts were ones which it seemed to us afforded a range of readings – we expected, on the basis of our own readings of the texts, that the two short stories would afford both story-and point-driven reading more than information-driven; that the New Yorker essay would afford point- and information-driven reading more than story-driven; and that the Le Guin parody would strongly afford point-driven reading.

The transcribed interviews are still undergoing scrutiny. We have already found some interesting patterns among them, which I will not describe here in detail; we have done so elsewhere (Vipond, Hunt, Jewett & Reither, in press). Here I wish to stress what seem to me some patterns which suggest a good deal about the social nature of point-driven reading that our previous, more experimentally manipulative and statistical, methods had not allow us to see. As I have said, our primary purpose in this study was to unpack the some of the general notions we've outlined in previous work, and move toward new

and increasingly specific hypotheses to drive further exploration. Let me describe three of the ideas which seem to me most important, exploring one in particular at a little more length.

I think the data shows that there are indeed some regularities among readers who are engaged with texts, who see themselves as having had satisfactory experiences (not that they necessarily liked or admired the text, but that they seem to have been engaged with it); habitual readers who describe themselves as satisfied with their own reading and whom we would describe (in this situation, with this text) as reading for point. Some of these regularities were surprising, others were not.

For instance, it was a surprise to me (not that I had expected something different; rather it hadn't occurred to me to make a prediction in this area, to ask the question at all) that such readers (as I have already suggested) tended also to be those who see the immediate situational and contextual frame as relevant, as something that mattered, that they talked in terms of voluntarily. They tended to have responded to the generic cues of the physical presentation of the text, to have noticed, for instance, that the two stories appeared in the same book and were by the same author; to have noticed that the essay appeared in a a certain magazine; that the Le Guin piece was not framed as scientific exposition, but rather as fiction. Readers who were less engaged did not; many of our readers, for instance, persisted in reading the Le Guin as a (largely incomprehensible) physics article, and when one, at the end of the interview, was told that it was fiction, she expressed amazement and decided that she no longer liked the piece because it wasn't true that, as the article proposed, the reason we're all so short of time is that time is leaking out of a tiny hole in the universe.

It was less of a surprise to us, because we had seen evidence of this in our previous work, that readers who were engaged seemed to act as though the author's intentions were an important issue: for instance, they regularly referred to authorial intention as a way of explaining the difference between two alternative passages. I do not, incidentally, mean to suggest with Hirsch (1967) and others that a

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historically reconstructed "authorial intention" should be the ulti-
mate arbiter of "the text's meaning." Our readers were <u>constructing</u>
authorial intentions, often quite different from what other readers,
or we ourselves might have constructed. As Beaugrande has observed,
"like authorship, authorial intention readily becomes our own
construct to account for our responses and values" (1987:67).

This is important, I think, because it suggests that in order to
treat generic conventions and evaluations (often signaled, as Labov
(1972) has phrased it, as "departures from the local norm of the
text") as intentional, and to expect explanations and coherence rather
than to dismiss them as inexplicable anomalies, readers must treat
text as intentionally coherent, and thus must at least tacitly imagine
an author or authority "behind" it, warranting that intentional
coherence.

All of these considerations came together in a nice contrast
between two of our participants' comments about the authorship of the
two Thompson stories. Thompson, author of "Metaphors" and "The Sun on
Mount Royal," teaches at the University of New Brunswick, located on
the same campus as St. Thomas University. Therefore some of our
readers not only knew of Thompson, but had actually met him and heard
him talk about his new "postcard stories." Only some of these read-
ers, however, considered this knowledge to be relevant when reading
and discussing the stories. Don, for one, clearly did:

> Jim: The question will be, what did you make of "The Sun on
>   Mount Royal"?
>
> Don: This must be one of Kent Thompson's postcard stories.
>   I talked to him about this.
>
> Jim: Is that right?
>
> Don: Yeah, last year, I was at a party at his house and we
>   got talking about this and so I kind of know what he's
>   trying to accomplish with these about giving everything
>   and forcing yourself to do it, you know, on the size of
>   a postcard. He suggested I try it and I haven't got
>   around to trying it. This is the first one of his I've
>   read actually. (12)

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On the other hand, Kevin, who has also (it turns out later) had advance notice of postcard stories, keeps this knowledge separate from his reading, as can bee seen in the "wrapup" discussion.

Jim: Would you happen to remember the name of the individual who wrote "Metaphors"?

Kevin: "Metaphors," no . . .

Jim: How about "The Sun on Mount Royal"?

Kevin: Again, no - I can't picture the name.

Jim: All right, do you think that those two pieces may have been written by the same individual or do you think they were written by two different people?

Kevin: (. . .) I think they could have been written by the same person.

Jim: All right, they were written by the same person, his name's Kent Thompson -

Kevin: Yeah, I like Kent Thompson.

Jim: Are you familiar with Kent Thompson?

Kevin: Yeah, I took a course from Dr. Jones two years ago on Maritime literature and we studied some of Kent Thompson's work and Dr. Jones has a, as you probably know, a lecture series throughout the year for that course and he was one of the persons who came in and read for us. I know he teaches at UNB himself. Yeah, I like his work . . . .

Jim: . . . There are some pieces in there that are only five or six lines long and . . .

Kevin: He started this thing a few years ago about writing on postcards, is that in here, too? . . . He was talking about that when he read for us. (30-31)

What seems to me particularly remarkable about this contrast is the way in which Kevin, who clearly had access to the same information, simply did not treat it as relevant to this text in this situation. It is important to insist, incidentally, that it is not simply a matter of what knowledge the reader <u>has</u>; it's a question of what knowledge is <u>activated</u>. If it were simply a matter of knowledge possession, as much research - e.g. Holmes & Roser, 1987 - assumes,

one might say, following E. D. Hirsch (1987), that the real difference is not one of stance or attitude, but merely a matter of "cultural literacy." People we identify as reading in a point-driven or engaged way, that is, have simply experienced more, and thus know more, than those who are not reading in such a way (for instance, they are familiar with the conventions of literary magazines or with authors). Kevin's failure to use his knowledge about Kent Thompson is significant here, because it suggests that the critical difference between these two modes of reading is not knowledge per se, but rather the use of that knowledge - the expectation and assumption that such knowledge may be relevant, that one participates actively in reading transactions (Johnston & Winograd, 1985). Both Don and Kevin knew in advance about postcard stories, but only one of them treated this knowledge as relevant.

Finally - we have of course found other regularities, but these are the three I think may be most interesting here - readers who are reading in this way expect that the text will have pragmatic consequences, they expect it to be connected to their life in some way. I don't mean, though this can also happen, that the story means something that will change your life. Rather, what I'm referring to is signaled by remarks like, "I know someone who'd like that story: can I get a copy of it?" or, "Who wrote that again? I want to write that down because I want to give that book to a friend." That taking of the story and "retailing" it seemed very important to me, because of course that's what we do with stories in conversation. If a story strikes you as pointed and interesting and powerful and memorable, you will often, in another situation, remember it and retell it. ("Oh, I heard about a guy who . . . ") That seems to me analogous to what many of our point-driven readers were doing, or expecting to do. And that was a surprise - not, again, because we'd expected otherwise, but because we'd had no expectations in the area at all. This, it seemed to us, was the sort of benefit Rubin had predicted when experimenters swap control for regularity.

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The way we formulated all this for ourselves was to say that the readers who were, in our terms, successful with these texts in this situation seemed be doing something that looked very much as though they were engaged in dialogue with the text (or, better, with an imputed or imagined intentional author by means of the text). I want to insist again, by the way, that we're not asserting that something "is true" about these readers as people: we are saying only that on this occasion, reading this text, these readers seemed to be acting in this way. I see no reason not to expect that everyone is capable of reading in a point driven way; after all, we are all point driven listeners.

All this seems to me worth knowing for three reasons.

First, it insists we need to include the pragmatic dimension in our concept of the reading of imaginative texts, of "literature," which people do for their own purposes. If we are to understand what reading is at all, I think we have to see it as a process in which, at least potentially, this kind of social interchange and activity is entailed. This view is one which, as I have admitted, challenges many of my basic assumptions about appropriate approaches in literary theory; it suggests that although most of the "aesthetic" and "inter-pretational" things which I as a hermeneutic practitioner have done may be interesting, they don't have a lot to do with how and why people read texts – including the "classics" of literature that I was interpreting and evaluating.

Second, it insists we need to introduce the pragmatic dimension into our understanding of any reading. This would challenge basic assumptions in the psychological study of reading – the assumption, for instance, that reading is pretty much the same thing from one reader to the next, from one text to the next and from one situation to the next; the assumption that it's not a social phenomenon, but a cognitive one. In my view, it now seems far more useful to consider reading as only in relatively trivial ways a cognitive phenomenon: the most important things about it can be understood, I now think, only by viewing it as primarily a social phenomenon.

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And finally, and perhaps of most immediate importance to me, this new emphasis on the rhetorical and pragmatic has powerful implications for education and teaching. Consider, for example, the status of written language in schools in North America (I don't know about schools in Germany yet): what often happens is that the printed texts which are used in schools, and the written texts which are produced in schools, are consciously and deliberately designed not to afford this kind of reading, consciously and deliberately designed to be fact dumps, to be collections of propositions stored in an orderly way – not to be pointed, not to be contact-driven, not to be human. They are written in many cases by committees, and often by corporations (Goodman, 1988; Luke, 1988). If you look at reading texts for young children, if you look at school textbooks in the sciences and humanities, if you look at the introductions and the footnotes and the explanatory material for the texts and anthologies which are usually used in North American universities as the basis of literature courses, you find that everything about them is written to make it very difficult to read them in a point-driven way. If that's true, and it seems to me no exaggeration, then we are offered a plausible explanation of why it is that we get so much information-driven reading in school situations, and so very little point-driven reading. Perhaps it offers us a partial explanation, too, of how some people develop into powerful manipulators of written language – both as writers and readers – and why others do not.

It may suggest, finally, some ways in which such a situation might be changed. It suggests, for instance, using authentic texts, texts which were not written to store information for future retrieval but which appear to have been written to make contact, to invite mutual participation in the creation of truth. It suggests, further, that the best way to teach a field that has a defined knowledge base may not be to present students with texts incorporating in an efficiently organized way "the truth" about the field (for instance, in "the" course psychology text or "the" course physics text, or even in "the" truth as presented in the instructor's lectures about eighteenth century literature), but rather to find a way to give the creative ↶ initiative to the students, help students participate in the construction of the knowledge of the field, to invent for themselves a role in

the social dialogue which constitutes a discipline.

It is, in the last analysis, those possible educational conse-
quences which seem to me to justify what I'm doing. And, of course,
that's why I started doing it in the first place.

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