Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses on Pleasure from Barthes's "The Pleasure of the Text"

C. Connor Syrewicz
University at Albany, State University of New York
c.syrewicz@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

My thinking in this essay began a few years ago, sometime after I completed my MFA in fiction, when I started to ask a question which I had been discouraged from asking in my time as a student: *How do I write fiction which readers will like?*

I didn't exactly ask this question consciously, but one could have seen me trying to answer it had they watched my behavior. I started to eye suspiciously some of the idiosyncrasies in my personality (such as a navel-gazing obsession with my own psychology) which I had always indulged in my fiction. I started reading literary criticism and theory which dealt directly with questions of how readers responded to texts. I poured through books on reader-response criticism, cognitive literary studies, and narratology.[1] These were incredibly helpful and provided me with many insights into how readers made texts intelligible, but I wanted more. The scholars I was reading seemed obsessed with interpretation or with a *hermeneutics* of reading, while I wanted to understand what Susan Sontag once called an *erotics* of reading (104): I wanted to understand not only how readers made sense of texts but also, and more importantly, how and why they took *pleasure* in texts. I wanted to know exactly why a reader might read a book, try to make some kind of sense of it, roll over, light a

---

1   Among those books that I found the most incisive and interesting, I would include Jane Tompkins's anthology *Reader-Response Criticism*, Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance,* Paul Armstrong's *How Literature Plays with the Brain,* Lisa Zunshine's anthology *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, Mieke Bal's *Narratology*, Michael Hoffman and Partick Murphy's anthology *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, Peter J. Rabinowitz's *Before Reading*, James Phelan's *Experiencing Fiction*, and David Herman et al.'s *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*.

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses

cigarette, and then say to themselves, "God, that was good!"

This is not to say that questions of pleasure were completely absent from the literary scholarship that I was reading; however, when these questions weren't marginalized by questions of meaning, they were often interpreted within a framework of psychoanalysis—and while psychoanalysis contains some important insights into why some readers like reading, liking a text is almost always, within this tradition, reduced to some kind "wish fulfillment" fantasy. In other words, if one takes pleasure in a text, these theorists claim, there must be some prior wish, desire, drive, etc. which the text is helping the reader to "satisfy" through fantasy.

The theory of wish fulfillment clearly has some important explanatory power in terms of understanding why some readers like some texts; however, wish fulfillment is probably only one character in the larger story of the pleasures of reading. In attempting to point out just how reductive the wish-fulfillment theory of pleasure can be, for example, the author and creative-writing-studies (CWS) scholar Kevin Brophy asks, "What then of writing that confronts and unsettles?" (132). He points out that some of the most intensely pleasurable experiences of reading contain profound displeasure and discomfort, feelings which are hard to imagine playing into any wish-fulfillment fantasies (143). It's possible that this displeasure is playing into some unconscious "death drive," as Freud might have interpreted it. However, it seems far more likely and straightforward to conclude that a reader's ability to take pleasure in being "confront[ed]," "unsettled," and "disturb[ed]" (143) is probably not the result of having some desire for pain satisfied through a wish-fulfillment fantasy but of some other hedonic process. Clearly having our desires satisfied can be very pleasurable, but if we reduce all of the pleasures of reading to wish fulfillment, then either we fail to account for any of those pleasures which are not the result of the satisfaction of a reader's desire, or we risk erroneously supposing desires in our readers which may not actually exist.

Ultimately, I have started to find some very provisional answers to the question of pleasure by surveying the evidence which has been presented by researchers in different fields of experimental psychology, such as experimental aesthetics, the psychology of emotions, and positive psychology.[2] Researchers in these fields have been empirically investigating people's

---

2   Among those papers and books that have most influenced my thoughts here, I would include Rolf Reber et al.'s "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure," Laura Graf and Jan Landwehr's, "A Dual-Process Perspective on Fluency-Based Aesthetics," Winifred Menninghaus et al.'s "Rhetorical features facilitate prosodic processing while handicapping ease of semantic comprehension," Christian Obermeier et al.'s "Aesthetic and emotional effects of meter and rhyme in poetry," Rachel Giora et al.'s "The Role of Defaultness in Affecting Pleasure," P.J. Silvia's *Exploring the Psychology of Interest*, D.E. Berlyne's *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity*, Shane Lopez and C.R. Snyder's anthology *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, and Martin Seligman's *Flourish*.

hedonic responses to art since 1876 (Graf and Landwehr 395) and, therefore, have some profound and provocative things to say about the diverse pleasures of art and creative writing.

In the future, I hope to write some papers which will translate these insights into a form that will be both understandable and useful to those of us in CWS who are (understandably) put off by the thought of reading the highly technical prose of contemporary research psychology. However, before attempting this feat of interdisciplinary translation, I thought that it might be useful to begin this investigation of pleasure by examining the thinking of a figure with whom some of us will already be familiar: the twentieth-century literary theorist, Roland Barthes.

Barthes was a complex and multi-faceted thinker whose ideas shifted and changed over time, and toward the end of his career (1973), he wrote one of the few works of literary scholarship which attempts to explicitly develop a theory of the pleasures of reading: a short monograph titled *The Pleasure of the Text.* Though it is slim and written in a fragmentary, aphoristic style, this volume contains some complex, fascinating, and potentially useful ideas about the pleasures of reading, and my goal in this paper is to outline three hypotheses which can be gleaned from Barthes's work: (1) that there are *many* factors involved in the generation of pleasure, (2) that one kind of pleasure (*plaisir* or "contentment"[3]) is the result of a reader feeling as though they can make sense of a text easily, and (3) that another kind of pleasure (*jouissance*[4]) is the result of a reader feeling as though they can only make partial sense of a text but in a way that is meaningful or significant.

I use the word *hypothesis* very intentionally, however, as I do not want to signal that these claims are necessarily true. Though I believe that they are accurate enough representations of Barthes's ideas, I am not yet convinced that they accurately represent how actual readers take pleasure in creative texts. At this point, it's worth noting that researchers in the psychology of emotions and experimental aesthetics have presented evidence[5] which seems to support some of Barthes's ideas; however, for the purposes of this paper, Barthes ideas are just that: *ideas.*

---

3   In the original French version of *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes (frustratingly) uses the word pleasure in both a general sense (to refer to all pleasure) and in a particular sense (to refer to one specific type of pleasure) (19-20). Barthes uses the word "contentment" only once (19), but for the sake of clarity, I am going to use it rather than "pleasure" to clearly distinguish these two senses.

4   Richard Miller, the English translator of *The Pleasure of the Text*, chooses to translate the French word *jouissance* into the English word *bliss* in order to reflect Barthes's view that jouissance is more intensely pleasurable than contentment. The term bliss, however, doesn't capture all of the sexual connotations which the French term would have conveyed to a native speaker. Therefore, I have decided to use the original French term, *jouissance*, in this paper rather than the English term, *bliss*.

5   See Silvia 25-9, 55-64 and Graf and Landwher 392-7 for summaries of some of this evidence.

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   *3*

The genre of philosophical and critical writings which literary scholars call simply "theory" is an excellent repository of ideas about how the world *might* work. The key word here, however, is "might," since there is, in most cases, no justification to believe a theory which has not received ample empirical support. To test a theory empirically means to go out into the world and to bear witness to it so that we might see if it works in the way the theory predicted it would. To bear witness to the world is an act of attention and care in which we allow the world to speak to us about our ideas; therefore, it is important that we listen closely and carefully to what it has to say. Occasionally, as we listen, we find that the world works more-or-less as we thought it would, but far more often, we find that the world works at least somewhat differently than we expected it to. In this case, we need to find new theories and ideas to describe what we have witnessed, and those new theories and ideas then serve as the basis for new rounds of attentive listening.

In a sense, therefore, by calling Barthes's ideas *ideas*, I am simply calling a spade a spade: they *could* correspond to the hedonic processes of some actual readers; however, without considering these ideas in the light of any evidence from the world itself, I cannot yet say whether or not there is any justification to believe them. As I mentioned before, some researchers in other fields have been attempting to bear witness to the hedonic processes of readers and viewers, and the evidence that some of them have presented shows some significant affinities with Barthes's ideas (Silvia 25-9, 55-64; Graf and Landwher 392-7); even so, this should not distract from the fact that, in this paper, I will attempt to describe Barthes's theory of pleasure without considering whether empirical evidence justifies the theory.

In the future, I hope to use empirical research methods in order to test Barthes's hypotheses on pleasure, and it's my hope that other CWS scholars may, one day, be willing to join me in empirically studying how people form hedonic responses to texts. Before I get too far ahead of myself, however, I imagine that some of the readers of this essay will be asking themselves some reasonable questions: This guy wants us to study reading and pleasure?! Why the heck should we care about why readers like to read? We study writing! Not reading! And if we turn our attention to reading, aren't we making the mistake, which has been rightly criticized by some CWS scholars (e.g. Reissenweber 2), of studying the *product* of writing (or, in this case, the product's reception) rather than the *process* of writing?[6]

In fact, I expect that some readers will be not only skeptical but also staunchly opposed to what I am proposing. For some time now, there have been voices in some creative-writing communities who have claimed that writers should not consider their audience (Moxley 22).

---

6   Throughout this essay, I have borrowed the APA convention of using the abbreviation "e.g." to distinguish those citations which exemplify my claims from those which support my claims.

Likewise, in a recent survey of 116 postsecondary creative-writing instructors, Janelle Adsit and Laura Wilder have found considerable ambivalence in their respondents' beliefs about audiences. As a group, the respondents had mixed feelings regarding the subject of audience; however, a few of the respondents with whom Adsit and Wilder conducted follow-up interviews disavowed considering one's audience as inauthentic (414). In a craft essay, the poet Maggie Nelson sums up these views nicely when she writes that,

> any writer worth his or her salt likely knows that one's writing . . . often doesn't please others . . . and that one writes first and foremost to please oneself, and that's exactly as it should be . . . (88)

If one looks closely at the views expressed by these writers, one will find a shared distaste for what compositionists call *audience awareness*: these writers all argue that creative writers should not consider their audience as they write—or, perhaps, only as they revise (e.g. Powell 222-3). At this point, it's worth noting that self-reports from professional creative writers display diverse feelings toward the subject of audience awareness. There are those, like Nelson, who disavow audience awareness entirely, and yet there are other writers, like Anthony Doerr, who suggest that considering the reasons why readers read can be important to understanding how writers should write (62-3), or those, like Cornelia Nixon, who argue that they aren't "worried about expressing [themself]," and are instead "worried about the reader's brain and what the reader is going to get out of this" (qtd. in Childress 25).

Self-reports like these suggest that the subject of audience awareness deserves far more attention by CWS scholars than it has currently received. That said, my intention is not to defend audience awareness here. Available evidence on the subject of audience awareness suggests that it probably has its place in the creative-writing classrooms but that its usefulness is probably *very* limited (Hayes 25; Berkenkotter 392-4). And so, to those who would take issue with the idea of studying the pleasures of reading by criticizing audience awareness, I would say that I do not necessarily want to study the pleasure of reading in order to teach audience awareness. Rather, there is a far more foundational and fundamental reason that we should study the pleasures of reading—a reason which speaks to the very goals of creative-writing instruction itself. To put it simply, I believe that understanding the pleasures of reading can be invaluable when it comes to deciding what knowledge and skills should be taught to our creative-writing students.

This argument is important to understanding why I am discussing Barthes's theory of pleasure in the first place; therefore, I am going to turn my gaze in a pedagogical direction before I turn it in the direction of the theory itself.

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   5

PLEASURE AND CREATIVE WRITING EXPERTISE

One of the fundamental difficulties of teaching creative writing has to do with deciding what kinds of knowledge and skills to teach to our students. If we compare creative writing to an activity like, say, playing chess one can see that part of this difficulty has to do with the fact that it is hard to say with any certainty what "good" writing looks like. In chess, a good outcome is clearly defined by the rules of the game—by the game's "win conditions"—and since we can say with certainty what it means to win, it's somewhat easier to discern what a chess player should learn in order to win more games of chess. By contrast, creative writing doesn't have any clear "win conditions"—a book held up as a masterpiece by one group of readers is ridiculed by another—and if we can't say with any certainty what "good" writing looks like, then it's hard to say what one should learn in order to write "well."

One of the most successful solutions to this problem comes from research conducted in the fields of composition studies and educational psychology. In the 1960's instructors in these fields turned their attention away from teaching what "good" writing looked like and turned instead toward teaching the process by which texts are made (Mayers 32-8). This new paradigm was a considerable improvement over the previous product-oriented paradigm; however, it left writing researchers with a new question to answer: What does a "good" writing process look like?

In the 1980's, a number of researchers working in the fields of composition studies and cognitive psychology attempted to answer this question by turning their attention toward studying the writing processes of "expert" writers, which is to say, writers who had achieved a certain level of professional success due, in part, to their writing. One particularly fruitful line of inquiry for these researchers involved "expert-novice studies," in which expert and novice writers were observed completing the same writing tasks. Attempting to compare the different processes by which experts and novices produce texts creates a (relatively) simple way of making claims about the skills and knowledge which define "expertise," and these claims can help to inform the pedagogical goals of writing instruction: if the writing processes of experts and novices differ in some clearly identifiable way, then a writing instructor can attempt to devise lessons and learning experiences which will help novice writers to think and write in ways that are more like expert writers.

Thus far, expert-novice studies have revealed that, when compared to novice writers, expert writers tend to work in longer sentence-parts while generating sentences (Kaufer et al. 122-27), develop more complex representations of rhetorical problems (Flower and Hayes

Journal of Creative Writing Studies *6*

29-32), detect and diagnose more textual problems (Hayes et al. 177-78), make far more significant and substantive revisions of their work (Sommers 380-7), and so on. Findings like these have played an important part in clarifying the pedagogical goals of some composition pedagogies (e.g. Harris and Graham 7-14), and have been responsible for informing the development of what evidence has shown to be one of the most effective methods for teaching writing: cognitive strategy instruction (Graham and Perin 466).

On the other hand, this line of research has been criticized by sociocultural theorists (e.g. Bizzell 82-101) for treating all forms of writing expertise as essentially the same and for, thereby, failing to account for the highly contextual discourse knowledge which defines expertise in the different genres or "domains" of writing. As the educational psychologist Alecia Marie Magnifico writes,

> Novice writers become more expert within a writing community, then, not just by learning a series of increasingly complex schemata and thinking processes but by becoming active members, taking on common practices and values—and, critically, being seen by an audience of other members as knowledgeable participants and, eventually, as experts. For example, becoming a rapper and becoming a poet require many of the same writing skills: knowledge of rhythm and sound, the ability to tell stories through images, and an interest in social commentary. At the same time, most expert rappers are not seen as expert poets, and vice versa, because their ways of being in the world are almost entirely different. (174)

Magnifico argues that we make a mistake if we overvalue "general writing expertise." If one does not think that an expert free-verse poet will seamlessly become an expert rapper (or vice versa) then there must be some kinds of "domain-specific" writing expertise which distinguishes these two kinds of expert writers.

In the years since this critique was first made, cognitive scientists have turned their attention toward accounting for domain-specific expertise, and today, "it is taken as axiomatic that both general strategies and domain-specific knowledge are required for expertise" (Kellogg and Whiteford 111). Likewise, in the field of composition studies, the branches like Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) have emerged out of a desire to describe the different kinds of domain-specific knowledge and skill which define expertise within different domains of academic writing (e.g. Wilder 91-103; Hyland 211-23).

From a CWS perspective, one can see why studying domain-specific expertise would be beneficial: if we can determine what kinds of knowledge and skills distinguish, say, an expert science-fiction writer from an expert New Formalist poet, then we will be able to devise

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   *7*

teaching methods designed to increase a novice writer's expertise in these domains. Thus far, thinking in creative writing education has largely been dominated by what Diane Donnelly calls an "expressivist" pedagogical paradigm in which the aim of instruction is not to teach new skills and knowledge but to help students to discover what they personally feel called to write (41-51). This expressivist paradigm is beneficial because it reminds us that creative writing is an individualistic activity—one born of love and passion—and that a writer must, as some theorists have noted (e.g. Harper 64-5), follow their own idiosyncratic and irrational impulses if they want to do it well.

That said, this individualistic, expressivist paradigm should not blind us to the fact that becoming an expert writer doesn't simply mean communing with one's personal muse but also means adopting the knowledge, the conventions, the values, the skills, and the strategies of *distinct* communities of fellow readers and writers. It is probably no mistake, for example, that many books on writing science fiction and fantasy begin with planning strategies aimed at helping a writer to conceive of a rich and interesting world before they begin writing about it; and it is probably no mistake most craft essays written by postsecondary fiction faculty ignore most planning strategies and instead focus more on reconceptualization and revision. (See, for example, *The Writer's Notebook: Craft Essays from Tin House.*) These books probably recommend different strategies for approaching the writing process because different strategies are beneficial for writing within different domains.

We make a mistake, of course, if we begin to police or prescribe these domain-specific differences. Barthes's theory of pleasure suggests that mixing the conventions of different domains of writing can lead to intensely pleasurable results, and I expect that a writer could achieve fascinating results by attempting to appropriate the writing processes of one domain of creative writing for use within another domain. Our goal, in other words, should be only to *describe* these domain-specific differences and to avoid *prescribing* them: we help no one by policing the boundaries between different domains of creative writing. But if we can avoid policing the boundaries between domains, then I think there is much to be gained from describing them. In fact, I imagine that describing the differences between domains can actually lead the boundaries between them to become more porous and more permeable rather than less. After all, if a poet wanted to appropriate the writing processes of, say, an erotica author, this would be much easier to do if the writing processes of erotica authors have been carefully and attentively described.

In my view, therefore, postsecondary creative-writing instruction would benefit from CWS scholars beginning to study and define different kinds of domain-specific expertise. In the fields of psychology and composition studies, doing this has sometimes meant studying experts as they write (as in the case of expert-novice studies) or studying the texts produced and disseminated by experts within a specific domain (as in the case of

some WAC and WID research). And while both of these methods of studying domain-specific writing expertise are deeply valuable and would, I believe, yield some surprising and teachable insights about how different creative writers in different domains approach the writing process, these *expert-centered* methods of studying domain-specific writing expertise are, I argue, incomplete. As sociocultural theorists like Alecia Marie Magnifico have pointed out, one becomes an "expert" not only because of how one writes but also because of how this writing is received and evaluated by different audiences of readers (174). Expertise is not only a set of skills and knowledge which an individual possesses but is also something bestowed upon an individual by specific communities of readers and writers. Expert-centered methods are incredibly valuable because they help us to make claims about the different cognitive and behavioral processes experts use to produce texts; but in addition to these methods, I argue that we need *audience-centered* methods of studying writing expertise to account for the sociocultural process by which expertise is bestowed.

Essentially, what I mean to say is that if we can understand how different audiences come to recognize that they like a text, then we can discern pedagogical goals which will increase a student's "expertise" in the eyes of these audiences.

To give one example of this idea in action, Barthes's theory of "jouissance" (which I will discuss below) suggests that readers tend to like texts when they appraise them as containing unexpected mixtures of content. As Barthes writes,

> Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes*? In [the realm of pleasure] . . . it is intermittence . . . which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (9-10)

Barthes returns to this idea again and again (6-11, 13, 36), and his point is that it is neither the clothing nor the body which is erotic but rather the point at which they can be seen to mesh or meet. And so, in more psychological and less metaphorical terms, we can then say that people tend to feel jouissance when they witness the meeting of what they would appraise to be familiar but disparate concepts or ideas.[7]

Because different audiences will appraise different pairs of concepts as "disparate," there are probably *many* different domain-specific ways to achieve this effect, but Erick Piller describes one promising method which involves teaching students to mix disparate kinds of

---

7   This has been supported by some empirical research on the psychology of interest (Silvia 55-64).

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   *9*

language or "established discourses" (2):

> Assigned writing exercises likely should, in most courses, play some role in extrinsically motivating experimentation, especially at the beginning of a term. For example, an instructor might ask students to rewrite a Shakespearean sonnet using only language encountered in advertisements over the course of a day . . . Of course, as the semester progresses and students amass a larger store of ideas and materials, the instructor should give students greater freedom to explore as they see fit, in ways that exercises would only hinder. (7)

Piller does not address how to adapt this method for use within different domains of creative writing, but doing so should be relatively simple. Different kinds of discourse are conventionally mixed within different domains of creative writing. Literary fiction, for example, often includes a lot of free indirect speech and thought, which involves mixing a character's or a culture's colloquial language with the narrator's voice, and science-fiction writers often mix lectures, textbook passages, and other educational texts into their stories because these kinds of expository discourses can be helpful for world-building. Teaching discursive mixing in either of these domains, therefore, might mean helping students to master these conventional types of discursive mixing while also teaching them to identify opportunities for drawing upon unexpected types of discourse in their own writing.

What it means to effectively teach this skill is another matter entirely.[8] But for now, it's enough to identify a pedagogical goal which could, if taught effectively, increase our students' "expertise" in the eyes of different audiences.

In the case of Piller's work, I have shown that studying the erotics of reading can help us to *evaluate* the pedagogical goals which have been suggested by the CWS community thus far; however, I believe that a far more exciting application of this knowledge would be to use it to identify *new* pedagogical goals which can be pursued in our creative-writing classes. To those who would protest that studying the erotics of reading privileges the product over the process, I would say that it is precisely for the sake of improving our students' writing processes that I am proposing this investigation. In order to investigate the ways in which texts are responded to by audiences, however, we need an initial theory, or a set of testable hypotheses, which can explain how different readers form hedonic or liking responses to a text. With

---

8   It's worth noting, for example, that evidence from educational psychology suggests that effectively teaching strategies like discursive mixing should, in fact, involve teaching methods which are more explicit and scaffolded than those which Piller suggests (Graham and Perin 451).

Journal of Creative Writing Studies   *10*

this in mind, I turn now to Barthes's theory of pleasure…

HYPOTHESIS #1: THERE ARE MANY FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE PLEASURE.

Thus far, I have elided an important question: What exactly is pleasure? The colloquial use of this word tends to be quite narrow, linking it to very specific sensations or cognitive states (e.g. the pleasures of sex). And while Barthes never goes so far as to define pleasure, for the purpose of this exegesis, I am going to choose to read Barthes's insights through the highly subjective definition of pleasure which has been developed by cognitive scientists. Neuroscientists, for example, don't think of pleasure as a specific sensation but as a "hedonic gloss" or "liking reaction" which hedonic brain systems "paint" onto cognitive states (Berridge and Kringlebach 457). As one group of neuroscientists recently put it,

> Pleasure . . . cannot be defined simply as a sensation. Even the simplest sensorial pleasure, such as the one associated with something sweet, requires the contemporary involvement of other neuronal circuits aimed at adding a positive hedonic impact to the stimulus. Without this emotional nuance, even a feeling associated to something with a sweet taste may result as being neutral or even unpleasant. (Moccia et al. 2)

Pleasure, in other words, is not an intrinsic aspect of any specific sensations or cognitive states (like those involved in sex) but is rather an *evaluative response of liking* which is added to sensations and cognitive states as we feel them. Or to put this another way, we can then say that the pleasures of reading are the result of the various conscious and unconscious processes by which a reader evaluates whether or not they like the different cognitive processes involved in the reading of a text.

Approaching the problem from the fields of structural linguistics and literary theory, Barthes was particularly interested in how semantic processes—or processes of meaning-making—are evaluated by readers, and he was particularly interested in how texts interact with the different conceptual frameworks or "schemas" (Shimron 45) which a reader uses to make sense of a text.[9] Much like today's experimental aestheticians (e.g. Reber et al. 365), Barthes thought of pleasure as an *interaction* between the schemas that a reader brings to the text and the text itself (*S/Z* 10). For ideological reasons, Barthes rarely focuses on the

---

9   I am borrowing the term *schema* from cognitive psychology; however, since Barthes often drew upon the vocabulary of structural linguistics, he would have used the term "code" (*S/Z* 18-20).

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   *11*

individual reader, but if he were to have described his theory of pleasure from a single reader's point of view, it may have looked like this: a reader reads a text; the reader looks for schemas in their memory to make sense of the text; the reader tries to "fit" the text into the schemas they have at their disposal in order to make sense of it; if the reader feels as though almost all of the text fits into the schemas they have at their disposal, they feel the "comfortable" pleasure of contentment (*The Pleasure* 14); if the reader feels as though some parts of the text fail to fit the schemas they have at their disposal and as though this failure is "insignificant," they feel that a "mistake" [10] has been made and they feel a sense of boredom (25-6); if the reader feels as though some parts of the texts fail to fit the schemas they have at their disposal and as though this failure is "significant," they feel the "violent" pleasure of jouissance (7, 12, 33); and if the reader feels as though almost none of the text fits into the schemas they have at their disposal, they feel that the text is "sterile" (32). In other words, a reader likes a text if one of two conditions is met: (1) if they feel like a text makes almost "perfect" sense to them, or (2) if they feel like a text is partially confusing but in a way that feels somehow "significant."
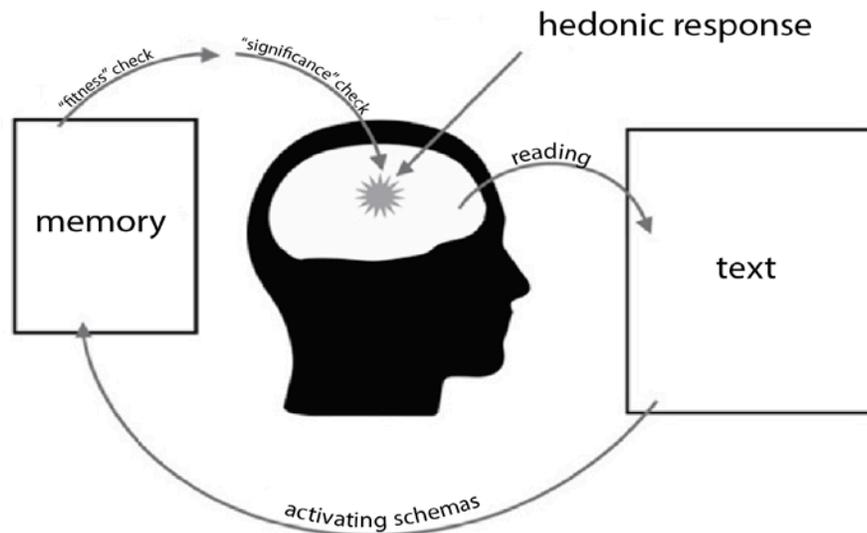

Fig. 1: A Visual Representation of the Cognitive Processes Implied by Barthes's Theory of Pleasure

---

10   Take, for example, a reader who has read plenty of fairy tales in their life and, therefore, has a lot of schemas available to make sense of fairy tales. If they were, at the beginning of a fairy tale, to encounter the words "Once upon a day," their schema for the phrase "Once upon a time" would probably be activated, but the reader would probably also notice that the final word, *day*, does not fit this schema. This divergence from the conventional fair-tale opening might, depending on the context, be read as meaningful, but if this divergence is found in an otherwise conventional fairy tale, then it would probably be read as a "mistake" and, therefore, result in displeasure of some kind.

Reading creative texts is a highly complex process (Shimron 49-51; Peskin 235-53; Earthman 351-78); therefore, I seriously doubt that this theory captures all that there is to say about the pleasures of reading. Barthes says nothing, for example, about what distinguishes significant nonsense from insignificant nonsense. Therefore, there must be some process by which a reader comes to feel that their failure to fully make sense of the text is a *meaningful* failure. Likewise, Barthes says a lot about the "conceptual" side of reading, but he says nothing about what experimental aestheticians would call the "perceptual" side of reading (i.e. the sounds and rhythms of the words themselves), which probably plays an important role in the pleasures of reading (Menninghaus et al. 55-7). And finally, it seems highly plausible that a text can make "perfect" sense to me but that it can also bore me or annoy me, and so there has to be something more to the pleasures of "contentment" than the degree to which a reader can or cannot make sense of a text. On the other hand, being able to make at least partial sense of a text seems, as Barthes argues, to be a necessary condition of pleasure (32); therefore, I think that we should read Barthes's theory not as a "complete" theory of pleasure but as the identification of factors which influence the evaluative processes involved in liking.

Barthes himself may have understood the incompleteness of his own theory, and this may be why, at the end of *The Pleasure of the Text*, he calls for a "typology of the pleasures of reading" (63). Trying to reduce all aesthetic liking to one single type is, I believe, bound to fail because there are probably many different kinds of pleasure in which one can engage. If we want to avoid being reductive, therefore, we must admit different types into our theory—or perhaps *theories*—of pleasure. That said, I am somewhat less interested in deliberating about the different types of pleasure than in identifying the factors which lead to them because it is only by identifying the *factors* which lead to pleasure that we can discern pedagogical goals.

HYPOTHESIS #2: CONTENTMENT OCCURS WHEN A READER FEELS AS THOUGH THEY ARE MAKING SENSE OF A TEXT EASILY AND EFFORTLESSLY.

After massaging Barthes's language a bit, we can say that contentment is the pleasure that readers feel when they have appraised a text as "obedient, conformist, plagiarizing" (6) and when they feel that a text "does not break" from the culture of which they are a part (14). Barthes does not exactly say how the reader comes to make these appraisals, but his language is telling: a text can only appear to "obey" the reader if the reader has issued some kind of "command" of the text. This might suggest that Barthes thought of contentment as the result of the satisfaction of a reader's desires; however, Barthes's discussion of desire makes this interpretation unlikely (5-6). The word *obedient*, therefore, should be read metaphorically:

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   13

contentment occurs not when a text obeys a literal command from the reader but when a text seems to obey or conform to the schemas the reader uses to try to make sense of the text. Likewise, the text is "plagiarizing" not because it has literally plagiarized other texts but because it evokes schemas from the reader's memory.

One could say that much of Barthes's academic career was dedicated to exposing the schemas that people use to make sense of cultural artifacts, and in *The Pleasure of the Text*, he mentions a number of schemas which readers may hold, such as grammatical schemas (a reader's understanding of usage, pragmatics, syntax, etc.), textual schemas (a reader's memory of other texts they have read), cultural schemas (the ideas which a reader has gleaned from their culture), discursive schemas (a reader's understanding of textual genres), and so on (6, 30).

Barthes's theory of contentment holds that a reader feels contentment when they read a text, when the text consciously or unconsciously activates their memory of one or more of these schemas, and then when the text seems to "obey" or "conform to" the schema that has been activated. Because much of this process occurs automatically and unconsciously, this account of pleasure might sound somewhat strange, but we can illustrate this process by considering an example:

Imagine a reader who holds a number of schemas related to what Barthes calls the "hermeneutic code." The hermeneutic code is that set of schemas by which a reader comes to feel that a text is posing a question or a mystery and that parts of the text are relating back to the question or mystery that has been posed (*S/Z* 17).[11]   Now, imagine this reader picking up Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for the first time and reading the first sentence:

> Many years later as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. (8)

According to Barthes's theory of pleasure, there are as many ways to take pleasure in this sentence as there are schemas that could potentially be activated by this text, but for now, let's keep our focus on a reader who has a number of schemas related to the hermeneutic code.

---

11   In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes suggests that the hermeneutic code is involved when a

reader appraises a text as "suspenseful" or whenever they feel the desire to know what will happen next, and he even playfully and disparagingly likens the pleasures of the hermeneutic code to those of a strip-tease because both pleasures "[take] refuge in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or in knowing the end of the story (novelistic satisfaction)" (10).

When their eyes pass over the first dependent clause, "as he faced the firing squad," we can expect that they will take the text to be posing some questions: *There is a man facing a firing squad? Why? What led him there? Does he deserve to be there? Will he live or die? What will happen next?* The reader may not ask themselves these questions consciously, but they might feel a slight (even unconscious) desire to keep reading to find out what happens next. The reader might even feel a vague expectation, a nebulous assurance that the text is foreshadowing events which will be more completely dramatized later in the text.

We can see that the reader's questions and expectations are "schemas" which they have brought to the text when we realize that neither these questions nor the foreshadowing they suggest are contained by the text itself. Were we to read the words of this dependent clause according to their dictionary definitions alone, we would see that the text has posed no questions nor given us any reason to think that we will necessarily see the events which lead Buendía to face the firing squad. If the reader takes the words to be posing questions or foreshadowing, therefore, it is because *schemas* related to the hermeneutic code have been activated by this clause and because the reader is using these schemas to make sense of the text.

Conventional wisdom would say that the desire to know what happens next in a narrative can be very pleasurable, and while Barthes's theory of pleasure does not contradict this, it adds two important wrinkles: (1) readers only want to know what will happen next if the text has activated schemas in the reader's memory, which give them reason to believe that a text is posing questions or foreshadowing narrative events, and (2) readers enjoy not just the desire of wanting to know what happens next but also the meaning-making process by which they come to realize that there is something to desire in the first place. In other words, it is not meaning alone that is the source of pleasure but also the *process* by which meaning is made.

Barthes calls this a "c*omfortable* practice of reading" (14) precisely to underline the seemingly automatic and effortless nature of this process. In fact, we may want to go even further than Barthes to claim that the more schemas the reader has to make sense of a text, the more "familiar" and "understandable" it will feel, and that this familiarity will be experienced by most readers as "comfortable."

Conversely, this hypothesis would suggest that increasing the difficulty of making sense of a text would decrease the degree to which a reader will be contented by it (so long that as this difficultly isn't appraised as "significant").

Imagine, for example, a reader who does not hold many schemas related to the hermeneutic code. What would happen when they read Márquez's sentence for the first time? Their eyes would pass over the first dependent clause—*as he faced the firing squad*—and instead

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   15

of finding a lot of meaning in these words, they would find only their literal meaning: they would read these words only according to their denoted meaning and wouldn't find these words to strongly connote anything. Where our imagined "hermeneutic" reader was easily able to make sense both of the words themselves and of their purpose—which is to say, their supposed reason for being included in the sentence—our "non-hermeneutic" reader would not be able to make sense of why this clause has been included and would therefore probably read them as merely a few extra words which don't seem to have any purpose. Given that we're assuming that this reader has enough schemas to feel as though they can easily make sense of the literal meaning of the words, I doubt that they would dislike this clause. Rather, Barthes's theory would suggest that this reader would find only a slight contentment in these words (perhaps even so slight that it may end up feeling hedonically neutral to the reader). Not as intense a contentment as that of our "hermeneutic" reader, but contentment neverthe-less.

One would be right to note some ambivalence in Barthes's account of contentment: calling contentment, "obedient, conformist, plagiarizing" (6), for example, isn't exactly a resounding endorsement of this experience. In addition to a number of ideological is-sues that Barthes has with texts which merely reproduce what readers already think they "know," his ambivalence toward contentment has to do with his belief that contentment was, in general, a less intense pleasure than jouissance (20).[12] That said, Barthes writes far more kindly of contentment in *The Pleasure of the Text* than he does in some of his earlier work. In his previous book *S/Z*, for example, Barthes explicitly disavows contentment claiming that the reader in the throes of contentment is merely a passive consumer, idle, intransitive, etc. (4), while in *The Pleasure of the Text*, he claims that contentment "con-tents, fills, grants euphoria" and suggests that it can even be valuable in its own right (14).

Likewise (and perhaps more importantly), Barthes no longer claims that contentment and jouissance are opposed (as he does in *S/Z*) but rather argues that a certain amount of contentment is *necessary* for a reader to feel jouissance:

> There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the "dominant ideology"; but this is to want a text without fecun-dity, without productivity, a sterile text . . . . The text needs its shadow: this shadow is *a bit* of ideology, *a bit* of representation, *a bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiar-oscuro. (32)

---

12   It's worth noting that some of the evidence has been presented by research psychologists, which suggests that Barthes was probably right about this (e.g. Silvia 25-29; Menninghaus et al. 55-7).

Journal of Creative Writing Studies   *16*

I will discuss jouissance at more length below, but as we finish our discussion of contentment, it's worth recognizing that without at least *a bit* of a feeling of understanding, without *a bit* of contentment, a reader would feel only confused and frustrated and would call the text, in Barthes's language, "sterile" (32). We should, therefore, not see contentment and jouissance as opposed but as complementary:

> [Texts that elicit jouissance] always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it is not violence which affects [joussance], nor is it destruction which interests it; what [jouissance] wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of [jouissance]. (7)

HYPOTHESIS #3: JOUISSANCE OCCURS WHEN A READER FEELS AS THOUGH A TEXT IS PARTIALLY BUT SIGNIFICANTLY RESISTING THEIR ATTEMPTS TO MAKE SENSE OF IT.

If I wanted to present evidence that Barthes preferred jouissance over contentment, I would need to look no further than the words he uses to refer to these two types of pleasure. Barthes uses the word *contentment* in order to suggest that this kind of pleasure is "minor" when compared to jouissance, and he uses the word *jouissance* in line with its meaning in both psychoanalysis and colloquial French, which suggests a sexual orgasm (19-20). In other words, if contentment is simply a "minor" pleasure, jouissance is (at least metaphorically) an "orgasmic" pleasure.

Barthes often characterizes jouissance by comparing it to contentment: where contentment is a "conformist" pleasure, jouissance is a "subversive" or a "revolutionary" pleasure (6, 7, 23); where contentment is "social" pleasure, jouissance is an "asocial" or even a "violent" pleasure (16, 25); where contentment is a "comfortable" pleasure, jouissance is a pleasure which contains "discomfort" (14); and so on. And while this would suggest that he views these two types of pleasure as opposed, I have shown that Barthes did not view contentment and jouissance as opposite pleasures but rather saw contentment as a necessary or intrinsic part of jouissance (7, 32). Therefore, we can say that jouissance is contentment with some (meaningful) discontentment added in. This is why Barthes often writes that jouissance occurs at an "edge" (6-11, 13, 36): because jouissance occurs whenever it would appear to a reader that two opposites (conformity *and* subversion, sociality *and* asociality, comfort *and* discomfort) have meshed or met.

Because Barthes was most interested in semantic processes, perhaps the most important

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   17

"edge" which he explores is that which forms between what we might call "sense" on the one hand and "significant nonsense" on the other. In Barthes's theory, a reader must be able to make at least "a bit" of sense of a text in order for them to feel jouissance (7, 32), but again and again, he suggests that jouissance is a result of a reader feeling as though they have failed to make sense of text (6, 7-8, 14, 18-9, 21-2, 30-1). Therefore, we can say that jouissance occurs whenever a reader would appraise that they have only made *partial* sense of a text.

But does jouissance occur anytime a reader can only make partial sense of a text? No. Barthes claims a number of times that jouissance is related to what he calls "significance" (12, 33, 38, 64, 66), and while he does not exactly explain what he means when he uses this term,[13] from context, we can say that "significance" is an appraisal a reader makes of their own inability to make sense of a text. Jouissance, therefore, occurs when a reader feels as though they have failed to make sense of a part of a text and as though this failure is meaningful or significant.[14]

As with contentment, this account of jouissance might sound somewhat strange, and so we can again illustrate Barthes's theory by way of an example:

Imagine a reader with a lot of schemas related to what Barthes calls the "proairetic code." The proairetic code is that set of schemas by which a reader comes to take the events of a narrative as sequentially related, and so readers use it both to discern cause and effect relationships between the different events of a narrative and to organize these different events into "plotlines" (*S/Z* 19-20).

Now, imagine this reader picking up Robert Coover's 2011 short story "Going for a Beer," for the first time and reading the first three sentences:

> [1] He finds himself sitting in the neighborhood bar drinking a beer at about the same time that he began to think about going there for one. [2] In fact, he has finished it. [3] Perhaps he'll have a second one, he thinks, as he downs it and asks for a third.

Again, there are as many ways to take pleasure in this passage as there are schemas which could be activated by it, but for now, we'll continue to focus on our imagined "proairetic" reader. What happens when their eyes pass across the first sentence? A number of events are

---

13 The closest he comes is to say that significance is "meaning, sensually produced" (61).

14 Conversely, if a reader feels as though they have failed to make sense of a part of a text, and if they appraise this failure as "insignificant"—in other words, if they do not sense that there is some kind of significance behind their failure to understand—then the reader will probably not like a text.

Journal of Creative Writing Studies *18*

mentioned—*sitting*, *drinking*, *thinking, going*—and the reader attempts to organize these events into a sequence according to the proairetic code, but they find their attempts frustrated: the sentence makes it sound like the character is sitting and drinking *at the same time* that he has started to decide to go to the bar. Because these events happen at *about* the same time, the literal content of the sentence is not totally nonsensical, but how then does it achieve this effect?

First, the sentence presents these events in what narratologists would call an "analeptic" order (Chatman 64): the sitting and the drinking are presented *before* the thinking in the sentence, and this runs against those proairetic schemas which tell the reader that people usually think about doing something before they actually do it. This analeptic ordering of events would not be a problem for the reader, however, if Coover had written the sentence using a different propositional phrase. And so the second way in which this sentence frustrates the reader's proairetic schemas is through the use of the temporally ambiguous prepositional phrase, *at about the same time*. If Coover had used a less ambiguous connecting phrase—if the protagonist had found himself sitting in the neighborhood bar *just after* he began to think about going there for one, for example—then this sentence would perfectly fit the reader's proairetic schemas. The ambiguity of the word *about*, means that the sentence does not completely cut against these schemas, but the reader now has to do a bit of work to mentally organize these events into the "correct" order.

And finally, the third way in which this sentence frustrates the reader's proairetic schemas is through the strategic use of verbs. The first clause, for example, begins with the verb *finds*. Cognitive or perceptual verbs are often used in literary texts to suggest a subjective point of view (Chatman 103), so we'll assume that our reader uses this schema and that they understand this sentence as being a subjective representation of the character's experience, which will (assumedly) weaken the frustrating effect of the rest of the sentence. In the second clause, however, Coover uses the verb *began*, which places the thinking at a greater temporal distance from the sitting and the drinking, and he uses the verb *going*, in order to clarify that the thinking did not, in fact, take place at the bar itself.

All of these factors together push against the proairetic schemas that the reader uses to try to make sense of the sentence, and so the reader experiences what I will call "resistance" from the sentence: the sentence seems to resist the reader's understanding by failing to completely fit within the schemas that it has activated.

At this point, the reader feels as though they have failed to make sense of parts of the sentence. But would they feel that this failure is "significant" and, thus, feel jouissance from

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   19

the text? Barthes does not say much about the process by which significance is appraised, so it is hard to say. On the one hand, if the reader has read Coover before or if they know of his esteem as an "experimental" writer or if they have read this sentence in its original source, *The New Yorker*, and know of this publication's esteem among some literary communities, they might use these contextual schemas to decide that these resistances must be "purposeful" in some way and, therefore, begin to take some pleasure in their own failure to completely understand it. Or maybe the cognitive verb, *finds*, and the reference to alcohol activates conceptual schemas which are related to the effects of alcohol and which suggest that the "dizzying" process of reading the sentence is *meant* to imitate these effects. On the other hand, if they do not have any of these schemas available to make sense of their feelings of failure or if these schemas are, for whatever reason, not activated by the sentence, then they probably wouldn't read these resistances as purposeful; the sentence would feel needlessly vague and ambiguous, and the reader would probably be more likely to conclude that it is just "bad" writing.

For the sake of our example, we'll assume that this sentence doesn't activate any of these contextual or conceptual schemas and that the sentence, therefore, feels needlessly confusing to the reader. What happens then? If we assume that the reader doesn't just put the story down out of frustration or out of an appraisal of "bad" writing, and that they continue to read right past the vague and slight displeasure that the first sentence causes, then they will read the second and third sentences.

In the first sentence, a number of mutually exclusive events seem to happen simultaneously, and in the second, this resistance is repeated: the reader is told not that the protagonist *finishes* the beer but that he *has* (already) *finished* it. According to the reader's proairetic code, the finishing of the beer is presented in the correct order, but Coover switches from the simple aspect in the first sentence to the perfect aspect in the second, which pushes the time of the action back and makes the finishing appear to the reader much closer in time to the events of the first sentence: the protagonist is drinking the beer and (somehow) he has (already) finished it.

The feeling that the second sentence has delivered a similar resistance to the first might make the reader somewhat alert: *Is this nonsense somehow meaningful?* And their suspicions would be confirmed by the third sentence, which delivers a similar, even stronger resistance to the first and second, as the character literally thinks about having a second beer *at the very same time* that he is drinking it.

At one point in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes compares the process by which the

reader comes to appraise significance to "the children's game of topping hands" (12), suggesting that significance is often constructed through repetition. Therefore, if our imagined, proairetic reader takes these three sentences to be repeating a similar type of resistance, then it would be around here that they would begin to see them as significant and, therefore, feel the first inklings of jouissance.

From this account, we can see that "significance" (in the sense that Barthes uses it) is a feeling that an aspect of a text signifies something but that the reader couldn't yet say what that signification is. Repetition is probably one very common means by which readers come to see resistance as significance; however, it seems to me that there are probably other processes (such as the contextual and conceptual processes that I alluded to earlier) which a reader could use to find some textual nonsense significant. One of the main questions, therefore which Barthes leaves unanswered in *The Pleasure of Text* has to do with these processes of significance.

This would suggest that more research is necessary if we want to understand Barthes's theory, but since Barthes's theory is just that—a *theory*—we need to first ask more foundational questions about the extent to which this theory may (or may not) describe some of the actual processes by which readers take pleasure in texts.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

I have decided to frame my description of Barthes's ideas around three *hypotheses* in order to emphasize the highly speculative nature of the ideas themselves. These ideas are speculative because I have not considered them in the light of any evidence which could confirm or disconfirm them; therefore, more research is needed if we want to start making claims about how readers actually take pleasure in texts. Because the question of pleasure has not yet, to my knowledge, been asked within the CWS literature, I can identify a number of directions for further research:

(1) *We should survey the evidence which has been presented by research psychologists on the subject of pleasure.* As I mentioned earlier, there is a long and robust tradition within research psychology of attempting to understand how people come to like art and writing; therefore, it would be useful to try translate some of these findings into the disciplinary context of CWS. This evidence could help us to build more sophisticated models of the different ways in which domain-specific audiences take pleasure in a text, it could help us to identify pedagogical goals, and it could provide us with models for conducting empirical research of our own.

(2) *We should empirically test Barthes's theory of pleasure.* As I mentioned earlier, I believe that there is some evidence which already supports some of Barthes's theory of pleasure (e.g. Peskin 252-3; Reber et al. 365-75; Silvia 25-9, 55-64; Graf and Landwher 392-7), but that does not mean that we should not empirically test Barthes's hypotheses ourselves as this psychological evidence is far from indisputable or conclusive. Likewise, conducting original empirical research often yields data which do not fit easily within current theoretical models and which, thereby, creates an opportunity for theorists to update, improve, or even re-write those theoretical models. Simply trying to replicate the results of other studies, in other words, can yield new and relevant findings which push the frontiers of knowledge in new directions. The social sciences provide us with a number of qualitative, quantitative, and experimental models for conducting empirical research, and so there are a many different ways to research this question.

(3) *We should begin to build domain-specific models of pleasure.* Different audiences seem to bestow expertise on writers for different reasons; therefore, there are probably different hedonic processes that these audiences use to evaluate the work that these writers produce. *Interactionist* theories of pleasure are useful for accounting for domain-specific processes because they require input from an audience. If Barthes's theory of pleasure is correct, for example, then the differences between people who like fan fiction and people who like seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry can probably be accounted for by considering what schemas these different groups of readers use to try to make sense of texts (Peskin 252-3). That said, I think that we should be reticent to generalize even regarding those processes that seem to span across many domains. As we have seen, taking pleasure in a text is a complex process which involves the mingling of many factors at once. Likewise, there are probably many useful ways to define different domains of creative writing; therefore, we should probably not attempt to build one, capital-M Model of pleasure which applies to all domains but many different models of domain-specific pleasure which crisscross, overlap, and cut across each other.

(4) *We should research other factors which influence liking.* Thus far, we have identified two processes which could potentially influence liking: the process by which a reader assigns meaning to a text and the process by which a reader assigns "significance" to those parts of the text they cannot make sense of. If Barthes's theory is correct, I doubt that these processes are universal across all groups of readers, but even if they were, I seriously doubt that they tell anything more than a small part of the story of pleasure. Not only are there probably other psychological processes which influence pleasure (e.g. Menninghaus et al. 55-7), there are probably many other textual, cultural, sociological, and contextual factors which also

Journal of Creative Writing Studies   *22*

influence pleasure. We should build as sophisticated a model of pleasure as possible since any of these factors could be translated in pedagogical goals.

(5) *We should research how knowledge about the hedonic responses of audiences can be effectively developed into pedagogical goals and methods.* I believe that researching the erotics of reading can be pedagogically valuable. That said, this is just a belief; therefore, once we have identified some potential goals, we should empirically research whether or not teaching with these goals in mind actually increases the "expertise" of our students in the eyes of different audiences.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Because I have insisted on the speculative nature of Barthes's theory, it may seem strange to begin to discuss how we can apply this theory. That said, since I am proposing that we should study the erotics of reading because this knowledge can be pedagogically useful, I would like to paint a picture of how this knowledge could be used. Therefore, I would like to offer a few ideas of how Barthes's theory of pleasure could inform our pedagogies if it turns out to be somewhat correct:

(1) *When studying model texts with our students, we should choose texts that are relevant to our students' backgrounds and experiences and develop their background knowledge of those texts.* Postsecondary creative-writing instructors often assign and study model texts with their students in the hope of informing the way in which their students write. It seems likely to me that students are more likely to take influence from those texts that they like; therefore, we should assign and discuss texts in ways that increase the chances that our students will like these texts.

Demographic changes in the United States suggest that creative-writing teachers will continue to teach more and more diverse cohorts of students. Diverse cohorts of students bring with them diverse schemas for making sense of texts, and so our students are more likely to like the texts we assign if we choose texts which reflect the diverse experiences our students bring with them into our classrooms. That said, more and more diverse cohorts of students are likely to share fewer and fewer schemas; therefore, we can help all of our students to take more pleasure in texts which they don't feel like they understand by providing them with the schemas necessary to feel as though they understand the texts we have assigned. Providing schemas to help students to feel as though they understand at least part of a text should help students to like and, therefore, to consider taking influence from texts that are beyond their immediate sphere of understanding. Therefore, providing schemas to students through content instruction is likely to expand the number of texts and domains which students draw upon in order to inform their own writing.

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   23

We should be careful, of course, not to *prescribe* readings or interpretations of the texts we assign, but if Barthes's theory is correct, then neither contentment nor jouissance are possible unless a reader feels as though they have at least a partial understanding of the text. Therefore, we can increase the degree to which all of our students take pleasure in the texts we assign by gently providing background knowledge and other schemas which will help them to feel like they understand.

(2) *Workshops should be, to some extent, domain-informed.* If Barthes's theories are even partially correct, then the schemas that a student uses to make sense of a text informs how they respond to work submitted in workshops. The diversity of schemas which students bring with them into workshop probably explains part of why workshops can be effective: workshop participants can use their personal knowledge, beliefs, and responses to help their fellow students to reconceptualize their own texts in ways that they could not on their own given the schemas they have at their disposal. But this diversity of schemas can also hurt the efficacy of workshops: if students do not have the schemas necessary to feel like they understand a text that has been submitted, then their feedback may simply be a reflection of their own desire to see the text "fit" their own personal schemas more adequately. This type of feedback can (at best) waste class time and (at worst) be misleading, harmful, or disparaging to the student who receives it. Therefore, it would be helpful to provide students with at least *some* of the necessary schemas to engage in a domain-appropriate way with the texts that have been submitted.

One student-centered method for accomplishing this might ask the students to inform each other about their own textual domain. An instructor might, for example, ask their students to submit a short "ideal reader" profile with the work that they submit. This profile might include information on what this student's ideal reader like and dislikes, what textual aspects (character, setting, plot, prose, etc.) they prioritize as they read, what they have read before, and so on. If Barthes's theory of pleasure is correct, then asking workshop participants to read this ideal-reader profile before they read should prime the participants to read in such a way that will minimize the amount of inappropriate feedback produced in workshop.

(3) *We should teach our students domain-specific strategies which help them to produce texts which will seem to conform to the schemas that the text's audience will have available.* One of the most effective methods for teaching writing to adolescents is known as "cognitive strategy instruction" (Graham and Perin 466). This method involves devising and teaching simple sets of instructions which students can use to achieve specific textual goals. This method has not received much testing in the postsecondary classroom, but its efficacy doesn't seem to modify with the age of the student (Graham 203), which suggests that this method

Journal of Creative Writing Studies   *24*

may be similarly effective at the undergraduate level as well. Once we have identified the schemas which different audiences use to make sense of texts, we can devise cognitive strategies which our students can use to help them to write texts which seem to conform to these schemas. This may not feel very "creative," but since Barthes's theory holds that a reader must feel as though they have at least a partial understanding of the text to take pleasure in it, then increasing our students' "expertise" in creative writing probably means helping them to produce texts which would make readers feel as though they have at least a bit of understanding. Therefore, every "expert" creative writer needs to write at least a bit un-creatively.

(4) *We should teach our students strategies which help them to produce texts which significantly resist the schemas their readers have available.* Cognitive strategy instruction can also be used to help our students to produce jouissance in a reader. Earlier, for example, I discussed Erick Piller's "discursive mixing" strategy which seems to be one potentially reliable and potentially transferrable method for achieving jouissance. Likewise, in one of my recent introductory creative-writing classes, I guided my students through a short unit on writing first sentences to literary short stories. We collectively surveyed fifteen of the first sentences in the *Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*, noted similarities between them, and found that one common feature of these first sentences was what we ended up calling *un-alikeness*: these sentences often invented a scenario in which two apparently "unalike" things were thrust together. From there, we collectively developed a simple strategy for writing literary first sentences which involves students first thinking of two unalike things, then thinking of a scene which brings them together, and finally writing a sentence which includes both of these "unalike" things. As one might expect, these students named some rather uninteresting pairs of concepts: fire and ice, love and hate, etc. These clichés led these students to write *a lot* of sentences that I, personally, thought were relatively uninteresting, though it should be said that even these clichés were used effectively by some students. (For example, one student used the pair love and hate to come up with this first sentence: "He relished solitude, but he hated loneliness.") Amidst all these uninteresting sentences, however, students also came up with some sentences that I found surprising and powerful: e.g. "I watched 'Cerise, the vegan' eat five whole hamburgers in the span of three minutes," "The day I met George Washington was the day I almost died," "My father was upset enough to throw the paintings away but thoughtful enough to remember to put them in the recycling," and so on. Personally, I find the results of this exercise very encouraging, and I imagine that the results could have been even better if I had introduced more scaffolding exercises and had created more opportunities for corrective feedback from both myself from the students' peers. But in any case, I have described this exercise here because it seems like an example of a cognitive strategy which could, if taught effectively, lead students to write

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   25

texts that will lead to jouissance in some readers.

(5) *We should teach students how to "prime" their reader's schemas.* Earlier, I alluded to the fact that a reader can have the "right" schemas to feel as though they understand a text but that it's possible for them to fail to apply these schemas at the right time. Priming refers to a psychological phenomenon in which one's conscious or unconscious schemas are activated in such a way that these memories guide the reader's attention (Tulving et al. 336). As I mentioned earlier, the subject of audience awareness is contentious within some creative-writing communities, but I find it likely that at least some expert creative writers probably use some kind of tacit or explicit audience awareness in order to anticipate when their readers might need their schemas primed. For example, a novelist might feel the need to remind their readers of details which have been established in an earlier chapter and which will soon become important to understanding the narrative.

Likewise, titles often serve as priming mechanisms. For example, in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story, "A Temporary Matter," the title primes the reader to pay extra attention to this phrase when it appears in the first sentence:

> The notice informed them that it was *a temporary matter*: for five days their electricity would be cut off for one hour, beginning at eight P.M. (321; italics added).

One of the titling strategies which I teach my students asks them to consider which part of the poem, story, or essay that they have written they would like their reader to pay extra attention to and then to title the poem, story, or essay, after that.

If a writer is not aware of their need to occasionally prime their reader's schemas, then the reader may end up applying the "wrong" schemas to their text which could make the text more "insignificantly" confusing. Conversely, including passages which prime a reader's schemas when they don't need to be primed can activate schemas which make the reader feel as though the text doesn't respect their intelligence and is, therefore, "condescending." Therefore, learning when to and when not to prime a reader's schemas can be very important for all creative writing students and especially those that are interested in writing longer creative texts.

A FEW CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this paper, I have pursed two goals simultaneously. On the one hand, I have called for an investigation into the erotics of reading in the hope of eventually developing audience- and domain-centered creative-writing pedagogies, and on the other hand, I have used Barthes's

ideas from *The Pleasure of the Text* to propose some initial hypotheses about a few of the factors which may lead to pleasure.

Because of the split focus of this paper, it seems appropriate to me to conclude this paper not with one remark alone with but several remarks at once:

(1) *We need an ethics of pleasure.* Developing a pedagogy which aims to help students to write more pleasurable creative texts raises an important question: What about all of those pleasures that are cruel, that are taken at another person's expense, that promote systemic injustice, that "punch down," so to speak?

A wealth of research in literary studies has shown how literature and (assumedly) pleasure have helped to tacitly or explicitly support, justify, or promote unjust and oppressive systems of power. Therefore, indiscriminately promoting pleasure runs the risk of promoting injustice and oppression. Likewise, other interesting ethical problems emerge when we focus on pleasure. For example, the positive psychologists Martin Seligman, Acacia C. Parks, and Tracy Steen once pointed out that "when people fluctuate within a relatively 'down' range of positive emotion, but live in a society like the USA that promotes an upbeat disposition, they can feel discouraged and even defective" (1380). In other words, different kinds of pleasure are valued differently by different cultures, and indiscriminately promoting pleasure runs the risk of reinforcing certain prevailing cultural attitudes toward pleasure, which make some non-conforming people feel "defective."

All of this together suggests that we don't only need an erotics of reading but also an *ethics* of erotics: a set of guidelines by which we can make informed decisions about which pleasures to promote and which to ignore or discourage.

In an earlier version of this paper, I suggested that my views on pleasure could be summed up by the (perhaps apocryphal) words of the nineteenth century French classical composer, Clause Debussy: "There is no theory. You have only to listen. Pleasure is the law" (qtd. in Shapiro 268). But if pleasure is the law, then its jurisdiction is not complete. As other CWS scholars have suggested (e.g. Dawson 208-14), we should explore with our students the political, social, and (more broadly) ethical implications of their work. Our goal, therefore, should be to teach writers the skills necessary not only to write pleasurable texts but also to use those skills responsibly in the midst of diverse, multi-ethnic societies. But this suggests that a pedagogy of pleasure cannot meet all of our students' needs. Therefore…

(2) *Increasing our student's expertise in the eyes of an audience is only one metric for measuring pedagogical "success."* Drawing upon some thinking from literary studies,

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   *27*

Dianne Donnelly proposes a four-part taxonomy of creative-writing pedagogies based upon the four of the loci where the meaning of a text can be found: the text, reality, the writer, and the reader (13-71). Proposing that we study audiences in order to discern pedagogical goals clearly places me in the latter of these four camps, but Donnelly's taxonomy is useful for reminding us that there are a number of justified and even complementary ways to teach creative writing.

As I mentioned before, one of the dominant paradigms for teaching creative-writing is the very writer-centered pedagogy which Donnelly calls "expressivism." Expressivist pedagogies tend to focus on helping students to discover, as one creative-writing instructor put it, "what they are genuinely being called to write" (qtd. in Adsit and Wilder 414). This focus is a wonderful complement to the very reader-centered pedagogy which I am proposing here because it reminds us that increasing our students' "expertise" in the eyes of an audience means nothing if our students are not personally interested in learning the kinds of skills which would increase their expertise. On the other hand, I would argue that we need more reader-centered pedagogies in creative writing because of the way in which reader-centered pedagogies complement expressivist pedagogies.

Teaching our students to write what they are "genuinely being called to write" does very little to ensure that they will write work which excites a reader's pleasure. Therefore, if we aim to produce writers whose work will be read and appreciated by audiences of readers— if we aim to produce writers whose writing effects the world—then we should, I think, pay attention to what readers like.

Reader-centered and expressivist pedagogies, in other words, complement each other in the sense that one helps to address a blind-spot in the other's pedagogical outlook. If this is correct, then the creative-writing education which our students receive will be enhanced by the presence of both of these modalities and, as Donnelly's taxonomy suggests, by the presence of others as well. Because no pedagogy is perfect, our students would probably benefit from being exposed to a number of modalities. So while I think there is much to be gained from establishing a reader-centered pedagogy, I do not think of reader-centered pedagogies as necessarily superior to other pedagogical modalities. Rather, I think that our students would benefit from being exposed to a rich tapestry of interwoven modalities, as they progress through their creative-writing educations.

That said, in order to establish a reader-centered pedagogy, we first need to understand what readers like and how they come to like it. But since the hypotheses that I have described here are just that—hypotheses—we need to consider whether and to what extent

Journal of Creative Writing Studies *28*

they represent how actual readers take pleasure in texts before we can confidently design a pedagogy which helps students to write pleasurably. But the world has a way of frustrating our ideas about it, so we should expect that…

(3) *Barthes's theory of pleasure is probably wrong, misleading, or (at the very least) incomplete.* In the philosophy of science, there is an ugly but helpful phrase called "pessimistic induction" (Saatsi 1088). Basically, this phrase is meant to capture the idea that if we survey the history of science we will see (or "induce") that science has been wrong *far* more often than it has been right and that, therefore, we should be pessimistic about the possibility that our current theories are correct.

I call this phrase helpful because it reminds us that we need to be humble about what we *think* we know, since chances are we are at least somewhat wrong. At this point, however, a reader might reasonably ask me why I have taken the time to explain Barthes's theory of pleasure if I think it will turn out to be wrong. And furthermore: Why have I claimed that we should be empirically studying the erotics of reading if so much empirical research turns out to be wrong or misleading?

Personally, I appreciate Isaac Asimov's response to questions like these:

> when people thought the earth was flat, they were wrong. When people thought the earth was spherical, they were wrong. But if you think that thinking the earth is spherical is just as wrong as thinking the earth is flat, then your view is wronger than both of them put together.

The process of testing our ideas empirically is not one of becoming *more right*; it is a process of become *less wrong*. As I suggested earlier, testing our ideas empirically is, more than anything, a *process*: we propose our blunt, misguided ideas and then we test them against the world by bearing witness to it. Ideally, bearing witness to the world is an act of care and attention—in which we let the world tell us what to think—and this act of care and attentions shows us how to modify our ideas about the world so that they are just a little less wrong than before.

And it's important that we become less wrong about pleasure because…

(4) *Pleasure matters.* In an earlier version of this paper, I spent a lot of time pointing out that reading and writing are often championed for the way in which they can achieve noble ends: improving society, edifying readers, alleviating suffering, and so on. Without a doubt, reading and writing can achieve these ends, but I also think that we can sometimes overlook that one of the simplest means by which creative writers can improve the lives of their readers

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   29

is by writing texts that their readers like. Scholars of rhetoric would say that writing texts which appeal to readers helps texts to accomplish all of the noble goals which I mentioned before, but this view overlooks the fact that pleasure seems to valuable in its own right.

The positive psychologist Martin Seligman argues that five subjective factors contribute to personal well-being: positive emotions, feelings of engagement, feelings of intimacy with other people, feelings of meaning, and feelings of accomplishment (16-20). The elation of a happy ending, the engagement of an unexpected event or turn of phrase, the intimacy of a powerful lyric or an honest essay, the significance of witnessing a character's pain, the accomplishment of developing a satisfying interpretation of a difficult poem—creative texts seem to be capable of helping readers to generate all five of these feelings, and since increases in some of these feelings have been shown to lead to increases in subjective well-being over time (Huta and Ryan 757-60), it seems reasonable to expect that reading for pleasure can play a part in supporting a reader's subjective well-being. Moreover, since subjective reports of one's overall happiness have been shown to correlate with a number of positive outcomes related to health (Danner et al. 804-13; Cohen et al. 652-57), relationships (Harker and Keltner 112-24), and economic success (De Neve and Oswald 19953-58; Burger and Caldwell 51-62), it seems that we stand to improve the lives of our readers considerably simply by making them more pleasurable. Far from being a "distraction" from the world's problems, therefore, pleasure may have an important part to play in solving them.

That said, I would like to be very clear that I am not arguing that we should care less about the world's suffering. I expect that some of the readers of this essay would find it callous to focus on pleasure given the many forms of suffering, inequity, and injustice which different groups of people face each and every day, and I would not disagree with this view. It would, in fact, be a problem if focusing on pleasure led us to ignore the part that reading and writing can play in addressing climate change, systemic racism, and systemic misogyny, and so on. We *should*, in other words, care more about alleviating suffering and injustice than we do about promoting pleasure, but I think we make a mistake if we care about alleviating suffering to such an extent that we underestimate the power that pleasure has to improve the lives of readers. While we should continue to care deeply about the world's suffering, in other words, we should care more about the world's pleasures.

WORKS CITED

Adsit, Janelle, and Laura Wilder. "Borders Crossed: A Nationwide Survey on the Influence of Rhetorical Theory on Creative Writing." *Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2020.

Armstrong, Paul B. *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art.* Baltimore, Md., Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014.

Asimov, Isaac. "The Relativity of Wrong." *Tufts University*, 1989, chem.tufts.edu/AnswersInScience/ RelativityofWrong.htm.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* Toronto, Univ. Of Toronto Press, 1997.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z.* Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, 1974.

—. *The Pleasure of the Text.* Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, 1975.

Berkenkotter, Carol. "Understanding a Writer's Awareness of Audience." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 32, no. 4, Dec. 1981, p. 388, 10.2307/356601. Accessed 5 May 2019.

Berlyne, D.E. *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity.* Mcgraw-Hill ; New York, 1960.

Berridge, Kent C., and Morten L. Kringelbach. "Pleasure Systems in the Brain." *Neuron*, vol. 86, no. 3, 6 May 2016, pp. 646–664., doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2015.02.018.

Bizzell, P. "Cognition, convention, and certainty: What we need to know about writing." *PreText*, vol. 3, 1982, pp. 213–243.

Brophy, Kevin. "Repulsion and Day-Dreaming: Freud Writing Freud." *New Writing*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2006, pp. 132–144., doi:10.2167/new324.0.

Burger, Jerry, and David Caldwell. "Personality, Social Activities, Job-Search Behavior and Interview Success: Distinguishing Between PANAS Trait Positive Affect and NEO Extraversion." *Motivation and Emotion*, vol. 24, no. 1, Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, Mar. 2000, pp. 51–62, doi:10.1023/A:1005539609679.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.* Cornell Univ. Press, 1978.

Coover, Robert. "'Going for a Beer.'" *The New Yorker*, 6 Mar. 2011, www.newyorker.com/ magazine/2011/03/14/going-for-a-beer.

Childress, Clayton. *Under the Cover: The Creation, Production, and Reception of a Novel.* Princeton University Press, 2019.

Cohen, Sheldon, et al. "Emotional Style and Susceptibility to the Common Cold." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, vol. 65, no. 4, July 2003, pp. 652–657, 10.1097/01.psy.0000077508.57784.da.

Culler, Jonathan D. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature.* Routledge, 1975.

Danner, Deborah D., et al. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 80, no. 5, 2001, pp. 804–813, 10.1037/0022-3514.80.5.804.

Dawson, Paul. *Creative Writing and the New Humanities.* London Routledge, 2005.

De Neve, J.E., and A. J. Oswald. "Estimating the Influence of Life Satisfaction and Positive Affect on Later Income Using Sibling Fixed Effects." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*,

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   31

vol. 109, no. 49, 19 Nov. 2012, pp. 19953–19958, 10.1073/pnas.1211437109.

Doerr, Anthony. "The Sword of Damocles." *The Writer's Notebook II: Craft Essays from Tin House*, edited by Christopher Beha, Tin House Books, 2012.

Donnelly, Dianne. *Establishing Creative Writing Studies as an Academic Discipline*. Multilingual Matters, 2011.

Earthman, Elise Ann. "Creating the Virtual Work: Readers' Processes in Understanding Literary Texts." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1992, pp. 351–384. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40171316. Accessed 5 Jan. 2021.

Essentials of the Theory of Fiction. edited by Michael J Hoffman and Patrick D Murphy, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2005.

Flower, Linda, and John Hayes. "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1980.

García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. translated by Gregory Rabassa, London, Penguin Books, 2014.

Giora, Rachel, et al. "The Role of Defaultness in Affecting Pleasure: The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis Revisited." *Metaphor and Symbol*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2 Jan. 2017, pp. 1–18, 10.1080/10926488.2017.1272934. Accessed 19 Apr. 2020.

Graf, Laura K. M., and Jan R. Landwehr. "A Dual-Process Perspective on Fluency-Based Aesthetics." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 19, no. 4, 5 Mar. 2015, pp. 395–410, 10.1177/1088868315574978. Accessed 10 Apr. 2019.

Graham, Steve. "Strategy Instruction and the Teaching of Writing: A Meta-Analysis." *Handbook of Writing Research*, edited by Charles A Macarthur et al., The Guilford Press, 2006.

Graham, Steve, and Dolores Perin. "A Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 99, no. 3, 2007, pp. 445–476, 10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.445.

Harker, LeeAnne, and Dacher Keltner. "Expressions of Positive Emotion in Women's College Yearbook Pictures and Their Relationship to Personality and Life Outcomes across Adulthood." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 80, no. 1, 2001, pp. 112–124, 10.1037/0022-3514.80.1.112.

Harper, Graeme. *On Creative Writing*. Bristol, Uk ; Buffalo N.Y., Multilingual Matters, 2010.

Harris, Karen R, and Steven Graham. *Making the Writing Process Work : Strategies for Composition and Self-Regulation*. Cambridge (Massachusetts), Brookline Books, 1999.

Hayes, John R. "A New Framework for Understanding Cognition and Affect in Writing." *The Science of Writing: Theories, Methods, Individual Differences, and Applications*, edited by C. Michael Levy and Sarah Ransdell, Lawrence Erbaum Associates, 1996.

Herman, David, et al. *Narrative Theory : Core Concepts and Critical Debates*. Columbus, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 2012.

Huta, Veronika, and Richard M. Ryan. "Pursuing Pleasure or Virtue: The Differential and Overlapping Well-Being Benefits of Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 11, no. 6, 31 Oct. 2009, pp. 735–762, 10.1007/s10902-009-9171-4.

Hyland, Ken. "Humble Servants of the Discipline? Self-Mention in Research Articles." *English for Specific Purposes*, vol. 20, no. 3, Jan. 2001, pp. 207–226, 10.1016/s0889-4906(00)00012-0.

Journal of Creative Writing Studies   *32*

Accessed 5 Jan. 2021.

Kaufer, David S., et al. "Composing Written Sentences." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1986, pp. 121–140. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40171073.

Kellogg, Ronald T., and Alison P. Whiteford. "The Development of Writing Expertise." *Writing: A Mosaic of New Perspectives*, edited by Elena Grigorenko et al., Psychology Press, 2012.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. "A Temporary Matter." *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction : 50 North American Stories since 1970*, edited by Lex Williford and Michael Martone, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Magnifico, Alecia Marie. "Writing for Whom? Cognition, Motivation, and a Writer's Audience." *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 45, no. 3, 28 July 2010, pp. 167–184, 10.1080/00461520.2010.493470. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

Mayers, Tim. "Creative Writing and Process Pedagogy." *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alexandria Peary and Tom Hunley, Southern Illinois University Press, 2015.

Menninghaus, Winfried, et al. "Rhetorical Features Facilitate Prosodic Processing While Handicapping Ease of Semantic Comprehension." *Cognition*, vol. 143, Oct. 2015, pp. 48–60, 10.1016/j.cognition.2015.05.026. Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.

Moccia, Lorenzo, et al. "The Experience of Pleasure: A Perspective Between Neuroscience and Psychoanalysis." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 12, 4 Sept. 2018, 10.3389/fnhum.2018.00359.

Moxley, Joseph. "Audience Awareness and the Inexperienced Writer." *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1985.

Nelson, Maggie. "A Sort of Leaning Against." *The Writer's Notebook II: Craft Essays from Tin House*, Tin House Books, 2012.

Obermeier, Christian, et al. "Aesthetic and Emotional Effects of Meter and Rhyme in Poetry." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 4, 2013, 10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00010. Accessed 5 Jan. 2021.

Peskin, Joan. "Constructing Meaning When Reading Poetry: An Expert-Novice Study." *Cognition and Instruction*, vol. 16, no. 3, Sept. 1998, pp. 235–263, 10.1207/s1532690xci1603_1.

Phelan, James. *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative.* Columbus, Ohio State Univ. Press, 2007.

Piller, Erick. "What's Creative about Creative Writing? Critical Pedagogy and Transversal Creativity." *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016.

Powell, D.A. "(Mis)Adventures in Poetry." *The Writer's Notebook: Craft Essays from Tin House*, Tin House, 2009.

Rabinowitz, Peter J. *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation.* Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1998.

Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* Chapel Hill ; London, The University Of North Carolina Press, Cop, 2006.

Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism. edited by Jane P Tompkins, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Reber, Rolf, et al. "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses   33

Experience?" *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 8, no. 4, Nov. 2004, pp. 364–382, 10.1207/s15327957pspr0804_3. Accessed 10 Apr. 2019.

Reissenweber, Brandi. "Before the First Draft: Cultivating Inspiration and Creative Insight in the Classroom." *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2018.

Saatsi, Juha T. "On the Pessimistic Induction and Two Fallacies." *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 72, no. 5, 2005, pp. 1088–1098. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508959.

Seligman, Martin E.P. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York, Atria Paperback, 2013.

Seligman, Martin E.P. et al. "A balanced psychology and a full life." *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London*. Series B, Biological sciences vol. 359,1449 (2004): 1379-81. doi:10.1098/rstb.2004.1513

Shapiro, Nat. *An Encyclopedia of Quotations about Music*. New York, Da Capo, 1985.

Shimron, Joseph. "Psychological Processes behind the Comprehension of a Poetic Text." *Instructional Science*, vol. 9, no. 1, Feb. 1980, pp. 43–66, 10.1007/bf00118968. Accessed 26 Nov. 2019.

Silvia, Paul J. *Exploring the Psychology of Interest*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, Cop, 2006.

Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 31, no. 4, Dec. 1980, p. 378, 10.2307/356588. Accessed 20 Aug. 2019.

Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *A Susan Sontag Reader*, by Susan Sontag, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies. edited by Lisa Zunshine, New York, Ny, Oxford University Press, 2015.

The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology. edited by Shane J Lopez and CR Snyder, New York ; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories since 1970. edited by Lex Williford and Michael Martone, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2007.

The Writer's Notebook: Craft Essays from Tin House, Tin House Books, 2009.

Tulving, Endel, et al. "Priming Effects in Word-Fragment Completion Are Independent of Recognition Memory." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 336–342, 10.1037/0278-7393.8.4.336.

Wilder, Laura. "'The Rhetoric of Literary Criticism' Revisited." *Written Communication*, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 76–119, 10.1177/0741088304272751. Accessed 8 Oct. 2020.

Toward an Erotics of Reading: Three Hypotheses　*34*