Lost and found in the reading machine

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It is a pleasure to write this foreword for the volume that follows, which contains fascinating explorations of some of the literary new-found land opened up by computing and digitization. As costs reduce, the new technologies are yielding to more and more of us, new ways of encountering literature and engaging with it, with hugely facilitated possibilities of searching, browsing, referencing, and linking. The single page at a time of codex reading is being displaced by multiple windows, multiple files, an indefinitely-extending array of images (static or moving), sounds (including music), and textual glosses and explanations. Anyone who starts out reading on the computer screen something brief like a Seamus Heaney sonnet can soon find themselves supplementing the bare fourteen lines of text with a variety of multi-modal resources unimaginable when illuminated medieval texts were in their heyday. With computers we can search and sort unprecedentedly large texts and corpora, and computerized text analysis is a burgeoning field. And with ever-increasing computing power, rapid access to huge stores of visual imagery (including moving images) and sounds and music promise an enriching of the immediate (that is, both spatially and temporally) contextualization of on-screen reading – at the click of a link. This in part is why champions of technologized literary reading, reception and interpretation emphasize the enhanced possibilities of visualization that digital resources create.

Still, and notwithstanding all these exciting kinds of cultural and experiential change, I want to enter some *caveats*. Here the reader will find some reminders of the limits to the new affordances, and of the enduring value in some of the old ways of doing things. I offer these not as a Luddite or a technophobe, but as someone wanting to relate the older practices of reading, analysis and interpretation to the new. I will begin with some comments on the extent to which, as one current view suggests, the reading of literature affords us a kind of mimetic simulation of the cognitive and emotional challenges (especially of interpersonal relationships) of everyday life. Critique of this view is important, I think, since it sometimes underwrites proponents' enthusiasm for a technology-dependent literary reading: the latter is argued to be an *enriched* version of the simulation that all literary reading is assumed to be.

1. Literature as training for real life?

In a recent plenary talk at the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) annual conference in Middelburg, The Netherlands, Keith Oatley (2009) used the following analogy in support of his thesis that literature offers readers a 'simulation' of everyday situations and experiences; "reading or watching fiction involves creating and entering a simulated social world" (Oatley 2009). He argued that this makes it possible for readers to experience emotions in themselves, in the imagined contexts

that the author depicts the characters occupying. By means of reader-character empathy, readers take on various goals and plans in the fiction (usually the goals and plans of one or another character); and "with the goals and plans we have taken on, we experience our own emotions in the circumstances of the outcomes of the character's actions" (Oatley 2009). Much of this I agree with—intuitively or empathetically! But some of this I also find difficult, or inexplicit: for example, what exactly does 'taking on' entail, and what is it that readers 'get' from and in their engagement with the text that causes them to experience certain emotions in themselves, but in the characters' contexts (which, they know, fictional)?

Are there difficulties, in particular, with the metaphor of simulation? Oatley has written:

> Just as we expect someone who learns to pilot a plane to benefit from time spent in a flight simulator, so we expect people who read a lot of fiction to develop better theory of mind and empathy. Recent studies by our research group (Maja Djikic, Raymond Mar, & Keith Oatley, see www.onfiction.ca) have shown such effects. (abstract, Oatley 2009; see also Oatley 2008)

The argument is that literary reading simulates real-life experience, so that the empathy developed in reading improves empathy 'performance' in real life. A crucial first step is that literary reading does simulate life experience, where by simulation is meant something virtually identical to the target activity while remaining fictional, pretence, without real-world consequences beyond the activity into a contiguous context, in the same ontological world. Thus doing really badly on a flight simulator – crashing the plane – may have consequences in the embedding ontological world where your performance is used to assess your suitability by the air force for further pilot training, for example; but there is no extending and expanding context in the world of the simulation itself, no strewn wreckage, no bodies to inter, no grief-stricken families.

With these considerations in view, there is a difficulty with the simulation analogy as invoked. Consider the flight simulator. These days, it includes a cockpit with a daunting array of instrument panels and screens supplying visual information, and the possibility of applying to those present the kinds of gravitational forces, thrust and banking sensations experienced in a real aeroplane cockpit. The best simulators today, to all intents and purposes, pass a kind of Turing test: if a pilot woke up in the middle of one, they might not be able to distinguish it from the real thing. In a flight simulator, a pilot *rehearses* any and all the manoeuvres they might have to perform in a   real cockpit (including, presumably, spilling hot coffee, dealing with drunk and obstreperous passengers, coping with a hallucinating co-pilot who starts telling everyone that the cockpit they are in *is* only a simulation...).

The reading of literary fiction does not I believe relate to those things which the fiction represents in a way that is truly comparable. This is most immediately clear if one imagines reading a narrative about a character who is learning to fly: reading such a narrative is poor preparation, cognitively or emotionally, for flying a real plane. By contrast, spending time on a flight simulator would be quite good training. The other main difficulty with the analogy is the idea of improvement, the

clocking of hours on the way to attainment of proficiency; it is doubtful that the steady growth in competence gained on flight simulators is paralleled by a steady growth in empathy with the increase in the number of novels we have read.

Let me emphasize that I recognize the centrality, in much art including verbal art, of the emotional engagement of the reader (my recognition of this is reflected in Toolan 2009 and Toolan in preparation). Art must be crucially, but not exclusively, emotionally engaging. It may be, too, that heightened sensitivity effects, or enhanced empathy, short-term or longer term, can be empirically confirmed among readers exposed to literature by comparison with those who are not: the work of Oatley and his associates in this regard is extremely interesting. What I question is whether emotional engagement derives from a process of simulation, and whether simulation misrepresents the practices of literary reading, even while it contains some truth. In a sense, I continue to see art as more *real* than the simulation figure (echoic of the Platonic idea of art as imitation, doubly removed from the ideal) assumes: a dramatization or articulation rather than a simulation. And, crucially, art depends on the addressee's imagination, whereas simulations require almost none (it is as real as the real thing!).

2. Contexts of reading, again

Another sign of the times comes in the abstract of a recent lecture given by Svenja Adolphs (2009), entitled "Corpus, Context and Ubiquitous Computing". Adolphs suggests that "everyday communication has evolved rapidly over the past decade with an increase in the use of digital devices" (although quite how one measures communicational evolution, as distinct from change, is unclear). She goes on to suggest that one of the most important challenges today is that of "being able to respond to the context of use" in our corpus and computational linguistics. As the abstract states: "The ability to understand how different aspects of context, such as location, influence language use is important for future context-aware computing applications." Besides position, she mentions movement, time and physiological state as contextual factors that may potentially cause variations in people's use of language. These are, to my mind, the tip of the contextual iceberg, but they are a useful reminder of how complexly contextually embedded is the actuality of language use, including that language use known as the reading of literature. On the other hand, are there specificities of context which the analyst of literary texts and literary reading is entitled to exclude from consideration? Even though they may affect particular readers and even whole groups of readers, are there contextual factors that are *not* integral to the designed and intended literary activity?

Consider three contexts of communication: one is the surreptitious sending of brief messages, scribbled on scraps of paper, between two adjacently-seated members of a panel, interviewing an expert witness in the course of a tribunal. The two members do not want the witness, or other panel members, to see these scraps of paper, let alone the messages they contain: they do not want the larger group to be

aware that there is this covert dyadic deliberation going on. These contextual factors, I would say, directly and relevantly bear on the production and processing of the messages; on the production side, they may lead to rushed, less legible, more abbreviated and unintentionally ambiguous messages; on the reception side, rushed and covert reading might cause misunderstanding. But the rushed and covert qualities are integral to the nature of this two-party written communication.

A second scenario might be that of someone who begins reading Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" as they step into a lift that is to take them 30 floors up in an office building; almost immediately the lift breaks down, the lights dim, and the emergency telephone advises the passenger that they will have to wait forty minutes to be rescued. During those forty minutes, with nothing else to do or read, the trapped person settles down and reads the whole Poe story. Under the contextual conditions, they find the story exceptionally disturbing: they begin to hyperventilate, feel that their own heart is about to burst, and by the time that the lift moves up to the nearest floor where they can alight, they are raving hysterically. That context of reading, however real for the person involved, is so atypical as to be no integral part of the normal or intended reading situation for that story. It is not a context of reading of "The Tell-Tale Heart" to which our computational analyses need be sensitive.

More difficult than the previous case, and really borderline, might be that of reading when ill enough to be hospitalized. This may not be the typical condition in which literary reading takes place, but it is hardly abnormal; literature is not often written expressly to be read by the unwell, but it is also clear that many people, even when so sick that their concentration is impaired, spend more time reading when ill than when not. It is very likely, and varying with the nature of the condition, that the reader's health condition will be a contextual effect on their attention to and evaluation of the literary text (as of their other communicational engagements). Nevertheless, when that person reads a new Alice Munro story in the *New Yorker* or a Kathleen Jamie poem in *The Guardian*, I would not want to include these contextual factors – the reader's illness – in the analysis or assessment of the literary text, or treat it as at the core of the reading experience. Again, this is not to deny the value and importance of what has come to be known as bibliotherapy, or to deny that someone with cancer may respond to a poem about chemotherapy rather differently from the other readers. But those are variations in readership; the poem itself stays the same, and is unchanged by those variations. And a poem about chemotherapy that is only striking to people who have undergone that treatment is a bit of a failure: a better one would be emotionally and cognitively engaging of a wider range of readers, regardless of health or other variable.

What do the three scenarios of reading reception suggest? In the first, I argued that the rushed and surreptitious conditions of production and reception are a permanently relevant part of the context of reading: someone coming across those texts years later should, in a sense, take that context into consideration when interpreting and evaluating the messages. In the Poe-story-in-lift example, I suggested that powerful as the particular context was for the trapped reader, this was

not a contextualization that one should automatically incorporate into an interpreting of the text. And even in the third scenario, involving a whole category of readers (one could apply this to other categories of course: all white readers, all women readers, all deaf readers), I wanted to resist the idea that the Munro story or the Jamie poem should be somehow tagged or calibrated, at the outset and so as suitably contextualize subsequent analysis, along the lines that Adolphs (2009) persuasively argues is appropriate and necessary in computational study of other kinds of language event. The short explanation is that the Munro story or Jamie poem is designed to be read by anyone reasonably fluent, regardless of their personal or situational particularities. Adolphs (2009) mentions physical movement as sometimes contextually relevant, and one can easily imagine someone saying "I was reading Jamie's 'Mr and Mrs Scotland' on my way to work this morning, but I couldn't get into it because the bus was lurching around too much". Fair enough: the reading experience has been compromized here. But also totally unfair: the unsatisfactory reading is no fault of the poem or Kathleen Jamie. That person should do better by that poem, and read it under different and more suitable contextual conditions.

3. New possibilities in the dissemination of literature (I): audiofiction

The distinctions among the kinds of relevant and irrelevant context offered in the previous section are rudimentary and only preliminary, but may help me to focus on the more integrally relevant types of variation and development that emerge, in text-reader relations in the digital, hypertextual age, where decisions about what is within or outside 'the literary' will be newly tested. Let me begin with audiofiction, and in particular the listened-to *short story* (a much more interesting case than the audio*book*, I believe). There seems to be little objection to saying that an Alice Munro story, satisfactorily orally performed by a competent radio actor, would be just as much the whole literary experience as, say, a print version of the story in a hard copy of the *New Yorker*. In some ways the oral/aural version is less contaminated: in the *New Yorker*, the printed story may be flanked by advertisements for malt whisky and reproduction Shaker furniture, accompanied by a half-page pen-and-ink depiction of one of the story's settings, plus 'user damage' such as creased pages and greasy fingerprints.

What ideational and emotional *differences* might there be, between the experience of *reading* an Alice Munro, Tobias Wolff, or David Foster Wallace story and *listening* to it? We are only beginning to explore these issues thoroughly. We know that listening (like speech) is inescapably 'timed' or 'in' time, and that by contrast reading permits us to stretch time, and even (to a degree) to impose our own pacing on this linear activity. We know also that imposing a pause during listening is different from the one that can take place in reading. The former is normally for purposes of 'repair' (halting the flow recorded speech because of some external interruption, or in order to catch a phrase or development that one has missed). The

latter, by contrast, has the potential to be a moment of 'reflection' (where, e.g., we lift our eyes from the text, or dwell on the words just read, in order to think again, or further, about the relevance and the implications of what has just been expressed). There is little evidence of equivalent 'reflection' time in the typical consumption of audiofiction, although there could be one.

Understanding of the effects and consequences of auditory rather than visual processing of literary fiction is still quite speculative (and in need of empirical study). Since in audio stories the consumer has 'less time', it may be that some of the things in stories which arguably need more time – reconsideration, intertextual evoking and analogizing, the 'liberty' of the consumer to 'take' the given words in different ways--will tend to be curtailed. Alternatively, or additionally, the textual style of audio stories might change to better suit audio consumption. For example, if one way of delaying the flow time (giving the listener the kind of time that a reader can take to process a message) would be to use more repetition, then possibly certain kinds of reiteration and recapitulation, over and above the kinds of disambiguating uses we find quite normally in written stories, might come to be more often used in audiofiction. It is possible that forms of such reiteration are already developed in formats like the radio story and radio play. Time for listener-reflection can also be secured by the use of a sonic or musical interlude, but these are not usually part of the writer's conception of the piece and are therefore a kind of intrusion; even where graphic images accompany written stories they do not usually *interrupt* the flow of the text on the page. Some of the differences in the reading vs. listening experience have been probed in Bailly (2007); see also Toolan (2008). Bailly (2007) noted that the iPod-delivered short story differs from the printed version at least in the way the pace and flow of the discourse is essentially under the performer's (or performers') control, and by virtue of the presence (intrusion?) of the performer's voice(s). Bailly (2007) set out to see, by means of informant questionnaires, whether such factors render the audio story easier to consume but less cognitively and emotionally rich than the same story encountered in written form. His very provisional findings were not always as predicted: printed stories seemed to be somewhat more enjoyable than those in audio format – possibly either because the processing was under reader 'control', or because of subjects' greater familiarity with written story consumption. Stories in audio format were judged to be less demanding, possibly because in listening you do not have to create the narrative voice. And while the audio stories engendered more emotional responses, these were mainly 'fresh' ones, relating directly to the scenes/episodes described; by contrast the read stories seemed to elicit far more emotional memories, relating story situations to more removed and richer past experiences of the individual readers.

4. New possibilities in the dissemination of literature (II): poetry as audiovisual performance

But audiofiction, via the computer or, allowing much greater mobility, via one's MP3 player or iPod, is still a relatively traditional literary digitization. Why not bring our poets more directly to us, in future? As an alternative to the 'slim volume', printed and bound, why shouldn't Kathleen Jamie's next selection of poetry come to us on videodisc: *performed* by the poet herself, speaking directly to the screen (of one's computer or iPod), with accompanying images and background music as deemed appropriate? Or we could have Alice Oswald's poetry about the Dart river, spoken by the poet herself, intermittently in shot, accompanied by video of the tidal Dart under the different phases of the moon. Oswald's oral performance of the poetry need not preclude the presence of other sounds as background accompaniment (birdsong, river sounds), and a readable version of the lines spoken could be provided in a panel above, below or to one side of the main screen. How could this be less than, or not fully, the 'text' of Oswald's Dart poems? Might we not alternatively say that this is the way we have always wanted to experience poems – the next best thing to having the living poet reading in front of us – but have hitherto lacked the means? If the latter is, increasingly, accepted as an entirely usual way to 'read' contemporary poetry, then a different general conception of the modern poetic canon will gradually emerge, partially displacing more traditional outlets such as the slim volumes published by Faber and others. Poetry performances are already available on YouTube and other free and fee-charging websites (van Peer 2009), but the audiovisual download is not yet a prominent way of acquiring the latest Rita Dove or Seamus Heaney collection: this mode is not yet fully institutionalized and professionalized. And if the audiovisual download becomes a prominent and financially attractive means of poetry publishing, then those poems that do not lend themselves to visual depiction or are difficult to perform orally may lose ground in the struggle for readership and attention; the genre or genres will change, with something gained and something lost.

5. Reiterating some literary fundamentals

By way of restraining a too-enthusiastic embrace of the digitization of all things literary, let me close with a reiteration of a few things that remain true even in the computerized era of Web 2.0, second life, twittering, texting and live cams.

5.1. We cannot actually *read* any quicker with computers than we did before they arrived; we can only cross-refer quicker, or with less effort (Planet Google and all its works has displaced our hard copy bound and printed version of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the *OED*, *Gray's Anatomy*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, etc.). Before long, any reader anywhere may enjoy direct on-the-screen access to every page in every book in the US Library of Congress. But you cannot *read* any of that material any faster than before. The affordances of digital technology of course nurture 'multi-tasking', browsing and scanning, but these 'advances' can be easily overstated; and recent psychological research on the "switch costs" of multitasking

suggests that it is often counterproductive (Rubinstein, Meyer & Evans 2001). I have never seen a poet write two poems at the same time, and I know of no-one who can read two poems at the same time. Digital technology runs up against the Saussurean buffers known as the linearity of the linguistic sign. Access is neither consumption, nor understanding. There is an analogy here with the students of ten years ago, say, who photocopied the key readings for a course and thereby persuaded themselves that they had 'taken possession' of the material contained therein; today they – and we – download the ftp files to a hard disk and similarly risk conflating access with knowledge/understanding. So with digitization some aspects of written culture are greatly changed (speed of access), but other aspects are *not* changed in the slightest (speed of reading, speed of understanding).

5.2. We can certainly hope that the reading machine will enrich our understanding of the particular literature we are presently reading (by enabling us to link at once to a cornucopia of relevant contexts, glosses, analogous materials, in at least the aural and visual media and in many modes). But alongside the enrichment of hypertextual and paratextual supplements there is a risk of impoverishment, distraction, contamination. This is a new version of an old debate in literary circles over the desirability of reading the bare text or of reading the text heavily annotated and supplemented by critical exegesis and commentary, intratextual and intertextual reference, and a record of all variant textual forms. Of course we can say we need both, or that different editions can be argued to suit different purposes, but in actuality choices will and must be made (linearity and time again). You – whoever you are – cannot read at time *t* in room *r* one and the same text in a bare and in an annotated edition. Which will you read first? And if you read the abundantly hypertextually annotated version first, *can* you, subsequently, truly read the same work in its bare and unadorned form? In short, we should see that more (more glosses, more exegesis, more links to images) does not invariably mean better, and that less on occasion will be better. To prefer the glossed version to the unglossed text is akin to preferring that every joke come with an explanation added (to help cultural outsiders, for example); an inescapable side-effect is that the joke cannot then be properly experienced as contextualized joke.

There is a general point here that is too often neglected: that with *every* change (of technology, or theory, or practice, for example) some conditions or qualities will be lost or will deteriorate even as others clearly improve. Optimists and modernists do not always accept this, to me, thermodynamic truism, since they evaluate change from within a system of cultural values. Thus they think of the new digital music technology which can re-master old Toscanini or Beecham recordings, and suggest much is improved and *nothing* is lost. On the contrary, the old recording, with its crackles and hisses and audience coughs and fluffed horn entry, and much more of what was part of the original *valeur*, has gone. Like a facelift, the result is better in some respects, but some qualities (whether they are good or bad is secondary) have been removed.

5.3. If to read literarily is to be immersed in the text to the point of being undistractable, unaware of the page margins and gutters or even of the page, the print, all the footnotes and *hors-textes*, then all such textual dietary supplements are unhelpful at best, deleterious at worst (they tend to cause the attention to be divided). I think of how, as a student, I read Shakespeare plays in those cheap Signet classic editions, my eyes repeatedly pulled away from the characters' speeches to the explanatory notes at the foot of almost every page (sometimes explaining the blindingly obvious, sometimes asserting an interpretation of the sense of a phrase that would strike me as a complete surprise). How does such an experiencing of Shakespeare compare with the 'immersive' attendance at a performance of the same scene in a theatre (or even on film)? In the latter, of course, one is not reading at all, so I may be criticized for not comparing like with like. My point, though, is that in literary reading we may ideally (or sometimes, or mostly) want the experience to be more like the totally focused response that is – in my view – theatre at its best.

5.4. Humanities scholars – perhaps more than other researchers – are prone to take a metaphor and run with it as if it were real. We are so keen on metaphors that if the marketing team tells us that this machine or package can 'read' texts, identify main themes and patterns, sort this, make that connection, we are a bit quick to believe them. But computers cannot think, feel, interpret, understand, misrepresent… only people can. My computer has not told me a single story; not one. It has not created a single thing. It is a mechanical device of enormous complexity in a few respects, but of glaringly narrow repertoire and adaptability by comparison with, say, a bird or a fish – let alone a human being. And it is so *dependent* upon me, unlike a tree, for example: if I do not turn it on, it cannot do a darned thing.

5.5. Computer programs for text analysis do the sorts of 'analysis' of, for example, Russian, that someone who can see Cyrillic marks or hear Russian sounds but not actually speak it, read it, or write it, could do. Our computers do not know that what they are looking at is Russian, with all the multi-aspectual and boundaryless hinterland that (as language-makers and users) we know that a text in Russian entails. In fact, *not* having or knowing any of that hinterland, grasp of some of which is critical to knowing that a text or speech *is* Russian, is crucial to the creation of the computerized analysis software. Via digitization, the software 'looks' at Russian standardized writing not as Russian or as language but as recurring and non-recurring shapes along a line; nothing more.

5.6. A familiar theme of commentaries and guides to literary studies and literary appreciation in the digital age is that *now*, as never before, reading and responding can be collaborative, interactive, and shared. All shall enjoy equal posting rights on the Wiki or LAN, the Blackboard or WebCT discussion forum. The 'private pain' of solitary reading, where the student or amateur struggles alone to make sense of

what they are reading without benefit of buddies, is banished. Again, I think we should beware of overstating the isolation of pre-digital reading, or the communalism of reading in the digital age. In the latter, it is true, a number of remotely-distributed readers can, even simultaneously, share their reactions to a poem in speech and writing; but that is when technology and practical provisions are optimal, and things are often less than optimal. More importantly, what underpins this 'intimate collaboration' is an acceptance of non-intimacy: a consenting to communicate via screen and digitized audio, rather than with physical, face-to-face interaction, and what I would call haptic proximity (*haptic*: the sense of touch). Call me a hopeless romantic, but for me an electronic computer-mediated two- or three-way discussion of, say, Yeats's "When you are old and grey and full of sleep" cannot fully compensate for the loss of those aspects of *embodied* interaction experienced in a *viva voce* conversation about this poem by people enjoying John Lyons's canonical situation of utterance: "one-one, or one-many, signalling in the phonic medium along the vocal-auditory channel, with all the participants present in the same actual situation able to see one another and to perceive the associated non-vocal paralinguistic features of their utterances, and each assuming the role of sender and receiver in turn" (Lyons, 1977: 637). My point then is that the old, face-to-face across-the-seminar-table way of reading and discussing Yeats was both a less private and a more embodied interaction than the new technologized fora. Less private and more embodied does not necessarily amount to 'better', or more supportive of the shy reader or the sensitive one (the loudest and most voluble seminar student is not always the most insightful!). But since such (old style) poetry discussions involve living, co-present, certain contact via two of the key senses (sound, sight) and potential contact via at least two more (touch, smell), the experience is more authentically embodied and collaborative than any virtual tutorial.

5.7. Living voice and human touch are important I believe, although I lack the space here to develop the argument fully. Let me instead refer to a moment of art-mediated intimacy in a celebrated film, by way of exemplification. Consider the episode in *Babette's Feast* (dir Gabriel Axel, 1987) where the opera-singer Achille Papin is giving a singing lesson to the pastor's sweet-throated daughter Philippa, eliciting from her a fully achieved performance of the famous love song in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* that begins (in the original Italian) *Là ci darem la mano, lá mi dirai di sí* ("There we will join hands, there you'll say yes to me."). The episode can be found on YouTube. Achille and Philippa become immersed in the situation they are creating or recreating. The music is partly outside its performers in some respects. Their voices project, and are audible, elsewhere in the house, and particularly audible to the possessive and puritanical pastor: the film cuts away twice during the song to shots of him seated with his other daughter at a table in an adjoining room, *their* hands joined in grief-stricken witness of the sinful seduction attempted by Papin or Mozart's black art. Also 'external' is the musical accompaniment that comes from the piano in the room, but significantly Papin abandons that mechanical

aid quite early in the duet, opting instead to hum the orchestral line where it seems to be needed. But the music is also inside the couple, brought forth from within their bodies (and we hardly need to speculate about their mental representations at this point). Papin, as Giovanni, clutches Philippa/Zerlina's arm, her shoulders, and at the song's conclusion kisses her forehead. The duettists do not quite kiss, then, and the scene is not interpreted as one where Papin takes advantage of his pupil. But no viewer would deny that the imminent *possibility* of their hands and lips touching is central to their and our experiencing of the music, of the situation, and of themselves. No viewer doubts that Achille is really smitten with Philippa and her voice (unlike the love-making of Giovanni to Zerlina, ironically, there is no simulation here), and the 'canonical situation' of his singing with and to Philippa is critical. Their singing and communicating does not merely role-play or simulate love; it crosses a line (a line which the logic of simulation theory implies is absolutely uncrossable) to become an embodied experiencing of love. What started out as pretending and role-playing (playing the roles of Giovanni and Zerlina) becomes *on the strength of that pretending or imaginative immersion* no pretending at all, but Achille truly (and innocently, as the song puts it?) in love with Philippa, and her half in anxious love with him. That Philippa shortly terminates the singing lessons (at her father's implicit behest and to what we interpret to be his idea of intense pleasure) only makes the now-abandoned connection the more palpable. The whole episode (like the film in which it arises) shows rather than tells the power of art, and then the curbs on that power. But what my description has failed to mention so far is the *quality* of Philippa's singing: Achille, the 'resting' professional, sings well enough; but Philippa's singing is transcendent, so pure, committed, and beautiful. It is a performing of the art-love-beauty nexus that (I believe) Axel and Blixen intended.   Mozart's beautiful love song is here as compelling a demonstration of the power of art and the artist as one can imagine (and we viewer-listeners, like the protagonists, are persuaded by the demonstration); in a parallel way, later in the film, Babette's feast will achieve the same goal.

5.8. If there was one most noteworthy area of development that I would want to pick out for attention, among the multiple practices of literary reading that have emerged over the past twenty years, it would not be literary weblogs, or net-based slash fiction, or hyper-fiction, or the growth of reading of the great authors via online critical editions. It would not be a high-tech development at all, but reading groups. Agreed, some of these rely on mass-media communication – the Oprah Winfrey book selections, the one city one book programmes in Seattle, Chicago, and now worldwide (these are civic initiatives that try to get everyone in a city to read and discuss the same book) – but even these are using relatively old technologies (on reading groups see the work of Swann, Allington and O'Halloran 2008 and Fuller 2008). And the larger growth in reading groups, at least in North America and the UK, has mostly occurred with a minimum of technological facilitation. For reasons not easily fathomed (decline in institutional religious belief and church-going? increased affluence and leisure time? a hunger for kinds of fluid or intermittent

community outside the traditional bases in family, class, ethnicity, profession?), small groups of like-minded people are taking the trouble to meet in person on a fairly regular basis, to share their thoughts about whatever literary work they have agreed to read. The reading group standardly conforms to Lyons's (1977) conditions for "the canonical situation of utterance" (where *utterance* could easily be replaced by the richer term *communication*). I believe they do so precisely because in that way more of their senses, more of their bodies (not just hearing and sight but touch also and even smell (e.g., of each other, or of the books or paper in hand) are engaged in the act of literary reading, broadly understood (and the sense of taste too, where refreshments accompany the book discussion).

5.9. Alongside the growth in the communal but low-tech shared literary reading that is the reading group, another distinct and enduring affordance of literary reading should not be neglected: that of private and undivided attention. The writer Colm Tóibín has recently re-asserted that literature is special by virtue of being art which can have a private impact, on one person at a time: "The business of reading and writing are done alone… There is a lovely privacy and power about that… You are affecting someone when they are alone, probably the most powerful time to affect people." (Tóibín 2008). Tóibín (2008) contrasts this (potentially) private relation, of fiction and poetry, with the typically more public relation of films and plays; and he perhaps overstates his case, neglecting the possibilities of a powerful shared literary experience – not only in the theatre but at a poetry reading or, as implied earlier, in a reading group.

Still, as hinted at in 5.3 above, undivided attention remains a specially important element to take into consideration because in the modern world there are, to an unparalleled extent, endless ambushes upon semiological immersion, whether that comes under the aegis of hyperliterature, multi-tasking, split-screens or other multi-source multi-modal communication. I am not saying that multiple modes of communication cannot be synchronized and integrated. On the contrary, the thrust of integrational linguistic theory is that they routinely are (cf. the integrational principle of cotemporality – Harris 1981: 157-164). But I do want to suggest that a different kind of reading, and arguably sometimes a qualitatively inferior one, takes place when the eye must repeatedly move not steadily and syntagmatically along the line of text, but from one text to a para-text, from body text to margin or footnote, or from one window to another (and then back again, or on to yet another). As others have noted, *desultory* reading (in one of the earlier senses of *desultory*: moving or jumping from one thing to another; disconnected) may militate against deeply engaged reading, one where there is both cognitive and emotional immersion in the narrative or situation literarily depicted (Ben Shaul 2009; Bauerlein 2008).

Acknowledgements

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