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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

READING READERS:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE AESTHETIC READING EVENTS  
OF FOUR EXPERIENCED READERS OF NARRATIVE FICTION  
READING SELF-SELECTED NOVELS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JOSEPH KEVIN DUPRE

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

1997

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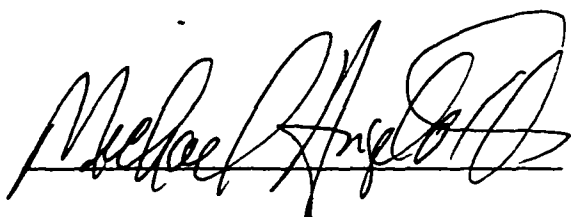
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A DISSERTATION  
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT  
OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

  
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## DEDICATIONS

To the memory of my grandfathers, Clarence Dupre and Roy Lafleur, two men who set powerful, seldom acknowledged examples for their grandchildren. When farmers who have toiled the earth die, they go home.

To Jordan and Hannah and their futures . . .

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, experienced readers of narrative fiction are examined as they read for primarily aesthetic purposes (e.g., for pleasure). This study investigated how four experienced readers read and created meaning with self-selected novels. Think-aloud protocols of participants reading selections from novels were the primary data source; ethnographic and stimulated recall interviews with participating readers supplemented the concurrent protocol data.

This investigation focused on (1) transactions between the readers and the novels they had chosen, (2) the readers' purposes and processes, (3) and the contexts, experiential and socio-cultural, that influence these readers in their construction of meaning. The questions guiding this study included: 1) how do participants make meaning while reading narrative fiction, 2) in what ways do blueprint texts of narrative fiction influence meaning making, 3) in what ways do personal experiences influence meaning making, and 4) in what ways do socio-cultural issues influence meaning making.

Data from this study suggest that readers made meaning primarily by investing themselves in the reading event, incorporating their own experiences and their cultural luggage into the milieu of the reading transactions studied. The role of blueprint texts was more a point of departure for connecting to other texts as well as a somewhat amorphous

sketch providing grounding for the reader. Reading and talking about experiences evoked through reading transactions served to mediate these readers thinking about their own lives. And reading for these readers served as a mediator in their social lives, a facilitator to their maintenance of valued relationships.

In short, these readers have networks, formal or informal systems of friends, relatives or colleagues with whom they spoke about their transactions. Further, the readers in this study mediate their places in their worlds through their reading. And, these four readers sustain their participation in worlds larger than the one they know as their own realities; that is, through their reading and transactions of meaning, these readers maintain their freedom and are empowered.

This study concludes with a discussion of implications including the social networks that these experienced readers found invaluable, the ownership these readers had of the entire meaning-making event, and the notion of reading as a mediating force for these readers' worlds. Several suggestions for future research are also included.

In sum, this study offers an authentic and thorough examination of the act of reading novels.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The processes by which readers create meaning have been described by numerous scholars from a variety of perspectives including cognitive psychology (Kintsch, 1985, 1986; Rumelhart, 1985; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), semiotics (Hartman, 1992; Witte, 1992), linguistics, (Jakobson, 1987), transactional theory (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, (1938/1983, 1978, 1985), and socio-cultural psychology (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Fly, 1994, Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994). Although much has been written, the act of creating meaning during the reading act may never be fully understood because of the array of influences on the processes and the uniqueness of every reader. Nevertheless, there is great interest among theorists, researchers, and practitioners in learning more about the elusive process of the making of meaning while reading texts.

In this first chapter, I begin with a brief discussion of the original *impetus* for conducting this inquiry. Second, I establish a background for investigating the problem by providing a brief *overview of the literature* and the conceptual framework used in this study. Third, I outline the *goals, rationale, and guiding research questions*. Then, *terms* used frequently within the dissertation are defined. Finally, the *significance and limitations* are discussed.

### **Impetus for the Study**

This study delineates my commitment to better understand what readers do when they read for aesthetic purposes, for

pleasure or escape, what life-long, dedicated readers do, and what keeps these readers perpetually engaged in reading. While much research has informed our understanding of reading, readers who read outside of formal contexts (e.g., for school) have not been given much attention. Particularly, we know little about the reading of extended, narrative fictional texts (i.e., novels).

Although my interest is with experienced readers of novels, the impetus for the study began when I encountered a perplexing situation as a sixth-grade language arts teacher. If one student may serve as an example for the many students I have seen who exemplified this baffling behavior, Juan stands out. Juan, a tall, street-wise sixth grader with on-level comprehension and verbal scores, clearly exhibited literacy skills. He could read a paragraph aloud and identify the main ideas and supporting details. Juan could access prior knowledge and understand text structures; he exhibited what Hynds (1990) called reading competence. But he simply would not read for any extended length of time during regular reading workshop time, a time in which students were expected to select and read books of their choice. When asked to explain this seemingly low interest in reading, he replied with something on the order of "Why should I read; there's not going to be a test on it." Daunted by his response, I began to reflect on how he could have adopted this stance toward reading.

I turned to colleagues whom I knew read widely. I asked these teachers about their own reading practices. Many said

they read fiction for pleasure or escape and read professional books and journals to keep abreast of their content areas. I asked them if they incorporated those goals in their teaching so that students might better understand various reading purposes. Most shrugged the question. But a well-respected and outspoken teacher said she taught reading skills like comprehension, identifying main points (e.g., character traits, themes) text structures (e.g., beginnings, middles, endings). Mastering these, this teacher claimed, laid a foundation for all kinds of reading. I recognized that assumption, but something still seemed amiss. What about readers like Juan who had mastered these literacy skills? Why would skilled readers choose not to engage in sustained reading? Or rather, why do readers choose to read? A leap of faith is required when one assumes that once readers know literacy skills and can function literately, they will practice literate behaviors.

Thus, in this study I have sought to systematically *examine experienced readers from their own perspectives* in order to better understand their reading transactions, purposes, and processes while they read novels of their choice. Through a more complete understanding of the reading acts of experienced readers, not only might educational research be furthered, but practitioners may be better informed and better able to facilitate readers like Juan.

To be sure, my interest in the reading act is both pragmatic and theoretical. The challenge noted through the example of Juan above is a formidable one facing teachers and

researchers. Education research must address issues raised in the classroom. Although our knowledge of the reading act is substantial, I am convinced that a gap exists in our understanding of why and how readers participate in the reading act. Therefore, I have chosen to examine readers who regularly, willingly, and frequently read (i.e., readers who not only have mastered literacy skills but who also practice literate behaviors), generally how they make meaning while reading, including their stances, purposes, and processes.

### **Overview of Literature**

To begin, the New Criticism--offered by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in the late 1930's, to provide literary critics with a concrete way to analyze literature--filtered down into the secondary classroom several decades ago and became and has remained the accepted way literature has been taught in schools for the past several decades (Beach, 1993; Fly, 1994; Rabinowitz, 1987; Wertsch, 1991). Furthermore, numerous features of the New Criticism continue to characterize many reading and literature classrooms today (Applebee, 1993). For example, teaching the elements of fiction as readiness for middle and high school students to learn to objectively identify elements including characters, setting, plot and theme in texts persists today.

Researchers and practitioners alike (Rosenblatt, 1978; Atwell, 1987) have questioned the practicality of teaching secondary students the techniques of New Criticism. Atwell (1987) charged that reading teachers

prepare and present lectures on literary topics and

require our students to memorize various bits of literary information--the Roman equivalents of the Greek deities, characteristics of the New Criticism, lists of Latin roots, definitions, George Elliot's real name--followed by exams where students report back what we said and assigned them to memorize. We talk of language as a prism for knowing ourselves and our world. But we seldom make class time for students to read or accommodate their choices or knowledge, and seldom do our students see their teachers reading, captivated by another's written words. (p. 153)

In short, the teaching of reading has been and often continues to be viewed as teaching a list of numerous components, transferring from the knowers (the teacher, the texts) to the learners (the students). Once "known," or as Atwell asserted, "memorized," students should be better readers. Atwell (1987) and Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) further assert that in reading classrooms, such an approach to reading neglects the reader by focusing on products of the reading event rather than its processes. Similarly, Hynds (1990) noted that the teaching of reading has tended to focus more on literacy skills than on literate behaviors.

The history of reading research is a rich one informed by two rather complimentary conceptual frameworks for examining the reading act; that is, as an interaction and as a transaction. Anderson (1990) traced the early work on reading, as it was viewed as an *interaction*. This research began by delineating a cognitive model which Anderson argued

was first concerned with how readers decoded and parsed texts, i.e., the ways readers translated symbolic representations (letters, words, phrases) to meaning representations.

Researchers during the last two decades have used interactional models which have focused more on understanding and comprehending texts (cf. Kintsch, 1977; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Readers' interactions with narrative texts (e.g., Rumelhart, 1985) and expository texts (e.g., Britton & Black, 1985) have been investigated. Other researchers examined reading interactions in terms of participants' specific purposes including writing (e.g., Flower, 1990; Spivey, 1990) and pleasure (Nell, 1988).

Recent research has focused more specifically on the reading of particular kinds of texts, recognizing that comprehension processes varied depending on the kinds of texts being read. Researchers including Kintgen (1983, 1985) and Earthman (1992) have examined readers reading poetry and short stories, respectively. Participants in Kintgen's (1983, 1985) and Earthman's (1992) studies were asked to think aloud while reading so that their reading processes could be examined. But these studies continued to view reading as an interaction, and understanding and comprehension of the texts as the purposes of the interaction.

While understanding the comprehension process and skills involved are certainly necessary, viewing reading as an interaction, Rosenblatt (1985) argued, places reading in the

context of a mechanized model which assumes that readers and texts act upon one another. Further, she argued

No matter how much one might build elements labeled top-down or bottom-up into a machine, the result would still be a machine, and not an organism. The same is true of the introduction of 'the feedback loop' in an effort to impart transactionality. This, too, is a mechanical concept that cannot effect the transformation (p. 100).

Examining reading from an interactional perspective has been extremely informative. But further examination within different theoretical perspectives and using different models highlights different processes.

Much current research has been influenced by transactional theory. The metaphor for transaction is situated in the idea of knowing and learning as a mutual, shared, organic model. Studies proceeding from a transactional perspective have focused on meaning as *emerging* from readers reading poetry and short stories in the contexts of classrooms (Fly, 1994; Hancock, 1993; Probst, 1988; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994). Hynds (1989) focused on the social influences on adolescent students reading outside of the classroom context, yet she chose the texts they read. Zancanella (1991) studied five teachers' personal approaches to literature, but he examined these in the context of their teaching of literature. While these studies have looked at reading from a transactional perspective, they have focused more on the ways readers create meaning in the context of formal social institutions with less emphasis on readers'

practices outside of those institutions.

Within institutional contexts such as schools, reading is assumed to be for the purpose of objectively scrutinizing literary elements and devices within texts (as exemplified by the New Critical approach). Scholars have reported that the New Critical model remains the norm in English classrooms (Applebee, 1993; Rabinowitz, 1987). As Rabinowitz (1987) noted, "New Criticism, in fairly unmodified form, still provides, among other things, the basis for secondary and undergraduate education in America" (p. 4).

But do experienced readers read "New Critically" when not reading for the purposes established in institutional contexts? For what purposes do experienced readers of novels read? Learning more about those purposes may provide researchers and teachers with evidence upon which to reassess current classroom practice and perhaps develop new methods for teaching reading.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In my examination of reading transactions, constructivism, and transactional theory in the sections below, I maintain that reading is a collaborative transaction--organic rather than mechanistic--between reader and text. From this perspective, I proceed in this dissertation to (1) focus on reader-text transactions from the readers' perspectives, and (2) examine the purposes and processes of teacher-readers as they create and recreate meaning while reading novels.

### **Reading Transactions**



Reading transactions are constructive in that they begin with an active reader, a learner with a multitude of experiences, meeting an active text, an object consisting of organized sets of symbols. Reader and text converge against a backdrop of experiential, social, cultural, and historical influences which make the reader and text what they are at the time of the meeting. Given that those influences are themselves actively evolving, the act of reading is a reflexive, dynamic process of creating and recreating meaning (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976, 1978, 1985a, 1985b, 1990, 1994).

Rosenblatt (1938/1976, 1978) argues that the event of reading a poem<sup>1</sup> is a transaction between reader and text. She refers to the situation of reading as "an event at a particular time and place in which each element [reader and text] conditions the other" (1978, p. 16). Similarly, in this study transactions are seen as meaning-making negotiations between readers and texts.

Differentiating between "the text" and "the poem" is crucial to Rosenblatt, for the reader and text transact the poem together. Thus, the poem is not the text per se but the event of the reader and text coming together.

Approaching reading as a transaction is characteristic of the work of numerous researchers and scholars (cf. Fly, 1994; Iser, 1980; Probst 1988; Rosenblatt, 1938/1976, 1978, 1985a, 1985b). While the work of these scholars has contributed much to the understanding of the reading

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid the "cumbersome phrase the 'literary work of art'", Rosenblatt (1978, p. 23) used "the poem" to include the novel, the drama, as well as the poem. Thus her study of readers and "the poem" applies to this study of readers and novels.

transaction, to better understand their contributions as well as Rosenblatt's seminal work, a discussion of the position of transactional theory within a general framework of constructivism will preface both a review of Rosenblatt's notion of transaction and current research.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism holds that reality is constructed by human beings as opposed to being deduced from an assumed single reality. Seung (1994) argued that the long-standing philosophical debate is a question of "Which is prior, moral principles or the concept of moral persons?" (p. 43). Constructivism, in a general sense, assumes the latter, that moral persons construct their own reality. The methodological implications become obvious: (1) scientific inquiries must begin with the individual, (2) an examination of phenomena requires an examination of the participant's perspectives regarding his/her engagement in the phenomena. This is in contrast to the assumption that reality exists apart from individuals, and thus, must be stated and examined in terms of standards or principles based--not on the individual--but on a singular reality. While both perspectives on reality provide support and the means for making scientific inquiries, researchers must reflect upon the theoretical underpinnings which inevitably motivate and steer their approaches.

Transactional theory is constructivistic, for it recognizes the reader as a substantial contributor to the construction of meaning. Each reader as well as each reading

act is considered unique. While this does not preclude comparisons or perhaps even commonalities which may take the form of patterns across readers, transactionalism--consistent with constructivism--recognizes that individual readers construct realities in their transactions with texts. In the discussion of the foundations of transactional theory below, its constructivistic nature may be seen.

### **Foundations of Transactional Theory**

Before discussing the more recent work which examines reading from a transactional approach, it is necessary to examine the foundations of the reading transaction. Rosenblatt (1938/1976, 1978, 1985b) credits Dewey for the term "transaction" and argues for its use over the term interaction. In her words:

*Transaction is used above in the way that one might refer to the interrelationship between the knower and what is known. The poem is the transaction that goes on between reader and text. (italics in original)*

(1938/1976, p. 27)

The interrelationship between the knower and what is known is mediational and reciprocal in nature. That is, meaning emerges from a negotiation. What is known is not merely given but is concocted. The relationship between reader and text is reflexive, mutual, shared, complimentary. What comes to be known both affects and reflects what the reader and text bring to the negotiation. From this milieu emerges the poem.

The notion of transaction comes from a phenomenological

approach which recognizes meaning as subjective and relational, dependent on a multitude of influences. The transactional view recognizes that reading must be examined holistically as a dynamic, reflexive process. In an aesthetic reading event, the text (set of verbal signs) becomes a poem or novel only through a reader during the reading event. The reading event, Rosenblatt (1985b) described as "this lived-through current of ideas, sensations, images, tensions becomes shaped into what the reader sees as the literary work or the evocation corresponding to the text" (p. 103). From this perspective, the reading act must be studied within the experiential and socio-cultural contexts in which it occurs.

### **Goals, Rationale, and Research Questions**

#### **Goals and Rationale**

This study was exploratory. My goal was not to generalize about readers of novels, nor to prescribe ways to teach reading. Rather, my goal was to fill in what I perceived as a gap between our theoretical and research-based understanding of reading. That is, the intent of this study was to examine experienced readers engaged in primarily *aesthetic* reading events. Further, readers chose naturalistic settings (e.g., in their homes, in their couches, in bed) in which they read novels which they selected. While aesthetic reading has a rich theoretical basis in the work of Rosenblatt (1978), support for the theories by further research is needed (Applebee, 1993).

In the present study, I examine readers who regularly read novels for pleasure. This study is necessary, because my review of the literature suggests the need to investigate *the ways experienced readers read, for pleasure, at their own paces, in their own settings, without the presence of a researcher, novels which they have chosen*. Furthermore, this study is needed, because recently many researchers, in their focus on social and institutional contexts (cf. Fly, 1994; Hancock, 1993; Probst, 1988; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994), have moved toward a view of reading as determined by social constructions (e.g., the classroom) which are beyond the reader's control.

This study of reading transactions recognizes both reader and text as well as socio-cultural influences on reader and text and is conducted outside of any formal institutions like schools. This study is also important because many middle and secondary school teachers continue to rely on assumptions about reading based upon the New Criticism views that reading is the concrete study of texts, literary elements and devices, and because practitioners continue to test students primarily for comprehension<sup>2</sup>, which constitutes but one purpose for reading, and not necessarily

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<sup>2</sup> See Sternberg's (1991) and Beach's (1993) discussion of the continued emphasis on comprehension in the classroom. Also, see Applebee (1993) for a thorough, national review of the status of literature instruction in the classroom. Zancanella (1991) also provides evidence from five case studies of teachers who take a more transactional approach when they read literature for themselves, whereas they adopt a more interactive approach when teaching the same literary selections. Teachers in Zancanella's study said they focus on comprehension in response to state-mandated achievement tests which continue to stress comprehension and literary terminology.

the purpose in aesthetic reading events. While research has been more concerned with studying reading in the context of classrooms, it has tended to do so without an adequate understanding of reading from readers' own perspectives.

By examining experienced readers reading novels from a transactional perspective, I hope to add to the limited literature available on the ways experienced readers read for pleasure and the ways they read novels. Viewing reading as a constructive transaction allows me to weigh influences on the reading event including the reader, the text and the socio-cultural influences on meaning making.

#### **Guiding Research Questions**

In this study, I examine how experienced readers construct meaning in the reading of narrative, fictional texts (novels). In this investigation, I examine (1) transactions between these readers and the novels they have chosen, (2) the readers' purposes and processes, (3) and the contexts, experiential and socio-cultural, that influence these readers in their construction of meaning.

This study is unique in two ways. First, it examines *experienced readers reading for pleasure*. Second, it examines readers reading *novels which they have selected*. Further, this investigation is important because it considers reading as a reflexive act. That is, reader-text transactions and readers' purposes and processes as well as their experiential and socio-cultural backgrounds will be examined as they effect and are affected by one another.

The following questions are related to the issues stated

in the paragraph above and served to guide this study:

1. How do the participants make meaning while they read narrative, fictional texts? What are these readers' purposes, and what strategies do they employ while constructing meaning? (How do participants make meaning?)
2. What roles do narrative, fictional texts themselves play in the meaning-making processes of these teacher-readers? In what ways are these readers' responses affected by the transaction between textual features and reader attributes? (How does the physical text influence meaning making?)
3. What roles do personal experiences play in the meaning-making processes of these teacher-readers? In what ways do previous and present personal experiences influence the current reading transactions? (How do past experiences influence meaning making?)
4. What roles do socio-cultural influences play in the meaning-making processes of these teacher-readers? In what ways do connections these readers have with communities and cultures influence their meaning-making? What roles do previous text-reader transactions play in current transactions? (How do socio-cultural influences on the participants affect meaning making?)

Since transactions, contextual influences and reading purposes are dependent upon textual, experiential, social and cultural influences, these questions will serve as guides and may require amending as the investigation proceeds. This

investigation will consider the various elements noted in the guiding questions above as they influence one another.

### **Definition of Terms**

Before proceeding, a clarification of some of the terminology used is in order. Because this study assumes that the reading event is a constructive process, readers will undoubtedly bring with them their own understanding of these terms. These definitions are provided to guide the reader through this document.

Aesthetic reading is characterized by particular stances or purposes for reading including reading for pleasure or for escape. In the aesthetic reading event, the text (set of verbal signs) becomes a poem or novel only through a reader during the reading event.

Efferent reading is characterized by particular stances or purposes including to obtain information or, as Rosenblatt (1978) noted, "to carry away knowledge."

Literacy skills may be described in terms of the ability to store and retrieve information (Hynds, 1994).

Literate behaviors include the will to read and to willingly participate in communities of readers (Hynds, 1994).

Stimulated recall interviews, briefly, are interviews which prompt readers to recall what they were thinking during the actual reading, allowing readers to revive thoughts from the original reading transaction being studied.

Think-aloud protocols are collections of readers' verbalized thoughts tape recorded (and later transcribed)



while they were reading.

Transaction. Rosenblatt (1985) clarified that a reading transaction occurs when "an element of the environment (the marks on a page) becomes a text by virtue of its particular relationship with the reader, who in turn is a reader by virtue of his relationship to the text" (p. 35). She added that a transaction "implies that the reader brings to the text a network of past experiences in literature and in life. . . . In the reading situation, the poem [or novel]--the literary work--is evoked during the transaction between the reader and the text" (p. 35).

Protocol analysis involves reviewing protocol transcripts to identify patterns of emergent characteristics, then coding the protocols using the categories which emerged.

### **Significance of the Study**

For decades, researchers and teachers have known about transactional approaches to literature, although as Applebee (1993) noted, Rosenblatt's transactional approach remained more on the theoretical level. Applebee wrote that Rosenblatt's work has been "very slim in the way of specific pedagogical techniques" (p. 117). My own research does not purport to offer specific pedagogical techniques. Rather, I realize that the gap between theory and pedagogical techniques must first be narrowed before it can be bridged.

My research does purport to narrow this gap by examining experienced readers reading novels, assuming a primarily aesthetic stance. I examined readers who read for aesthetic purposes, for I believe that, before we can begin to change

the way that reading is taught, researchers and practitioners must first understand the ways *experienced readers* create meaning in aesthetic reading, the ways *they* exhibit literate behaviors, the ways *they transact meaning*. With this study, I explored the ways these experienced readers transact with or live through novels with the guidance of the text as a blueprint and the influence of their personal, social and cultural backgrounds.

By approaching this research from a transactional perspective, I viewed reading as a reflexive act. That is, the reading act does not end when a reader puts down a book and picks up a pencil to take a quiz or a standardized test to measure comprehension. When teachers stress literacy skills, they do so presumably because they have learned that that is what must be taught in order to ensure comprehension (Sternberg, 1991). The focus of instruction is on the text and not the reader. While literacy skills might be the goal if a reader's purposes are efferent (to carry away knowledge), readers who read fictional narrative texts appear to do so for aesthetic purposes (for the experience itself). Although literacy skills are necessary for aesthetic reading, a review of related research (See Chapter 2) suggested that an understanding of literate behaviors may help us narrow the gap between the way reading is taught and the natural complexities of the way we read and make meaning in everyday life.

Therefore, an examination of *the ways experienced readers read, for pleasure, at their own paces, in their own*

*settings, without the presence of a researcher, novels which they have chosen* will add to researchers' knowledge of: (1) the ways experienced readers read *novels*, and (2) the ways experienced readers read *for pleasure*. Previous research has examined the ways readers read short stories, poetry and expository texts in classroom contexts or artificial contexts. but this study focuses on *the reading of novels for pleasure*. Further, this study might contribute to practice by adding to the growing body of research which examines reading from a transactional, theoretical perspective, from a perspective which recognizes the reflexive influences of reader and text.

This research will help to fill a gap between research which has focused on social institutions and research which has focused on literacy skills taught in classes. Recently, much has focused primarily on the influence of social institutions upon readers, particularly, the context of the classroom. Prior to this more recent trend, research had previously focused on reading classroom practices; these studies had been primarily concerned with mastery of literacy skills including comprehension.

In sum, this study will contribute to the reading research knowledge base by examining the making of meaning during reading as a constructive transaction influenced by both reader and text, by examining experienced readers, and by examining readers of novels.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

As with all scientific inquiries, this study has its

limitations. Some of those limitations are offset through triangulation and thoroughness. Yet, the following are some that remain.

First, this study of reading transactions is limited by the reflexiveness inherent in all transactions. Despite diligent efforts to refrain from altering the natural reading transactions under study, to gather data I was forced to (1) introduce and explain to participants the data gathering techniques used, (2) ask participants to verbalize otherwise unexpressed thoughts while reading, and (3) ask participants to record those thoughts with an audio tape recorder. These factors admittedly altered the ways readers approached these books in spite of my encouraging participants to read their selections as they would outside of this study. The study of a phenomenon like reading cannot be done without some form of participation on the part of a researcher. This participation inadvertently affects other transactions including the interviews as well as the think-alouds and any discussions participants may have had with others regarding their participation.

Second, the study is limited by lack of generalizability, an inherent limitation in an exploratory study which uses a small number of volunteer participants. Therefore, findings will be limited to the sample of readers who participated. This study will highlight only the ways the participants involved make meaning and the results will not be extrapolative to other populations.

Thirdly, time and monetary constraints provided their

own set of limitations. In this study, I was primarily interested in studying readers of narrative fiction as each read a single novel at her own pace (reading time ranged from three to ten weeks). Further, it certainly may be argued that use of video taping procedures would have provided access to other aspects of the transaction including access to nonverbal responses. But since this would have increased the cost of the study, and would have likely been more intrusive, I decided to impose the limitations which came with using only audio taping procedures.

Despite the efforts made to alleviate some of the limitations, this study was limited, in part, due to the effects of data gathering procedures including the reflexiveness inherent in researcher involvement, lack of generalizability, and time and monetary constraints.

### **Overview of the Report**

By recognizing the constructive nature of the reading act, I am aware that readers of this study will have their own unique transactions with it. While readers of this report will likely approach it primarily from an efferent stance, this overview of the document is intended to provide the reader with assistance in the carrying away of as much knowledge as possible. However, any extent to which readers may approach this reading from an aesthetic stance is certainly welcomed.

In the first chapter, the goals of the study, conceptual framework, research problem, significance and limitations were provided to furnish the reader with a basis for the

review of related literature contained in the second chapter. Within Chapter three, the research methods used to achieve the goals of the study will be examined. Chapter four contains the case studies of each of the participants. In Chapter five, the similarities among the transactions of readers is examined via think-aloud protocol analysis. The sixth and final chapter includes a discussion of the implications of this study of readers as they transacted meaning while reading novels.

## CHAPTER 2: RELATED LITERATURE

Research into reading is diverse and takes many forms. Yet, Smith (1996) noted that "virtually no research has investigated the relationship of adults' reading practices to literacy abilities" (p. 199). While the present study does not purport to examine the breadth of such a relationship, it does purport to look closely at adult reading practices and literate behaviors. There has been extensive research examining literacy skills and cognitive strategies such as comprehension, interpretation and evaluation. But few studies have "examine[d] adults' reading practices in contexts outside of school, such as work, family, and leisure" (Smith, p. 199). Such examinations require a theoretical foundation, a grounding for their inquiries. Recently, a few studies have begun to do so within a constructivist framework.

Many current researchers have examined aspects of reading from a transactional perspective. Recently, some of them have begun to focus primarily on socio-cultural influences on the reading act (cf. Fly, 1994; Hull & Rose, 1990; Hynds, 1989; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994). Other researchers have focused more on experiential influences (cf. Blake & Lunn, 1986; Jacobson, 1982; Probst, 1988). These researchers and others have approached their investigations of reading within a transactional framework. To these current works and the issues they raise, this discussion now turns.

### **The Reader**

First, from a transactional perspective, the role of the reader is given the utmost consideration. The reader may be viewed as responding from personal and socio-cultural perspectives. Probst (1988) found that personal responses were characterized by a personal "crystallizing" (p. 34) of a work of literature. Readers in his study, Probst attested, "had begun to articulate the personal implications of the story even before the teacher was able to start her lesson" (p. 34). Probst also revealed socio-cultural influences on the reader when he added "and it took some effort for her [the teacher] to interrupt it so that she could proceed with her work on characterization" (p. 34). The teacher's interruption of students' natural discourse resulted in a more teacher-centered dialogue. Student learning was not seen to involve students' own reading transactions; readers transactions were not treated as relevant to the discussion, that is, students' transactions were not valued. Their own personal and socio-cultural influences on their transactions were subjugated to that of the teachers' and the schools' institutional influences. These influences emphasized a focus on the text and stressed the study of textual components such as characterization. In sum, the approach reported on by Probst showed that the teacher *valued* a notion of reading which was enmeshed within the New Criticism and *devalued* the range of influences on the transactions brought by readers.

Classroom research shows that the teacher, the classroom



environment, and the student all influence reading transactions (Fly, 1994; Greene, 1993; Hynds, 1989, 1990; Marshall, 1987; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994). Fly's (1994) study deftly illustrated the range of influences on the reader. In her study of ninth graders completing classroom reading assignments, Fly concluded, first, that readers in her study used text-based, personal, and socio-cultural texts in constructing meaning. Fly determined this through analysis of readers' responses as they read short stories assigned in class. Second, Fly concluded that readers' responses indicated that each was unique, each with a "sense of the individual and his or her approach to life, literature, and school" (p. 114). Thus, readers' transactions were the result of not only the physical text but also personal experiences and socio-cultural influences. In Fly's study, each reader's responses and the socio-cultural influences on those responses were viewed as being shaped by the individual as well as by the classroom context within which the individuals read.

### **The Text**

The role of the text is equally complex. A text is a collection of letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, etc., which functions as a system. Witte (1992) defined texts as organized sets of symbols or signs. These sets of signs or symbols may themselves function, for either writers or readers, as a collocated but unitary symbol or sign, as in the case of an individual text considered as a totality. (p. 237)

This organized set of symbols is both open and constraining. It is open in the sense that, over time and among individuals and cultures, symbols do not maintain a singular meaning. Consider the differences between Modern, Renaissance, Medieval, and Old English; English before the end of the first millennium is hardly recognizable to English speakers (readers and writers) as we approach the end of the second millennium. Further, Chaucer's and Shakespeare's English must be footnoted profusely with explanations of words, phrases, and frames of reference to assist the modern reader with transactions. Meanings of symbols are far from being fixed or objective. Nevertheless, symbols become functional through intersubjective agreement among members of a culture at a given time in that culture's history. That is, the symbols within a text serve as a blueprint which provides some constraint over the reading act.

Aware of this variance, some scientists operationally define symbols or words in an attempt to maintain objectivity and to make aspects of phenomena "measurable." Comprehension, for example, was for a time defined operationally in terms of perception, parsing and utilization of language, with each term further operationalized (Anderson, 1990). It was thought that, through a process of operationalization and empirical measurement, comprehension could be understood in objective, statistically generalizable terms. Yet, researchers working from an information processing perspective began to expand and reconsider their ideas about comprehensions (Kintsch, 1986). As research from

information processing perspectives and from experiential/ socio-cultural perspectives continues, it is likely that the "definition" of comprehension will continue to evolve.

As organized sets of symbols, texts provide cues which (to an extent) limit the number of meanings which may be made of them. Rabinowitz (1987) noted that

critics admit, in their different ways, that to read--in the sense of to understand--a text is to imitate it in some way, to produce something 'around' (para) it that is new but that bears some clear relationship to the original text. (p. 18)

In other words, texts provide cues which may be "understood" to connote a range of possible meanings, given that that understanding has a relationship or connection to the symbols which influence it. Although open to be "understood" in a variety of ways, texts provide some parameters for the transaction.

Similarly, Rosenblatt (1978) described texts as blueprints. She viewed the text as activating

elements of the reader's past experience--his experience both with literature and with life . . . . the text serves as a blueprint, a guide for the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what is being called forth (p. 11).

In summary, transactions with texts are continuous negotiations between readers and texts. Reflexive rather than linear in nature, transactions allow meaning to be mediated, constructed, created, and recreated between the

parties of text and reader. The text provides parameters or a blueprint, while the reader supports the processes and determines the purposes, employing a variety of reading processes or strategies.

### **Reading Purposes and Processes**

The processes involved in reading are complex. Each reading experience is different, even when the reading purpose(s) and the text remain the same for the same reader. In this section, representative research and theory on reading purposes, processes and strategies are discussed.

To characterize reading processes, the purpose of reading experiences must be considered. Rosenblatt (1978) described two different purposes of reading, *efferent* and *aesthetic*. In *efferent* reading, "the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). Typically, expository texts are read *efferently*, with an explicit, primary purpose to gather information from the text. For instance, Kintsch (1989) argued that "the text itself is secondary" (p. 25) to the information sought by the reader. Kintsch (1989) held that:

Some texts (e.g., literary texts) are studied for their own right; other texts are merely media by which information is transmitted, as is the case when a student learns about geography from reading a chapter in a textbook, when someone solves a problem stated in verbal form, or when one learns to operate a computer from reading a manual . . . what matters most is how well the student learns geography, whether the problem

can be solved correctly, or whether we know what to do with our computer. (p. 25)

By contrast, an *aesthetic* reading experience may be considered in terms of a different set of primary purposes. Rosenblatt (1978) described aesthetic purposes this way:

the reader's primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event. Though, like the efferent reader of a law text, say, the reader of Frost's 'Birches' must decipher the images or concepts or assertions that the words point to, he also pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. 'Listening to' himself, he synthesizes these elements into a meaningful structure. *In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.* (p. 24-25)

Readers of fictional texts, then, may have different purposes (e.g., reading to relax, to escape) than do readers of expository texts (to gather information). When readers read a poetic or narrative text, they may be concerned more with the situations of the narrative and their aesthetic experiences prompted by those situations (Kintsch, 1989; Vine & Faust, 1993) than with carrying away the solution to a problem or understanding a theoretical construct. In sum, a reader's purpose in any transaction may vary somewhere between becoming situated with a text to carrying away knowledge from a text.

Efferent and aesthetic reading may be considered complementary. A reader may have an aesthetic experience while reading an expository text, just as a reader of a fictional text might have an efferent experience, carrying away knowledge. Thus, it is appropriate to focus on the reader's purpose rather than on the type of text. It is *the reader's role* to determine whether any text, expository or narrative, will be read for predominantly efferent or aesthetic purposes. The implication is that the reading transaction and not the text should be the focus of instruction.

Research shows that readers adopt different strategies depending on their purposes, their reading experiences, and the texts. Kintgen (1985) had eight graduate students and eight faculty members think aloud while they read a poem he had selected for them. Through the analysis of the think-aloud protocols, Kintgen identified 21 elementary perceptual processes employed by these readers. Kintgen concluded that these processes accounted for approximately 95 percent of the kinds of processing readers in his study did. The 21 processes Kintgen identified were grouped accordingly:

- \* Comment, Narrate
- \* Read, Select, Locate
- \* Word, Phonology, Syntax, Paraphrase, Form
- \* Deduce, Generalize, Connect: Poem, Connect: Nature, Connect: History, Connect: Literature
- \* Test, Justify, Qualify, Specify
- \* Interpret

(p. 136)

Kintgen's findings are important for several reasons. The findings identify specific processes and recognize that these are limited to readers of the poem used in the study and the expert participant readers. Further, Kintgen recommended that future research examine the reading of other types of texts. Kintgen's study focused on comprehension as the outcome of the reader-text meeting, but his approach was adapted by several researchers who examined reading from a transactional perspective. More recently, researchers have begun to examine the reading act with greater emphasis on experiential and socio-cultural influences.

Similar to Kintgen, Blake and Lunn (1986) examined the immediate responses of five readers to a poem the researchers had selected. Unlike Kintgen who studied adults, Blake and Lunn studied readers who were adolescents. Following Kintgen's (1983, 1985) approach, Blake and Lunn had these readers think aloud while reading. Further, they removed students from the school setting in an effort to reduce the likelihood of responses fashioned for a teacher. Blake and Lunn analyzed the protocols of each participant for their responses to a section of the poem. Blake and Lunn noted what appeared to them to be experiential and socio-cultural factors. However, because they had not collected data on readers' experiences and backgrounds for the study, they were unable to specifically examine those types of influences on meaning making. But, in a more in-depth analysis of one of the readers, Blake and Lunn identified eleven stages in the responding process. These include (1) reading/rereading, (2)

associating, (3) interpreting, (4) paraphrasing, (5) quoting, (6) responding emotionally, (7) looping back (to a previous line or section), (8) connecting, (9) generalizing, (10) revising, and (11) evaluating. Blake and Lunn concluded that, for the adolescents in their study, the process of reading poetry was a complicated, recursive, time-consuming experience.

In his ethnographic study of a junior high school reading class, Probst (1988) noted that students were often discouraged from applying experiential or socio-cultural perspectives to a short story they were discussing. When students began to identify with characters and their predicaments in a class discussion, the teacher methodically attempted to return the discussion to predetermined, comprehension-type questions. The teacher in Probst's study appeared to conceptualize reading and the teaching of reading in terms of the learning of literacy skills<sup>1</sup>. When students' discussions turned to their own moral dilemmas which were similar to the ones depicted in the story being discussed, the teacher redirected the discussion to literacy skills. While the students appeared to conceptualize reading more as a transaction that offered opportunities to examine moral dilemmas with which they had experience, the teacher's skill-oriented purposes took precedence. In their efforts to explore moral dilemmas in class discussions, students were exhibiting what Hynds (1990) called "literate behaviors"

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy skills are defined by Hynds (1989) as the ability to store and retrieve textual information.



(p. 238)<sup>2</sup>.

Other research has examined readers' more self-directed responses to literature. The unconventional responses of a Latin American composition student led Hull and Rose (1990) to examine the power of personal experiences and sociocultural influences on reading. The student's remarks about an assigned poem were so unique that the instructor initially wondered if the student had "miss[ed] the point of the central section" (p. 290) of the poem. Using think-alouds, stimulated recall, written responses, and interview data, Hull and Rose (1990) noted the ways this reader brought personal and cultural experiences to bear on the meaning of the poem. The reader's meaning markedly differed from the teacher's, yet was intelligibly based within his own Latin-American background. The reader's background was different from the instructor's, and his processes, strategies and meaning reflected these differences.

Like the Hull and Rose (1990) study, several studies have been conducted which examine experiential and socio-cultural, as well as textual, responses to literature. Some of these (e.g, Fly, 1994; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994) were conducted within various classroom environments to examine the contextual influences of the classroom on meaning making. These researchers argued for the examination of reading processes as they occurred. Fly (1994) used think-alouds and open-ended interviews while Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994)

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<sup>2</sup> In contrast to literacy skills, literate behaviors include the will to read and to willingly participate in communities of readers.

used stimulated recall interviews. Their conclusions established that classroom contexts, and students' memberships in classroom communities as well as other social and cultural communities, play a significant role in the ways readers respond while reading.

Hynds (1989) also studied social influences on reading as well as the relationship of readers' perceptions of literature to their own lives, particularly their relationships with peers. Hynds defined social influences to include "academic, cultural, and interpretive communities" (p. 32) as well as "literature itself [which] becomes a vehicle for the development of social knowledge necessary for participating in a particular culture or social group" (p. 32). From her study of high school readers, Hynds concluded that the participants perceived reading for school as fundamentally different from reading for self. Cathy, one of Hynds's participants, compared school reading to pleasure reading in this way:

A lot of time when I read something [for school] I make myself read every little thing . . . . Sometimes if you know you're gonna have a quiz on it you think, 'Well, they could ask about that. I should remember it.' You don't have anything to do [in pleasure reading] but you can just read, and it's like you don't know what's going on. You're just sitting around. (p. 44)

This difference in perceived purposes between school and pleasure reading is a significant one. Cathy's words raise crucial issues that researchers and educators must

contemplate: Is comprehension the primary purpose for reading? Is close reading, a definitive characteristic of New Criticism (Applebee, 1993; Rabinowitz, 1987), the strategy used to ensure comprehension? Are readers primarily taught efferent skills, that is, to read for the knowledge that can be carried away? Cathy perceived the purpose of reading for school to be literal comprehension, and her approach can be characterized as close reading. Cathy's depiction that readers are taught to read for the test rather than read for pleasure appears to be the norm in secondary schools throughout the United States (Applebee, 1993).

This emphasis on reading skills that promote comprehension was examined by Hynds (1990). Hynds looked at the differences between what she called "literacy skills" and "literate behaviors" (p. 238). She described literacy skills in terms of the ability to store and retrieve textual information. Literate behaviors, on the other hand, include the will to read and to willingly participate in communities of readers. Teaching and learning literacy skills, Hynds asserted, does not ensure learners will practice literate behaviors.

In summary, a critical review of the research examining reading purposes and approaches reveals that readers adopt different stances depending on text, purposes, strategies, experiences, and cultures. These influences on the reading process are reflexive (when one influence changes, all of the other influences are affected by the change to varying degrees).

While numerous studies have informed our understanding of the ways readers transact meaning, two areas warranting further attention include the following. First, although studies have looked at the ways readers read expository texts, poetry, and short stories, in my review of literature, I have not found studies which examine the *ways readers read novels*. Second, studies have looked at reading for various purposes, but in review, few have looked at the ways *experienced readers read for pleasure*. In this study, I seek to address this area of need in the literature by examining experienced readers reading novels in order to provide a deeper understanding of the literate behaviors and reading practices of these readers.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

Examining the literate behaviors which characterize the aesthetic events of readers reading novels required careful consideration of the methods used. Researchers have long recognized that studying individuals who are making meaning with narrative texts necessitates capturing concurrent thoughts with as little intrusiveness as possible. Also, researchers have become increasingly aware of the need to support participants' concurrent thoughts with considerable contextual data in order to provide triangulation to the study.

Methods detailed below were selected for their ability to provide data on readers engaged in authentic aesthetic transactions with novels. Also, these methods were chosen because they recognize and attempt to maintain the integrity of authentic transactions with novels. Reader's initial transactions often occur over several hours, often over several days or weeks. The methods described below attempt to provide for as much authenticity and as little intrusiveness as possible given the nature of the study.

Below, the rationale for selection of the sample is presented. Then, the methods used are described; these methods include think-alouds, stimulated recall and ethnographic interviews.

#### **Selection of the Sample**

Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were recruited from a pool of experienced

readers of fiction, a group of teacher-consultants from a state writing project. This sample pool was selected for three primary reasons. First, members of this pool were thought to be self-motivated readers. All members of the pool had devoted considerable personal time to the study of improving the teaching of literacy in classrooms. Members of this pool from the writing project had spent a summer devoted to preparation as teacher-consultants through writing, researching, and preparing workshops to be delivered as inservice demonstrations for schools and school districts. Volunteers from this group agreed to not only participate in this literacy-related research but also to devote considerable time doing so conscientiously.

Secondly, through my acquaintance with members of this sample pool, I had learned that many members were frequent, experienced readers of narrative, fictional texts. And finally, a third reason for selecting from this pool was convenience. Having worked with many of the teacher consultants from this pool as a graduate assistant for the writing project, I had built sufficient rapport with members in general, which, in such a time-consuming study from the participants' perspectives, made solicitation of participants easier.

Originally, nine experienced readers volunteered to participate. Two of the original group of nine were lost to attrition before any data was gathered; both explained that extenuating personal and professional commitments made it impossible for them to participate. This study began with

seven original participants from this group of experienced readers of narrative fiction, but one of the participants was unable to complete the reading/think-aloud of the book selected. Data from two other participants was dropped due to inaudible recording levels which made transcribing the tapes impossible. Complete sets of data from four participants was gathered and transcribed; therefore, this study examines the reading of four participants.

Participants were selected for theoretical interests; because the study was designed to examine experienced readers who read narrative fiction, this group afforded such characteristics. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explained that in qualitative research, sampling selection should

depend on conventions of pragmatically and theoretically informed selection rather than probabilistic sampling; they [ethnographers] rarely have access even to . . . conditions for generalization. As a consequence, in application they aim for comparability and translatability of generated findings rather than for outright transference to groups not investigated (p.12).

Goetz and LeCompte maintained that comparability and translatability are accomplished when researchers use "nonidiosyncratic terminology and analytic frames," (p. 13) and describe the participants, methods, constructs, categories, and phenomena "so clearly that they can serve as a basis for comparison with other like and unlike groups" (p. 13).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) concurred and offered

"transferability" (p. 297) as a productive goal of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba argued that transferability may be accomplished when researchers provide sufficient contextual information to allow readers to judge the applicability of the research data to situations with which he or she is familiar.

Since the proposed study was exploratory, the purpose of the analysis was to describe the reading processes and contextual influence of only the participants involved. This approach was used in order to provide readers of this research with sufficient grounds for comparability, translatability, or transferability. Further, given the large amounts of data yielded in protocol analyses (100 pages of think aloud protocol data, the interview data (300 pages of interview data), the time required to analyze each of the protocols, and the fact that this study was conducted by a single researcher, a small sample size was necessary.

#### **Data Collection**

Data consisted of three complementary collections including (1) four think-aloud protocols from each participant, (2) an interview with each participant stimulated by excerpts from her/his think-aloud protocol, and (3) two open-ended, ethnographic interviews with each participant.

The multimethod approach provided this study with a means to triangulate data, to examine readers' transactions from various perspectives with the intent of compensating for weaknesses of a particular data-gathering method with



strengths offered by other methods. By employing the multimethod approach, Brewer and Hunter (1989) noted that researchers must

accept the fact that no method measures perfectly and to exploit the fact that multiple measurement offers the chance to assess each method's validity in the light of other methods (p.18)

In the following sections, each type of data is described.

### **Think-Aloud Protocols**

Think-aloud protocols are collections of readers' verbalized thoughts tape-recorded while they are reading. In this study, recordings were later transcribed by the researcher. Since Kintgen (1983, 1985) used think-aloud protocols to examine the reading of poetry, numerous scholars (cf. Blake & Lunn, 1986; Earthman, 1992; Fly, 1994; Hynds, 1989) working from experiential and socio-cultural perspectives have adopted (and adapted) think-aloud protocol techniques to examine readers thought processes. Prior to Kintgen's (1983, 1985) study of reading, researchers had used think-aloud protocols to examine cognitive processes involved in problem-solving (cf. Ericsson and Simon, 1984). Also, much research into writing and composing processes have employed the method of think-aloud protocols (cf. Emig, 1971; Hayes & Flower, 1983; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994).

Think-aloud protocols provide researchers with an impression of a reader's thoughts while doing reading. (See Appendix A for think-aloud procedures.) Researchers including Blake and Lunn (1986), Earthman (1992), Fly (1994),

and Kintgen (1985) have used think-aloud procedures to examine readers thinking while reading. They had participants read aloud poems or short stories and verbalize their thoughts; protocols were recorded by audio-cassette recorders which the participants operated.

Think-alouds are generally, though not universally, perceived as providing researchers the best available access to concurrent thoughts currently at our disposal. These protocols provide researchers with access to concurrent thoughts while reading as well as particulars about textual, experiential, and socio-cultural influences that may have prompted responses.

Think-aloud protocols offered several advantages particularly suited to the present study. The first advantage was its relative unobtrusiveness, allowing the reader to read in a natural context without the presence of the researcher. This was particularly preferable given that most readers presumably read novels alone, at times, at paces, and in locations that they themselves determine. Secondly, the length of time readers take to read novels also made it impractical for a researcher to be present throughout a participant's reading of a given novel.

There has been some concern among researchers that a task and a participant's thought processes, in this case reading, would be adversely affected by the act of thinking aloud while reading. Yet, in their extensive review of think-aloud procedures in studies of problem-solving strategies, Ericsson and Simon (1984) noted that

participants' thoughts were not significantly altered, provided they were asked only to vocalize, as opposed to analyze while vocalizing, their thoughts. Hayes and Flower's (1983) work and their review of other researchers' work also revealed that the writing task was not adversely affected by think-aloud protocols. Further, Hayes and Flower noted three distinct advantages of think-aloud protocols:

1. They provide direct evidence about processes.
2. They yield rich data and thus promote exploration.
3. They can detect processes that are invisible to other methods.

Overall, Hayes and Flower (1983) as well as Ericsson and Simon (1984) established a convincing argument that think alouds have only minimal negative effects. However, these researchers freely admit that think-aloud protocols, like all other methods of gathering data, do not ensure all thoughts will be documented during a task. Thus, in this multimethod study, arrangements were made for data triangulation in an effort to obtain as much as possible of the concurrent thoughts readers had while engaged in the reading act.

Think-aloud protocols capture readers' thoughts as they read, but, of course, no method has been found to capture all thoughts. Therefore, procedures including stimulated recall have been employed by researchers, including Hull and Rose (1990) as well as Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994), to gain further insight into readers' construction of meaning during reading and writing. And since experiential and socio-cultural approaches recognize that participants, when allowed

to speak openly and freely, can significantly inform the investigation of reading processes, ethnographic interviews are regularly employed (Earthman, 1992; Fly, 1994; Hynds, 1989; Zancanella, 1991).

### **Stimulated Recall**

Stimulated recall interviews also proved particularly suited for the investigation of the ways readers construct meaning during reading. Stimulated recall interviews are interviews which prompt readers to recall what they were thinking during the actual reading event, allowing readers to revive thoughts from the original reading transactions. (See Appendix B for stimulated recall procedures.) While think-aloud protocols provide researchers with concurrent thoughts of readers as they read, stimulated recall interviews afford participants the opportunity to expound on those thoughts at a later time. This advantage furnishes researchers with the opportunity to identify and further investigate particularly interesting as well as typical responses from think-aloud protocols. Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994) found stimulated recall particularly useful in their examination of the cultural influences, within a classroom context, that a student used to construct meaning in response to a short story.

Since Benjamin Bloom (1954) developed the method of stimulated recall in his study of the "ways in which learning situations influence the thinking students do in class" (p. 23), researchers have adopted it to study a variety of phenomena including writer's block (Rose, 1984), basic

writing programs (DiPardo, 1994), and responses to literature (Hull & Rose, 1990; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994).

Stimulated recall has been employed as a primary methodology (cf. Bloom, 1954; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994) and secondarily as a means to triangulate data (cf. DiPardo, 1994). In her research experiences, DiPardo credited stimulated recall as stimulating "freewheeling and candid conversation" (p. 167) in the interviews in which the technique was employed. In DiPardo's analysis of stimulated recall procedures, she concluded that it has proven particularly useful for getting even reluctant interviewees to respond.

A disadvantage of stimulated recall is that participants have been exposed to many other life events between the reading/think-aloud and the stimulated recall interview, some of which will have undoubtedly affected participants memory of the original event. Since stimulated recall is recognized as a flexible tool for researchers (DiPardo, 1994), the length of time between the actual event and the stimulated recall interview will vary with each study. While in DiPardo's study, several weeks had elapsed, Bloom used stimulated recall immediately following the original event. In the present study, participants were interviewed within one to four weeks of completing the reading of the novel. Also, to assist the reader with recall, each participant was reminded of the context of each of the segments replayed in the stimulated recall interview, a technique similar to the one DiPardo reported using in her study.

In the present study of readers, the method of stimulated recall was used to triangulate data gathered through the think-aloud protocols. Data from stimulated recall interviews provided participants with opportunities to elaborate considerably on their thoughts recorded during the initial reading and think-alouds. Additionally, stimulated recall interviews supported the ethnographic interviews.

### **Ethnographic Interviews**

Ethnographic interviews were a vital method in examining reading transactions in this study. Spradley (1979) wrote that ethnographic interviews resembled "friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (p. 58). Since this study of readers' transactions recognized the importance of readers' experiential and socio-cultural backgrounds, ethnographic interviews offered the flexibility needed to investigate readers' backgrounds. Researchers examining the reading act have used open-ended interviewing widely in conjunction with other methods when examining readers (cf. Fly, 1994; Hull & Rose, 1990, Zancanella, 1991).

As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest for qualitative inquiries, data collection and analysis should be combined. In this study, interviews proved particularly useful in providing the opportunity to ask more in depth questions of participants after analyzing previous data. Interviews provided the occasion to investigate the context of the transaction from the reader's perspective. Furthermore, along with stimulated recall interviews, ethnographic

interviews provided additional means to triangulate data gathered through the think-aloud protocols.

The ethnographic interviews in this study were structured using an itinerary, a list of open-ended questions which were asked to each of the participants. Often follow-up questions pursued topics participants introduced which related to their meaning making.

Using the ethnographic approach, each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview preceded the training and practice of doing think-alouds. In this interview, participants were asked general questions about biographical information, personal reading interests, and their roles as teachers. For the current study, this first interview was as important for rapport building as it was for gathering data.

The second ethnographic interview was the culminating event with each participant. This interview closely followed the stimulated recall interview, which in turn had closely followed the participants completing the reading of the novel and four think-alouds. The second ethnographic interview was also structured using a list of predetermined, open-ended questions asked to each of the participants (see Appendix B or C). However, follow-up questions were used frequently, dependent upon a particular participant's response to the original question.

### **Procedures**

The methods of think-aloud protocols, stimulated recall and open-ended interviewing were used to gather data. These methodological techniques produced data which were

transcribed into documents (protocol and interview transcripts).

The procedures will be discussed in the order in which they were used in the study. The study proceeded in five phases. The first phase, the sampling/pre-interview phase, began as follows. Participants were solicited through a letter to teacher-consultants affiliated with a state writing project. Those who responded were telephoned and asked whether they regularly read novels for pleasure. Respondents who did were scheduled for an introductory interview to which they were asked to "bring a novel of your choice, something you may have wanted to read for some time but haven't yet."

The second phase was characterized by the initial interview. This interview was seen as an opportunity to build rapport with participants and to make clear that my interest was to study readers from their own perspectives, to describe the think-aloud procedures and conduct a practice think-aloud/reading of a short story with the participant. The interview and practice session were recorded. The following questions guided the initial interviews: (1) Where are you from?, (2) Where do you teach?, (3) How long have you been a teacher?, (4) What grades/subjects do you teach, (5) Have you taught a novel before?, (6) How often do you typically read from a novel?, (7) What other genres do you read?, (8) What are some of the titles of the books you've read recently?, (9) What is the book you have chosen to read during this study?, (10) Why did you select this particular book?



Once the interview portion of the meeting was complete, participants were introduced to think-aloud procedures. (See Appendix A). Then they were given a copy of the procedures which were adapted from Kintgen's (1983) study of readers reading poetry and Fly's (1994) study of readers reading short stories. Participants were asked to follow the think-aloud procedures during the reading of the practice short story written by James Thurber entitled "A Couple of Hamburgers."

During the training session and after participants felt comfortable producing think-alouds, each was provided with a hand-held, audio-tape recorder and three 90-minute cassette tapes. Then participants were asked to read, on their own, the novel of their choice, producing think-aloud protocols for four sections of each of their novels. The four sections included (1) the first chapter or section, (2) a chapter or section at approximately the one-third mark, (3) a chapter or section at approximately the two-thirds mark, and (4) the last chapter or section. These sections were collaboratively determined by participant and researcher. Most of the sections were between 6 and 25 pages in length. Participants read a total of approximately 20-25 percent of each of their books aloud; the remainder of each novel, participants read silently and did not record their thoughts.

In the third phase, participants read and completed the four think-aloud sections designated. At the conclusion of the reading, participants were asked to mail the cassettes and book to me in a self-addressed, stamped enveloped

provided. Participants were also instructed to call on me if they had any questions or problems during this time. When the tapes were received by mail, I reviewed and transcribed them in preparation for phase four.

The fourth phase of the data gathering process was a stimulated recall interview which focused on the reader's responses during the think-aloud. At the start of these interviews, I reminded participants that I was interested in learning more about their reading of the novels from their perspectives and clarified the procedures of the stimulated recall interview. Having examined the think-aloud protocols, I solicited more information regarding particularly interesting or recurrent responses from the think alouds by replaying those responses for the participant. Participants were asked to elaborate on their original responses, to explain what they were thinking as they listened to each selection. Procedures outlined by Rose (1984) and DiPardo (1994) were used to introduce and guide the stimulated recall interview. (See Appendix B).

The fifth phase was characterized by an in-depth, open-ended interview. Three primary areas of interest were explored including *biographical information* (e.g., Who was the most influential in your learning to read? Tell me about that person and their influences. Who is most influential on your reading now? Tell me about that person and their influences.); *reading practices, habits, and purposes* (e.g., What does reading novels do for you? personally? socially? emotionally? How did you come to read the way you do for

pleasure? How would you feel or react if you had read and were discussing aspects of the book and someone expressed contradictory impressions of that book?); and *socio-cultural aspects* (e.g., With whom do you talk about the books you read? Tell me about those people. How would your friends describe you as a reader? In what ways does your gender, ethnicity, job status, marital status, parental status, religious affiliation, socio-economic status influence your reading choices and practices?).

In sum, the procedures for this study may be viewed in terms of five phases. These phases included (1) the sampling/pre-interview, (2) the initial rapport-building interview and practice session, (3) participants reading and producing think-aloud protocols, (4) stimulated recall interview, and (5) the open-ended interview.

### **Data Analysis**

In the words of Bogdan and Biklen (1982), "The study itself structures the research" (p. 55). Given that my intentions were to study readers and their reading from their perspectives and based on their thoughts, qualitative methods incorporating think-aloud protocols, stimulated recall and open-ended interviews met the needs of the inquiry and have been used widely in similar inquiries (cf., Blake & Lunn, 1986; Earthman, 1992; Fly, 1994; DiPardo, 1994).

In exploratory, inductive research such as this, questions help guide the inquiry. The questions guiding this study were designed to examine readers in transactions and influences on those transactions including the experiential

and socio-cultural backgrounds of readers.

Before analysis began, cassette recordings of readers thinking aloud while reading were transcribed as were interviews with readers. Four transcripts from each participant were used in the think-aloud protocol analysis; three interview transcripts from each participant were used in building the case studies. The multi-case study is discussed below and is followed by a discussion of the think-aloud protocol analysis.

### **Interviews**

The open-ended interviews conducted with each participant were used to develop a multi-case study which provides the context for understanding the analysis of think-aloud protocols. A case study of each reader is presented in Chapter four. In Chapter five, an analysis of the think-aloud protocols is presented.

Data from the interviews with each participant was analyzed by identifying initial points of interest from the interview transcripts. Passages were identified on the basis of their being particularly informative of the readers' background and its relationship to the ways readers understood their own reading processes. These selections were used to build representative cases of the various dimensions which seemed to inform each readers understanding of how she read.

This analysis yielded a holistic picture of each of the readers. Techniques such as these are characterized as a multi-case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 62). Each of the

participants' reading acts and influences on those acts was the focus of each of the case studies. Bogdan and Biklen defined a case study as "a detailed examination of one setting, or one subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event" (p. 58). The case study approach facilitated analysis which not only described the reading transactions and influences on those transactions but also concretized transactional theory in terms of the ways participants make meaning. In short, the case studies provided a broad context that complimented the analysis of the think-aloud protocols. These case studies are presented in Chapter four.

#### **Think-aloud protocols**

Two stages were required in the analysis of the think-aloud protocols. The first stage yielded the categories which were used in second stage of analysis.

In stage one, categories descriptive of readers' transactions and reflective of the influences on those transactions emerged across readers through constant comparison. That is, data from the think-aloud protocols was analyzed across subjects for emergent patterns or commonalities. This analytic approach to establishing categories has been called the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison was accomplished through examining data for key issues which recur across participants. These key issues comprised emerging categories which were further examined in each additional data gathering session and tested as new data

was analyzed.

For the purpose of analysis, protocols were divided into units. Each unit of analysis is a complete thought or approximately one sentence verbalized by a reader. (Clearly, there are other options including independent clauses.) In the following excerpt from a participant's think-aloud protocol, divisions between units of analysis are designated by a slash (/). For example, the end of each unit of analysis in the following excerpt is marked by a slash:

Continuing the tradition that her mother had--ahem--told Tita that she had to stay home and take care of her forever./ And, so Esperanza's supposed to stay and take care of Rosaura forever./ I'm glad that wasn't a tradition in the United States./ I'm an only daughter./

Thoughts, organized approximately into sentences, were selected as units of analyses in order to maintain the integrity of each individual thought verbalized, to distinguish between units in terms of their content, and for the purposes of coding.

#### **Constant-comparison**

Categories which emerged in the constant comparative portion of the analysis were refined and were used to build a case for similarities across readers' transactions with narrative fictional texts. Constant comparison afforded the opportunity to describe the similarities among participants' transactions providing greater opportunities for translatability and comparability. Through constant comparison of units of analyses within each transcript of

each think aloud protocol, the coding system used to analyze the think-aloud protocols emerged.

As similarities and differences among responses emerged, responses that were most similar were organized into categories, described and refined. Two general dimensions of responses were noted. The first was a posturing by the reader, the second, an orientation to a particular text. For example, the unit "This is a man who is overwhelmingly stifled in his emotional life" received two codes; first, the unit was assigned the code appraising; second, it was coded blueprint. The two general categories from which these codes come are discussed below.

The two general dimensions or levels of participants' reading events include (1) the reader's primary stance toward a text within a particular transaction, and (2) the text with which the reader appeared to be primarily engaged. Each of the general categories is made up of more specific types of orientations and texts comprising the literary events.

The first general category, readers' orientations, is comprised of (1) appraising, (2) predicting, (3) paraphrasing, (4) amending, (5) questioning, and (6) struggling with orientation. The second general category, textual orientations, corresponded to the three texts with which the readers transacted; these included (1) the texts held in hand and read aloud (referred heretofore as *blueprint* texts), (2) *personal* texts, and (3) *socio-cultural* texts.

The coding system described above is defined more thoroughly in the introduction to Chapter five. (See pages

102-107.) It is presented as the introduction to the analysis of the think-aloud protocols to assist the reader's understanding of the protocol analysis.

Emerging categories were also compared with coding systems used by other researchers (cf. Blake & Lunn, 1986; Fly, 1994, Maclean, 1986). Each category was defined and supported by examples. The emergent categories were then used as the coding system for coding all of the readers' think aloud responses.

### **Think-aloud protocol analysis**

The second stage of the analysis of the think aloud protocols began with coding each unit of analysis with two codes, one for the reader's primary stance and the other for the text with which the reader appeared to be primarily engaged. After the coding system was developed, a second coder was recruited. Once the coding system was explained to the second coder, and she was provided with examples for each code, four transcripts (25 percent of the think-aloud protocols) were randomly selected and coded independently. The four transcripts were selected randomly by assigning numbers 1-16 to all of the protocols and then using a random number table. Inter-coder reliability for the coding system was established at 88.5%, with agreement on 223 of the 252 units coded by both coders.

In the data analysis of the think aloud protocols reported in chapter four, carefully selected excerpts are presented. These selections from the think alouds were identified using two criteria: (1) instances when the reader



seemed to be highly engaged with those thoughts, and (2) instances when thoughts/responses seemed representative of the reader's typical verbalizations.

### **Stimulated recall**

These selections of the think aloud protocols, when reported in Chapter five, are frequently accompanied by data gathered from the stimulated recall interview. Data from these stimulated recall interviews are used to further facilitate and triangulate the primary data from the think-alouds.

In summary, this multi-method approach, multi-case studies, constant comparison, think-aloud protocol analysis and stimulated recall, guided the data analysis. This approach provided ways to examine reading from participants' perspectives, to examine participants' purposes and processes in the reading of novels, and to examine the experiential and socio-cultural influences on readers' transactions. Further, these approaches were consistent with transactional theory's respect for the reflexive nature of reading events. That is, reading is viewed as being informed by a multitude of contexts and the experience of reading informs those contexts for the readers. The combinations of methods used here facilitate the examination of the reflexive nature of readers' transactions.

## **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA**

The data have been analyzed to shed light on the reading transactions of participants as they read novels. Since this study is situated in transactional theory, the analysis focused on the reader and the personal, socio-cultural, and textual influences with which the reader transacted meaning. To preview this chapter, the contexts of each of the reading events are established using the data gathered through the ethnographic interviews. First, the participants are described generally. Then each of the readers, Julia, Alicia, Sybil and Donna, is examined individually. This chapter is intended to provide the context for understanding the readers as they transacted with their reading selections; that is, this chapter serves as a preface for the fifth chapter, where readers' think alouds are analyzed.

### **The Readers: A Brief Demography**

While different in many ways, the four readers in this study were all teachers. They ranged in age from twenty-eight to sixty-three years. At the time of the study, Donna taught third grade, Sybil taught ninth through twelfth grades, and Julia and Alicia taught at the community college level. All participants volunteered in response to a request for participation which emphasized that participants must consider themselves to be experienced and regular readers of novels. Readers and reading events were examined from the perspectives of the readers themselves.

All participants noted having read countless works of

fiction, and when asked how many novels each read during the last year, responses ranged from Julia's three or four to Donna's dozens. Julia admitted taking a long time to get through some books while reading others in a day or two. For example, Julia explained her approach to literature as well as her persistence:

"It [Gravity's Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon] took me four goes--I know. What hooks me about Pynchon is that there would be, you know, I'd make it about two hundred pages the first time and then I'd go, "Oh gosh, I just can't make it." I'd put it down for six months, come back to it and in that time period, just the things that stick to your brain. You'd read those two hundred pages again and you'd realize--which is, to me, the magic of Pynchon--his incredible ability to blend fiction and fact.

Julia admitted preferring to savor books over weeks and months; she admitted to selecting lengthy, time consuming works to read. Yet, she also noted that she sometimes read books in a day or two, completely absorbing herself in the experience.

The four participants volunteered that they were part of supportive communities of readers. One reported that she belonged to a formal reading discussion group. Another was part of an informal "pass along" group of colleagues who shared, read and discussed books they passed along to one another. The other participants talked about close friends with whom they regularly discussed their reading. One

participant reported regular telephone discussions with her sisters, one living several states away and another living in a foreign country, conversations in which these sisters discussed their reading. The powerful role that supportive communities of readers play in these readers' practices will be explored later.

Below, each of the readers are examined individually using the data gathered from interviews. The contexts of their reading histories are explored in this chapter. These contexts include (a) the way each perceives herself as a reader, (b) the personal ways each reader engages texts, (c) some of the social and cultural influences which seem to affect the way each reader reads, and (d) the roles texts play for each reader. Readers are featured in this order: Julia, Sybil, Donna, and Alicia

**Julia's Reading: "This copious notebook  
of Julia's little categories of reading"**

Julia relished the opportunity to talk about literature. That she was able to make time to do so was surprising, given her busy schedule. As school district coordinator for the language arts, Julia supervised dozens of K-12 teachers from six schools, provided resources for these teachers, taught specialized units in her teachers' classrooms, organized and led numerous district and school level workshops and meetings, attended several state and national conferences each year and much more. She taught one or two composition and literature courses each semester at a community college. When she volunteered for the study, Julia noted that she

loved to talk about literature, that she was part of a reading group of teachers who read and discussed books every two or three months. In sum, Julia had a very active schedule which was supported by communities who valued similar literate behaviors.

Julia was confident of herself as a knowledgeable, experienced reader. She spoke candidly about her knowledge of and views on literature. After a lengthy response to distinctions she made about the range of literature available to readers, Julia leaned forward enthusiastically and said,

[L]ets keep flipping through this copious notebook of Julia's little categories of reading. Um, I can certainly distinguish also between what I'd call *high-class trash* and *just plain trash*. For me--and lots of people might disagree with this--high-class trash is like Ann Rice's Vampire books. They are fun, they have style, and there are even a few things in there that make you mull over the bigger questions of life. But let's face it, they're made to sell the movie rights. Then there is absolutely schlock, what I consider the *low-class trash* like--my favorite to pick on--The Bridges of Madison County. I read just a scathing review of it by a woman who said, 'If this had been written by a woman, it would have sold for \$2.95. It was written by a man, and it sells in hard cover for \$20.00.' And I really think there is so much truth to that. To me, that's just not quality, and I am outraged.

Julia indicated in her hierarchical comparison of "high-class trash" and "low-class trash" that she distinguished literature in terms of quality. Further, her choice of metaphors relating to class hint at a recognition of social differences amongst intended reading audiences. This social metaphor or distinction, she noted in her reference to "low trash" literature and the different treatment she thought it warranted. In connecting this social class metaphor to gender issues, Julia discerned inequity. Further, that a book written by a man should cost more than the same type of book written by a woman "outraged" Julia. Her acknowledgement of such perceived social and economic injustices illustrates some of the social and cultural influences on Julia's reading transactions. She volunteered that she was interested in social issues including feminists' issues. Such socio-cultural references, indicate that Julia was aware of the economic inequities which she saw as the result of differences in treatment of men and women authors.

To Julia, books were like wine to a connoisseur, sophisticated, yet very personal. She savored them. She read with fervor, and she spoke about her reading with zeal. Julia cited someone whom she had read who provided support for her gender inequity argument, an argument for which she conceded strong emotions as can be seen in her statement, "And I really think there is so much truth to that. To me, that's just not quality, and I am outraged."

### **Julia's Reading Stances**

Julia recognized that she could employ different types

of strategies to fit a given purpose for reading. Some strategies she valued more, considered them as more sophisticated than others. When discussing her purposes for reading fiction, Julia apologized for her personal approach to reading, making a case for it being somehow less than the critical approaches which she had come to accept as better. Julia explained that she did not read as much as she thought English teachers should, nor in ways that she thought students of literature should:

When I am not reading as a student, per se, as I was in a master's program in literature, I tend to revert back to those more pleasure-reading-type techniques which very often, to me--I mean--I just, I relate to characters on a personal level.... In this particular book [Remains of the Day], it's very hard to miss the statements that are being made about society, but that I see as author commentary more than the quirks of the character himself. So, in my own reading, would I say, do I look always for the character to represent something? No, I really don't. It's much more of a personal kind of thing. I worry that that makes me a less sophisticated reader than my boyfriend, for instance, who is also a literature major and has a masters in literature, tends to read, always, at the level of--he will begin to apply some form of interpretation, even in a first reading. And since he's a more scholarly reader than I, I sometimes say--he in turn would say about me that I am a more insightful

reader than he is because I read from an emotional base. In her reading of The Remains of the Day, Julia did indeed focus mostly on character; approximately 54 percent of her responses pertained to character (See Chart B). Also, she related intensely on an emotional level with the main characters. At one point during her reading, she revealed sadly,

This is really, I'm not crying because everything is so completely contained, but it is absolutely pathetic that these people are so repressed, so horribly repressed. There's a tremendous lesson for us there.

However, Julia's reading was not limited to transactions which focused on character. She looked beyond character shifting many transactions to a universal "lesson."

The complex influences of her emotional response ["I'm not crying," "it is absolutely pathetic"] meshed with the textual influences ["everything is so contained"]. Again, through the milieu of the personal and textual influences, the transaction took on socio-cultural dimensions. In this socio-cultural realm, her transactions shifted from a personal to a socio-cultural one by incorporating what she saw as universal views on meaning in her statement about there being a "lesson for us there."

### Julia Defines Herself as a Reader

Through comparing herself with her boyfriend, Julia illustrated her own view of herself as a reader. She considered her approach as less scholarly than approaches of



other readers she knew. She saw her own reading as mostly making personal connections: "I very often relate to characters on a very personal level." Julia characterized her boyfriend Sean's reading as more "scholarly," for she respected his ability to "apply some form of interpretation, even in a first reading." She perceived herself as understanding, but not practicing, what she saw as respected qualities of a widely read reader.

I have been narrow focused in my realm of experience. I know a lot about not too many things, and Sean [her boyfriend], I think, thinks of himself as someone not as bright as I am, which is not true, but I think he perceives that because his nature is to know a lot about a lot of things. And so he's forever sampling. One of the things he samples is literature, and he is literally the kind of person that if he reads an interesting review in the back of Time, he will go get that book and read it. I will just read the review and pretend to people that I've read it, talk glibly about it. Who will know?--you know--who will know I really didn't read that?

While appearing insecure about her preferred way of approaching literature, Julia spoke confidently of her ability to talk to others about books, whether or not she has read them: "I will just read the review and pretend to people that I've read it, talk glibly about it. Who will know?"

At once, confident about her ability to talk about

literature and insecure about the natural, personal characteristics of her transactions with literature, Julia considered herself to be actively involved in literary events (reading and talking about reading) and practicing literate behaviors.

### The Social: Talk About Reading

That Julia viewed reading as something to "talk glibly about" reveals that she recognized being perceived by others as "well read" and able to articulately speak about literature. For Julia, to speak knowledgeably about literature brought with it a certain esteem from peers; she perceived it as supportive of her status in interpersonal relationships.

Julia spoke repeatedly about the various ways reading facilitated her in personal and professional relationships. She talked to her friend Sean:

I find that for all my boyfriend and I read, we don't talk a tremendous amount of our reading at the moment. But we do talk about our body of reading.

With friends and colleagues, Julia observed that talking about reading fostered a sense of community:

I mean it [reading, talking about books] builds community, certainly for those friends of mine that have been really close friends, and now who live far away, and I don't see them very often and don't get to have engaging conversations with them. It's a continuing bridge that's very important.

Julia related numerous stories of the social role reading,

talk and writing about books played in her relationships.

One of these stories follows:

A friend, who has been a friend of mine since we went to high school together, but we didn't become friends until college. And he's lived in New York for many years now, and he was home a couple of weeks ago and brought me a book for my birthday. I started to read that and it was just a delightful little book, and one that I wouldn't have discovered on my own, really. However, I did read a blurb on it in Newsweek, and Don is someone who identifies books for me; I've done the same for him. I have another friend who was a librarian when he was here but has also lived in New York for many years and Michael is very influential in that. He'll send the [undecipherable] postcard from somewhere and just in the postscript, he'll write what he is reading and of course, it's very intriguing, and he'll send me his real life philosophy about reading: to read it and then pass it on, so a lot of times I will get books [from him].

Reading, sharing books, talking and writing about books provided a "continuous bridge" in social transactions which fostered "engaging conversations" and prompted postscripts on postcards. Julia and her friends went so far as to discuss their "philosophy about reading."

Julia spoke enthusiastically about another of her social networks, her students, and of plans for an upcoming class that she was scheduled to teach.

I am really excited about it, to do some cyber-punk

fiction. So, we'll be doing, I don't know how much freedom I will have in terms of purchasing materials, but I certainly plan to do, if nothing else, William Gibson's Neuromancer and maybe Count Zero, and probably some excerpts from Clockwork Orange, which I haven't read for myself in ages and ages and may have memories that aren't the right ones when I go back to the book. And then maybe some shorter pieces. But those three novels, probably--most certainly.

When speaking about her views on teaching reading, Julia declared that as a class, "We would approach the whole purpose of reading as an adventure, as an inquiry into the human condition." Her approach to teaching reading was characterized by sharing experiences with books that made for transactions which she found significant for her. She taught classes using books which she enjoyed. Additionally, Julia had abundant enthusiasm for teaching using those literary selections.

Colleagues provided yet another social setting in which Julia sought and found talk about books. She founded a reading group of English teachers which meets several times a year to discuss a given book. In tracing the evolution of that group, Julia noted that she was looking for the kinds of discussions she remembered having in literature classes in college. She described the role of the group as such:

I wanted college all over again, and I was looking for people who wanted college all over again. So we got down to about ten of us that are fairly dedicated, and

then we've had those people through the last two or there years, and it's been interesting. I've also added in the outside person who leads the discussion rather than me doing that.... That whole reading group is really not a situation where I almost feel that competitive student. The one nice thing about this not being really college is that you don't feel like you have to swim-with-the-sharks sort of deal.

She described their discussions as "literary" but not in the threatening way she remembered literature college courses being. Talk in this group provided Julia and fellow members with a safe yet challenging forum.

Significant others, close friends, students, and peers made up the primary social networks in which Julia read and talked about literature with others. Her networks were both informal and formal; she talked informally with her boyfriend and other close friends and formally with her students and peers. These transactions were facilitated by and facilitated Julia's desire to regularly engage in what she perceived as literate behaviors.

**Julia and the Blueprint Text: "A sucker for style"**

The text is important to Julia. Having studied literature formally for a master's degree in English, she has much experience examining texts. When asked to share "anything about you as a reader that might help me understand you better," Julia quickly responded, "I'm a sucker for style. I think sometimes I set down things of good quality because they don't read with great fluency." The language of

the text, the author's choice of words, sentence structure, use of figurative language all contribute to a text's style. Julia valued these over other marks of "good quality." However, Julia did not refer to style very often in her think alouds.

Julia did spend a good deal of time in her think alouds responding to blueprint textual issues. Yet, in the interviews, Julia spoke sparingly about blue-print. Her comment about style above was as extensive as Julia spoke about the blueprint texts she read. Julia's extended comments centered on her personal response or connections to social or cultural issues. The blue-print was at best secondary to the array of socio-cultural and personal connections she made.

**Reading for Sybil: "Once that connection's made"**

Sybil seizes opportunities to enrich her reading. The connections Sybil made were many. In interviews she repeatedly connected to her son Eric, her sisters Susan and Michelle, her former boyfriend Bob, her ex-husband Seth, her mother, her friend Dan, her students, job, gender, philosophy, socio-economic status, race and more. What stood out about Sybil was the extent to which she was aware of these connections. She invited connections. Each connection brought with it a range of experiences that Sybil treasured and incorporated into her reading in ways that added depth, that enriched her transactions.

At the time of this study, Sybil had been teaching school for fourteen years, mostly in small, rural schools in

the Midwest. Her warm, easy-going manner made her reflections take on the feel of stories all their own. Soft, haunting melodies of Mazzie Starr, music Sybil described as "like the feeling of memory," drifted into the cozy, sunlit living room and dinning room where our interviews took place. Although quite modest, Sybil was never reluctant to share past experiences and ways she made sense of them. A gentle sincerity in her voice and mannerisms leave the impression that one is speaking with a wise and trusted friend. The eldest daughter in a family of five girls, Sybil referred to her sisters and other relatives in many of her responses. Family is important to her. She saw threads that have woven her, her sisters, and her friends and relatives together not so much by blood as by friendship.

In the following sections, I examine Sybil's reading stances, the ways she defines herself as a reader, and the influences of social factors as well as blueprint texts on Sybil's reading.

### **Sybil's Reading Stances**

Sybil perceived that she approached reading differently depending on the material and the context in which she was reading it. She identified four stances that she saw herself taking. These included professional reading, reading for her job as a teacher, reading for her classes as a graduate student, and personal reading.

Professionally, Sybil read discriminately, particularly if she felt it was thrust upon her, "because somebody said, 'you need to read this'." She admitted to being reluctant to

do that type of reading: "I'm really bad to go, 'Oh, I've already heard this! You can't teach me anything new here'." Sybil also read in preparation for the classes she taught. In this type of reading, Sybil read the works that she had assigned to her students. Even when teaching the same work over, Sybil felt it her responsibility to reread the work:

A lot of literature I present in my class--of course, I reread it every time I teach it, but every year it's different because my students are different. So, for instance, if we're doing Shakespeare, which right now we're doing Julius Ceasar in my sophomore English class. I have eight students, a very small class, seven of them are boys, [and all] seven of those boys are in the lower third of the class. They are not going to do as well as upper students, so I try to look at Shakespeare, at their ability, their interests, and think, 'what can I get from this and still appreciate Shakespeare?'. . . . So I guess my purpose is to read to look for ways to adapt to my class better.

Sybil recognized this different stance required shifting purposes and focus, to read from a perspective different from the one she took when reading as a graduate student studying literature or simply for her own pleasure.

In her role as a graduate student, Sybil felt the additional pressure of reading works that were required for her classes. She compared the experience of reading books as a student to reading The Bridges of Madison County:

I was doing a lot of other things for my class and



everything else, so I'd just read a little bit, put it down, that kind of thing. The book [Bridges] was so involving right from the very beginning . . . . it was a nice change of pace from what I had been reading [for class]. I had been reading things like Uncle Tom's Cabin, Babbitt, some off-beat novels, one was called The Ragged Dick--anyway, it was a nice change of pace from those books. It was almost like a fun thing as a opposed to work . . . . it felt more personal.

Sybil recognized that she took a different stance when reading purely for herself. Sybil had high expectations for herself as a reader: "When I read, I should, because I'm older, more experienced, wiser, I feel I should get more out of the book." Sybil went on to tell about rereading Faulkner's A Light in August, a favorite of hers in her undergraduate days. This rereading was prompted by:

[T]hat curiosity to go back and see why I fell in love with this book and try to imagine what was going on at that time and compare what is going on with my life now and see if the two will go together, and surprisingly, they do.

While she talked about the different things she did when reading for the varying purposes described above, Sybil also saw some similarities across the varying stances:

It's going to be the same whether I'm relating for myself or trying to look at something--like my students would look at it. Even though I'm doing it for myself, I'm still relating, personalizing, internalizing. . . .

when I read for myself, I know that I don't have to follow anybody's agenda. . . . I'd rather just go into the book not knowing a whole lot about it and get what I can from it.

Sybil was adept at seeing the nuances that distinguished the varying stances she took but also aware of the threads that connected her various approaches, what she referred to as "relating, personalizing, internalizing."

**Sybil, the Reader: "My mother just handed me another"**

Sybil described herself as a reader by alluding to her roles in personal and social networks. When and how she read depended upon what was going on in her life at the time. She did not see herself as simply a certain kind of reader who did only certain things while reading. Rather, Sybil defined herself as a dynamic reader in a dynamic social environment. Sybil recognized that her mood and outside demands on her life had a good deal to do with the frequency with which she read novels.

Normally, I have to be in a mood and my mood is sometimes to go months without reading a novel, and then I'll go through a mood where I'm a voracious reader, and I read everything, usually by an author. I picked up Steinbeck one summer and read everything I could get my hands on. I do that.

Another factor influencing how often Sybil reads novels related to whether her sixteen year-old son was staying with her or with his father. When he was living with her, she spent more time with him and less time reading. When he was

away, she read more regularly, "probably every night." Still another factor effecting Sybil as a reader was her choice of reading material. Sybil often read books on popular psychology (e.g., Thomas Moore's Soul Mates), assorted poetry, short stories and popular magazines (e.g., Rollingstone).

When reading novels, Sybil said she preferred classic literature. Her reading experiences were wide, but when choosing literature on her own, she felt drawn to critically recognized literature. When I asked her why, she explained it simply as "I know which one is the best in the classics." Her identification with classical literature may have something to do with the early influence her mother had on her reading as well as her graduate work in English:

I remember that my mother bought books a lot. She was in a book club, and in fact, when we built a new home, one wall was a bookcase. That was part of the design, and she filled that bookcase very quickly. When she found I read a lot of books at school, she encouraged me to read some of her books. I thought, 'those are your books, Mom, not my books.' She introduced me to Anays Seaton who is a novelist, who I'd describe as a woman's writer because she writes the kind of novels women enjoy . . . . I loved that, so my mother just handed me another one, she was very influential.

Her interest in more classical literature might be best illustrated by her decision to reread Faulkner's A Light in August and her lack of interest in less high-brow reading:

"I very rarely read the Tom Clancy's or Danielle Steele's." For Sybil, her own literacy is part of a larger picture which includes familial and other social forces including her career as a teacher and her roles in relationships with friends.

### The Social Element of Reading for Sybil: Nourishing Relationships

Social influences on Sybil's reading were numerous and powerful. Her mother and sister continued to be compelling forces. Sybil also found that a counselor she once saw, her boyfriend, graduate courses in English literature, and friends played important roles in the reading dimension of her life.

As noted in the section above in which Sybil defined herself as a reader, her mother filled Sybil's childhood home with books. As Sybil remembered it, when she was in sixth grade, she began reading books in series including:

Bobsey Twins and Nancy Drew or whatever. My Mom even recommended some to me--Tarkington. He wrote about the twenties, thirties, or forties, something like that. My mother would read them before she recommended them to me. I started reading good books then.

But it was her sister with whom she developed a relationship that involved talking about books each was reading. She and her sister Renee maintain those discussions, today, as Sybil noted, "My sister is a big influence, but she doesn't read the same kinds of books I do. However, we talk about the books we read to one another." Sybil described her frequent

conversations about books as a way she and Renee could share books and maintain a dialogue about literature they had both read.

Sybil credited her counselor and her sister with swaying her reading interests from exclusively fiction to a mixture of non-fiction and fiction. Her counselor recommended:

[P]sychology, self-help books, and that kind of thing . . . I had read novels primarily up to that time, and I went through a period of that, and now I read a little of both. Renee still reads a lot of the psychological, spiritual, feminist-type books, and we talk about them a lot. Then I'll read things that aren't along those lines, and I'll recommend those to her, and we'll exchange off.

The reciprocal nature of the relationship was important for Sybil, with her and her sister, Renee, recommending books to one another and talking about books with each other. Even when asked only about influences on her own reading, Sybil would make a point to include her role in Renee's reading; to Sybil, their roles in each other's reading were contiguous.

Sybil also credited her boyfriend Bob with broadening her interests in literature beyond exclusively reading fiction. With Bob, Sybil read and discussed poetry, drama and critical analyses of literature:

[W]hen I was going with Bob, he read a lot, too, and we shared a lot, but he read a lot of poetry, plays, critiques and things like that. Different stuff from what I--I mean I read the poetry, but I didn't read that

many plays, but we exchanged our reading experiences, and that was fun to talk about. It was good.

That the relationship between Sybil and Bob ended during her reading of the novel for this study made discussing the nature of their relationship regarding reading a more sensitive issue, particularly since The Bridges of Madison County focused on a love affair. However, Sybil revealed that the reading of the novel helped her process some of her own feelings about her relationship with Bob, and its end. Similar to the way Sybil noted the reciprocal elements of her relationships with her sister, Renee, and her former boyfriend, Bob, Sybil viewed her reading of the novel for this study and the connections she made with the characters and events in the novel in a reciprocal relationship with the actual events in her own life. That is, Sybil's reading about the relationship of Fransesca and Robert informed Sybil's own relationship with Bob, and that relationship informed her understanding of the relationship between Fransesca and Robert in the novel.

That particular novel helped me to deal with some pain I needed to deal with. I know I could have very easily shoved to the back--it's very hard to let go--the grieving process, the whole loss thing and experiencing Fransesca's experience, where they both had to let each other go, kind of helped me.

For Sybil, sensitive issues that may have been painful were faced rather than avoided, for she recognized the reciprocal nature of transactions with literature.

When asked if social issues like gender, ethnicity, employment effected the way she read, Sybil stated that she did see them as influential. With gender, for example, Sybil responded, "I think I read more because I'm a woman. . . . I think women are searching, especially now." When asked about whether she thought that her being a White American effected the way she read, again she noted quantity, replying:

I think it does have an influence. I don't know how much or the way, but I think if I were a Native American female, I would not read as much because it's not encouraged. If I were a Black American or African-American, the same thing. I wouldn't read as much. If I were Asian, I'd probably read more.

Sybil thought that her status as a teacher also effected the amount of reading she did:

I expect that I should read, in the summer especially. This is a time where I need to do some reading--one summer I demolished everything I could get my hands on that John Steinbeck had written. I had a diet of John Steinbeck.

Sybil perceived that these social distinctions effected the way she actually read. Particularly, she perceived that her gender, ethnicity, and employment status proliferated the quantity of reading she did.

Sybil's decision to read The Bridges of Madison County, the book she chose for this study, revealed that she felt she must be aware of and discriminatory amongst the various social factors that influenced her reading. The person to

originally recommend the book, and who actually gave the book to Sybil, was not considered by Sybil to be a particularly credible source. It was not until the book had been recommended by a more trusted source that--after having the borrowed book in her possession for about nine months--Sybil decided to read The Bridges of Madison County. Sybil noted that the opportunity to participate in this study:

has given me a good excuse to read it, which I've had trouble picking the book up. I don't know why. Maybe it's because of the woman who recommended it to--our school secretary. She thought I'd like it, and I'm thinking, 'How does she know I'd like this book? If she recommended it, I'm not sure I want to read it.' That's crazy! But my sister has read it just recently, she said, and she said it was excellent, and I trust my sister.

When I inquired further about her reluctance to read the book, whether she really wanted to, she responded enthusiastically saying, "Yes, because now my sister has recommended it. I trust her recommendation and that's all it takes."

In the interviews, Sybil helped to situate her own reading within a social context. She identified several social factors including relationships with her mother, sister, a former boyfriend, along with her gender, ethnicity and employment status.

### Sybil and the Blueprint

Thinking the events in her life were atypical during the



time that she was a participant in this study, Sybil's description of the role of the blueprint text in her reading kept straying back to speaking about factors other than the blueprint. Nevertheless, one can ascertain Sybil's sense of the role of the blueprint for herself as a reader.

When asked to describe her own part of the meaning making in her reading experience with The Bridges of Madison County, Sybil responded by saying she felt particularly influential in that reading experience: "I think more so, I think, had I read it another time." She explained that during the time that she read for this study, she had been particularly busy at work, as a student, and, most notably, involved in the traumatic, stressful cessation of a primary relationship in her life. Sybil gave these reasons for what she perceived was a reading experience in which she played an even more influential role than most of her reading experiences. When asked to describe the ways she perceived the text fit into the reading experience with The Bridges of Madison County, Sybil said:

I don't think it's simple and straightforward that you can just read it as is. I think you have to stop and do some thinking, searching, and decoding. I mean maybe not a lot, but some; I know I did. . . . Someone who has read that book and hasn't been through a similar experience as Franscesca and Robert obviously is going to have a different experience. For instance, a person who has fought in the Vietnam War and reads literature connected with that is going to bring that experience

more into the reading.

Perceiving that the blueprint text had had less influence in this read than was typical for her, Sybil did not articulate ways she perceived the blueprint working. Yet, from what she stated above, one could infer that the events in the blueprint text were prompts for the reader to connect personal and social experiences to those events. That is, Sybil portrayed the blueprint as a catalyst in that it served to trigger connections which were necessary for transactions.

In establishing the context in which Sybil perceived herself as a reader, it is possible to say that Sybil was aware of an array of influences on her meaning making as a reader. While holding a clear sense of how she had become the reader she was, Sybil also was mindful of the ever-changing personal and social factors impacting the stances she took while reading.

#### Donna Finds Solace:

##### "We moved a lot.....So books were my friends"

A teacher with more than 24 years teaching experience in the rural Midwest, Donna was teaching third graders, and had been doing so for eight years at the time of this study. A native of the Midwest, Donna moved around considerably throughout the East and Southeast while growing up, a fact that she considered influential on her early reading practices. She offered the following illustration of the extent to which she and her family moved while she was a child: "My dad was with a geophysical company, and so, uh,

in first grade I went to school in five different states." She recounted that her way to adjust to a new place to live was to turn to books:

When I started kindergarten, Mother came and got me. And with the geophysical crew, we started moving and we moved a lot. And so there were the other kids with the crew's families, too, but they weren't always my age. Most of the time the ones that were my age were boys, and they didn't want anything to do with me. So we'd move into a new town, and my mother would take me to the library. I'd come home with a bunch of books, and I'd read books, and sometimes it would be a couple of weeks before I'd--particularly if it was summertime--before I'd meet anybody or make any friends. So books were my friends, they were my pleasure, they were my escape.

At sixty-three years of age, Donna was serenely confident in her interests, reading and otherwise. Her interests were eclectic: she spoke of mountain climbing in Peru and Mexico, romance novels she had read, favorite jazz musicians, her young grandson, her grandmother whom Donna claims "was Christian Scientist anytime anybody said, 'I think you need to go to the doctor.'" The rest of the time, she was Methodist." Donna's grandmother was an integral figure on her early reading practices. An intriguing individual in her own right, Donna had Charlie Parker blaring on her stereo when I knocked on her front door for our first interview. She turned it down only slightly, for she explained, it was one of her favorite tunes. When we had

talked a few minutes, each asking the other to repeat almost every statement, she turned it down to background level.

Donna spoke openly and freely on almost all subjects, shying away only once when discussing a particularly erotic scene from the novel Like Water for Chocolate, which she read for the study. Her enthusiasm for reading was unmatched by any of the other participants. However, Donna was not euphemistic about her reservations with the book that she read for the study. In her first comments to me after reading the novel, Donna volunteered:

I enjoyed part of it, but I like the sweeter fantasy more than this gory fantasy. I didn't care for that at all. I thought she [the author] overdid some of that. Her candidness reinforced her credibility as a participant.

Donna did not try to assuage our conversations; her interests in reading and discussing her own reading practices seemed sincere. And her interests in reading were obvious, for her home was filled with books, on shelves, coffee and lamp tables, stacked upon the television, draped open and facing down on the arms of her couch.

Donna was keenly aware of the nuances of her own reading interests and the varying stances she employed while reading. Through careful examination of interviews with Donna, she appeared aware of at least four different stances she took while reading. Donna seemed to understand these four different stances in relation to reading various kinds of texts in different contexts for differing purposes. These included the experiences of reading to maintain membership of

a social group at work, reading for pleasure and sharing, reading for information and reading with her students. Each of these reading experiences and Donna's stances within them are explored below.

### Reading to Maintain Membership

Donna's primary purpose for reading "pass along" books was to maintain an active role within a group of colleagues at the school in which she teaches. She was explicit in explaining her purpose for reading books that fellow teachers shared with her:

I wouldn't read them if I wasn't teaching and running around with that bunch. Because you read four pages and you can predict exactly what will happen clear to the end and I like to be surprised.

The "pass along" books which Donna read privileged her to participation in discussions around school. Further, being seen by other teachers as a voracious reader, "everybody there knows I like to read so much, often instead of taking them (pass along books) to the lounge, they'll give them right to me," gave Donna more than simply membership, but status within the group.

Donna perceived a difference between the reading experiences surrounding the reading she did for membership and those she did for other purposes. She critiqued "pass-along" books by saying, "Lots of times they are really, really good books, but sometimes they are like Judith Michaels' romances, formula romances."

Reading for Donna: "Reading is better than eating and eating and eating and eating"

When describing her other reading experiences outside of the books she read as part of the group, Donna spoke of these experiences in more personal terms. When asked to describe what reading a novel did for her, Donna compared it to a smoker's habit:

I think its relaxing. It's entertainment . . . sometimes it will help you be introspective. I sit down, and if I didn't have papers to grade then I'm looking around for a book or a magazine or Reader's Digest or something to put in my hand. I guess it's partly habit like a smoker will really not want a cigarette but they're reaching, and 'what am I reaching for? Oh, a cigarette.' Reading is better than eating and eating and eating and eating.

By comparing it to compulsive behaviors like smoking and over-eating, Donna turned to reading when she was not occupied by something else. When she spoke in general about reading, she saw it as merely providing her with something to do. Yet, when she spoke of specific reading experiences like the following, Donna grew enthusiastic:

. . . a very, very small book, I've had it for years and years and it's about a German prisoner of war. He's in this prison camp, and the guard begins to have an understanding of what is going on emotionally and it affects the guard: 'what would I feel if I were like that?' It's very small, but a very deep psychological

book and that had an impact on me, and I've never talked about the book. I can feel the whole time through you didn't know if the prisoner was working the guard and would do something to him and escape. You didn't know if the guard was going to become so sympathetic of the prisoner that he would let him escape and get into trouble. I got really tense. I stayed up all night until I finished. I couldn't lay it back down and go back to sleep.

The intensity that she mentioned upon the initial reading was evident in her voice and physical stance. She spoke of the reading experience with fervor, her voice grew louder, her posture straighter. Donna seemed to be describing the experience of others in one sense and revealing that she had then and was again at the time of the interview not simply a subject reading a text but remained an active participant. She was the guard, the prisoner, and she was herself. Beyond a vicarious experience, Donna spoke of it as though it were she who had witnessed the actual event, had been there with the two and seen it from the point-of-view which she described.

This personal reading Donna did also had social implications, for she and her daughter-in-law usually conversed about these experiences. Donna viewed these conversations with her daughter-in-law differently than she did those with her colleagues and talk about the "pass along" books. When I asked her to describe that relationship involving sharing books with her daughter-in-law, Donna was

rather brief, "we kind of like the same types of books. With her I have no qualms about saying, 'I don't like that book!'" I was unsuccessful in getting Donna to speak further about this relationship and their talk about their reading experiences. From what Donna did share, it appeared that she felt open to express her opinions more authentically than with her "pass along" colleagues.

**Reading for Information: "Did you remember anything?"**

Donna's reading experiences with informative texts illustrate how differently she perceived these reading events. These differences include purpose, stance, location, auditory considerations, and writing. Donna explained the differences eloquently:

When I read for pleasure I just get as comfortably as I can. I don't worry about absorbing it or anything. I just read and read and read. But if I'm reading something like DOS for Dummies, I read through it quickly, not the whole book, but the section (inaudible). I might read through quickly, stop and think, 'Did you remember anything?' Then sometimes, I'm reading something that I find difficult, I'll have to sit down and read it out loud to myself. Sometimes I even have to copy part of it to be sure to get it.

In this type of reading event, Donna distinguished the aesthetic and the efferent rather well. Her response began by comparing her experience reading for pleasure to an experience of reading to better understand a computer operating system. The purpose for this type of reading



appeared to be overt, for she asked herself, "Did you remember anything?" Also, Donna noted that the pace was different from other types of reading experiences. She read DOS for Dummies at a pace which seemed to her to be "quickly," one section at a time. She checked her comprehension along the way, and when she noticed it wasn't at the level she wanted it to be, she adapted a strategy to increase it.

I really don't read a lot for my job as a teacher anymore, because--I used to read the stories for the children, make out questions and ask them, 'What would you do?' and things like that. But the stories--but the vocabulary is so difficult even the teachers will go to the lounge and say 'Have you ever seen this word before?' . . . I don't do a lot of reading ahead. I read it with them; we dig it out together.

Donna's organic metaphor of digging it out together with her students is not unlike the other reading events that she regularly experiences. When Donna reads with her students, she is engaged with a community of readers, in real time. The reader will recall that Donna considered the reading she did as part of the informal group of fellow teachers at her school to be dictated by a role that she felt comfortable with as prolific reader. For Donna, reading and sharing those experiences with colleagues kept her reading books that she claimed she wouldn't have read otherwise. She read with her students, seeing no point in reading ahead since it was the experience, the act itself, the process of experiencing

and sharing, stances she took and valued in her own reading apart from her teaching. This is further reflected in Donna's recognition of the ubiquitous role of reading in her classroom: "there really isn't anything that we do that doesn't involve some manner of reading."

**Alicia's Reading:**

**"It just connects to everything else I'm doing."**

Alicia's connections to family, her son, her husband and her sisters flowed through the interviews. Her own life is a shared one. In a world where individuality is seen as a way to define oneself, Alicia breaks the stereotype. Alicia belongs. Her identity is closely tied to her roles as a mother, a wife, a sister, a teacher, a Catholic. She embraces her world, participating in ways in which critics might conclude keep her from her own individuality. Such critics would have failed to see that Alicia comes from a socio-cultural milieu that values community over individuality rather than the opposite.

A native of the Midwest and a fifth-year teacher, now of freshman composition but previously of high-school English, Alicia weaves her interests into all that she does. She shares with her students her own thoughts about a favorite letter and teases them when they see the letter in a different light than she does:

I had them [her students] look at this letter by a Civil War soldier. Its one of my favorite things; I thought it was so beautiful, and they looked at it like, 'what if his wife doesn't even love him?' And they went on,

and I said, 'you guys just ruined it for me.' Then I started teasing them about their interpretation spoiling mine.

Alicia values others' views, for she knows diverse views, from her immediate family [she, her husband and their son] and the family into which she was born.

The ninth of ten children, Alicia's connection to family is not surprising. Her one-year old son was a "vocal" part of our interviews. She cares for two of her nephews after school until their parents return from work. Her phone rings regularly: more often than not, a sister calling to check in. Nowhere in the interviews was there a hint of family overwhelming her. Rather, numerous family transactions were a natural, welcomed part of each day. And sharing of reading experiences was a part of many of those transactions, particularly with her sisters, her husband and her son. In Alicia's words, "[I]t just seems anytime I'm reading something, it just connects to everything else I'm doing."

In the following sections, I examine Alicia's connections, her reading stances, the ways she defined herself as a reader, and the influences of texts: personal, socio-cultural and blueprint.

### **Alicia's Reading Stances:**

#### **"I read things to educate myself."**

When Alicia read at the time this study was conducted, she usually did so with her son or her home in mind. Her domestic agenda, raising a young son and moving into a new house, had a great deal of influence on her reading choices

over the several months before she read for this study. She explained:

I mainly read 'how to' books, and like A Child's First Steps, and stuff like that, and things like how to fix your dream house. I read things to educate myself.

Before her son was born, her reading choices had been heavily influenced by other priorities, her career (as a teacher and student), her friends and family, and favorite authors:

I would read the books in my classes, and if someone would give me a book to read, I would want to read everything by that author. I had a young adult [literature] class in college, and it was great because she [the instructor] gave us a list of books we could read and everything on there was good. I read a lot of Chaim Potok: The Chosen and Time for Love. I think I read all of his novels.

Alicia's purposes for reading and her reading choices coincided. As she said of her most recent reading selections, "I read to educate myself," it can be said that her earlier reading was also to educate herself. That is, when she read the young adult fiction of Patok, she was part of a class and carried that away from the class because of her interest in other post-World War II, Jewish culture, and the friendships she saw portrayed in these books. Prior to the reading of Patok's books, Alicia noted, "I read a lot of Amy Tan . . . . I then read the book The Client and then wanted to read all of his [John Grishom's] books."

When I asked Alicia directly if she saw "any social

purposes for reading," she responded exuberantly:

Yeah, I always do! I think part of that--and I was just thinking about this on the way home today--what I do now, because I'm home most of the time. . . . My husband comes home in the middle of the day, I have to give him a basic rundown of everything Corey did, and I do that same thing when I'm reading a book. I've got to talk to someone about it.

For Alicia, her reading purposes and the stances she took while reading were determined by the roles in which she dwelt. She read books on raising children and beautifying her home when her role was primarily mother and homemaker. She read young adult literature for class and beyond because of her own tendency to connect with authors and want to read everything her favorite authors wrote. Alicia preferred realistic fiction not as an escape, but rather for the connections to her life, son, parents, childhood, gender, religion, and culture. Because she defined herself in the above terms and was aware of her roles in each, Alicia defined herself as a reader as one interested in topics that furthered her understanding of her own place in these various personal/social milieus. And to those milieus, her story now turns.

**Alicia and the Personal: " I would like to read every great novel before I die."**

Alicia's response to my query, "What does reading novels do for you?" prompted a complex message. Her initial response was a surprise, for she bluntly stated: "It

alleviates my sense of guilt that I need to be reading something." Later, she disclosed the origins of that guilt as coming from her being a teacher and her Catholic upbringing.

When Alicia elaborated on her rationale for reading novels, she disclosed a rather altruistic motive:

Because, I think that makes me a better person. I would like to read every great novel before I die. That type of thing--and I usually go into the summer with a goal like that, that I'm going to read this many books. I really feel good about myself when I'm reading novels because I think that's what I should be doing. I envy people who do a lot of reading; that's an admirable thing.

Additionally, Alicia added that reading fiction fulfilled something "that's very internal, and I have to sit there and read." But, she added that time for herself had dwindled considerably since she had become a mother. She had reconciled the sense of guilt she felt when her son interrupted her reading of novels by substituting for novels books on child rearing and home improvements.

Nevertheless, Alicia further explained the sense of internal fulfillment reading fiction gave her:

I've learned so much from what I've read and I really like getting into a different person and reading about different things, like whenever I read The Firm, that was so fascinating for me to learn about that career--I was telling a lady the other day--I guess what reading

does for me--I get to learn about other people because in my job, other people know what I do, but I don't know what other people do. I don't really have any idea of what they do, and sometimes I like to know. Reading will do that for me. . . . I may not start with that purpose in mind, but I think whenever I am reading, I usually think of how they apply to what I am doing. It becomes a part of that file. It's kind of filed away in my memory, and I can use it if I need it.

This practical rationale was consistent with Alicia's perception of self, as a teacher, a student, and a mother. To read, even to read for pleasure, in Alicia's world of belonging, of sharing with others as a teacher and mother necessitated practicality. Given this notion, it is not surprising that Alicia's personal and socio-cultural connections aligned closely.

**Alicia and the Social: "they look at me as someone that considers reading important."**

As noted earlier in the introductory remarks about Alicia, she felt compelled to share with others about what she read, and she spoke of these in the same fashion as she spoke about her son Spencer. Recall Alicia's comments:

[When m]y husband comes home in the middle of the day, I have to give him a basic rundown of everything Corey did, and I do that same thing when I'm reading a book. I've got to talk to someone about it.

Alicia talked about reading with a number of people. Particularly, Alicia shared with three of her sisters via

letters and telephone. Also, she shared regularly with her students in the classes she taught at a nearby community college. When I asked Alicia to describe the kinds of talk regarding fiction that she and her siblings did, she shared:

I don't talk to Paula that much; we just write letters. When I do see her we just recommend books to one another. That probably is true with Jean, too. Because I see Virginia on more of a daily basis, we have time to talk about books. When you're talking to someone on the phone you usually don't get into things that are--more detailed things in your life. She probably does. Whenever I'm talking to my class about it, then that's true because I talk to them more about the meanings of things. When I talk to Virginia its about how I wonder how this or that relates or whatever. I don't really think that I talk so much about developing a meaning or what something means. I just might say, 'Ohooo, this was a weird story.'

Alicia recognized that others perceived her differently as a reader depending on their own reading and life experiences. Also, Alicia did not entirely agree with how others might assess her as a reader. In the following passage, Alicia gave several angles on her relationships with others based on their reading repertoires.

Well I know Virginia looks at me as reading really deep things, but I'm not that way at all. She also sees me as being a very active reader, but when I compare myself to my other sisters, Tina and Paula read something all



the time. I don't know enough about my own reading habits to make this determination, but I think they know I have an interest in young adult literature and they know I really like children's literature. In fact, Jean usually asks me about children's literature to get some ideas of what she would like to read or some books for her daughter. So they know kind of what my interests are, and they look at me as someone that considers reading important.

Alicia's awareness of herself in relationship to her sisters and the more immediate social circles in her life might predict that she would be aware of herself in relation to larger cultural factors. When I asked her about whether she selected books based on issues like gender and what effects gender had on her reading experiences, she answered passionately:

Oh, yes, absolutely! I mean, I can't answer that strong enough. I've read since I was a young girl, all the Little House on the Prairie, all the Louisa May Alcott books, and a lot about girls and women, and I enjoy that. In reading with my brothers--how I was reading about different things like sport figures, and I thought, this is good, too. I like hearing about people.

Alicia also noted selecting books based on her career for the purpose of learning more about teaching. She chided me for not having heard of one book she recalled related to teaching and noted "I read a lot of books about teachers." Regarding

her connections between career and reading, Alicia had this to say:

Up the Down Staircase? I thought everybody knew that. Every teacher--and you ought to look at it because I was just thinking the other night--it talks about an English teacher's first year in an inner-city New York school in the sixties. The way she talks about presenting a lesson, I think its a New Critical approach. She studies all these interpretation of a text and presents them to the students. . . . But yeah, especially my first year as a teacher, I was the only English teacher in the school district. I felt so lost that I wanted to read other teachers' experiences and get a good idea or something.

On ethnicity, Alicia also was keenly aware of how selection and reading significantly factored into her life. To literature, Alicia again turned to better understand her mother-in-law and help her son develop an understanding of his multiethnic heritage. Alicia reflected thoughtfully on the issue of reading culturally diverse literature and again linked it to her own world.

For Corey--I want to get a perspective on a different culture, I want to educate myself for his purposes. That's why I read All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes by Maya Angelou because Maya Angelou grew up in Southern Arkansas, where my mother-in-law is from. That book helped me understand her so much. No one really ever thought to tell me. I think I do a lot to try to

educate myself and make myself more aware of different cultures and things.

Similarly, for religion and her own ethnicity, Alicia sought diversity:

I want different religious perspectives. I also like reading books about Catholics I like some stories that present a perspective about the old days in the church that I had just heard about but never experienced. So I like stories like that. Stories about Irish Americans and German Americans, since that's my heritage. Just like when you mentioned whether or not I chose books because I'm a woman, I think that and the fact that I'm a parent and the fact that I'm Catholic, that those are very strong aspects of my personality. Those things have a very strong impact on what I choose.

Interestingly, Alicia made connections at every turn. But one of the most striking discoveries about her reading practices and meaning making had to do with her perceptions about her transactions with blueprint texts.

**Alicia and the Blueprint: "In my mind, it was taking place in my grandfather's house."**

Alicia repeatedly noted that she saw herself as a practical reader. Earlier in this chapter, in the discussion of her purposes for reading, it was reported that she said:

I usually think of how they [her reading selections] apply to what I am doing. It becomes a part of that file. It's kind of filed away in my memory, and I can use it if I need it.

These views on the texts with which she transacted indicated that she primarily viewed herself as taking what Rosenblatt referred to as an "efferent stance," a stance whereby the reader intends to carry away information, particularly in relation to blueprint texts with which Alicia was engaged. Yet, Alicia also took a much more aesthetic stance at times. Her description of how she regularly transacted with blueprint texts and shifted to personal texts is fascinating. When talking about ethnic factors influencing her transactions, Alicia turned to the literary element of setting to illustrate an interesting perspective:

In fact, I was thinking. They had some description on the back cover of that book [Annie John, the novel she read for the study] about how you get such a feel for the island life and I thought, 'What?' In my mind, it was taking place in my grandfather's house in Okarche, Oklahoma, and I didn't really get that [feel for island life]. They mentioned the water but nothing like it was a big part of their--maybe if I'd look back at it.

Her transactions with the blueprint, in this case and in most cases with regards to setting, Alicia acknowledged, were subjugated to her transactions with places with which she was personally familiar.

Alicia's appreciation for blueprint texts and the extent with which she transacted with not only the blueprint but also with a multitude of other texts is the subject of the next chapter. But before proceeding to that chapter, a final excerpt from Alicia's interviews provides transition from the

extensive holistic examination in the form of these case studies in this chapter to the more particulate examination in the form of think-aloud protocol analysis. In this excerpt, Alicia explained that texts, defined in the broadest since here, provide stories that facilitate readers' understanding and relationships to their life worlds:

I think my being Catholic has made a difference in my understanding literature. Being an English teacher has influenced my faith probably stronger than anything. I think I got the most out of it--the big benefit for me of being an English major. I was reading this article in this Catholic magazine a month ago and it said, 'Why do people stay in the Catholic church?' There doesn't seem to be reconciliation with things they don't agree with. It said the reason most people stayed in was because they liked the stories. The stories are meaningful to them. Symbolism, and all that in the Church, brings meaning to the events in their lives, and I can think in so many ways the Church is full of symbolism and helps me understand the things that I read. Because there is so much tradition to the Catholic church, you can read a lot into it, and I think those experiences help you relate a little better.

Alicia points to a number of issues related to the way she perceived herself transacting with texts, particularly the opportunities texts offered readers facilitating their understanding of texts, themselves and perhaps most importantly, providing means to "relate a little better."

## CHAPTER 5: THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOL ANALYSIS

Within this chapter, the emergent coding system is presented as a preface for discussing the responses which readers verbalized concurrently as each read and transacted meaning. A detailed analysis of readers' responses within each category follows the denotation of the coding system. Here, protocol analysis is facilitated by supporting data gathered through stimulated recall interviews.

### **Emergent Coding System**

Within the next two sections of this chapter, the two general categories, readers' initial stances and textual orientations, are described in detail.

### **Readers' Initial Stances**

Six codes were established to distinguish the various stances readers took towards texts. Each of these codes, *appraising, predicting, paraphrasing, amending, questioning, and struggling with an orientation*, is outlined next.

1. Appraising. This code was used to refer to responses in which the reader made a subjective judgment about a text(s). Statements coded as appraisals illustrated that the reader had made an assessment or a judgment. I. A. Richards (1949) referred to appraising as the "rank[ing] of something-ups or downs it as desirable or not" (p. 249). Example: "This is a man who is overwhelmingly stifled in his emotional life."

2. Predicting. This code referred to a reader's orientation that indicated she was foretelling that which she

thought might occur later as she continued reading. Example:  
 "But I mean, I think if Annie's mother saw her looking that way, like the girl on the front of the book, she would just be astounded."

3. Paraphrasing. This code referred to a reader's orientation that indicated the reader was summarizing a passage either just read or read during a previous sitting, without placing a value judgment on that which was referenced. For example, in the reader's response below, she restated in her own terms two events which had just occurred in the plot of the blueprint (blueprint in plain text, reader's response in bold italics):

Darkness came about them as they crossed the fence, with him pushing down the wire for her this time. ***It's kind of like opening the door./ He opens it for you, you open it for him./***

4. Amending. This code referred to a stance taken by a reader which indicated that the reader had drawn a conclusion that she no longer thought was accurate, so she changed her stance. These statements rejected prior predictions, appraisals, questions, or paraphrases. Example: "Oh, Erdle is his last name. I thought Erdle was his first name."

5. Questioning. This code referred to responses which were phrased as inquiries or which indicated that the reader was seeking additional information. Examples: (a) "'Stevedore.' What is that?"; (b) "I wonder what she's doing with the paper."

6. Struggling with orientation. This code referred to

responses which indicated that the reader was expressing a perceived lack of understanding during the reading or about her own physical state which the reader perceived as affecting her reading transaction. Example: "I feel sleepy."

### **Primary Textual Orientation**

Examining readers' responses during analysis revealed that they took not only primary stances as discussed in the section above, but also that readers were orienting themselves to and transacting with some sort of text. Just as Fly (1994) found in her study of adolescent readers reading short stories, readers in the present study appeared to be engaging with three different types of texts. Fly called these personal, textual, and socio-cultural. In the present study, the three types of texts are referred to as personal, blueprint, and socio-cultural texts; this shift was necessary to emphasize that each was a distinctive text; that is, each unit of response was textual, none more or less textual than the others. Each of the three textual orientations, *personal*, *socio-cultural* and *blueprint*, are defined below.

1. Personal text codes were used to designate responses which indicated that the reader was drawing primarily upon a personal experience or a personal situation which served the reader as the primary text with which she was transacting. For example:

I remembered my--I had a friendship in junior high, I'm still friends with this woman, now./ It was really



intense where we would have taken class together all day long, and we would get home and talk on the phone for hours, and literally hours on the phone./ My mother was not too pleased with this girl either--I don't know why--there was something my mom didn't like about her.

In these responses, the reader connected to a personal text, one that had been created by the reader as reflected through her telling of the brief story, a text made real by the reader. The connection to this personal text begins as a paraphrase of it, then shifts, in the second and third statements, to appraising. To emphasize, the literary transaction, the novel event, occurred between a *personal text* about a past set of events and the *reader*.

2. Socio-cultural text codes referred to texts that the reader perceived were shared by members of a culture, most often the social and cultural institutions with which the reader was familiar. These socio-cultural texts included views the reader perceived she shared with other members of social and cultural institutions on issues including ethnicity, philosophy, religion, employment, marriage, and parenting. Responses which indicated that the reader was drawing primarily upon one or more of these texts were coded as socio-cultural texts. For example: "Oh, I bet in earlier times people who had real learning problems, ah, were just dismissed as being stupid." In this response, the reader appeared to be drawing upon not only prior personal experiences, but upon beliefs she considered other members of the same society held. These beliefs constituted the text

with which the reader was transacting.

Also, responses which drew upon or referenced other blueprint texts (see blueprint texts in the paragraph below) were coded as socio-cultural texts. This was done because readers were not referring to the blueprint in their hands at the time but to blueprint texts that had become part of the social and cultural milieu of readers' worlds; that is, the text had been appropriated as a social/cultural artifact and functioned as such. For, example:

*Again, I'm struck by the contrast with the movie./ I believe that in the film it was Stevens' idea to leave because he was looking for the housekeeper again at this time and had information that he might be able to get the housekeeper back./*

3. Blueprint text codes referred to responses which indicated that the reader was drawing primarily upon the book from which she was reading. That is, the blueprint text was the text the reader was holding in hand and from which she was reading aloud during this study. The following example provides an example of a reader's transactions with the blueprint text (plain print indicates actual blueprint text; bold italics indicates the reader's response):

And the more I considered it, the more obvious it became that Miss Kenton, with her great affection for this house, with her exemplary professionalism--the sort almost impossible to find nowadays--was just the factor needed to enable me to complete a fully satisfactory

staff plan for Darlington Hall. *I'm curious now as to what staff plan he sees fit to put Miss Kenton into, since he already has a housekeeper in Mrs Clemons, or perhaps Mrs Clemons is just the cook./*

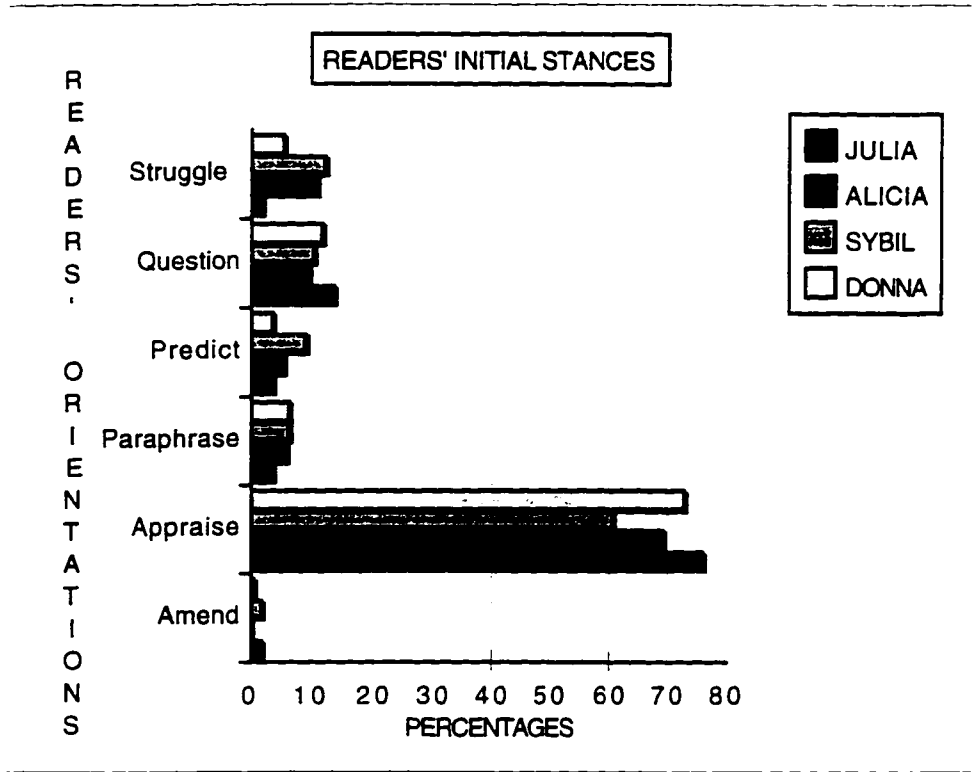
The reader's verbalized thoughts referred directly to the blueprint text she was reading aloud, and they were centered upon that blueprint.

With this two-tiered coding system of readers' initial stances and readers' primary textual orientations, the think aloud protocol data was given meaning, structure and organization. From the fifteen to twenty-five typed pages of think-aloud protocols from each reader, particularly informative sections of responses which illustrated the nuances of each readers' concurrent transactions were culled. It is to the readers and their verbalized thoughts during transactions that this chapter now turns.

### Readers' Initial Stances

Within this section, readers' statements coded as appraisals, predictions, paraphrases, amendments, questions, and struggles will be highlighted. The frequencies of these varied by reader. (See chart A). An appraisal might follow a statement of paraphrase and might be followed by a question. Therefore, the quotes from readers are presented here as they occurred; that is, from when the reader ceased to *read aloud* from the blueprint and began to *think aloud* to when she ceased verbalizing her thoughts and resumed reading the blueprint.

Chart A



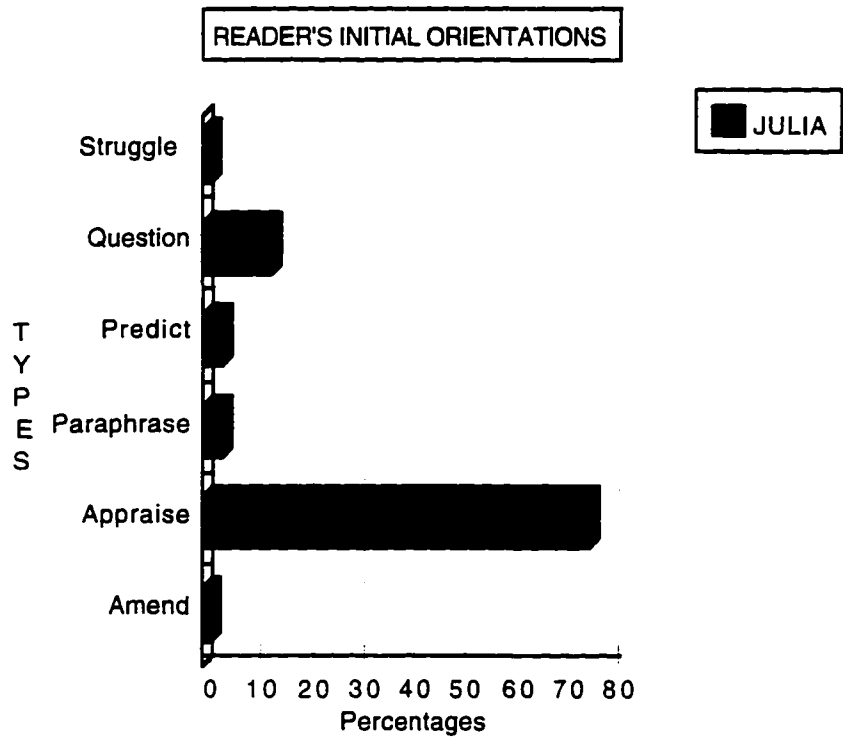
### Appraisals

Most of Julia's initial stances, ways of relating to a text, were self-assured. Her vocalizations often read and sounded like declarations revealing a highly active involvement and confidence in the reading process. Not all of her responses were so definitive, however. Many of Julia's initial stances often revealed more tentative, exploratory thoughts.

Nevertheless, Julia did a great deal of appraising; about 76 percent of her orientations were characterized as appraising. (See Table B.) Just as Julia was sometimes confident and sometimes wavering about her literate behaviors during the interviews (See chapter 4), in her think aloud responses her confidence ebbed and flowed. While she read and thought aloud in the following passage, Julia first paraphrased the blueprint text she was reading, then she appraised a socio-cultural text, that of the film (blueprint text in plain type; reader's responses in bold italics):

But let me make it immediately clear what I mean by this; what I mean to say is that Miss Kenton's letter set off a certain chain of ideas to do with professional matters that led me to consider anew my employer's kindly meant suggestion. ***So now we have the introduction of a key character./ I've got to let go of this comparison of this book to the film because I already have, unfortunately, a basis for interpreting the book./*** But let me explain further.

Chart B



In Julia's first comment above, she paraphrased the blueprint text which had provided her with a guideline. In the second statement, the blueprint faded as Julia recalled another text, the socio-cultural text of the film version which she had previously seen. And her stance shifted to one of appraisal, for Julia argued that the film was providing her with "a basis for interpreting the book." She appraised this as something to be avoided: "I've got to let go of this ...." Through paraphrasing and appraising the blueprint, Julia and blueprint entered into a meaning-making transaction to create character.

While Julia shifted from paraphrasing to appraising, she transacted with two different kinds of texts, and with these two texts, blueprint (book) and socio-cultural (film), the transaction yielded the creation meaning forming character and genre. In the first unit above, the transaction revealed Julia's first glimpse at character: "the introduction of a key character." In the second unit, the transaction yielded elements of genre, novel and film.

It is important to note Julia's role in this reading transaction. *She determined* the way she transacted with the text to facilitate the formation of character, and *she determined* with which text she would transact, the blueprint or film socio-cultural. While texts did play a role in the transaction, the readers's role was the more active and mediating.

Through her appraisals, Julia maintained the role of active meaning maker, not waiting for meaning to be proposed

by texts. Her active role and the frequency with which she appraised illustrated Julia's empowerment in the reading transaction.

While other readers in this study appraised somewhat less frequently than Julia did, they did take appraising stances on a number of occasions.

When Sybil appraised, she typically did so rather gently. Often her appraisal responses were brief as in "Safe answer," or "Gosh, that would be torture, having to show that she's unaffected," or "Too many memories."

The brevity of some of Sybil's responses may have had to do with the difficulty she was having in her relationship with her boyfriend Bob. In at least three of her responses during the think aloud/reading, Sybil alluded to memories that she felt were too difficult to explore. For example, in the following responses, Sybil hints at these difficulties, then terminates the responses (blueprint in plain text; think aloud in bold italics):

When they came to the fence, she held down the barbed wire with one hand and stepped over it, feeling the dew on her feet around the thin sandal straps. *I can picture this very easily./ How many times have I crossed barbed-wire fences and held them for other people to go across going out to the meadows./ Reminds me of so many things, things that I really don't want to talk about right now./*

In the stimulated recall sessions, Sybil revealed that she



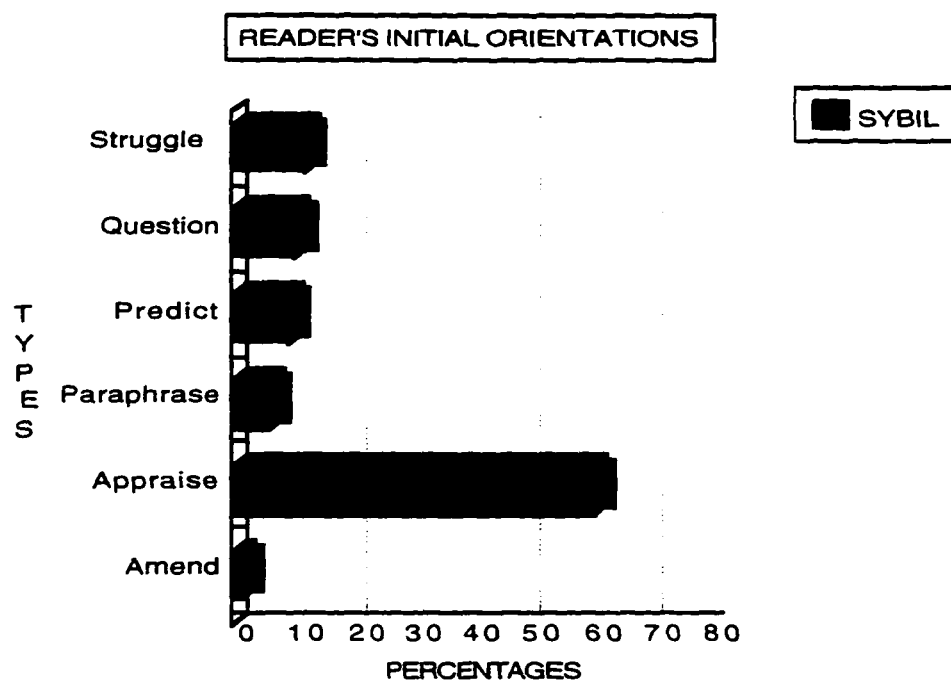
and Bob frequently took walks in the meadows near her home. Further, she revealed that her memories of these walks were fond ones, memories that contrasted with the painful ones surrounding the end of their relationship. Her inability to divulge those memories in the think aloud may have attributed to the shortness of some of Sybil's responses.

Overall, Sybil appraised in approximately 60 percent of her responses (See Chart C). About one-third of Sybil's appraisals were subtle, as illustrated in the above passage. In the first response, Sybil transacted with a couple of powerful personal texts which facilitated the creation of setting for her. In the second response, she elaborated on the personal connection and gave cause for her ability to "picture this very easily." Then, in the third response, Sybil shifted texts with which she transacted, creating a trope or shift from thinking about setting to thinking about broader, thematic issues through the process.

When I replayed the responses during the stimulated recall interview, Sybil revealed more of the thoughts she had only alluded to in the think aloud:

I remember the part about the barbed wire, and I was the oldest, and I always held it down for my sisters to cross. They would try to hold it down for me, but they were too little and not as strong as I was, so it was scraping my back. And then there was some images that, like I said, when I was reading this book, I had gone through a very personal trauma, and it was a very painful time for me, extremely painful. So some of the

Chart C.



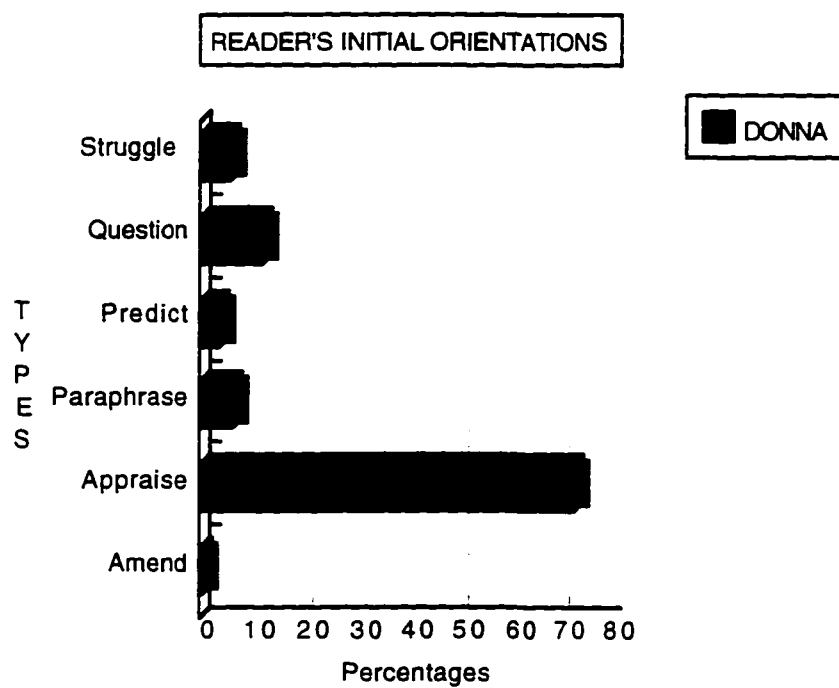
images that were brought forth were from the relationship that was causing me so much pain and especially the thing about the meadows because there were so many times when we [Sybil and Bob] were--I don't know--nature children. We just were that way, it was our connection and the relationship ended during this time, and there was a reason, and the trauma comes from the reason. The meadows just brought back a particular evening especially, not an evening where something bad happened--something good happened, and it was just really painful.

Sybil went on to disclose more about the pleasant memory from the evening she mentioned above as well as the painful memory from the trauma when she was physically assaulted by Bob. These two memories which each comprised deeply personal texts for Sybil were drawn into her appraising, overshadowing all other texts for that time during her reading.

Donna appraised in almost 73 percent of her think-aloud responses. (See chart D.) Like in the selection which follows, many of Donna's appraisals were preceded by paraphrases or predictions. In the selection below, Donna paraphrases (in the first two units coded) as a preface to the appraisal, an appraisal that was to characterize her thoughts and feelings on the socio-cultural issue in question, that of conflicting views about a tradition.

Her only consolation was that at least she had her daughter Esperanza, who was obliged to stay with her forever.  
*Continuing the tradition that her mother*

Chart D.



*had--ahem--told Tita that she had to stay home and take care of her forever./ And, so Esperanza's suppose to stay and take care of Rosaura forever./ I'm glad that wasn't a tradition in the United States./ I'm an only daughter./*

For Donna, this issue of identifying with Tita and Esperanza as youngest or only daughter, held responsible for caring for aging mothers really struck a chord for her. Donna's own gender and role in her family seemed to weigh in heavily in its influence on this transaction. When given the opportunity to elaborate in the stimulated recall interview, Donna was adamant about her feelings:

I just wouldn't have put up with it. I would have done my duty. I would have taken care of whatever her needs were, but I would not have just given up my whole life. Even Tita at her worse is thinking, well, what's going to happen to me someday. If I don't marry, and I don't have any children and I don't--what do they do--go out in the dessert and lie down under a cactus and die.

Donna went on later to talk about how this affected her view of the characterization of Tita, saying that she could not see real people doing what this character did. Donna's further reflections revealed that she did not "think anybody--any real person can constantly be a victim." But Donna found a way to rationalize the character's victimization. When I asked her about Tita as a character, Donna used the following justification.

Its not realistic. Its fantasy, and in fantasy the bad people are all bad and the good people are all good. And so you know, since its fantasy, the author's doing what she needed to do to stay in that.

What this reveals is the multitude of this reader's connections which underlaid her simple original appraisal of "I'm glad that wasn't a tradition in the United States. I'm an only daughter."

Alicia appraised in 69 percent of her responses. (See Chart E.) In many of her appraisals, Alicia transacted with personal and socio-cultural texts as she does below.

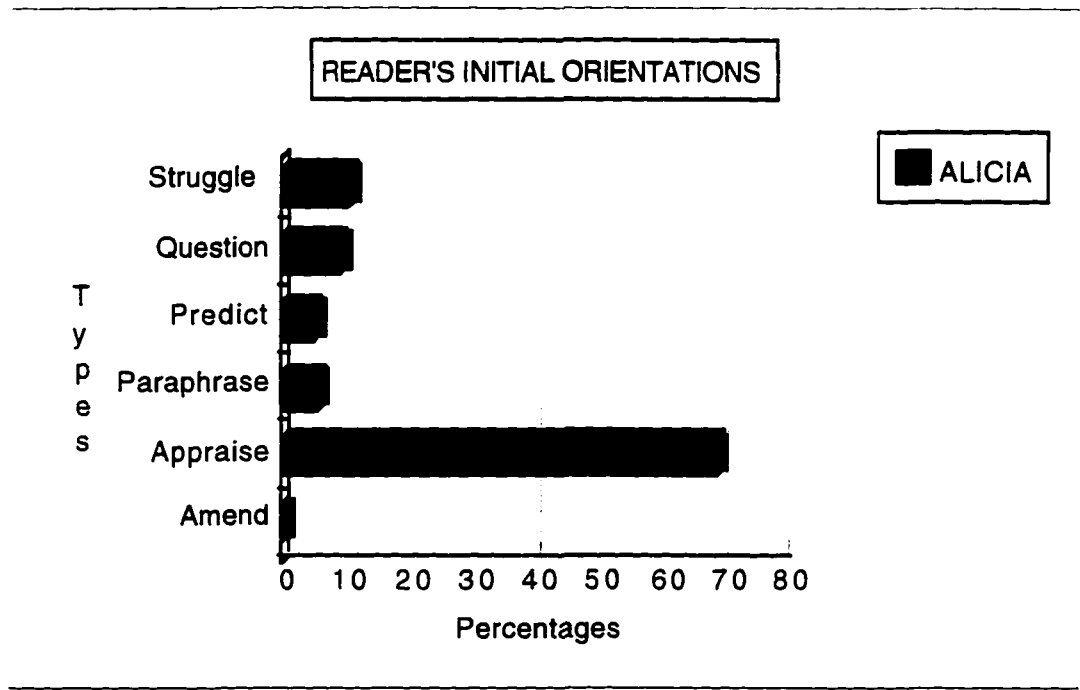
Until then, I had not known that children died. **Man, if I saw this kind of thing, it would scare the hooey out of me./ Yaaah, it gives me the creeps to think about it./ And I think children do have this preoccupation with death./**

Alicia frequently shifted her reading transactions to include herself in a hypothetical situation as she does in the first unit above. This focus on her own imagined response, her own personal text gave way to another shift to a socio-cultural text which took in a generalization about children.

### **Questioning**

For Julia, the next most common type of stance her verbalizations took was questioning. Slightly more than 13 percent of Julia's initial stances had her searching for more information from one of the texts with which she was transacting at the time. (See Chart B.) For example, her

Chart E.



curiosity with the blueprint text, led her to take the following stance (blueprint in plain, reader's think aloud in bold italics):

In any case, Miss Kenton did not seem to mind at all confiding in me over these matters and I took this as a pleasing testimony to the strength of the close working relationship we had once had. ***I'm just now reflecting on who Miss Kenton was referring to when she made the remark 'its as well one of us is sensitive about these things'--herself or her husband?***

Julia's uncertainty did not prevent her from moving on. She simply posed the question, then read on.

When Julia took a questioning stance, it appeared that she was preparing herself to wait for the answer to be revealed in a later transaction. Perhaps, it is significant to note that when Julia posed questions, she did not require immediate "answers." Rather, Julia's questions seemed to serve her as sensors, potentially connecting and broadening future transactions.

Sybil questioned slightly less often than Julia did. In ten percent of her responses, Sybil made some kind of inquiry. (See Chart C.) When Sybil's responses indicated that she was uncertain about some aspect of a text, she made comments including "I wonder if she thought about that when she saw it go by or is this something that the author put in?" and "I wonder if this happens in all marriages?" In these types of responses, Sybil seemed to realize that either her memory of the text with which she was transacting (if it



was a personal or socio-cultural text) had failed her or that she had not received the kind of information she had expected from the text (if it was the blueprint text). In a sense, questioning indicated an acknowledgement by Sybil that her expectations in the transaction had not been met.

In the first example above, Sybil seemed to be transacting primarily with the blueprint text, for her reflection focused directly on the passage immediately preceding her response. Her question was an attempt to put that passage into a context which would meet Sybil's expectations about character development or authorial voice.

The second example above illustrated Sybil taking a questioning orientation with a socio-cultural text. Her response extended beyond reflecting on simply the blueprint preceding her verbalization to the broader socio-cultural issue of marriage as *she drew* from the blueprint a possible generalization to "all marriages."

Donna's questioning was even less frequent, for she assumed a questioning stance only once during her think alouds. (See Chart D.) This occasion occurred early on in her reading of the first chapter when Donna asked, "I wonder why they're making Christmas rolls in the January chapter?" At this point in her transactions, Donna was orienting primarily toward the blueprint text, but bringing in her knowledge of time of year to bear, secondarily, on the transaction. Her questioning stance and the texts with which she was transacting together created a sense of setting.

Alicia's questioning deserves special attention not so

much for frequency, for just under ten percent of her responses were coded as questioning (See Chart E.), but for the number of questions she asked about personal and social texts. When Alicia questioned, she often did so of texts other than the blueprint as she did early in her think-aloud/reading when she asked "I wonder why the upstairs of our house always seemed mysterious and creepy for me." On another occasion Alicia made a socio-cultural connection to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, asking

Why did Romeo, if he thought that he saw color on Juliet's' lips, why didn't he just touch her and see that she was warm and she was alive?

This question came on the heels of Alicia reading a passage in Annie John where a character recalled a story she had been told by her mother regarding her mother's assistance in the preparation of a dead body for burial. Such inquiries which question socio-cultural and personal texts are interesting because they indicate the depth with which Alicia was engaged in these texts at the same time of her engagement with the blueprint.

### **Paraphrasing**

When participants paraphrased, their responses indicated a more passive kind of engagement which usually briefly summarized a passage either just read or read during a previous sitting with the novel.

Julia was rather infrequent in her paraphrasing, doing so only in about four percent of her responses. (See Chart B). Paraphrasing seemed to serve Julia as a means to reorient

to the text, a way to check with herself by retelling what she thought had transacted in much the same way a counselor might do with a client, restating in her own terms that which she had just heard. A typical example of Julia paraphrasing follows.

Indeed, but for the tranquility of the present setting, it is possible I would not have thought a great deal further about my behaviour during my encounter with the batman. **Ah, so he will confront his less than great behaviour.**

For readers, paraphrasing seemed to be a way to stay with a reading. As these readers invariably revealed when asked about the experience of doing the think-aloud, they sometimes were just reading the words, or as Donna put it, "following the story without thinking much." Readers' paraphrases seemed to serve them as a means to maintain focus on what they felt were relevant influences on the transaction.

Donna paraphrased infrequently; just over six percent of her responses were coded as paraphrasing. (See Chart D). Donna's paraphrases were brief. To illustrate their brevity of Donna's paraphrases, the following example is one of her lengthiest.

Her only consolation was that at least she had her daughter Esperanza, who was obliged to stay with her forever. **Continuing the tradition that her mother had, ahem, told Tita that she had to stay home and take care of her forever.**

Paraphrasing was not something Sybil did very often,

either. She paraphrased in only six percent of her responses. (See Chart C). For Sybil, paraphrasing seemed to be a way to take stock, a reconnoitering, usually with the blueprint text.

After he left, Francesca stood before the mirror, naked. Her hips flared only a little from the children, ***She's checking herself out, seeing, taking inventory.*** Sybil's paraphrasings were usually brief and to the point as were most of her other responses.

Alicia paraphrased with about the same consistency as Sybil and Donna. Slightly less than six percent of her responses were coded as paraphrasing. (See Chart E). Alicia began the response which follows with a comment that was coded as an appraisal; then she followed the appraisal with a lengthy paraphrase of the blueprint text.

Looking at how sickly he has become and looking at the way my mother now has to run up and down for him, gathering the herbs and barks that he boils in water, which he drinks instead of the medicine the doctor has ordered for him, I plan not only never to marry an old man but certainly never to marry at all. ***I think its also interesting about the father because whenever Annie was sick, the mother had medicine form the doctor and medicine from this healing woman./ She had it all lined up--the mother had it all lined up on the shelf./ And the father really, he wouldn't even be there whenever the healing woman came over, and when he saw how the***

*medicine was lined up, he talked to the mother; she moved it so that the doctor's medicine was up in the front and the healing woman's was in the back./ And now he drinks the home remedies instead of doing what the doctor wants him to do./*

Alicia's paraphrase here and connection of two sections of the blueprint text illustrate an intensive investment in summation, perhaps as a means to refocus on elements of plot and character that she considered important and relevant to the story.

### **Predicting**

Julia predicted in four percent of her responses. (See Chart B.) In the passage which follows, Julia appraised the blueprint in the first statement. Then her stance shifted to predicting in the next two units. Next, her stance shifted to questioning and finally, back to predicting.

But I have been thinking a little more about that other pronouncement made by the Hayes Society--namely the admission that it was a prerequisite for membership of the Society that 'an applicant be attached to a distinguished household.'

*Well certainly our butler has been attached to a distinguished household,/ but one, I am beginning to suspect, that is about to fall into some disrepute./ So there is perhaps some ironic foreshadowing here--is that something that gets done, ironic foreshadowing--foreshadowing of an*

*ironic./ I'm also at this point in the book wondering why the critics were calling it a comedy./ I guess it is a comedy of manners from the old school./*

Julia's stances also shift in transacting with the initial two units which were with the blueprint text to the last three which were with socio-cultural texts. Her rather predictions may have been the result of her experience with formal literary analysis, for Julia was much more likely to appraise and question, but more reluctant to predict.

Sybil took a predicting stance towards a text in nine percent of her responses. (See Chart C). Her predictions were often succinct and usually focused on plot events that she was anticipating. In the following example, Sybil predicted the action of one of the characters in the blueprint text:

She dressed again and sat at the kitchen table writing on half a sheet of plain paper. Jack followed her out to the Ford pickup and jumped in when she opened the door. He went to the passenger side and stuck his head out the window as she backed the truck out of the shed, looking *Oh, she's gonna put the note on the bridge.*

Sybil's frequent predictions seemed to empower her as a reader. Her predictions appeared to allow her to feel as though she was an increasingly active part of the transactions with the blueprint. When these predictions were accurate, Sybil usually made a point to acknowledge that her prediction

had been correct.

Donna predicted in only about three percent of her responses. (See Chart D). In fact, Donna's only predictions came one after the other. In a response where she initially began by questioning herself about a transaction with the blueprint text, Donna made three predictions, three guesses as to the answer to her question. Note the shift to predicting in the third, fourth, and fifth units of response below.

She appeared to ascend drawn by a superior power, but nothing happened. Disappointed, she discovered that the smoke wasn't hers. ***I wonder if she has other meanings./ I wonder what the hands represent in this./ Her soul./ Her dreams--hmmh./ Her lost years./ I'd like to know what she was thinking./***

These units of responses were labeled as predictions rather than questions. These predictions were more hypothetical than the two units which proceed and the one that follows; these predictions contain possibilities as opposed to being open-ended wonderment. Additionally, the tone with which Donna uttered these remarks was declarative as compared to the interrogative tone with which she delivered the questions preceding and following.

Alicia predictions accounted for just over five percent of her responses. (See Chart E.) An example of Alicia's predicting which illustrate a transaction with socio-cultural texts follows.

She was such a dunce that sometimes she could not

remember the spelling of her own name. I would try to get to school

*Oh, I bet in earlier times people who had real learning problems, ah, were just dismissed as being stupid.* early and give her my homework.

In this case, Alicia made a general prediction about the way she perceived students with exceptionalities were treated. Obviously, Alicia was relying on a number of socio-cultural texts which provided for her the basis for this prediction; these may have included texts from her work toward teacher certification which incorporated course work in psychology and special education.

### Amending

Julia's only amendments came on the heel of a rather strong indictment of social class distinctions. In order to understand her amendment, it is necessary to present her original and eloquent indictment, a response which preceded her amendment by only a few seconds:

It seems again so misguided and sad to me that--and I, its so British, I suppose. It reminds me of Milton's term "they also serve those who stand and wait" in the most literal of interpretations. These people, this serving class who wants to idealize themselves by saying that they served great houses and great gentlemen. I mean, my gosh, they could be going out and doing something far more direct to, to improve civilization than to pour tea at the right time. But what do I know?

Julia's closure of the response above with "But what do I



know?" was delivered sarcastically. When she did amend as shown below, her tone was rather sheepish.

Conversely, I am sure there were many of my father's generation who recognized instinctively this 'moral' dimension to their work. *Oh well, you see, I spoke too soon./ I didn't let Stevens explain, so./*

This recanting by Julia accounted for all of the amendments she was to make in her think aloud. Further, those two statements account for two percent of all of her think aloud responses. (See Chart B.)

Approximately two percent of Sybil's think-aloud responses were coded as amending. This amendment indicated that she had drawn a conclusion that she no longer thought was accurate. In the passage below Sybil amended after having appraised and questioned the blueprint text.

For a short while, red streaks cut across part of the sky.

"I call that "bounce." Robert Kincaid said. *That's kind of strange that the author still calls him Robert Kincaid in the book, here it is, page 59./ Is it because they're still strangers, maybe that's what he wants to emphasize?/ Robert Kincaid uses his full name? At first, I thought there was another Robert, to eliminate confusion.*

Evidence of Sybil's amending can be seen in the third sentence of the above responses. After appraising in the first unit above, Sybil's responses shifted to questioning in

the second and third unit. Then, in the fourth unit, she indicated that she had made a previous appraisal of the name situation and was now amending it.

Donna only made one response which was coded as amending; this accounted for just under one percent of her responses. (See Chart D.) She had posed a question in a previous response, and as Donna read on for about five pages, she noted that the mystery that had prompted the initial question had been solved.

As the name implies, these rolls are usually prepared around Christmas, but today they were being prepared in honor of Tita's birthday. ***Well, that answers my question about why they were prepared then-- anyway.***

Donna then returned to her reading. That Donna amended only once might be considered curious; however, since she appraised so readily and often in generalities, it may be said that she considered her reading as authoritative, seldom warranting any reconsideration of judgments.

None of Alicia's think-aloud responses were coded as amends.

### **Struggling with Orientation**

Julia rarely struggled with her initial orientation. Only on two occasions did she do so, accounting for less than two percent of her responses. (See Chart B.) One struggle prompted a rereading on her part and the other provoked the statement: "I have no idea what a batman is," which Julia followed immediately with this prediction: "I guess some

sort of like--I don't know--lieutenant or something maybe." Julia was not to return to identify the term batman again, and likely went away without discovering that a batman is a servant of a British army officer.

The occurrences of responses in which Sybil struggled with an orientation to a text were more frequent than Julia's; Sybil struggled in twelve percent of her statements. This may have been the result of the distractions due to the difficult time Sybil was having personally with her relationship with Bill. A typical struggle with orientation for Sybil included the following: "I jumped ahead because I saw the words 'but he didn't love her'." Shortly thereafter, Sybil struggled in a similar way, verbalizing "I did that again. I jumped ahead again." She would then find a point in the blueprint where she resumed her reading.

Donna struggled with orientations in just over six percent of her responses. Most of these struggles were with vocabulary, with which Donna was unfamiliar. In fact, in half of her struggles, she simply spelled the word aloud and remarked, "Whatever that is," or "Hmnh." Then she resumed her reading without further ado. Donna's other struggles included stopping to take a drink of water, answering the phone and talking to her dog.

Alicia's struggles were frequent, but most of these were connected to disruptions in her readings caused by her having to break away momentarily to tend to her young son.

Oh, I think Spencer--I put Spencer down./ He's learning to go to sleep by himself. Bernie (her husband) is

making so much noises out in the garage, and I'm probably keeping him awake./ I'll talk a little bit quieter./

These responses represented a regular distraction to Alicia's personal reading experiences, one she acknowledged and worked around, she recalled, just as she did when reading apart from this study. Struggles accounted for eleven percent of Alicia's responses.

Also, on occasion, Alicia struggled with issues related to the blueprint. In the following couple of units of response, which illustrate the way she typically went back to reread the blueprint: "Now I'm confused--who is--okay, Mistress Maynard is the neighbor. I had to go back and look."

Readers in this study made initial orientations which ran the gamut from assessing, predicting, paraphrasing, questioning, amending, to struggling. Overwhelmingly, readers assessed in their initial orientations and that was consistent across readers. Assessment appears to be the type of orientation that required the most extensive involvement of the reader, for it required not only recognizing and registering an issue from a text, but also required connecting and extending those ideas intratextually and/or intertextually.

In the next section, those texts with which readers transacted are identified and the various ways each reader transacts with each is highlighted. Through this identification, readers initial orientations are connected to

a source. In the transaction, meaning is made.

### **Textual Orientations**

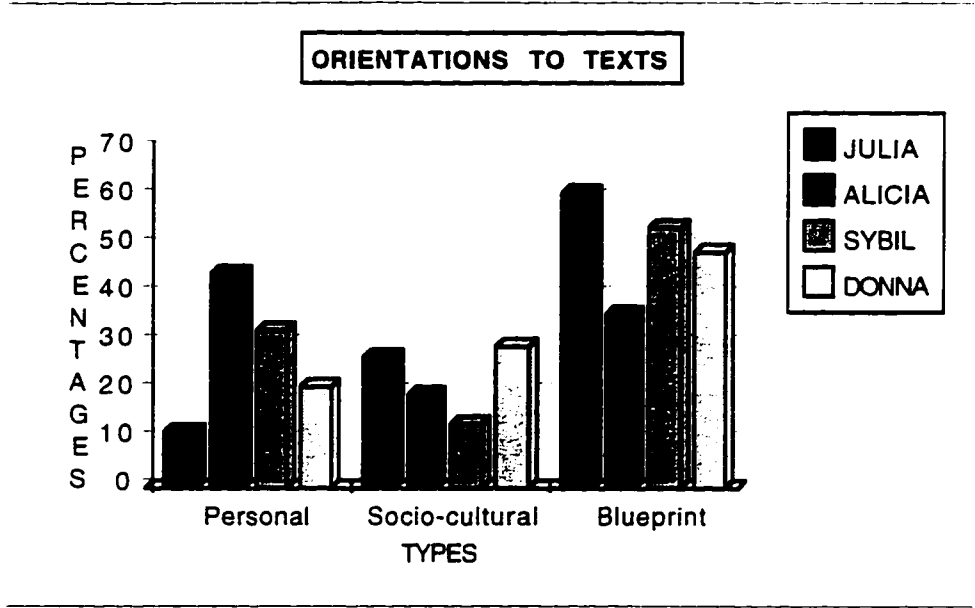
Readers initial orientations, as discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, connected to one of three types of texts. These texts are referred to as blueprint, personal and socio-cultural. As defined at the beginning of this chapter, blueprint texts are the texts readers held in hand and from which they read aloud during this study. Personal texts are those texts that readers were drawing primarily upon when recalling personal experiences or personal situations which served readers as primary texts with which they were transacting. Socio-cultural texts refer to texts that readers perceived were shared by members of a culture, most often the social and culture institutions with which readers were most familiar and of which they perceived they belonged. Socio-cultural texts included views the reader perceived she shared with other members of social and cultural institutions on issues including ethnicity, philosophy, religion, employment, marriage, and parenting.

In the sections below, each of the textual orientations are examined with illustrations of how the four readers made use of personal, socio-cultural and blueprint texts to create meaning. There was considerable differences in each reader's reliance on texts. (See Chart F.) Julia favored the blueprint, Alicia transacted more with personal texts, and Donna made the most transactions with socio-cultural texts.

#### **Julia's textual orientations**

In approximately 61 percent of her responses, Julia

Chart F.

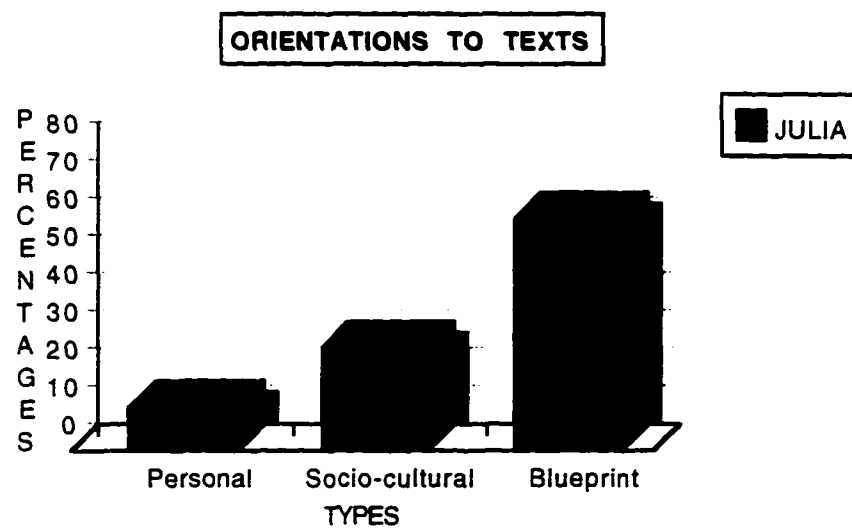


transacted with the blueprint text. (See chart G.) Julia's focusing so heavily on the blueprint might be explained by her having been through undergraduate and graduate English programs as reported in the previous chapter. She appraised the blueprint text and predicted events she expected to occur. Frequently, Julia used her knowledge of literary techniques and criticism in her responses. Note her use of such terminology including irony, foreshadowing, narration and criticism in the following passage:

But I have been thinking a little more about that other pronouncement made by the Hayes Society--namely the admission that it was a prerequisite for membership of the Society that an applicant be attached to a distinguished household."

*Well certainly our butler has been attached to a distinguished household, but one, I am beginning to suspect, that is about to fall into some disrepute./ So there is perhaps some ironic foreshadowing here--is that something that gets done, ironic foreshadowing--foreshadowing of an ironic./ I'm also at this point in the book wondering why the critics were calling it a comedy./ I guess it is a comedy of manners from the old school./ You can step back and read this character, read this book through the first person voice of this character and find him amusing, but it's laughing at his expense which is maybe not something so amusing.*

Chart G.





Through this approach, Julia began by directly responding to the blueprint; then through the responses, her orientation shifted away from blueprint text to socio-cultural texts. Julia's responses indicated that she was using the blueprint as Iser (1980) had theorized, as a guide with gaps for the reader which she filled in with her own connections, in this case connections with the social community of critics. This socio-cultural text also provided Julia with gaps, for she attempted, with misgivings, to give a rationale for how the blueprint might be seen as a comedy.

In the stimulated recall interview, Julia explored this connection further. Beginning with the social connection, the critics who called it a comedy, Julia explained:

I never quite came to terms with that. This was a moment where in the book--I guess I'm supposed to laugh at the irony of this situation where his own house is going to come crumbling down, so he's saying well, it's been wonderful to be a part of this distinguished house, but that shouldn't be a requirement.

Through her struggle with the critics' conclusion, Julia turned to a more personal response in the stimulated recall interview. That is, she relied on her personal reaction to guide the meaning making. Yet, it is evident that she was reluctant to reject the critics' opinion for the social value Julia perceived those opinions held. Her struggles were reflected in another interview in which she compared her own reading approach to that of her friend, Sean, whose reading she characterized as more "insightful" than her own because

he applied a critical approach "even in a first reading."

Julia's concern about reading in a way that she perceived as socially and culturally more "respected" revealed the powerful devaluing effects of critical approaches, a devaluing of personal connections with literature through a valuing of the connections "critics" deemed as more important. Yet, while Julia struggled with that conflict between the two approaches, she relied on her own approach to make the reading experience her own, meaningful to her, but not without a measure of cognitive dissonance.

Moving from one text to another and within those texts, Julia's construction of meaning became more and more her own, despite what she perceived as conflicts between her personal texts, those of the social and cultural texts, and the one offered by the blueprint text. So while most of Julia's protocol responses referred to the blueprint, many were capped off by engagement with personal and socio-cultural texts.

Approximately forty percent of Julia's protocol responses were personal and socio-cultural. (See Chart G.) Typical of these responses is the one that follows:

For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply on how well one practiced one's skills, but to what end one did so; each of us harboured the desire to make our own small contribution to the creation of a better world, and saw that, as professionals, the surest means of doing so would be to

serve the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted.

*It seems again so misguided and sad to me that,/  
and I--it's so British I suppose./ It reminds me  
of Milton's term "they also serve those who stand  
and wait" in the most literal of  
interpretations./ These people, this serving  
class who wants to idealize themselves by saying  
that they served great houses and great  
gentlemen./ I mean my gosh, they could be going  
out and doing something far more direct to, to  
improve civilization than to pour tea at the  
right time./ But what do I know?/*

Initially, Julia responded from a personal orientation. Her tone supported the sadness to which she referred explicitly in the passage above. She seemed deeply emotionally involved in the transaction. This personal orientation yielded to a broader socio-cultural one with her recall of the quote from Milton, a former blueprint text for Julia that had become a socio-cultural one for her as she now used it to facilitate the meaning she made in the transaction with the current blueprint, The Remains of the Day.

In the stimulated recall interview, after hearing her response, Julia revealed "I'll have to work hard to make this connection." She quoted Milton further and talked about how one "can make hell of heaven and heaven of hell." Julia explained that she saw the protagonist, in the following way:

Little bits of hell are intruding into his [the protagonist, Stevens'] self-made heaven, and he's bound and determined not to let any of those dark visions cloud his skyline. What we see is different. He has been a part of something hellish.

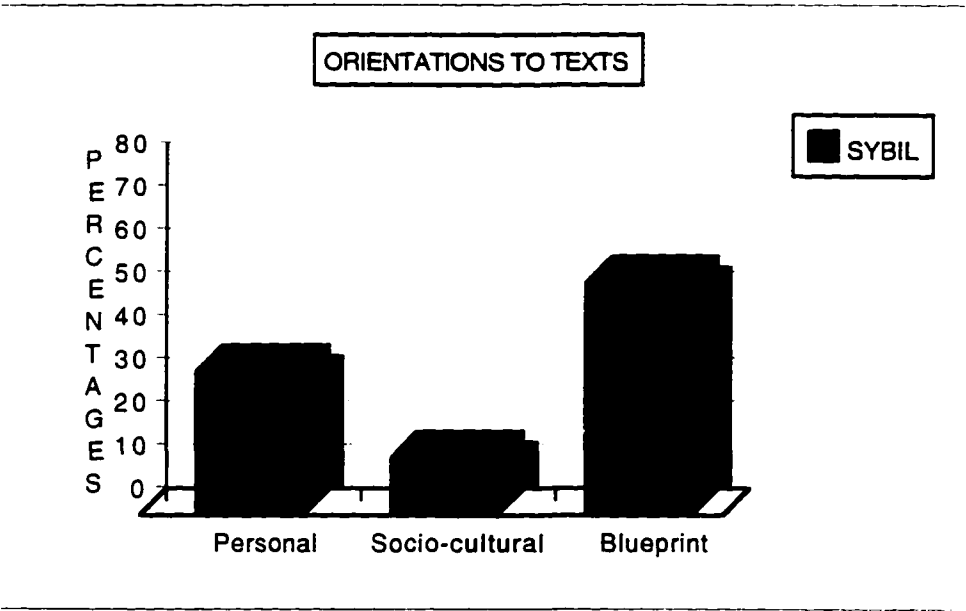
Julia's orientation then shifted to the blueprint as she paraphrased the text she held. But that shift was short lived; actually, the focus on the blueprint served Julia as a means to refocus on the socio-cultural. At that point, Julia's orientation began to transcend the blueprint, as Julia engaged, once again, in transactions with socio-cultural texts, taking issue with social class structure.

Julia's response ended on an interesting note. To conclude the rich transactions, Julia questioned her own authority as a meaning maker. Julia indicated that her meaning making might be somehow "less" than meaning made through more systematic means by some perceived "meaning-making and meaning-holding authorities."

### **Sybil's textual orientations**

Sybil's orientated to the blueprint in 54 percent of her transactions. (See Chart H.) One-third, 33 percent, (See Chart H) of Sybil's responses were primarily focused on personal texts. That this percentage of responses focused on the personal does not come as a surprise given the intense personal turmoil Sybil noted during her reading of the book and the many connections she perceived between her personal life and the lives of characters in The Bridges of Madison County.

Chart H.



In the think-aloud protocol, Sybil's references to personal texts were often elusive. The following brief responses were typical of many of the responses coded as personal texts:

- 1.) *Oh, wow. This may be hard for me to read.*
- 2.) *I know this. Duty: 'You need to come in,' or feel guilty; that kind of stuff.*
- 3.) *I think--[Sybil paused for several seconds] I don't really want to talk about it now. That's unusual for me because usually I can talk about things. This is one I'll probably think about for a long time before I really can talk about it.*

These three passages from Sybil's think-aloud were culled from her reading of three different sections of The Bridges of Madison County, from the beginning pages, from near the middle, and from her reading of the last page. Throughout her reading, Sybil seemed to postpone processing her personal connections. Although, she said she was going to think about it before talking about it, Sybil later admitted that while she was physically reading the book, she hurried through some of the parts difficult for her in an effort to avoid thinking about her troubles. Yet, she read on because she used the transaction to help mediate her understanding of her own personal turmoil at the time.

In the excerpt from Sybil in the preceding paragraph, her transactions were with personal texts in the first unit. In the second unit, her response was brief, precarious, and

elusive. Were it not for the disclosures Sybil later made in the stimulated recall interviews which were prompted by playing these very excerpts from the think-aloud protocols, Sybil may not have revealed the intense personal struggles in her life at the time of the reading, and these may not have been factored into the understanding of her transactions.

Note the way the reading experience and the life experiences mediate one another in the following excerpt from the stimulated recall interview with Sybil. In this interview, upon playing back for Sybil the first of the three selections above, Sybil revealed the following personal texts she perceived as influencing her reading:

Sybil:           It was emotional. I don't know if you detected that from my voice.

Researcher: Yeah, I did.

Sybil:           And then, what was going on--I have to share this with you, it may have some impact on how people read. At the time I read the novel, I'd had a very traumatic personal incident in my life, and so this sort of compounded the feelings. Just that I was on this emotional edge.

Sybil went on to disclose that she had been assaulted by her boyfriend. She talked freely about the incident and related her feelings about the event, the relationship, and the intense emotional connections that reciprocally informed her transactions while reading and were informed by those transactions.

Sybil seemed to use the reading transactions with

personal, socio-cultural and blueprint texts to mediate her intense feelings about the difficulties in her life related to not only those events but also to mediate her understanding of a not-so-current relationship, the one with her ex-husband.

During the stimulated recall interview, when asked to elaborate on several of her brief responses, Sybil noted that she found herself relating to two personal texts, simultaneously, neither of which she was able to explore with much depth during the think-aloud. However, in the stimulated recall interview, when asked if she was willing and able to share those, she did so openly.

The first personal text Sybil shared held several connections with the blueprint text. When Sybil related her personal text, note how it had become entwined with the blueprint text:

When she [Fransesca, a protagonist in the blueprint text] made the decision to not go with Kincaid [another character in the blueprint]; he asked, but she knew him only three days, but she also knew him all of her life, you know, for eternity she had known him. And he asked her to go with him, and she wanted to, her spirit and soul wanted to go with him, and if it were just the spirit and soul, I guess she did--he took that part of her with him, and she never had that part to give back to anybody else. I guess in a way I admired her stance on staying with her husband and family because that was something I didn't do. So you know, it's not like I



felt I did the wrong thing, because I still don't think I did the wrong thing; there have been many opportunities where Seth and I could have gotten back together. Each time, my intuitive side said this is why you got out in the first place. But she [Fransesca] was staying just for the family, and I was thinking about myself, which she wanted to do, she wanted to think about herself. Kincaid was thinking about himself, but her strength was to be admired.

Using her experiences (personal texts) of leaving a marriage, Sybil mediated meaning with the blueprint text. Sybil directly identified with the character of Fransesca, empathizing with the character's struggle, admiring the character's decision, feeling with the character. Sybil's ability to mediate meaning at the level she did in the passage above depended upon her deeply personal reflections which were facilitated by the personal text she called upon.

When asked to talk about her thoughts and feelings related to the above revelations, Sybil responded with "It was bringing up a lot of old issues, not hidden away, but I wasn't clear on yet. I don't think it becomes clear quickly, only over time." Through the reading, think aloud and interviews, Sybil reaffirmed and further clarified her own rationale for her decision to leave her marriage.

These two personal texts Sybil called upon above, the incident with her boyfriend and the story from her former marriage, substantively facilitated her transactions with Bridges of Madison County. Recognizing that what she

referred to may have been deeply personal, I reminded her that she had the option to refuse to discuss those things. When Sybil responded that she was "far enough away from the incident that I can talk about it," I reiterated the researcher promise to maintain her anonymity. (All names used here are pseudonyms). Sybil countered with, "That's not a problem either. Everybody knows about it anyway, now."

Sybil's meaning making through transactions with personal and blueprint texts illustrates how, for Sybil, the personal and blueprint texts worked together reciprocally. Her transactions with each text were facilitated by the other.

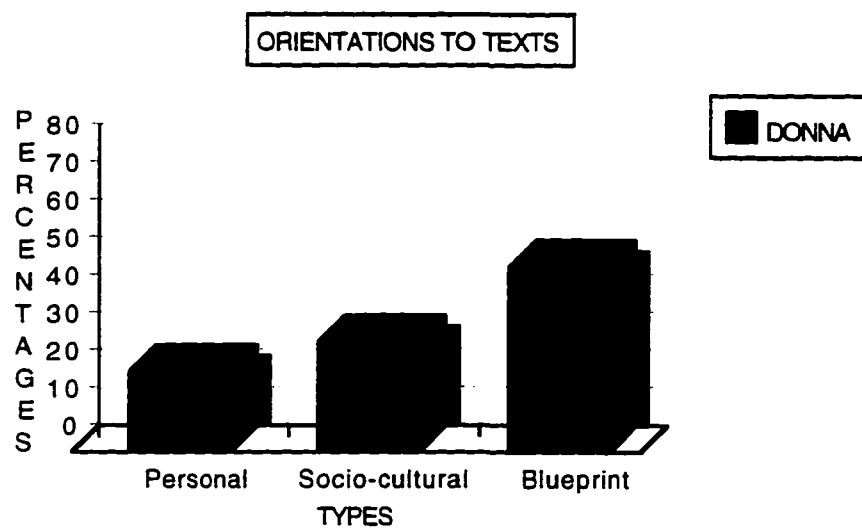
Furthermore, Sybil's point about how the reading experience prompted recall of previous personal experiences, of connections and thoughts that became clear "only over time," illustrates that readers continue to make meaning over time, that the reading experience lingers with the reader long after the original reading event. Additionally, Sybil's case is interesting, for she was aware of that lengthy, complex process.

### **Donna's textual orientations**

In approximately 49% of Donna's transactions, she oriented toward the blueprint text. (See Chart I.) While often, that also means that in over half of her transactions, Donna oriented primarily to texts other than the blueprint: personal (21%) and socio-cultural (30%) texts.

In a think-aloud response from Donna during her reading of the first chapter of Like Water for Chocolate, Donna was

Chart I.



indignant about the way one of the characters was described. Her emphatic comment, coded as blueprint because it made direct reference to specific lines in the blueprint, was:

**Well, excuse me./ It wasn't decent to desire her  
. . . sister's future husband?/ Her sister's  
future husband was first her future husband!//**

While this seemed to be a reference to the blueprint, Donna's response during stimulated recall indicated that she, as a reader, was calling forth some personal and cultural contradictions which seem to explain her strong response. After hearing the above replayed during the stimulated recall interview, Donna added:

Well this was where, this was where I was beginning to wonder why she didn't, she didn't buck this. And I knew it had to be the culture or he and his father wouldn't be giving in to it.

Researcher: Did you think about the culture that early in the story?

This was where the culture started coming through to me. That this was not just an isolated thing. That if it was just isolated, Pedro and his father wouldn't be going on with it. That was my first clue that this was more than just family eccentricities.

Such a response during stimulated recall revealed that this reader was aware early in the reading experience that the meaning she made while reading would require that she draw upon a culture different from her own, a Latin-American culture set in the past, to continue the reading transaction,

to co-create a character in the novel. For Donna, the character in question in her response, Tita, was more virtuous because Donna was drawing from her own knowledge of the culture being portrayed in the blueprint text as well, particularly in comparison with the different culture of mid 1990's, Midwestern, middle-class, United States.

Later in her reading, Donna began a response which easily qualified as transacting with the blueprint text. On initial examination, Donna's comments appeared to be a paraphrase of a recurrent conflict in the plot, that the youngest daughter would take care of the mother, forever. In her response, Donna essentially restated that element:

***Continuing the tradition that her mother had told Tita that she had to stay home and take care of her forever./ And, so Esperanza's supposed to take care of Rosaura forever?/***

But as Donna continued her response, her attention shifted to include more than a transaction with the blueprint, as can be seen in the excerpt below (first unit: socio-cultural text; second unit: personal text):

***I'm glad that wasn't a tradition in the United States./ I'm an only daughter!//***

After reading a few more lines in the blueprint related to this same custom, Donna continued her response transactions with socio-cultural and personal texts:

***And if it had been a U.S. custom, I probably would have rebelled./ In fact, I'm sure I would have./***

Upon further reflection in the stimulated recall interview, Donna's comments revealed considerable residual thoughts, for she noted, forcefully:

I just wouldn't have put up with it. I would have done my duty. I would have been nice to my mother. I would have taken care of whatever her needs were, but I would not have just given up my whole life. Even Tita, at her worse, is thinking, well what's going to happen to me someday? If I don't marry and don't have any choice and I don't--what do they do?--go out in the dessert and lie down under a cactus and die!

The intensity with which Donna expressed this was impressive. She had strong personal and social beliefs dominating her thoughts. What started as a gentle paraphrasing of a blueprint text for Donna evolved steadily to a passionate argument against the tradition, and a proclamation that things would have been different for her, for she would not have tolerated the situation the character was facing.

Donna's think aloud responses were coded as personal in approximately 21 percent of the cases. (See Chart H.) Many of these personal responses were simple declarations like the following:

***I'm sorry, but I've got to talk;/ I wouldn't be able to sit and not--and sip tea and not talk./***

Such brief personal declarations were typical of responses coded as personal texts. They are also interesting because they illustrate just how personally involved she was at different intensities. At times Donna's personal responses

were emphatic and lengthy, but most of her responses were brief, indicating active involvement/thinking, but allowing the flow of her transaction with the blueprint, personal and socio-cultural texts to continue.

The following excerpt is typical of the numerous transactions with personal texts Donna thought aloud:

Then serve it all, leaving the top covered with foam.

***They don't put any milk in their hot chocolate./***

Hot chocolate can also be made using milk instead of water, but in this case, it should only be brought to a boil once, and the second time it's heated, it should be beaten so it doesn't get too thick. However, hot chocolate made with water is more digestible than that made with milk. ***Now, I guess I'm just lazy./ I just use the chocolate mix and pour boiling water in it, and its got the dry milk and everything./ Its good enough for me./***

Donna seemed completely engrossed in these texts. Her connections were numerous and frequent, many led to more universal, thematic processes, and many like the one above, were simply connections to the like of the making of hot chocolate. The significant point here is that Donna maintained her connections carefully throughout a variety of topics; all of the responses seemed to serve to keep Donna connected to the event, to reading, to meaning making.

Approximately 30 percent of Donna's responses were coded as socio-cultural. (See Chart H.) These proved particularly interesting because of Donna's sense of humor which

accompanied the question and appraisals she made with social and cultural texts upon which she drew.

In the following excerpt, Donna made a connection with a news story she remembered:

Her burial was very poorly attended, because the disagreeable odor Rosaura's body gave off got worse after death.

*Oh, my lord--oh, reminiscent./ I wonder if this was inspired (hushes Cricket, her barking dog)--I wonder if this was inspired by that woman they took into the hospital a couple of years ago./ And, she had a terrible odor, and the nurses and doctors and everyone was overcome and sick./ They never did find out what made that woman, what made that woman--oh--whatever you call it./ She died./*

In the stimulated recall interview, Donna was quick to explain:

That's a terrible reaction because I'm sure the author meant for us to take that seriously . . . and if she meant it, she didn't write it very seriously: 'poorly attended because of the disagreeable odor.' That just broke me up.

When I asked Donna about her reference to the news story, she was unwilling or unable to return to that connection:

I couldn't remember any specifics about it. It just--the two of them, one reminded me of the the other--so I just wondered if she was influenced.



Although some of Donna's connections to socio-cultural texts were vague, they played a frequent and significant role in Donna's meaning making while reading.

Donna's recollections of the initial transactions, although not always lengthy enlightenments of her socio-cultural connections, did provide her with a great deal of pleasure upon reflection, and the connections played an important role in providing her with a familiarity which facilitated her pleasure. These brief socio-cultural connections extended her transactions with the blueprint, and the whole produced frequently recurring laughter from Donna.

When Donna connected to socio-cultural texts, she sometimes drew secondarily upon the blueprint text in search of more context clues. She seemed to hold the blueprint text responsible for providing those clues she expected and was somewhat hesitant to indulge in transactions with socio-cultural texts beyond the initial noting of the texts.

#### **Alicia's textual orientations**

Only 36 percent of Alicia's responses were coded as blueprint. (See Chart I.) Alicia's responses oriented primarily with the blueprint prove interesting for several reasons. First, she seemed to use many of these events to reconnoiter with the blueprint through appraising and paraphrasing as she does below.

Looking at how sickly he has become and looking at the way my mother now has to run up and down for him, gathering her herbs and barks that she boils in water, which he drinks instead of the medicine the doctor has

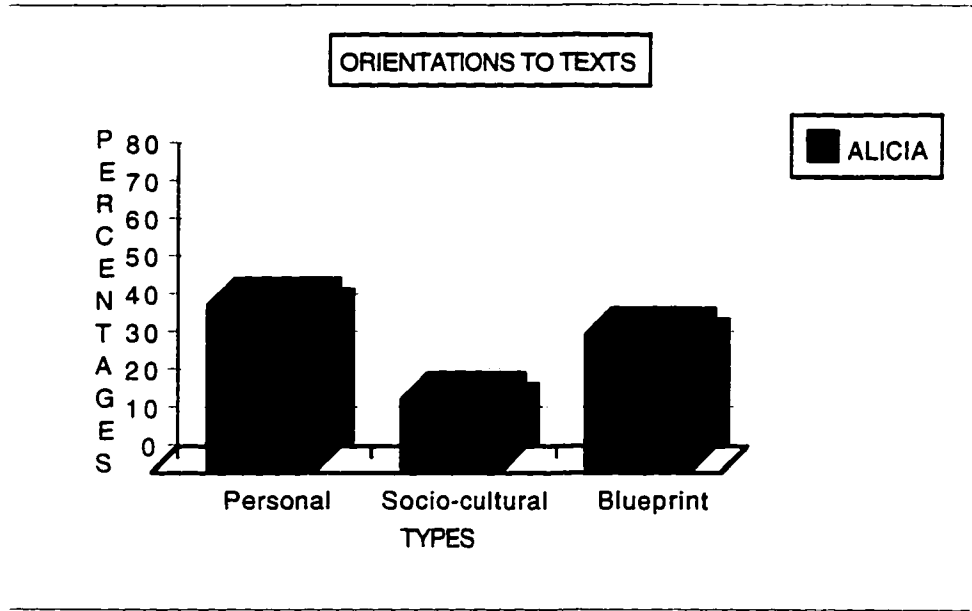
ordered for him, I plan not only never to marry an old man but certainly never to marry at all. *I think its also interesting about the father because whenever Annie was sick, the mother had medicine from the doctor and medicine from this healing woman./ She had it all lined up--the mother had it all lined up on the shelf./ And the father really, he wouldn't even be there whenever the healing woman came over, and when he saw how the medicine was lined up, then talked to the mother, she moved it so that the doctor's medicine was up in the front and Annie's was in the back./ And now, here, he drinks the home remedies instead of doing what the doctor wants him to do./*

A distinguishing factor effecting Alicia's transactions with the blueprint was her need to frequently reorient with the blueprint. In her paraphrasals and appraisals of the blueprint, Alicia seemed to be making concerted efforts to make connections across the blueprint. In the selection provided above, Alicia made the association across the blueprint in the last unit of response with the words "And now, here, he drinks the home remedies instead of doing what the doctor wants him to do."

Another reason for Alicia's tendency to reorient may have been to pull together some sense of meaning or theme from the events.

My mother had placed three pennies in my little basket, which was a duplicate of her bigger basket, *Again, I*

Chart J.



*think that's significant that, you know, she was a little mother then--I mean a little carbon copy of her mother./ They each would wear the same dresses from the same material./* and sent me to the chemist's shop to buy a pennyworth of senna leaves, a pennyworth of eucalyptus leaves, and a pennyworth of camphor.

Noting that she found other incidents that illustrated her hypothesis that the daughter was a "little carbon copy of her mother," lends support to Alicia's establishment of significance to the blueprint and its role in the transaction Alicia had with this text to co-create theme.

Orientations to personal texts were most common for Alicia. Forty-four percent of Alicia's responses were coded as personal. Many of those transactions with personal texts were extensive, as is illustrated by the one below.

*We used to go to funerals with my mother./ My mother, to this day, this is one of the special things she does./ She sings at funerals./ She also prepares food for bereavement dinners which my sister also does which I think is something I would like to do, too./ I think it is very important./ But anyway, when we were very little, we'd go to funerals with my mother./ And I remember they always sang that song, "How great thou art."/ And, my brother and I were like, we were little, because we weren't even in kindergarten, we were just little funeral*

*hoppers./ Ahm, we just thought the lyrics to that song, we didn't understand what they were singing; it sounded to us like they were singing, "Then sings my soul, how great to have you gone."/ But we sang--for that song, we thought it was pretty funny./ Anyway./ But, I remember going to lots of funerals and crawling into a pew and just being./ I'm sure they just loved to see us coming./ So here she is going to funerals./*

Such lengthy personal connections were common for Alicia. The depth of the connection is also apparent in this selection. Alicia utilized such rich texts which were tied directly to her family life, which was a priority in her daily activities. Phone conversations with her mother and sisters interrupted each of our interviews and Alicia talked at length in all of the interviews about her family. The memory of attending funerals as a child intrigued her. Later in her think aloud, Alicia even returned to the funeral text, sharing additional memories. The extent to which she drew upon this and other similar personal texts contributed to the closeness she felt to the characters and the numerous personal textual transactions she had throughout her reading.

In this next selection from Alicia's think aloud protocol, her appraisals in these personal texts revealed another point where her past spills over into the past of the protagonist in Annie John.

There was Gweneth, whom I loved so, and who was my dearest friend in spite of the fact that she with my

mother's complete approval, but she had such slyness and so many pleasing, to me, ways that my mother could never have imagined.

*I remembered my--I had a friendship in junior high, I'm still friends with this woman, now./ It was really intense where we would have taken class together all day long, and we would go home and talk on the phone for hours and literally hours on the phone./ My mother was not too pleased with this girl either--I don't know why, there was something my mom didn't like about her./*

Alicia's connection, if examined using close reading, might be considered distorting. Yet, she--as well as the other readers in this study--frequently called on personal texts that were so near to her that once "opened" flowed over the blueprint text. That is, in the blueprint text preceding Alicia's think aloud, one can see that the situation between daughter, friend and mother was considerably different than the one in the personal text which Alicia provided. However, the personal text summoned by Alicia provided essential grist for her meaning making.

Alicia made socio-cultural connections in twenty percent of her orientations. Her socio-cultural transactions ran the gamut from Schultz's Charlie Brown to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, from adolescent situation comedy to adolescent psychology. In the passage below, Alicia connected to Charlie Brown.

The corkscrews didn't lie flat on her head, they stood straight up, and when she walked they bounded up and down as if they were something amphibian and alive.

Right away to myself I called her the Red Girl. *Like little Charlie Brown's red-headed girl./*

In the next passage, Alicia first makes a personal connection, then her textual orientation shifts to the socio-cultural. In the first two units of responses which were coded as personal, Alicia revealed the function of this particular connection, then she moved into the actual connection:

I then began to look at my mother's hands differently. They had stroked the dead girl's forehead; they had bathed and dressed her and laid *And I can understand what she's talking about because I kinda had that same uneasiness with death that she has./ I remember in one of my Shakespeare classes, we were talking about Romeo and Juliet./ And why Romeo, if he thought that he saw color on Juliet's lips, why didn't he just touch her and see that she was warm, and she was alive./ And I said, 'maybe he didn't want to touch her because she was dead,' you know./ I would not touch a dead person./*

In the first two units, Alicia revealed that she could relate to the discomfort felt by Annie John, the main character. After revealing this thought about herself (which was coded as a personal text), Alicia disclosed the socio-cultural

texts informing her transaction of meaning, a discussion in her class on Shakespeare and a specific portion of the play, Romeo and Juliet. And finally, Alicia returned to the personal.

Similar to the reference to Charlie Brown, Alicia made a number of short references to various other socio-cultural texts, all of which informed her transactions through her reading. For example, this reference to the situation comedy Seinfeld:

Perhaps it had stuck in my mind that once my mother said to me, 'I'm so glad you are not one of those girls who like to play marbles,' and perhaps because I had to do exactly the opposite of whatever she desired of me, ***Just like old George Costanza being the opposite guy.*** / I now played and played at marbles in a way that I had never done anything.

Alicia also drew upon more scholarly, socio-cultural sources:

I especially never wanted to lie in my bed and hear my mother gargling again. ***Another thing I was reading in my adolescent psych text book was that teenagers get extremely annoyed at the little habits people have, the way they chew their food or the way they brush their teeth or whatever. / And they feel that way because of their sense of just having no control of their lives and being trapped. / It seems like I've seen just so many examples of that lately.***

These varied socio-cultural textual orientations informed



Alicia's meaning making throughout the literary event.

The textual orientations by these four readers illustrate the breadth of resources upon which they drew as they made meaning while reading. From Julia's heavy reliance on the blueprint text to Donna's heavy reliance on socio-cultural texts, particularly the contrasting cultural texts of Mexican-American culture and Midwestern American culture, to Sybil and Alicia's indebtedness to deeply personal texts, these four experienced readers provide a case for the richness of readers' transactions. Further, these readers own the meaning they made in these novels, for they brought much of themselves and their socio-cultural affiliations to their transactions of meaning.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Within this chapter, a brief review of the guiding questions and impetus for this study is provided. A discussion revealing ways that the findings of this study shed light on these questions ensues. And finally, implications of this study are examined.

This research offers to the field of reading, to scholars and practitioners, an in depth view of the reading worlds of the four experienced readers of narrative fiction who participated. Certainly, one would not generalize from a study of four readers. Nonetheless, studies such as this one offer comparability and translatability (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), that is, a context from which others may make comparisons and connections as they deem appropriate. The four readers and their readings are discussed in terms of the networks to which they belonged, the ways that readers mediated meaning in transactions and in their lives, and the ways that these readers maintained their participation in society.

This investigation focused on (1) transactions between the readers and the novels they had chosen, (2) the readers' purposes and processes, (3) and the contexts, experiential and socio-cultural, that influence these readers in their construction of meaning. The questions guiding this study were: 1) how do participants make meaning while reading narrative fiction, 2) in what ways do blueprint texts of narrative fiction influence meaning making, 3) in what ways

do personal experiences influence meaning making, and 4) in what ways do socio-cultural issues influence meaning making. In this chapter, each of the four guiding questions are explored.

### **Ways Readers Made Meaning**

#### **While Reading Narrative Fiction**

Participants in this study made meaning by investing themselves in reading events. The most striking conclusion from analysis of the think aloud protocols was the extent to which these readers took appraising stances in their reading transactions. In their initial orientations with texts, the four readers appraised an average of just under seventy percent (range of 61% to 76%; see Chart A, p. 108) of their responses. That is, their verbalized thoughts indicated that they evaluated (responded by making a subjective judgment about one of the three texts--blueprint, personal or socio-cultural--with which they were transacting). That these readers thoughts were invested to this extent reveals just how empowered these readers were as they transacted meaning.

Each of the four readers, on numerous occasions, incorporated their own experiences in an average of 27 percent (range of 12% to 44%; see Chart F, p. 134) of their transactions. Also, with similar frequency, readers relied upon their socio-cultural luggage in an average of 22 percent of their think aloud responses (range of 13% to 30%; see Chart F, p. 134) as they transacted. For example, Alicia saw her experiences as a child in the experiences of Annie in Annie John; through this confluence of the reader's

experiences and the character's experiences in the transaction, Alicia, the reader, mediated her understanding of those connections to her own childhood experiences as the childhood experiences of the novel's protagonist reciprocally facilitated that mediating process.

Further, these readers' gender, ethnicity, religious background, and careers played significant roles in their thinking during the reading transactions. Donna was adamant of how she would have refused to acquiesce to the gender roles that the character Esperanza did in Like Water for Chocolate. Even as Donna acknowledged the cultural and historical differences between herself and the protagonist, she insisted "I just wouldn't have put up with it."

Furthermore, these readers talked at length about personal and socio-cultural influences as they continued to expand the meaning of their reading experiences. Those reading experiences facilitated their understanding of personal and socio-cultural issues. Julia's socio-cultural connections regarding the "serving class" she found portrayed in the novel The Remains of the Day empowered her to call into question a British tradition, appraise that tradition, and postulate on how things may have been different without such a tradition. With respect to the "serving class," Julia concluded that "they could be going out and doing something far more direct to, to improve civilization than to pour tea at the right time."

These readers invested themselves in the construction of meaning and through these experiences reevaluated, changed

and/or reaffirmed the meanings of texts (blueprint, personal and socio-cultural) which comprise their worlds.

**Ways in Which Blueprint Texts  
of Narrative Fiction Influence Meaning Making**

The roles of blueprint texts for these readers were rather similar across the four readers, for the blueprint text seemed to serve these readers as a point of departure for connecting to other texts as well as a somewhat amorphous sketch providing grounding for the reader. Most of readers transactions were found to be with blueprint texts; an average of fifty percent (range of 36% to 61%; see Chart F, p. 134) of readers' orientations to texts was to blueprint texts, indicating that it remains the primary medium with which readers transact. Although, it must also be noted that readers transact with the two other texts identified (personal and socio-cultural) for a combined total of fifty percent of their transactions. This suggests that while the blueprint plays a significant role, it is only significant and not dominant.

Sybil found that in reading Bridges of Madison County the blueprint provided her with prompts to which she readily connected personal and social experiences. Alicia saw the blueprint as facilitating connections to "what I am doing. It [the blueprint] becomes a part of that file. It's kind of filed away in my memory, and I can use it if I need it." Alicia seemed to perceive blueprint text as two-dimensional: on the one hand it is a matter of providing opportunities for connections to other texts and on the other it serves an

informational role when the reader takes an efferent stance.

### **Ways in Which Personal Experiences Influence Meaning Making**

A significant finding of this study has to do with how reading and talking about experiences evoked through the reading served to mediate these readers' thinking about their own lives. Sybil's case provides a classic example. While reading Bridges of Madison County, Sybil was in the midst of a tumultuous ending of what had been a lengthy, intimate relationship. Sybil's reading evoked powerful personal texts from her life, some of which Sybil thought mirrored the relationship she was following in the blueprint text which she was reading, and in other personal texts which involved her partner physically and verbally abusing her. The milieu of texts evoked facilitated Sybil's thinking about her world, lending some sense of perspective in a time when she was struggling to come to terms with the recent abuses. Reflecting upon the experience of reading the novel and making connections with the raw, personal texts, Sybil said, "So it wasn't a problem for me to read it and talk about it. I guess it's kind of therapeutic, too--healing." Sybil's insight revealed how the reading experience and the sharing with others facilitated her in mediating her thoughts and feelings related to the recent, unexpected turn of events in her life.

Alicia's personal connections to funerals made for an interesting, and surprisingly light-hearted mediation of a time during her youth, and even aspirations for future deeds

to be done. Alicia recalled texts from her childhood in which she, her brother and her mother frequented many funerals as part of her mother's service to her church community. Rather than evoking morbidity, for her personal texts and the connections to the blueprint text, her connections served to mediate her own understanding of why she went to funerals as a child and why she might want to facilitate the bereavement process for others. Alicia returned to this subject on several occasions in her think aloud, and prompted this verbalization:

We used to go to funerals with my mother. My mother, to this day, this is one of the special things she does. She sings at funerals--she sings at funerals! She also prepares food for bereavement dinners, which my sister also does, which I think is something I would like to do, too. I think it is very important.

As Alicia transacted with personal and blueprint texts, she came to understand and redefine her own role in her community; that is, her reading and ensuing transactions served to help her mediate meaning for her.

Readers in this study not only had transactions with the books they read, but they transacted with texts from their personal lives (past, present and future), with texts from the societies to which they belong, and with texts from the cultures from which they come. Through reading, these readers experienced themselves reflectively and with depth, and these experiences facilitated their relationships with their worlds. For these readers, their experiences

facilitated the mediation of personal and socio-cultural experiences beyond the reading event.

### **Ways Socio-Cultural Issues Influence Meaning Making**

Reading for these readers may be seen as a form of socialization and even guarantor of democracy. To begin, something to read is available to anyone through libraries or for about five dollars in supermarkets or bookstores. Access to any type of literature is protected by the constitution and that access has been repeatedly upheld by the courts. What other event allows its participants to so fully experience other worlds, themselves, and their roles in their worlds (personal, social and political) as reading narrative fiction does? For these readers, for Sybil who was hundreds of miles from the setting of Bridges of Madison County, for Donna and Alicia who were centuries and cultures and thousands of miles apart from Like Water for Chocolate and Annie John, respectively, and for Julia who was a culture and a continent apart from The Remains of the Day, these readers forged meaningful connections across time, place, people, world views, and themselves. Sybil, Donna, Julia, and Alicia discovered other worlds, redefined themselves, and shared with others, through their socio-cultural transactions during and following their reading experiences. These readers recognized their invaluable roles in communities, relied on and respected their individual, personal texts and negotiated with broader socio-cultural texts to transact their very own meaning, not simply with books but with world views.

Alicia summarized the maintenance of her socio-cultural



as well as democratic ideals best when she related her awareness of different cultural perspectives to her year-old son:

For Corey--I want to get a perspective on a different culture, I want to educate myself for his purposes. That's why I read All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes by Maya Angelou because Maya Angelou grew up in Southern Arkansas, where my mother-in-law is from. That book helped me understand her so much. No one really ever thought to tell me. I think I do a lot to try to educate myself and make myself more aware of different cultures and things.

Brodsky (1989) explained that

Aesthetic choice is a highly individual matter, and aesthetic experience is always a private one. Every new aesthetic reality makes one's experience even more private; and this kind of privacy, assuming at times the guise of literary (or some other) taste, can in itself turn out to be, if not a guarantee, then a form of defense against enslavement. For a man [woman] with taste, particularly literary taste, is less susceptible to the refrains and the rhythmical incantations peculiar to any version of political demagoguery. The point is not so much that virtue does not constitute a guarantee for producing a masterpiece, as that evil, especially political evil, is always a bad stylist. The more substantial an individual's aesthetic experience is, the sounder his [her] taste, the sharper his [her] moral

focus, the freer--though not necessarily the happier--he [she] is. (p. 223-24)

Alicia, Donna, Sybil and Julia illustrated that they treasure choice and their own aesthetic experiences. As Donna stated flatly in response to what she saw as an injustice subjugating a character in the blueprint with which she was engaged:

I just wouldn't have put up with it. I would have done my duty. I would have taken care of whatever her needs were, but I would not have just given up my whole life. Participants' aesthetic experiences served to empower readers and ensure that they maintained power in their worlds and their roles in the democracies in which they lived.

Each of the readers had some form of social networks which seemed to play a role in their continuous reading experiences. These social systems were sometimes formal, sometimes informal and often ad hoc. Julia lead a group which met monthly to discuss a book that each had been reading during that month; group members read the same work and had regularly scheduled meetings. Sybil and Alicia talked with their respective sisters frequently about the books each was reading. Alicia joked about running up phone bills talking about recent reads. Sybil noted that she and her sister had considerably differing tastes in literature, but often shared with each other their reading experiences and even recommended books to one another across their different interests. Further, one of Sybil's sisters, at one time, had recommended the book Sybil chose to read during

this study. Sybil and Donna also had informal networks at their respective schools; these networks worked to facilitate their selections of titles. Additionally, readers in Sybil's and Donna's networks chatted across the halls between classes about their readings as well as in their teacher's lounges.

These networks had reciprocal influence on readers. That is, readers gained from belonging, however informally, and by their belonging, seemed to feel obliged to read in order to maintain their status in these groups. Donna admitted to reading books recommended by colleagues, books which she predicted she would not have necessarily enjoyed, but in order to continue to participate in the sharing, and to be considered when books were passed along, Donna read the "pass alongs."

### **Implications**

This study points to a number of interesting implications for practice and future research. Certainly, larger, more extensive research studies in this area are needed.

First, in order to facilitate the social networks that these experienced readers found invaluable, teachers might model the connections readers make with personal and socio-cultural texts and give import to these connections in their classrooms. Also, readers in this study maintained ownership of the entire reading event; they selected the books they read, determined when and where to read, and tried to be as open and explicit with all aspects of their reading experiences. Studies which examine readers in classrooms

which value these facets of the reading experience would certainly be warranted. Such investigations might also include examination of readers' talk with friends, peers, and families as they relate to the reading experience.

Another related implication pertains to the notion of reading as a mediating force for readers' worlds. In this vein, using think alouds as a means to elicit authentic responses from readers deserves further attention. In the present study, each of the participants noted that the think aloud experience was a rewarding one. Alicia's unsolicited comments about her experiences in her closing comments reveal her thoughts about the experience:

Well, I enjoyed reading the book . . . . It was nice; its nice just to have a break from my other routine. My husband's been forced to give me some time on my own, so that's been pleasant. Well, let me know when you want to talk to me again. Its been really nice. Thanks.

As noted earlier, Sybil found the experience "therapeutic." Julia explained that she talked with fellow educators at a conference about her experience with the think alouds:

I found myself thinking a lot about--and I called that technique just 'think aloud,' which I've done with my own students from time to time, although I never had the aspect of recording. I've just done that orally and then moved on. We've just done that, and not had the recursive step that you put me through. I've spent a lot of time thinking and shared with a number of table groups that I worked with--this whole process with you .

. . . that was wonderful, I was thinking, what a powerful tool that was, to go back and be forced to comment on whatever you've listened to, and I've never experienced that.

Studies which would examine the value of think-alouds for the reader are certainly warranted.

Think alouds are not for everyone, however. One of the original participants abandoned her reading, citing lack of interest in the book and explicitly stating that she regularly abandoned books that did not hold her interest. Because of the incomplete set of data, this original participant was not included in the final analysis, but it is likely that having to think aloud contributed to her abandoning the reading.

Other research implications might include designing a study which asks readers to read, perhaps, three contrasting types of written texts in order to get a better sense of how readers' stances relate to the different reading selections. Also, a study which examines readers of differing ages (e.g., grades 8th, 10th, 12th and college sophomores) and the developmental influences dependent on the reading experience would be warranted. Another study, similar in design to the present one, might include asking readers to respond in journals in addition to having participants think-aloud while reading.

In summary, the data from this study suggest three primary findings about these experienced readers of fiction. First, these readers have networks, formal or informal

systems of friends, relatives or colleagues with whom they spoke about their transactions. Second, the readers in this study mediate their places in their worlds through their reading. Third, these four readers sustain their participation in worlds larger than the one they know as their own realities; that is, through their reading and transactions of meaning, these readers maintain their freedom to be themselves.

In closing, this study offers to the field of reading research as many questions as it does answers. Yet, this study does provide an authentic examination of the very elusive act of making meaning while reading for pleasure.

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**APPENDICES**

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## Appendix A.

## THINK-ALOUD PROCEDURES

Please try to verbalize everything you do in coming to an understanding of this short story or section of a novel as if, say, you were preparing to be on a panel discussing aspects of it. Try not to censor anything--if you read parts of the story several times, if you start in on one train of thought and then switch to another, if stray thoughts occur to you--whatever, please try to do it verbally rather than silently so it will be included. Think of this as an exercise in introspection: verbalize your thoughts directly without suggesting any split between yourself as the thinker and the reporter of your thoughts, that is verbalize your thoughts as you are thinking them. This verbalizing will undoubtedly interfere to a certain extent with your normal practice of reading, and may be a bit frustrating, but please try to include everything.

Please observe the following:

1. Select a place where you typically read. Before beginning to read and think aloud, (a) turn on the tape recorder; (b) state your name, the date, title of the book, and beginning page; (c) rewind the tape and play back your introduction to test the recording.
2. Read the selection aloud. Remember to say aloud the words you read and your own thoughts. The tapes are 90 minutes long, 45 minutes per side. If you reach the end of side A, stop reading wherever you are, turn the tape over, and continue reading and thinking aloud.



3. After you have finished the reading and thinking aloud, please label the tape with your name, the date, and the title of the book.

{Adapted from Fly (1994) and Kintgen (1983)}

## Appendix B.

## STIMULATED RECALL PROCEDURES

As we listen to the tape I'll be asking you questions about what you were thinking as you read. At times I'll stop the tape so we can more closely examine your thoughts. As you listen to the tape, try to recall what you were thinking at the time; try to put your mind back into the task. Any time you remember something, say it, interrupt me, stop the tape if you want. I'm interested in finding out what you were thinking when you were reading, and it doesn't matter at all to me if those thoughts were silly or profound. I'll record our conversation so I don't have to divide my attention by taking notes.

{Adapted from Rose (1984)}

## Appendix C.

## PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION LETTER

Dear OWP Teacher-Consultant,

As you know, I have been conducting research for a dissertation study on readers while working with the Oklahoma Writing Project. My research has been concerned with how teachers read fiction on their own as opposed to reading as part of preparation for teaching a work of literature. I am interested in how teachers read fiction for their own pleasure. And, I know that many of you are prolific readers of fiction. To conduct the final phase of this study, I am looking for participants, teachers like you who are readers.

Teachers, students, and researchers could benefit from knowledge gained in this study. By shifting the focus from what texts say onto what real readers do, this study and your participation in it could have an impact on future reading instruction.

I will explain briefly what is involved in the study, and if you are interested in participating, please complete the attached form and return it to me:

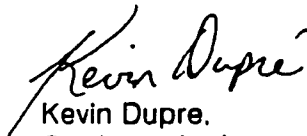
1. Read a novel of your choice
2. Three or four sections of the novel will need to be read aloud and accompanied by think-alouds, verbalizations of your thoughts as you are reading a particular section. You will tape record these read/think-alouds.
3. A training session for doing think-alouds
4. Three interviews about your reading interests, preferences, habits as well as background/biographical information.

The length of time involved in this study will, of course, vary with the pace with which you read the novel. Also, interviews will be scheduled prior to your beginning reading and following your completion of the reading.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the attached form, and include your name, address, and telephone numbers. Then return the form to the address indicated, or call me, by December 22, 1994.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to learning more about your reading and working with you in this study.

Sincerely,

  
Kevin Dupre,  
Graduate Assistant-

## APPENDIX D.

*Participation Form*

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to be a participant in this reading study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

Kevin Dupre  
Oklahoma Writing Project  
820 Van Vleet Oval, Room 100  
Norman, OK 73019-0260  
405/321-2970 or 405/325-1081