



## Reading as Evocation: Engaging the Novel in Phenomenological Psychology

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### Abstract

*Literary fiction gives us a window into ourselves and into those who may seem most unfamiliar to us. We therefore have a moral imperative to read, just as, as psychotherapists, we have a moral imperative to listen. Literary study teaches us to read closely, to listen for structure as well as content, and it also instructs us about different ways of paying attention. Inversely, because the practice of psychotherapy values connection and process, rather than simply interpretation, it shows us how we can bring ourselves more fully to literature. In this paper I propose ways of engaging the field of phenomenological psychology in this dialectical relationship of literature and psychotherapy. By using as a case study a recent experience of teaching Aimee Bender's (2000) novel *An Invisible Sign of My Own* in an interdisciplinary seminar on literature and psychology, I illustrate how literature and clinical discourses can inform and challenge each other as we seek to understand the meaning and lived experience of neuroses. I argue that the very act of reading can give the reader the sense and structure of experience that, if explored in a dialogal context, helps us gain access to phenomena that is neither simply self-generated nor simply observed in the other. I term this access evocation: A response that is a calling forth of the reader's own lived experiencing.*

I have long been fascinated by how psychotherapists tell the story of their experience of sitting with their first client and how this story changes over time. This fascination is borne out of my own experience and my own recounting. My first client, 'Richard', has appeared in several conference talks, graduate class lectures, and in even more conversations with other psychotherapists. Although I like to believe that I have not appropriated the experience of our work together to highlight some misguided fantasy about my precocious therapeutic skills, I fear that too often I have been the protagonist (though certainly not the hero) of such stories. After giving Richard's case study (narrating a childhood of physical and emotional abuse, and a variety of diagnoses ranging from schizophrenia to schizoaffective disorder to Asperger's syndrome, and a wide array of psychotropic drugs), I have then focused on myself. How

difficult it was to sit with this extremely isolated man. How anxious I became every week during the hour leading up to his appointment time. How I read and re-read his two-inch thick case file and tried to map out a plan for our sessions, almost as if I were preparing to teach a class. How I tried to engage him in conversation and was met with what felt like one of five pre-recorded responses from him. How, even though over time he began to show me himself (how he hit himself in the face when he felt bad and how the beginning of a smile in his eyes looked), I wondered if I ever really learned how to keep him company. Maybe, at best, we sat together in a very mutual loneliness.

Once again I am telling another story about Richard, about Richard and me. This time the story was prompted by a question one of my colleagues (who

teaches acting) posed to me: What do you imagine as the fundamental question or problem that you are trying to address in your work?

The first word that came into my mind was empathy, mostly because my work as a psychotherapist, beginning years ago with Richard, has actually challenged my sense of what empathy means or looks like, although I feel that this is the implicit goal for a genuine connection between client and therapist. I thought about my actor friend, whose work is so embodied, and I felt moved to be as concrete as possible in my response. (Perhaps that is one of my problems with empathy; it is over-determined with abstraction). I responded, thinking a bit sadly about Richard: "As a psychotherapist fundamentally my concern is in how I keep my clients company." As I said this I realized that this was the concern that I recently brought to a graduate-level course that I taught on issues in psychotherapy. Without explicitly articulating my concern, I used this metaphor of 'keeping company' as a guide for myself, as my students and I read theories (many very abstract) regarding topics such as the unconscious, transference/counter transference, empathy, and healing.

During this discussion Richard grounded me as I showed my students examples of the ways in which 'empathy' has become operationalized or instrumentalized in discussions of clinical practice, as if it is a tool in our therapist's toolbox that we can exercise at will. For example, Clark (2010) describes empathy as "an active sharing by the counselor of what a client is experiencing while maintaining some level of emotional detachment" (p. 96), suggesting that counsellors mete out empathy intentionally and strategically. My obsessive planning and anticipating of Richard's visits did not seem like a particularly empathic strategy. Counter transference, while perhaps a more appropriate approximation of my experience, proved itself an even less useful framework for understanding my experience with Richard; in fact, when I told my story to my graduate students, they became preoccupied by the differences between theories of projective-identification and Freud's definition of counter transference. They focused on questions such as: Where did the feelings originate? What were they revealing about his unconscious? What were they revealing about my unconscious? How did I use the experience? I resisted responding to what felt like algebraic questions or very understandable efforts to instrumentalize, that is to understand what to do in such a situation. What I could say was that, finally, my response to Richard probably did result in my gaining some insight into his experience. Richard and I, in our own experiences of anxiety, probably found a way of keeping company with each other that made possible new ways of

interacting with, or simply showing up for, one another. Therefore, in this class full of psychotherapists-in-training, I steered away from operationalizing and theorizing and relied instead on stories, the same things that have grounded my literature classes for the past ten years.

Every story needs a bit of history. My first teaching job after receiving my PhD in American literature placed me amidst non-traditional middle-aged students who had entered the university after raising families or working in manual-labour jobs or escaping abusive spouses. My students came to my office to talk about the literature, but frequently told me their own stories that the literature had evoked. After several years of listening to their stories I made the decision to get some professional training for and philosophical orientation toward what I was finding an increasingly compelling practice of sitting one on one with my students. I therefore went back to graduate school to study phenomenological psychology. When I began clinical practice I discovered that many years of studying and teaching literature fundamentally shaped the way in which I kept company with my clients in the therapy office. I also realized that attending to the experience of listening, by immersing myself in phenomenology, had fundamentally changed my experience of teaching literature in a classroom.

I now see that 'keeping company' is the same metaphor that I bring with me into both the therapy office and my literature courses. The lived experience of reading literary texts is often lost and devalued in the literature classroom. It is this experience that I refer to in this paper as evocation. I define evocation in this sense as a response to the world of the text as separate from the reader but as a calling forth of the reader's own lived experiencing, prior to theoretical or historical analysis or interpretation. Evocation therefore concerns how we keep company with a literary text and with each other in relation to this text. Similarly, in the process of psychotherapy, attention to the lived experience of the interaction between client and therapist can be lost. This attention needs to occur prior to the theorizing, interpreting, and actively responding, particularly, but not exclusively, for new therapists. I would even suggest that a focus on empathy (primarily seated in the emotional experience, and as Clark (2010) and others suggest, in the strategic intentions of the therapist) can at times hinder us from attending to the fullness of the encounter.

While keeping company with literature and keeping company with clients are certainly not synonymous, within this article I will place them in a dialogic relationship. Within this paper I will therefore describe the ways in which literary study and my

teaching of literature, focusing specifically on an experience of evocation that unfolded in a recent teaching experience, have given me new insights into keeping company in the contexts of psychotherapy and phenomenological research. However, before telling another story I need to situate this discussion in conversation with other studies on the role of literature in the field of psychology.

The relationship between the academic fields of psychology and literary study is certainly very much alive and growing; however, much of it seems to be mediated by a kind of utilitarian agenda, originating from both disciplinary perspectives. Moghaddam (2004) usefully catalogues various forms this relationship can, and often does, take. From a psychological perspective, literature can be a source of psychological data; an exploration of personality and of relationships over time (as opposed to lab and outcomes based experimentation). Literature can also be read as a case study of a specific character or characters (Moghaddam, 2004, pp. 507-509). In addition, psychology can examine the ways in which specific literary texts or certain trends in literature directly have an impact on personality development and behaviour (noting the ways in which it enters into discourses of people or relationships within a specific culture) (Moghaddam, 2004, p. 511). We can also examine the ways in which literature reflects and is shaped by the culture in which it is written or by the psyche of the individual author (Moghaddam, 2004, p. 509-510). Although each of these approaches can be rich and fascinating depending upon the questions asked and the context in which they are asked, the purpose of this paper is to give voice to the experiences of reading literature and of sitting with clients and the ways in which these very different experiences can inform each other.

I want to use a literary text (rather than psychological research or theory) as my guidepost as I move through this discussion. Although Billy Collins' (1988) poem "Books" seems erroneously titled as it places emphasis on things, I think his poem is really a phenomenology of reading. It can be read as a very effective illustration of this experience of evocation.

#### Books

From the heart of this dark, evacuated campus  
I can hear the library humming in the night,  
a choir of authors murmuring inside their  
books  
along the unlit, alphabetical shelves,  
Giovanni Pontano next to Pope, Dumas next to  
his son,  
each one stitched into his own private coat,  
together forming a low, gigantic chord of  
language.

I picture a figure in the act of reading,  
shoes on a desk, head tilted into the wind of a  
book,  
a man in two worlds, holding the rope of his  
tie  
as the suicide of lovers saturates a page,  
or lighting a cigarette in the middle of a  
theorem.  
He moves from paragraph to paragraph  
as if touring a house of endless, paneled  
rooms.

I hear the voice of my mother reading to me  
from a chair facing the bed, books about  
horses and dogs,  
and inside her voice lie other distant sounds,  
the horrors of a stable ablaze in the night,  
a bark that is moving toward the brink of  
speech.

I watch myself building bookshelves in  
college,  
walls within walls, as rain soaks New England,  
or standing in a bookstore in a trench coat.

I see all of us reading ourselves away from  
ourselves  
straining in circles of light to find more light  
until the line of words becomes a trail of  
crumbs  
that we follow across a page of fresh snow;

when evening is shadowing the forest  
and small birds flutter down to consume the  
crumbs,  
we have to listen hard to hear the voices  
of the boy and his sister receding into the  
woods. (pp. 31-32)

The books in the beginning of this poem are living breathing entities, but they are also contexts and catalysts for readers' journeys outside of themselves. Collins (1988) writes, "I see all of us reading ourselves away from ourselves/straining in circles of light to find more light" (pp. 31-32). Literary fiction gives us a window into ourselves and into those who may seem most unfamiliar to us. We therefore have a moral imperative to read, just as those of us who are psychotherapists have a moral imperative to listen. Literary study teaches us to read closely, to listen for structure and metaphor as well as content, but it also instructs us about different ways of paying attention. Inversely, because the practice of psychotherapy values connection and process, rather than simply interpretation, this practice shows us how we can bring ourselves more fully to literature. The very act of reading can give the reader the sense and structure of experience that, if explored in a dialogal context, helps us gain access to phenomena that is neither

simply observed in the other nor experienced as the self. This access can also be through about in relation to the phenomenon of evocation. Consider again Collins' (1988) description of "a figure in the act of reading/ shoes on a desk, head tilted into the wind of a book/ a man in two worlds, holding the rope of his tie/ as the suicide of lovers saturates a page" (pp. 31-32). In this case, literature is no longer simply a 'thing' (data, case study, historical document) but a vehicle of and for immediate experience.

Collins' (1988) description and my definition of evocation overlap in part with the phenomenological analyses that Kuiken et al. (2004) conducted on the ways in which certain literary reading experiences can effect what they call self-modification. They write:

At times, readers of literary texts find themselves participating in an unconventional flow of feelings through which they realize something that they have not previously experienced – or at least that they have not experienced in the form provided by the text. When this occurs, the imagined world of the text can become unsettling. What is realized (recognized) may also become real-ized (made real) and carried forward as a changed understanding of the reader's own life world. (pp. 268-269)

These researchers therefore found that when readers articulate metaphors of personal identification with situations, characters, or events in literary texts, these identifications often lead to modifications in readers' own lives, attitudes, perspectives, and senses of self. However, although self-modification is a useful place to begin thinking about evocation it is not wholly descriptive of the experience of reading literary texts in a teaching context in which responses to the texts do not simply occur between self and text but within a larger and more complex dialogal context.

I now recount in some detail an experience of reading a novel with participants in a continuing education interdisciplinary seminar I taught on literature and psychology. The participants were university alumni working in fields as diverse as psychology, primary education, and software development. This experience was unsettling for many reasons, but primarily because it took me out of the safety/reliability of both of my academic disciplines and out of the approaches that Moghaddam (2004) lists. Instead, it left me in a new mode of experiencing -- one that I propose could find a rich home in educating future clinicians in the work of psychotherapy or researchers in the field of phenomenological psychology.

I had originally designed this seminar as a way to engage the fields of literature and psychology in the various kinds of conversations that Moghaddam (2004) describes. I opened with an historical reading of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's (1892) "The Yellow Wallpaper" and placed the story in the context of nineteenth-century somatizing discourses surrounding hysteria. We then moved forward in history with Freud's (1905) "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case Study" and focused on the uneasy and blurred distinction between case study and literary text, as well as the role of interpretation in both discourses of psychology and literary study. We next looked at Art Spiegelman's (1986) holocaust narrative *Maus* within the context of interdisciplinary theories on trauma that both draw and depart from Freud and on the unique role that the genre of the graphic novel plays in deepening our understanding of trauma. All of this brought us to Aimee Bender's (2000) novel entitled *An Invisible Sign of My Own*.

My choice to include this novel in the syllabus was based primarily on my utter enjoyment of its narrative voice. The narrator, Mona Gray, lives a life proscribed and proscribed by her obsessive fear of her father's mortality and by her compulsive rituals to stave off this mortality and to find order in a world that she experiences as confusing and threatening, even or especially in the predictable everydayness of her small hometown that, at age twenty, she has never left. Mona's voice is funny and painful. The novel is relatively simple and, as we follow Mona through just a couple of weeks in her life during which mostly mundane things happen (until the end when several interrelated dramatic things happen), it reads almost as an allegory. Indeed, my choice to include the novel seemed almost too simple and I feared that the participants might simply diagnose Mona with obsessive compulsive disorder, read it as a case study, and be done with it. Thus, as a pre-emptive move, I assigned the novel in conjunction with a printout of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) criteria for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and with Angyal's (1965) holistic description of OCD as a "pattern of noncommitment" (p. 156). I also furnished them the following study questions to consider:

1. What is the relationship between the novel and psychology readings? That is, do you get a 'felt sense' of the lived experience of OCD in such a way that the DSM (APA, 1994) and Angyal's (1965) essay do not give you?
2. Now, let's come at it from the literary perspective: One of the dangers of teaching this novel in an undergraduate literature course is that students are tempted to diagnose the

protagonist and to see that as an 'endpoint' for analysis. How can we 'recover' this novel and this character from the psychological diagnosis as the 'answer' and make the diagnosis the 'beginning point' for analysis?

I was proud of the study questions and I was genuinely curious about how they might respond, as I was uncertain as to how I would respond. I was very fond of the novel and found it very well-written and 'evocative' in way that I could not really describe adequately (without, frankly, using the term OCD). I was unprepared for the participants' response to the novel. However, before I dive into the experience of walking into that seminar room, I will provide a brief summary of the novel.

In the prologue to the novel we hear a bedtime story that Mona's father tells her when she is ten years old. In the story each family member (as decreed by the town's leaders) must sever a limb in order to save the family, thus making the act of amputation a controlling metaphor of the whole novel (pp. 1-4). This is again emphasized at the beginning of Part One of the novel, which begins in Mona's voice: "On my twentieth birthday, I bought myself an ax" (p.7). We are thus introduced into Mona Gray's world, the 'my own' to which the novel's title refers.

She introduces us throughout the first few chapters to her father, a former track star from whom she has inherited her own gift of speed and with whom she spends her childhood running. Coincident with Mona turning ten (and the traumatizing choices in bedtime stories), her father had fallen ill with an undiagnosed kind of melancholy, a colourlessness that had locked her, her mother, and father into a kind of collective grey inertia for the next ten years. His dis-ease had also precipitated Mona's penchant for quitting, she quit everything - running, piano playing, desserts, and relationships. She metaphorizes the quitting as a form of amputation, recalling both the bedtime story and the ax: "It's a fine art, when you think about it," she says, "to quit well requires an intuitive sense of beauty; you have to feel the moment of turn, right when desire makes an appearance, here is the instant to be severed, whack" (p. 9). Quitting is a wonderful example of Angyal's (1965) pattern of non-commitment.

The only things that Mona does not quit are her compulsion to knock on wood and her obsessions with numbers (and with thinking about her father's mortality and, indeed, death in general). After her mother beseeches her to move away and claim her own life she takes an apartment around the corner from her parents and takes a job as the local elementary school's math teacher, and becomes

particularly attached to the second grade class and specifically to one student Lisa Venus, whose own mother is dying of cancer. Mona's carefully constructed and constricted world and quest for order begins to disintegrate when she brings her newly acquired ax to school and hangs it on the wall of her classroom, telling the second graders that although "people sometimes use it to chop wood ... we're going to use it as a 7" (p. 88).

The ax becomes the central object around which the plot and character development hinge. When Mona first sees the ax she compares it to a "lover made from steel and wood" (p. 7), she greets it when she comes home from work, "Hello, beautiful tool," and views it as the "weapon ... every young lady should have ... around the house" (p. 25), and just prior to displaying it at school fantasizes about using it to amputate one of her body parts: "I could change my life, right here ... The ax felt so good in my hands, so strong and real, so regular and steady" (p. 83). The ax takes on multiple meanings and use values for Mona as she appropriates it in different contexts and moods to locate a kind of anchor amidst the tumultuous waves of emotion and change she experiences in her new job and new-ish life. While the ax is a potential (and literal) weapon of self-destruction (or for her the self-sacrifice necessary to save the family), it also becomes the catalyst for unexpected, and potentially devastating, change when one of the second graders nearly severs her own leg with it toward the end of the novel. The object that held so much solidity, reality, potential for order and control is wrested from Mona's hands and unleashes chaos. However, it also realizes (makes real) Mona's fears and externalizes them; the ax is no longer simply 'her own' (with its multiple invisible signs that only she can determine and see). In the moment of near amputation, the ax ironically becomes a catalyst for connection. The injured child is rushed to the hospital and Mona is fired from her job. However, Lisa Venus, the favoured student and soon to be motherless child, finds Mona in the teachers' lounge and tries to keep her company by mimicking Mona's wood-knocking tics, again real-izing and making visible what Mona has always assumed was the invisible sign of 'her own'. When Lisa's knocking turns self-destructive and she bashes her head into the wall, Mona steps outside of her world to save the child.

I kept holding her as tight as I could, fierce as a vice, and she said, I wanted to cut off MY arm, I wanted to do it ... I wanted to bleed all over the carpet, I want to have chemotherapy, I want to have no hair, I want to be in the hospital too, she's going to have to die all by herself ... and it was my turn to talk but I kept holding her close and I have nothing to say ... No matter how many times she kept her

mother company, it was clear who was leaving, and who was staying put. (p. 193)

Through this interaction Lisa becomes visible to Mona in a way she has not been before (in fact, earlier in the novel, Mona is actually jealous that Lisa's mother has a clear diagnosis rather than static greyness in which her father lives). Mona's act of seeing Lisa has the added effect of making Mona visible to herself and of initiating a profound decision when Mona visits her dad and tells him quietly, "I'm sorry ... but I don't think I can keep you company anymore" (p. 229).

In the final page of the novel, Mona retells the opening bedtime story to Lisa Venus, but with an important difference. Rather than sacrificing a body part for the family, the daughter of the family announces her decision to move away. She invites others to join her and when they hesitate, she simply says, "Bye ... I'll be next town over" (p. 242) and walks off into the bright sunshine. "I don't want your company like that" (p. 191) Mona has earlier told Lisa when she slams her head into the door frame. This moment marks the beginning of a new kind of authorship or voice as well as the introduction of a new kind of keeping company that Mona had not been able to realize before, a keeping company that is based on connection and shared experience rather than a shared quitting or a shared path to self-destruction.

I was excited when I entered my classroom that evening. However, I was met with an unusual silence. The students glanced at each other, almost furtively, almost angrily. I then asked them to talk about the novel and referred to the study questions, thinking, erroneously, that they did not quite know where to begin. Then it started. The following is a composite sampling of some of the comments:

OK, I have been teaching for 30 years and there is no WAY a teacher would ever be able to bring an ax into a classroom and hang it on the wall. Especially a second grade classroom.

What was she thinking?

I'm sorry but those second graders did NOT act like REAL second graders. I mean, there is precocious, and then there is just unrealistic!

Lisa Venus has way too much insight for a girl her age.

This is the strangest town I have ever heard of. What's with all the numbers hanging on the trees?

These comments went on and on. It is important to remember that these were sophisticated readers. They had analyzed Freud's (1905) *Dora* in a way that rivalled some graduate-level discussions in which I had participated. They had thrown themselves into *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) passionately and had suspended disbelief from the first frame. Jews as mice; Nazis as cats. No problem. In fact, it was profoundly effective in its simplicity.

Their response to this novel made me feel like I had entered the wrong classroom. The vehemence with which they wanted to dis-engage from the novel and dis-identify with the narrative voice was, at first, a little frustrating. I started to give a mini-lecture on allegory, frantically flipping pages to show them what I had felt was the simple brilliance of Bender's use of metaphor – using the shifting meanings of the ax as an example. The more I tried to convince them, the more firmly they dug their heels into the 'real' and how this novel just did not seem even to approximate reality. I finally asked out loud:

Since when did you all become such literal readers? We all agreed that *Maus* hovers uneasily between fiction and nonfiction and you were fine with that. You all agreed that if you knocked on Art Spiegelman's door and a man-sized mouse did not, in fact, answer it, you would still embrace the deep humanity in the text.

To which they responded:

OK, but who would even hire Mona to teach children? You need to have the following credentials to even be considered ...

At this point I sat back and just listened and I felt a dawning sense of what was emerging in the classroom, which seemed to be very close to the neurotic style that Angyal (1965) and Bender (2000) both work to describe. Indeed, rather than articulating metaphors of personal identification with Mona or the events of the novel (the gratifying experiences that Kuiken et al. (2004) report in their research on the experience of literary reading), a kind of obsession with the 'real' emerged. It was as if they were trying to establish a set of rules within which we could discuss this novel, or a set of rules through which to assess the value of a work of fiction. For them, the climax of the child's leg wound subsumed the rest of the novel, such that some of them had actually forgotten that important events occur after she is rushed to the hospital. In fact, very few of them remembered Mona's act of self-determination in relation to her father or the retelling of the bedtime story and, if they had, they overlooked the importance of the different ending that Mona gives to the child

Lisa, or the fact that Mona and Lisa represent an important doubling throughout the novel (certainly a topic for another paper).

As I started to point out some of these observations to them I read out loud from Angyal (1965), "One can view the devices used by the patients as having four main objectives: To reduce confusion by making clear-cut divisions, to achieve a synthesis of opposites, to evolve rules to live by, to override confusion" (p. 185). Their rigid assessments based on literal thinking overrode the metaphorical complexity of the novel and of Mona's own movement out of such a rigid style. Ironically, in their dis-identification through not only cutting themselves off from the possibility of figurative levels of meaning within the novel but also cutting off (or severing) the ending from the rest of the novel, they began to enact (if not articulate) a more profound identification with the narrator. Like Mona my students eschewed metaphor for a strict adherence to the real. While I have read the ax as a metaphor because of its shifting and multiple meanings and because of its function as a catalyst for movement and change, in a way the narrative voice actually refuses the metaphorical. For Mona the ax, which takes on the role of a lover, a tool, a weapon, and a number seven, never really loses its literalness as ax. Just as my students could not escape its ax-ness, neither can Mona, even as she insists on its seven-ness. I would also argue that the neurotic style in which Mona lives is a kind of hyper-literal way of being. Mona cannot just imagine herself severing a limb or metaphorically sever a limb for the sake of the family, she feels compelled to actually sever a limb. She feels compelled to knock on wood to solidify, to act out her compulsions; her magical thinking is not just thought, it must be enacted. In a way, my students' refusal to engage with the metaphorical was a more accurate response, but accurate only insofar as it was also mirroring or a mimicking of the narrative voice.

"It's funny," one of the more vociferous students said, after a long silence in the classroom, "I feel like we were sort of diagnosing this novel as, itself, pathological". I reflected that Mona assumes herself to be both doctor and patient; she creates her own treatment by generating her 'own' signs. Through doing so she encloses herself within her own world. She is a reader of the world but only in terms of her own self and her own fear. It is difficult to 'keep company' with Mona throughout much of the novel, but this is part of the point. Although some of the students remained sceptical and quiet, many of the other students began talking about the experience of reading the novel and the growing anxiety they experienced as events unfolded. One student said, "When we read novels, we're sort of invited to see the

world through the eyes of the narrator ... and in this case I really didn't want to".

I have since thought about this comment in relation to clinical work. When we read a novel we are invited to identify; similarly when we sit with a client in therapy we feel called to respond (whether directly or indirectly, silently or otherwise). What is evoked in us as readers of literary texts is different from what is evoked in us as clinicians, perhaps in part because the reading experience is unmediated by what Martin Buber, in his 1957 dialogue with Carl Rogers, claims is always intrinsic to a therapist-client relationship - a kind of power-differential between the well and the sick or the helper and the one in need of help. However, most of us have sat with clients who live with very rigid styles, akin to Mona's (akin to Richard's), and have felt a kind of anxiety and right-wrong dualistic thinking come over us. Instead of simply (or not so simply) chalking this up to counter transference, I would rather refer back to Collins' (1988) "man in two worlds, holding the rope of his tie/ as the suicide of lovers saturates a page" (pp. 31-32)

We live in two worlds, we always live in multiple worlds, at once. These worlds are always already co-constituting each other. The act of literary reading can give us endless access to different worlds and the experience of identification as well as dis-identification (in fact the latter may be, in some ways, more salient). This can elicit a kind of connectedness, a 'keeping company' (to use Mona's words) that may prove very valuable to the work of psychotherapy and phenomenological research.

Indeed, by the end of our seminar discussion participants were reflecting on the ways in which their experiences of reading the novel were akin to Mona's 'keeping company' with her father or Lisa's initial keeping company with Mona, a mode of keeping company where 'keeping company' becomes undifferentiated mirroring/mimicking. As we all re-read the end of the novel we realized that Mona locates a new way of 'keeping company' that becomes an invitation into what is possible, rather than a staving off what is feared. "I'll be in the next town over ..." (Bender, 2000, p. 242) the daughter in her bedtime story calls back. It is both an assertion of selfhood and an invitation to accompany one into the unknown.

What is important in the end of this novel is not what has been settled, but what has been left unsettled. Indeed, what was important in the end of the seminar was not that we all settled on a specific reading of the novel but that we were able to look at why reading the novel and our initial discussions of it were so unsettling. The class remained divided on whether

they 'liked' the novel or not but this, finally, became irrelevant.

It was really during this self-reflective part of our discussion, during which students reflected not only on the experience of reading but also on our initial discussion, when I began to see some implications of engaging this process for clinical work. The experience of reading literature can become a catalyst for psychotherapists entering into other worlds without being in the prescribed stance of 'helping' or diagnosing. The experience of evocation, in other words, can give us a new perspective on keeping company. In this process, the client, like the novel, becomes the other, separate from the self of the therapist (in all our empathy and well-intentioned

intentionality). This would lead to consideration of the experience of what is evoked by the client or the interaction in therapy, rather than primarily our experience of empathy (in other words, the extent to which we identify with our clients or elide the difference between us and them). Perhaps through drawing on this metaphor and experience of evocation we will remember to focus on what new worlds the client is making available to our experiencing in such a way that we can see her or him as well as ourselves in new lights. "I see all of us reading ourselves away from ourselves/ straining in circles of light to find more light" (Collins, 1988, p. 31-32).

### Referencing Format

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