The oceanic mind: a study of emotion in literary reading

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Chapter 4

Mood and Location

4.0 Introduction
In this second part, consisting of four chapters, I will consider four affective inputs that help create meaning during literary reading. Chapters five and six will deal respectively with the essentially sign-fed notions of literary ‘themes’ and ‘style’. In chapter seven, I will bring these inputs together and discuss them within a framework of affective and oceanic cognition. Before that, however, in this chapter I shall focus on two pre-reading, mind-fed, affective cognitive factors: ‘mood’ and ‘location’. The first pertains to all of the as yet unfocused thinking that takes place once a person ‘decides’ to read literature: the second concerns the place in which a person chooses to position his or her body in anticipation of the literary reading experience. This is usually the final stage of the pre-reading situation just prior to the hands opening the book and the eyes meeting the page. Both mood and location have been neglected in previous analytic accounts of literary discourse processing. They should be properly explored because their role in literary meaning construction can be crucial. The addition and proper consideration of two such factors will enhance the range and depth of contextualised stylistic analysis and will better validate the claims of empirical scholars of literature. Finally, since methodology is at the heart of this chapter, I shall, after I have dealt with mood and location, conduct a short discussion on the challenges that methodology poses with regard to literary reading experimentation that seeks to record valid emotive responses. I do this here and not elsewhere because it is within the context of a discussion on mood and location that the real methodological dilemmas become all too evident.

4.1 Mood as a pre-literary-reading affective input
Literature, one could say, is all about words.1 From my position as an experienced university lecturer in classical rhetoric, literary stylistics and creative writing, i.e. someone who is fully aware of the persuasive and emotive effects that words and texts can have, and do have, on readers, I believe that literary reading is about far more than just lexis and syntax. This is not an easy admission for a rhetorician to make — equivalent perhaps to a barrister saying that justice is about more than just laws and statutes. Nonetheless, it is true. Readers create meaning not solely by perceiving and processing words on the page; they are also affected by a whole scale of interactive, largely non-textual, phenomena that constitute important inputs that go into the meaning-making confluence of literary discourse processing. This is what this chapter will show, beginning with the phenomenon of ‘mood’.

When I use the term ‘mood’ in this work I do not mean it entirely in the strict psychological sense of the word as it was described in a previous chapter, namely affective states of relatively long duration often elicited by an internal event (Frijda 252). Rather, by mood I mean a primarily subconscious, affective and somatic pre-reading state that plays a distinctive, important role in the reading process along with other such phenomena as location, themes, style and LRI. In effect, mood is a positive kind of feeling that a reader can get once a mainly subconscious ‘decision’ has been made to engage with a literary work. This is not a simple process. Writer and essayist Alberto Manguel confirms this: meaning in literary reading comes about “through a vastly entangled method of learned significances, social conventions, previous readings, personal experiences and private tastes” (37). The diversity of pre-reading moods, as I have defined it, is described by the twentieth-century novelist and academic Harold Brodkey:

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1 I am purposely omitting the trend of ‘multi-modal’ novels, involving text, drawings and pictures.
The act of reading as it really occurs is obscure; the decision to read a book in a real minute, how one selects the book, how one flirts with the choice, how one dawdles on the odd path of getting it read and then reread, the oddities of rereading, the extreme oddities of the procedures of continuing with or without interruptions to read, getting ready to read a middle chapter in its turn after going off for a while, then getting hold of the book physically, having it in one’s hand, letting one’s mind fill with thoughts in a sort of warm-up for the exercise of mind to come — one rifflies through remembered scenes from this and other books, one diddles with half-memories and other pleasures and usefulnesses, one wonders if one can afford to read, one considers the limitations and possibilities of this book, one is humiliated in anticipation or superior (sic) or thrilled in anticipation, or nauseated in retrospect or as one reads. One has a sense of talk and of reviews and essays and of anticipation or dread and the will to be affected by the thing of reading, affected lightly or seriously. One settles one’s body to some varying degree and then one enters on the altered tempos of reading, the subject to being played upon, one passes through phases, starting with reacting to or ignoring the cover of the book and the opening lines (101-2).²

As an avid reader of fiction I too recognise such flirting with choices in book selection; the dawdling on the pathway to the reading event; the getting hold of a book physically and letting my mind fill with thoughts in a warm-up for the mental exercises to come. I can also recognise a kind of automatic riffling through remembered scenes from previously read books and playing with half-memories. I too have felt thrilled in anticipation and have had a sense of talk, reviews and essays. And perhaps most important of all, I have had the subconscious desire to be affected intensely by the very act of reading literature. This description comes very close to capturing what I mean by mood as it touches on all the important, often unconscious, preparatory affective and somatic issues; all of which are grounded to some extent in prior experience. These include the pre-decision-making processes, the mental projection of states of satisfaction and the flashbacks before moving toward the physical preparation of ‘settling one’s body’.

Let us return to mainstream cognitive psychology for the moment. The general principle that emotion comes into being as a result of an interaction between many associated physical and mental phenomena is, as we saw, a view also held in the social sciences. As Frijda puts it:

> Emotions are rarely, if ever, elicited by an isolated stimulus. Rather, the emotional effectiveness of sensory stimuli depends upon the spatial, temporal, and meaning context in which they occur, the adaptation level upon which they impinge, and the expectations with which they clash or correspond (267).

From the previous section we learned a number of things specifically about mood in its default psychological sense. These included the notion of ‘mood congruity effects’: if a person feels happy, then that person is more likely to remember things learned and stored while in a happy state of mind, than things learned and stored in a negative one (Frijda 121). We also saw that positive affective states lead to better retrieval of positive material. This is essentially what is known as mood-state-dependent retrieval. Isen expanded on this by claiming that if affective states are essentially retrieval cues, then the events and experiences that are stored in memory must be tagged according to the feelings that are associated with them (218). Oatley and Jenkins echo this: “moods are specific modes of brain organization, and so specific moods preferentially give access to memories of incidents experienced in the same emotional state” (277). From this, Oatley and Jenkins concluded that “emotions are heuristics” (280).

In the previous discussion we also saw how a person’s mood affects the style and performance of how he/she cognitively processes objects in the world (Forgas 130; Fiedler and

² From “Reading, the Most Dangerous Game” (in Gilbar 102).
Bless 163) and how moods can influence beliefs (Clore and Gasper 39). I also briefly touched on Damasio’s notion of ‘background feeling’, which he differentiates from mood because it is what he calls a body state that exists between emotions: “the image of the body landscape” (151). In addition to these previously mentioned mood-based cognitive phenomena there are also other relevant cognitive concepts. One of these is known as ‘set’, which can be defined as “any preparatory cognitive activity that precedes thinking and perception”. Can literary reading involve a kind of ‘set’ that can be defined as an anterior, embodied, neural process? Are there processes active before or even long before the full flood of affective cognition arrives in consciousness and working memory? The idea that much unconscious cognitive work takes place before conscious cognitive work may seem far-fetched, but many experiments in neurobiology have supported this general principle. One famous experiment conducted by Benjamin Libet showed that the intention to do something takes place after the brain has actually started doing it. Mood, as a pre-literary reading input, must also be linked to such notions as desire and anticipation. From the perspective of the first of these, mood can be said to be a kind of subconscious desire: a longing to become emoted through the abstract, yet seemingly deeply personal, medium of fiction. In this sense, reading fiction is addictive in neuro-chemical terms. But what is the nature of this desire? I believe that it is not only a desire to be ‘transported’ to other worlds, as Richard J. Gerrig has cogently argued in Experiencing Narrative Worlds; nor is it wholly to experience emotion at “a safe aesthetic distance” as Thomas J. Scheff has maintained in Catharsis in Healing Ritual and Drama. Rather, it is something far more fundamental and philosophical, as I will set out in depth in a later chapter.

Mood can also be viewed as an emotive form of anticipation. Anticipation may seem to be at the threshold of emotion rather than being a full-blown emotion itself. Evidence, however, would suggest otherwise. Frija and Mesquita, for example, have argued that emotion anticipations are real felt emotions (58). In order to be maximally affected in the course of reading literature I believe it is beneficial to first have experienced such affective anticipation of the reading event itself. It will be recalled from an earlier chapter how Frija suggested that

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3 Forgas has also conducted work on how mood affects such things as perception (1993), judgements and memory (1995) and verbal communication (1999).

4 In his discussion of background feelings Damasio sets them in a distinctly oceanic framework of mind processes; in his own words “as thought contents ebb and flow” (151).

5 Solso (522). This is ‘mental set’. ‘Perceptual set’ pertains to how humans tend to impose patterns on random data.

6 Libet’s consciousness experiments in the early 1980s showed how the decision to act comes nearly a whole second after the motor areas have started preparing themselves for action: (see, for example, Libet 1981). This is a very long time in neurobiology for a stimulus to be made conscious. Fellow neuroscientist Susan Greenfield sums up the enormous implications of these findings with the term “staggering” (184).

7 Frija sets out a three-step scheme with regard to desire: (i) desire is engendered by the thought of, or encounter with, a fit object not in possession, (ii) emotions proper arise from events that are encountered on the way to possession, and (iii) enjoyments arise when being there; they respond to unobstructed possession (283).

8 See Gerrig on the phenomenon of ‘being transported’ by means of literary texts (157-95). Scheff describes how, when reading about events in literary texts, autobiographical memories can become channelled into the affective meaning-making process: “When we cry over the fate of Romeo and Juliet, we are reliving our own personal experiences of overwhelming loss, but under new and less severe conditions. The experience of vicarious loss, in a properly designed drama, is sufficiently distressful to awaken the old distress. It is also sufficiently vicarious, however, so that the emotion does not feel overwhelming” (13).
anticipation intensifies emotional experience in that it “considerably extends the time period over which a given event exerts emotional influence”; he added that it “casts its shadow forward” (292). He also stated that anticipation affects an emotional response when it comes, since it permits, among other things, preparatory actions like “relaxing and bracing”, giving one the opportunity for advance coding or recoding of events (292-3). In a similar vein Zull wrote that we get enjoyment from anticipating imagined movement and the example he used to illustrate this was literary discourse processing: in his own words “[anticipation] is probably the most important thing that keeps us reading a good book” (61).

Anticipation in the domain of literary reading was also an important concept in the reception studies of the 1970s, also known as reception aesthetics. It featured prominently in the work of Hans Robert Jauss, who wrote on the phenomenon of readers’ ‘horizon of expectations’. The basic idea is grounded in the idea of ‘assumptions’. There is a predominant social side to the theory but an individual aspect is also present. The former involves readers having shared assumptions about such things as genres, structure conventions and culture in texts. If the text activates these in a reader, this will lead to a kind of reformulation of those expectations. Similarly, at an individual level, a reader can be said to bring his/her assumptions to a text. The discovery of them in that text can help to bring about better personal understanding. Jauss also said that a text will be different for every reader both cross-culturally and historically through time. But whereas Jauss’s ‘horizon of expectations’ only comes into play once the text has been engaged with, I argue that those expectations and assumptions are already having their ‘shadows cast forward’, to paraphrase Fridja. In short, the anticipation of textual meaning based on prior experience, and all the full-blown emotion that comes with it, will already be active before the first lexical item of the text is visually processed.

Addressing the role of prior mood and the affective expectations of certain literary genres, van den Broek et al. say:

Activation of a schema results in top-down processes, that is, the generation of extensive expectations and inferences. For example, when a reader is told that he or she will read a fairy tale, general knowledge about the content and structure of fairy tales may be activated and influence the interpretation of the text that follows (89). It seems likely to me that this situation will be the case for many experienced readers of literature as can be seen from the earlier Brodkey quote, which lends substance to van den Broek et al.’s claims of “extensive expectations and inferences”.

Since this discussion on pre-reading mood has now landed in the domain of discourse psychology it is pertinent to reconsider how everyday language appears to be processed. It will be recalled from chapter one how discourse processing is often considered either immediate or cumulative/incremental. What I am suggesting with my concept of mood is that in certain

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9 One of the most comprehensive versions of Jauss’s ideas is to be found in “Toward an Aesthetic of Reception” (1982).

10 Other important criteria were social significances such as what the reader knew of the author and the time in which he/she was writing. Similar work has been conducted in cognitive psychology. Writing on authorial intentions, i.e. what a reader believes intentions to be, rather than what they actually were, Gibbs (1999) argues that this is an important input in literary meaning making.

11 I expand on this in chapter seven.

12 Similar claims have been put forward as well by other discourse psychologists (see, for example, Zwaan and Brown 1996).
affective literary discourse processing situations, an important aspect of that processing takes place before the immediacy of first eye contact with the words on the page. In effect, there is plausibly a notion of pre-immediacy in such anticipated emotive encounters with fiction. However, if the starting point of affective literary reading is not when light strikes the retina after being reflected off the semiotic symbols on the page, then what is? In short, what strikes or rather ‘floods’ the mind first? I believe it is inferences, memories and expectations, all of which are saturated with emotion and pouring into the working memory and the buffer-zones that feed it. In effect, these are Manguel’s “previous readings”, “personal experiences” and “private tastes”; they are Brodkey’s “remembered scenes from previously read books”, “half-memories” and “the sense of talk, reviews and essays”; and they are Jauss’s “horizon of expectations for the individual reader”. This is also the “generation of extensive expectations” that van de Broek et al. spoke of in the context of particularly literary discourse processing. Hence, mood, in contexts of affective literary discourse processing, can be pre-immediate. The inferences are not minimalist as Ratcliff and McKoon thought, nor are they limitless as Graesser has argued; rather, they are flexible yet predictable patterns akin to Bartlett’s claims on conventionality in recall. In sum, therefore, mood is in its initial state a mind-fed affective input. It is initially mind-fed in that affective cognition is flooding through the embodied mind long before hands are brought into contact with the book and eyes with words on the page. This act of “letting one’s mind fill with thoughts in a warm-up for the exercise of mind to come”, to cite Brodkey, is a top-down process. However, all those visions, images and anticipations are based on previous physical and perceptual experiences, albeit ones that are now significantly altered through the diffuse storage system that long-term human memory employs.\(^\text{13}\)

I have shown above how both the humanities and the social sciences seem to offer support for the idea that expectations and mood that occur prior to the actual reading event can influence the interpretation, meaning-making and reading experience itself. But how might such claims stand up to responses from a group of readers? The next section will seek to address this question.

4.2 Pre-reading mood: A reader-response experiment
Question eight of my NRQ had two parts. The first asked for simple yes/no responses while in the second, more important, section subjects were asked to elaborate. Less than half the subjects chose to do so. My basic prediction was that a good majority of responses would react affirmatively to the statement and that this would be reflected in the qualitative data inasmuch as tangible references to my claim, and the theories upon which I have based it, would be present.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) During the actual reading process, mood will be affected by styles and themes but can also, in turn, affect them.

\(^{14}\) A breakdown of these students and the conditions under which this experiment took place can be found in the previous chapters. Throughout this chapter, and all of the ones that will follow, I no longer make the distinction as I did earlier between the responses of the VU subjects and the RA subjects. My reasoning behind this is that the RA group, with just nine participants, is, in hindsight, too small to be able to say anything interesting. Hence, there are few worthwhile comparative observations to be made between the two groups.
NRQ – Q.8 Prior to starting to read a novel do you think that your mood has ever affected the actual reading event itself?

Initial responses

Yes = 29  No = 7

These initial responses (80.5%) seem to lend some support to my prediction. Of much greater importance is the qualitative data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>When I’m very happy it’s easier to see the happy/positive side of a story. When I’m feeling a bit down, it’s easier to just notice the negative/depressing side of a story. So my mood can really influence the way I read a novel and it can also influence the way I think about the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>If I am in a good mood, I have less trouble appreciating a novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I think that the mood has a big effect – maybe not on reading as such, but definitely on what I remember from the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>For instance, I was once in a very happy and energetic mood when I started to read a book that was rather serious and dramatic. For me, my mood didn’t go together with the moods of the people in the book. So I put the book down because I couldn’t identify with the book’s characters. However, when I picked it up at a later time, when I was in a more serious and calm mood, I found the book to be wonderfully written and I found it very interesting and gripping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My mood influences which book I read. It can also account for why I stop reading a book after just a couple of pages because it doesn’t match the way I am feeling at that moment in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I think one’s mood always affects the reading somewhat, mine certainly does, although the effect tends to turn around very quickly, i.e. the reading will have a stronger effect on my mood than the other way around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>There is always more than one reading of a text possible and my gut feeling tells me that my mood could very well influence this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sometimes you have to be in the mood to read something. It is not that you can read anything in any mood. I have read the same book more than once in the same period and it turned out that I could appreciate the book more in a certain period than another and vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sometimes I know I mustn’t start in a certain book, because my state of mind isn’t right. For example, in The Discovery of Heaven I must have a certain state of mind to start that book. Otherwise, I can’t enjoy it, and I can’t even read the book properly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>If I don’t feel right when I start to read a book, I will just stop because I won’t be able to get into it. If I read a book I am usually on vacation or at least do not have a lot of studying to do, my mind is clear and the book will help me to relax even more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>If I am in an emotional mood, it’s more likely I get emotional because of tragic or unhappy events in the book. If I’m very happy, I tend to laugh easier at jokes in the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>When I feel stressed out or sad/bad about something, then I cannot concentrate properly. My mind wanders off to what’s bothering me. That’s why I probably never was any good at obligatory reading. I did read the books, but not as well as I wanted to. Simply because I had to finish the book in a certain number of hours. I think I tend to read best when I’m happy and won’t get distracted by a sad thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>To be in the mood to read, feeling energetic, but always a little lonely, works for me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Brief discussion

Let us begin by observing that there is substantial evidence for the mood-congruency effect, the best examples of which are perhaps responses 1, 2 and 4. Also Forgas’s claim that the processing effects of mood may influence how observed information is attended to seems to be confirmed in a number of responses and is perhaps best represented in response number 1. Also Fiedler and Bless’s claim that mood and feeling states can influence cognitive performance appears to be
supported by response number 2 and others. There is also evidence for the cognitive
psychological phenomenon of ‘set’, i.e. ‘any preparatory cognitive activity that precedes thinking
and perception’, in responses 8, 9 and 10. Two responses appear to resonate Jauss’s horizon of
expectation theory. The first is number 8, which suggests that reading the same book in different
periods of one’s life can lead to different levels of appreciation. The second, respondent 7, added
a more personal aspect to Jauss’s theory by saying his/her gut feeling was that his/her mood could
influence the kind and number of readings that a text might offer.

However, with regard to my own claim of how I view mood in the pre-reading sense, the
evidence is at best sparse. It is now obvious to me in hindsight that the wording of my question
has set subjects thinking about the default sense of mood and, as a result, several respondents
spoke of mood in the more general sense: response number 6 is a prime example of this.
Notwithstanding, some responses seemed to fall in between what I meant and the more general
sense of mood. These included respondent 10 who indicated “if I don’t feel right when I start to
read a book, I will just stop because I won’t be able to get into it”. Another respondent stressed
the importance of mood by saying that it has a ‘big effect’ on what he/she remembers from a
book. The subject who provided response 5 confided that his/her mood “influences which books
he/she reads”, suggesting that the book must fit the mood and not the other way around.
Respondent 9 confessed that he/she cannot start a certain book until his/her ‘state of mind’ is in
the appropriate mode. Perhaps the most quixotic yet paradoxically pertinent response was number
13. That reader confided that he/she needed to be both “energetic” and “lonely” in order to read
literature. It is this state of what one might term fluvial nostalgia that embodies the underlying
concept of what I mean by mood. It also has a similar somatic profile to Damasio’s somatic
notion of ‘background feelings’.

In conclusion, the evidence here for my claim is limited. Nonetheless, from a more
general perspective, judging by the quality of some of the responses, we can provisionally
conclude, as respondent 6 does, that “one’s mood always affects the reading somewhat”. So
despite the mixed qualitative feedback, I am still inclined to believe that during literary discourse
comprehension, meaning-making starts long before a reader’s eyes encounter the words on the
page. In order to test this further I now wish to focus on what might be seen as a key aspect of
pre-reading mood that occurs at the end of the preparatory ‘cline’, so to speak. I am referring to
the moment just before the eyes meet the page and engage with the text. Brodkey alluded to it
when he spoke of “settling one’s body to some varying degree”: it is the essentially mind-fed
affective input of ‘location’.

4.4 Location as a pre-literary reading affective input
A central concern that can influence mood is the physical location that a reader chooses to place
his or her body in when reading. The place, time, and reasons for reading are of great importance.
Consider the following claim by Manguel:

Some books seem to demand particular positions for reading, postures of the reader’s body that in
turn require reading places appropriate for those postures … Often, the pleasure derived from
reading largely depends on the bodily comfort of the reader (151).15

Before starting to read for pleasure one often makes some kind of loose plan. Whether one reads
at home or on vacation; at night or during the day; in the summer or in the winter, readers are
wont to try and match the subject matter of the book with a designated place of reading, and
sometimes even vice versa. This can occur consciously or subconsciously. When people are about
to go on vacation, for example, they will try to ‘select’ books that may match both their mood and

15 In the first half of this citation Manguel is recalling the writer Colette’s views on reading.
destination. It seems that finding the right place to read for pleasure is important. This also includes securing conventional criteria like comfort, silence, solitude and good light.  

Let us backtrack and first review some facts about reading locations. It may seem counter-intuitive but the act of literary reading as we know it today is largely socially constructed. For a long time reading was always done indoors. Until the seventeenth and eighteenth-century, books in Europe were generally produced as leather-bound tomes to be read in libraries or in a person’s study. All this changed in the nineteenth century when certain editions of books became light enough to be read outdoors or while travelling. In the mid-nineteenth century the bookseller W. H. Smith & Son set up the first railway bookshop at Euston station in London. There, novels and short stories were sold from the ‘Routledge Railway Library’ series. But full reader mobility only came with the ‘invention’ of the pocket paperback, which was first launched by Penguin in 1935. Only ten books were chosen to be marketed in this format and at first it was far from a success: sales remained well under break-even levels. It was only when Woolworth’s stepped in and sold them in their chain of general stores alongside the tea, vegetables and biscuits that sales rose and the publishers became convinced that there was a profitable future in pocket paperbacks. This story shows that the kind of ‘curling up snugly with a book’ in a place of one’s choice in order to try to create ‘comfortable reading conditions of one’s own making’ became only recently possible. This illustrates again how much the affective cognitive act of reading is just as culturally and socially constructed as it is biologically and genetically engendered. The literary reading mind is a blend of our neurobiological nature and our social nurture.

I believe that when readers sit down in a comfortable location of their own choosing to read a book they experience subconscious echoes of where they came from and what made them. These are implicit, somatic, affective memory prompts. Manguel suggest something similar when he says the manner in which he personally interacts with the words on the page when he starts reading depends on ‘who he is and how he became who he is’ (38). Hence, literary reading does not start with a tabula rasa; rather, it is a process, which “is common and yet personal to the process of reconstruction” (Manguel 39). This inter-subjective idea of ‘common yet personal’ is something that has been tested and confirmed in discourse psychology. Indeed, there have been several studies that have highlighted the existence of inter-subjective affective responses in specific situations. For example, Martin A. Conway and Debra A. Bekerian have shown in their experiments from the 1980s that members of the same culture share a high degree of consensus over what affective states are readily associated with particular situational contexts. There seems to be no reason why a situational context of a literary reading experience should be any different. In light of this research it might be argued that readers know beforehand what kinds of affective states are achievable during literary reading situations.

Criteria like the size, the colour or the form of a book might seem to be completely superfluous to the facilitation and realisation of emotion during reading. But is this the case? Consider the following account:

My hands, choosing a book to take to bed or to the reading desk, for the train or for a gift, consider the form as much as the content. Depending on the occasion, depending on the place where I have

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16 What I have said here about reading largely holds for writing, editing and correcting too, as many teachers, scholars and writers will confirm.

17 See Manguel (141-47) for a more detailed overview of this development upon whose account my synopsis is based.

18 As I have argued in the previous chapter and will suggest later, these ‘echoes’ may plausibly be of the childhood home, of siblings, friends and parents, of those teachers who encouraged and inspired us as children, of friends with whom we might have discussed literature in the past, and a whole host of other emotive inputs. These cannot but affect both what we read and how we read it.
chosen to read, I prefer something small and cozy or ample and substantial. Books declare
themselves through their titles, their authors, their places in a catalogue or on a bookshelf, the
illustrations on their jackets; books also declare themselves through their size. At different times
and in different places I have come to expect certain books to look a certain way, and, as in all
fashions, these changing features fix a precise quality onto a book’s definition. I judge a book by
its cover. I judge a book by its shape (Manguel 125).

From this perspective, reading literature appears to have far more than a visual sensory
dimension. The tactile gripping and bending and folding of a book are also of importance. There
are most certainly readers who will refuse to engage with a novel produced in hardback, since this
‘flexibility deprivation’ would take away from their overall reading experience. In the above
statement there is also an implicit acknowledgment of the somatic role that the body plays in
literary reading: something that scientists like Kintsch and Damasio, judging by their earlier
comments, would not dispute.

The location of reading is important, not only for everyday readers like ourselves, but
also for many writers when they read. For example, as a girl, the French writer Colette read in
bed in order to create a safe and comforting haven for her reading experience. Reading in her
bedroom, however, would not just remain a childhood preoccupation, as Manguel notes:

Throughout her adult life, Colette would seek out this solitary reading-space ... she would set aside
(not always successfully) an area in which the only intrusions would be those she invited herself.
Now, stretched out in the muffled bed, holding the treasured book in both hands and propping it
up on her stomach she has established not only her own space but her own measure of time (150).

Reflecting on his own reading experience Manguel notes that he too read in a long succession of
beds from those in his childhood home, through those of hotels rooms, the bedrooms of strange
houses in towns or by the sea and the homes of his recent adult life. No matter where he was, he
could always read in bed, and that act had a kind of intangible sense of continuity to it. Reflecting
on this, he says “the combination of bed and book granted me a sort of home, which I could go
back to night after night, under whichever skies” (150). The very location involved in the
cognitive act of reading was for Manguel, from the very beginning, inscribed with an aspect of
being able to return to a sense of his childhood. Perhaps other literary readers will be able to
identify with some of the things Manguel says about his own reading habits and those of Colette,
as I do. I believe that like Colette we too may ‘seek out a solitary reading-space’, an area that has
been ‘set aside (sometimes unsuccessfully) in which the only intrusions would be those we invite
ourselves’. There we can ‘establish not only our own space but also our own measure of time’. Similarly, the combination of ‘bed and book’ — or even ‘favourite chair and book’— might grant us, like Manguel, “a kind of home” to which we can return no matter where we are or how old we become. These ideas are not as fanciful as they may first appear.

There are many more examples of writers with special locative reading habits. For instance,
Henry Miller confessed that all his best reading was done in the toilet, adding “there are certain
passages of Ulysses which can be read only in the toilet, if one wants to extract the full flavour of
them”, while Marguerite Duras did not like to read outdoors, especially on beaches or in
gardens. A final example I will give here concerns the writer and academic Stanley Elkin, who
claims that when he was younger he spent the whole 1958/1959 academic year reading in bed.21

19 It is important to note that the bedroom has not always been a private place in Western culture. This too
is a relatively recent cultural and social development. So reading in bed was not always possible in the
same private sense as it is these days.

20 Cited in Manguel (152).
He was not ill. He was in fact preparing to take his preliminary exams for his Ph.D. and he only left his bed for reasons of personal hygiene or to teach rhetoric to first-year undergraduates. This was the place he could best read all the novels on the required reading list for his examinations. Elkin was not reading for pleasure, but as a kind of side-effect of his year spent reading in bed he found that in later life he could read nowhere else: not at the beach, nor on park benches, nor on airplanes or trains, nor in waiting rooms and not even in libraries — which, in later life as a professor of modern literature must have been something of a handicap. Thus it seems that for many readers location of the reading is far from a trivial matter. Perhaps there is some locative and bodily reason as to why only certain books can be read in certain places? Judging by several of these self-reflective accounts, that reason must involve to some extent satisfaction and emotional gratification. As Manguel observes: “there are books I read in armchairs, there are books I read at desks, there are books I read in subways, on streetcars and on buses” (151).

The majority of the above accounts come from literature and literary theory. However, cognitive psychology also has something to say about the role of bodily comfort in processing situations. Frijda, for example, suggests that bodily comfort is seen as one of the unlearned stimuli for positive emotions that can often be seen as an elicitor of desire (275). So, contrary to what one might think, one does not need to be tense in order to be ready for emotion. As Frijda has also pointed out, muscle tension and action readiness can be uncoupled, as indeed they are in Eastern martial arts (91). This physiological state appears to fit the optimum condition needed for affective acts of literary reading. I believe that just as animals make a warm, safe nest for themselves, so too do we often go in search of the ‘comfy chair’ or ‘warm bed’ when we want to create the optimal conditions both before and while reading literature. The desire to be emot ed during literary reading therefore appears to go hand in hand with the preparatory need to position one’s body in an optimally favoured space or location.

The significance of the physical position and location of one’s body in all kinds of acts of perception and remembering is something that has been highlighted in the text processing work of Walter Kintsch. In Comprehension Kintsch reflects on how the self is represented in working memory. He says that this ‘sense of self’ is not fixed or vivid, rather it is being constantly reconstructed. More specifically, Kintsch also suggests that a person’s memory content is determined by his/her physical location: “the memories that make up myself are probably not entirely the same when I am at home with my family or when I am speaking at a professional meeting” (411). If this is true then LRI in a place of comfort will differ from LRI in an ad hoc reading environment. In order for all this to work, short-term memory must also have somatic markers continually present together with other more loadable and re-loadable cognitive ones (410). Kintsch also points out that the sense that we have of our own body is context-dependent: “there is the constant background feeling of one’s body – its position, tone and feeling. There is the self that is reading” (411). This is essentially Damasio’s notion of somatic markers: the idea that the body develops specific feelings associated with certain cognitive tasks. Of course, if we assume that somatic markers are an essential aspect of working memory, then we must also

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22 It is interesting to note that when a person is in a relaxed, awakened state they are said to produce what are known as ‘alpha waves’ in the brain (Myers 253).

23 We must remember that this is not a universal biological phenomenon but a socially constructed one too.

24 In his Poetics of Space Bachelard also speaks of the physical pleasure experienced when we consider withdrawing into a favourite corner or space. He alludes as well to the primal, animal-like nature of this procedure (91).

25 In chapter eleven I will seek to account for this.
conclude that bodily feeling becomes an important aspect of knowledge, beliefs, perception and language, as Damasio cogently argues throughout *Descartes’ Error*. Convincing evidence that language and the body are linked is provided by cognitive linguistics, not least by the works of Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999), Johnson (1987) and Gibbs (2006). If we were to take this and apply it, not just to everyday occurrences of discourse comprehension, as Kintsch does, but also to literary ones, this would show how the location of a reading event will help determine which somatic nodes in long-term memory are primed for activation. For example, reading while sitting in a favourite comfortable chair in a trusted environment will in all probability lead to quite different mind-fed inputs from reading in a sterile, unfamiliar setting. These affective cognitive, somatic inputs, which may change the affective content of a reading experience, will have their own form and content irrespective of the genre, content and style of the literary text that is to follow. So reading a novel, for example, as part of an experiment in a laboratory or classroom is unlikely to produce the crucial LRI content, and all the affective and somatic aspects that go into it, that reading at home would. In sum, bodily comfort appears to be a significant component of affective cognition in literary reading processes. But how valid is this claim?

4.5 Some reader-responses on location

Question six of my NRQ had two parts. The first was a simple yes/no response, while the second contained a section in which subjects were asked to elaborate, if they had chosen the ‘yes’ option. Twenty-two chose to do so. I predicted that a good majority would respond affirmatively to the proposition.

NRQ Q6  
If you want to read a novel that you have very much looked forward to reading, does it matter to you, and to the quality of your subsequent reading experience, where you actually read it, i.e. where you decided to physically put/position your body for the reading process?

**Initial responses**

Yes = 27  No = 9

This 75% affirmative result is slightly less than I expected. As always, my interest is in the qualitative data.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>If I want to read a book I’ve really looked forward to I find myself a quiet place where I can sit comfortably and where I will not be disturbed. I would never read such a book for instance on the train because then I am not really able to ‘dive’ into the book</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>When I am in a comfortable situation (not too much noise, etc) I can concentrate much better which makes me enjoy reading more</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>I would not be able to concentrate on reading a book elsewhere than in my room. Especially if it is a book I have been looking forward to reading. I am even used to locking my door while reading</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The place where I decide to sit should be somewhere comfortable where I can curl up and read the book in peace; for instance, a couch or a big deep chair. Also, the spot should be in the sunlight; in natural light</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I would want to read that novel in either a very comfy chair or love seat or in bed at night. I cannot just sit down in the train and read it. I get too distracted to be able to fully enjoy the novel</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>It has to be somewhere reasonably comfortable and for me it is also important that I know I’ll have plenty of time to read (that I don’t have something urgent to do or have be</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>I have experienced that I can’t read in places where there is a lot of noise as good as I can in silent places. Also reading in bed or in hot/sunny places makes me feel tired and decreases my attention.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>It is more relaxed to read a book sitting on the couch, than it is when you are sitting in a car. I always prefer reading a book in the garden when the sun shines, this makes it possible for me to really ‘get into’ the book.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>I cannot start reading a book that I have looked forward to just anywhere. I need to be at home and also need to have some time so that I can read at least the first few chapters before having to put it down again.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I always wonder how people can read in trains, busses and aeroplanes. I have tried doing so many times but have never really enjoyed it. I tend to be easily distracted by people and things around me and then I need to reread parts of what I have read because I cannot continue reading while knowing that I have not completely absorbed those parts. I always have the fear of having missed something that is crucial for the story. I do like reading outside, for instance at the beach, but then early in the morning or late at night – again to make sure that there are not too many people there to invade my reading experience. In the US I used to love reading in the college church and in the stacks of the library. Also, at the fountain, because the constant sound of water had a soothing effect.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>The place I always do all my reading is in bed. I like to make it comfy and cosy and cuddle up big time with lots of pillows and blankets/covers and hot chocolate.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>If I look forward to reading a book, I want to take the time to read it. I probably won’t start reading it in the metro or something, or somewhere very noisy, where I will get distracted but somewhere I can pay all my attention to the book. Probably my couch or my bed.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>I like to read when I am on vacation in quiet places with not too many people bothering me. I also like to read at home, alone, in bed. Some people I know read when they take the tram to work or to the university but for me that’s not quiet enough.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>When I look forward to reading a book, let’s say the new Harry Potter, I want to give it my full attention. I don’t want to miss a thing. So I read it when I’m alone. I probably won’t answer the phone when I want to spend a couple of hours reading. I don’t want to be disturbed.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>I love to read in bed or in a place where I feel safe. But I do read in planes and on trains as well. These last two probably out of boredom, and to keep my mind busy to prevent thinking about ‘what will happen if’ scenarios. I definitely prefer the former: in bed and places where I feel safe.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>It has to be quiet and comfortable, i.e. a sofa.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>I read best when I am alone with some very soft music in the background, either in a comfortable chair or on the balcony in the sun. Sometimes I can enjoy reading on the train but there is often too much noise and talk to concentrate for long.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>I like to lie down on the sofa or in bed with lots of cushions. I need to be nice and comfortable. And have my feet up.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>I read best when I am at home on the sofa or in bed. When I start reading a novel that I really want to read then I almost always start at home. When I am sitting for example in a metro/train, I can’t concentrate that well. With a really good novel I want to be able to concentrate really well, because I don’t want to miss one word of it.</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>I usually read in or on my bed, either in the evening before going to sleep or during the day (for lack of a chair or couch). I tend to really ‘install’ myself, complete with a cup of tea, cushions at my back, feet up and music on.</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>When I read I prefer to lie on my bed or sit in a comfy chair where I can relax.</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>I think when starting to read a novel that I have been looking forward to I would like to be in a place where I feel comfortable and peaceful. I have to be able to focus my attention and let go the ego to become part of a story which is different to mine.</td>
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4.6 Brief discussion

Embodied in the central question to which my subjects responded was my prediction that the place a person decides to position their body in prior to reading literature would be of importance to the reading event itself. From my subsequent observations, it became clear that especially the notions of comfort, solitude, silence and good light would play a significant role in the positioning of the body. Several of the qualitative responses above seemed to agree with this. My comfort claims, echoing the personal experiences of Manguel, and the writer Colette, in her *bateau-lit*, and Frijda’s ideas on bodily comfort as a stimulus of positive emotion and desire, might be divided into two categories: comfort in the sense of relaxation and comfort in the sense of consolation. Several subjects appeared to support this in their responses. Some of the better examples included responses 15, 18, 19 & 20. I also suggested that in addition to the bed, the ‘comfortable chair’ would also be a popular place of reading. Responses in support of this included 4, 5, & 21. Further, some readers exhibited what might be termed ‘Elkin-like obsessiveness’ with their acts of reading in bed. For example, responses 3, 9 & 11. Implicitly the role of the ‘locative body’ in language processing suggested in several of these responses also lends weight to both Kintsch’s fluvial sense of self and Damasio’s observations on the importance of somatic markers. My solitude prediction, echoing Colette, that readers would ‘seek out a solitary space’ found some support too.26 The response data, however, was not as compelling as I had anticipated, though there were some comments that did appear to support my claim. Some of the better examples include numbers 6, 7 & 14. Some responses even combined both notions of comfort and solitude; these include 1, 2, 4, 13, 16 & 22.

In conclusion of this section, some support has been found for my predictions. Of course, there were responses that rejected my claims. These included subjects who read ‘on planes and trains’ (response 15) and ‘with the music on’ (response 20). By and large though, these were in the minority. Hence, we can make a tentative suggestion, as in the case for mood, that there is evidence that location is a significant affective cognitive pre-reading input in the literary reading experience that can influence meaning-making and the reception process as a whole. I therefore agree with Manguel that “often, the pleasure derived from reading, largely depends on the bodily comfort of the reader” (151). It is proper, however, to end this section on a note of caution. Even though I believe Manguel is right, there is counter evidence out there in the world that should not be ignored. For example, comfort and solitude might not have to fit the reading location for an appropriate reading experience to take place. Moreover, what most of us consider as ‘comfortable’ will not be the same for everyone. This can be individually or culturally determined. For instance, I was recently confronted with two cases of ‘bicycle-reading’, which, though they are perhaps anomalies, have had some impact on my thinking with regard to comfort and location.27 Somewhat similarly, the tactile aspect of grasping, bending and folding a book may also be but a temporary or cultural phenomenon, since we appear to be on the threshold of a hardware e-book revolution. In the words of Robert McCrum in 2006 “the world of publishing

26 This also echoes Bachelard’s claim that there is a physical pleasure experienced when we consider withdrawing into a favourite corner or space.

27 I spotted my first bicycle reader in May 2006 in Zeeland (The Netherlands) while looking out of the window of a train. There was a bicycle path parallel to the rails where a cyclist was reading a book in the afternoon sun — while cycling. I was very surprised, but on reflection convinced myself that he probably knew that no-one would be travelling in the opposite direction and that if he just kept cycling in a straight line while reading he would be safe. I therefore discounted this anomaly. However, later that same year in December I saw a young woman in the east end of Amsterdam cycling along a busy road in the cold and rain engrossed in a book. Although these are oddities — and perhaps even cultural oddities related to the prevalence of cycling in a flat country like the Netherlands — the reality of the ‘bicycle reader’ shows that my comments and findings on the reading location in this chapter are neither absolute nor exclusive.
stands on the cusp of the greatest innovation since Guttenberg. With cheap, portable electronic readers just around the corner, what is the future for the printed book?28

4.7 Reading studies for research purposes: Why mood and location matter
Just how relevant are mood and location in empirical reader response studies that aim to discover something about the roles of affect and emotion in literary discourse processing? Throughout this thesis I employ feedback from readers in take-home experiments as part of my argumentation. Although feedback from readers other than oneself is important for a study of the role of affect in reading processes, trying to implement it in a fair and scientifically responsible way is far from unproblematic. The drawbacks of testing are best highlighted in this chapter on mood and location. It seems most appropriate therefore to discuss them here. To my mind there are some serious methodological stumbling blocks with regard to eliciting evaluative and emotive responses from reading subjects. In what follows I will attempt to highlight the constraints that testing mood and location place on current methodology. The three domains I will look at are (i) neurobiological experimentation, (ii) empirical reader-response experiments and (iii) stylistic analysis. The first pertains to challenges in the future; the second and third to ones in the present.

4.7.1 Emotive reader responses in neuroscientific experiments
One of the future strands of reading experimentation seems to lie in neural-scanning technology. The first extensive results of such experiments will be with us well within ten years.29 I welcome this development. However, the restraints placed on the crucial criteria of mood and location prior to and during the act of literary reading in such experiments will seriously challenge the validity of the very data they seek to elicit. The results from such experiments will be scientifically and methodologically valid, but they will be a long way from the actuality of the literary reading experience as it occurs in the real world for real readers. I shall explain what I am alluding to here by means of a staged scenario. Below are two fictional accounts of the same hypothetical literary reading event from two quite different perspectives. The first is from the point of view of the ‘tester’ and the second from that of the ‘tested’.

Scenario 1
Ah, there you are. Just in time. You managed to find it then. Good. Now come in and sit down over there please in that special booth. Let me explain what is going to happen. We are going to attach this cap to your skull which will monitor the electric activity in your brain. You will also wear this special pair of glasses: it is an eye-tracking device. The experiment should only take an hour or two to set up. My lab assistants will help. Once the cap is attached you can put on the glasses and we will leave you alone in this booth. Shortly thereafter you will hear three beeps. This is the sign that the experiment is about to begin. The first chapter of a novel will then appear

28 Coincidentally, in November 2007 the world’s largest on-line bookseller Amazon launched the Kindle: an e-reader that, according to the makers “disappears in your hands, like a real book and does not get in the way of the reading” (cited in a digital letter to customers from Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO, 20 November 2007). Amazon is also in the process of reissuing many books in digital/e-form to run on its hardware.

29 Integrating neuroscience into the discourse processing of basic units of language is in fact already taking place (see St. George et al. (1999) and Robertson et al. 2000). The analysis of larger chunks of real, rather than contrived, text (such as literature) is perhaps not far away and may even have already taken place.
on your screen, one line at a time in the centre. All we want you to do is to start reading silently and don’t stop until you have read the whole novel.

Which novel will I be reading, Professor Buzz?

Hmm, I’m not sure. I’ll ask.

Today’s novel is called *Fahrenheit 451* by a Raymond Bradbury. We purposely chose short novels so that the experiment can be completed within three hours. After lunch we will conduct another experiment where you will be inserted into an fMRI scanner. You will read the same novel from the book itself while we monitor the magnetic activity and blood flow in your brain. As you read in both experiments we will be observing what is happening in your brain and we will be tracking those areas in the various cortices that are lighting up. With this data we will be able to see exactly which parts of the novel emoted you, what the linguistic or thematic reasons were for this emoting and which areas of the affective brain were engaged in the processing.

That sounds amazing, Professor Buzz. But surely the results of this experiment would mean that soon all the secrets of art and literature and mental imagery and emotion will be secrets no more. Exactly. Exciting, isn’t it? In fact, in the future we predict that you need never waste your time again by reading a novel. Soon you will be able to punch in the title of a novel and download a summary of the emotions that a certain novel is likely to induce in you and get it sent to you as a synopsised text-message on your cell-phone or e-reader.

Wow!

And that’s not all. By the end of the current century we hope to be able to feed the data directly into your brain, via a nanotechnology port linked to your hypothalamus. Before you realise it, books and reading will be a thing of the past — Isn’t science wonderful?

It sure is, Professor Buzz.

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**Scenario 2**

*The professor leaves the booth and closes the door behind him leaving the student alone*

I hate being tampered with: doctors’ surgeries, hospitals, dentists’ waiting rooms: I detest them. This lab is just as horrid: cold, computerised sterility. I feel like a deep-sea diver in these goggles. This cap is irritating too. What was that gel they smeared onto my scalp? This is ridiculous. I wonder whether this guy actually has a life or does he spend all his time here? Come to think of it, what am I doing here? Oh yes, I remember, the ad. in the student magazine:

> Readers sought (preferably Humanities students) for neurobiological experiments in the REAL project, investigating the relationship between *Reading, Emotive processing, Affect and Literature*. All participants will receive a twenty-euro book token.

What a load of rubbish: not the book token, that’s why I’m really here, I mean the experiment. I need to buy that damned handbook for my linguistics course and I spent all my money on booze last weekend. Ah well, desperate times require desperate measures. Hey, but hang on a minute. Every cloud has a silver lining. At least I get to sit around here for most of the day doing nothing and get twenty euros for my ‘labours’. This chair is a nightmare though. It’s impossible to relax in it. It’s probably made that way so you don’t fall asleep during these mind-numbing experiments. You know, the irony is that I really do want to read Bradbury’s 451 and have ever since I read Orwell’s 1984. But I can’t possibly do it here. Not with this thing on my head and with these goggles on, surrounded by machines, flashing lights and boffin-brained weirdos, who probably know absolutely nothing, or even care, about literature. But hang on a minute. I know what I’ll do. This coming weekend I’ll cancel everything and stay in and treat myself to Bradbury’s classic. I can even borrow some money and get some decent food in and a good bottle of wine. I’ll take the phone off the hook, sit back in my favourite chair and enjoy...

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Yes, it’s going to be a great weekend. But hang on. Never mind the weekend; what am I going to do this evening? Who should I call? Let me think. No, not her again. I don’t think I really suit a vegan. She didn’t like football either. That reminds me, England is on the box tonight against
Holland. … I do hope that Burnley actually manage to win a game this coming weekend. That would be a nice change after four months without a victory. They should never have bought that Greek striker … Waste of money … I wonder how large my overdraft is these days …

Whoops, the experiment is running, I’d better start pretending to scan these lines otherwise I might not get my cash at the end of the day … How did that song go again?

The above example is admittedly both contrived and exaggerated. Nonetheless, it describes to a reasonable degree what I see as the lab liability and in doing so highlights the real somatic obstacles for present and future literary reader-response experiments employing neural scanning technology to record emotive responses. What the above scenario suggests is that when a body is not comfortable and the mood is not right, a reader’s mind will struggle to concentrate on the literary text in the way it should. Indeed, that mind may start to drift and project a multitude of future scenarios pertaining to everyday life, as the human mind, by nature, is wont to do. In the above hypothetical case, this involved a whole host of associative everyday ideas such as food, drink, football, girlfriends, money, etc. Even though this account is fictive, the notion that using subjects in laboratory reader-response experiments is unreliable is not. Let us for a moment reactivate Damasio’s somatic markers and Kintsch’s claim that location and the way the body feels in that location determines the nature and form of memories and mental imagery. These tell us quite clearly that a reading experience in a neural testing laboratory environment is a completely different kind to one done at home; on one’s own terms, in one’s own time and in one’s own preferred location.

The dilemma of the lab-liability is more than likely to continue to be a problem for neuroscientific experimentation — as long as people have human minds and human bodies that produce human emotions. The only way to circumvent this is to assume that the reading location and the pre-reading mood play little or no role in the affective quality of the literary reading experience. However, based on (a) my own intuition as an avid reader and on my own past reading experiences, (b) the evidence supplied by many readers, including some successful authors, and (c) some of the reader-response qualitative data from my take-home reading experiment, I would argue that such a claim is difficult to maintain. As stated, I welcome neurological advances in discourse processing of all genres, but my belief in mood and location as important affective inputs for meaning-making in the literary reading experience make it difficult for me to square this circle right now when hypothesising about the future of neurobiological research into literary reading processes.

4.7.2 Emotive reader responses in empirical science

Eliciting valid and candid responses from readers is an important tool for testing the validity and the inter-subjectivity of our own responses as literary analysts. Indeed, I do exactly this throughout this work: albeit in a non-statistical manner. However, some of the methodological constraints that will affect reader response testing in neuroscience in the future are already affecting response testing in empirical studies right now. Pre-reading mood, the reading location and the motivation of the subjects are just three problem areas. Most current reader response experiments occur in classrooms or language/computer laboratories. The experiments also often occur in groups rather than in one-to-one situations. Those of us doing these experiments need to ask ourselves: do these locations and conditions affect the quality of the reading experience of those subjects? Furthermore, if these affect the quality of the reading, what kind of results do we actually have and what kind of claims can we really make about those data? This becomes all the more problematic when we ask students to read texts and answer questions pertaining to the emotive quality of those texts and the emotive effects that they have on them.
Some scholars who employ such methods in cognitive psychology are only too aware of the problems: but many more are not. Kintsch, for example, states that “there is good evidence that much of the time, and in particular in many psychology experiments, readers are lazy and get away with a minimum of work” (193). My fictive reader in the above neurobiological testing scenario would fit into this category. Julie Foerstsch and Morton A. Gernsieberh reiterate the essence of this problem of motivation in their article “In Search of Complete Comprehension: Getting ‘Minimalists’ to Work”. There they found that student readers in experimentation settings are not committed to the reading processes. Similar reservations are found in cognitive scientific work on the study of literature. Patrick Colm Hogan, for example, notes how reader-response memories “are most often artifacts of the testing situation” (163). This seems to be an accurate observation: after all, what kind of natural reader recounts his/her past aloud to an authoritative third party or into a recording device while engrossed in a book? In short, the obligatory reading of literature in college courses, with its deadlines and exam dates can at the best of times tax the patience of the devoted reader. Moreover, if one were to add into that mix the idea of reading in a language laboratory, instead of at home, having been lured there by a pecuniary inducement, then the conditions are in place for the most unnatural of literary reading circumstances. In the words of one subject (respondent 12) from question eight of the NRQ on mood: “when I feel stressed out or sad/bad about something, then I cannot concentrate properly. My mind wanders off to what’s bothering me. That’s why I probably never was any good at obligatory reading. I did read the books, but not as well as I wanted to; simply because I had to finish the book in a certain number of hours”. Reading a book ‘not as well as a person wants to’ because of obligatory and unnatural conditions is something that should be avoided in experiments on literary emotion. In short, natural episodes of affective fiction reading require a natural and motivated state of mind; as Forgas noted, a person’s mood affects both the style and performance of how an object is cognitively processed. This being the case, it is difficult to see how artificial conditions can lead to anything other than fabricated reading experience and illusory results.30

Earlier in the section on location I reproduced the responses from other readers in my take-home experiment pertaining to the role of the reading location for eliciting real emotive responses. Some said they preferred to read at home, on the sofa, in a favourite comfy chair and in or on their bed. Some said they preferred to read inside and some outside, for example in the park or at the beach, while others said they also liked to read on trains and aeroplanes. Almost all readers said they read alone rather than in the company of others. I have never received in any responses like the following:

- All of my best literary reading experiences occur in university classrooms
- I always read in company and never alone
- I love to read novels in labs. I especially like reading novels from a computer screen
- The emotive aspect of my reading experience is enhanced when I am paid ten euros by a research assistant to fill in a questionnaire about my behaviour either during or after the reading process
- I love having my reading interrupted by university professors asking me questions about how I am reading and feeling. Such think-aloud protocols really contribute positively to my literary experience
- There is nothing I like better when I choose to read a novel than to go to the science labs at the local university and have an E.E.G. cap attached to my scalp and then sit for three hours while the electrical activity in my brain is monitored – I am also fond of reading in an fMRI scanner

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30 I am all too aware of this in my own reading experiments.
These exaggerated, fake responses are relevant, since the location of the reading event is still sometimes given little or no priority in reader-response experiments.\(^\text{31}\) Also, there is the enduring problem of the hierarchy of tester over the tested. It will be even more problematic if the tester is also the teacher/instructor of the tested upon whom students rely for good results as students will comply, often subconsciously, with what they feel their lecturer might wish to see or hear. So what can be done about all this? A starting point might be that in order to get more validity with regard to mood and location in such experiments one will have to loosen one’s grip on quantitative accuracy. This will result in less focus on the mean and more on the outliers; fewer figures and symbols and more words and sentences. The resulting qualitative data, natural reading conditions and real motivated readers will have the huge side effect of watering down one’s methodology. The question is how an acceptable balance can be achieved, as well as how and when one should blend the qualitative and the quantitative with theoretical rigour, which must surely occur when testing for something as ephemeral and delicate as literary emotion.

Regrettably, this is not the place to expand on this topic. However, if we were to start by running the same emotion reading experiment under completely different sets of conditions, we might just start to see how large the gaps are in our response data: especially if the one is conducted under the current language laboratory conditions and the other on the subjects’ own terms: location-wise, time-wise and data response-wise. This will give us an indication of what needs to be changed and how quickly it needs to be done.

### 4.7.3 Location in stylistic analysis

Although my claims about location and mood are unfamiliar in modern studies of literary reception and stylistics, they are by no means novel. In classical rhetoric, which has been shown to be the source discipline out of which stylistics has developed, these concepts were essential for any speech.\(^\text{32}\) The term the ancients had for this was *kairos*, which literally means ‘the right or most opportune moment’. In classical rhetoric it pertained to production: when, where and how a specific speech should be given in order to achieve the maximum of its intended persuasive effect. However, I believe that an awareness of location and mood is equally important for reception. Though I have suggested that this idea has gone unnoticed in modern stylistics, this appears to be not entirely the case. For in the article ‘The Poem and the Occasion’, Balz Engler argues for the primacy, not of language or cognition, but rather of ‘the occasion’, which he broadly equates with the ancient Greek rhetorical notion of *kairos*. Engler makes a number of persuasive claims. The first of these, pertaining to mood, is that “even before we start reading a literary text what it will mean has been fixed to a considerable extent no matter whether we are aware of this or not” (162). I would like to believe that “what it will mean” also includes emotions and emotive effects. On the concept of location Engler claims that “we also read texts in specific situations, which not only sharpen or blunt our perceptions but also shape them, and thus contribute to what we make of them” (162). Here, the situation or location of the reading event plays a major role in how perceptions or meaning-making are formed. A third claim pertains to the fully integrated nature of all these inputs, pre-reading, reading and post-reading: “as we always encounter texts as part of a particular occasion, and never in isolation, there is no way in distinguishing between what has been contributed to the result (…) by the as yet uninterpreted

\(^{31}\) Some discourse researchers used to undervalue the role of the physical location in literary reading: “we do not need to ask whether a reader of literature is sitting in an easy chair”… “For literary reading, situations are usually irrelevant” (Steen 87). Such views were understandable back then. However, what we now know through cognitive neuroscience about the crucial role that the body plays in discourse processing — through the work of such scholars as Damasio (1999), Kintsch (1998) and Gibbs (2006) — challenges these older, ‘anti-somatic’ views.

\(^{32}\) Modern stylistics is influenced by the third canon of rhetoric: *lexis/phrasis* (G) / *elocutio* (L).
black marks on the page (…), and what by other factors of the occasion (162). Engler makes all these claims but unfortunately does not go on to explain how one should go about achieving such an analysis in practice. So how might stylisticians start to take account of mood and location in their analyses? Perhaps, as part of the stylistic methodology, an analyst should attempt to explicitly mention this before the analysis commences. This should be set out in the background or scene-setting section of an essay or article where the methodology is described. Reference should also be made to both mood and location after the analysis, recording how these two factors might have affected the analytic reading either negatively or positively. This should take part in the discussion section of an essay.

Literary reading, including the analysis thereof, is in part about emotion and emotive effects, albeit to a slightly lesser degree in the case of analysis. If stylistics is going to start including an affective analytic dimension, as I believe it should, then the location and the mood of the reading event is where it should begin. As Frijda has stated, “the emotional effectiveness of sensory stimuli depends upon the spatial, temporal, and meaning context in which they occur, the adaptation level upon which they impinge, and the expectations with which they clash or correspond” (267). These first two are of a locative nature; the third more mood-based.

4.9 Conclusion
The focus in this chapter has been on two pre-reading, mind-fed, affective cognitive factors: mood and location, and also on how current methodology pertaining to these falls short. I argued that mood is a significant ‘pre-immediate’ input in engaged acts of literary discourse processing, and also that the location of the body prior to and during literary reading forms an important aspect of meaning making. My claims found some support in the qualitative data, which was, however, far from conclusive. Larger studies should be set up under more appropriate, but not over-rigorous, conditions to improve on this. Mood and location should be properly explored because their role in literary meaning construction is significant. Location in particular has been much ignored. If it is true that the body develops specific feelings associated with certain cognitive tasks, as Damasio has argued, then somatic markers must be highly significant to meaning-making in literary reading events. In sum, the addition of two such factors will enhance the range and depth of contextualised stylistic analysis and will better validate the important work being done by empirical scholars of literature.

33 In an analysis in Part III of this thesis I will attempt to account for the kairos of my own analytic reading experience.