

Contemplating Affects: The Mystery of Emotion in Charlotte Wood's *The Weekend*

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Abstract: In this chapter, I explore my affective engagement with Charlotte Wood's *The Weekend* (2019). Adopting definitions that reveal the nested hierarchies of *feeling*, *affect*, and *emotion*, I situate emotion as a semantic experience within the framework of thought, arguing that thought itself is an affectual process that carries meaning. Cognition, in other words, is an affective process. Thought's affectual status is often overlooked, however, with the focus on its semantic content drawing attention from this; yet meaning affects us, and this is the function of thought as affect: it organises experience in ways that are, in turn, affecting. My approach to Wood's novel aims to emphasise this and find firmer ground on which to perceive emotion as a kind of thought, noting that reading stimulates thinking in terms of grammatically established points of view.

Introduction

Jude had no illusions. (Wood, 2019, 1)

Charlotte Wood's novel, *The Weekend* tells the story of three friends, Jude, Wendy and Adele, who have gone to the holiday house of their friend Sylvie eleven months after her death to clear the place ahead of sale. The novel opens on Jude's consciousness, which includes this focalised statement of her having no illusions. Describing Jude's thoughts about her thoughts, the statement marks an instance of recursive thinking (see Tomasello 16), whereby Jude takes a stance towards herself that, although mediated by the narrative voice and the use of third person, nonetheless performs shifts in perspective indicative of oscillations between constructions of subjective and objective appraisals of self.

Jude, apparently, has no illusions about cognitive decline and death (the friends are in their seventies). And yet, now that I have read the novel and moved beyond the limits of its opening paragraphs, I find myself inferring something else—something related to this but beyond those feelings that Jude openly expresses. I call this sense of something else *the mystery of emotion* because I refer to interpretations involved in reading that go beyond the comprehension of characters like Jude or the story as a whole to include effects on personal experience called upon through imagining the story (see Feldman Barrett xiii; Armstrong 113). Like Jude, I involve myself in shifting perspectives that include construing an objective stance toward my own experience. With myself as the reader in this instance, oscillating between the text and my experiences through the identification of partial correspondences, the mystery arises as to why and how I have become involved in reading. Although my reading depends upon the common ground of language and culture (Tomasello 20, 59) that I share with the novel's author (implied or otherwise), in representing that common ground to me in novel ways, *The Weekend* has led me to reappraise and re-interpret aspects of my experience.

In this chapter I argue that the mystery of emotion, as a question of involvement, derives from emotion as a form of reasoning, brought within the parameters of thought as an affectual process. It is through the intimacies of experience as something that recursively moves through bodily apprehensions, interpretive (affective) expressions, and the comprehension of such in cultural contexts, that emotion becomes the recognisable outcome of a given experience.

On Being Affected by Reading

I feel affected by the statement, “Jude had no illusions.” I take Jude's lack of illusions to represent a particular emotion—anger—though, in the novel, it takes the form of suffocated rage which Jude redirects as annoyance and frustration. I was affected by the statement because I recalled my mother saying something very similar, repeatedly, during my childhood. My

mother, who struggled with her mental wellbeing throughout her life, spoke her rage out loud on a daily basis around the home, sometimes involving long hours of brooding hushed conversations with herself and extended rants. She would often burst into the room where my twin sister and I were playing to perform her rage with wild eyes that did not seem to see us. As a child, I had access to her thoughts in ways that few people experience outside literature. I grew up in someone else's mind—listening to the litany of offenses others had committed, hearing the details of such through the distorting echoes of grief and rage that characterised her self-expression. So it was that, in some measure, I recalled this when I read that “Jude had no illusions.” I did not recall the details immediately, but later recognised them in the affective ‘huh!’ that I experienced on reading that statement for the first time.

Paul B. Armstrong argues that “The comprehension of a story requires active participation by the recipient, who must project relations between the parts that are told and their probable configuration in the whole that seems to be forming” (Armstrong 116). It is an oscillating, to-and-fro process whereby readers come to identify with aspects of the narrative—sometimes with specific characters. John Frow describes identification with “character as an effect of desire, understood not as ‘someone’s’ desire but as a structure forming the imaginary unity of subjects in their relation to the imaginary unity of objects.” Identification thus involves the reader in the formation of character through the recognition of aspects of self. Literary character might be understood to be, in this sense at least, “an effect of the ‘self-recognition’ of a subject in its dispersal through the multiple positions offered to it by a text” (Frow 2016, 53-54).

Jude's having no illusions thus became recognisable to me in partial terms. I reformed these correspondences in a reappraisal of personal experience that resulted in my identifying the statement as the summary of insults and frustrations my mother had experienced. This I translated back to Jude, who, unlike my mother, swallows her rage. Understanding that Wood

was inviting comparisons in setting out the lives of these three women, each facing old age on her own terms, each without the financial or social life raft that a husband might offer in a world of gender inequality (see Wood 51), I found further relevancies. I saw how Wendy's academic life and self-expression was unlike that otherwise conventionally permitted a woman (particularly of her generation [see 110]), and how her achievements afforded her no alibi for her resentful children (16, 55, 94, 114, 116, 117, 119, 165, 222-23) who might have forgiven her, perhaps, had she been a father rather than a mother.

Wendy, of the three friends, is financially secure. She has meaningful work as an academic and is in a very different position to Jude and Adele. She is nonetheless still caught in a social world where gender determines status and delimits a person's role as much as value. The inequalities of that dynamic are especially marked in Wendy's difficult relationship with her children; but her situation overall, stands in contrast to the positions of Jude, a retired restaurant manager, "glorified waitress" (78), hostess, or *maitre-d* (it is not clear which), and Adele, an unemployed actor—both childless. These two women, as it turns out, have no safety net, and no life raft with which to navigate the choppy waters of old age and looming indigence. Adele enters the narrative in a state of financial crisis and needing to borrow money from Wendy; but Jude's fall is the central point here because the turnaround is so surprising yet retrospectively evident, causing the reader to reappraise Jude's situation from the outset. As my reading of "Jude had no illusions" will show, this reappraisal brings greater depth of meaning to that statement.

Jude is the kept lover of a wealthy married man, Daniel Schwartz—their relationship spanning forty years (78). It is Jude's sudden realisation of what she has been deferring and suppressing for these last decades that contradicts her having no illusions. She has been living on illusion in fact. Her perpetual state of suppressed rage throughout the weekend she spends with her friends is there for a reason. But it is not organised in ways that make the meaning of

her feelings immediately apparent to Jude herself. Rather, it is the reader who must make this interpretation.

Jude is left stunned and bereft when she discovers that, not only has her lover suffered a catastrophic stroke, her situation in life has drastically altered. When confronted with a text revealing that Daniel will be forever unavailable to her, it becomes clear that his affairs have now fallen into hostile hands (that of his wife and adult children). Jude can only utter (“in disbelief”), “I don’t know what this means” (250). She has deferred all comprehension of the precarity of her situation, transferring her annoyance and frustration onto other scenarios and individuals: for much of the novel she is aggravated all round, by her friends, and just about anything she lays her eyes upon—anything and everyone, that is, except Daniel. Thus, by the time I reached the close of the narrative, “Jude had no illusions” seemed the kind of statement made by someone who, being used to her frustrations, reluctantly accepts an insurmountable wrong. What is wrong—what is made apparent by the reappraisal of Jude’s position by these surprising events at the end—comes down to those inequalities that leave women like Jude and Adele vulnerable and dependent on others rather than self-sufficient.

The reversal of Jude’s situation—from a woman seemingly without financial cares, to a woman in dire circumstances—caused me to look more closely at her underlying aggression. With deeper reflection, I saw abnegation encoded in the statement’s assertion, and I realised that Jude’s anger with her friends was exacerbated by her inability to direct anger towards Daniel. Daniel visits Jude weekly *or* monthly (156), indicating that there are constraints upon her interaction with him: “Jude’s life depended on an opaque acceptance of many facets of Daniel’s life” (33). Indeed, implicated in the vagrancy of his presence in her life is the possibility that his distance might on occasion be wielded as a form of reproach at Jude behaving unpleasantly by getting annoyed about other people—her friends, in particular (7, 9, 84, 207). Given her financial dependence on him, Jude’s anger about the unequal nature of

their relationship could not be safely expressed. Thus, Jude, “asking for nothing, expecting nothing, from Daniel” (220), defines “her code: you did not refuse what was offered” (7). This then accounts for Wendy’s observation that “Every time you went to [Jude’s] place it looked somehow different. Daniel’s money was a steady, generous tide, washing up new things, taking old ones away” (42). Daniel’s generosity, in other words, is to give *and* take—meaning that his lover is kept on her toes, unable to set down roots in the form of attachment to things. There is no room for eccentricity to develop in Jude except in her attachment to him. With his generosity, and the secretive nature of their relationship (42, 70, 97, 98), and just these few friends—Sylvie (now deceased), Wendy, and Adele—Jude is left otherwise isolated, hidden away, and possibly even alienated from the wider world (see, for example, 123).

That “Her life was as clean and bare as a bone,” now seems tragic—something that was not apparent when I viewed it as an aesthetic choice. But, with “The rooms of her apartment [...] uncluttered by the past” such that “Nobody would have to plough through dusty boxes and cupboards full of rubbish for Jude” when she died (5), this aesthetic now stands out as indicative of a woman constrained and controlled. If my comprehension of Jude’s vulnerability was deferred by the brusqueness of her confidence and her self-serving acts of generosity (see 7)—with that generosity perhaps necessitated by the constant renewal of objects in the apartment (before Jude has a chance to leave her mark upon them)—it was awakened by Adele’s focalised statement that “What happened was what was always going to happen to Jude” (251). My reappraisal was crystallized by Jude’s acknowledgment that “her apartment [...] was probably no longer her apartment” (255). Indeed, it never was. The neutrality of the furnishings suggests as much. Daniel, it would seem (despite never discussing the matter with Jude [3]), though he may not have actively thought about what would happen if Jude were to die one day, was (by the constant flow of his generosity) subconsciously making preparations to erase her completely. Jude, still in shock, is brought to the threshold of this realisation, when

she tries and fails to see Daniel in hospital. With Daniel's wife Helena and his two children who, "Without looking in the women's direction [...] walked with their arms linked past the waiting room" (252), cementing Daniel's denial of her existence.

The interpretive capacities of emotion as an organising concept

Armstrong defines emotions as "mixed products of biology and culture that are better thought of as variable, internally heterogeneous populations than logical categories or universal classes with fixed neurobiological foundations" (21). On this view, "language and narrative are biocultural hybrids," each a "product of variable but constrained interactions between brain, body, and world and not universals that are homologous to logical structures of the mind" (24). Variably constituted in neuronal and cultural terms, yet somehow recognisable, Armstrong's approach to emotion makes it sound very much like genre. Indeed, Lisa Feldman Barrett gives an account of the brain as fundamentally involved in categorising and she outlines processes of meaning making consistent with genre theory (see, for example, Frow 10; Feldman Barrett 35). Emotions as categories have a specific focus, organising such relations in terms of culturally recognisable feeling states and their associated actions, affects, and effects. I want to avoid tracking specific literary genres and emotion (see Carroll 125; Storey 101-178), however, and rely instead on genre as an organising strategy in the making of meaning—one that groups larger concepts by linking parts within a whole to other parts within otherwise different wholes in ways that are consistent with Armstrong's approach to meaning. For Armstrong, interpretation, involving the reading of signs, finds its "neurobiological basis" in "the reactivations of simulation" in terms that are "partial and [which] can be configured in different ways" (120). Thus, figurative patterns or gestalts supply a model for cognition (see 17), whereby "gaps and indeterminacies," which are "a familiar feature of perceptual experience" (139), are resolved by the reader of narrative "by the intertwining of different modalities"—

different gestalts or patterns of experience (133)—creating “an illusion of presence and facilitate[ing] immersion in a fictional world” (138).

Emotion, following Armstrong and Feldman Barrett, is a semantic category, rather than something that happens in a specific region of the brain. It is an interpretive stance taken towards bodily feelings and thoughts, within a given context (Feldman Barrett 42-55). Forming a semiotic system based on embodied experiences, emotions are the first stage in processes of expression and communication through, what Michael Tomasello calls, protoconversations (54-55). Shaped by cultural values, emotions are the means by which we select and organise a range of internal feelings and sensations into states of being within a range of contexts.

It was through the organising effects of reading and emotion—whereby identification enabled the recognition of parts of experience across two distinct wholes (the fictional Jude and my memory of my mother)—that I was affected in my reading of *The Weekend*. My reappraisal of Jude, drawing on my personal experiences, involved reappraisals in personal terms as well. I already understood that much of what I had found distressing in my mother’s behavior (and which was obviously distressing for her) was caused, or at least exacerbated, by similar frustrations, organised around gender inequality. These frustrations centred on gendered barriers to meaningful work in the 1960s and 70s, my mother’s inability (as an unmarried woman) to secure a housing loan when cheap housing became available, and other tragic denials of her social status as an equal member of society (predominantly clustered around her experience of having been raped by a soldier when a member of the Australian Women’s Army during World War Two, and her inability to have this acknowledged and compensated by the Department of Veteran Affairs). Though, of course, there were other factors to my mother’s distress, the intensity of her suffering, and the suffering experienced by her children, owed a lot to gender inequality. Her angry and sometimes brutal reaction to her frustrating situation, together with the poverty she experienced as a single parent (homelessness

loomed throughout my infancy and my brother suffered malnutrition), had a huge impact on us all.

In comprehending Jude, the compassion that I had already organised around the realisation that my mother's anger at society had been redirected and expressed within the home, was prompted, renewed, and reformed by the compassion that I felt for Jude. Of course, *The Weekend* is not in any way an equal comparison to my recollected experiences. Jude's ranting (if it can be called that) takes place in her thoughts. But because my mother's speech incorporated other perspectives, it seemed to bear some correspondence to the effects created in Wood's text. This may be an effect of my unique experiences as a child, hearing what I came to regard as internal speech spoken out loud, combined with my understanding of narrative poetics. Suffice to say, part of what affected me was the correspondence that I found between the narrative voice of *The Weekend* and my mother's unusual self-expression.

Importantly, I was affected by my thoughts—by my understanding of Wood's text, and the correlations I found there. And this is significant—if stating the obvious—because cognition stands at the seeming extremity of recursive processes of interpretation, which we might say begin, in a sense, with interoception. If feeling forms in response to interoception (Damasio 24-25; Feldman Barrett 56), and affect is the expression of feeling in bodily processes, then emotion, as the interpretation of bodily experience in environmental and social contexts (Feldman Barrett 72, 32-41; see Solomon 11), is a form of reasoning—one that stands upon the bodily apprehensions of feeling and affect (see Zajonc 31; Forgas 387-390) while being part of that affective chain. Thoughts, in other words, are contemplating affects. Although a number of philosophers have touched upon the role of thought in respect to emotion (Solomon 4, 5, 7, 10), thought's affectual status is often overlooked, with the focus on its semantic content drawing attention from this; yet meaning affects us, and this is the function of thought as affect: it organises experience in ways that are, in turn, affecting.

Grammatical mood and perspective-taking

Bearing resemblances to focalised perspective and even free indirect discourse (see Miller 42), my mother's speech became aligned with both the narrative voice and character perspective. This alignment perhaps accounts for another aspect of my reading of *Jude*. Because I had come to understand my mother's anger as, in some sense, part and parcel of a desperate attempt to counter deeper feelings of self-loathing, I read self-contempt in the statement, "Jude had no illusions." Although I am importing assumptions formed by my reading of my mother's speech, in light of my reappraisal of *Jude*, I find a hint of awareness in the ironic distance that lies between the narrative voice and this focalised statement. This awareness slides between narratorial and characterological constructions. It is messy, in some respects, but the distinctions of multiple perspectives—Jude as herself, Jude as the perceiver of herself, the narrative voice articulating an 'objective' perspective of Jude as she sees herself, and the implied reader, taking all this in—can be found in Wood's text.

Perspective-taking is an important element in the social construction of emotion (Tomasello 16-17)). It is embedded in language and emphasised in styles of speech deployed in literary works (see Genette 1983, 73). Wood demonstrates an awareness of this early in the novel through an instance of perspective-taking within Jude's thoughts. Lying in bed, worried about aging and cognitive decline, not having any illusions, Jude "pictured the soft grey sphere of her brain and remembered lambs' brains on a plate. She used to enjoy eating brains," we are told; "it was one of the dishes she ordered often with Daniel" (2):

But at first bite the thing yielded in her mouth, too rich, like just-soft butter; tepid and pale grey, the colour and taste of moths or death. In that moment she was shocked into a vision of the three lambs, each one its own conscious self, with its own senses, its

intimate pleasures and pains. After a mouthful she could not go on, and Daniel ate the rest. She had wanted to say, 'I don't want to die.'

Of course she did not say that. Instead, she asked Daniel about the novel he was reading. (2)

Jude's earlier enjoyment of lambs' brains is called into question by her sudden revulsion for them when seeing them as "three bald, poached splodges on a bed of green" (2). Unadorned of the usual breadcrumbs, Jude is repulsed; but "She ate them, of course" (2). Her affective response interrupts her intention, however, and she gives up on the meal. Her thoughts, having become involved in the process of eating, have further affected her. Thinking of the lambs themselves, as whole beings whose body parts (the brains) are now before her, Jude focuses her attention on the brain's role in sensation and feeling and from there arrives at the idea of lambs as creatures of consciousness. Wood, in this way, demonstrates how our thoughts complicate our affective states to add layers of diversity in terms of valence and intensity (see Feldman Barrett 72) through perspective-taking.

Narrative mood, as the grammatical instantiation of perspective, supplies the means by which the literary work establishes nested intimacies like that demonstrated by Jude. We might say that Jude is performing the narrative voice in embodied terms by taking the lamb's brain into her mouth. The passage thus functions as an allegory of narrative speech in ways that emphasise the strange intimacy of speaking as another. Distinctions of grammatical mood are relevant to Gérard Genette's notion of focalisation and to free indirect discourse (see 1983, 73; 1980 161-62): when mood goes awry (that is, when tenses seem at cross purposes by not corresponding to the position of the speaker), it means that the narrative voice (as a grammatically instituted point of view) is inflected with the spatiotemporal markers (in the form of grammatical tense) indicative of another point of view (that of character). Basically, the tenses in a given statement do not match the grammatical parameters for the speaker of that

statement, yet the anomaly makes sense as the insertion of another consciousness or subjectivity—another point of view.

This splitting of states of being, involves complexities of feeling, in that the narrative voice, inflected with another subjectivity, will, through its word choices, convey something of the narrating subjectivity's attitude or feeling towards what it describes (whether this feeling is pleasant or unpleasant, for example). Though the narrative voice may not articulate feeling or opinion as plainly as Jude's experience has it (whereby she stands in relation to the lamb's brain as the narrative voice stands in relation to character), some relation between the spoken narrative and its content is nonetheless evident in its coherence as speech, simply because we understand speakers to be invested in the subject matter of which they speak.

Whether interest or disinterest, engagement or disgust, are openly performed in the narrative voice, emotion as a linguistic pattern embedded in speech, is, at the very least, established in the deontological markers that are implicated in all narratorial speech. As my analysis of my reading reveals, the nested intimacies of perspective-taking evident in narrative are further complicated by the to-and-fro mediation of correspondences identified through reading. Comprehension thus involves emotion in those processes of reasoning that result in identification.

If emotions, as constructs, are the effects of organising experiences in the intentionally collective ways of culture, then recursive thought (thinking about feeling, context, affect, emotion, etc.) introduces those meaning values in ways that sometimes intensify and diversify our personal and shared experiences in the collaborative processes of social construction (see Tomasello 90). It is this intensification and diversification that we most likely identify as internally experienced emotion. I can unpack this process on my own terms in Wood's characterisation of Jude having no illusions and not wanting to die: the leap from disgust (over what she is eating) to fear (of death) makes perfect sense once we untangle the layers of cultural

belief and personal experience that contribute to it. If Jude is aware of the meanings that underlie the superficial value of Daniel's generosity, she must surely realise that she has become a problem in old age. Too old to be a mistress (51), she seems to intuit the consequences of Daniel's erasure of her presence through the constant flow of the things he gives her, resulting in the bare-boned existence that is her life. Her death would be convenient for him, and her plaintive thought, "I don't want to die," seems to accept the strength of his wishes, as though she has read his mind, just as I have read hers. "I don't want to die," she thinks, seemingly out of the blue—as though she has no say in it; as though Daniel merely wishing it so, would make it so. Framed within her thoughts on cognitive decline and her not having any illusions, the connection between her perceived redundancy and death makes sense to me. At some point, she must bow out gracefully, and die—that is what she realises, on some level, as she gives up on the lambs' brains. She has already prepared the way by absolving Daniel of any need to tidy up the mess of her life: her (always) newly furnished apartment would, upon her death, quickly resume a tidy impersonal status within his property portfolio.

This is the semantic outcome of the affective charge that stirred in me when I connected these episodes. These meanings are not there for Jude to disentangle, though I use language that involves her in my thought processes. Jude, of course, functions within a sign system that provokes the simulation of her experience in my imagination, and I read those simulations on these terms. But even if we extend to Jude the possibility of existence, she must remain at the threshold of such realisations for the surprising reappraisal of her character to take place. Her thoughts must remain obliquely configured; her anger suppressed so that it might be redirected as annoyance towards her friends. No, Jude will not benefit from these insights. But I most certainly do—not in the sense of having learned a valuable life lesson, but in affective terms. Through the pleasures of comprehending (see Solomon 5), both myself (via my mother) and

the narrative, I have gained what Feldman Barrett would call a deposit to my “body budget” (Feldman Barrett 82).

Comprehension is itself rewarding, then. But the rewards go beyond understanding story and extend to the issue of my involvement in it—what I have termed the mystery of emotion. In comprehending Jude’s lack of illusions, and the denial of Jude, I came to organise my recollected feelings about certain life events a little differently. That difference has proved meaningful for me. And because meaning can be very affecting, Jude’s relatively mild musings, seeming like the milder expressions of my mother’s thoughts in the lead up to major episodes of rage, have contributed to the formation of a new emotional stance towards my mother and myself. It is not vastly different from the stance I had already adopted. But it is, nonetheless, different. It is different because I have broadened my perspective-taking to include perspectives relevant to the construction of Jude’s suffering. If Jude can be understood, so can my mother, and so too can I—as the child caught within the abnegating effects of her denial, and more lately, as woman caught within similar configurations because inequality persists and I am facing the same feared redundancy of being a woman in middle age.

Contemplating Australian Literature

In turning our attention, as readers, to the matter of what it is to be a mature Australian woman, Charlotte Wood has, with her novel *The Weekend*, made a significant contribution to Australian literature. Issues of equality are particularly significant for a nation that sees itself as middle-class and egalitarian, and Wood’s novel persuasively shows us some of the ways in which we fall short of these aspirations.

There are many ways in which inequality operates in our society. The inequalities experienced by Indigenous Australians pose a significant problem for our country and the individuals thus impacted. Although *The Weekend* does not address this issue, it does offer

insights on inequality that may be applied more broadly. In this respect, I rely on Armstrong's observations on the role of patterns in the formation of thought when I say that similar patterns in terms of outcomes and effects happen along lines of race, ethnicity, and culture. Outcomes like those articulated in the experiences of Wood's characters are not unique to issues of gender and age. Indigence and vulnerability (Adele), manipulation and exploitation (Jude), rebuttals of value in the face of success, with those rebuttals based on the individual's failure to 'properly 'perform their social role in accordance with their identity category (Wendy), can result from situations of inequality besides gender.

This is not to say that inequality is measurable on the same terms across social groups and cultures. But identity categories have emotional values attached to them, and our feelings about identity may sometimes prevent us from seeing a given situation for what it is when it is unjust. What the outcomes of *The Weekend* highlight regarding Jude, Wendy, and Adele, is the potentially limiting effect of social norms and expectations on the lives of individuals. Yet as much as they shape outcomes, normative values shape our reaction to unjust outcomes too. Norms, after all, are like blinkers—they can limit our vision. The impact of identity categories are of course relevant and still need to be taken into account, but when we identify the situation (poverty, vulnerability, disregard) independently of the normative values that apply to identity categories like gender, age, race, and ethnicity, we may gain insights we might otherwise overlook.

Conclusion

The interpretative capacity of emotion as a concept, brought within the intimate realm of thought as affect, has enabled my reading of *The Weekend*. Reading stimulates thinking, with the thinking that is provoked through the nested intimacies of grammatically established points of view likely to stimulate affects that in turn come to be organised under the concept of

emotion. Perspective-taking is the means by which we feel emotion for ourselves as much as others: we take a perspective or stance—a seemingly objective stance—towards our subjective selves, and we feel for ourselves. When our internal realisations pertain to others, we no doubt feel for these others a little differently—with that difference marked by an awareness that we do not occupy both positions (of perceived and perceiver). It may be that identification sometimes obscures the distinction and I find myself moved to tears out of pity for myself, or I might experience feelings of elation through the memory of comparable happy events, via the perspective offered through the other. Empathy is no doubt something that is complicated by degrees of identification—we must recognise ourselves in partial terms, after all; but sometimes the part seems closer to the whole when reading moves us.

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