

Analyzing Narrative Empathy in Readers' Responses to Literature:

A Taxonomy of Linguistic Evidence of Empathetic Responses

Carolina Fernandez-Quintanilla (University of Granada, Spain)

Abstract

The study of narrative empathy (i.e., readers' sharing of characters' perspectives and mental states) is getting increasing attention from theoretical and empirical perspectives. Recently, a number of empirical quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted on empathy in literary reading. However, in qualitative studies where participants are not directly prompted to comment on empathy, the analysis of empathetic responses raises an important methodological problem; namely, determining whether and how there is evidence of empathy in readers' verbal responses.

This article proposes a way to operationalize, or make workable, what counts as evidence of narrative empathy by developing a taxonomy of linguistic evidence of empathetic responses that ranges from explicit to implicit evidence. The taxonomy is illustrated with data from a focus group study of readers' responses to two short stories by Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano.

This research makes a methodological contribution by outlining a framework for the qualitative analysis of empathetic responses. At the same time, the article considers some caveats in the analysis of readers' responses which may be valuable for those conducting empirical reader research in general because these issues ultimately influence the analysis and interpretation of the data, and thus, the results obtained. I argue for a shift in current scholarly discussion toward the issues that concern the actual analysis of reader responses without shying away from acknowledging the problems that arise in the process of analysis. This discussion should be of interest to scholars working in empirical narratology, empirical stylistics, and empirical literary studies.

Keywords

empathy with characters, empirical study of literature, linguistic evidence of empathy, reader response research, narrative empathy

Author biographical information

Carolina Fernandez-Quintanilla is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Granada, Spain. Her research is in the areas of cognitive stylistics and cognitive narratology, with a focus on narrative empathy and empirical reader response research. Her published work on this includes a journal article in *Language and Literature* and a co-edited special issue in the *Journal of Literary Semantics*.

1. Introduction

Narrative empathy involves vicariously experiencing or mentally simulating what we perceive are characters' mental states from characters' own perspectives. This article addresses a methodological issue that arises in the qualitative analysis of reader response data in relation to narrative empathy; namely, determining the extent to which, and the ways in which, there is evidence of empathy in the data. Currently there is no explicit analytical framework in the literature to analyze the extent to which readers' verbal responses might stand as evidence of empathy. This article aims to advance one such framework for the qualitative analysis of narrative empathy in readers' responses.

This article proposes a way to operationalize, or make workable, what may count as evidence of narrative empathy by developing a taxonomy of linguistic evidence of empathetic responses that ranges from explicit to implicit evidence. This taxonomy should be especially helpful in qualitative studies where the researchers do not directly and explicitly prompt participants to comment on empathy, as in the study presented here (see Section 4).

Empathy is receiving increasing scholarly attention (see Fernandez-Quintanilla and Stradling) because it is thought to be an important mechanism underlying the way readers relate to characters (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy"; van Lissa et al.). According to my working definition, narrative empathy comprises two steps. First, readers interpret the character's mental states and form a mental representation of the character's situation and mental states while maintaining a self-other distinction.¹ Second, the affective response of empathy follows whereby readers reenact, simulate, or imaginatively experience in a first-person way what they perceive is the character's mental state and mental activity. The resulting response is congruent with the reader's perception and understanding of what the character's experience must be like. (*N.B.* This definition draws on work in cognitive narratology by Keen ("A

Theory of Narrative Empathy," "Narrative Empathy") and Caracciolo (*Experientiality of Narrative*); philosophy of mind by Coplan ("Empathic Engagement"; "Understanding Empathy"; "Real Empathy") and Gallagher; psychology by Cuff et al.; and social neuroscience by de Vignemont and Jacob).

As the definition suggests, the first step in any readerly response involves the interpretation of mental states, and the second step involves the actual readerly response of empathy, sympathy, or other affective and non-affective responses. It is worth clarifying that the terms "empathy" and "sympathy" are often conflated and used interchangeably in popular and academic usage (Keen, "Narrative Empathy"). However, there is a significant difference between them: whereas empathy involves feeling *as* the other, sympathy involves feeling *for* the other (Hein and Singer 157). Put differently, whereas in empathetic responses both empathizer and target are in the same or in a similar affective state, in sympathetic responses the sympathizer is in a different affective state, usually sorrow or concern (Gallagher 359). Despite these differences, scholars agree that the two often work together and occur simultaneously (Halpern; Coplan, "Empathic Engagement" 145).

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines previous theoretical and empirical work on narrative empathy that shares the focus of my study; namely, the narrative-stylistic features of texts that can potentially trigger empathy with characters. Section 3 describes the texts that were used with readers (short stories by Eduardo Galeano) and summarizes the stylistic-narratological analysis that was conducted on the stories. Section 4 outlines the taxonomy of analytical categories that was used to analyze the reader data in terms of potential evidence of empathy. Finally, Section 5 illustrates this taxonomy with data from a qualitative focus group study that used the above-mentioned short stories. Two focus group discussions were conducted with nine readers (five participants in one group and four in the other) in

Spanish, in keeping with the original language of the stories (see Fernandez-Quintanilla for main findings; see also Wirag, who discusses this work from the perspective of empirical narratology).

2. Research Background

In 2006, narratologist Suzanne Keen advanced a theory of narrative empathy that has since become one of the key works in narrative empathy studies. Keen positions her theory as contributing to rhetorical narratology, which is concerned with effects on readers (“Narrative Empathy” para. 12). Her theory contains three main elements: authorial strategies for empathy, the empathy-altruism hypothesis,² and empathetic narrative techniques. The last item was the focus of the study presented here.³

Empathy, and other reader response phenomena in general, can be investigated theoretically and empirically. Theoretical work may involve introspection and the formulation of hypotheses (Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy”). Empirical work, on the other hand, collects and analyzes extratextual data to capture “aspects of readers’ behaviors, interpretations or evaluations in response to particular literary works” (Whiteley and Canning 72). Empirical approaches to reader response collect extratextual data on readers’ responses and can adopt qualitative, quantitative, or mixed approaches to gather participants’ verbal and nonverbal data. Verbal data includes participants’ responses as linguistic expressions and may be generated through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups,⁴ or through experimental methods such as “think alouds” (i.e., participants verbalize their responses to the text at pauses while reading) or self-probed introspection (i.e., participants mark the text and later on report on the reasons for their markings) (Whiteley and Canning 74). On the other hand, nonverbal data can be

gathered through measurements (e.g., ratings, reading times) and through the tracking of physiological features (e.g., eye movement) (Whiteley and Canning 74).

Since the publication of Keen's theory, a few empirical studies have specifically examined the potential influence of some narrative techniques on readers' experiences of empathy while reading: László and Somogyvári, van Lissa et al., Kuzmičová et al., and Fernandez-Quintanilla. The aim of these studies was to investigate the textual and reader factors that can modulate readers' empathy with characters. This growing body of research shows that there is an increasing interest in empirical research on readers' experiences of narrative empathy and the (non-)textual factors involved in these experiences (for an overview, see Fernandez-Quintanilla and Stradling). As this research area develops, it seems timely to consider and open the debate around the kind of methodological complexities that can arise in the process of analysis.

The question *To what extent and in what ways is there evidence of empathetic responses in the reader data?* needs to be addressed and resolved before analyzing the data for other concerns (e.g., in the case of this study, the factors that seem to influence readers' empathetic and non-empathetic responses). In other words, when we investigate narrative empathy empirically and qualitatively, the problem of determining *if and how* there is evidence of empathy in the responses has remained unarticulated in earlier studies but should be brought to the fore. In what follows I review earlier empirical studies of narrative empathy with the aim to identify (1) the analytical categories or codes they use to analyze their data qualitatively, and (2) the way they determine whether empathy occurred in the responses.

László and Smogyvári examined whether readers' and characters' group identity had any effects on narrative empathy. They gathered nonverbal quantitative data to check empathy with the characters through questionnaire ratings. They also asked participants, individually in

writing, to remember and write the story (i.e., narrative recall). However, this verbal data was analyzed only quantitatively through correlation analyses. In short, no qualitative analysis of the narrative recalls was conducted to look for evidence of empathy beyond the quantitative results (or at least the authors do not share this process of analysis).

van Lissa et al. focused on whether first-person narration has more potential to elicit empathy and trust than third-person narration. As with the above study, evidence of narrative empathy is provided only by means of quantitative measures (i.e., questionnaire ratings). In addition to the quantitative element, van Lissa et al. elicited verbal answers to two questions (about attitude and trust toward the protagonist) that were analyzed qualitatively.⁵ However, this part of the study did not aim to assess whether the responses showed evidence of empathy. For the sake of transparency and comparability in future studies, it would have been useful if these two quantitative studies had specified the items used in their questionnaires to gather evidence of empathy.

Kuzmičová et al. investigate the effects of different degrees of foregrounding on narrative empathy. This study also combines quantitative and qualitative elements. In the qualitative part, participants were asked to mark striking passages while reading. After that, they were asked, individually in writing, to give reasons on why they had marked specific passages. These elaborations about markings were analyzed qualitatively via a handful of codes.⁶ Relevantly for my purposes, Kuzmičová et al. looked for “explicit markers of empathic response” (143). The code *Emp* is defined as follows: “item explicitly refers to subject’s first-person experience of empathy with character’s mental state” (144). Two examples of data are given that were coded with the *Emp* code: “I get to feel the father’s grief” (143) and “. . . put myself in the character’s position” (144). These codes were useful for and suited the purposes of their study (where data is made up of brief elaborations). Nevertheless, sticking only to “explicit markers of

empathy” may be fairly limiting for other types of data. For example, the data used in the present article consisted of extended spoken group discussions that included plenty of data with arguably plenty of nuance, and so it was necessary to go beyond explicit evidence of empathy in my study.

My study adopted a fully qualitative approach. The study examined the effects of some narrative techniques (i.e., point of view, speech and thought presentation, emotion presentation, and characterization techniques) as well as reader factors (i.e., contextual appraisal, including moral evaluation) on narrative empathy (see Fernandez-Quintanilla for an overview). I asked participants, in spoken group discussion, to comment on their perception of the characters as well as their emotional and moral reactions. In contrast to the above studies, participants were not aware that the study would examine empathy, and so the term “empathy” was completely absent from the focus group questions. In this way, any empathy reported by participants might be considered spontaneous rather than prompted. The codes for qualitative analysis are provided in Section 4. The way to determine whether there was empathy in the responses is discussed in Section 5.

This section has shown that the above-mentioned studies differ greatly in the degree of detail and explicitness with which they articulate the codes used to analyze empathetic responses. An explicit analytical framework to examine qualitative evidence of empathy in readers’ responses is missing from current methods in narrative empathy studies. Section 4 proposes one such model to address this gap in the scholarly literature.

3. Narratives Used with Readers

The data presented in this article involves readers’ responses to two short stories by Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano dealing with persecution and torture. The stories are

"Gelman" and "Professional Life," from Galeano's *The Book of Embraces*. Stylistic narratological analysis of the two stories was conducted to examine the textual features that have the potential to invite readers' empathy. "Gelman" and "Professional Life" are biographical stories that are based on historical events. The stories feature perpetrators and victims in narratives of persecution ("Gelman") and torture ("Professional Life"), so in terms of plot the victim characters go through extremely distressing events (i.e., loss of family and torture), which is in itself likely to bring about responses such as empathy and sympathy. Four narrative techniques were examined through linguistically based analytical frameworks:

1. Point of view presentation, including narration and focalization, was analyzed using Fowler and Short.
2. Characters' discourse (speech and thought) presentation was analyzed using Leech and Short.
3. Characters' emotion presentation was analyzed using Langlotz.
4. Characterization techniques were analyzed using Culpeper.

This stylistically informed analysis yielded the following results. The mode of narration in the two stories is first-person, extradiegetic narration. "Gelman" tells the story of Argentinian poet and journalist Juan Gelman, whose relatives were kidnapped by the military during the dictatorial regime in Argentina (1976–1983). In terms of *point of view presentation*, the narrator is the holder of point of view and occupies the role of the focalizer, whereas Gelman is positioned in the role of the focalized (Bal). The story presents external focalization, as the narrator-focalizer is not an experiencing character. In terms of ideological point of view (Fowler), the story presents anti-dictatorial attitudes, which might prompt different reactions depending on readers' socio-political values (as part of readers' "experiential background" (Caracciolo, *Experientiality of Narrative*)). Regarding *emotion presentation*, the story presents what the

narrator believes Gelman's emotions are likely to be, and these speculations can elicit readers' empathy because emotion is made available. Emotion is conveyed mostly through metaphor and include being emotionally devastated, worried, anguished, and possibly guilty. Finally, *characterization techniques* involve characters' actions and names. Characters' actions position them in the character roles (Propp) of perpetrators and victims, which in itself might lead to distancing and closeness effects, respectively, depending on readers' moral and socio-political values. In regard to naming, whereas Gelman is given a proper name, the characters behind "the Argentine military" remain as a group (and are thus "lumped"). Lumping has the potential to create distancing effects and may hinder empathy (Cameron).

"Professional Life" tells the story of an unnamed torturer, who works for the French colonizers of Algeria, and Ahmadou Gherab, who fought in the National Liberation Front against France during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). In terms of *point of view*, the omniscient narrator is not a story character but knows about characters' internal states. By adopting an internal point of view, the story grants access to the thoughts and feelings of the two characters. However, the story privileges the Torturer's point of view to a greater extent because most of the story deals with his inner states. This access to the character's inner world can elicit empathy (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy"). As far as *discourse presentation* is concerned, the story conveys mostly the Torturer's speech (through Direct Speech, Narrative Report of Speech Acts and Free Indirect Speech) and the Torturer's thoughts (through Free Indirect Thought). Free Indirect Style is commonly regarded as an empathy trigger (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy"; Adamson). Concerning *emotion presentation*, both characters' emotional states are presented implicitly, and so readers need to draw inferences (Ahmadou's pain on the one hand, and the Torturer's emotional conflict on the other). According to Keen, "indirect implication of emotional states through actions and context" may produce empathy

just as effectively as direct description (“A Theory of Narrative Empathy” 218). Finally, in terms of *characterization*, characters’ actions might invite different responses depending on readers’ moral values, such as empathy and/or sympathy for Ahmadou and distancing effects towards the Torturer. Naming might have similar effects of closeness and distancing, respectively, as Ahmadou is given a proper name whereas the Torturer is referred to via noun phrases related to his professional role: “torturer,” “executioner.”

4. A Taxonomy of Linguistic Evidence of Empathy

In empirical reader response studies, it is key to consider the ways in which responses are being elicited from participants because the initial information about the study and the wording of instructions and questions will directly influence the kind of evidence to be found.

Consequently, *the context of elicitation* should be acknowledged and seen as relevant to the resulting interpretations (Swann and Allington 262). In the case of my study, I deliberately avoided using the word “empathy” in all the information given to participants, both at the recruitment stage and in all instructions and questions during the group discussions. This feature of the study design ensured that readers would not be predisposed towards empathy as a response, and so if empathy was reported it would be spontaneous rather than prompted by the researcher. This aspect of the study design distinguishes my work from the other studies mentioned in Section 2, where it may be argued that the wording of the questions can predispose readers to empathy as a response when it might not have occurred spontaneously (or even *to report* empathy due to demand effects (Singer and Lamm 91); in other words, participants might be influenced by what they perceive to be the researchers’ expectations).

However, the nondisclosure of the study’s focus on empathy does pose challenges. In the absence of explicit prompts (e.g., quantitative measures to rate empathy with the characters

while reading, or empathy-related statements to agree/disagree with), I had to look for more indirect ways of getting at what may be regarded as evidence of empathetic responses. Thus, my analytical focus became the linguistic evidence of empathy as displayed in participants' verbal self-reports. The data offers insights into how participants talk about their experience and engagement with characters (i.e., participants' discursive choices). The taxonomy presented below captures linguistic evidence of empathetic responses which ranges from more explicit instances (Section 5.1) to less explicit ones (Section 5.2).

A useful starting point for developing this taxonomy was Kuroshima and Iwata's study, from the field of conversation analysis. Kuroshima and Iwata investigate displays of empathy performed by volunteers towards evacuees' experiences in the context of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and associated Fukushima nuclear power plant explosions in Japan. They discuss three conversational practices by which people show empathy with other people's experiences: (1) formulating the troubles-teller's experience as uniquely owned, (2) differentiating the troubles-teller's experience from the recipient's, and (3) invoking a similar experience as a way of showing empathy. It is the latter category that I draw on in my framework. The conversational practice of invoking one's own experience may be used to account for "*how one can affiliate with another person's displayed stance*" (102, my emphasis). Put differently, "by claiming to have a similar experience, a speaker can *demonstrate solid grounds for relating* to what the other person is going through" (95, my emphasis). Importantly, describing a similar experience (even though the experience may not be identical to that of the other person) helps to show *how one is able to understand* what the other person (or character) is experiencing (104). The emphasized bits in italics above are important because in spoken group discussions participants use a number of discursive strategies to discuss their engagement with the characters, including providing reasons for their responses.

Another useful source for developing this taxonomy was Caracciolo's model of experientiality in narrative from cognitive narratology. Caracciolo proposes that there are two reading strategies when engaging with literary characters: *consciousness attribution*, whereby we attribute experiences to characters, and which involves a third-person stance; and *consciousness-enactment*, whereby we enact or mentally simulate the character's experience, and which involves a first-person empathetic stance (*The Experientiality of Narrative*) (see Section 5.2 for further discussion). The final element that informed the development of the taxonomy below was my definition of narrative empathy, which is in turn informed by empathy research in different disciplines (see Section 1).

In my study, the code `Explicit empathy` was used when readers themselves describe their engagement with characters as empathetic. However, linguistic evidence of empathy can also be found *in the combination* of a group of codes that capture implicit evidence of empathy (see table 1). This taxonomy is divided into the following categories according to whether they indicate:

- *Perspective taking*, whereby readers represent characters' situations from characters' points of view and reconstruct their experience by adopting their perspective.
- *Affective understanding* since the emotional component is central to empathy.
- *Understanding of other mental states*, given that empathy may not be restricted to emotional states and may encompass any mental state (see endnote 1).
- *Situational understanding*, whereby readers understand characters' actions and mental states in their specific context and circumstances.

According to my definition of narrative empathy in Section 1, some of these readers' behaviors belong in Step 1 or Step 2 of an empathetic response; however, *Step 1 is a necessary condition*.

Step 1 involves interpretation and understanding and includes "affective understanding,"

“understanding of mental states,” and “situational understanding.” On the basis of this understanding, readers attribute to characters different aspects of experience such as speech/thought, mental states, and situational factors. Empathy then follows.

Table 1. *Taxonomy of Implicit Evidence of Empathy*

	CODE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
perspective	Character-oriented perspective taking	Participants imaginatively adopt characters' viewpoints and focus on characters' inner states and circumstances	"I put myself in the protagonist's situation" (H5, 75:75) ⁷
	Attribution of speech/thought_affiliation	Participants verbally articulate characters' speech/thought in direct form. This may suggest that participants simulate characters' mental activities. This is seen in sudden shifts to the first person pronoun (see below). This code captures cases where participants have expressed an affiliation with the characters' stances	"he's waiting for a promotion [. . .] 'if I get promoted maybe later on I won't do this'" (E3, 146:146)
	Pronoun use/shift	Readers' pronoun use shows differences between (1) talking about characters in the second or third person from an observer position and (2) the verbal simulation or enactment of characters' experiences in the first or second person, where readers suddenly impersonate characters	"he's waiting for a promotion that they are not giving him, so 'damn it, I'm doing this'" (E3, 146:146)
emotions	Attribution of emotional experience	Participants attribute specific emotional states to characters. They spell out the emotional implications of storyworld events; that is, what characters are likely to feel as a result of the storyworld events	"you put yourself in that situation [. . .] you're suffering a continuous torment" (H5, 87:87)
	Evaluation of what the experience is like	Sometimes the attribution of emotional experiences (above) is coupled with evaluative expressions. This explicit element of evaluation indicates degrees of how (un)desirable the characters' emotional experiences are	"it's been the worst" (H5, 75:83)
	Affective alignment	Display of understanding of the characters' emotional states based on firsthand experience: readers claim to have firsthand knowledge or experience of a similar situation and, as a result, they verbalize what the experience must be like for characters. These displays of understanding based on similarity of experience can suggest, as noted by Kuroshima and Iwata, (1) affiliation with the target's stance towards the experience, (2) understanding of the nature of the experience and its	See extracts 10 and 11 in Section 5.2

		meaning (i.e., what the experience is like), and (3) a congruent affective stance (i.e. potentially shared feelings)	
other mental states	Attribution of thought processes	Thought processes are attributed to characters	"he's justifying himself" (H6, 63:63)
	Attribution of values and beliefs	Values and beliefs are attributed to characters	"I automatically thought Fernando Huidobro and Mauricio Rosencof were left-wingers" (C1, 140:140)
	Attribution of goals and needs	Goals and needs are attributed to characters	"they have the need to communicate" (E1, 58:58)
situation	Attribution of situation	Participants spell out characteristics of the situation characters are going through	"whenever the word 'independence' comes up we're talking about a situation where freedom has been taken away" (B3, 187:191)
	Imagined scenario	Participants describe a scenario parallel to the events undergone by characters, and they vividly depict the details of the situation, thus suggesting understanding and a potential projection into characters' situations	See extract 10 in Section 5.2
	Attribution of situational factors	Participants attribute characters' actions and circumstances to situational forces; that is, they provide contextual explanations for characters' behaviors	"and then he sits down next to him, but the thing is they're forcing him to do that" (A3, 118:118)

In narrative studies, Meir Sternberg has persuasively argued that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a particular technique and an effect. Sternberg's Proteus Principle proposes that "any effect can be produced by an infinite number of forms, and any form can produce an infinite number of effects," as it works both ways. The Proteus Principle allows for "many-to-many correspondence," as "many forms relate to one effect, and one effect to many forms" (40). If we apply this to the analysis of reader data, two things follow: (1) the same data may generate different effects for different readers, and (2) the same data may generate more than a single effect in individual readers. Thus, the above reader behaviors in table 1 do not

necessarily signal empathy alone, since other readerly responses may be at play as well. In other words, the features of readers' discourse identified in table 1 can be used to operationalize evidence of empathy (given the focus of this study), but other reader responses are not to be excluded.

5. Operationalizing What Counts as Evidence of Narrative Empathy

5.1. Explicit Linguistic Evidence of Empathetic Responses

Explicit expressions of empathy can be found in those instances where readers themselves articulate their engagement with the character(s) in those terms; that is, in terms of empathy.

Table 2 lists some of the instances where readers expressed empathy explicitly (**see bold**):

Table 2. *Explicit Expressions of Empathy with Characters*

<i>"Celebration of the Human Voice"</i>		
[1]	<i>ya directamente empatizas con las dos personas que están en la cárcel porque tú asocias dictadura a malo, a represión y a tal (B1, 171:171)</i>	you directly empathize with the two people who are in prison because you associate dictatorship with evil, with repression and so on
[2]	<i>me identifico quizás más con . . . quizás la solidaridad esa que he dicho antes de ponerme en la piel, se me hace más fácil empatizar con estos personajes que con el ente que es la dictadura uruguaya (C1, 144:144)</i>	perhaps I identify more with . . . perhaps that solidarity of putting myself in their skin that I talked about before, I find it easier to empathize with these characters than with the entity which is the Uruguayan dictatorship
[3]	<i>seguirás empatizando con la situación porque son oprimidos, o encarcelados, prisioneros de una dictadura (14, 196:196)</i>	you will keep empathizing with the situation because they are oppressed, or imprisoned, prisoners of a dictatorship
<i>"Gelman"</i>		
[4]	<i>quizás porque yo soy madre y me pongo en la situación del protagonista (H5, 75:75)</i>	perhaps because I am a mother and I put myself in the protagonist's situation

- [5] *yo creo que en la sociedad actual la palabra “dictadura” ya te provoca un rechazo moral automáticamente y automáticamente te hace sentir empatía hacia las personas que están sufriendo esa dictadura (H5, 111:111)* I think that in today’s society the word “dictatorship” readily provokes an automatic moral rejection, and it automatically makes you **feel empathy towards** the people who are suffering that dictatorship
- [6] *aquí te dan detalles del sufrimiento de la persona y te pone en situación lo que está viviendo, yo creo que en realidad eso influye, no es lo mismo que te diga “no, esta persona lo está pasando mal porque hay una dictadura,” fin, a que te explique exactamente cuál es su situación, yo creo que eso influye mucho (G5, 117:117)* here you’re given details of the person’s suffering and **you’re put in the situation** he’s going through, I think this actually has an influence, it’s not the same if it [the text] says “this person is having a bad time because there is a dictatorship,” full stop, than being told exactly what his situation his, I think that makes a difference

“Professional Life”

- [7] *también me pongo en la situación del torturado que después de estar ahí hecho polvo que el otro te venga contando los problemas como “venga hhh ¿te estás cachondeando de mí encima o qué?” (C3, 136:136)* I also **put myself in** the tortured man’s **situation** because after being there feeling crushed the other one [the torturer] tells you about his problems like “come on hhh are you kidding me or what?”
- [8] *yo me pongo un poco en la piel de los dos, que deber de ser muy duro que te obliguen a hacer . . . (B3, 144:144)* I **put myself a bit in the skin of** both of them, because it must be very hard to be forced to do . . .
- [9] *Pero yo soy capaz de sentir más empatía del verdugo que del torturado porque el torturado es una situación por la que yo no voy a pasar, espero, pero la otra es una situación en la que yo sí puedo tener en mis manos el control de una persona (B3, 282:283)* But I am able to **feel more empathy for** the executioner than for the tortured one because the tortured one is in a situation which I’m not going to go through, I hope, but the other is a situation in which I can have control over another person
-

Explicit empathy was linguistically articulated by participants through the use of:

- Verbal phrase “to empathize with the characters” in extracts 1 and 2; “to empathize with the character’s situation” in extract 3.
- Verbal phrase “to feel empathy” with different prepositions: “to feel empathy towards characters” in extract 5; “to feel empathy for [lit. ‘of’] the character” in extract 9.

- Metaphorical expression “to put oneself in the character’s skin” in extracts 2 and 8. The metaphorical expression “to put oneself in someone else’s skin” [*ponerse en la piel de alguien*] is used in Spanish to express empathetic perspective taking and is rather similar to the English language phrase “to put oneself in someone else’s shoes.”
- Metaphorical expression “to put oneself in the character’s situation” in extracts 4 and 7; and “to be put in the situation of what the character is going through” in extract 6.

This type of explicit evidence of empathy is one kind of evidence available to the analyst. However, in some cases participants may never use the word “empathy,” or they may do so without elaborating on what they mean. In the latter case, the explicit use of “empathy” or similar expressions (see table 2) is not completely unproblematic, as sometimes participants will not openly articulate the meaning behind these words. In this situation, it would be safer not to take it for granted that when a participant uses the word “empathy” the meaning is exactly the same as what the analyst takes it to mean, so looking at the co-text (i.e., words surrounding the term “empathy” or similar) is essential. As I argue below, implicit evidence of empathy offers another kind of evidence that is exceptionally valuable when examining participants’ engagement with characters.

5.2. Implicit Linguistic Evidence of Empathetic Responses

This section illustrates the application of the taxonomy presented in table 1, which captures different aspects of readers’ engagement with characters. As I argue below, *the cumulative effect of having several implicit-evidence-of-empathy features* suggests an empathetic engagement with characters. Although my focus is on empathy, my interpretation of the data does not fully exclude other related affective responses such as sympathy.

In the following extract, Reader H displays empathy with Gelman in the short story “Gelman” (see Section 3 for context about the story and its main textual features):

[10] Perhaps also because I am a mother and I put myself in the protagonist’s situation. I mean, I can be at home, perfectly available, and if anyone wants to hurt me the only way to hurt me in a brutal way is to take away what I love most, and what I love most is not my life or my freedom, what I love most is my children and my grandchildren, and if they take that away, they take away your reason for living. I mean, when you become a parent you realize there’s nothing in the world that matters more than your own children [. . .] so the very immense PAIN that can be caused to this man is not to imprison him or deprive him of freedom or communication or food. . . [. . .] he is empty because they have taken away what’s most important, his children, his grandchildren, his legacy [. . .] Therefore it seems to me that they have caused the greatest of cruelties that can ever be caused, that is, it’s been the worst. (H5, 75:83)

At the beginning of the extract, Reader H’s shared trait of parenthood (i.e., her role as a parent) begins to establish similarity of experience with Gelman’s based on firsthand experience. She takes a character-oriented perspective and vividly describes an imagined scenario which might suggest simulation of the character’s experience in the first person. She displays an affiliation with Gelman’s stance and an understanding of the nature of Gelman’s experience. Based on her understanding of Gelman’s situation, she attributes several emotional experiences to the character—if one’s family is taken away, one is stripped of all reasons for living; immense pain (notice the higher volume/emphasis on “PAIN”); feeling of emptiness—and evaluates what the experience must be like (“greatest of cruelties,” “the worst”). In terms of pronoun use, there are shifts between the third person, second person (including the speaker), and first person (see below on pronoun use). Overall, this extract can be said to portray a rather enactive display of empathetic engagement with Gelman, as I explain next.

When examining the data, I noticed differences in the extracts that I would label as empathetic. The differences have to do with the *presence vs. absence* and *high vs. low frequency* of the implicit-evidence-of-empathy features (table 1) within the same conversational turn. I drew on Caracciolo's model of experientiality in narrative to account for these observed differences,⁸ on the basis of which I propose that implicit evidence of empathy can be considered *on a spectrum between the poles of "attributive" and "enactive" displays of empathy*. I borrow these two notions from Caracciolo's model, where he distinguishes between the reading strategies of attribution and enactment. He distinguishes between (1) "consciousness-attribution," whereby the reader attributes an experience to a character, and which involves a third-person stance and (2) "consciousness-enactment," whereby the reader enacts or mentally simulates the character's experience, and which involves a first-person empathetic stance (*Experientiality of Narrative* 49). Consciousness-enactment always occurs together with consciousness-attribution, but not the other way around (118–19). I adapt these notions to describe readers' verbal displays of their empathetic engagement with characters' experiences in the reading discussion. The notion of "enactment" can be taken to mean "acting something out, turning it into action" and, in the linguistic domain in particular, enacting human experience can be seen as "turning it into words, giving it verbal and structural form" (Wales 35). The notion of "attribution," on the other hand, refers to the process of ascribing something (e.g., an emotion) to characters.

Thus, in readers' verbal descriptions of their engagement with characters, implicit linguistic evidence of empathy can be positioned at different points on this spectrum of enactive and attributive verbal displays of empathetic engagement with characters' experiences. The extent to which verbal displays of empathy are seen as enactive or attributive depends on

the *presence and clustering* (i.e., cumulative vs. isolated instances) of the “explicit” and “implicit” evidence-of-empathy features in some participants’ turns.

Thus, the enactive end of the spectrum of linguistic evidence of empathy corresponds with the *presence and cumulative clustering* of the “explicit” and “implicit” empathy features, some of which occur several times in the same conversational turn. Arguably, the combination of different evidence-of-empathy features creates a cumulative effect that can be interpreted as a rather enactive and sustained verbal display of empathy. In extract 10 above, many of the evidence-of-empathy features occur simultaneously: *character-oriented perspective taking, pronoun use/shift, attribution of emotional experience, evaluation of what the experience is like, affective alignment, attribution of values and beliefs, and imagined scenario*. Reader H’s firsthand experience as a loving mother provides understanding of the importance of children in any parent’s (including Gelman’s) life. In so doing, she is invoking similar experiences to show empathy (see Kuroshima and Iwata 102–7). This similar experience of being a devoted parent is used to demonstrate how she can understand what Gelman is going through. In this way, Reader H can “claim to have independent access to the kinds of experiences described [in the story]” (102), and thus she can account for why she can empathize with Gelman.

The remainder of Reader H’s turn also shows an articulation of the speech/thoughts that she attributes to Gelman, whereby she re-enacts Gelman’s speech/thought (see single quotation marks) from the character’s psychological viewpoint (i.e., code `Attribution of speech/thought_affiliation`):

[11] You put yourself in that situation, and it’s what it [the text] says, you wake up in the middle of the night when you have a problem, you’re unable to sleep, you’re unable to rest, that is you’re suffering a continuous torment. So of course, ‘Why didn’t they find me? Why did they take my children? What did I do wrong? What did I not do? Why wasn’t I there at that moment?’ I mean the constant torture of that father who thinks that he is

responsible for the harm they've done to his children, that is, 'How can I breathe the air I breathe if it doesn't belong to me? If because of me, because of the way I think they have killed my son, they have taken away my son-in-law, my daughter-in-law, my grandson.' I think the one who has done that reaches such a level of refined TORTURE which is much subtler and greater than what we've seen before. [Turn by Participant I omitted] It says here "writes, hoisting himself from the rubble of his life, from its dust and debris," that is, they have destroyed this human being, they have destroyed him because EVERY day he imagines living the life that belonged to his children. That is, 'I shouldn't be here! What am I doing here if the ones that should be here are my son, my daughter?' (H5, 87:95)

In this extract, Reader H alternates between talking about the character in the third person, and suddenly impersonating the character and reenacting his speech/thoughts on three occasions, with shifts to first person. In addition, she imagines a scenario which mirrors what is being conveyed in the story, thus providing a vivid depiction of the details of Gelman's situation and, arguably, imaginatively simulating his situation. She attributes concrete emotional states to the character—feelings of torment/anguish, constant torture and devastation—and evaluates what the experience must be like (notice the higher volume/emphasis on "TORTURE" and "EVERY day"). Again, the combination of these features suggests a rather vivid and enactive verbalization of what Gelman's experience must have been like, thus providing evidence of empathy at the enactive end of the scale.

What is interesting about the implicit-evidence-of-empathy features is the ways in which they cluster together. Sometimes, as I have just shown, participants' turns can be seen as rather enactive verbal displays of empathy (extracts 10 and 11) because of the cumulative effect of multiple features that count as evidence of empathy. In contrast, other turns show more attributive displays of empathy with isolated instances of the "explicit" and "implicit" evidence-of-empathy features. For example, in the following extract participants are commenting on the

story “Gelman.” The extract contains a turn by Participant B (see bold) (*N.B.* I present what happens in the discussion before and after B’s turn in order to show the co-text):

[12] C: But I think that in this case we shouldn’t forget that it’s not random, it’s not a tsunami which is a catastrophe that you cannot avoid, rather it’s a group of people making a decision, deciding to kill his children on purpose, to hurt him

E: Because the former [i.e., the tsunami] is bad luck, they were there, the wave comes and has taken them away

B: Basically, the man says “the military took my children away” and that’s it, I mean what really hurts him is not that the military took his children away but the fact that his children are no longer there (B2, 193:193)

E: Maybe because of that his projects are ruined, or at least his well [imagination] runs out, or perhaps because his children are missing he no longer has that imagination or gets blocked.

Reader B’s turn in extract 12 can be placed towards the attributive end of the scale because there is less presence and a lower frequency of the “explicit” and “implicit” evidence-of-empathy features, which are rather isolated. Reader B attributes to Gelman the emotional experience of pain and briefly voices the speech/thought that she attributes to him.

One further example to illustrate attributive verbal displays of empathy is the following turn by Participant B, who is commenting on her response to the Torturer in the short story “Professional Life” (see Section 3 for context about the story and its main textual features):

[13] I am very empathetic, and I always try, even though sometimes it’s a problem, because I can see the good things in situations which are not good [. . .]. He is an executioner, a murderer, but at the end of the day, and it says so in the second paragraph, “he is a civil servant” . . . Hmm. . . I don’t know if you’ve watched the film *The Executioner*, a Spanish film by Berlanga, which is an old one, and it’s about a man who is married to a woman and the father of this woman is the executioner at the time of the garrote vil [death penalty tool], and he has to inherit the job whether he wants to or not, and if he doesn’t he will go unemployed without a home, and the woman is pregnant, he inherits the job from an old man who is dead, and during the film is the anguish, and the thing is that you feel the anguish [. . .] you see a man who doesn’t want to do it but he has to because his

life depends on it. Many times you say ‘it’s not justifiable, I wouldn’t be able to do it.’ But the thing is you also have to put yourself in the other situation because at the end of the day it’s what it says “he and he are the same person but not the same person,” **on the one hand you see the family man who is worried, who is tormented because he has to harm others, and on the other hand you see the oppressed one who has to do what he is told to do** (B3, 7:12)

Here Reader B takes up the Torturer’s viewpoint and attributes emotional experiences to him—anguish, worry and torment (in bold). In this extract, however, the way in which the “explicit” and “implicit” evidence-of-empathy features cluster together does not create as great a cumulative effect as that which results from extracts 10–11.

Participants’ pronoun usage is also worthy of attention (code `Pronoun use/shift`) because pronoun shifts occur, sometimes often, in some participants’ turns throughout the discussion. In the following extract, Participant E is at this point discussing his perception of the Torturer in “Professional Life”:

[14] It can also be seen that **he’s** there temporarily because **he’s** waiting for a promotion that **they** are not giving **him**, so ‘damn it, **I’m** doing this’ but maybe it’s only a period of **his** life because ‘if **I** get a promotion maybe **I** don’t have to do this anymore, because **I** don’t want to do this’ but, well, **he’s** being forced to do it (E3, 146:146)

The extract provides evidence of empathy with the Torturer because participant E adopts the character’s perspective and reenacts the speech/thought that he attributes to him from the character’s perspective. What is most interesting about this turn is the frequent shift in pronoun use: participant E goes back and forth between talking about the Torturer in the third person and impersonating the character in the first person.

Pronoun shifts can indeed suggest shifts of perspective from an observer stance to an enactment of characters’ consciousnesses. Whereas the former takes third-person pronouns, the latter is realized through the use of the first-person pronoun, but also the second-person pronoun that includes the speaker him/herself (see also extracts 10 and 11 above). Thus,

pronoun shifts can be accounted for in terms of a tension: when readers enact a character's consciousness a tension is created between the reader's simulation of the experience in the first person and the reader's attribution of the experience to the character in the second or third person (Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative* 110). In my data, readers often alternate between verbally enacting the character's experience (in the first or second person) and talking about the character from an observer stance (in the third person) (122).

A final distinction to be addressed is to do with whether a dimension of the implicit-evidence-of-empathy taxonomy (i.e., perspective, emotions, other mental states, scenario) features most often in readers' discussions. In this sense, the data revealed differences in the kinds of empathetic involvement that participants displayed with the different characters. Put differently, in some conversational extracts the evidence-of-empathy features would cluster together around one specific dimension and not others. The starkest contrast is that between the characters Gelman and the Torturer: readers engaged with Gelman's experience in a rather emotional way (and so the empathy-of-evidence features clustered together more around the "emotion" category of the taxonomy), whereas the empathy displayed for the Torturer seems to be more cognitive in nature (and so the clustering occurred around the "other mental states" and "situation" categories).

Scholars often agree that empathy is both an affective and a cognitive process, as the interaction between affective and cognitive dimensions is widely recognized in the literature (Cuff et al.). However, in some cases the data shows more evidence of either cognitive empathy or affective empathy. "Cognitive empathy" is regarded as the ability to understand other people's feelings (Cuff et al.), draw inferences about their mental states (Zaki and Oschner), and take their psychological point of view (Burke et al.). In contrast, "affective or emotional

empathy" involves the ability to understand *and share* the feelings of others by way of simulation (Zaki and Oschner; Burke et al.).

Participants often attributed emotions to Gelman (see extracts 10–12 above) and displayed an understanding of *how Gelman must feel* in his situation. In contrast, very few emotional experiences were attributed to the Torturer (extract 13 being the exception), and participants mostly made inferences about *how the Torturer thinks*. What readers attributed most to the Torturer are (1) speech/thoughts, (2) thought processes, (3) values and beliefs, (4) goals and needs, and (5) aspects of his situation, and on that basis, they explained the Torturer's actions and behavior. To illustrate this contrast, I refer to three extracts: extract 13 (see above) shows evidence of emotional empathy with the Torturer, whereas extracts 15 and 16 below show evidence of a more cognitive kind of empathy with the character.

The only instance of emotion attribution for the Torturer in the two focus group discussions was found in one turn by Participant B (see extract 13 above), which I displayed in full because the co-text (i.e., surrounding text) is extremely useful for understanding how she articulates her empathy with the Torturer. In extract 13 above, Participant B starts by acknowledging her own empathetic disposition, which frames the rest of the turn. Her previous experience of a narrative text (the film *The Executioner*) enables her to attribute concrete emotional experiences to the Torturer—anguish, worry, and torment. This provides linguistic evidence of empathy in that Participant B takes up the Torturer's viewpoint and displays an affective alignment with the character's experience. However, the general trend among those who empathized with the Torturer is rather a more cognitive form of empathy, as the two extracts below illustrate:

[15] But here is a different story. Because we're seeing the two faces of humanity, the man who apparently fought for independence, and then the other is a soldier, right? A French

soldier, yes, I imagine he's a policeman or a soldier who maybe in order not to be sent to the front and not to combat in order not to get killed, because it's really for that reason, in order not to be killed [...] you don't take the risk of getting shot or getting blown out and we see it's a man who is a civil servant [...] and has a salary and we see he's a human being who is there because he has to be there, or because he has no other way to live in a better way, [...] but it's the human contradiction of 'I survive even though I have to lose part of my pride and dignity and ethics and morality' (16, 9:11)

[16] I think what also influences is the fact that he doesn't consider one hundred per cent if what he does is right or wrong, I think perhaps, this is imagining it a bit because the text doesn't say this, but if a man who has been raised at the time of the French colonies, etc., I think it's different from a situation of dictatorship because if this man has always been told that 'Algeria is ours, it is French land, and that's how things are', and he has never seen it in a different way he can't see the scale of what he's doing, because in a way, yes, he knows he [is harming] a person, a human being, it's not a nation, he's torturing a person, but it's not his fault that Algeria wanted to become independent at that moment, but at the same time he has that in the background 'I've been raised with this, we're a nation, and now I don't understand why'... (G6, 96:97)

Both Participants I and G mentally represent the Torturer as having specific goals, values, and beliefs: (1) a soldier who tries to avoid death during the independence war, and (2) a man whose mindset and behavior are influenced by his upbringing during colonial times. Both extracts provide evidence of empathy with the Torturer because of the presence of several implicit-evidence-of-empathy features—both participants adopt the character's perspective and describe an imagined scenario which is framed by the character's own goals, values, and beliefs. All of this enables these two participants to understand the character's actions and mental states in the complexity of his situation. In short, the kind of empathy displayed in extracts 15 and 16 is arguably more cognitive in nature, whereas extracts 13, 10, and 11 above capture a more emotional type of empathy with the characters.

To recapitulate, the notions of "enactive" and "attributive" verbal displays of empathy are useful to capture the different verbalizations or linguistic realizations of participants

engagement with characters' experiences, depending on the presence and clustering of the "explicit" and "implicit" evidence-of-empathy features. In short, enactive displays of empathy are seen in the cumulative effect of multiple features clustering together (extracts 10–11) and can be associated, for example, with a higher degree of vividness in participants' accounts when expressing (i.e., giving verbal form to) what they perceive the character's experience must be like. At the other end of the spectrum, attributive verbal displays of empathy are seen in rather isolated instances of the "explicit" and "implicit" evidence-of-empathy features (extracts 12–13). Attention has also been given to participants' pronoun use, as this can suggest shifts between a first-person enactment of characters' experiences and a second- or third-person attribution of characters' experiences. Finally, I have pointed out how sometimes a particular category or dimension of the evidence-of-empathy taxonomy (i.e., perspective, emotion, other mental states, situation) features more prominently depending on what aspect of characters' experiences readers focus on during the discussion.

6. Conclusion

This paper has addressed an important methodological gap in the analysis of empathetic reader responses. Given the lack of explicit guidance in the literature on how to conduct a qualitative analysis of empathetic reader responses, I have proposed a taxonomy to make workable the key issue of how we can tell that there is evidence of empathy. In the case of my data (i.e., elicited verbal data in the form of spoken group discussion), this necessarily narrows down the evidence to participants' linguistic expressions and discursive strategies and shows the need for a linguistically-aware analysis of the data. The analytical focus is thus on the *linguistic evidence of empathy* as displayed in participants' verbal self-reports.

As noted in Section 1, it is urgent to address this gap because the empirical study of narrative empathy is quickly growing (see Fernandez-Quintanilla and Stradling) and there is a genuine need for a framework to qualitatively analyze evidence of empathy in readers' responses. This taxonomy has been successfully applied already by Stradling and Pager-McClymont and Pager-McClymont and Stradling, where they examine empathetic responses to a short story by Alice Walker.

The taxonomy of implicit evidence of empathy proposed here helps to capture when (1) readers adopt characters' perspectives and reenact or recreate their speech/thought from the characters' psychological viewpoints; (2) draw inferences about and grasp characters' mental states (including emotions, thought processes, values and beliefs, goals, and needs); (3) verbalize what the experience means for the character (i.e., what it must be like to experience what the character is experiencing), and evaluate the experience; and (4) mentally represent the details of the situation that characters are facing, vividly imagine a similar scenario, and/or attribute characters' actions and situation to contextual forces (as opposed to personality/dispositional factors). Although the focus of my analysis is on empathy, the implicit-evidence-of-empathy features that I have identified do not exclude other readerly responses.

To conclude, the problem of determining what counts as evidence of empathy in qualitative verbal responses, although under-emphasized in previous literature, should be openly discussed in order to inform future research practice in narrative empathy studies. In addition, the taxonomy can be adapted for the analysis of other reader responses, with the aim to identify linguistic evidence of the phenomenon under analysis. As well as empirical narratology, empirical stylistics, and empirical literary studies, this article hopes to make a methodological contribution to the empirical study of the arts more generally, as the taxonomy

can be adapted by other empirically-oriented scholars to analyze empathetic responses to other forms of art.

Research funding

Carolina Fernandez-Quintanilla thanks the Spanish Ministry of Universities and the European Union (Next Generation EU) for her María Zambrano Postdoctoral Research Fellowship.

Works Cited

- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Breithaupt, Fritz. *The Dark Sides of Empathy*. Translated by Andrew B. B. Hamilton. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.
- Burke, Michael, Anežka Kuzmičová, Anne Mangen and Theresa Schilhab. "Empathy at the Confluence of Neuroscience and Empirical Literary Studies." *Scientific Study of Literature* 6.1 (2016): 6–41.
- Cameron, Lynne. "Living with Uncertainty Working Paper 6: A Dynamic Model of Empathy and Dyspathy." *Metaphor and the Dynamics of Empathy in Discourse*, 2013.
<https://www5.open.ac.uk/research-projects/living-with-uncertainty/working-papers>
- Caracciolo, Marco. "Experientiality." In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, 2014. <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/102.html> (accessed 3 October 2020).
- . *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.
- Cooper, Colin. "State." In *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology*, edited by Graham Davey. London: Routledge, 2006.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGJlbGU6MjUwODEyNQ==>
 (accessed 6 September 2024).
- Coplan, Amy. "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62.2 (2004): 141–52.
- . "Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects." In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, 3–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- . "Will the Real Empathy Please Stand up? A Case for a Narrow Conceptualisation." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49.1 (2011): 40–65.
- Cuff, Benjamin M.P., Sarah J. Brown, Laura Taylor, and Douglas J. Howat. "Empathy: A Review of the Concept." *Emotion Review* 8.2 (2016): 144–53.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*. Harlow: Longman, 2011.
- Fernandez-Quintanilla, Carolina. "Textual and Reader Factors in Narrative Empathy: An Empirical Reader Response Study Using Focus Groups." *Language and Literature* 29.2 (2020): 124–46.
- Fernandez-Quintanilla, Carolina and Fransina Stradling. "Introduction: Stylistic Approaches to Narrative Empathy". *Journal of Literary Semantics* 52.2 (2023): 103–21.
- Fludernik, Monika. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Fowler, Roger. *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *El Libro de los Abrazos [The Book of Embraces]*, 13th ed. Madrid: Siglo XXI, (1989) 2002.
- Gallagher, Shaun. "Empathy, Simulation, and Narrative." *Science in Context* 25.3 (2012): 355–81.
- Halpern, Faye. "Closeness Through Unreliability: Sympathy, Empathy, and Ethics in Narrative Communication." *Narrative* 26.2 (2018): 125–45.
- Hein, Grit and Tania Singer. "I Feel How You Feel but Not Always: The Empathic Brain and Its Modulation." *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 18.2 (2008): 153–58.
- Keen, Suzanne. "A Theory of Narrative Empathy." *Narrative* 14.3 (2006): 207–36.
- . "Narrative Empathy." In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, 2013. <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/42.html> (accessed 3 October 2020).

- Kidd, David. C. and Emanuele Castano. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science* 342.6156 (2013): 377–80.
- Koopman, Emy. "Empathic Reactions after Reading: The Role of Genre, Personal Factors and Affective Responses." *Poetics* 50 (2015): 62–79.
- Kuroshima, Satomi and Natsuho Iwata. "On Displaying Empathy: Dilemma, Category, and Experience." *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 49.2 (2016): 92–110.
- Kuzmičová, Anežka, Anne Mangen, Hildegunn Støle, and Anne Charlotte Begnum. "Literature and Readers' Empathy: A Qualitative Text Manipulation Study." *Language and Literature* 26.2 (2017): 137–52.
- Laffer, Alex. "A Poetics of Empathy: Discussion of Migrants in and around a Work of Fiction." PhD diss., The Open University, UK, 2016.
- Langlotz, Andreas. "Language and Emotion in Fiction." In *Pragmatics of Fiction*, edited by Locher Miriam A. and Andreas H. Jucker, 515–52. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.
- László, János and Ildiko Smogyvary. "Narrative Empathy and Inter-group Relations." In *Directions in Empirical Literary Studies: In Honor of Willie van Peer*, edited by Sonia Zyngier, Marisa Bortolussi, Anna Chesnokova, and Jan Auracher, 113–25. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2008.
- Leech, Geoffrey and Mick Short. *Style in Fiction*. London: Longman, 2007.
- van Lissa, Caspar J., Marco Caracciolo, Thom van Duuren, and Bram van Leuven. "Difficult Empathy: The Effect of Narrative Perspective on Reader's Engagement with a First-Person Narrator." *Diegesis* 5.1 (2016): 43–62.
- Nuttall, Louise. "Attributing Minds to Vampires in Richard Matheson's 'I Am Legend'." *Language and Literature* 24.1 (2015): 23–39.

- Pager-McClymont, Kimberley and Fransina Stradling. "Using Think-Aloud Data to Explore Pathetic Fallacy's Impact on Narrative Empathy". In *Applied Cognitive Ecostylistics: From Ego to Eco*, edited by Malgorzata Drewniok and Marek Kuzniak, 69–97. Bloomsbury, 2024.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Reber, Arthur S., Rhianon Allen, and Emily Reber. "Mental State." In *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*. 4th ed. London: Penguin, 2009.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6OTI0Mzcx> (accessed 6 September 2024).
- Singer, Tania and Claus Lamm. "The Social Neuroscience of Empathy." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 11561 (2009): 81–96.
- Short, Mick. *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays, and Prose*. London: Longman, 1996.
- Shuman, Amy. *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
- Sternberg, Meir. "Reconceptualizing Narratology: Arguments for a Functionalist and Constructivist Approach to Narrative." *Enthymema* 4 (2011): 35–50.
- Stradling, Fransina and Kimberley Pager-McClymont. "The Role of Pathetic Fallacy in Shaping Narrative Empathy." *Journal of Literary Semantics* 52.2 (2023): 123–43.
- Stueber, Karsten R. "Varieties of Empathy, Neuroscience and the Narrativist Challenge to the Contemporary Theory of Mind Debate." *Emotion Review* 4.1 (2012): 55–63.
- Swann, Joan and Daniel Allington, "Reading Groups and the Language of Literary Texts: A Case Study in Social Reading." *Language and Literature* 18.3 (2009): 247–64.
- de Vignemont, Frédérique and Pierre Jacob, "What Is It like to Feel Another's Pain?" *Philosophy of Science* 79.2 (2012): 295–316.

Wales, Katie. *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. Harlow: Longman, 2011.

Whiteley, Sara. "Text World Theory, Real Readers and Emotional Responses to 'The Remains of the Day'." *Language and Literature* 20.1 (2011): 23–42.

Whiteley, Sara and Patricia Canning. "Reader Response Research in Stylistics." *Language and Literature* 26.2 (2017): 71–87.

Wirag, Andreas. "The Scope of Empirical Narratology." *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 6.1 (2020): 113–26.

Zaki, Jamil and Kevin N. Ochsner. "The Neuroscience of Empathy: Progress, Pitfalls and Promise." *Nature Neuroscience* 15.5 (2012): 675–80.

Endnotes

¹ The term “mental states” is used broadly to include emotions, thoughts, beliefs, values, intentions, and desires (Cooper; Reber et al.; Stueber). Although the emotional component is central to empathy, some scholars consider that empathy may encompass any mental state, and so it may not be restricted to emotional experiences (Caracciolo, *Experientiality of Narrative* 130). Thus, mental states may include both cognitive and affective processes (Fernandez-Quintanilla 143).

² Within the study of literary empathy, it has been claimed that experiencing empathy with characters in literary reading can help readers develop their real-world interpersonal empathy skills; more specifically, their affective theory of mind (Kidd and Castano). However, this claim is not without controversy (see Koopman; Kuzmičová et al.).

³ Empathy is commonly thought to promote positive social outcomes such as altruism and morally correct behavior. Care should be taken, however, not to oversimplify and glorify empathy (Breithaupt). There have been critiques of empathy that offer helpful cautions about its potential negative effects. For example, Fritz Breithaupt's *The Dark Sides of Empathy* explores the egotistic aesthetic pleasure of the empathizer in behaviors such as “empathetic sadism” (when empathy is used to enjoy the pain of others; e.g., in tragedies, bullying, or domination) and “vampiristic empathy” (when someone expands their own life experiences by appropriating another person's experiences; e.g., helicopter parents, stage mothers, and fans). Particularly relevant for the study of narrative empathy is Amy Shuman's *Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy*. She warns of two ethical dangers of storytelling involving the ownership, (mis)representation, and (mis)appropriation of experience in stories: “entitlement” (when a story is used beyond the context of the experience it represents) and “allegory” (when a personal story is used to represent a collective experience). In Shuman's view, both entitlement and allegory compromise empathy and “the possibility of understanding across differences in experience” (4). These and other critiques of empathy are useful to the empirical study of narrative empathy because analysts need an awareness of the ethical relationships between tellers, stories, readers/empathizers, and characters/targets of empathy.

⁴ My study used the focus group method to collect readers' responses. Other qualitative studies of reader responses to texts have used *reading groups* (Laffer; Swann and Allington), *discussion groups* (Whiteley), *online book reviews* (Nuttall), or *think-aloud protocols* (Stradling and Pager-McClymont).

⁵ van Lissa et al. used the following codes for the analysis of attitude and trust: ethical condemnation, unpredictability, strangeness, unreliability, psychological evaluation, positive attitude, sympathy, negative attitude, social evaluation, feelings of distance, lack of interest, psychological disorder, pity, lack of understanding, hesitation, interest, story not long enough, feelings of closeness, temporal development, the character should act differently, synthetic judgment (58).

⁶ The coding categories in Kuzmičová et al. were:

Theory of Mind-related qualities

ToM: item refers to story character's affective and/or cognitive mental state)

Spec: character is attributed a specific emotion, intention, belief, or other mental state.

Mod: epistemic modality is used in attributing a specific mental state to character.

Gen: character's specific mental state is generalized based on subject's real-world knowledge.

Emp: item explicitly refers to subject's first-person experience of empathy with character's mental state (specific or not).

Other (non-ToM) qualities

Non-ToM: item refers to other story qualities unrelated to theory of mind)

Plot: item refers to subject's suspense or surprise in relation to plot.

Imag: item refers to subject's experience of sensory mental imagery.

Styl: stylistic features. (144, emphasis original)

⁷ When citing the focus group data, the information in brackets refers to participant (A–H), primary document in Atlas.ti, and line numbers from the transcripts. For example, (B2, 89:90).

⁸ According to Caracciolo, the concept of "experientiality" (first introduced by Fludernik) has been interpreted in two ways: (1) the textual representation of characters' experiences and psychological processes, and (2) the experiences and psychological processes undergone by recipients of narratives (*Experientiality* para. 6; *Experientiality of Narrative* 3). Regarding the latter, experientiality can be regarded as the potential of narratives to trigger experiential states and responses in readers (*Experientiality* para. 13), and so experientiality emerges from the interaction between texts and readers' past experiences (para. 6).