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# A Theory of Narrative Empathy

We are living in a time when the activation of mirror neurons in the brains of onlookers can be recorded as they witness another's actions and emotional reactions.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary neuroscience has brought us much closer to an understanding of the neural basis for human mind reading and emotion sharing abilities—the mechanisms underlying empathy. The activation of onlookers' mirror neurons by a coach's demonstration of technique or an internal visualization of proper form and by representations in television, film, visual art, and pornography has already been recorded.<sup>2</sup> Simply hearing a description of an absent other's actions lights up mirror neuron areas during fMRI imaging of the human brain.<sup>3</sup> The possibility that novel reading stimulates mirror neurons' activation can now, as never before, undergo neuroscientific investigation. Neuroscientists have already declared that people scoring high on empathy tests have especially busy mirror neuron systems in their brains.<sup>4</sup> Fiction writers are likely to be among these high empathy individuals. For the first time we might investigate whether human differences in mirror neuron activity can be altered by exposure to art, to teaching, to literature.

This newly enabled capacity to study empathy at the cellular level encourages speculation about human empathy's positive consequences. These speculations are not new, as any student of eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism will affirm, but they dovetail with efforts on the part of contemporary virtue ethicists, political philosophers, educators, theologians, librarians, and interested parties such as authors and publishers to connect the experience of empathy, including its literary

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form, with outcomes of changed attitudes, improved motives, and better care and justice. Thus a very specific, limited version of empathy located in the neural substrate meets in the contemporary moment a more broadly and loosely defined, fuzzier sense of empathy as the feeling precursor to and prerequisite for liberal aspirations to greater humanitarianism. The sense of crisis stirred up by reports of stark declines in reading goes into this mix, catalyzing fears that the evaporation of a reading public leaves behind a population incapable of feeling with others. Yet the apparently threatened set of links among novel reading, experiences of narrative empathy, and altruism has not yet been proven to exist. This essay undertakes three tasks preliminary to the scrutiny of the empathy-altruism hypothesis<sup>5</sup> as it might apply to experiences of narrative empathy (to be developed in greater detail in the forthcoming *Empathy and the Novel*). These tasks include: a discussion of empathy as psychologists understand and study it; a brief introduction to my theory of narrative empathy, including proposals about how narrative empathy works; and a review of the current research on the effects of specific narrative techniques on real readers.

### WHAT IS EMPATHY?

*Empathy*, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading. Mirroring what a person might be expected to feel in that condition or context, empathy is thought to be a precursor to its semantic close relative, *sympathy*.<sup>6</sup> *Personal distress*, an aversive emotional response also characterized by apprehension of another's emotion, differs from empathy in that it focuses on the self and leads not to sympathy but to avoidance. The distinction between empathy and personal distress matters because empathy is associated with the moral emotion *sympathy* (also called *empathic concern*) and thus with prosocial or altruistic action.<sup>7</sup> Empathy that leads to sympathy is by definition other-directed, whereas an over-aroused empathic response that creates personal distress (self-oriented and aversive) causes a turning-away from the provocative condition of the other. None of the philosophers who put stock in the morally improving experience of narrative empathy include personal distress in their theories. Because novel reading can be so easily stopped or interrupted by an unpleasant emotional reaction to a book, however, personal distress has no place in a literary theory of empathy, though it certainly contributes to aesthetic emotions, such as those Sianne Ngai describes in her important book *Ugly Feelings*.

In empathy, sometimes described as an emotion in its own right,<sup>8</sup> we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others.<sup>9</sup> Empathy is thus agreed to be both affective and cognitive by most psychologists. Empathy is distinguished in both psychology and philosophy (though not in popular usage) from *sympathy*, in which feelings for another occur. So, for instance, one may distinguish empathy from sympathy in this fashion:

**Empathy:**

I feel what you feel.  
*I feel your pain.*

**Sympathy:**

I feel a supportive emotion  
 about your feelings.  
*I feel pity for your pain.*

These examples emphasize negative emotions—pain and pity—but it should be noted from the outset that although psychological and philosophical studies of empathy have tended to gravitate towards the negative, empathy also occurs for positive feelings of happiness, satisfaction, elation, triumph, and sexual arousal.<sup>10</sup> All of these positive kinds of empathy play into readers' pleasure, or *jouissance*.<sup>11</sup>

Experts on *emotional contagion*, the communication of one's mood to others, have done a better job of studying the full range of emotional states that can be shared through our automatic mimicry of one another.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, primitive emotional contagion, or "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and consequently, to converge emotionally" (Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson 81) offers a compelling explanation of a component of our empathy as arising from our physical and social awareness of one another, from birth. Inherited traits play an important role in our disposition to experience emotional contagion,<sup>13</sup> but our personal histories and cultural contexts affect the way we understand automatically shared feelings.<sup>14</sup>

So, for instance, emotional contagion comes into play in our reactions to narrative, for we are also story-sharing creatures. The oral storyteller not only takes advantage of our tendency to share feelings socially by doing the voices and facial expressions of characters, but also tacitly trains young children and members of the wider social group to recognize and give priority to culturally valued emotional states.<sup>15</sup> This education does not create our feelings, but renders emotional states legible through their labels and activates our expectations about what emotions mean. Narratives in prose and film infamously manipulate our feelings and call upon our built-in capacity to feel with others. Indeed, the early history of empathy as a subject of study emphasized both emotional contagion and aesthetic responses.

The word empathy appeared as a translation of *Einfühlung* in the early twentieth century. In 1909, the experimental psychologist E. B. Titchener translated as "empathy" aesthetician Theodor Lipps' term *Einfühlung* (which meant the process of "feeling one's way into" an art object or another person).<sup>16</sup> Notably, Titchener's 1915 elaboration of the concept in *Beginner's Psychology* exemplifies empathy through a description of a reading experience: "We have a natural tendency to feel ourselves into what we perceive or imagine. As we read about the forest, we may, as it were, become the explorer; we feel for ourselves the gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger; everything is strange, but it is to us that strange experience has come" (198). In the beginning of the twentieth century, the English novelist Vernon Lee brought *Einfühlung* and empathy to a broader literary audience. In a public lecture followed by a magazine piece in a popular journal,<sup>17</sup> Lee advanced a theory of aesthetic perception of form involving empathy,

though not (at first) so named. Originally Lee's aesthetics focused on bodily sensations and muscular adjustments made by beholders of works of art and architecture and downplayed emotional responsiveness. By the time she revised and expanded her ideas for presentation in book form, however, Lee had adapted Lipps' understanding of empathy, a parallel development from common sources in German aesthetics.

Defining the purpose of art as, in part, "the awakening, intensifying, or maintaining of definite emotional states" (Lee 99–100), Lee makes empathy a central feature of our collaborative responsiveness (128). In an account that combines motor mimicry, memory, and psychological responsiveness to inanimate objects, Lee argues that empathy enters into "imagination, sympathy, and also into that inference from our own inner experience which has shaped all our conceptions of an outer world, and given to the intermittent and heterogeneous sensations received from without the framework of our constant and highly unified inner experience, that is to say, of our own activities and aims" (68). No sooner had the term been announced and situated so centrally in aesthetic theory for an English-language audience, however, than it received brisk challenge from high modernist quarters. The disdain of Bertolt Brecht for empathy (and his advocacy of so-called alienation effects), the embrace of difficulty by modernist poets, and the dominance of New Criticism, which taught students to avoid the affective fallacy all interfered with the integration of empathy into literary theory until recently. Novelists and novel readers who prized experiences of emotional fusion cultivated narrative empathy throughout periods when the term was in eclipse.

### HOW IS EMPATHY STUDIED?

The focus on our embodied experience in feminist criticism, disability studies, cognitive approaches to narrative, and some ecocriticism, draws literary studies closer to disciplines that accept the use of making measurements, doing tests and experiments, and interpreting empirical evidence. This section explains some of the methods being used by neuroscientists and developmental and social psychologists to study empathy. Developing the conversation between literature and psychology ought to benefit both disciplines, however, and the subsequent comments on what is known and especially what has not yet been tested about the effects of narrative techniques contributes to a more nuanced application of psychonarratology to questions of interest to social and developmental psychologists.

Psychologists test and record empathy in a variety of ways. Physiological measures, sometimes combined with self-reports, can show the strength or weakness (or presence and absence) of empathic responses.<sup>18</sup> Psychologists measure changes in heart rate and skin conductance (palm sweat). They collect data on perceptible and imperceptible facial reactions, the latter captured by EMG (electromyographic) procedures.<sup>19</sup> They ask subjects how they feel or how they would act in certain situations, gathering responses through self-reports during or immediately after experiments and through surveys. Specialized surveys known as "empathy scales"

are used to assess subjects' strength of empathic feeling.<sup>20</sup> Recently, Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) has had a profound impact on brain science, including the study of empathy.<sup>21</sup>

Tania Singer and her colleagues have recently published a study in *Science* documenting empathetic responses to witnessing another's pain, supported by fMRI data. This study broke new ground in demonstrating why a person perceives that she feels another's pain, while not literally experiencing the identical sensations. Singer compared what happened in a subject's brain when she was actually shocked, when pain regions in the limbic system (the anterior cingulate cortex, the insula, the thalamus, and the somatosensory cortices) lit up on the fMRI, with what the brain looked like during observation of another's pain. When watching a loved one in the same room receiving a sharp shock, subjects showed active responses in the *affective* parts of the brain's pain matrix (in the anterior insula and anterior cingulate cortex, the lateral cerebellum, and the brainstem), but not in the somatosensory cortices of the brain. The affective brain areas responded to both real and imagined pain. A person not actually experiencing pain but observing a loved one being shocked showed brain activation of matching emotional areas, though not the sensory areas. Empathy alone did not light up the sensory areas for pain. Singer and her colleagues conclude that empathy is mediated by the part of the pain network associated with pain's affective qualities, but not its sensory qualities (Singer et al 1157). They observed that subjects with higher scores on general empathy scales<sup>22</sup> "showed stronger activations in areas significantly activated when the subjects perceived their partner as being in pain" (1159). They also discovered that the same empathetic effects could be elicited without an emotional cue—in other words, subjects did not need to see their partners grimacing in pain in order to show empathic responses. An "arbitrary cue" signaling the feeling state of another was sufficient to elicit empathy (1158). This set of results affirms what neuroscientist working on mirror neurons on monkeys have theorized and what philosophers since David Hume have been saying about empathy for centuries. For the first time, brain images supporting the long-standing introspective account of empathy have been recorded.

The questions of how and why empathy works in the bodies and brains of human beings can still only be answered with theoretical speculations about the physiological substrate,<sup>23</sup> though the fMRI-based research described above and recent neuroscience on the shared manifold for intersubjectivity gets researchers closer than they have been before. Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal propose that witnessing or imagining another in an emotional state activates automatic representations of that same state in the onlooker, including responses in the nervous system and the body. They write that "empathy processes likely contain fast reflexive subcortical processes (directly from sensory cortices to thalamus to amygdala to response) and slower cortical processes (from thalamus to cortex to amygdala to response). These roughly map onto contagious and cognitive forms of empathy, respectively" (Preston and de Waal 12). The advantages of automatic responses lie in their speediness. Joseph LeDoux has written about how fear responses in the amygdala provide a quick and dirty, possibly life-saving response to environmental threats, which can then be evaluated as the slightly slower cognitive evaluation of a

threat kick in (*Le Doux* 168–78). What is sometimes called “primitive empathy” may work in the same way, provided a first, fast, feeling response to seeing or learning about another’s emotional state, before cognitive evaluation through deliberate role taking occurs.<sup>24</sup>

The human capacity for primitive empathy, or the phenomenon of spontaneously matching feelings, suggests that human beings are basically similar to one another, with a limited range of variations. Psychologist Martin Hoffman, for instance, believes that the structural similarities in people’s physiological and cognitive response systems cause similar feelings to be evoked by similar events (Hoffman, *Moral Development* 62). However, Hoffman would be the first to concede that similarity itself is not enough to guarantee an empathic response. Singer and her colleagues believe that our survival depends on effective functioning in social contexts, and that feeling what others feel, empathizing, contributes to that success. They suggest that “our ability to empathize has evolved from a system for representing our internal bodily states and subjective feeling states” to ourselves (Singer et al 1161). In other words, empathy as Singer’s group understands it participates in a theory of mind that links second order re-representations of others to the system that allows us to predict the results of emotional stimuli for ourselves. Recent research suggests a mechanism at the neural level that would enable such representations of others’ actions, including facial expressions and bodily postures that may convey emotional states.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary neuroscience theorizes a system for representation of others’ feelings that participates in the task of enabling us to understand the motives, beliefs, and thoughts of others. This work on empathy thus supports the theories of evolutionary psychology that emphasize the adaptive function of our social relations.<sup>26</sup> Given this basis in human shared intersubjectivity, empathy thus appears to many to be a key element in our responsiveness to others.

My work seeks to clarify why the link between narrative empathy and altruism is nonetheless so tenuous. For a novel reader who experiences either empathy or personal distress, there can be no expectancy of reciprocation involved in the aesthetic response. The very nature of fictionality renders social contracts between people and person-like characters null and void. Unlike the hostage children in Beslan who wished that Harry Potter would come to their rescue, adult readers know that fictional characters cannot offer us aid. Similarly, we accept that we cannot help them out, much as we may wish to intervene: Don’t marry him, Dorothea! We may feel intense interest in characters, but incurring obligations towards them violates the terms of fictionality. That is, an empathetic response can be diverted from a prosocial outcome through interfering cognition.

The treatment of emotions and rationality as separate and dichotomous features of our experience has been challenged in recent decades. Thinking and feeling, for Antonio R. Damasio, are part of the same package.<sup>27</sup> In a series of academic articles and popular books, he has shown that clinical patients suffering from emotional disorders have cognitive difficulties: Ronald DeSousa has advocated recognition of the rationality of emotions and Joseph LeDoux’s cognitive neuroscience focuses on *The Emotional Brain*. Evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby<sup>28</sup> speak for a growing group of scientists who believe that “one cannot sensibly talk

about emotion affecting cognition because ‘cognition’ refers to a language for describing all of the brain’s operations, including emotions and reasoning (whether deliberative or nonconscious), and not to any particular subset of operations” (Cosmides and Tooby, “Evolutionary Psychology” 98).<sup>29</sup> In the relatively recent field known as Cognitive Approaches to Literary Studies, where the work of LeDoux and Damasio has virtually canonical status, matters of affect are generally considered to fall under the umbrella of the term “cognitive.” Few literary cognitivists acknowledge that a psychologist might not readily accede to the centrality of emotions to cognition. The sub-disciplinary boundaries within the extremely diverse field of psychology result in different emphases and perspectives on the place of the emotions. Empathy studies have from the start challenged the division of emotion and cognition, but they have also been altered by the convictions and disciplinary affiliations of those who study empathy.

I set aside for the moment the view that emotions and cognition describe different processes of the central nervous system, for empathy itself clearly involves both feeling and thinking. Memory, experience, and the capacity to take another’s perspective (all matters traditionally considered cognitive) have roles in empathy. Yet the experience of empathy in the feeling subject involves the emotions, including sensations in the body. In any case, narrative empathy invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations. Yet overall, emotional response to reading is the more neglected aspect of what literary cognitivists refer to under the umbrella term cognition. This does not need to be so. The discipline of aesthetics, which has historical ties both to philosophy and to psychology, as well as to literary studies, has been interested for over a century in empathy as a facet of creativity and an explanation of human response to artworks.<sup>30</sup> In its strongest form, aesthetics’ empathy describes a projective fusing with an object—which may be another person or an animal, but may also be a fictional character made of words, or even, in some accounts, inanimate things such as landscapes, artworks, or geological features.<sup>31</sup> The acts of imagination and projection involved in such empathy certainly deserve the label cognitive, but the sensations, however strange, deserve to be registered as feelings. Thus I do not quarantine narrative empathy in the zone of either affect or cognition: as a process, it involves both. When texts invite readers to feel, they also stimulate readers’ thinking.<sup>32</sup> Whether novel reading comprises a significant enough feature of the environment of literate people to play a critical role in their prosocial development remains to be seen. Even the leap between reading and empathizing can fall short, impeded by inattention, indifference, or personal distress. Readers’ cognitive and affective responses do not inevitably lead to empathizing, but fiction does disarm readers of some of the protective layers of cautious reasoning that may inhibit empathy in the real world.

Narrative theorists, novel critics, and reading specialists have already singled out a small set of narrative techniques—such as the use of first person narration and the interior representation of characters’ consciousness and emotional states—as devices supporting character identification, contributing to empathetic experiences, opening readers’ minds to others, changing attitudes, and even predisposing readers to altruism. In the course of reviewing the available research on this subject, I point



out the gaps in our knowledge of potentially empathetic narrative techniques. No specific set of narrative techniques has yet been verified to over-ride the resistance to empathizing often displayed by members of an in-group regarding the emotional states of others marked out as different by their age, race, gender, weight, disabilities, and so forth.<sup>33</sup> Human beings, like other primates, tend to experience empathy most readily and accurately for those who seem like us, as David Hume and Adam Smith predicted.<sup>34</sup> We may find ourselves regarding the feelings of those who seem outside the tribe with a range of emotions, but without empathy.<sup>35</sup> If empathetic reading experiences start a chain reaction leading to mature sympathy and altruistic behavior, as advocates of the empathy-altruism hypothesis believe, then discovering the narrative techniques involved matters. It is one thing to discover, however, that high empathizers report empathetic reading experiences, and quite another to show that empathetic reading experiences can contribute to changing a reader's disposition, motivations, and attitudes. If novels could extend readers' sense of shared humanity beyond the predictable limitations, then the narrative techniques involved in such an accomplishment should be especially prized.

### A THEORY OF NARRATIVE EMPATHY

Character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from one another in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but empathy for fictional characters appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization. Whether a reader's empathy or her identification with a character comes first is an open question: spontaneous empathy for a fictional character's feelings sometimes opens the way for character identification. Not all feeling states of characters evoke empathy; indeed, empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative emotions, whether or not a match in details of experience exists. Finally, readers' experiences differ from one another, and empathy with characters doesn't always occur as a result of reading an emotionally evocative fiction.

Several observations help to explain the differences in readers' responses. Most importantly, readers' empathic dispositions are not identical to one another. Some humans are more empathetic to real others and some feel little empathy at all. (Some research suggests that empathizers are better readers, because their role-taking abilities allow them to more readily comprehend causal relations in stories.<sup>36</sup>) The timing and the context of the reading experience matters: the capacity of novels to invoke readers' empathy changes over time, and some novels may only activate the empathy of their first, immediate audience, while others must survive to reach a later generation of readers in order to garner an emotionally resonant reading. Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances, either in the moment of first publication or in later times, fortuitously anticipated or prophetically foreseen by the novelist.

Novelists do not exert complete control over the responses to their fiction. Empathy for a fictional character does not invariably correspond with what the author

appears to set up or invite. Situational empathy, which responds primarily to aspects of plot and circumstance, involves less self-extension in imaginative role taking and more recognition of prior (or current) experience. A novelist invoking situational empathy can only hope to reach readers with appropriately correlating experiences. The generic and formal choices made by authors in crafting fictional worlds play a role in inviting (or retarding) readers' empathic responses. This means that for some readers, the author's use of the formulaic conventions of a thriller or a romance novel would increase empathetic resonance, while for other readers (perhaps better educated and attuned to literary effects) unusual or striking representations promote foregrounding and open the way to empathetic reading.<sup>37</sup>

Novelists themselves often vouch for the centrality of empathy to novel reading and writing and express belief in narrative empathy's power to change the minds and lives of readers. This belief mirrors their experiences as ready empathizers. Yet even the most fervent employers of their empathetic imaginations realize that this key ingredient of fictional worldmaking does not always transmit to readers without interference. Author's empathy can be devoted to socially undesirable ends that may be rejected by a disapproving reader. Indeed, empathic distress at feeling with a character whose actions are at odds with a reader's moral code may be a result of successfully exercised authorial empathy. Both authors' empathy and readers' empathy have rhetorical uses, which come more readily to notice when they conflict in instances of empathic inaccuracy (discordance arising from gaps between a author's intention and a reader's experience of narrative empathy). Experiences of empathic inaccuracy may contribute to a reader's outraged sense that the author's perspective is simply wrong, while strong concord in authors' empathy and readers' empathy can be a motivating force to move beyond literary response to prosocial action. The position of the reader with respect to the author's strategic empathizing in fictional worldmaking limits these potential results. I theorize that *bounded strategic empathy* operates within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality and leading to feeling with familiar others. *Ambassadorial strategic empathy* addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end. *Broadcast strategic empathy* calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes through universalizing representations.

## EMPATHETIC NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Consider the commonplace that first person fiction more readily evokes feeling responsiveness than the whole variety of third person narrative situations. Even a college sophomore with a few weeks' training in theoretical terms can report that within the category of first person narratives, empathy may be enhanced or impeded by narrative consonance or dissonance, unreliability, discordance, an excess of narrative levels with multiple narrators, extremes of disorder, or an especially convoluted plot. Genre, setting, and time period may help or hinder readers' empathy. Feeling out of sorts with the implied readership, or fitting it exactly, may make the difference between a dutiful reading and an experience of emotional fusion.<sup>38</sup>

Contrasting first person with third person puts the question too broadly, with too many other variables, to reach a valid conclusion. Narrative theorists can contribute specificity and subtlety to the research into narrative empathy.

A variety of narrative techniques have been associated with empathy by narrative theorists and discourse processing experts carrying out empirical research into literary reading. The formal devices themselves are regarded as empathic in nature by some theorists and researchers, while for others the disposition of the reader towards the text can be measured by inquiring about particular consequences of literary reading. The observations made by this latter group often lead to speculations about narrative technique. Mapping these ostensibly empathetic narrative techniques draws attention to the many aspects of narrative form that have *not yet* been associated with readers' empathy, but which ought not to be ruled out without careful consideration.

The most commonly nominated feature of narrative fiction to be associated with empathy is *character identification*. Specific aspects of characterization, such as naming, description, indirect implication of traits, reliance on types, relative flatness or roundness, depicted actions, roles in plot trajectories, quality of attributed speech, and mode of representation of consciousness may be assumed to contribute to the potential for character identification and thus for empathy.<sup>39</sup> The link between readers' reports of character identification and their experiences of narrative empathy has not yet been explained.

A close second for formal quality most often associated with empathy would be *narrative situation* (including point of view and perspective): the nature of the mediation between author and reader, including the person of the narration, the implicit location of the narrator, the relation of the narrator to the characters, and the internal or external perspective on characters, including in some cases the style of representation of characters' consciousness.<sup>40</sup> Many other elements of fiction have been supposed to contribute to readers' empathy, including the repetitions of works in series,<sup>41</sup> the length of novels,<sup>42</sup> genre expectations,<sup>43</sup> vivid use of settings,<sup>44</sup> metanarrative commentary,<sup>45</sup> and aspects of the discourse that slow readers' pace (foregrounding, uses of disorder, etc.).<sup>46</sup> The confirmation of many of the hypotheses about specific narrative techniques and empathy has yet to be undertaken in most cases, but the work that has been done *as often* fails fully to support the commonplaces of narratology as it authenticates them.<sup>47</sup> Whether this has to do with faulty experimental design, insufficient grasp of the nuances of narrative theory, or verifiable confutations of theory has yet to be discovered.

#### *Character identification*

To begin with the necessary clarification, character identification is not a narrative technique (it occurs in the reader, not in the text), but a consequence of reading that may be precipitated by the use of particular techniques of characterization.<sup>48</sup> These qualities have not yet been investigated in a comprehensive fashion. Peter Dixon and Marisa Bortolussi emphasize aesthetic qualities of narrative that open the way to personal involvement.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Jèmeljan Hakemulder suggests that read-

ers experiencing strong admiration of an author's writing style may engage less readily with the fictional world and its inhabitants (Hakemulder, *Laboratory* 73–4). Readers' personal involvement with a fictional character may (or may not) be contingent upon the use of a particular technique or the presence of certain representational elements that meet with their approval.<sup>50</sup> Keith Oatley believes that readers' personal experiences of patterns of emotional response provoke sympathy for characters, especially as readers identify with characters' goals and plans.<sup>51</sup> David S. Miall and Don Kuiken argue that emotional experiences of literature depend upon the engagement of the literary text with the reader's experiences,<sup>52</sup> but they emphasize foregrounding effects at the level of literary style that shake up conventions, slow the pace, and invite more active reading that opens the way for empathy.<sup>53</sup> Don Kuiken's research shows that readers who linked themselves to story characters through personal experiences were more likely to report changes in self-perception, if not actual empathy.<sup>54</sup> Max Louwerese and Kuiken suggest that empathy may work as a gap-filling mechanism, by which a reader supplements given character traits with a fuller psychologically resonant portrait.<sup>55</sup> Readers' judgments about the realism of the characters are supposed to have an impact on identification,<sup>56</sup> and the similarity of the reader to the character is widely believed to promote identification.<sup>57</sup> None of these phenomena, however, inhere in particular narrative techniques contributing to character identification.

A few techniques of characterization have actually been tested for their relation to readers' emotional responsiveness or empathy. Characters' involvement in a suspenseful situation provokes physiological responses of arousal in readers even when they disdain the quality of the narrative.<sup>58</sup> Plot-laden action-stories have been shown to promote faster reading than narratives focusing on characters' inner lives,<sup>59</sup> which may suggest by contrast greater reflectiveness on the part of character-focused readers, as Hakemulder supposes (Hakemulder, *Laboratory* 74). However, this does not account for the quick, apparently involuntary responses to particular plot situations inspired by trashy novels. Speedy reading may be a token of involvement in a character's fate, identification, and even empathy. With the exception of appraisal of causality, virtually nothing about the role of plot structure has been associated with readers' empathetic responses, or tested in controlled settings.<sup>60</sup> Aspects of plot structure and narration that might have a role in invoking readers' empathy include the control of timing (pace), order (anachronies), the use of nested levels of narrative (stories within stories)<sup>61</sup>, serial narrative, strong or weak closure, the use of subsidiary (supplementary, satellite) plot events, repetition, and gaps. Since each one of these structural categories contains an array of possibilities for characterization, their neglect leaves us with an incomplete picture of the devices whose use makes character identification possible.

Many aspects of characterization familiar to narrative theorists have not yet been tested in controlled experiments, despite their nomination by theorists. The naming of characters (including the withholding of a name, the use of an abbreviation or a role-title in place of a full name, or allegorical or symbolic naming, etc.) may play a role in the potential for character identification. The descriptive language through which readers encounter characters is assumed to make a difference (content

matters!), but what about grammar and syntax? Does the use of present tense (over the usual past tense) really create effects of immediacy and direct connection, as many contemporary authors believe? The old “show, don’t tell” shibboleth of creative writing classes remains to be verified: direct description of a character’s emotional state or circumstances by a third-person narrator may produce empathy in readers just as effectively as indirect implication of emotional states through actions and context.<sup>62</sup> David S. Miall has suggested in “Affect and Narrative” that characters’ motives, rather than their traits, account for the affective engagement and self-projection of readers into characters, though it remains unclear when, and at which cues, readers’ emotional self-involvement jump-starts the process of interpretation. Bortolussi and Dixon believe that “transparency,” or the judgment of characters’ behavior as sensible and practical, contributes to identification (Bortolussi and Dixon 240). This may be too simple: even traditional novels are complex, polyvocal, and various, and Wayne Booth offers this sensible caution: “What we call ‘involvement’ or ‘sympathy’ or ‘identification’, is usually made up of *many reactions* to author, narrators, observers, and other characters” (Booth 158, my emphasis). Some way of accounting for the multiplicity of reactions making up a normal novel reading experience needs to be devised in order to study the transition from distributed characterization in narrative fiction and readers’ everyday synthesis of their reactions into an experience of character identification.<sup>63</sup>

This may mean setting aside some common value judgments about techniques. For instance, the critical preference for psychological depth expressed by the “roundness” of characters “capable of surprising in a convincing way” (Forster 78), does not preclude empathetic response to flat characters, minor characters, or stereotyped villains and antagonists. Drawing on the literature of cognitive social psychology, Richard J. Gerrig has suggested that readers are likely to make category-based judgments about fictional characters, and to emphasize attributed dispositions of characters over their actual behavior in situations.<sup>64</sup> This theory suggests, as Forster intuited, that flat characters—easily comprehended and recalled—may play a greater role in readers’ engagement in novels than is usually understood. Fast and easy character identification suffers in theorists’ accounts of the reading process, which often privilege more arduous self-extension and analogical reasoning. Patrick Colm Hogan, for instance, regards categorical empathy (with characters matching a reader’s group identity) as the more prevalent form, while situational empathy, the more ethically desirable role taking, depends upon a reader’s having a memory of a comparable experience, which is never guaranteed.<sup>65</sup> If Hogan’s situational empathy alone leads to the ethics of compassion, as he has it, then quick-match categorical empathy looks weaker and more vulnerable to bias through ethnocentrism or exclusionary thinking. We do not know, however, that categorical empathy does *not* lead to compassion, no more than we know the ethical results of situational empathy for fictional characters. Neither hypothesis has yet been tested. While literary critics and professionals value novels that unsettle convictions and contest norms, readers’ reactions to familiar situations and formulaic plot trajectories may underlie their genuinely empathetic reactions to predictable plot events and to the stereotyped figures that enact them.<sup>66</sup> The fullness and fashion by which speech, thoughts, and feelings

of characters reach the reader are very often supposed by narrative theorists to enhance character identification, as I discuss below, but relatively externalized and brief statements about a character's experiences and mental state may be sufficient to invoke empathy in a reader. Novelists do not need to be reminded of the rhetorical power of understatement, or indeed of the peril of revealing too much. Indeed, sometimes the potential for character identification and readers' empathy *decreases* with sustained exposure to a particular figure's thoughts or voice.<sup>67</sup>

### *Narrative Situation*

It has been a commonplace of narrative theory that an internal perspective, achieved either through first person self-narration, through figural narration (in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator stays covert and reports only on a single, focal center of consciousness located in a main character) or through authorial (omniscient) narration that moves inside characters' minds, best promotes character identification and readers' empathy. Wayne Booth, for instance, writes, "*If* an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, *then* the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him (Booth 377–8, emphasis in original). The technique also works for characters in which readers have a natural rooting interest, such as Jane Austen's heroines. Booth's detailed account of how Austen uses the inside view to promote sympathy for the flawed Emma is a classic of narrative theory (245–56). Booth asserts, "By showing most of the story through Emma's eyes, the author insures that we will travel with Emma rather than stand against her" (245). Austen, one of the early masters of narrated monologue to represent characters' consciousness, crafts smooth transitions between her narrator's generalizations about characters' mental states (psycho-narration) and transcriptions of their inner thoughts, in language that preserves the tense and person of the narration.<sup>68</sup> Also called free indirect discourse, narrated monologue presents the character's mental discourse in the grammatical tense and person of the narrator's discourse.

Subsequent theorists have agreed that narrated monologue has a strong effect on readers' responses to characters. David Miall specifically mentions the means of providing "privileged information about a character's mind," free indirect discourse, as especially likely to cue literariness and invite empathic decentering (Miall, "Necessity" 54). Sylvia Adamson arrives independently at a similar point, arguing that narrated monologue should be understood as "empathetic narrative." In Adamson's language the representational technique and its ostensible effects fuse. *Quoted monologue* (also called interior monologue, the direct presentation of characters' thoughts in the person and tense of their speech) also has its champions, who regard the move into first person as invariably more authentic and direct than the more mediated or double-voiced narrated monologue. *Psycho-narration*, or the narrator's generalizations about the mental states or thoughts of a character has fewer advocates, perhaps because it is associated with traditional narratives such as epics. However, both Wayne Booth and Dorrit Cohn suggest that psycho-narration can powerfully invoke character identification, and Cohn points out that both poetic

analogies and metaphors for feeling states (as Virginia Woolf often employs) require the use of psycho-narration.<sup>69</sup> Despite the frequent mention of narrated monologue as the most likely to produce empathy,<sup>70</sup> quoted monologue and psycho-narration also give a reader access to the inner life of characters. Most theorists agree that purely externalized narration tends not to invite readers' empathy.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to these speculations about modes of representing inner life, the person of the narration often seems likely to effect readers' responses to narrative fiction and its inhabitants. In particular, first person fiction, in which the narrator self-narrates about his or her own experiences and perceptions, is thought to invite an especially close relationship between reader and narrative voice. For instance, Franz Stanzel believes that the choice of internal representation of the thoughts and feelings of a character in third person fiction and the use of first person self-narration have a particularly strong effect on readers. Novelist and literary theorist David Lodge speculates that historical and philosophical contexts may explain the preference for first person or figural third person narrative voice: "In a world where nothing is certain, in which transcendental belief has been undermined by scientific materialism, and even the objectivity of science is qualified by relativity and uncertainty, the single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness" (Lodge 87). However, the existing experimental results for such an association of technique and reaction are not robust. In several studies of Dutch teenagers, W. van Peer and H. Pander Maat tested the notion that first person narration creates a "greater illusion of closeness . . . allowing the reader a greater and better fusion with the world of the character."<sup>72</sup> They conclude "it remains unclear why point of view has no more powerful and no more overall effect on readers, given the effort devoted by authors in order to create these devices that produce a point of view" (van Peer and Pander Maat 152). While noting that readers certainly express preferences about point of view and prefer consistency over inconsistency, they found that enhancement of sympathy for protagonists through positive internal focalization actually weakened as teenagers matured (152–4).

Lodge concedes that the first person voice "is just as artful, or artificial, a method as writing about a character in the third person," but he insists that it "creates an illusion of reality, it commands the willing suspension of the reader's disbelief, by modeling itself on the discourses of personal witness: the confession, the diary, autobiography, the memoir, the deposition" (Lodge 87–8). In my book I argue the opposite, that paratexts cuing readers to understand a work as fictional unleash their emotional responsiveness, in spite of fiction's historical mimicry of non-fictional, testimonial forms. My research suggests that readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion. Thus they may respond with greater empathy to an unreal situation and characters because of the protective fictionality, but still internalize the experience of empathy with possible later real-world responsiveness to others' needs. While a full-fledged political movement, an appropriately inspiring social context, or an emergent structure of feeling promoting change may be necessary for efficacious action to arise out of internalized experiences of narrative empathy, readers may respond in those circumstances as a result of earlier reading.

## HOW NARRATIVE EMPATHY WORKS: AUTHORS AND AUDIENCES

The dispositions and beliefs of novelists themselves also belong in a thorough study of narrative empathy. Fiction writers report looking at and eavesdropping on their characters, engaging in conversations with them, struggling with them over their actions, bargaining with them, and feeling for them: characters seem to possess independent agency. In a remarkable study of fifty fiction writers, Taylor and her collaborators discovered that 92% of the authors reported some experience of the illusion of independent agency (IIA) and that the more successful fiction writers (those who had published) had more frequent and more intense experiences of it. Taylor hypothesizes that IIA could be related to authors' expertise in fantasy production (Taylor 361, 376–7), suggesting that it occurs more easily and spontaneously with practice, or that writers naturally endowed with creative gifts may experience it more readily. Though clearly novelists still do exercise their authority by choosing the words that end up on the page, they may experience the creative process as akin to involuntarily empathizing with a person out there, separate from themselves. Several tests administered by Taylor to her subjects support this connection. Taylor found that the fiction writers as a group scored higher than the general population empathy (361). Using Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), a frequently used empathy scale, Taylor measured her subjects' tendency to fantasize, to feel empathic concern for others, to experience personal distress in the face of others' suffering, and to engage in perspective-taking (369–70). Both men and women in her sample of fiction writers scored significantly higher than Davis's reported norms for the general population, with females scoring higher in all four areas than males. Fiction writers of both genders stood out on all four subscales of Davis's IRI, but they were particularly off the charts for fantasy and perspective taking. Taylor speculates that "these two subscales tap the components of empathy that seem most conceptually related to IIA and might be seen as 'grown-up' versions of variables associated with children who have imaginary companions (pretend play and theory of mind skills)" (377).

Taylor's discoveries lead to speculation about the function of narrative empathy from the authors' perspective: *fiction writers as a group may be more empathetic than the general population*. However, we must also consider the difficulty of pinning down the difference between innate dispositions and results of practice and habitual use in groups of people; thus, *the activity of fiction writing may cultivate novelists' role-taking skills and make them more habitually empathetic*. These proposals do not imply that the actual behavior of fiction writers is any better than the population at large. Even the most ardent advocates of narrative ethics hesitate to argue that being a novelist correlates with being a better person, and novelists known to be nice people sometimes also exercise their empathy on behalf of nasty characters.

Most theories of narrative empathy assume that empathy can be transacted accurately from author to reader by way of a literary text (critiques of literary empathy disparage this goal as an unwholesome fantasy or projection). The comments of writers about their craft suggest the formation of a triangulated empathic bond. In this model authors' empathy contributes to the creation of textual beings designed to



elicit empathic responses from readers. In fact there is no guarantee that an individual reader will respond empathetically to a particular representation. Because real people—for instance, objects of pity presented by charitable organizations—might find their position in that empathic triangle discomfiting, critics of empathy claim it results in misunderstanding or worse.

From the failures of empathetic individuals to question whether their assessments of the other's feelings could be off base comes a great deal of the negative reputation of empathy as a particularly invasive form of selfishness. (I impose my feelings on you and call them your feelings. Your feelings, whatever they were, undergo erasure.) Contrary to this fearful scenario, the research on empathic accuracy records the remarkable degree of correctness in human mind-reading abilities, though to be sure more cross-cultural verification of these findings would be welcome.<sup>73</sup> Whether from expert reading of facial cues, body language, tone of voice, context, or effective role taking on the part of the empathizer, ordinary subjects tend to do pretty well in laboratory tests of empathic accuracy. Verification can be achieved readily enough through interviews cross-checked with physical measurements and observations.

When we respond empathetically to a novel, we do not have the luxury of questioning the character: we cannot ask, Is that how you really felt? The text, however, may verify our reactions even as it elicits them. No one narrative technique assures readers that our empathetic reaction precisely catches the feelings embedded in the fictional characters. For this reason, extratextual sources, such as interviews with authors, become important tools in assessing literary empathic accuracy. My term *empathic inaccuracy* describes a potential effect of narrative empathy: *a strong conviction of empathy that incorrectly identifies the feeling of a literary persona*. Empathic inaccuracy occurs when a reader responds empathetically to a fictional character at cross-purposes with an author's intentions. Authors also sometimes evoke empathy unintentionally. This accident contributes to empathic inaccuracy. Unlike in real world, face-to-face circumstances, the novel-reading situation allows empathic inaccuracy to persist because neither author nor fictional character directly confutes it. Indeed, literary studies privileges against-the-grain interpretations of fiction that may be founded on deliberate acts of role taking that subvert the authors' apparent intentions and increase empathic inaccuracy. A reader persuaded that she has felt with a fictional character may defy the stated or implicit intentions of an author. When the author's intention matches the reader's feelings and the agreement resonates with empathic accord, then the introduction of alternative perspectives on the matter at hand may meet with disbelief or outrage. *Empathic inaccuracy*, to craft a proposal out of this circumstance, *may then contribute to a strong sense that the author's perspective is simply wrong*. This is by no means an unproductive critical stance.

For those writers who hope to reach readers with emotionally resonant representations, the struggle against empathic inaccuracy thus has two component liabilities, failure and falsity. On *failure* of narrative empathy, I propose that while *author's empathy may be an intrinsic element of successful fictional worldmaking, its exercise does not always transmit to readers without interference*. A second form of empathic

inaccuracy occurs when authors represent a practice or experience that unintentionally evokes empathy in readers, against authors' apparent or proclaimed representational goals.

Focus on the *falsity* of narrative empathy expresses the concern that experiencing narrative empathy short-circuits the impulse to act compassionately or to respond with political engagement. In this view, narrative empathy is amoral (Posner 19), a weak form of appeal to humanity in the face of organized hatred (Gourevitch 95), an obstacle to agitation for racial justice (Delgado 4–36), a waste of sentiment and encouragement of withdrawal (Williams 109), and even a pornographic indulgence of sensation acquired at the expense of suffering others (Wood 36). To some feminist and postcolonial critics, empathy loses credence the moment it appears to depend on a notion of universal human emotions, a cost too great to bear even if basic human rights depend upon it.<sup>74</sup> The fearful view of author's empathy as corrupting readers by offering them others' feelings for callous consumption leads in some quarters to the depiction of empathy itself as a quality that weakens humans and makes them vulnerable to others' cruelest manipulations. Narrative empathy becomes yet another example of the western imagination's imposition of its own values on cultures and peoples that it scarcely knows, but presumes to feel with, in a cultural imperialism of the emotions. Empathic inaccuracy, in this quarrel with moral sentimentalism, then becomes evidence of the falsity of the whole enterprise of sympathetic representation.

Rather than attempting to eliminate empathic inaccuracy by arguing with or correcting readers' feeling responses, recognizing the conflict between author's empathy and reader's empathy opens the way to an understanding of narrative empathy as rhetorical. *Both authors' empathy and readers' empathy have rhetorical uses, which may be more noticeable when they conflict in instances of empathic inaccuracy.* By using their powers of empathetic projection, authors may attempt to persuade readers to feel with them on politically charged subjects. Readers, in turn, may experience narrative empathy in ways not anticipated or intended by authors. When those readers articulate their differences with a text's or an author's apparent claims, they may call upon their own empathetic responses as a sort of witness to an alternative perspective. Arguments over empathic differences between authors and readers, or among readers with different emotional reactions to a shared text, give feeling responsiveness to fiction a status it has not often been granted in academic analysis of literature. Narrative empathy can impede or assist arguments staged in the public sphere. Indeed, the existence of empathetic novel reading experiences, whether accurate or not, often enters into debates covertly. More self-consciousness about our own experiences of narrative empathy depends in part upon identifying where we stand as members of the diverse audiences reached by authors' empathetic representations.

Narrative empathy intersects with identities in problematic ways. Do we respond because we belong to an in-group, or can narrative empathy call to us across boundaries of difference? Even this formulation could be read as participating in a hierarchical model of empathy. The habit of making the reactions of white, western, educated readers home base for consideration of reader response has not yet been corrected by transnational studies of readers, though narrative theorists such as Peter

J. Rabinowitz offer subtle ways of understanding the various audiences narrative fiction may simultaneously address. When the subject positions of empathizer and object of empathetic identification are removed from the suspect arrangement that privileges white western responses to subaltern suffering, the apparent condescension of empathy can be transformed by its strategic use. *Strategic empathy* is a variety of authors' empathy, by which authors attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text.

Three varieties of strategic empathizing may be observed at work in contemporary narrative fiction, though I feel sure they also pertain to the hopes of authors in earlier periods as well. First, *bounded strategic empathy occurs within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others*. The bards of the in-group call upon bounded empathy, and lack of familiarity may indeed prevent outsiders from joining the empathetic circle. Certainly some experiences of empathic inaccuracy can be accounted for by recognizing that readers do not belong to the group invited to share bounded strategic empathy (not in the implied readership and blocked from aspirations to join the authorial audience). Second, *ambassadorial strategic empathy addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end*. Appeals for justice, recognition, and assistance often take this form. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) provides a good example of ambassadorial strategic empathy in a novel, written in English for a readership outside the caste system that in the 1930s still governed India. Third, *broadcast strategic empathy calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes*. The Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo has deliberately employed broadcast strategic empathy in his fiction, provocatively embracing the universality so often rejected by contemporary champions of difference. The fact that many postcolonial novelists aspire to extend readers' sense of our shared humanity suggests that broadcast strategic empathy deserves attention more nuanced than refusal of empathy as an impossible goal of representation.

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

In the book from this essay is derived, I subject to critical scrutiny the literary version of the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which holds that novel reading, by eliciting empathy, encourages prosocial action and good world citizenship. If indeed such a link could be substantiated (it has not yet been verified), then investigation of the effects of narrative techniques on real readers would have to extend beyond generalizations about character identification and a small subset of narrative situations. To the questions currently under investigation many more may be added.

What effect (if any) does consonance (relative closeness to the related events) and dissonance (greater distance between the happening and the telling) have on readers of first person, self-narrated fictions? Does a plural, communal narrative voice, a "we" narration, bring the reader into a perceptive circle where empathetic

reactions are more readily available? Does the use of second person “you” narration enhance the intimacy of the reading experience by drawing the reader and narrator close, or does it emphasize dissonance as it becomes clear that “you” can’t include the reader? In third person fiction, does the use of a figural reflector, rather than an authorial (omniscient) narrator make any difference in readers’ emotional responsiveness to situations and character?<sup>75</sup> Does the location of the narrator inside (or outside) the story-world effect readers’ reactions to the content of the narration? Does a covert narrator, who scarcely does more than provide cues about characters’ movements and speech, disinvite empathy for those characters, or invite readers to see the action with a greater sense of immediacy, as if it were a play, as Bortolussi and Dixon suggest (Bortolussi and Dixon 202)? In the most fully polyphonic novels, in which a single narrative perspective is simply not available to the reader, does readers’ empathy increase, dwindle, or vary according to the page they are on?

Finally, to bring the questions back to what happens in actual readers, if a narrative situation devised to evoke empathy fails to do so, does the fault lie in the reader, or in the overestimation of the efficacy of the technique? While I am inclined to agree with Wayne Booth that no one ethical effect inheres in a single narrative device, the commentary on narrative form often asserts (or assumes) that a specific technique inevitably results in particular effects—political, ethical, emotional—in readers. These views, in my opinion, should be subjected to careful empirical testing before any aspect of narrative technique earns the label of “empathetic.” To persist in the nomination of favored techniques as empathetic without attention to the full range of techniques that may be contributing to empathetic effects renders the study of narrative empathy an impressionistic endeavor at best.

## ENDNOTES

1. On mirror neurons, see Keysers, et al., “Demystifying Social Cognition” (501) and Gallese, et al., “A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition” (396).
2. For an overview of this research in neuroscience, see Gallese, “‘Being Like Me’: Self-Other Identity, Mirror Neurons, and Empathy.”
3. On the neural effects of hearing narrative, see Tettamanti, “Listening to Action-Related Sentences” (273). Though most neuroscientists working on mirror neurons agree that the effects are strongest in real life, face-to-face interactions, what Gallese calls the “shared manifold for intersubjectivity” still operates when subjects see videos, experience virtual reality through computer interfaces, and simply hear narration about others. See Blakeslee (F1, F4).
4. Dr. Christian Keysers, cited in Blakeslee (F1, F4).
5. Social and developmental psychologists, philosophers of virtue ethics, feminist advocates of an ethic of caring, and many defenders of the humanities believe that empathic emotion motivates altruistic action, resulting in less aggression, less fickle helping, less blaming of victims for their misfortunes, increased cooperation in conflict situations, and improved actions on behalf of needy individuals and members of stigmatized groups. See Batson, et al., “Benefits and Liabilities of Empathy-Induced Altruism” (360–70) for a discussion of the recent research on each of these results of empathy. For a warm, agent-based virtue ethics view of empathy and sympathy, see Slote, *Morals from Motives* (109–10).

6. Although the word *empathy* is a relatively young term, entering English in the early twentieth century as a coined translation of the German word *Einfühlung*, aspects of empathy have been described by philosophers since the days of Adam Smith and David Hume under the older term *sympathy*.
7. On personal distress as aversive and empathy as a precursor to sympathy or empathic concern, see Batson, *The Altruism Question* (56–7) and “Altruism and Prosocial Behavior” (282–316); see also Eisenberg, “Emotion, Regulation, and Moral Development” (671–2), and “The Development of Empathy-Related Responding.”
8. Charles Darwin’s treatment of sympathy in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* clearly includes empathy, though he does not use the term. Paul Ekman, the leading authority on facial expressions as indicators of universal human emotions, does not treat empathy as a core emotion, but as one of the nine starting points for emotional reactions (when we feel what others feel). See Ekman, *Emotions Revealed* (34, 37). Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp argues that emotional systems in the brain involve central affective programs comprised of neural anatomy, physiology, and chemicals. Panksepp considers empathy one of the higher sentiments (mixing lower, reflexive affects and higher cognitive processes), emerging out of the recent evolutionary expansion of the forebrain. See “Emotions as Natural Kinds in the Brain” (142–3). For philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, empathy comes into play as a part of compassion, which she treats as a human emotion. See *Upheavals of Thought* (327–35). For John Deigh and those working at the intersection of ethics and cognitive science, empathy is one of the moral emotions.
9. For working definitions of different vicariously induced emotional states, see Eisenberg and Fabes, “Children’s Disclosure of Vicariously Induced Emotions” (111). I follow Eisenberg in differentiating empathy, aversive personal distress, and sympathy. Empathic response includes the possibility of personal distress, but personal distress (unlike empathy) is less likely to lead to sympathy, if it proceeds beyond evanescent shared feeling.
10. Positive forms of empathy are drastically underemphasized in the literature. See Ainslie and Monterosso, “Hyperbolic Discounting Lets Empathy be a Motivated Process”.
11. See Barthes for the distinction between the relatively easy pleasure of the readerly text and the bliss that comes when the demanding writerly text helps readers break out of their subject positions.
12. See for instance the treatment of happiness, joy, and love in Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, *Emotional Contagion*. Theodor Lipps, an important early theorist of empathy, proposed motor mimicry as an automatic response to another’s expression of emotion. See Lipps, “*Das Wissen von Fremden Ichen.*”
13. For genetic influences on prosocial acts and empathic concern, see Zahn-Waxler, et al., “Empathy and Prosocial Patterns in Young MZ and DZ Twins”.
14. Cultural differences implicate differences in the nature of emotional experience. Our understanding of what it means to be a person in our cultural context affects the way we experience daily emotions of pleasantness and unpleasantness, or whether we feel entitled as individuals to express a particular emotion. See Shields.
15. Oral storytelling is not isolated to preliterate cultures. Children in literate cultures also absorb cultural values and narrative styles through collaborative storytelling. See the comments on rapport and empathy in Minami and McCabe.
16. See Titchener, 181–5. See also Lipps, *Zur Einfühlung*.
17. See Lee and Anstruther-Thomson for the original journal articles.
18. Evaluation of patients who show changes in behavior as a result of brain injuries, ailments, or surgery contributes to the understanding of empathy. See Gratton and Elsinger.
19. Physiological measures have the advantage of being unaffected by the subjects’ desire to present themselves favorably, as may occur in surveys, interviews, or self-reports. See Eisenberg, et al.,

“Physiological Indices of Empathy.” On deceleration of heart rate in response to negative experiences of others, see Craig. On the measurement of palmar skin conductance and heart rate in response to images of people in pain, see R. S. Lazarus. For a skin conductance study suggesting that empathetic arousal occurs when subjects believe a person is receiving a painful shock, see Geer and Jarnecky. On facial or gestural responses as indications of empathy, see Marcus. See also Hoffman, “The Measurement of Empathy.” On EMG and other physiological measurements of emotional responses, see Cacioppo and Petty.

20. A number of empathy scales developed since the 1950s are still in use by psychologists. The Sherman-Stotland scale includes a factor (VI) measuring “fantasy empathy” for fictional characters in stories, plays, and films. See Stotland (135–56). More recent tests of emotional intelligence include the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) and Davis’s Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). On BEES, see Mehrabian. For the IRI, which has subscales in Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, Fantasy (including narrative empathy), and Personal Distress, see Davis, “A Multidimensional Approach” and “Measuring Individual Differences.” Survey methodology has its limitations, as psychologists acknowledge. Eisenberg has repeatedly observed that cultural influences such as sex-role differentiation show up more in the kinds of tests that rely on surveys and interviews and much less (or not at all) in tests using physiological methods. See Lennon and Eisenberg.
21. For a salutary caution on the interpretation of these fMRI studies, which feature such dazzling pictures and often receive quite credulous promotion in the press, see Cacioppo, et al.
22. Singer and her colleagues employed two empathy scales, Mehrabian’s Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale and Davis’s Empathic Concern Scale (1159).
23. The amygdala, anterior temporal cortex, and orbital frontal cortex (as well as physiological synchrony of the autonomic nervous system) are probably involved in empathy, as the evidence of emotional impairment in brain-damaged or diseased patients suggests. See Brothers; Levenson and Ruef; and Rosen.
24. This account is consistent with the emotion theory of neuroscientist Edmund T. Rolls, who hypothesizes that human brain mechanisms provide two routes to action, one a quick, unconscious prompt for a behavioral response (which we share with other mammals) and the other a slower, language mediated, rational planning faculty. The two routes can produce conflicting results.
25. Mirror neurons fire not only when carrying out an action but also when observing another carrying out the same action. They provide a basis for understanding primates’ mind-reading, including human empathy. See Gallese, et al., “The Mirror Matching System.” See also Iacoboni.
26. See for instance Cosmides and Tooby, “Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange.”
27. See for instance Antonio Damasio, et al, “Somatic Markers and the Guidance of Behavior: Theory and Preliminary Testing”. Damasio’s works for general readers (*Descartes’ Error*, *The Feeling of What Happens*, and *Looking for Spinoza*) have resulted in wide dissemination of his theories.
28. See Cosmides and Tooby, “Evolutionary Psychology and the Emotions.”
29. Some neuroscientists informally refer to “cogmotions” to emphasize the fusion of the two concepts in their research. (My informant is neuroscientist Dr. Tyler S. Lorig.) Nonetheless, many experts in cognition carry out their work without regard to the emotions, and basic textbooks on cognition rarely refer to emotions. See for instance Reed’s introductory college text, *Cognition: Theory and Applications*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Emotional states receive fleeting mention on just three pages of this text. The younger hybrid discipline of Social Cognition is more likely to reflect the understandings of affect and cognition as intertwined. See for instance Forgas.
30. The core elements of the modern concept of empathy in aesthetics can legitimately be traced to Lee, who was also a novelist. As with several key dates in psychology, rival claimants to earliest usage appear. Lipps’s 1897 work on *Einfühlung* gets translated in 1909 by experimental psychologist Titchener as *empathy*. Lee drew on Lipps’ work for *The Beautiful*. Freud also had Lipps’ books in his library and adopted the term *Einfühlung*. See Wispé.

31. For speculations on the role of aesthetics in human evolution, see Cosmides and Tooby, "Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds?"
32. Philosopher Lawrence Blum believes that insofar as emotions of sympathy and empathy promote perspective taking, they may result in better prosocial responses than rationality alone. See Blum (122–39).
33. Some studies suggest that people with very empathetic dispositions respond more positively to members of outgroups than less empathetic people do, but for most people, perceived similarity encourages empathy. For a classic study affirming similarity's relationship to higher empathy scores, see Krebs. On outgroups, see Sheehan, et al. On similarity, see the literature review in Davis, *Empathy* (15, 96–99, 105–6, 109, 116–18).
34. On evolutionary bases for empathy for those who are like us, see Kruger; see also Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development* (4, 13, 206).
35. See the account of empathy's potential to replace egocentrism with ethnocentrism in Sherman.
36. On empathy as a precursor to reading comprehension, see Bourg.
37. See Miall and Kuiken, "What is Literariness?"; see also Miall, "Beyond the Schema Given."
38. For this catalog of helps and impediments to empathetic reading of first person fiction, I draw upon the in-class essays of the students in English 232, The Novel, composed on 20 February 2006, answering this question: "How does your recent reading experience in this course square with the notion that first person narration is especially productive of empathetic reading? What differences in technique in the variety of first person narrative situations might alter readers' responses?"
39. Very little empirical research has been attempted to verify the theoretical speculations about aspects of characterization that operate in readers' character identification. Bortolussi and Dixon's pioneering study *Psychonarratology* reports their findings that character actions contribute to readers' assessments of character traits, while self-evaluations provided by the narrator (description) do not. However, the test stories employed first-person narrators, so narrators' evaluations of characters in third-person fiction cannot be included in this preliminary conclusion (160–65).
40. Schneider represents narrative situation as a factor in eliciting readers' empathy, and lack of representation of inner life as a likely inhibitor of it.
41. On affective responses to serial fiction, see Warhol (71–2). See also Hakemulder, *Moral Laboratory* (93, 143), drawing on Feshbach's observations of the effects of repetitive role-taking.
42. Nussbaum's empathy-inducing novels are invariably long. Writing about the character David Copperfield's reading habits in Dicken's novel of that name (1849–50), Nussbaum comments, "he remains with [books] for hours in an intense, intimate, and loving relationship. As he imagines, dreams, and desires in their company, he becomes a certain sort of person." For Nussbaum the length of the immersion is a vital component of the process, permitting intensity, dreaming, and desiring that develops the reader's loving heart. See Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (230–1).
43. Canonically, see Jameson. See also Zwaan, which compares readers' behavior when processing texts labeled as "news stories" or "narratives." Bortolussi and Dixon aptly caution that research in discourse processing has focused on broad generic distinctions rather than on narrative fiction's subgenres (253–4). For emotional responses to fictional subgenres in television exists, see Bryant and Zillmann, eds. Literary genre critics have been reluctant to adopt findings from mass communications research (to the extent that they are aware of them), perhaps because audiovisual (iconic) representations are assumed to be more emotionally stimulating than the verbal representations of prose narrative fiction. This assumption, however, has not been investigated systematically.
44. Feminist criticism often celebrates the power of women's writing's vividly represented spaces and places, in tandem with identity themes, to work out boundary-crossing potentials for connection, communication, and change. See for instance Friedman.

45. See the account of Nünning's remarks on empathy-inducing functions of metanarration, in Fludernik, "Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary" (39).
46. Relevant to slower pace as potentially fostering empathy is Zillmann, who hypothesizes that the fast pace of television news stories and dramas may impede empathetic response (160–1). Miall's work on foregrounding and empathy in literary texts correlates a slower reading pace with enhanced empathy.
47. See for instance van Peer's judgment in "Justice in Perspective."
48. Character identification thus exemplifies what Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon identify as readers' mental constructions, as opposed to textual features (*Psychonarratology* 28). Bortolussi and Dixon systematically measure how particular readers process specific textual features in narratives, but the experimental results bridging disciplines of discourse processing and narrative theory are still quite scanty. On their narratology, see Diengott.
49. See Dixon, et al (5–33).
50. Writing about identification with dramatic characters, Zillman argues that the audience-member's disposition precipitates empathic and counterempathic reactions and suggests that audiences must be made to care about characters one way or another. He believes that enactment of good or evil deeds by protagonists and antagonists, with opportunities for the moral appraisal of their actions, promotes strong emotional reactions. See Zillman, "Mechanisms of Emotional Involvement."
51. See Oatley, "A Taxonomy of the Emotions of Literary Response."
52. In this respect Miall and Kuiken are in accord with earlier work that demonstrates a relationship between a subject's prior similar experiences and empathy felt for another in the same situation. See Stotland.
53. See Miall and Kuiken, "What is Literariness?" (121–38) and Miall, "Beyond the Schema Given."
54. See Kuiken, et al., "Locating Self-Modifying Feelings."
55. See Louwse and Kuiken (170). Their research confirms some of what Iser proposes about active reading as gap-filling (168–9).
56. For critiques of this assumption, see Konijn and Hoorn, from a discourse processing angle; see also Walsh.
57. See Klemenz-Belgardt (368); see also Jose and Brewer. Hakemulder reports on recent studies confirming the importance of personal relevance for intensity of reader response. See *Moral Laboratory* (71).
58. Wünsch cited in Hakemulder. *Moral Laboratory* (73).
59. For this reading-speed research, see Chupchik and Lázló.
60. Research into the empathy evoked by various genres of television advertisements suggests that discontinuous, nonlinear "vignette" ads discourage empathy, whereas classical, character-centered dramatic form in ads evokes viewers' empathy. See Stern.
61. For a good application of cognitive theory on levels of embedding to readers' capacity to comprehend embedded accounts of characters' mental states, see Zunshine, "Theory of Mind."
62. For a subtle treatment of the variety of techniques by which sympathy for characters may be cultivated, see Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction* (129–33, 243–66, 274–82, 379–91). Ultimately Booth prefers the use of an "inside view" for invoking sympathy, but he describes the full range of strategies that authors from the classical period to the modernists actually employ.
63. For an excellent description of readers' imaginative construction of characters, see Cohan.
64. See Gerrig, "The Construction of Literary Character." See also his account of participatory responses to fiction in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*.
65. See Hogan, "The Epilogue of Suffering." Though this article suggests a preference for the cognitive role-taking Hogan associates with situational empathy, his later very brief treatment of readers' em-



pathy in *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts* improves on his theory by describing how emotion triggers invoke quick-and-dirty responses, as well as imaginative role-taking, neither of which need be denigrated as egocentric (186–7). For work confirming the role of lived experience in spontaneous situational empathy with characters on film documentaries, see Sapolsky and Zillmann, “Experience and Empathy.” Women who had given birth responded to a medical film of actual childbirth with more intense physiological reactions; otherwise, gender and related experiences had a negligible effect on empathy.

66. See Jauss (152–88), especially his summary figure, “Interaction Patterns of Identification with the Hero” (159). See also Hogan on emotions and prototypes in narrative, in *The Mind and its Stories*.
67. For preliminary confirmation from film studies, see Andringa, et al. (154–5).
68. For narrated monologue, psycho-narration, and quoted monologue, see Cohn (14).
69. See Booth’s discussion of traditional literature’s use of “telling” in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (3–16); see also Cohn on psycho-narration (46–57).
70. See for instance Palmer (138).
71. Three good starting points for recent work on the representation of consciousness are Fludernik’s magisterial *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction*; the essays of Zunshine, “Theory of Mind,” and “Richardson’s Clarissa and a Theory of Mind”; and the phenomenological theory of Butte.
72. van Peer and Pander Maat designed experiments using five versions of stories, rewritten to test the relationship between positive internal focalization and readers’ allocation of sympathy. See “Perspectivation” (145).
73. For a variety of essays verifying humans beings’ tendency accurately to identify others’ feelings and states of mind, see Ickes, ed.
74. Indeed, human rights are not exempted from criticism. Some regard “the whole idea of ‘universal’ human rights” as a “gigantic fraud, where Western imperialist or excolonial powers try to pass off their own, very specific and localized idea of what ‘rights’ should be as universal, trampling roughly over everyone else’s beliefs and traditions.” See Howe (3).
75. Bertolussi and Dixon have done the best work on this subject, though they phrase the question differently: to what degree do readers fuse narrators and characters as a result of perceptual access to a particular character’s perspective, thus develop a rooting interest in that character and making assumptions about the narrator’s and author’s gender. See *Psychonarratology* (166–99).

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