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Literature and Empathy

The Supposed Role of Literature in Making the World a Better Place

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Abstract

For many years there have been an interest in the positive effects of art. Nowadays, researchers are able to make bold assumptions about the effect of art as they have neuroscience as a scientific support. Reading, for example, has the power to better human beings according to some researchers, making readers more empathic. In this thesis this ability of literature will be discussed. Thus, the research question for this study was: According to secondary sources, does transportation into a story increase empathy? After defining the key terms: transportation and empathy, along with character and identification, a variety of secondary sources in different domains have been discussed. Namely, neuropsychological research, research on changing the self, the importance of fictionality, personality research, the so-called sleeper effect and the use of literature as an educational tool. The secondary literature showed that the effects of reading are disputed amongst scholars. Neurological findings show that literature is more than mere entertainment, however, it might be too simplistic to believe that literature can better the world.

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1. Introduction

The positive effects of art have been hypothesised by scholars as early as Aristotle, who said that tragedies cleanse the soul. Today, there still is an interest in the effects of art on human beings. However, there is one important difference; with the ever growing interest in the human mind and new precise inventions, such as fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging), of how to monitor brain activity, it has become easier to study the effect of art in an objective manner. It is now even possible to link the effects of art with human behaviour and emotions. Due to these new inventions, neuroscience has found a way to show the underlying mechanisms of empathy (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 207). For the first time in history it is possible to directly measure the effects of art on the human brain. This means that it is possible to measure whether literature is able to change the characteristics of an individual. In this thesis this ability of literature will be discussed, more specifically, the effects that literature has on empathy.

When it comes to the workings of the brain, researchers still have much to discover. However, it is relatively safe to say that brain structures usually do not have a single function. This includes the regions in the brain where emotions are said to be generated and experienced. There are many regions that are involved in this intricate process. One of the principal regions is the limbic system which surrounds the brain stem in mammals. It is a group of structures that includes the hypothalamus, the amygdala, the hippocampus, and parts of the thalamus (see figure 1, Campbell et al. 1077). The limbic system controls emotion, motivation, olfaction (sense of smell), memory and behaviour. Especially the amygdala plays an essential part in processing emotions with a focus on emotional memory. Emotional experiences are often stored as memories for future references when similar circumstances occur (Campbell et al. 1078; Wolters and Groenewegen 436). Apart from the limbic system, there are other regions outside the system that are said to participate in generating and experiencing emotions as well. The sensory areas of the cerebrum for instance, interact with parts of the limbic system when it comes to emotions that manifest themselves in behaviours such as laughter and crying. Furthermore, there are structures in the forebrain that can attach emotions to basic survival-related functions such as aggression, nourishment, and sexuality that are controlled by the brainstem.

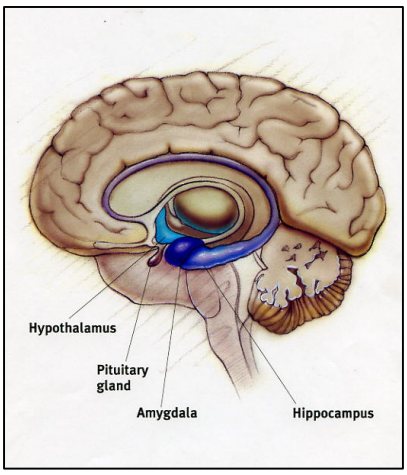

Figure 1 Limbic System, (Campbell et al. 1077)

The activities of this intricate network of brain systems that interact amongst themselves can be measured with fMRI. fMRI detects the oxygen use in the brain and can detect where the activity takes place and how much oxygen that particular activity needs. This means that the results can show how active neurons are in particular brain areas. For example, in the limbic system when it comes to emotions, the more oxygen the activity requires, the busier the neurons are, which means that the subject experiences a particular emotion to a larger degree (Campbell et al. 1077). Apart from this neuro-scientific approach there are other research methods that are frequently used. Other biological methods include heart rate measurements and skin conductance (measuring how much the test subject sweats by measuring the degree in which the object conducts electricity). Furthermore, there are various psychological methods including face recognition (a computer application that can monitor emotions by analysing faces), standardized surveys and self-reports. With surveys a researcher measures the degree in which a subject 'feels' empathy. The self-reports are, as the name suggests, reflections of the subjects on how they feel after taking tests or taking part in experiments (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 210).

These new findings lead to bold statements made with scientific support. As Suzanne Keen mentions in her article "A Theory of Narrative Empathy", "neuroscientists have already declared that people scoring high on empathy tests have especially busy mirror neurons systems in their brains" (207). A neuron is the most basal processing technique in the brain. It is a cell that is capable of receiving information, processing it and passing it on to another cell (Zimbardo, Johnson and McCann 54). But fairly recently, researchers discovered another kind of neuron that responds equally when an action is performed, as when the same action is witnessed being performed by someone else. These neurons are called mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are phenomena that were found in primates first, which left scholars interested in whether humans have the same type of neurons. This could possibly explain how human beings survive in a complex social world (Winerman 48). As Keen's quote at the start of this paragraph indicated, research suggests that these mirror neurons may be an explanation for empathy.

There are various fields that study empathy. These disciplines have one thing in common though: their research is often multi-disciplinary and the most important discipline they reach out to is psychology. This thesis will therefore adopt theories found in psychology as well and will focus on narrative empathy. As Keen explains in *Empathy and the Novel,* narrative empathy is placed "at the intersection of aesthetics, psychology, and philosophy" (34). According to her, fiction depends on authors lying persuasively in order to create a credible world. However, this creation of a fictional world is only effective if the reader actively helps

to create the storyworld. Human beings are capable to "engage intellectually and emotionally with imaginary worlds" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 34). This interest in empathy has brought up the notion that reading literature can increase empathy. A notion especially being brought forward by teachers, trying to steer the children into reading more (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 11).

These are loaded assumptions and inadvertently give the impression of a solution for many problems in modern society. Basically, literature is able to better humans and consequently the world. This leads to a key question: Does reading literature actually have an effect on the degree of feeling empathy? There will be an attempt to answer this question based on secondary sources. Therefore, the research question for this study will be: According to secondary sources, does transportation into a story increase empathy?

Before the relationship between transportation and empathy can be explored, it is necessary to define the key terms. This can be quite tricky due to the multiple definitions that have been brought forward by a variety of scholars. The two key terms are undoubtedly transportation and empathy. Transportation is something that a lot of readers experience. The expression 'being lost in a book' is well known and frequently uttered by the so-called bookworms. It describes the feeling of being so absorbed in a book that readers forget what is happening around them. This feeling of being lost in a book, which is known by avid readers, can be called transportation or immersion. The other key term is empathy. Empathy is a relatively new emotion which has been introduced in the early 1900's. It is closely related to sympathy but there is a slight difference. This difference will be touched upon as well in this study. In addition to these two key terms, there are two more terms that have to be explained briefly: character and identification. As identifying with characters can have an effect on transportation. These terms will be explained in the following order: character, identification, transportation and finally empathy.

1.1 Character and identification

When it comes to character analysis there are many theories. A well-known theory is the one by Edward M. Forster who made the distinction between flat and round characters. According to Forster flat characters are constructed around a single idea or quality and a true flat character can even be expressed in one sentence (65). There are two advantages when it comes to flat characters. Firstly, they are easily recognized by readers and they are a convenience for authors. They do not need to be watched for development and can be thus used freely (Forster 66). Secondly, they are easily remembered by readers because they do not

change no matter what the circumstances are (Forster 67). At the other end of the spectrum there are round characters. Round characters have a mind and heart (Forster 72). They develop throughout the story and are capable of "surprising in a convincing way" (Forster 75).

In the *Handbook of Narratology,* Fotis Jannidis provides a general definition for character: "Character is a text or media-based figure in a story world, usually human or human-like" (14). This definition makes a distinction between storyworld individuals and individuals in the real world and immediately eliminates non-fiction individuals. For this research, it is the process of characterizing storyworld individuals that is interesting. Characterization is the "process of ascribing properties to names which results in agents having these properties in the storyworld" (Jannidis 15). This can be done in two ways: direct characterization, when the author explicitly ascribes a trait to a character, or indirect characterization, when the characterization is the result of conclusions by the reader drawn from the text–partly from his or her knowledge and partly based on the explicitly ascribed traits and textual cues. In other words, the reader uses his or her pre-given knowledge of the world and the real people in it and combines this with the explicit traits and (missing) information given by the author to give shape to a personality for a character (Jannidis 22). This can be done in different ways. For example, the author may choose to provide readers with conflicting images which can lead to different personality interpretations about the same character (Jannidis 15). Characters are seen as an important aspect of the narrative for readers and researchers overall agree that "character can be best described as an entity forming part of the storyworld" (Jannidis 17).

However, it is still unclear what the ontological status of character as an entity in a storyworld is. Jannidis mentions three theories that address this problem (18). Firstly, he addresses Uri Margolin's theory on possible worlds. According to Margolin a character, or non-actual individual, is a member of a domain or domains of the possible world. And in it or them, a character can be identified, located and given physical and mental attributes and relations (844). Possible-world semantics develops a theory of narrative worlds and develops a theory of non-actual individual (character) in them. The character becomes a possible individual and is a construct. Characters are required by texts and are therefore not discovered, but determined by descriptive conditions (Margolin, 846-847). In short, the storyworld is created by the text and is hence an independent realm and the characters are constructs within a storyworld that are determined by description. Secondly, Jannidis refers to the perspective of cognitive theory in the work of Ralph Schneider. Schneider uses the theory of mental models which argues that people construct mental representation of their experiences of the world. When they encounter tasks such as problem solving, the representations that they already have can provide guidelines

for the operations of mental tools. Schneider therefore argues that the understanding of a literary character can benefit from concentrating on a reader's mental representation and the nature of characters in them (609). According to him, readers form these mental representations through the interaction with the text, meaning the information it provides about a character and the pre-given knowledge readers have from the real world (Schneider 608). Finally, Jannidis mentions the perspective of the neo-hermeneutical theory of literary characters. This theory resembles Schneider's mental model theory but has a focus on the text. The text is an intentional object and character is seen as a mental model. This mental model is created by a hypothetical reader who uses different insights of text processing (Jannidis 18).

Although character can be seen as an entity within a storyworld, it does not mean that character as an entity is self-contained. As Jannidis explains: "They are at the same time devices in the communication of meaning and serve purposes other than the communication of the facts of the storyworld as well" (23). Character is a part of a variety of structures that both provides meaning to the narration, as well as determines the narration. Furthermore, character plays a role in the symbolic or thematic meaning of the text and storyworld.

When readers have characterized individuals in a storyworld, they might develop strong feelings about the characters. One of those feelings can be a feeling of identification with the character. However, identification is a difficult concept to define. As Jannidis argues, it encompasses a variety of aspects such as: sympathy for a character, when a character is similar to the reader; empathy with a character, when the character is in a particular situation; and attraction to a character, when the character is a role model for the reader (24). The notion of identification can be found as early as the works of Aristotle. In his *Poetics* he describes "poetry as a species of mimesis" or imitation (Aristotle 3). According to Aristotle, imitation comes natural to human beings from early childhood and it is in this that humans differ from animals. Not only do they imitate, humans also take pleasure in seeing imitations. But imitation has a more important function than sheer pleasure (Aristotle 6). One of the most lasting functions of poetry or narrative is catharsis. This can be reached when the mimesis of certain actions arouses pity and fear. The reader or spectator is able to identify with a character through this process of mimesis and as a result reaches catharsis. When an individual reaches catharsis through poetry, he or she is healed or purged of pity and fear (Kearney 51).

Another research area that is interested in identification is psychology. Sigmund Freud, the well-known psychoanalyst, was one of the first psychologists that discussed identification. He mentioned identification in his psychosexual stage theory which explains the different stages children go through when they are growing up. In the third stage, the phallic stage, the

infamous Oedipal conflict arises. The boy is unconsciously attracted to his mother and wishes to kill his father in order to have her all to himself. But because of his fear towards his strong and powerful father, he decides to give up his desire for his mother and do the next best thing: become like his father. The desire to become just like the father is called identification by Freud. Girls experience the same feeling but in their case they want to have their father for themselves and thus want to become like their mother (Larsen and Buss 288). This means that there can be two types of identification. First, a person may feel a sense of identification because someone is reminded of him- or herself when looking at the other person. Second, a person may feel a sense of identification because he or she admires the other person. This feeling can be applied to characters in a storyworld as well.

1.2 Immersion and transportation

There has been a brief mention of storyworld previously, namely when it came to the different character theories and Margolin's possible world theory. If we look at the storyworld as a possible world, Aristotle's poetics can be mentioned again. According to him "the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity" (Aristotle 16). This leaves out many genres but it still connects to Marie-Laure Ryan's notion of text as potentiality. In *Narrative as Virtual Reality* she uses virtuality to explain the immersion of readers in narratives. She provides three definitions of virtual, which she distributes across an axis delimited by two poles. On the one end there is the optical sense, in the middle there is the association of virtual reality with computer technologies and on the other end there is the scholastic sense. The optical sense, which she calls virtual as fake, carries connotations as a double and an illusion. Or in other words, a duplicate of the 'reality'. The scholastic sense, which she calls the virtual as potential, implies productivity, openness and diversity (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 27). Aristotle's view on imitation can be linked to the text as fake, namely an artistic duplication. Just as there is the text as fake, there is the text as potentiality. Here Aristotle's view on the function of the poet can be applied. As mentioned before, this excludes certain genres, but Ryan finds a solution for that by saying that "[The poet is] to construct imaginary worlds governed by their own rules" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 44). This means that certain things may be impossible in the real world, but are within the possibility of the storyworld.

David Herman places narratology as a science amongst the cognitive sciences (*Story Logic* 299). According to him, "narrative is a pattern of thinking and communicating" which helps humans to comprehend the world (*Story Logic* 298). When reading, humans create a

broad range of mental representations that helps them to understand the narrative. He prefers using the term storyworld as opposed to story because it "captures what might be called the ecology of narrative interpretation" (Herman, *Story Logic* 13). Herman mentions that readers do not merely reconstruct what happens in narrative, but reconstruct the surrounding environment as well (Herman 13). In addition, Herman argues that narrative has a "world-creating power" (*Story Logic* 14). He defines storyworld as follows: "Storyworlds are mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response" (Herman, *Story Logic* 17). Or in other words, worlds that are evoked by narratives. Narratives in turn, can be defined as blueprints for the creation of storyworlds (Herman, *Basic Elements* 107).

When readers create a storyworld, there is the possibility to be immersed in the new world. When it comes to immersion, the text can be seen as a world. Through language, readers construct a world in their imagination. Ryan gives the following definition for this world, "The text is apprehended as a window on something that exists outside language and extends in time and space well beyond the window frame" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 91). When a reader is immersed in the text, he or she can be transported to the storyworld. Ryan distinguishes four degrees of immersion when it comes to reading–concentration, imaginative involvement, entrancement and addiction. The first degree is called concentration, where the reader is highly vulnerable for distractions of the external reality. Second there is the imaginative involvement, where there is a split subject attitude. The reader is transported into the storyworld, but can still be detached enough to view the text in an aesthetic way. The third degree is called entrancement, where the pleasure of reading is so high that the reader is completely caught in the storyworld, or landscape as Ryan calls it, and thus does not experience anything external to it, including the aesthetic quality of the text. This can be paraphrased as losing yourself in a book. The final degree is called addiction, which has a negative connotation. There are two types of addiction: the first where the reader wants to escape quickly from reality but cannot enjoy the landscape because he or she goes to fast to be able to enjoy it, or the second where the reader loses the capacity to distinguish textual worlds from the actual world (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 98). According to Ryan, there has to be a possible world before the reader is able to transport into a text. The basis of possible worlds theory presents possible worlds as the idea of there being a reality, which is the total of imaginable things (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 99). This reality consists of a wide variety of elements that are hierarchically structured by one element which is the centre of the system for the other members. This centre is seen as the actual world and the other members are interpreted as

possible worlds. In order for a world to be perceived as possible it must be linked to the centre. This connection is called an accessibility relation, and has two criteria. First there must be logical laws and second there must be a validity of physical laws that are obtained in real life (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 100). This means that *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka is excluded in this definition of possible worlds, as humans do not have the capacity to change into giant bugs overnight. This opposition between the actual and the possible world can be seen as absolute or relative. In the absolute interpretation, the actual world exists independently of the human mind and only the possible worlds are products of mental activities. With the relative interpretation, "the actual world is the world from which I speak and in which I am immersed, while the nonactual possible worlds are those at which I look from the outside" (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 101). Instead of reality, individual images of reality are placed at the centre. Ryan illustrates this in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* with the following figure, figure 2 (102).

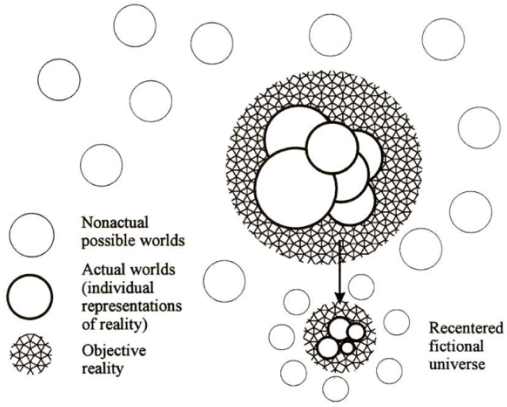

*Figure 2 A recenterable possible-worlds model (*Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 102)

At the centre there are hypothetical real worlds made up of individual representations. Surrounding these actual worlds are different objective realities held collectively by cultures or by various individuals. Their boundaries overlap because they share a physical reality. Even though there are differences, there is a broad area of agreement as to what exists and what does not exist. Finally, there are the nonactual possible worlds. The distance between the nonactual possible worlds is set by the difficulty of enacting with the possible world. When the reader manages to transport him- or herself into the textual world, sentences are then processed as a statement of fact. This process is called recentering. Non-actual possible worlds need recentering to be experienced as an actual world. Ryan calls this experience the "basic condition

for immersive reading" where readers are literally immersed into the storyworld (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 103).

The most immersive media experience is provided by moving pictures, especially in movie theatres. This can be mimicked when the reader simulates the story, vividly imagines it and turns the mind into a cinema. Once a reader gets immersed in a fiction, the characters come to life and become real for the readers. The world the characters live in takes the place of the actual world, even if it might be just momentarily (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 21). Richard J. Gerrig mentions different kinds of media as well, including paintings and television, but calls them all narratives (3). In the end they all have the same purpose namely, "a narrative serves to transport an experiencer away from the here and now" (Gerrig 3). Gerrig describes six elements of the literal experience of being transported as can been seen in table 1.

Table 1 Found in Experiencing Narrative Worlds (Gerrig 10-11)

Transportation elements
1. Someone ("the traveller") is transported
2. by some means of transportation
3. as a result of performing certain actions.
4. The traveller goes some distance from his or her world of origin
5. which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible.
6. The traveller returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey

During the first step the reader assumes new characteristics in order to be transported. Readers willingly adapt themselves to the local conditions, in this context the possible world. The means of transportation is a narrative in any kind of form. This can be a novel, but as mentioned before, a movie or even a painting is also able to transport individuals. With the third step Gerrig means that readers perform narratives (Gerrig 12). When they perform narratives, readers actively contribute to their own experience of the storyworld (Gerrig 29). The fourth step can be interpreted in two ways. First, there is the distance in space and time. Second, there is a particular distance that makes it impossible for readers to intervene in the storyworld. This second interpretation is the fifth step (Gerrig 13). Finally, if a reader is successfully transported to a storyworld, it could be possible that is has an effect on him or her, no matter how minimal it may be (Gerrig 16).

As indicated previously, there are different degrees of being transported or immersed into a storyworld. Ryan mentions three different types of immersion in *Narrative as Virtual Reality*: spatial immersion, temporal immersion and emotional immersion (121). With spatial immersion Ryan means the response to the setting. This type of immersion depends heavily on

the reader's personal memories. A word, name or image can be all that is needed for an individual to be transported into a particular landscape. It is not the length and detail of the descriptions that causes the immersive quality of the information, but rather the salience of the features and whether the descriptions project a map of the landscape (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 124).

Next there is the temporal immersion which Ryan defines as "the reader's desire for the knowledge that awaits her at the end of narrative time" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 140). In opposition to spatial immersion that slows the pace of reading down, temporal immersion urges readers to rush through the text because of the desire or suspense. Temporal immersion is about the human experience of time. Henri Bergson split up time in duration and external time. Duration is the internal time, the amount of time a person experiences. External time is the objective and chronological time, the time that the clock indicates (Bergson 109).

Thirdly, Ryan mentions emotional immersion which has to do with the response readers have towards characters. Scenes in novels can create emotional responses even though readers have the background knowledge that it is made up (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 124).

In order to be immersed or transported into a storyworld, readers have to be engaged with the narrative. Rick Busselle and Helena Bilandzic proposed four dimensions of engagement: narrative understanding, attentional focus, emotional engagement and narrative presence. The first dimension is called narrative understanding, which is the ease in which reader construct a model of meaning. When readers are engaged, they should be unaware of the comprehension progressive. Even though the first and foremost activity of narrative engagement is comprehension, this should happen unaware. The next dimension is attentional focus which has a similar argument as narrative understanding. An engaged reader should be unaware of being focused on a narrative. Or in other words, "one should *not* be aware that one is *not* distracted" (Busselle and Bilandzic 341). Thirdly, emotional engagement, feeling for and with the characters. Something that is "specific to the emotional arousal component of narrative engagement" (Busselle and Bilandzic 341). Finally, the last dimension narrative presence, which is similar to what Gerrig calls transportation. In this dimension the reader feels as if he or she has left the actual world and has entered the storyworld. Busselle and Bilandzic see this as a two-fold phenomenon. There is the intense focus which results in losing awareness of the self and the surroundings, and there is the sensation of entering another world. According to Busselle and Bilandzic narrative presences is only available when an "alternative world or environment is created" (341).

Melanie C. Green and Timothy C. Brock conceptualise transportation into a narrative as a mental process: "an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings" (Green and Brock 701). Following Gerrig's theory, they proposed three consequences of transportation. Firstly, transportation makes parts of the world of origin inaccessible. This means that readers can lose access on a physical level, for instance, they may not notice what is happening around them. On a psychological level, readers might encounter a subjective distance from the reality. Secondly, readers that are transported can experience strong emotions and motivations, even though they know that the events in the narrative are non-existent. Finally, similarly to Gerrig, readers return from their 'journey' somewhat changed by what they have experienced (Green and Brock 702).

Green and Brock make a distinction between transportation and cognitive elaboration as they both are hypothesised as having the ability to change beliefs or attitudes. They argue that "elaboration leads to attitude change via logical consideration and evaluation of arguments, whereas transportation may lead to persuasion through other mechanisms" (Green and Brock 702). Additionally, they attribute three mechanisms to transportation. First, transportation can reduce negative cognitive responding. When readers are transported they are more likely to believe story claims which in turn can influence their belief. Second, transportation into narratives can make the experience seem like an actual experience. Direct experience is a powerful mean when it comes to forming attitudes. Finally, as Ryan mentions, transportation may create strong feelings towards characters. The experiences or beliefs of the story characters can have a strong influence on the readers' beliefs (Green and Brock 702). Among these emotional responses, empathy may occur.

1.3 Empathy and sympathy

Empathy is a term that is difficult to define, which results in having several definitions for the same word. For example, Rosalind F. Dymond sees empathy as a social insight (28). But Helene Borke on the other hand defined empathy as a cognitive accomplishment. According to Borke empathy is "the ability to comprehend the affective (and sometimes cognitive) status of another" (Eisenberg and Lennon 101). Another straightforward definition is that of Carl R. Rogers, who defines it as understanding the other from his or her point of view (4). However, the confusion does not stop there. Nancy Eisenberg and Randy Lennon noticed that not only empathy was used to discuss this specific cognitive ability, but sympathy was being used as well (101). This means that empathy and sympathy are being used as interchangeable terms even though they embody different concepts (Wispé 314).

In order to know what empathy is, it is important to know what it is not. As mentioned in the paragraph above empathy and sympathy are often being used as interchangeable concepts. Coming from the Greek *sympatheia,* sympathy has a much longer history in psychology. Sympathy literally means 'with (syn) suffering (pathos)'. In the 18th century David Hume and Adam Smith introduced the concept of sympathy into the behavioural sciences (Wispé 314). It was mainly Smith who used the term as the heart of his system and it is his definition that is seen as the classic description. In *Theory of Moral Sentiments* he argues "How selfish soever man may be supposed there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortunes of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, although he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it." (Smith 47). In other words, as Lauren Wispé phrases it, "Sympathy for Smith was a way of feeling for others by putting ourselves in their situation" (314). This means that the way Smith sees sympathy is purely altruistic. Consequently, this means that sympathy according to Smith is an intrinsic feature. After Smith's concept of sympathy various scientists picked up the notion and discussed it in their own research. Charles Darwin for example used Smith's analysis and used it in his discussion of the evolution of morality and saw it as an "all-important emotion" (478). And it is that all-important emotion that counters the cruelty of nature according to Darwin. In the first half of the 20th century the notion of sympathy could be found in social psychology texts. William McDougall, Floyd H. Allport and Junius Brown for instance have written on sympathy. But in the second half of the 20th century the concept of sympathy became less interesting and it fell into disfavour. Around that time authors started to prefer the term empathy (Wispé 315).

Compared with sympathy, empathy is a fairly recent concept first appearing in the early 1900's. The German philosopher Theodor Lipps coined the term *Einfühlung*, working from Robert Vischer's work, he systematically organized the concept (Wispé 316). He emphasised that *Einfühlung* is something subjective and that it can only be done by "me as a self" (Lipps 112). According to him *Einfühlung* is a tendency of perceivers to project themselves into the object that is being perceived. To simplify this, for Lipps empathy meant placing yourself in somebody else's shoes. This definition is the same that Smith used for sympathy. This clearly shows the confusion surrounding these two notions. Wispé suggests that empathy has become the term of choice in the field of psychology. According to him it has become a popular word to use, which translates itself in an increase of interest in empathy rather than sympathy (Wispé 316). However, he concludes his article with two different definitions. According to Wispé, "*sympathy* refers to the heightened awareness of the suffering of another person as something to be alleviated" (318). This definition brings up two aspects. First, there is the increased

sensitivity of sensing someone else's emotions. But this is only the case for negative emotions as sympathy is defined by Wispé in those terms. Second, Wispé addresses the fact that the suffering of someone else must be alleviated. This means that a sympathetic person will try to mitigate the suffering of another person, even if he or she does not have the power to do so. The urge to help and the feeling of compassion will still be present (Wispé 318). Keen calls sympathy "the more complex, differentiated feeling for another", when comparing it with empathy but mentions that these two concepts are associated (*Empathy and the Novel* 4). Her definition of sympathy follows the same line as Wispé's, "I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 5). Like Wispé, the feelings occur for another and not for the self.

After defining sympathy, Wispé next provides a definition for empathy. "Empathy, on the other hand," he says, "refers to the attempt by one self-aware self to comprehend un-judgmentally the positive and negative experiences of another self" (318). Thus empathy, according to Wispé, is all about understanding someone else's experience, whether they are negative or positive. This means that empathy takes more energy than sympathy for "empathy depends upon the use of imaginal and mimetic capacities" (Wispé 318). Even though the two concepts look alike, the major difference is that somebody who empathizes reaches out for the other, and somebody that sympathizes is moved by another (Wispé 318). As Wispé puts it, "In empathy *I* act '*as if*' I were the other person. In sympathy I *am* the other person" (318). In *Empathy and the Novel*, Keen provides a similar definition for empathy, "we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others" (5).

Stephanie D. Preston and Alicia J. Hofelich prefer to use the term empathy broadly, "[they] refer to [the] processes by which observers come to understand and/or feel the state of another through direct perception or imagination of their state" (25). Their definition includes three different types of empathy. First they mention emotional contagion, which is subjectively feeling the same emotion as another. This is generally seen when individuals express intense emotional states. The second type of empathy they mention is 'true empathy', or an other-oriented state. Within this state however, the observer still has a distinction between the self and the other. And finally they mention cognitive empathy, where the other is understood by engaging personal representations through top-down processes (Preston and Hofelich 25). When empathy is triggered through a top-down process, a person moves into the feeling and thinking of another person through imaginative transposing. The individual imagines him- or herself experiencing the same feelings and thoughts as the other. On the other hand, there is the

bottom-up processing which is the tendency to automatically mimic expressions of others which can trigger feelings such as empathy (Decety and Jackson 54).

To summarise, most scholars agree that empathy has a cognitive component whereas sympathy is purely emotional. However, as mentioned by Eisenberg and Lennon, there are definitions that attribute a cognitive aspect to sympathy as well. This shows the difficulty of defining a concept such as empathy. But what is the role of fiction in all of this? The argument is that through identification with characters, readers learn to empathise with real-life individuals and consequently become more compassionate. However, this might not be as simple as it seems. As Keen says "empathetic response to fiction is less consistent than it might at first seem" (*Empathy and the Novel* 3-4). According to her, empathy is even quite unlikely to be influenced to such an extent that narrative can increase empathy, compassion and pro-social behaviour (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 4).

2. Literature and its effects

In order to examine which texts that are designed to evoke feelings in readers were the most effective, Keen devised an experiment for her students. There were three sample texts. First an email with the proposition for a money transaction with a cash reward, sent by someone who claims to live in Africa. Second a handwritten letter from an eighteen-year-old from Uganda, with a plea for financial assistance so that she can continue her schooling, claiming that she has to support her family after her father died. Finally, a text which consisted of an excerpt from Alexander McCall Smith's novel *Morality for Beautiful Girls.* The excerpt that Keen used was the story of Motholeli, a girl who rescues her baby brother from a burial pit and escapes enslavement, but who loses the use of her legs after being bitten by a diseased dog. Being wheelchair bound, she is sent to an orphan farm but ends up being rescued together with her brother. Keen hypothesised that her students would feel no sympathy towards the first text, "respond favourably to this 'stranded student'" and "respond feelingly" towards the Smith novel (*Empathy and the Novel* 29-30). Almost all students dismissed the e-mail, feeling no appeal at all and responded sceptically. Many of the students felt confused about the handwritten letter, but responded cautiously. Little than a half of the students felt it could be a genuine letter. However, the majority was hesitant about helping a stranger who suddenly makes contact out of nowhere. But the third text, the novel, drew forth the truest and strongest feelings. None of the students saw Motholeli as a stranger and the character identification seemed to disarm the distrust towards strangers. In addition, it opened the possibility for an emotional response. One student even changed her opinion of the continent and country, Africa and Botswana, to a more positive view. Two other students were judgmental towards themselves after reading the excerpt. They felt angry and ashamed, angry because these situations happen and they are not able to do anything about it, and ashamed because the student would not be able to behave in the same humbling and accepting way as Motholeli (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 31). This suggests that literature is a tool that can elicit emotional responses.

2.1 Neuropsychological research

As indicated before, scientific developments have allowed researchers to measure the effects of literature on the brain. As Keith Oatley describes, when individuals read novels or watch movies, their own goals and plans are swapped with those of a fictional character. Those plans are then put into the human's planning processor, which individuals use to construct their own planned actions. The fictional narrative gives cues as to what is happening when the action takes place and the reader or viewer then experiences empathetically the emotions they would feel in relation to the outcome of the action (Oatley 427). To put this to the test, Nicole K. Speer et al. examined neural activity in the brain when people read stories. In their experiment they tried to determine whether readers have the same brain regions activated when reading about an action, as would be activated when actually carrying out the activity (Speer et al. 990). Their results suggest that readers activate the same regions while reading about activities in the context of a narrative, as they would if they were actually performing the activity themselves. Furthermore, when specific aspects of the narrated situation were changing, the "regions that are involved in processing goal-directed human activity, navigating spatial environments, and manually manipulating objects in the real world" increased in activation. This means that when a reader processed a character's interaction with the object (for instance grabbing a pen), brain regions that are associated with grasping hand movements increased in activation (Speer et al. 995).

Speer et al.'s research looked at physical activities but they did not incorporate the representation of another person in their study. Jean Decety and Jessica A. Sommerville however, took the other in account and studied the self-other representations. They argue that the self is a construct that relies on a neural network which encompasses shared self-other representations (Decety and Sommerville 527). Their results showed that representations of aspects of the self partially overlapped with representations of the other. This means that humans have the ability to represent their own thoughts and those of the other and that these abilities are tied together. Moreover, this suggests that there seems to be a partial overlap between self-processing and processing the other, meaning that they may have similar origins within the brain (Decety and Sommerville 532).

Thus Decety and Sommerville argue that the representation of the other and self might have similar origins. But the question remains whether these activations actually have an effect on empathy. Tania Singer et al. took the self-other condition and looked whether individuals would literally feel the same pain that a loved one would feel. Pain is experienced in several regions of the brain amongst which the cerebrum and thalamus. This pain-related network is

also called the pain matrix (Singer et al. 1158). Singer et al.'s results showed that many structures in the pain matrix were activated similarly to when an individual feels pain him- or herself. Additionally, participants who scored higher on the empathy scales showed stronger activations in the pain matrix areas when their partners were perceived to be in pain (Singer et al. 1159). Thus, empathising with the pain of the other does not activate the whole pain matrix, but it activates the subjective affective dimension of pain (Singer et al. 1161). Like Decety and Sommerville's study, Singer et al.'s results show that there is a neural overlap between the self and other.

2.2 Changing the self

The previous studies suggest that there is a neurological process that underlies feeling empathy for others. However, is there a possibility for the self to be changed? Maja Djikic et al. studied whether fiction can transform the self. They hypothesised that art can cause changes in the self-experience of personality traits. Djikic et al. hypothesised that exposure to an artistically recognised narrative would cause greater changes in self-reported traits than exposure to the documentary story of the same content, even if this change might be temporary (25). Participants who were in the artistic narrative condition scored higher trait changes than participants who were in the documentary condition. Furthermore, the participants who read the artistically recognised narrative showed a significantly greater emotion change. These results suggest that art can cause significant changes in the self-perception of individuals when it comes to their traits. This study argues that art, and in this case literary art, can have an effect on individuals' traits and emotions. This suggests that art can be more than mere entertainment (Djikic et al. 27).

Other scholars who wanted to show that literature is more than mere entertainment are Raymond A. Mar and Keith Oatley, who wanted to bring literary fiction into the realm of psychology and scientific research (173). According to them, authors and psychologists have the same interests, namely "understanding human behavior and its underlying cognitions and in addition motivations" (Mar and Oatley 187). Mar and Oatley argue that fictional stories are informative and are simulations of real world experiences. This might explain why reading narratives provides a special kind of experience (Mar and Oatley 173). Mar and Oatley indicate that narratives simulate the social world through abstractions which in their turn transmissions social knowledge (187). In other words, fiction is a simulation by readers' minds that extends their understanding of selves in the actual social world. This means that readers can experience

complex social situations through simulations in storyworlds, which can help them understand how these situations work in the real world.

Apart from the effects of literature on social skills, there has been quite some research on the effects of reading on different personality traits. Empathy, for example, is a trait that has been studied often. Dan R. Johnson's research showed that reading has an increasing effect on empathy and prosocial behaviour. Johnson specifically researched the role of transportation into a story and the effect it has on empathy and whether this translated into prosocial behaviour. For his definition of empathy, he uses Decety and Philip J. Jackson's different types of empathy. As indicated before, these include "affective empathy, meaning feeling concern or compassion for another, emotional contagion, or experiencing identical emotions as another, and perspective-taking, or a basic understanding of another's thoughts and emotions" (Johnson, "Transportation into a Story" 150). The last is also known as cognitive empathy. The component that is predicted to be most affected by reading fiction is affective empathy and it is this type of empathy Johnson uses in his study. Johnson found that when individuals experienced higher transportation into the story, they had a higher affective empathy for the characters ("Transportation into a Story" 151). In addition, individuals that were more transported into a story and reported higher affective empathy for characters, were significantly more likely to show prosocial behaviour. However, affective empathy did not entirely mediate the influence of transportation into a story on prosocial behaviour. This means that there is something else that led to prosocial behaviour. The author suggests that this may be explained by readers copying the main character's modelled prosocial behaviour (Johnson, "Transportation into a Story" 152). Mar, Oatley and Jordan B. Peterson found similar results in their study. Their narrative transportation variable was an independent predictor of empathy ability. The authors suggest that this may have to do with an individual's willingness to transport into a narrative. If this might be the case, then there is a possibility that an individual is also willing to transport into another's mind. On the basis of these results they argue that reading can improve transportation in stories and therefore improve the understanding of others (Mar, Oatley and Peterson 421).

The previous studies did not take lifelong exposure to literature in account. Mar et al. however focused on the long-term exposure to fiction. They hypothesised that frequent readers of fiction have better social-processing skills whilst reading, even though they do not experience actual social contact when reading. This is in contrast with non-fiction readers who do not enjoy the simulation of experiencing social contact (Mar et al. 695). The results showed that exposure to fictional literature is positively related to social ability when compared to

exposure to non-fiction. Furthermore, fiction was positively associated with empathy whereas non-fiction was negatively related to empathy (Mar et al. 705).

Another study that looked into the difference of fiction and non-fiction was done by David C. Kidd and Emanuele Costano. In addition, they also looked at the degree of literariness of narratives. But in contrast to Mar et al., Kidd and Castano researched Theory of Mind, which differs slightly from empathy. Kidd and Castano define it as "the understanding of others' mental states" or the ability to 'mentalize' (377). Whereas empathy refers to the ability to understand what others feel, whether that is an emotion or a sensory state (Singer et al. 1157). Their results showed that literary fiction enhances Theory of Mind as opposed to non-fiction. Furthermore, participants who were more familiar with fiction were better in identifying facially expressed emotions. In addition, when comparing literary fiction and popular fiction, participants who were in the literary conditions showed a greater Theory of Mind (Kidd and Costano 380).

Scholars have suggested that narratives evoke emotions through empathy which in turn relies on the Theory of Mind, or 'mentalizing'. Mikkel Wallentin, Arndis Simonsen and Andreas H. Nielsen examined whether these assumptions are grounded. They call mentalizing "a 'cold' form of empathy", whereas affective empathy adds a bit of "shared emotional experience" (Wallentin, Simonsen and Nielsen 138). Their results showed that participants who scored higher on the empathy tests reported greater emotional arousal. This supports the notion of empathy being a driving force behind experiencing emotions in narratives (Wallentin, Simonsen and Nielsen 146). Furthermore, the passages in the narrative that were related to empathy all evoked some kind of mentalizing. This suggests narratives evoke emotions by two interacting emotional systems. On the one hand affective empathy and on the other hand the affective Theory of Mind (Wallentin, Simonsen and Nielsen 147).

2.3 Fictionality

Jennifer J. Argo, Rui Zhu and Darren W. Dahl took another approach. They investigated whether the degree of empathy has an effect on the preference for high or low fictionality with transportation as a mediator (614). They used a specific genre for this, namely emotional melodramatic entertainment. They hypothesised that differences in the degree of empathy may have an influence on individuals' responses to emotional melodramatic entertainment. Individual differences in empathy (low empathizers vs. high empathizers) will interact with the level of fictionality (high vs. low) and in turn determine the enjoyment of a melodrama. They hypothesised that high empathizers will favour low fictionality, or in other words 'more real'

narratives and that transportation will mediate the influence of empathy and fictionality (Argo, Zhu and Dahl 616). In line with their hypothesis, high empathizers favoured the melodramas when they were low in fictionality (Argo, Zhu and Dahl 617). Furthermore, transportation had a significant impact on the relationship between empathy and fictionality when it came to the evaluation of emotional melodramatic entertainment (Argo, Zhu and Dahl 618). These results however, are in contrast to the results found by Mar et al., who concluded that readers of fiction had higher empathy levels than non-fiction readers. This difference can be accounted to several reasons. First of all, Argo, Zhu and Dahl looked at a specific genre (emotional melodramatic entertainment) whereas Mar et al. looked at non-fiction and fiction in general. Second, Mar et al. measured a long-term exposure whereas Argo, Zhu and Dahl examined immediate effects of their study. And finally, Argo, Zhu and Dahl started from empathy levels, whereas Mar et al. examined the effects on empathy. Argo, Zhu and Dahl's study suggests that individual differences may have an effect on emotional responses to narratives. This means that the reader's emotional state can also have an effect on other processes, such as the degree of transportation. Melanie Green, Christopher Chatham and Marc A. Sestir were interested in this and they examined if the reader's pre-reading emotional state has an effect on the degree of transportation. In addition, they took the fact and fiction difference in account during their experiment. They hypothesised that a match between the reader's emotional state and the emotional content of the story would increase transportation. Or in other words, being happy makes it easy to 'travel' into a joyful narrative and being sad makes it easy to 'travel' into a mournful narrative (Green, Chatham and Sestir 39). Additionally, like other scholars (e.g. Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu), they predicted that openness to experience, such as mild positive emotions, will have a positive effect on transportation, even when there is no emotional match (Green, Chatham and Sestir 40). In their analysis Green, Chatham and Sestir did not find a significant difference between fact or fiction when it came to emotional response. The participants were equally upset by a tragic story, whether it was thought to be factual or fictional. In line with their hypothesis though, individuals who had a matching emotional state with the tone of the story were more transported into the narrative. Furthermore, individuals who were content and in a thoughtful state showed a greater immersion as well. However, as opposed to Green, Chatham and Sestir's expectation, not all relevant positive emotions showed these effects (48).

So according to some scholars there is a difference between fact and fiction when it comes to the effects on empathy. Contrary to that statement, some scholars have not found any significant differences. Another approach at discovering the influence of fiction versus factual

narrative, is to take the neural mechanisms that underlie the processing of factual and fictional narratives in account. If there are different neural mechanisms, there might be a difference between factual and fictional narratives and the influence they have on readers. Ulrike Altmann et al.'s results indicate that the processing of fictional and factual narratives shares some brain areas. Some brain regions were more strongly activated in the facts condition and vice versa. The regions that were more strongly activated in the facts condition are more likely to be part of the mirror neuron system and are involved in action observation, imitation or imagination. When it comes to fiction, apart from expecting entertainment, readers also gather information to update their world knowledge (Altmann et al. 25). When reading fiction, the region that contains the working memory, attention, action monitoring and pain perception is activated. In addition, this region also reacts to emotional chemical bonds and appears to have a role during the representation and evaluation of the value of future plans and action. This means that reading fictional narratives seems to surpass mere information gathering (Altmann et al. 26). Altmann et al. argue that "readers perceive the events in a fictional story as possibilities of how something might have been, which leads to an active simulation of events–similar to the simulation of a possible past or possible future" (26). In other words, reading factual narratives appears to elicit mental processes regarding actions and their outcomes, whereas reading fictional narratives seems to initiate simulations concerning the motives of an action and thus the character's mind (Altmann, 27). Their results show that both factual and fictional narratives activate mental processes of imagination, but they reflect other simulation levels. Factual narratives represent inner imitations of actions, whereas fictional narratives represent stimulations of imagination and simulation of hypothetical scenarios (Altmann 28). This indicates that different neural mechanisms are activated when reading fictional and factual narratives. Nonetheless, there are regions that are activated in both conditions although they do differ in the level of activation. This suggests that it can be possible for fiction and fact to have different effects on empathy.

2.4 Personality

Nevertheless, these studies forget one important aspect and that is personality. It may be possible that people who are more open to new experiences tend to be influenced by stories more easily than people who are less open to new experiences. Openness is a personality trait that can be measured with the Big Five Model. From the different personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism), Openness was the only personality factor that was associated with fiction (Mar, Oatley and Peterson 416). As Mar,

Oatley and Peterson mention “certain traits may predict greater enjoyment of fiction, and also better empathic accuracy” (408). In their study, they aimed to rule out this aspect in the relation between reading fiction and empathy. Their analysis shows that Openness, or being open to new experiences, does not necessarily mean that individuals enjoy fiction more and thus automatically perform better when empathy is tested (Mar, Oatley and Peterson 422). They argue that these results rule out individual differences and its effect on the relationship between fiction and empathy.

The interest in personality differences was picked up on by Djikic, Oatley and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu. They continued to look at the difference between fiction and non-fiction, but took particular personality traits in account as well. They hypothesised that readers of fiction will have higher scores on the empathy scale. Additionally, the expectation was that people who score high on Openness (the empathy personality trait indicator) will have higher empathy levels. Their results showed no difference between fiction and non-fiction except when it came to the interaction with Openness. Participants who scored low in Openness had a significant increase in their empathy levels when reading fiction (Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu 41). However, the participants who scored high on Openness went against the expectations. Their scores on the empathy scale actually lowered when reading either fiction or non-fiction. The authors suggest that the lack of difference between fiction and non-fiction has to do with the fact that both texts were literary. The largest surprise, however, was the fact that participants with high Openness reported lower empathy levels. The authors suggest that this may have to do with the so-called ceiling effect. There was simply no room for positive change on the scale. Or there is the possibility that the participants were made aware of their limitations and reported afterwards that they have less empathic accuracy (Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu 42). Nonetheless, their results were the same as Mar et al. when it came to the effect of long-term exposure to literature. The participants who had had more exposure to literature reported higher levels of empathy (Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu 43).

Eva M. Koopman continued the work on the personality factor and long-term exposure to literature. She did an extensive research on empathic reactions after reading and took the role of genre, personal factors and affective responses in account. These are few of the factors that are often mentioned in discussions when it comes to the relationship of reading and empathy. The study revealed that having empathy as a personality trait predicts empathic understanding (Koopman 75). Long-term exposure to literature is another predictor for empathic understanding as well as personal experience with the subject of the narrative. However, there was no difference when it came to fictionality. Koopman suggests that narrativity may play a

larger part and it might be a more important and useful concept than fictionality. In other words, it does not matter whether the story is factual or fictional, as long as it is written in a literary way it will have an effect on the reader. In contrast to other studies, simply being absorbed into the storyworld was not sufficient enough to trigger empathic responses. Nonetheless, empathising with characters did predict empathic responses. As mentioned before, long-term exposure to literature is a predictor for empathic understanding. This exposure seemed to be an important indicator and suggests that repeated exposure to narrative texts is important, something argued before by Mar et al. and Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu (Koopman 76). In conclusion it can be said that this study showed that personal factors do have an effect on empathic responses. Nevertheless, Koopman confirms with her results that repeated reading is related to empathic understanding (Koopman 77).

2.5 The sleeper effect

However, the previous results only show the immediate effect of reading. If reading truly can better humanity, the effects need to be lasting and have a permanent effect on their readers. Markus Appel and Tobias Richter took this into account as they looked at the absolute sleeper effect of fictional narrative. Or in other words "the belief [that] change caused by the processing of fictional narratives not only persists, but that the magnitude of this belief change may even increase over time" (Appel and Richter 114). Their results indicate that the belief in a statement increases over time, suggesting an absolute sleeper effect (Appel and Richter 127). Appel and Richter argue that these results therefore suggest that fictional narratives can have an implicit influence on the way individuals view the world. In addition, these effects may last longer than is assumed. This means that fictional narrative can be used as a powerful educational tool (Appel and Richter 129).

Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp studied the absolute sleeper effect as well, but looked at the effect of fiction on empathy. They believe that the effects of fiction on empathy present themselves over time and are even increased. Just as Johnson, Bal and Veltkamp took the moderating role of transportation into account (4). Their results showed that there was no immediate effect on empathy. However, when empathy was measured a week after the experiment the individuals had an increase in empathy. Furthermore, in line with Johnson's findings, the more transported the individuals were, the more their degree of empathy had increased. But not only that, readers who were lowly transported into the fictional story became less empathic over time. So not only do readers who are transported become more empathic over time, the opposite happens as well, readers that are not transported become less empathic

(Bal and Veltkamp 5). Thus according to these results, readers of fiction are more empathic than readers of non-fiction.

2.6 Literature as an educational tool

There have been several suggestions that literature can be used as an educational tool and there have been scholars who have looked at the pedagogical implications of feeling empathy for fictional characters. Although Howard Sklar uses the term sympathy as opposed to empathy, he examined how narrative experiences can help individuals to develop their emotional capacities (481). His experiment was conducted under secondary school students and consisted of two different texts. These texts showed opposite results. On the one hand, only subjects who were high-sympathisers found sympathy for characters. On the other hand, the individual inclination towards feeling sympathy did not have an effect on their expressions of sympathy and therefore might have been produced because of the text (Sklar 489). This means that different types of text have different kinds of effects on readers. Sklar argues that fictional texts stimulate emotions. According to him the judgements readers make are similar to those that are made in non-narrative situations (Sklar 490). And it is here that there are educational opportunities. Cognitive and rational skills can be combined with affective sensibilities. Emotions can thus provide a stimulus for rational reflection (Sklar 491). Sklar suggests that educators should not rely on the content of the story or on the literary features. Instead, educators should support their students to understand their own emotions and ideas. This should be done through structured discussions with the students. These discussions "would involve a *negotiation between* individual varieties of sympathy on the part of students […] and the directions implied by the text". With these discussions, the distance between the real and the hypothetical is bridged and therefore the extent of the belief in the fictionality is no longer relevant (Sklar 494-495).

Whereas, Sklar tried to show that educators can teach their students to be more empathic through literature, Johnson's research suggests that narratives can reduce prejudices against minority groups, particularly for highly immersed individuals. Johnson looked at the prejudice towards Arab-Muslims. His results showed that participants who reported a higher transportation degree, showed lower levels of Arab-Muslim stereotyping after reading the narrative (Johnson, "Transportation into Literary Fiction" 82). These results are quite bold as they imply that the answer to racism and discrimination lies in books that show non-stereotypical characters. Opposed to these positive results, Ann Jurecic doubts the 'power' ascribed to empathy by some educators and scholars. She argues that empathy is far more

complicated than some scholars seem to portray. Empathy is complex and integrated and is difficult to measure, even with the existing scales (Jurecic 16). According to her, educators cannot assume that students will become more empathic simply by reading a book (Jurecic 12). Studying literature is not a shortcut for becoming humane and empathic (Jurecic 24). Readers tend to pick books that contain characters or plots with whom they know beforehand they will identify. Students may be encouraged or are even told to read novels that cut across social and cultural boundaries, but this is not the case for private reading. Furthermore, Jurecic mentions that "readerly empathy differs profoundly from social empathy" (15). When individuals read for pleasure, they release themselves from social obligations. Jurecic explains "feeling an empathic connection with an autobiographer's narrative persona […] is a whole lot easier that interacting with her in person" (15). Jurecic concludes that literary critics and educators can only encourage readers to 'learn' from narratives. It is, however, fully up to the reader's choice if he or she wants to learn from novels (Jurecic 15).

3. Discussion

To summarise, there have been many studies that examined the relationship between reading and empathy. It is argued that there are neurological processes that underlie the effects of art. Oatley for instance explained that the brain is like a planning processor that works the same way when reading novels and real life actions. Speer et al. found similar results when they examined brain activities when participants were reading. These neurological findings provide the argument that literature is not pure entertainment. Mar and Oatley for instance, tried to bring literary fiction into the realm of psychology in order to prove this. Other scholars followed and started to approach literature through scientific research. Mar, Oatley and Peterson took transportation into account and their experiment showed that the willingness to transport into a storyworld has a positive effect on empathic ability. Johnson's research supported this view as his experiment showed that the more an individual is transported into the storyworld, the higher the increase was in empathy. Although this did not necessarily have an effect on pro-social behaviour.

These studies only examined the immediate effects of reading. Appel and Richter took the absolute sleeper into account and argue that literature can be used as an important tool to teach. Supporting Appel and Richter's findings, Bal and Veltkamp found similar effects when looking at the long term effect of reading fiction on empathy. They also took the role of transportation into account. Their results suggest that individuals who were transported had an increase in empathy and lowly transported individuals even became less empathic over time.

Another interesting distinction is the difference of the effects of fiction and non-fiction. Mar et al. concluded that fiction readers had higher empathy levels than non-fiction readers. Kidd and Costano showed similar results as their results indicated that fiction had positive effects on Theory of Mind. However, Koopman, Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu and Green, Chatham and Sestir did not find significant differences between fiction and nonfiction. Koopman, Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu suggest that this might have to do with the narrativity or literariness of narratives.

A final important aspect is that of individual traits. Mar, Oatley and Peterson did not find any individual differences and therefore suggest that personality does not have an effect on the relation between fiction and empathy. Koopman's results, however, suggest that personality differences do have an effect on the fiction and empathy relationship. Nonetheless, in accordance with the other studies her results indicate that repeated reading has a positive effect on empathic understanding. These results are impressive, but Jurecic warns scholars that empathy is more complicated than studies may show. Empathy is a complex emotion that is

difficult to measure. It is too simplistic to assume that individuals will become more empathic purely through narratives. Besides, when individuals read they release themselves from social obligations and do not feel they have to empathise. Sklar solves this problem by urging educators to not simply discuss plots or narrative features, but go into discussions with the students. Educators can support their students with these structured discussions.

The aim of this study was to try to answer the following question: According to secondary sources, does transportation into a story increase empathy? Reading certainly has some kind of effect on individuals. Neurological findings partly prove that there is more to literature than mere entertainment. However, it is difficult to follow Mar & Oatley in claiming that literature can better human beings. This is supported by the fact that the magnitude of the effects of literature continues to be disputed between scholars. Critics mention that an emotion such as empathy is too complicated to measure. Besides, ascribing such positive effects to reading might be a bit simplistic. Nonetheless, there seems to be an overall consensus that transportation into a narrative is associated with a greater emotional response towards a narrative. There also seems to be an agreement that there is a certain overlap between fiction and fact when it comes to neural region activation. Which in turn suggests that fictional narratives can change an individual. However, there are still too many questions left unanswered in order to answer the research question.

As Dixon and Bortolussi point out, it is still not known what component of narratives elicits emotions. Do the features play a role or is it the content that is important? Or maybe it is the interaction between the two that elicits emotions (Dixon and Bortolussi 64). Moreover, different types of narratives could have different kinds of effect. Argo, Zhu and Dahl showed that low fictionality evokes more empathy when it comes to emotional melodramas. It can be interesting to do further research into different genres. Or perhaps Koopman is on to something when she mentioned that the narrativity is more important when it comes to eliciting emotions than whether the narrative is fictional or factual. Furthermore, it still cannot be ruled out that empathic people tend to read more. Koopman for example found that personality differences have a certain degree of effect on empathic responses. Moreover, while Wallentin, Simonsen and Nielsen used a whole narrative namely The Ugly Duckling, the other studies discussed above used short fragments. It might be interesting to see whether whole narratives elicit more or less emotions after reading. Besides, if literature has this amazing strength that can turn humans into better beings, then there should be more research on the effects of literature on adolescents or perhaps even a younger target group, as children are easier to influence. It would be interesting to follow children from a young age into their adulthood whilst keeping up with

their reading habits. That would truly show the effects of literature on empathy. Finally, the participants in the experiments that have been described above were mostly women. Even though the results did not find gender differences, it might be interesting to try and represent men more in the studies. Perhaps if there are more men in the experiments, there would be differences between the genders.

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