

Spring School “The Role of Empathy and Emotion in Understanding Fiction” – March 27-31 2017

Abstracts

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Novel Responses

Thinking about the role of empathy in response to fictions is a promising way to explain a number of interesting phenomena associated with the way audiences respond to stories. One of these phenomena can be captured by The Problem of Disparate Response, arguably the central problem when it comes to understanding the way audiences emotionally engage with and respond to stories.

The problem of Disparate Response is how we can account for the fact that we respond to events in stories in ways which, in some ways, we find surprising; why should I respond to a rough hero by wishing her success on a heist, when I would expect that in similar circumstances in real life I would want her to fail; why do I have soft feelings about Ryder’s religious conversion at the end of *Brideshead Revisited* when an account of such a conversion in real life would cause me merely to roll my eyes? In short, why should it be the case that we respond to representations of events in stories in ways that apparently depart from how we ordinarily would respond to those events?

Philosophers have tended to understand this problem by contrasting ‘Disparate Responses’, brought about by stories, with ‘Ordinary Responses’, that manifest in response to real-world events. This makes it relatively easy to spell out a solution to the problem of Disparate Response in terms of empathy (conceived as perspective taking), by suggesting that in engaging with stories we sometimes take on a perspective according to which some things that we would ordinarily find upsetting we find funny, or according to which some things that we would ordinarily find saccharine we find uplifting. However, in this talk I show that it is difficult to delimit a class of ‘Ordinary Responses’ suitable for understanding the problem along these lines, and suggest that we should instead understand the phenomenon of Disparate Response simply as a matter of confounding expectations, and not disparity between ‘disparate’ and ‘ordinary’ sets of responses.

However, I also suggest that an empathy model of narrative engagement is still very well placed to explain the phenomenon of Disparate Response, even conceived of as merely a matter of disparity between actual and expected responses, rather than ‘Disparate’ and ‘Ordinary’ responses. I argue that this is because a part of what makes our ‘disparate’ responses to stories surprising is that they run counter to our expectations of the kinds of perspectives we tend to have on the kinds of events in question, and so the best way of explaining why our responses to stories so often depart from what we would expect those responses to be remains that in engaging with stories we often adopt a perspective that is significantly different from the one that we ordinarily possess.

<p>Bálint, Dr. Katalin University of Augsburg katalin.balint@phil.uni-augsburg.de</p>	<p>The Role of Narrative and Formal Features in Eliciting Engagement and Theory of Mind with Fictional Characters</p> <p>(with Dr. Brendan Rooney)</p> <p>A growing body of research showed that audio-visual fictional narratives have a huge potential to elicit and improve Theory of Mind (ToM), a sub-process of empathy referring to the awareness of mental states in others. Our research project concerns how audio-visual formal features contribute to ToM response. In these experiments we worked with professional creative designers to create fictional animation films that served as ecologically valid research stimuli.</p> <p>Study 1-2 manipulated the scale and content of the film shot to explore how close up frequency and facial expression affects ToM in film viewers. Together the findings suggest that these character depiction features can elicit ToM responses by directing attention towards character mental states rather than improving viewers' ability to use ToM. We completed Study 3 with measuring approach-withdrawal tendencies (through prefrontal asymmetry in EEG) and trait empathy. Finally Study 4 builds upon the findings above using Virtual Reality film. This experiment investigates the effect of the characters' responsiveness to engage in mutual gaze with the viewer, as well as the narrative frame of the film scene on ToM. We hope to extend this work exploring the way in which narrative and formal features elicit and improve social cognition. This way we can begin to build engaging experiences that use fiction and narrative to guide and support social cognition.</p>
<p>Brassey, Vanessa King's College, London vanessa.1.brassey@kcl.ac.uk</p>	<p>Should we get excited about Arousal?</p> <p>Do dry-eyed critics perform 1) blameless omissions of engagement 2) failures of understanding or 3) acts of negligence? In this paper I will argue that dry-eyed criticisms should be construed as 2). Can a failure of understanding also be in breach of a duty to conform to the required standard of conduct leading to actual harm or damage? If so, who or what is the victim? If negligence is too strong a claim, are dry-eyed critics still guilty of 'passing-off' hearsay as judgements?</p> <p>When we judge, 'Nighthawks is melancholy' we indicate that we ordinarily take artworks to be the bearers of expressive meaning which is stabilized to some standard of correctness. Borrowing Bouwsma's terminology, a judgement is 'dry-eyed' just in case we believe P expresses E without actually being 'aroused' by the work, where arousal stands for an occurrent emotion or feeling (Bouwsma, 1954). I ask if we can be blamed for judging dry-eyed if we take 'blame' as a failing addressed to the agent's act as some reprehensible (rather than moral) characteristic. I proceed in the following steps, a) show that arousal is insufficient for judgements of this sort b) deny the strong claim that arousal is a necessary condition on such judgements, for c) a weaker claim that arousal is a necessary condition on good evidentiary practice. One may have good reasons to be excited about arousal, but that does not negate the possibility of a correct dry-eyed assessment and condemnation is inappropriate. Unless d) 'arousal' is taken to pick out not only occurrent emotions, but also the more subtle relations</p>

	<p>between ourselves and our emotions, for example, being ‘put in mind of’ melancholy, then we can make a stronger claim; that dry-eyed judgements are failures of exemplary understanding, unsafe and apt for condemnation.</p>
<p>Fernandez-Quintanilla, Carolina Lancaster University c.fernandezquintanilla@lancaster.ac.uk</p>	<p>An empirical linguistic-stylistic approach to narrative empathy</p> <p>Empathy is often involved in readers’ engagement with fictional characters (Coplan, 2004; Keen, 2006). Narrative empathy, understood as the sharing of characters’ perspective and feelings (Keen, 2013), can give readers an insight into what it is like for characters to experience the fictional world. In this sense, empathy can play a major role in readers’ understanding of fiction.</p> <p>A number of claims have been made about the potential effects of particular narrative techniques on readers’ empathetic engagement with characters. My doctoral research project addresses the scarcity of empirical studies on narrative empathy from a linguistic perspective. I examine the role of some textual devices in the dynamics of empathy by taking a qualitative linguistic-stylistic approach which combines stylistic-narratological textual analysis and empirical reader response research.</p> <p>This paper presents results from my analysis of readers’ responses to three of Eduardo Galeano’s (2002) short stories, and offers new insights into the intricate engagement between readers and characters. My findings problematise some claims about direct effects of textual cues, and suggest that there may not be a single answer to the question of what triggers and blocks empathy in all narrative-reading scenarios. I argue for a carefully nuanced, contextual approach which accommodates the interaction between textual and non-textual phenomena, the latter being readers’ prior-reading experiences and background (see Caracciolo, 2014). The paper will show the various ways in which readers understood and engaged with the story world and its inhabitants by mapping out the complex interplay between textual cues and non-textual factors.</p> <p><u>References</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caracciolo, M. (2014). <i>The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach</i>. Berlin: De Gruyter. • Coplan, A. (2004). Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions. <i>The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</i>, 62(2), 141-152. • Galeano, E. (2002) [1989]. <i>El libro de los abrazos [The Book of Embraces]</i> (13 th ed.). Madrid: Siglo XXI. • Keen, S. (2006). A Theory of Narrative Empathy. <i>Narrative</i>, 14(3), 207-36. • Keen, S. (2013). Narrative Empathy. In: Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert (eds.), <i>The Living Handbook of Narratology</i>. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. Retrieved from http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Narrative_Empathy

<p>Konrad, Dr. Eva-Maria Johann Wolfgang Goethe- Universität, Frankfurt am Main Konrad@lingua.uni-frankfurt.de</p>	<p>Are emotional responses relevant for an adequate understanding of literary texts?</p> <p>(with Dr. Thomas Petraschka)</p> <p>Claims about the decisive role emotional reactions play with regard to an understanding of literary texts can be found in a whole range of recent publications. We want to show that this widely accepted view has more problems than its prevalence suggests, and that it is even false in its more ambitious variants: First, we will distinguish different versions of the claim, which are varyingly promising. In a second step, we will discuss three of the most important arguments presented in its favor. These arguments are the trigger-argument (emotions direct the reader's awareness towards relevant parts of the text), the data-argument (emotions provide the reader with additional data for the interpretation), and the empathy-argument (by empathizing with fictional characters the reader experiences feelings she would not have experienced otherwise, and therefore she understands the text in a way she would otherwise not have understood it). We will explain why we think these arguments are flawed, and finally offer our own view on the role of emotions in understanding literature.</p>
<p>Langkau, Dr. Julia University of Zurich julialangkau@gmail.com</p>	<p>Fiction and Two Kinds of Perspective Taking</p> <p>Empathy is often defined in terms of perspective taking. In recent literature, two kinds of perspective taking have been distinguished which are often confused or not taken account of (see [Batson, 2009, p. 268], [Coplan, 2011, p. 9]). Peter Goldie distinguishes them as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. '[. . .] empathetic perspective-shifting: consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine being the other person, and thereby sharing [. . .] his or her thoughts, feelings, decisions, and other aspects of their psychology. [Goldie, 2011, p. 302] 2. '[. . .] in-his-shoes perspective-shifting: consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine what thoughts, feelings, decisions, and so on you would arrive at if you were in the other's circumstances.' [Goldie, 2011, p. 302]. <p>According to Goldie, the difference between these two kinds of perspective taking lies in the content of the imaginative project, in who is doing the thinking in the imaginative project. In the first case, the thinking is done by the other person, which I imagine to be. In the second case, I imagine myself in the other person's situation and the thinking is done by myself. Goldie argues that the first is conceptually impossible, because only the subject themselves can take their stance towards their own thoughts, intentions, etc. [Goldie, 2011, p. 303].</p> <p>In my paper, I will argue that Goldie is wrong and that fiction provides a context where we can practice empathetic perspective-shifting for real life. I will argue that the reason why empathetic perspective-shifting indeed (often) fails is empirical and not conceptual in nature. We choose this kind of perspective-shifting in certain situations because we don't have enough information, and we fail for the very same reason [Batson, 2009]. Fiction, however, provides us with an ideal context for empathetic perspective-shifting, because we often have sufficient information both about the fictional characters we empathize with and about their situation. We often get to know their thoughts,</p>

	<p>feelings, etc. as we usually don't get to know the thoughts, feelings, etc. of a real person. Thus, while we might not naturally engage in empathetic perspective-shifting [Batson, 2009] when reading fiction, fiction provides a context where we can safely practice it.</p> <p><u>References</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Batson, 2009] Batson, C. D. (2009). Two forms of perspective taking: Imagining how another feels and imagining how you would feel. In Markman, K. D., Klein, W. M. P., and Suhr, J. A., editors, <i>Handbook of Imagination and Mental Simulation</i>, pages 267–279. Psychology Press. • [Coplan, 2011] Coplan, A. (2011). Understanding empathy: Its features and effects. In Coplan, A. and Goldie, P., editors, <i>Empathy. Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives</i>. Oxford University Press, Oxford. • [Goldie, 2011] Goldie, P. (2011). Anti-empathy. In Coplan, A. and Goldie, P., editors, <i>Empathy. Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives</i>, pages 302–317. Oxford University Press. • [Goldman, 2006] Goldman, A. (2006). <i>Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading</i>. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
<p>Martínez, Irene University of Uppsala irene.martinez@filosofi.uu.se</p>	<p>Remembering Seymour Glass: Nostalgia as an Aesthetic Emotion in Narrative Fictions</p> <p>J.D. Salinger's short stories featuring the Glass Family are primarily about vulnerability, nostalgic sentiments by an emphasis on childhood reminiscences, and sincerity in the expression of tenderness. These are attitudes commonly described as sentimental in the philosophy of emotions (Savile, 2002; Solomon 2004). In this context, sentimentality is understood as an evaluative mode of feeling linked to the pleasure and the gratifying self-image that the sentimentalist obtains indulging in certain enjoyable feelings (Pérez-Carreño, 2014). But are sentimental emotions necessarily defective?</p> <p>The aim of this paper is to clarify the nostalgic tone that colors the memories of the Glass about their older brother Seymour- whose suicide as portrayed in <i>A Perfect Day for Banana Fish</i> (1963) resides at the heart of <i>The Glass Chronicles</i>- in order to reveal the cognitive and aesthetic dimension of a bittersweet emotion traditionally neglected. I will propose, firstly, a narrative theory of emotions (Goldie, 2002) to illuminate how the painful act of the Glass of thinking about their own present attending to thoughts involving Seymour, a moral guide for all of them, can be considered as a desire for emotional closure after a traumatic event. Secondly, Salinger's nostalgia will be considered a reflective emotion (Boym, 2001) and also a central character trait that functions in his works as: 1) a feeling linked to intellectual contemplation through epiphanic episodes 2) an artistic virtue exemplified in the artistic sensibility of the Glass, and in their strong believe about the relation between the act of writing and human well-being. Attending to the apparently naïve form of Salinger's style combined with the specific darkness at the core of his work, this paper aspires ultimately to identify the nostalgic in narrative fictions with the comprehension of an authentic past.</p>

<p>Panero, Maria Eugenia Boston College panero@bc.edu</p>	<p>Does reading a single passage of literary fiction really improve theory of mind?</p> <p>Fiction simulates the social world and invites us into the minds of characters. This has led various researchers to suggest that reading fiction improves our understanding of others' cognitive and emotional states. Kidd and Castano (2013) received a great deal of attention by providing support for this claim. Their paper reported that reading literary fiction (but not popular fiction or nonfiction) immediately and significantly improved performance on the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET), an advanced theory of mind test. Here we report a replication attempt by three independent research groups, with 792 participants assigned to one of four conditions (literary fiction, popular fiction, nonfiction, and no reading). In contrast to Kidd and Castano (2013), we found no significant advantage in RMET scores for literary fiction compared to any of the other conditions. However, as in Kidd and Castano (2013) and previous research, the Author Recognition Test, a measure of lifetime exposure to fiction, consistently predicted RMET scores across conditions. We conclude that the most plausible link between reading fiction and theory of mind is either that individuals with strong theory of mind are drawn to fiction and/or that a lifetime of reading gradually strengthens theory of mind, but other variables, such as verbal ability, may also be at play.</p>
<p>Panter, Dr. Rebecca Vanderbilt University rebecca.panter@vanderbilt.edu</p>	<p>Changes of Heart in Adalbert Stifter's <i>Brigitta</i>: Emotion and Narrative Tempo</p> <p>In the novella <i>Brigitta</i>, the titular protagonist undergoes an emotional transformation that the narrative portrays as the result of an accumulated weight of experiences gathered over a long period of time. The experience of years is not, however, something that can be replicated in a fictional work, and thus a reader's experience of a text must necessarily operate in a fundamentally different way than the narrated experiences of a fictional character. Despite the impossibility of replicating the protagonist's experience, the narrative makes a play for reader empathy with her situation. This is accomplished by means of an abrupt revelation—that is, plot twist—at the end of the story, which necessitates that the reader re-evaluate a significant amount of the information that had been presented up to that point. This produces a destabilization of the reader's assessment of the characters, which parallels the destabilization of the protagonist's attitudes, thereby presenting a possible basis for the reader to empathize with the protagonist's situation.</p> <p>An examination of this novella thus reveals how the compositional principles of a narrative can correspond to trains of thought that result in specific emotions. It also shows how the emotion of surprise can play a role in destabilizing the mind's conceptual framework, opening up the possibility of altering deeply held beliefs.</p>

<p>Pascale, Marius A. Seton Hall University mapascale@albany.edu</p>	<p>Morbid, Morose, and Moral: The Ethical Status of Macabre Fascination</p> <p>Macabre fascination is often viewed as incompatible with morally healthy behavior. Yet, it is a prevalent and often indulged facet of character. This prompts the question; what is the moral status of macabre fascination? Is it properly categorized as necessarily distinct from the morally fit? I begin by identifying the two major ethical arguments that vilify this exercise. Specifically, the Argument From Reactive Attitudes, which posits that indulging macabre fascination causes desensitization, and the moralist position, which contests exercising delight in the macabre violates the innate moral status of emotional responses. Drawing upon Susan Wolf's concept of the moral saint, I propose both positions are mistaken. Each argument contains an implicit premise that it is always better to be moral. As morbid intrigue is distinct from moral behavior, one necessarily ought avoid giving oneself over to the indulgence of macabre fascination. However, such a demand is largely impossible from a practical standpoint. Additionally, behaving thusly would produce an individual who is both morally unhealthy as well as incapable of pursuing a desirable life. In actuality, the converse is true. Fascination with the macabre may, if exercised with restraint, prove beneficial to fostering valuable aspects of character. Although we ought regulate our macabre fascination, it is a mistake to dissociate it entirely from the morally commendable. I briefly discuss the value macabre fascination, which presents significant advantages for moral, social, and psychological wellbeing. Following this, I conclude by proposing some guidelines for determining at what point fascination with the macabre might become.</p>
<p>Petraschka, Dr. Thomas University of Regensburg thomas.petraschka@ur.de</p>	<p>Are emotional responses relevant for an adequate understanding of literary texts?</p> <p>(with Dr. Eva-Maria Konrad, see page 4)</p>
<p>Rettig, Noelle Georgetown University, Washington, DC nbr6@georgetown.edu</p>	<p>Feeling on the Edge: The Representative Transformation of Melancholy in Goethe's <i>Die Leiden des jungen Werther</i> (1774)</p> <p>Goethe's <i>Werther</i> uses an array of both images and discourses of melancholy as a way of working through the lacunae in self-definition in the wake of secularization and individualization and as a means of renegotiating the ambiguities of science and subjectivity, passion and reason. The novel initially offers a representation of aestheticized, poetic, or sentimental melancholy. This is a temporary state of mind, or mood, marked primarily by the cultivation of enhanced sensibility and self-awareness, as well as by a synthesis of antithetical qualities, namely joy and grief. Its language is the ornate emotional intensity of Sensibility: lyrical to the extreme, with feeling as its bedrock. Over the course of the novel, however, this kind of subjective melancholy gives way to a darker, pathologized form, which includes a vastly different set of aesthetic concerns, signified by a crippling degradation and insignificance, eventually resulting in the <i>loss</i> of feeling. While the novel's third-person commentators discuss this form of pathological melancholy via structures of medico-empiricism, this discourse discounts the voice of the sufferer. From Werther's pen, melancholy is expressed as an acute anxiety toward articulation in general, as continual self-</p>

	<p>doubt, hesitation, and rare breakthroughs. <i>Werther</i> therefore operates between two planes: truth is both subjective, <i>empfindsam</i>, and emotional – it is found in the elation of being in love and in the horror of unrequited love – <i>and</i> it is empirical: the heart is a vital organ, and once it “breaks,” the bodily devastation of death is signaled.</p>
<p>Romano, Benedetta Ludwig-Maximilian- University, Munich benedettaromano@gmail.com</p>	<p>Emotion and narrative connection: an enactivist approach</p> <p>What is distinctive about the connection that a reader experiences between the events presented in a literary narrative? Although I agree with David Velleman that emotions play a fundamental role for the narrative connection, I question the idea that they do so by constituting an emotional cadence. According to Velleman, the emotional cadence of a story is given by the presence of an emotional closure, and of evaluative judgments about the narrated events, and is grasped because of a resonance between the reader’s interior emotional life and the emotional structure of the story. I argue that these elements do not adequately characterize what is specific about the experience of the narrative connection. I claim that the latter is better explained by applying an enactivist framework to account for the emotional occurrences during literary reading. In the enactivist view, emotions are not mere reactions to external stimuli, but they are part of the organism’s ongoing regulatory processes, and they have implicit intentionality towards maintaining and achieving those processes. In this context, specific objects function as affordances triggering the expression of already ongoing emotions. I argue that literary narrative may also offer affordances, triggering the reader’s emotional responses. Because of their implicit intentionality, such emotional occurrences may generate a certain anticipation, that is expected to be either confirmed or disconfirmed by later narrative events. In either case, such events are apprehended in relation to the implicit intentionality of the emotions afforded by previous events. Here, I claim, lies the experience of the narrative connection. Literary examples from J. Kosiński, D. F. Wallace, and V. Woolf are discussed to substantiate my proposal.</p>

<p>Rooney, Dr. Brendan University College, Dublin brendan.rooney@ucd.ie</p>	<p>The Role of Narrative and Formal Features in Eliciting Engagement and Theory of Mind with Fictional Characters (with Dr. Katalin Bálint, see page 2)</p>
<p>Semeijn, Merel Rijksuniversiteit Groningen m.semeijn@student.rug.nl</p>	<p>Fictional interaction</p> <p>A particular type of engagement with fiction is ‘pretend play’ – acting as if something is the case while correctly perceiving it is not. Pretend play is generally considered to be a developmental landmark in theory of mind acquisition, or the ability to represent another’s mental states (e.g. beliefs, desires, intentions). This is because children are commonly taken to have acquired a theory of mind when they pass false belief tests (i.e. tests that require the child to predict another’s behaviour based on a belief that the child himself recognizes to be false) and pretend play requires children to anticipate behaviour of playmates that is also based on <i>false</i> (pretend-)beliefs. Paradoxically, whereas the ability to pass false belief tests emerges at the age of four, pretend play emerges at the much earlier age of two. This conundrum has sparked a debate among developmental psychologists Leslie, Perner and Harris on the role of pretend play in theory of mind acquisition. I propose an alternative account that is inspired by Matravers’ recent argument in the philosophy of fiction and Hutto and Gallagher’s developmental account of social cognition. The key contribution of my account is an analysis of pretend play as fictional interaction involving social embodied cognition, which enables children to directly perceive and react to the pretend-intentions of others.</p>