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Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-Reflection: A Theoretical-Empirical Framework

Abstract: Various scholars have made claims about literature's potential to evoke empathy and self-reflection, which would eventually lead to more pro-social behavior. But is it indeed the case that a seemingly idle pass-time activity like literary reading can do all that? And if so, how can we explain such an influence? Would the effects be particular to unique literary text qualities or to other aspects that literary texts share with other genres (e. g., narrativity)? Empirical research is necessary to answer these questions. This article presents an overview of empirical studies investigating the relationship between reading and empathy, and reading and self-reflection. We reveal those questions in the research that are not addressed as of yet, and synthesize the available approaches to literary effects. Based on theory as well as empirical work, a multi-factor model of literary reading is constructed.

With regard to reading and empathy, the metaphor of the moral laboratory (cf. Hakemulder 2000) comes close to a concise summary of the research and theory. Being absorbed in a narrative can stimulate empathic imagination. Readers go along with the author/narrator in a (fictional) thought-experiment, imagining how it would be to be in the shoes of a particular character, with certain motives, under certain circumstances, meeting with certain events. That would explain why narrativity can result in a broadening of readers' consciousness, in particular so that it encompasses fellow human beings. Fictionality might stimulate readers to consider the narrative they read as a thought experiment, creating distance between them and the events, allowing them to experiment more freely with taking the position of a character different from themselves, also in moral respects. Literary features, like gaps and ambiguous characterization, may stimulate readers to make more mental inferences, thus training their theory of mind. However, apart from literature possibly being able to train basic cognitive ability, we have little indication for the importance of *literary* imagination over narrative or fictional imagination.

Regarding self-reflection, while there is no convincing evidence that literary texts are generally more thought-provoking than non-literary texts (either narrative

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or expository), there is tentative indication for a relation between reading literary texts and self-reflection. However, as was the case for the studies on empathy, there is a lack of systematic comparisons between literary narratives and non-literary narratives. There are some suggestions regarding the processes that can lead to self-reflection. Empirical and theoretical work indicates that the combination of experiencing narrative and aesthetic emotions tends to trigger self-reflection. Personal and reading experience may influence narrative and aesthetic emotions.

By proposing a multi-factor model of literary reading, we hope to give an impulse to current reader response research, which too often conflates narrativity, fictionality and literariness. The multi-factor model of literary reading contains (our simplified versions of) two theoretical positions within the field of reader response studies on underlying processes that lead to empathy and reflection: the idea of reading literature as a form of role-taking proposed by Oatley (e. g., 1994; 1999) and the idea of defamiliarization through deviating textual and narrative features proposed by Miall and Kuiken (1994; 1999). We argue that these positions are in fact complementary. While the role-taking concept seems most adequate to explain empathic responses, the defamiliarization concept seems most adequate in explaining reflective responses. The discussion of these two theoretical explanations leads to the construction of a theoretical framework (and model) that offers useful suggestions which texts could be considered to have which effects on empathy and reflection.

In our multi-factor model of literary reading, an important addition to the previously mentioned theories is the concept »stillness«. We borrow this term from the Canadian author Yann Martel (2009), who suggests reading certain literary texts will help to stimulate self-contemplation (and appreciation for art), moments that are especially valuable in times that life seems to be racing by, and we are enveloped by work and a multitude of other activities. Other literary authors have proposed similar ideas. Stillness is related to, or overlaps with the more commonly used term »aesthetic distance«, an attitude of detachment, allowing for contemplation to take place (cf. Cupchik 2001). Stillness, we propose, allows a space in which slow thinking (Kahneman 2011) can take place. Stillness is not reflection itself, but a precondition for reflection. In our model, stillness is an empty space or time that is created as a result of reading processes: the slowing down of readers' perceptions of the fictional world, caused by defamiliarization. Our multi-factor model suggests that while role-taking can take place for all types of narratives, literary and fictional narratives may evoke the type of aesthetic distance (stillness) that leads to a suspension of judgment, adding to a stronger experience of role-taking and narrative empathy.

In a time when the biggest bestsellers are about crime and erotic sadomasochism, the idea that reading literature can make us better human beings may seem farfetched. However, ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* (1987; orig. around 335 BCE), authors, critics, and academics have made claims concerning the ethical potential of narrative drama and poetic language (e. g., Althusser 1983; Booth 1988; Boyd 2009; Bronzwaer 1986; De Botton 1997; Habermas 1983; Hunt 2007; Nussbaum 1995; 1997; 2001; 2010; Pinker 2011; Sontag 2007; Van Peer 1995). The general claims are that reading literature may enhance self-knowledge, make people more aware of the plights of those suffering, and more willing to take action to help them. In recent years, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has defended the ethical power of literature most ardently. Reading literature, she says, triggers a type of imagination that is »an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own« (1995, xvi). Through this »literary imagination«, readers learn to put themselves in the place of people they could not have known that intimately in any other way, thus deepening their understanding and compassion. As Nussbaum (2001, 2) further argues, literary texts can lead to the sort of »self-examination« that is crucial to ethical decision-making. Often this is reflection on the self, in relation to others. Knowing how we might respond to certain situations might help us understand how others would feel as well (cf. Johnson's 1993 conception of »moral imagination«, and extensive use of the term elsewhere, e. g., Beran 1998; Guroian 1996; Hutchison 2004).

These are just a few of the reasons why empathy and self-reflection make an interesting couple to focus on when studying the effects of reading literary texts. To various scholars, the claims about the relevance of this duo and their relation with literary imagination are far-reaching rather than farfetched. Hunt (2007), for instance, proposes that fiction has contributed to a mindset that enabled people to think up a concept like human rights. Novels such as Rousseau's *Julie* (1761) and Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) stimulated readers, she says, to empathize across borders of class, sex, and nation. »As a consequence«, Hunt claims, »they came to see others – people they did not know personally – as like them, as having the same kinds of inner emotions. Without this learning process, ›equality‹ could have no deep meaning and in particular no political consequence« (ibid., 40). She illustrates her statements with examples of responses of contemporary readers. Pinker (2011) takes this line of argument even further, suggesting that the spectacular increase in availability and consumption of narratives in our history might have caused an increase in empathic ability and, subsequently, a decline in violence.

The relevance of literature's effect on self-reflection is maybe less self-evident, but that does not make the claims less sweeping. Among others, Althusser (1980), Habermas (1983), and Bronzwaer (1986) have argued that literature's polyvalence

can lead us to reflect on our own norms, values, and prejudices, and that this would ultimately benefit society. Indeed, awareness of self and others may be key to our happiness, social success (Cooper/Sawaf 2003; Goleman 1995), and even productivity (Ibarra/Barbulescu 2010, see Bal/Veltkamp 2013). But is it indeed the case that a seemingly idle pass-time activity like literary reading can do all that? And if so, how can we explain such an influence? Would the effects be particular to unique literary text qualities or to other aspects that literary texts share with other genres (e. g., narrativity)?

The purpose of this article is to construct a model for such effects of literary narratives. It will reveal those questions in the research that are not addressed as of yet, and will synthesize the available approaches to literary effects. In our attempt to construct an explanatory model for literary imagination, we first evaluate the empirical indications that reading literature affects empathy in its various forms (Section 2.1). We will see that it remains unclear how such effects come about, but that recent studies help us to make some significant progress in understanding the workings of literary imagination (Section 2.2). In Section 3 we will do the same for reflection. Finally, we will synthesize our findings in our explanatory model in Section 4. We will make use of earlier overviews (Hakemulder 2000; Keen 2007; Kimmel 1970; Klemenz-Belgardt 1981; Mar/Oatley/Djikic/Mullin 2011), adding other and more recent empirical work that will help us to build a synthetic framework for future research. Yet, before all this, we need to define the key terms (Section 1).

1 Key terms: Literature – empathy – self-reflection

Defining the key terms of our present undertaking is tricky. Arguably the easiest (read: least complicated) concept to define is reflection. It may be conceptualized in many different ways: thoughts about the human condition, the faults in the personality of others, cultural differences, author intentions or his or her biography, and things that seem totally unrelated. Here we use the term »reflection« or »self-reflection« to designate thoughts and insights on oneself, often in relation to others, and/or society (in the present context of course evoked by reading). While we are thus speaking of a mostly cognitive process of generating (new) thoughts, since the self is implicated, affect-loaded memories are likely to be involved. We will discuss the most relevant studies (Section 3), looking at thoughts triggered by reading, devoting special attention to idiosyncratic aspects of reading literature.

But what is »literature«? The choices we can make here are debatable. According to the sociological approach, literature might be nothing more than what we were brought up to believe it to be, a matter of convention, perception, and socially

determined status (e. g., Bourdieu 1996; Corse/Westervelt 2002; Fish 1980; Janssen 1997; Van Rees 1989). When theorizing about the effects of literature, however, two other, text-immanent, definitions are used. For the purposes of the present paper, these are more useful. We distinguish (1) a broad, inclusive definition of literature, and (2) a narrow, exclusive one. The first pertains to »narrative texts«, that is, texts presenting a sequence of events in which one or more characters are involved. The second pertains to particular text qualities that distinguish literary texts from other genres (»literariness«). »Literariness« has been typically conceptualized as a combination of the aesthetic and the unconventional. Some argue it can be pointed out in textual features that depart from ordinary language use (»foregrounding«; Miall/Kuiken 1994; 1999; Mukařovský 1976; Shklovsky 1965). This perspective also acknowledges that literariness is ultimately a historical and contextually determined concept rather than a universal, unchangeable quality of texts. What are unconventional, novel, and deviating ways of representing at one moment in time for a certain population of readers, may be cliché-like, trivial, uninteresting at other times, or for other readers. Since theorists who argue for the ethical effects of literature seem to use both the inclusive and the exclusive definition, we will deal with both, but when we explicitly speak of »literary texts«, we refer to the narrow sense. This distinction between narrativity and literariness is essential in our discussion of the research.

The term »empathy« is equally difficult to conceptualize. The term »empathy« only exists in English since the early twentieth century, introduced by Titchener (1909) as a translation of the German »*Einfühlung*«. Before that time, the term »sympathy« was used to denote processes of feeling the pain or joy of a fellow human being (see Keen 2007). It is thus not surprising that »empathy« and »sympathy« are often used interchangeably. Recently, however, scholars have pleaded to distinguish the two, with »empathy« designating experiencing emotions perceived as similar to the character(s) (»feeling with«), and »sympathy« designating feeling concern for another without feeling what the other feels (»feeling for«; e. g., Busselle/Bilandzic 2009; Coplan 2004; Keen 2006; Mar/Oatley 2008; Mar et al. 2011). The question is to what extent readers experience this theoretical difference in practice. Nevertheless, where researchers have made the distinction between sympathy and empathy with characters or made a clear choice for either one of the two phenomena, we will make that clear in our own discussion.

We also need to be specific about the *type* of empathy we are talking about. Davis (1980; 1983), who defined empathy as »the notion of responsivity to the experiences of another« (1980, 3), has argued that there is both a cognitive, perspective-taking side and an emotional reactivity side to empathy. Davis (ibid.) thus distinguishes between »cognitive empathy« (the ability to understand a character's perspective, cf. »theory of mind«, see Leverage/Mancing/Schweickert/Mar-

ston William 2011) and »emotional empathy« (feeling similar emotions to a character, cf. »emotional contagion«, see Hatfield/Cacioppo/Rapson 1994). Similar distinctions have been made by several other scholars (e. g., Cohen 2001; Decety/Jackson 2006; Zillmann 1994). Furthermore, this distinction is supported by evolutionary theory (De Waal 2007), as well as by neurological evidence (Shamay-Tsoory/Aharon-Peretz/Perry 2009). The latter suggests that cognitive and emotional empathy are mediated by different brain structures: the emotional and cognitive components of empathy appear to be working autonomously. Even so, Shamay-Tsoory et al. (ibid., 625) emphasize that »every empathic response will evoke both components to some extent«. Likewise, Nathanson (2003) has argued for the interdependence of the affective and cognitive aspects of empathy. In most cases it is unlikely to feel something similar to what someone else is feeling without being able to take that person's perspective. The possible distinction between cognitive and affective empathy will become relevant later on in our discussion and the construction of our synthetic model, as we will see different studies making use of different measures assessing either the one or the other form of empathy.

A final distinction needs to be made between trait and state empathy, and empathic ability as an after-effect. First, before starting to read a text, readers already have a certain disposition when it comes to their empathic sensitivity to others. This disposition, »trait empathy«, is a personality variable, that could, as some have argued (Mar/Oatley/Hirsch/Dela Paz/Peterson 2006; Mar/Oatley/Peterson 2009), have been developed more strongly because of one's exposure to narrative, but it also could be independent of reading behavior. Second, during reading, readers can have the cognitive and affective empathic responses towards characters that have been discussed above. This type of empathy can be called »narrative empathy« (after Keen 2007), and it is linked to the broader concept »narrative emotions« (see Kneepkens/Zwaan 1994; Miall/Kuiken 2002; Tan 1996), which consists of all emotions toward the narrative world, including empathy with characters. Third, after reading, cognitive and affective empathic responses to living beings who are similar to the depicted characters can occur (»real-life empathy« as an after-effect), or there could be (for some period of time) a more general increase in one's empathic ability. Differentiating between these types of empathy may be useful, since claims about the effects of reading on empathy would need to take into account how far-reaching and long-lasting these effects are, if they occur at all. It does seem possible that we cry in response to the tragedies that befall characters, but fail to sympathize with a neighbor in need. Obviously this might curb the general enthusiasm about the relevance of literary imagination for society at large. Let us first see whether previous research provides us with enough evidence to warrant the optimism of the theorists quoted in our introduction.

2 Empathy

2.1 Effects: The evidence

When it comes to the impact of reading stories on empathy, several studies demonstrated positive effects on various empathic measures, like role-taking ability, motivation for pro-social behavior and altruistic conduct (Adler/Foster 1997; Bilsky 1989; Djikic/Oatley/Moldoveanu 2013; Johnson 2012; 2013; Mar et al. 2006; Mar et al. 2009; Shapiro/Morrison/Boker 2004). In Bilsky's (1989) experiment, for instance, high school students were randomly assigned to read one of two stories, or asked to do some quiet work on their own (control group). Both stories presented a pro-social dilemma: a character has to decide whether to offer help to another character and bear the personal costs. After reading, participants were separately interviewed by an experimenter asking them to consider the consequences of the alternative solutions of the dilemma they had read about. Then the *Awareness of Consequences Scale* was administered, which measures the ability to put oneself in the position of another person. Furthermore, participants completed a *Prosocial Motivation Questionnaire*. Both story groups scored significantly higher on both measures than the control group. In the context of the present article it is interesting that this study used literary texts as stimulus materials; however, it is not clear whether it is essential *that* these stories were literary.

Bilsky (1989) showed evidence for an effect of reading narratives on the cognitive aspects of empathy, although affective aspects may be implied in the ability to take another's perspective as well as in pro-social attitudes. Other studies have used items on attitude change as a measure of cognitive empathy (or: social reasoning). In these studies, researchers typically attempt to change white school children's attitudes toward (minority) outgroups (from Native Americans to children with disabilities) with the help of stories (Beardsley 1979; Brisbin 1971; Geiger 1975; Jackson 1944; Heldsworth 1968; Litcher/Johnson 1969; Marlowe/Maycock 2001; Schwartz 1972; Tauran 1967; Zucaro 1972). Only two of these studies showed no effects (Beardsley 1979; Schwartz 1972). From the remaining reports, we can conclude that reading stories with positive portrayals of outgroup members results in a positive change in attitude toward that group. Again, it is not clear what literariness contributes to such effects; the literary value of the texts that were used is unknown. Also, children and adolescents might be easier to influence than adults.

A few studies have found an effect of narratives on cognitive empathy measures with adults. Hakemulder (2000) found that readers of a narrative text about a woman in a fundamentalist Islamic country opposing traditional gender roles were more inclined than readers of an expository text on the same subject to believe that women in such countries find it hard to accept their secondary

position in society. It seems that readers are more likely to (over)generalize from the experience of one story character than from an essay recounting the experiences of many (cf. the »identifiable victim-effect«, e. g., Kogut/Ritov 2005).

Other recent findings suggest that reading fiction is related to empathic ability while reading non-fiction is not (Djikic et al. 2013; Mar et al. 2006; Mar et al. 2009). Mar et al. (2006), for instance, found that readers who were more familiar with fiction, as attested to by their correct recognition of the names of fiction authors (the Author Recognition Test, ART), also had higher scores on the »Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test« (Eyes Test) in which respondents have to infer emotional states from pictures of actors' eyes. Mar et al. (2006, 706) used the Eyes Test as a measure of »mentalizing«, which they see as »a cognitive form of empathy«. How this particular capacity to recognize (visual) facial expressions would be increased by reading fiction is unclear. Perhaps this is due to one's imaginative abilities, but then the relation can also be reversed: people who are more able to imagine themselves in another's position may be more attracted to fiction. Of course it is problematic to infer (mono-directional) causal relations from correlation studies.

Recent causal evidence for a relation between reading literary fiction and empathic ability (note: not actual empathic behavior or attitudes) comes from Kidd and Castano (2013). Kidd and Castano (2013) compared reactions on multiple measures of theory of mind after reading literary fiction versus popular fiction, and literary fiction versus expository non-fiction. In both comparisons, comprising five experiments with different texts, they found higher scores for the literary condition on the Eyes Test and the more intricate Yoni test (Shamay-Tsoory/Aharon-Peretz 2007). Yet, it is unclear to what kind of »literary« feature or features this can be attributed. In an additional analysis using frequencies of various words, Kidd and Castano (2013) found that the frequency of negative emotion words was related to higher scores on ToM, while the effect of condition remained significant. Since their main empathic ability test, the Yoni test, consists for a large part of understanding »gloating« and »envy«, it could be that literary texts are better at priming these »negative« emotions. The Eyes Test, on the other hand, uses some rather complex terms to designate emotions (e. g., »despondent«), which could partly make it a test of verbal knowledge, maybe leading readers who just read a more complex text to score better.

While Kidd and Castano (2013) claimed to have measured both affective and cognitive ToM, the Eyes Test and Yoni test can be seen as measuring very basic mentalizing skills, which can be considered predominantly cognitive, since there seems to be little emotion involved. As the authors of the Eyes Test, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste and Plumb (2001, 241), have stressed, attributing a correct mental state is just the first stage of theory of mind: »It does not include

the second stage: inferring the content of that mental state«. Nor does it directly translate to actually felt compassion with someone else. Affective empathy for others is not often specifically measured in empirical studies, and when it is, effects of reading narratives appear limited. Djikic et al. (2013) randomly assigned respondents to read an essay or a literary short story and measured both cognitive and affective empathy, using Davis' self-report measure, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis 1980; 1983). Respondents in the literary condition did not show greater changes in self-reported affective empathy. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) did find that reading a fiction text (as opposed to a non-fiction newspaper article) caused an increase in respondents' self-reported affective empathy (measured again by Davis' IRI), but this effect only held for those participants who felt emotionally transported in the story (measured by the narrative engagement scale by Busselle/Bilandzic 2009).

2.2 Processes: Explaining the relation between reading and empathy

All in all, the above-mentioned research gives tentative support for the statement that reading narratives affects empathy positively, at least in some of its cognitive aspects. Now let us turn to the question *how* it might work. To do this, we need to discuss under which *conditions* we see the effects, hoping that these conditions will help us make informed speculations about the underlying psychological mechanisms. We will look at the following aspects: narrativity, fictionality, literariness, narrative engagement, and personal reader variables.

When a comparison was made between different types of texts in the above-mentioned studies, this was a comparison between a type of narrative text (a »story«) and an expository text, except for the Kidd and Castano (2013) study, which also compared »literary fiction« to »popular fiction«. That narrative texts would have stronger effects on empathy than expository texts makes sense theoretically. According to Oatley (1994; 1999; 2002; 2008), narrative fiction constitutes a simulation that runs on our »planning-processor«, that is, the part of our minds we use in daily life to plan actions in order to attain goals. When reading a story, Oatley (ibid.) argues, we make mental models of the narrative world, take on the goals and plans of the protagonist, and subsequently experience emotions according to our evaluation to what extent these goals are accomplished (cf. Hakemulder 2000). This type of simulation, or »role-taking«, Oatley (1999) suggests, does not only help us to experience emotions, but also to understand these emotions better than in everyday life.

Oatley (1999, 101) speaks of narrative »fiction«, claiming that fiction is »twice as true as fact«. He suggests that the low-threat context of reading fiction may cause an optimal aesthetic distance (cf. Cupchik 2001), creating a safe environment to engage with characters. Since they are not real, we can feel for them without actually having to come to their aid. However, while the above-mentioned studies tell us something about the effects of narrativity on empathy, they do not provide evidence for an effect of fictionality, as they did not exclusively pertain to fictionality. In the studies of Bal and Veltkamp (2013) and Kidd and Castano (2013), the texts the researchers compared differed on many more variables than just fictionality or literariness. While the Mar et al. (2006; 2009) studies explicitly claimed to compare the effects of fiction with those of non-fiction, the difference between the authors listed in the ART could also be seen in terms of narrativity instead of fictionality. Many of the authors of non-fiction texts will use some narrative aspects in their writing, but never as many as any of their counterparts in fiction. In addition, other studies comparing the emotional effects of fiction and non-fiction found no clear evidence for a specific »fiction effect«. Goldstein (2009), for example, found no difference between experienced levels of sadness and anxiety in response to film clips presented as fictional or factual.

On the other hand, there is evidence from neuropsychology that texts that are presented as fictional are processed differently than when the same texts are presented as factual (Altman/Bohrn/Lubrich/Menninghaus/Jacobs 2012). In the »fiction« condition, participants in Altman et al.'s study applied the »literary imagination«: they perceived the events in the stories as possibilities of how something might have been, an imaginative construction of hypothetical events or scenarios. These results seem to suggest that fiction causes simulation processes, as Oatley proposed, focused on the motives of character's actions, that is, theory of mind. In the non-fiction condition, readers were reading to update their world-knowledge (cf. the referential function of communication in the model of Jakobson 1960), focusing on content (Altman et al. 2012). Thus, while non-fiction appears unchangeable, readers of fiction seem to be involved in a process of constructive content simulation, inclined to mind-wandering, considering what might have happened, or could happen. The authors suggest that these simulation processes must involve perspective-taking and the generating of relational inferences, leading to co-activation in brain areas related to theory of mind and empathy. Future research should further test whether fiction is indeed »twice as true as fact« (Oatley 1999, 101), and examine to what extent believing a story is based on facts has a positive (or negative) impact on empathy.

Regarding literariness, the studies discussed above provide little empirical evidence that this is a relevant factor for empathy. The only causal empirical study that showed a bigger impact of literary narratives than of popular narratives (Kidd/

Castano 2013), was limited to empathic ability and did not take into account which features of literary texts would be of influence – the texts were selected on the basis of acclaim. However, we do have theoretical reasons to believe that literature is special. It could be argued that literary texts, with their »gaps« (Iser 1988), polyphony (Bakhtin 1984) and often ambiguous and more complex characters, will give readers complex psychological schemas to figure out, deviating schemas that we encounter less frequently outside of literature (cf. Hakemulder 2000; Kidd/ Castano 2013; Mar/Oatley 2008). Hence, literary texts could give readers a greater challenge for their theory of mind, and consequently a better training of the faculties involved than other narrative texts would. Even though they did not look specifically at empathy, Kotovych, Dixon, Bortolussi and Holden (2011) have provided some evidence that gaps and other ambiguities in literary texts may be conducive to training one's cognitive empathy. They showed that when readers had to make inferences about characters due to ambiguities in the text, the characters became more transparent to them, »closer« as it were. However, more empirical studies are needed.
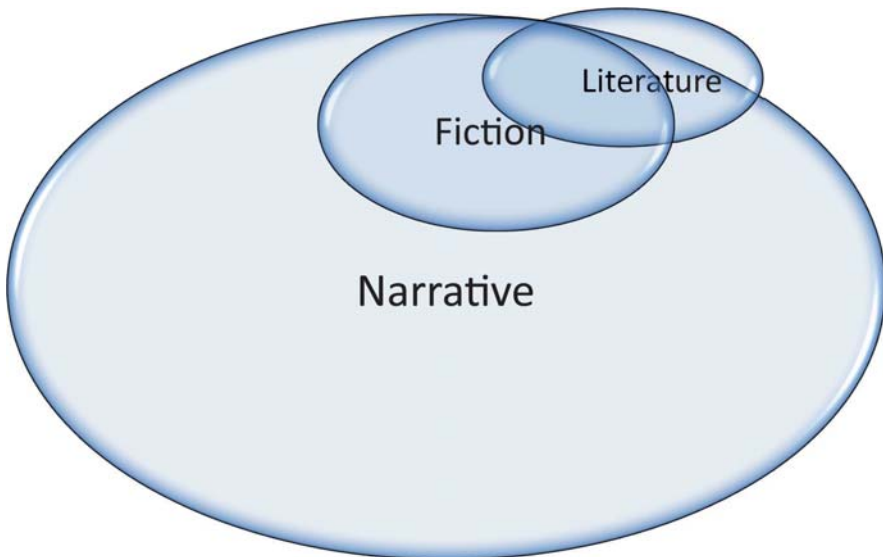

Figure 1: The distinction between narrativity, fictionality and literariness

What we have found so far are mostly effects of narrativity. Figure 1 shows fiction (novels and short stories not presented as »factual«) as a subset of narratives (which include, besides novels and short stories: diaries, news reports, stories we tell each other in daily conversations or on blogs, etc.), and

literature as another subset of narratives that overlaps partly with fiction. Literature, however, can also be explicitly presented as based on facts, as in literary journalism or literary memoirs. Thus, if we find evidence that the degree to which a text is literary increases certain responses (e. g., affect, cf. Miall/ Kuiken 1994), this does not mean that we found evidence for the effects of fiction, as fiction includes many non-literary texts, and literature includes many non-fictional texts. If we find that reading fictional texts causes more of a certain type of response (e. g., personal memories, cf. Seilman/Larsen 1989) than expository texts, this again does not mean we found evidence for the effects of fictionality: it might just as well be the lack of a narrative in the latter. A simple solution for many of the methodological problems involved here, is using an instruction variable, leading one group of participants to believe they will be reading a fictional text, while the other group, reading the same text, thinks it is a »true story« (cf. Zwaan 1993, whose instruction to respondents reading a newspaper text that they were reading a »literary« text lead to slower reading, deeper processing, and better recall for text surface structure).

Apart from the distinction between narrativity, fictionality and literariness, other factors need to be taken into account, as some of the above-mentioned studies bring to the fore. First of all, the extent to which readers are transported into the narrative world seems relevant in determining the effect of reading. In the Bal and Veltkamp (2013) study, namely, effects of increased affective empathy only held for those who felt emotionally transported. If readers do not engage with characters and events, they are also less likely to experience a more general increase in empathy. The involvement with characters and events has been given various names in the literature, including »narrative engagement«, »absorption«, »transportation« and »narrative emotions« (e. g., Busselle/Bilandzic 2009; Green/ Brock 2000; Kneepkens/Zwaan 1994; Koopman 2011). In the present context we find it useful to make a distinction between being drawn into the narrative world, feeling a sense of transitioning to that world, on the one hand (»absorption« or »transportation« in the narrow sense), and having specific character-directed emotions like empathy, sympathy and identification (»narrative empathy«, Keen 2007) on the other.

A study by Johnson (2012), provides empirical evidence for an effect of transportation as well as for sympathy. Johnson (ibid.) measured effects of read-ing a fiction story on what he called »affective empathy« during reading (»sym-pathy« with the character, according to our previous definitions), and on »pro-social behavior«. Johnson assumed that the degree of being transported into a narrative indicates the extent to which one simulates the social experiences depicted, and that this is the main way in which reading leads to empathic responses. Indeed, in Johnson's first study, participants who reported higher

»transportation« also reported higher sympathy with the character and were more likely to engage in pro-social behavior (picking up a pen the experimenter had dropped). This effect was independent of trait empathy. Johnson (2013) also found supporting evidence for the notion that transportation into a story is responsible for changes in beliefs and attitudes toward outgroups. The story used in Johnson's (ibid.) experiments generated sympathy with Muslims and intrinsic motivation to reduce prejudice; these variables were argued to explain how transportation leads to prejudice reduction.

While it is unclear whether transportation occurs before sympathy and empathy with characters (or vice versa) or whether these aspects of narrative engagement occur simultaneously, the Johnson studies (2012; 2013) do suggest that transportation and sympathy/empathy with characters work together in influencing attitudes towards others who are like the characters. Similarly, Hakemulder (2000) showed that readers who were instructed to put themselves in the shoes of the character representing an outgroup to them, were affected more strongly in their beliefs about that outgroup than the group who read the story without such an instruction, and even more so than the control group who read a text unrelated to the topic of the story. Hakemulder (2008) replicated this effect for other age groups and target outgroups.

Of course, there is a reason why readers feel for characters and are transported into the narrative world. This could partly be explained by textual characteristics (style, plot, subject matter), but it is likely that no text ever has the exact same emotional impact on all readers (cf. Koopman/Hilscher/Cupchik 2012). There is some empirical evidence that readers' personal experiences (e. g., Green 2004; László/Larsen 1991) and their previous experience with reading narrative texts (e. g., Andringa 1996; Thury/Friedlander 1995), can play a role here. Personality factors, like trait empathy, could also be of importance. However, there has not been much research into these factors.

2.3 Empathy: Summary

The metaphor of the moral laboratory (cf. Hakemulder 2000) comes close to a concise summary of the research and theory on reading and empathy. Being absorbed in a narrative can stimulate empathic imagination. Readers go along with the author/narrator in a (fictional) thought-experiment, imagining how it would be to be in the shoes of a particular character, with certain motives, under certain circumstances, meeting with certain events. That would explain why narrativity can result in a broadening of readers' consciousness, in particular so that it encompasses fellow human beings. Fictionality might stimulate readers to consider the

narrative they read as a thought experiment, creating distance between them and the events, allowing them to experiment more freely with taking the position of a character different from themselves, also in moral respects. Literary features, like gaps and ambiguous characterization, may stimulate readers to make more mental inferences, thus training their theory of mind.

However, apart from literature possibly being able to train basic cognitive ability, we have little indication for the importance of *literary* imagination over narrative or fictional imagination. While someone who just has read a literary text appears better at recognizing when someone is »gloating« or »envious« than someone who just read a popular text (Kidd/Castano 2013), this gives no guarantee of an enlarged compassion for fellow human beings. When looking at potentially »beneficial« effects of literature, we should not limit ourselves to empathy. Feeling empathy for characters, or even more generally after reading a text, may not translate as readily into pro-social behavior as some of us tend to hope (cf. Keen 2007). Could it be that, indeed, all narratives (soaps, narratives in talk shows, reality television, cf. Krijnen 2007) can function as a moral laboratory, but that some are more effective in challenging and extending readers' consciousness while others confirm preexisting conceptions? Here we arrive at the importance of including reflection as a potential ethical effect of literary reading. The multiple meanings in literary texts may trigger readers to reflect on their own lives, including their views and behaviors (cf. Althusser 1980; Bronzwaer 1986; Habermas 1983). Self-reflection might interact with empathy, as one could relate feelings towards a character to one's own previous experiences or future goals. The reversed could also be true: thoughts about oneself could increase one's understanding for someone else. Yet, it also seems possible that reflection can occur and be ethically valuable even without empathy, for example when one is irritated by a character, leading one to reflect on the character's actions and how one would act oneself.

3 Self-reflection

3.1 Effects: The evidence

We now turn to evidence that reading literature stimulates self-reflection (e. g., Culp 1985; Levitt/Rattanasampan/Chaidaroon/Stanley/Robinson 2009; Shirley 1969; Sorensen 1999; Waxler 2008). In a qualitative self-report study by Shirley (1969), for example, participants provided comments that show that reading literature can stimulate moral self-evaluation. As one reader of Dostoevsky's

Crime and Punishment reported: »After reading the book I discovered how self-centered I was and how quick I was to form my opinions« (ibid., 407).

This type of retrospective self-report suggests that readers are at least familiar with the ethical potential of literature. Their reports are important because they convey experiences that seem more likely to occur outside than inside a controlled laboratory setting. However, there are reasons to remain skeptical. Informants' responses may have been subject to social desirability, and their reconstructions of their past experiences are not necessarily reliable. Moreover, it is unclear whether literariness is a precondition for these experiences.

When we focus on experimental evidence, there appear to be only a few studies that support the notion that reading increases reflection, or related concepts, like critical thinking (Bird 1984; Block 1993). Bird (1984) demonstrated that literature programs (a Junior Great Books Program) can enhance scores on the *Worden Critical Thinking Test*. Scoring high on this test indicates that participants actively process written and spoken information, they are more likely to be involved in questioning, activation of background knowledge, divergent thinking, exploring the relations among ideas, and grappling with real-life issues. It may be that reading literary texts trains such mental activities.

However, Halász (1991) did not find more reflection in response to a literary than to an intermediate and an expository text. In this study the researcher conceptualized reflection as ideas related to the text itself. He did find that »remindings« (or: memories) in response to the literary text were more personal, more affective, and more detailed (cf. Seilman/Larsen 1989). Now, memories are not necessarily related to deeper reflection; a story can make us think about a certain personal experience, but that does not mean we reflect on it, or come to other, meaningful insights about ourselves. But it does seem that the more room there is for personal remindings, the more likely it is that readers will indeed reflect on their lives.

Indeed, it could very well be the case that the reflection triggered by texts higher in literariness is qualitatively different. Multiple content analysis studies of reader responses conducted by a research group led by Miall and Kuiken arrived at the concept of »self-modifying feelings« as feelings specific to literary reading (e. g., Kuiken/Miall/Sikora 2004; Miall/Kuiken 2002; Sikora/Kuiken/ Miall 2010; 2011). »Self-modifying feelings« designate a deeper or changed self-understanding. However, self-modifying feelings are not automatically evoked by literary texts. As Miall and Kuiken (2002, 229) emphasize: »self-modifying feelings are evident only among certain readers – and among them only some of the time«. The question then becomes how and when this and similar types of reflection occur. Even though only a minority of readers may experience it, the

possibility of reflection causing changes in the way one sees oneself and others makes it worthwhile to study the processes that bring this reaction about.

3.2 Processes: Explaining the relation between reading and reflection

Let us now look at the conditions under which the effects of reading on reflection seem to occur. First of all, it can be argued that literary texts are more complex to read, more complex than the generally more straightforward expository texts (which want to inform or convince) and popular narrative texts (which do not include as many ambiguities as literary texts; cf. Van Peer 1986b). Beach and Hynds (1991, 461) have shown that understanding literary texts requires well-developed problem solving strategies as well as »asking questions«. The motivation to understand a text may stimulate readers to consider their own questions, to bring their problem solving skills into action, and thus to train their critical thinking. The more complex the text, the more thoughts may be provoked (although there may be a turning point where the text becomes incomprehensible). Indeed, in an experiment Van Peer, Hakemulder and Zyngier (2007) found higher cognitive reflection in response to a poetic sentence when it contained more deviating linguistic features (»foregrounding«).

Further theoretical argumentation that literary texts would trigger deeper reflection than non-literary texts comes from Miall and Kuiken (1994; 1999). In line with Russian Formalism, Miall and Kuiken (ibid.) propose that what makes a text »literary« is the extent of foregrounding, and that foregrounding leads readers to become unsettled and to start looking at things differently (»defamiliarization«). This would provide an explanation for the process of reflection. Miall and Kuiken (2002) offer the theoretical argument that the deep type of reflection that they call self-modifying feelings results from the following sequence: striking features in the texts evoke narrative and aesthetic emotions; these are linked to personal experiences (memories), and used to reflect upon oneself. Narrative emotions would include empathy, sympathy, and identification, while aesthetic feelings would include surprise, admiration and appreciation. The feeling of things becoming »strange«, i. e. defamiliarization, can be seen as an aesthetic emotion, the most important one within this theory. Empirical evidence for the connection between foregrounding, aesthetic emotions and reflection comes from Sikora, Kuiken and Miall (2010). Sikora et al. (2010) found that emotions while reading were related to changes in self-concept and they explained these processes through a focus on style. Students in the Sikora et al. study who had experienced a loss, sensed the presence of the lost one in certain striking stylistic

moments of a poem, leading them to identify metaphorically with the text and experiencing deepened self-perception.

The above suggests that self-reflection is most likely to occur when, (i) previous personal experiences are evoked by descriptions of characters, places and events, (ii) readers experience emotional responses to the characters, and (iii) readers perceive the text itself, the artefact, as striking. But when do people experience such narrative (i and ii) and aesthetic emotions (iii) and do these responses co-occur? Hypotheses on narrative and aesthetic emotions during reading have been proposed by Kneepkens and Zwaan (1994). They have argued that literary texts (i. e., texts with unconventional syntactic and semantic features) will evoke more aesthetic emotions than non-literary texts. In addition, they suggested that experiencing more aesthetic emotions would diminish the experience of being absorbed in the fictional world, and thus limit narrative emotions. However, studies by Andringa (1996) and Koopman (2011), which explicitly measured narrative and aesthetic emotions, indicate that narrative emotions like sympathy and absorption tend to correlate with aesthetic emotions like finding the text beautiful. These interrelations appear dependent on text and reader characteristics: the correlation between sympathy and perceiving aesthetic attractiveness was stronger for those with extensive reading experience in Andringa's (1996) study, and only these experienced readers demonstrated a correlation between sympathy and perceiving novelty. It takes some experience with reading literature, Andringa proposes, to notice and appreciate unconventional stylistic features.

It does seem likely that both strong aesthetic emotions and strong narrative emotions can lead to reflection, however, empirical evidence mainly pertains to the relation between narrative emotions and reflection. In the context of studying responses to film, Igartua (2010) has found that a higher involvement with characters (empathy and sympathy) is related to cognitive elaboration and a more complex reflective process (cf. Vorderer 1993). It can be hypothesized that similar processes hold for (narrative) texts. As Levitt et al. (2009) argued, based on in-depth interviews with six readers, identification with characters' experiences enables readers to reflect on threats and experiment with new possibilities and perspectives to deal with personally difficult situations. In an experimental study by Koopman, Hilscher and Cupchik (2012) on responses to literary rape scenes, narrative emotions (absorption, identification, sympathy and empathy) were found to correlate positively with an intellectual response. Likewise, and suggesting a role for aesthetic emotions as well, a study by Cupchik, Leonard, Axelrad, and Kalin (1998) showed that literary excerpts with emotional subject matter did not only evoke more emotions than literary excerpts with descriptive content, but also evoked more thoughts on the text, and were found more

challenging and interesting (cf. Cupchik/László 1994). Yet, their respondents were relatively experienced readers. For less experienced readers, narrative and aesthetic emotions may not be as strongly related, as the Andringa (1996) study suggested, and the subsequent reflection may also be less.

3.3 Self-reflection: Summary

While there is no convincing evidence that literary texts are generally more thought-provoking than non-literary texts (either narrative or expository), there is tentative indication for a relation between reading literary texts and self-reflection. However, as was the case for the studies on empathy, there is a lack of systematic comparisons between literary narratives and non-literary narratives. There are some suggestions regarding the processes that can lead to self-reflection. Empirical and theoretical work indicates that the combination of experiencing narrative and aesthetic emotions tends to trigger self-reflection. Personal and reading experience may influence narrative and aesthetic emotions.

4 Empirical-theoretical models

In this section, we will contrast two theoretical positions within the field of reader response studies on underlying processes that lead to empathy and reflection. These positions have been briefly explained before: the idea of reading literature as a form of role-taking proposed by Oatley (e. g., 1994; 1999) and the idea of defamiliarization through deviating textual and narrative features proposed by Miall and Kuiken (1994; 1999). We argue that these positions are in fact complementary. While the role-taking concept seems most adequate to explain empathic responses, the defamiliarization concept seems most adequate in explaining reflective responses. Supplemented by further empirical studies, the discussion of these two theoretical explanations leads to the construction of a theoretical framework (and model) that offers useful suggestions which texts could be considered to have which effects on empathy and reflection. (Note that the »role-taking model« and »defamiliarization model« explained below are our simplifications and interpretations of what respectively Oatley and colleagues, and the Miall and Kuiken research group have claimed.)

4.1 Role-taking model

As indicated before, according to Oatley (1994; 1999; 2002; 2008), during reading we make mental models of the narrative world and protagonists' goals and plans. Mar and Oatley (2008) suggest that human interaction is the most central aspect to literary reading, since »literary narratives fundamentally deal with relationships among individuals and the navigation of conflicting desires« (ibid., 174). Making mental inferences about characters, according to Mar and Oatley (2008), is likely to result in identification, empathy and/or sympathy with these characters. Further theoretical explanation of this perspective is provided, we believe, by Kotovych et al. (2011), who argue that reading is like a conversation between narrator and reader: when we try to understand a character in a book, we make similar inferences about what the other is thinking and feeling as in conversation, and making such inferences would increase our understanding of and identification with the character.

Reading narratives could, in this way, function as practice for inferring emotions and taking the perspectives of others in real life (Mar/Oatley 2008; Nussbaum 1995). Through the process of simulating others' experiences, readers might eventually feel more empathy for others outside of the narrative world. Figure 2 presents a visual summary of this role-taking model. Within this model, a reader (with at least a basic level of trait empathy) encounters a narrative text (of at least a basic quality) depicting »the vicissitudes of human intentions« (Bruner 1986, 13). Subsequently, perspective-taking will occur: the reader makes inferences of the character's mental states and may even adopt the character's goals and plans temporarily (cf. Aarts/Gollwitzer/Hassin 2004). This process, we assume, is partly a function of narrative qualities (such as narrative perspective; Hakemulder/Van Peer in press). As the practice of making mental inferences, perspective-taking may lead to an increased ability to form an adequate theory of mind, although that ability is a reader variable that will already differ before one starts to read. Role-taking may also lead to narrative emotions: transportation into the narrative world, and sympathy and/or empathy with the character. In the model, we have focused on the character-centered emotions, using Keen's term »narrative empathy«. Both the increased ability to form a theory of mind and the experience of narrative empathy could subsequently lead to empathy towards others outside the narrative world: changed attitudes towards others and possibly increased pro-social behavior. Of course, for pro-social behavior to occur, the situational context also plays an important role (e. g., the personal costs involved). The exact conditions under which empathic attitudes towards others and pro-social behavior occur remain to be investigated (cf. Loewenstein/Small 2007). The relationship between

experiencing narrative emotions and empathic attitudes and behavior will thus not be as straightforward as this model suggests.

The central place of role-taking in this model would explain why reading narrative texts is more likely to lead to certain empathic responses than reading non-narrative (expository) texts: without characters to make inferences about, there are no processes of perspective-taking, sympathy and empathy. Both life-long exposure and short-time exposure to narratives have been associated with measures of (mainly cognitive) empathy (theory of mind), indicating an increased ability to take another person's perspective. While Keen (2007) has argued that the ability to feel for characters has no direct relation to our actions towards actual people, feeling narrative emotions in response to stories appears to be able to have modest pro-social effects (see Johnson 2012).
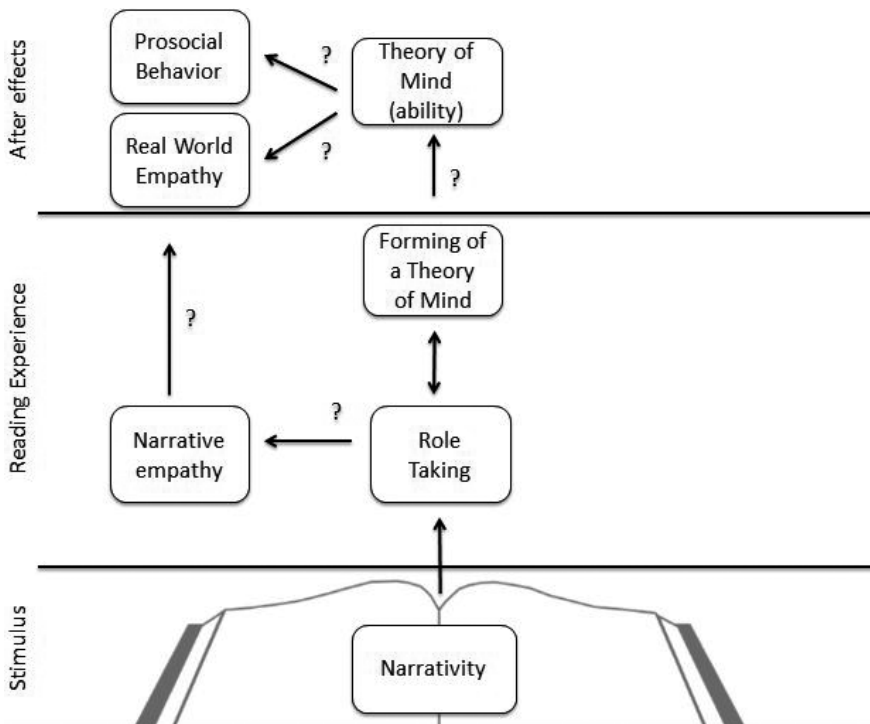

Figure 2: Role-taking model

There remain a number of questions to be solved for future research, indicated in Figure 2. Although it seems likely that regularly forming a theory of mind about fictional characters leads to training of that ability, we still lack conclusive

evidence for this. Similarly, we do not know for sure that empathy toward characters will lead to empathy for people. Also, we do not fully understand yet under which conditions role-taking leads to narrative empathy. Nor do we know when theory of mind (cognitive empathy as ability) leads to real-world empathy and prosocial behavior.

4.2 Defamiliarization

We believe that the role-taking model only tells part of what may be going on. If we want to understand responses to literary narrative, it is relevant to take other stimuli factors into account than just narrativity. An attempt to create a theory of affective response particular to literary texts has been made by Miall and Kuiken (1994; 1999; 2002), who follow Van Peer (1986a) in his focus on »foregrounding« and »defamiliarization«. While Oatley (1994; 1999) suggests that empathic and reflective responses arise mostly from role-taking, from identifying with a character, seeing things and events from his or her perspective, Miall and Kuiken (1994; 1999) place the potential power of literature mainly in style. They suggest that the striking features in a literary text (»foregrounding«) lead readers to become unsettled and start looking at familiar things in a different way (»defamiliarization«). While they also see a role for narrative emotions, and for other aesthetic emotions, we simplify their theory in a model focusing on the aesthetic emotion defamiliarization.

In addition to the previously mentioned (scarce) support for the idea that foregrounding triggers reflection (e. g., Hakemulder/Van Peer in press), there is some indirect empirical support for the defamiliarization hypothesis. In a study on phonetic, semantic, and grammatical foregrounding (Miall/Kuiken 1994), literary excerpts with a higher rate of these types of foregrounding, provoked longer reading times and stronger affect (cf. Hunt/Vipond 1985; Van Peer 1986a), which at least suggests the possibility of providing opportunity (time) and cause (affect) for reflection. Readers also seem to aesthetically appreciate foregrounding (e. g., Hakemulder 2004), although the moderating influence of reading experience has to be further explored (see Hakemulder/Van Peer in press, for mixed results).
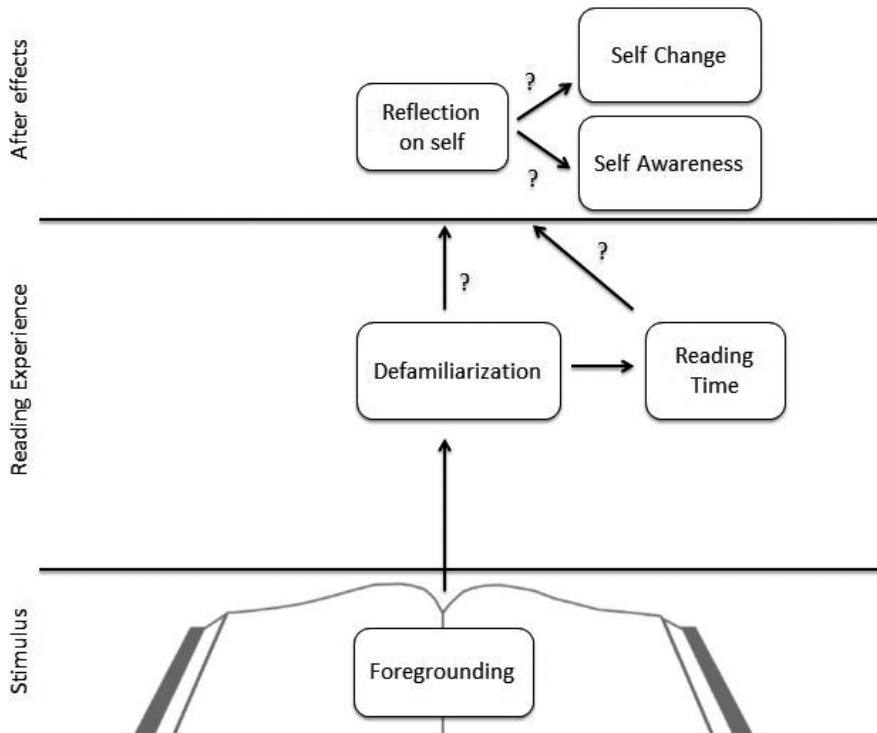
Figure 3: Defamiliarization model

The defamiliarization model as represented in Figure 3 focuses on the proposed effects of literariness on reflection. Here it is not the narrativity but the literariness (foregrounding) of the text that is deemed most important. Foregrounded features in the text (e. g., novel metaphors, rhyme) can lead to aesthetic feelings of perceived beauty, but particularly surprise and defamiliarization, the latter of which is given the central position in our simplified visualization of the defamiliarization theory. Together with the longer reading times it evokes, defamiliarization could subsequently lead to self-reflection. Again, we see a number of questions emerging. We have talked about the possible relation between defamiliarization and reflection; it is still unclear under which conditions this effect occurs. Also, how self-reflection relates to self-awareness and self-change is uncertain.

4.3 Multi-factor model of literary reading

While both of the separate models are valuable in formulating predictions about reader responses, to get a full picture of the way literary reading could lead to empathy and reflection, they need to be combined in one model that takes into account both narrativity and literariness on the stimulus side, and thus narrative empathy and defamiliarization as processes. Moreover, we propose to include a third factor, fictionality. Even though empirical evidence that fictionality would be crucial is minimal (but not nonexistent, see Altman et al. 2012), there are important theoretical reasons to assume it could be relevant. By including fictionality, the stimuli side of the multi-factor model reflects the distinctions made in Figure 1, and speaks to all the claims made regarding the effects of literary narrative fiction.

Figure 4 includes most of the elements of Figures 2 and 3. Central in our model, however, is a new term, »stillness«. We borrow the term stillness from the Canadian author Yann Martel (2009), who suggests reading certain literary texts will help to stimulate self-contemplation (and appreciation for art), moments that are especially valuable in times when life seems to be racing by, and we are enveloped by work and a multitude of other activities. Other literary authors propose similar ideas. Rushdie (1991) said it is a psychological need for everyone to have, in the »house« of their minds, at least one »room« in which they can be quiet. Kundera (1995) proposes that literature is a realm in which readers can suspend their moral judgment, rather than giving in to the habit of judging instantly, before one even understands what one is judging. Stillness is related to, or overlaps with the more commonly used term »aesthetic distance«, an attitude of detachment, allowing for contemplation to take place (cf. Cupchik 2001).

In our model, stillness is an empty space or time that is created as a result of reading processes: the slowing down of readers' perceptions of the fictional world, caused by defamiliarization (compare the increased reading times in Figure 3). The model proposes both narrativity and literariness influence stillness indirectly, as it would result from defamiliarization but also from role-taking: both processes are associated with longer reading times. As Zillmann (1994) argues, role-taking requires cognitive effort, and hence time. Miall and Kuiken (2001) showed that reading time increases with the degree to which texts present character perspective. It might be argued that this is due to readers' role-taking efforts. Fictionality may also contribute to stillness: reading a text one knows to be fictional allows one to postpone judgments, to suspend disbelief, follow the (implied) author in his/her representations. It is stillness, we propose, that gives readers the opportunity to reflect: to reflect on what the events really mean to the characters, time to consider several options for appropriate inferences (theory of mind), and time to let empathy emerge to its full extent. Zillmann (1994) discusses evidence to suggest that it is the

fast paced media that cause emotional confusion, because a full empathic response requires some 30 seconds to emerge. Now, extending these suggestions to the present subject, it can be argued that slowness in perception of characters will help readers to develop their empathic responses in full. Also, the cognitive process of forming a theory of mind will profit from slowness.

Stillness, we propose, allows a space in which slow thinking (Kahneman 2011) can take place. It takes a pause, or break, a moment of quietness, for readers to be able to contemplate, for instance, a new way of looking at the (over)familiar, or to consider several narrative perspectives of different characters at once. Stillness is not reflection itself, but a precondition for reflection.

The model shows how two seemingly competitive approaches are actually complementary. However, instead of answering all questions, the model also reveals new problems. As it would make the model unclear, no question marks are added in the visualization, but most of the relations represented in this model need to be explored. First of all, the exact order is a matter of discussion: does defamiliarization cause stillness, does stillness allow for defamiliarization to occur, or does foregrounding cause stillness and subsequently defamiliarization? Second, the poetic term »stillness« obviously needs to be specified and operationalized further. In the present context it must suffice that we might find indicators in a combination of online measures (N400 responses and longer reading times) and offline measures (open responses suggesting readers also experience the text as allowing for mind-wandering). This is crucial, we propose, to our understanding of the effects on empathy and reflection, especially if we want to compare the value of literary reading to, for instance other media and genres.

A third matter for discussion is the exact placing of the line between reading experience and after-effects. We propose here that the mental processes of forming a theory of mind and reflection on self are part of both the realm of reading experience and that of the after-effects. It seems to us that these processes do not have two separate pendants. When a text inspires readers to self-reflection, is that a reading experience or an after-effect? It might be that the first thoughts occur during the reading (for instance during mind-wandering, when readers' attention is less focused on the ongoing perceptual information, and more on internally generated thoughts and feelings), or during moments the reading is actually interrupted. Scholes (1989) argues that such breaches in the flow of reading may be essential in bringing life to our reading, and the other way around (see also Vlad 2009). These thoughts may later be elaborated upon when talking to others, reading about the text, or writing in diaries or book reports. As to the exact placing of the box for »theory of mind«, we think there may be good reasons to propose that many of the processes involved in social cognition are similar for fictional characters and human beings (cf. Culpeper 1996). On the other hand, it

may also be that there are additional attribution processes for fiction directed by literary conventions. Finally, by reducing the narrative emotions to the character-centered »narrative empathy« and the aesthetic emotions to »defamiliarization«, the model may not sufficiently specify the emotional process during reading. We deemed this necessary to not make the model overly complex.
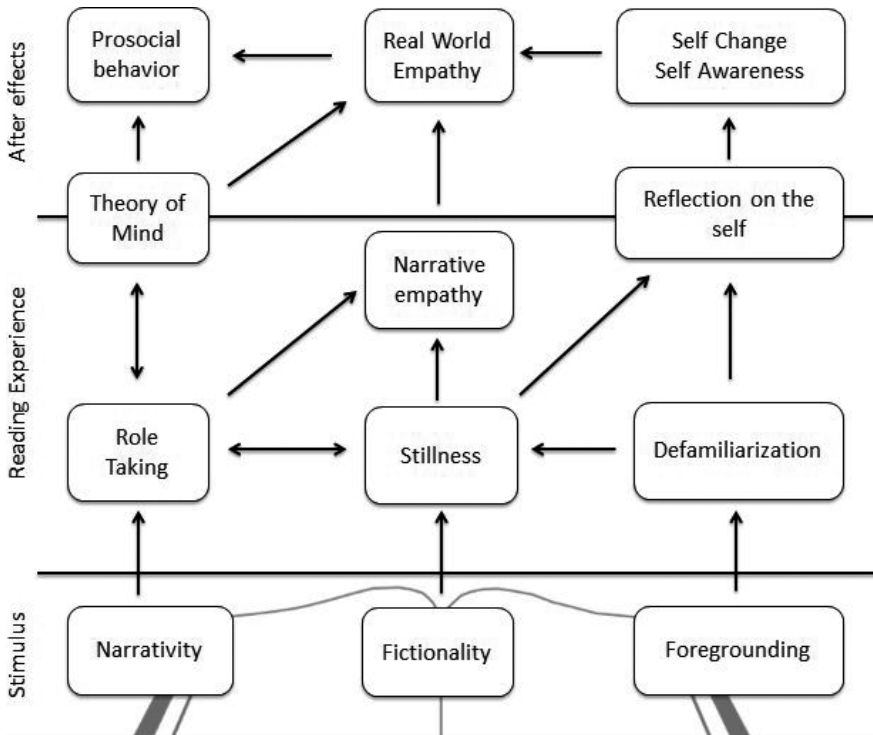

Figure 4: Multi-factor model of literary reading

Outlook

By proposing a multi-factor model of literary reading, we hoped to give an impulse to current reader response research, which too often conflates narrativity, fictionality and literariness. Our multi-factor model suggests that while role-taking can take place for all types of narratives, literary and fictional narratives may evoke the type of aesthetic distance (stillness) that leads to a suspension of judgment, adding to a stronger experience of role-taking and narrative empathy.

However, we need to stress that we do not expect this process of stillness to occur for every reader and for every text. Currently, the model needs to further specify reader and textual characteristics as factors, because these are probably of influence. As to which text factors stimulate role-taking, a number of suggestions were made by researchers. Oatley (1999) for instance, proposes that narrative techniques such as the use of point-of-view, stream of consciousness, but also conversation, and presenting characters with a coherent set of goals will lead to the type of emotional involvement that in the end leads to insight (cf. Hakemulder/Van Peer in press, for an overview). It seems that some of these techniques are not exclusive for literary narratives. Also, it might well be that some literary techniques are aimed at or at least have the effect of distancing readers from the character's perspective rather than bringing them closer to it (defamiliarization). Future research might look into the interplay of these two textual effects, that of pulling readers into the narrative world versus distancing them from it (cf. Cupchik 2001). It may well be key to understanding the effect of literature.

Another issue is the degree to which the »human vicissitudes« presented in the narratives should be familiar to readers (helping them to recognize a common humanity); what if the text presents characters (e. g., from a far-removed outgroup) with goals that seem strange and irrelevant to the readers due to a cultural and/or moral distance between them and the characters? The model proposes that role-taking leads to narrative empathy. An empirical question is at what level of role-taking we will find such effects, and when does it actually become »simulation«? Fictionality might be an important factor. Future researchers may examine whether the »safe environment for reflection«-hypothesis can be upheld.

The style and structure of the text are also likely to impact stillness and role-taking. It can be reasoned that readers' ability to take someone else's perspective is trained to a larger extent when they are presented with multiple or otherwise complex perspectives. This would mean that literary texts are more likely to train readers' ability to take the perspective of others. However, for a proportion of readers, complex perspectives (i. e. an unreliable narrator, the polyphony or double voice in Free Indirect Discourse, ambiguous metaphors, etc.) may interfere too much with enjoyment of the text, leading them to stop reading altogether. Researching such interactions between text features and reader variables remains crucial for future empirical studies (cf. McManus/ Furnham 2006).

To the extent that effects on empathy and reflection are found, the question remains, of course, how long these effects last. Some preliminary attempts have been made to establish the duration of effects. Appel and Richter (2007) suggest that persuasion through reading narrative fiction needs an incubation period, some

time to sink in. This so-called sleeper effect could also apply to other effects than persuasion, like empathy and reflection. In their study on reading and empathy, Bal and Veltkamp (2013) indeed found such a sleeper effect: the effects did not occur right after the reading but one week later. Yet, as said before, Bal and Veltkamp did not systematically compare different genres, so it still remains to be seen under which conditions the sleeper effect occurs. Clarifying these kinds of issues will not only help to substantiate the claims made by scholars in the field of Literary Studies, but will also inform our general psychological knowledge of the processes of empathy and reflection (e. g., of its preconditions). In the end, this might give some extra weight to arguments about the uses of literature in, for instance, the context of moral education, development of self-knowledge in several social contexts, reducing prejudice, sensitivity training for certain professional groups (e. g., physicians and nurses, lawyers and judges), and bibliotherapy; reasons enough to put the problems we discussed high on the research agenda.

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