Màster en Construcció i Representació d'Identitats Culturals

Negative Empathy in Narrative: Humanizing Evil in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*

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"I believe that the Evil – an acute form of Evil – which it expresses, has a sovereign value for us. But this concept does not exclude morality: on the contrary, it demands a 'hypermorality'

George Bataille, *Literature and Evil*

"The aesthetic will be a pathway towards the fully ethical"

Nicholas Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics*

ABSTRACT

Prompted by the critical void in affect theory about how literary affects are created, the present MA thesis aims to analyse the emotional response to negative empathy precisely as a literary narratological construction. To do so, drawing on L. Doležel's conception of the theory of mimesis as a "possible-world semantics" and on the subsequent understanding of fictional narratives as "parasocial" worlds (Oatley), the main body of this MA thesis will consist on a narratological analysis of T. Capote's *In Cold Blood* and J. Littell's *Les bienveillantes.* This examination of both novels focuses on the literary devices —which I have called "empathic builders" — that promote an empathic engagement with negative characters. On the one hand, it reveals in-text negative empathy to be a formal phenomenon with a material dimension; on the other hand, it exemplifies the capacity of literary texts to enlarge the reader's affective and empathic capacity.

Keywords: negative empathy, narratology, Doležel, *In Cold Blood, Les bienveillantes.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the basis of feminist theory's focus on corporality and the exploration of emotions conducted within queer theory (Hardt 2007: ix), cultural criticism was enriched, at the beginning of this century, by a growing critical movement labelled the "affective turn" (Clough), a tendency that soon developed into an area of study: "affect theory" (Ahmed). As Cvetkovich explains, the integration of the affective turn in academia signified an increasing focus on "emotions, feelings, and affect […] as objects of scholarly inquiry" (qtd. in Pedwell 2014: 13), an innovative perspective that was mainly a "transdisciplinary approach to theory and method that necessarily invite[d] experimentation in capturing the changing co-functioning of the political, the economic, and the cultural" (Clough 2007: 3). One of the most prolific objects of analysis within affect theory was —and still is— *empathy*, an emotional response that has been the subject of a plethora of monographic studies not only in cultural criticism, but also in the political or even the scientific fields, where the discovery of the mirror-neurons in 1996 caused the rise of the so-called "science of empathy" (Pedwell 2014: 40). In what social sciences are concerned, the affective turn quickly made an influential mark in literary theory, giving place to a new affect-based critical regard by which, as Pedwell notes, "texts [were] revitalized, unveiled in their emotional implications and bec[a]me, thus, readable in new ways" (2014: 8). Nonetheless, as some scholars have noticed, the literary critique that has come out of the affective turn —and of the subsequent "empathic turn" (Pedwell 2014: 61)— has revolved around a set of specific themes, to wit the affective reactions of the readership and the implications of an affective re-reading of the literary tradition (Keen, Nussbaum)[1],

[1]"It is worth noting here that literary criticism's increased attention to matters of emotion has predominantly centered on the emotional effects of texts on their readers […] but what gets left out in this prevailing

the sociopolitical effects of in-text emotions[2] (Ahmed) or, especially in the case of empathy, the possibility of posterior prosocial action (Hakemulder, Oatley, Kaplan). Without aiming to underestimate the fruitful and interesting insights that these points of view —mainly devoted to the reader's *reception*— offer, I consider that the existing literature on the emotionality of literary texts has disregarded what I think is a basic and necessary question: how are affects deployed in literature? Or, in other words, by which narrative mechanisms/devices do emotions rise out of the text and are transmitted to the readership?

In order to provide a first approach to what I regard as a critical void within literary affect theory, the current MA thesis consists on a practical study on how a specific emotional response is generated in narrative literature. With the goal of spotlighting yet another silence present, in this case, in the "empathic turn", this investigation is centered on negative empathy, a transgressive and conflictive emotion that, as will be argued, has factually been deprived of critical attention. All in all, the theses that this research aims to advance are three: first, that novels constitute "parasocial" alternative worlds in which emotions are exposed and where the reader's empathic capacities are enlarged; second, that the transmission of textual affects in general, and of negative empathy in particular, does not only depend on the reader's disposition, but is materially created via narrative devices; and finally, that negative empathy, an emotional response practically unique to the fictional *milieu*, stands as a humanizing and "potentially regressive aesthetic

emphasis on a reader's sympathetic identification with the feelings of characters in a text is the simple but powerful question of 'objectified emotion' or unfelt but perceived feeling" (Ngai 2005:28-29).

[2] Despite the semantic difference between affect and emotion —by which "affect" assumes a third-person perspective, designating a "feeling described from the observer's perspective" (Ngai 2005:25) and "emotion" constitutes a feeling that "belongs" to a first-person—, both concepts will be used indistinctly during the present MA thesis. This terminological decision responds to this research's subscription to Doležel's conception of the literary world, by which "fictional existence is not only determined but also manipulated by the authenticating narrative act" (1988:491). Taking into account that the narrative act needs a narratee to come into existence, affects in literature would automatically become emotions, as they do not exist until they are perceived by an observer/critic who is always, simultaneously, a reader.

experience" (Ercolino 2018: 244). Thus, to develop the assertions above and to examine the way in which negative empathy is constructed, after having made some previous remarks on negative empathy and having briefly explained Doležel's "semantics of the possible worlds" —the mimesis theory from which this study departs—, the current MA thesis will undertake a narratological analysis of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Jonathan Little's *Les bienveillantes* (2006), focusing on how each of these novels gives rise, narratologically, to negative empathy. To round it up, a short contrastive study of both narratives will be carried out in order to contest or confirm previous critical statements on the creation of "narrative empathy" (Keen) and its negative variant and to try to reach conclusions concerning the formation and status of the latter: an emotional response that, as will be reasoned, constitutes a paradigm of literature's capacity to push the reader's affectivity to the edge.

In what methodology is concerned, the current MA thesis proposes an intersection between the theoretical considerations on empathy in the context of "affect theory" and the practice of narratology. As has been exposed, the purpose of such a methodological dialogue is to give a formal and specific application to the study of "narrative empathy" and to collaborate with the investigation of negative empathy in literature. As will be explained in the following section, negative empathy has only been examined in the recent years by S. Ercolino; as a result, his article "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism" (2018) will be a primary bibliographic source for this MA thesis. Besides, the present research will also be informed by theorists of literary empathy, as S. Keen or A. Morton, by scholars dealing with empathy and affects in a more general way, as S. Ahmed, S. Ngai or C. Pedwell, and by the work of some academics studying the juxtaposition novel/empathy from a psychological or cognitive point of view, as J. Hakemulder, K. Oatley or A. Coplan. Moreover, in order to join "affect theory" and

narratology in a coherent way, and to grasp negative empathy as a completely "narrative and hermeneutical phenomenon" (Deciu 2016: 52), this MA thesis will draw upon L. Dolezel's conception of the narrative process —or theory of mimesis— as a "possible-world semantics". In addition to the ideas of the Czech literary theorist, posterior publications applying his work to the understanding of the empathic engagement with fictional characters, as A. Deciu's or M. Caracciolo's, have also contributed greatly to the goals of the present research. On the other hand, the critical analyses of the narrative techniques inviting empathy in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*, which occupy the body of this project, will be conducted in accordance with the terminology provided by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* because of its hegemony in the field of narratology.

With regard to the secondary sources dealing directly with both novels, it must be pointed out, to start with, that both texts achieved an instantaneous comercial success, which reberverated on the interest that they awoke among the literary critics. Nevertheless, the focus of their analysis has not been centred on their implementation of negative empathy. Thus, on the one hand, the academic research on Capote's *chef d'oeuvre* has mainly devoted its attention to the innovating new genre that it proposed, "the non-fiction novel", and therefore has largely discussed the position of the novel within the binary opposition fact/fiction (Nance, De Bellis, Hill). However, the publications of M. González de la Aleja and E. Ortells, which have significantly helped me in the present understanding of the novel, deviate from this critical commonplace to delve into the novel's formal and thematic structure, covering partially the lack of attention given to its literary traits. On the other hand, whereas the critical work concerned with *In Cold Blood* is not copious, with only one book entirely consecrated to it, Jonathan Little's *Les bienveillantes* has been, since its publication in 2006, the object of much literary research. Due to the

extension and thematic vastness of this historical novel, the research works devoted to it present a great multiplicity of foci, especially concerning the novel's treatment of historical facts (Lyle, Sanyal), its intertextual games (Grethlein, Boisseleau) and its aesthetics (Razinsky, Ferdjani, Tame). Among the critical insights dedicated to *Les bienveillantes*, two articles have had a great theoretical impact on my reading of the novel as conducted here: Meretoja's, as she uses the hermeneutical tradition to try to clarify how the reader's engagement with the protagonist may function, and, once again, Ercolino's, as he resorts briefly to this narrative in order to exemplify the theoretical dynamics of negative empathy.

The present MA thesis has directly confronted, because of its object of study, the "long-standing problem in philosophical aesthetics" (Ngai 2005: 29) concerning the subjective/objective status of the affective dimension of literary texts: a problematic that seems to reinforce "la disposition de l'œuvre à l'ouverture" by which, according to R. Barthes, "l'œuvre détient en même temps plusieurs sens, par structure, non par infirmité de ceux qui la lisent" (1966: 22). Even if this MA thesis defends that emotions are invariably elicited in the diegesis, the plurality of effects that the affective structure of a novel may provoke —which are, as Barthes asserts, already contained in the narrative— depend on an act of reading, on a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer) which is always individual. Consequently, the difficulty of exploring in-text emotions lays in the fact that, particularly in this area of study, no artwork can be reduced to a single totalizing criterion of analysis. The present work is then restricted to the exploration of one of the possible interpretations that these novels offer. Nonetheless, as Derrida remarked, literature, as well as literary critique, consists on "suspending the real and exploring the limits of what can be said and thought" (Derrida 1992, 170). Such is the underlying motivation of the present investigation: to try to mirror the epistemological expansion present both in the

novels and in the negative emotion that they explore in order to grasp literature in its whole affective potentiality.

2. NEGATIVE EMPATHY: AFFECT AT THE MARGINS OF MORALITY

In the context of the affective turn in literary theory explained above, multiple critical voices, such as Sarah Ahmed's or Carolyn Pedwell's, have focused on re-conceptualizing the very definition of "affect", focusing on the idea that affects are political and cultural practices and that, therefore, they "reproduce cultural distinctions, social norms and political practices of exclusion" (Pedwell 2014: 2).[3] As a result, affects and feelings bear, inherently, a sociocultural charge that precedes them and provides them with a pre-existing connotation. Under the light of this cultural perception, affects could be reducible, as Ngai proposes, either to the category of "ennobling or beatific feelings" or to the group of "ugly feelings" (2005:6).[4] Within this simplistic taxonomy, empathy, one of the emotional states which, as has been explained, has received more critical attention during the last decades, seems to belong undoubtedly to the first group, as it is generally assumed "that empathy is inherently a good thing" (Pedwell 2014: 96) and so, that "[a] person who displays empathy is, it appears, to be congratulated for having fine feelings" (Garber 2004: 24). However, this evaluation of empathy neglects the fact that, as all emotions, empathy only takes shape "as a part of a web of other feelings, subjects, objects and forces" and that it is, thus, "inherently multiple" (Pedwell 2014: 190). The perception of empathy as a positive emotional state *per se* would then correspond to what S. Keen calls "mainstream empathy" (2007: 74), meaning the canonical idea of empathy as an emotional response that the empathizer is willing to have and the target *deserves*. Nonetheless, as Pedwell observes, this type of emotional engagement presents multiple

[3] In her publication *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed starts from acknowledging "the importance of understanding emotions not as psychological dispositions, but as investments in social norms" (2014: 56).

[4] In the same vein, Pedwell alerts that there exists an "Euro-American affective imperative to eschew 'bad' feelings for 'good' ones" (2014: 93).

deviations, even if those are more easily arisen via "forms of representation such as literature", which "can activate ways of thinking and feeling empathy that may not be possible, or easily discernible, through the embodied face-to-face encounter alone" (Pedwell 2014: 4). Negative empathy, the intricate and practically unexplored emotion to which the present MA thesis is devoted, is, as I hope now to develop, one of those dissident forms of empathy that is more likely to emerge in the realm of the fictional.

Originally coined by the German philosopher Theodor Lipps (Ercolino 2018: 245), "negative empathy" was initially defined as "empathy for others' negative emotions" (Morelli, Rameson, & Lieberman, qtd. in Ercolino 2018: 244). Nevertheless, taking into account that the label "negative emotions" encompasses emotional states as sadness or distress, which are usually also the object of "mainstream empathy",[5] contemporary revisions of the concept have re-defined negative empathy as "empathy with those who perform atrocious acts" (Morton 2011: 318) or, in relation to literature, "a cathartic identification with negative characters" (Ercolino 2018: 244). Therefore, starting off from a general description of empathy as a sympathetic "'understanding' of someone's feelings, not the 'sharing' of them" (Pedwell 2014: 6), negative empathy would consist in undertaking this same process with respect to those who commit immoral deeds. As noted above, a sector of academia has put emphasis on the idea that, as a cultural practice, empathy is "radically shaped by historical relations of power" (Pedwell 2014: 30) and so, it may perpetuate prejudice because its "narrow focus" (Bloom 2016: 31) is prompt to give preference to people "that we find attractive or and who seem similar to us" (Bloom 2016: 2). As an emotional practice, negative empathy constitutes then a contradiction to these cultural restrictions affecting empathy.

[5] "Empathic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative feeling states" (Keen 2007: 72).

Like A. Morton notices, these constraints that limit the empathic capacity are due, in many occasions, to an "internalized code of behavior" (2011: 318) that morally restricts our imagination when it comes to humanizing others. Amongst those who have been traditionally excluded from the "spotlight" of empathy (Bloom), one paradigmatic case is that of "people who does evil", whom we are "prone to dehumanize" (Bloom 2016:181) because of our moral principles. Therefore, negative empathy, in which this Evil other is the target of empathic understanding, demands an overcoming of the "moral barriers" (Coplan 2011a: xlvii) that normally constrict empathic engagement and fosters an epistemological expansion of the focus of empathy, taking the emotional practice of empathy towards its moral limits.

Despite the theoretical challenge that this transgressive emotion poses, as Ercolino states, since its first formulation in the 19th century, "negative empathy has received little attention by scholars" (2018: 244): a critical gap that, I argue, has not been covered at all by the researchers in the field of the recent affective turn. As far as I know, only two scholars have directly dealt with negative empathy in the last two decades: A. Morton, whose chapter "Empathy for the Devil" (2011) investigates the identification with negative fictional characters; and S. Ercolino, the most direct informer of the present MA thesis, whose article "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism" (2018) constitutes an ambitious attempt to "to propose a theory of negative empathy that is able to highlight its heuristic potential for the purpose of literary analysis" (Ercolino 2018: 244). Other than these brief investigations, S. Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), which offers one of the most insightful panoramic studies of the intersection between narrative an empathy, does mention briefly the possibility of co-feeling with antagonistic figures, but without employing the term "negative empathy" or delving deeper into the concept.[6]

[6] See Keen (2007: 74-77 & 131-136).

Something similar occurs with P. Bloom's informational study on the moral limitations of empathy, *Against Empathy* (2016), which elaborates a pugnacious critique of the biased practice of this emotional relation in which the paradigmatic case of negative empathy is mentioned but not developed. Finally, well-known scholars dealing with the functioning and representation of emotions in a more general way, such as S. Ahmed, M. Nussbaum, S. Ngai or C. Pedwell, also inform the present MA thesis. They have established useful theoretic tools for the study of non-normative emotions, as would be the case of negative empathy, without approaching this concept in particular. A representative example of these indirect but fruitful approximations to negative empathy would be Pedwell's theorization of the category "alternative empathies",[7] by which she means forms of empathy which escape the "repeated mapping of categories of empathizer and sufferer" (2014: 95), that is to say, that reject the canonical scheme of voluntary empathizer-worthy target: a heterodox dynamic in which negative empathy fits perfectly, even if it is overlooked by Pedwell's work. Most interestingly, as has already been mentioned, Pedwell asserts in her study of these type of "affects at the margins" (2014: 95) that they are more easily found in literary representations, as, in her words, literature "generates possibilities for activating alternative empathies" (2014: 4).

With this last remark, Pedwell approaches an agreed-on assumption amongst the reduced bibliography on negative empathy: that this kind of "alternative empathy" is essentially linked to the field of fictional narrative. As has been pointed out, Morton, as well as Ercolino, focus their respective analyses of negative empathy on the case of narratee's identification with non-benevolent literary characters, arguing, like Ngai, that "literature may in fact be the ideal space to investigate ugly feelings" (2005: 2), as it "provides safe spaces within which to see through the eyes of the psychopath, to occupy the subject

[7] See Pedwell (2014: 93-118).

position of the oppressive racist or to share the brutalizing past of the condemned outcast" (Keen 2007: 131). This line of argument puts forward the idea that literature would not only be better at offering encounters with a more variated range of subjectivities than real-life experiences, in which our access to and knowledge of this kind of individuals is very limited, but would also constitute a "safe space" where the "moral barriers" (Morton) that prevent us from empathizing with them could be broken down, giving space to, as Ercolino describes it, "a potentially regressive aesthetic experience, consisting in a cathartic identification with negative characters" (2018: 244). Nonetheless, through which understanding of the process of fictionalization can these last assertions on literature be justified and validated? How are affects, and particularly, an "unpleasurable" emotional response as negative empathy, deployed and transmitted in narrative? How does literature enlarge the readership's empathic capacity? This vision of literature as an alternate and privileged space for affect transmission, where an empathic appraisal of immoral subjects is viable, can be assumed without difficulty by resorting to Lubomír Doležel's perception of the mimetic theory of narrative as a "possible worlds semantics".

3. MIMESIS. THE NOVEL AS A PARASOCIAL WORLD

3.1 POSSIBLE-WORLDS SEMANTICS

Based on the Leibnizian philosophical model of "the heterocosmic and the best of the possible worlds" (Doležel 1988: 485), and in order to clarify the mimetic theory of fictional narratives and its correspondence to reality, literary theorist Lubomír Doležel proposes an approximation to mimesis through the so-called "possible worlds semantics". This theory rejects the orthodox "one-world frame", that considered fictional worlds to be dependent on reality for their meaning, and favors a "multiple-worlds frame" (Doležel 1988: 481) in which "fictional worlds" are understood as multiple "sets of possible states of affairs" (Doležel 1988: 482) which are constructed *ex nihilo* "in the creative act of the poetic imagination, in the activity of poiesis" (Doležel 1988: 489). Hence, for Doležel, every narrative act determines and manipulates (Doležel 1988: 491) a possible world of fiction, which is incomplete (Doležel 1988: 486) but possesses its own internal logics and stands, therefore, as a self-contained alternative reality. This "world of the text" (Ricoeur) is, at the same time, inhabited by characters, or "fictional particulars", which "are not dependent for their existence and properties on actual prototypes" (Doležel 1988: 482) but, who, nevertheless, are, as the rest of their fictional world, "accessible from the actual world" (Doležel 1988: 485). This accessibility is viable because, even if the "possible world" that the narrative enacts is parallel to the actual state of affairs, it also is, according to Doležel, at the same ontological and epistemological level than the former (Doležel 1988: 485). As a result of this homogeneity between the actual and the fictional, readers are allowed to enter a fictional world via "semiotic mediation", that is, through a "crossing of world boundaries, a transit from the realm of actual existents into the realm of fictional

possibles" (Doležel 1988: 485). For the Czech theorist, the act of reading, by which the possible world of fiction is materialized, permits the narratee to "'observe' fictional worlds and make them a source of his experience, just as he observes and experientially appropriates the actual world" (Doležel 1988: 485). In this sense, the experience that each narrative world offers to the readership is also a *social* one, as every novel includes opportunities to know the "fictional particulars" that are described in it, who normally constitute the very heart of the narration.[8] In addition, the practice of "cross-world identification" (Doležel 1988: 483) that is necessary for apprehending the possible world enacted by the *poiesis* sets out the perfect conditions not only for discovering these fictional subjectivities, but also for empathizing with them: narratives, following Doležel's considerations, are ways of experiencing a world and its internal subjects while "temporarily shifting our own reality out of focus" (Deciu 2016: 68). Our way of approximating novels would mirror, thus, the cognitive process of empathy. Therefore, in the same way that the narrative reveals itself as a parallel "possible world", it automatically becomes, also, a "parasocial" (Oatley) world, where empathy is, as I will now explain, more easily evoked, as the reader is protected by the fictionality of this social experience.

3.1 "THE MORAL LABORATORY": PARASOCIAL RELATIONS IN LITERATURE

Starting off from Doležel's conception of the narrative text as an independent cosmos, a group of scholars, as A. Deciu or M. Caracciolo, have attempted to clarify how the "cross-

[8] "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" (Koopman & Hakemulder 2015: 97).

world identification" (Doležel 1988: 483) that reading requires may affect the reader's reception of fictional characters. Adding to the theory of "possible worlds semantics" by means of Gadamer's hermeneutical tradition, Deciu remarks how the process of engaging with the "possible world" of the diegesis can be described and understood by employing the German philosopher's narrative concepts of "horizon" and "application". For Gadamer, "application" is the weaving in the novel's "new situation to what we already know" (Deciu 2016: 59), and it is achieved by shifting our "horizon" —our vision of the world— to adopt the novel's own "horizon", its "possible state of affairs" (Doležel). Hence, "application" "involves the adjustment of our familiar frame of reference — assumptions and expectations— to the frame of reference proposed by or contained in the object of interpretation" (Deciu 2016: 60). Even if this adaptative movement does not signify the readership's complete abandonment of their perspective, but rather an expansionist "revision of what we have come to expect based on our experiences" (Deciu 2016: 59); "application" does indeed imply a tendency towards "stillness", an effect of "critical distance" (Gadamer) in observation, by which, because of defamiliarization, the readership's perception of the fictional world slows down and their judgement is momentarily suspended (Deciu 2016: 80). This epistemological investment —or immersion— in the "world of the text" (Ricoeur), which is strikingly similar to the "other-oriented perspective-taking" (Coplan 2011a: xxxiv) of empathy, has been regarded by scholars like K. Oatley or F. Hakemulder as being of key importance for the empathic engagement with literary characters, with whom the reader establishes a social bond unique to the narrative experience.

In general, it is commonly agreed upon among the critical literature that novels are often invitations to socialization, "simulations of selves in interaction" with whom the reader "becomes emotionally involved" (Oatley 2016: 617). These "cross-world" relationships

between reader and character, which Oatley calls "parasocial relations" (2016: 623) are exclusive to the reading act not only because, as Oatley remarks, they are one-directional —what led Kierkegaard to refer to them as "indirect communications" (Oatley 2016: 625)—, but also because the "parasocial" world that the diegesis opens appears as more free and open-minded than real life socialization.[9] According to S. Keen, narrative literature extends our empathic capacities because of our perception of its intrinsic "fictional status", that "licenses our feeling responsiveness because it frees us from responsibility to protect ourselves through skepticism and suspicion" (2007:106, emphasis in the original). Besides, considering that, on the one hand, as Doležel proposes, the "possible state of affairs" of a novel displays its own moral rules (1988:482), which permit it to deal with social taboos; and, on the other hand, that the reader is more prompt to accept such moral propositions due to the "stillness" inherent to the process of "application" explained above, fiction will often "lead readers to experiment with forms of intersubjectivity they would tend to disfavor in daily life" (Caracciolo 2013:27). Hence, the "parasocial" world of the novel can be defined not only as a parallel form of sociability, but as an *enlarged* one. In Gadamer's words, "the miracle of understanding literature consists in the fact that no co-naturality is necessary" (1997: 277). For all these reasons, literary theorist J. Hakemulder has described narrative fiction through the accurate metaphor of the "moral laboratory": an alternative social space where "plausible implications of human conduct can be studied in a relatively controlled and safe way" (Hakemulder 2000: 150), allowing readers "to experiment more freely with taking the position of a character different from themselves, also in moral respects" (Koopman & Hakemulder 2015: 79). Therefore, it could be concluded that, because of its condition as a "safe environment" (Koopman & Hakemulder 2015: 81), empathic engagement is more

[9] "The perception of fictionality releases novel-readers from the normal state of alert suspicion of others' motives that often acts as a barrier to empathy" (Keen 2007:168).

easily arisen in narrative than in real-life itself. In my opinion, the possibility of in-text negative empathy is a "parasocial" affective relation which is paradigmatic of the empathic enlargement that novels enable.

Negative empathy can be considered, as has been pointed out before, as an effective response that is, practically, only tolerable in "the fictionality of narrative's world-making" (Ercolino 2018: 250). That is so because novels "allow us to play with moral limits" (Ercolino 2018: 25) and may "change our perspectives on unlike persons 'who might otherwise seem subhuman'" (Pinker, qtd. in Keen 2007: xix), challenging, as a result, our pre-conceptions of humanity.[10] Then, negative empathy, an undesired reaction that threads the reader's "horizon", appears as one of the most transgressive experiments that the "moral laboratory" of fiction may propose, and, therefore, as a clear example of the expansion of empathy that the novel may invoke. To summarize, such an understanding emotional reception of negative characters would be initially made possible: first, by the protective fictionality of the "possible world" of the novel (Doležel), that turns the text into a "moral laboratory"; secondly, by its moral freedom, which allows the narrative to transgress taboos and deal with immoral subjectivities; and, last but not least, by the readership's relegation of their "horizon" in the process of apprehending this alternative "parasocial world" and the negative characters it may include.

Nonetheless, as Ercolino notes, "[i]t is not only a matter of the by now very well-known protective distance, typical of aesthetic experience, which allows us to play with moral limits in a safe environment" (2018: 250). All these just-mentioned pre-conditions for an empathetic reception of Evil concern exclusively the Ricoeurian moments of mimesis I and III,[11] and they are not enough for the creation of negative empathy, as the moment

[10] "Character-based stories (perhaps especially those of a literary kind) encourage a sense of shared humanity as a general mode" (Oatley 2016: 623).

[11] In the first volume of *Temps et Récit* (1983), the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur elaborates a re-interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of mimesis by dividing the whole process in three moments:

of mimesis II, that is, the construction of the diegesis, appears as the most determinant element in the affective orientation of a literary work. In fact, what makes literary fiction "specially good for […] understanding other people's minds" (Oatley 2016: 625) is, according to Feagin, "its style and substance" (2011: 161), meaning the level of introspection and description of the subjectivity of an Other that narrative often offers: a knowledge which is impossible to get in real-life empathic experiences, and which is provided in the novel by means of its literary devices.

3.3 "EMPATHIC BUILDERS": EMPATHY AND NARRATOLOGY

In general terms, if, as Doležel claims, "fictional worlds of literature are constructs of textual activity" (1988: 488), the affective charge that such texts bear is equally displayed via the formal and aesthetic characteristics of the textual practice. Therefore, in-text emotions would not depend on the author or the narratee's dispositions, but would be evoked by specific uses of written language, which, in novels, "changes into sensations, pictures, sounds, smells, and even tastes in our brains, subsequently to be 'treated like any other event by the automatic-appraisal mechanisms to arouse emotions'" (Ekman, qtd. in Keen 2007: 88). This hypothesis that narrative devices have an evocative quality is also supported by S. Ngai, who in her analysis of "ugly feelings", turns to Adorno's concept of "tone",[12] that I will be equally employing during the present MA thesis. First theorized in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1958) and further developed by S. Ngai, the

Mimesis I, the conception of the fictional world; Mimesis II, its narratological elaboration through poiesis; and Mimesis III, its final realization via the act of reading or reception. See (Ricoeur 1983: 85-129).

[12] "It is worth noting here that literary criticism's increased attention to matters of emotion has predominantly centered on the emotional effects of texts on their readers […] but what gets left out in this prevailing emphasis on a reader's sympathetic identification with the feelings of characters in a text is the simple but powerful question of 'objectified emotion' or unfelt but perceived feeling, that presents itself most forcefully in the aesthetic concept of tone" (Ngai 2005: 28-29).

"affective-aesthetic idea of tone" (Ngai 2005:41) seeks to resolve the "long-standing problem in philosophical aesthetics" (Ngai 2005: 29) with the location of emotionality in literary texts, by which in-text affects are usually described as a subjective response depending on the readers' attitude. On the contrary, the idea of "tone" separates the emotionality of the artwork from its receiver in order to understand the "affective values" as an "aesthetic immanence […] something that seems 'attached' to an artwork" and that is generated by a series of formal aspects (Ngai 2005: 43). Therefore, the concept of "tone" studies emotionality as a direct effect of narratological devices.

The chief role of the formal and the stylistic in the "emotionality of texts", for which "figures of speech" become "crucial" to affect transmission (Ahmed 2014: 13), is even more assumed, in the literature on the subject, in what empathy is concerned. M. Smith argues that "some features of a narrative […] are especially relevant to empathizing with characters" to the point that they become "cognitive protheses" that help in the process of "other-focussed personal imagining" (Smith 2011: 109) as they inform of the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of the target facilitating the reader's empathy. Thus, the domain of narrative representation would collaborate in setting the environmental support for empathy to happen. Nonetheless, despite the reiterated manifestations of the importance of literary techniques for "narrative empathy" (Keen) among academics, few specifications have been made on the type of devices that invite the establishment of an empathic bond with characters. Then, as has been remarked in the Introduction to this MA thesis, besides some affirmations on the relevance of "voice or perspective" (Smith 2011:159), whose accuracy will be put into question at the end of this research, most academics in the field of affect theory have coincided in limiting their studies to the assumption that "affect is perhaps the most difficult plane to define and describe […]

because there's no critical vocabulary to describe its forms and structures" (Grossberg, qtd. in Ngai 2005: 46).

However, once again, this not very much studied materialistic construction of empathic engagement in the text will be specially relevant in the specific case of negative empathy, where the readers' imagination must be reinforced and "dragged" enough by the narration for it to be able to overcome the "moral barriers" (Coplan 2011a: xlvii) that prevent this negative empathy to arise in real life. Thus, as Ercolino points out, the potentiality of narrative will be determinant for fostering this "unnatural" empathic response, as "rhetoric can transform the individual, making her/him believe impossible things and drive her/him to good or evil deeds" (Ercolino 2018: 251).

For all of the above, it seems that the proper way to analyse the construction and functioning of negative empathy in narrative is by an intersection of the disciplines of affect theory and narratology. As a result, the present MA thesis will undertake a narratological analysis of two novels which, as will be argued, seem to point, in their affective bearing, towards negative empathy. Due to the limited length of the current MA thesis, both analyses will be focused only on the narratological traits —which I have labelled "empathy builders"— of both novels that, in my opinion, foster an empathic reception of certain Evil characters. The term "empathy builders" was inspired by Doležel's assertion that the "possible world" of fiction is *built* and determined by the textual activity, so that it can be considered a "constructional text" in contrast to other "descriptive texts" (Doležel 1988:489). Furthermore, this naming aims to reinforce the main thesis of the current MA thesis: that affects in general, and negative empathy in particular, do not simply emanate from the text, but are materially constructed and promoted via its formal aspects, in a way that they can perfectly be studied through the domain of narratology. Hence, the following analyses of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*

and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes* aspire, on the one hand, to collaborate in the study of negative empathy in literature and, on the other hand, to elucidate which specific literary devices give rise to negative empathy, covering, then, a critical void in the study of "narrative empathy" (Keen).

4. NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS. NEGATIVE EMPATHY IN *IN COLD BLOOD* AND *LES BIENVEILLANTES*

From a philosophical perspective, various thinkers, Michel Foucault amongst them, have regarded literature as "one of a number of 'counter-discourses' partly associated with the experience of madness and opposed to an all-encompassing Reason" (Freundlieb 1995: 301). Then, as exposed in the previous section, as a "possible world" is independent from reality, literature is more given to "infringe moral laws" in order to inquire into the nature of humanity outside "the limitations of reason" (Bataille 1957: 14). Consequently, as Bataille defends, "truly humane literature" (Bataille 1957: 16) is often inclined towards Evil. This tendency is, as literary theorists have discussed at length, even more remarkable in the American literary tradition,[13] where canonical novels such as Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* or Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* exemplify the American predisposition to delve into Manichean puritan morals and the expressions of sheer Evil. Having a vast tradition of narrative dealing with morally reprehensible or ambiguous characters to choose from, why is the current MA thesis focused on two novels as chronologically and stylistically diverse as Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Littell's *Les bienveillantes*? The reasons for this selection are threefold.

First of all, the form of Evil that both protagonists epitomize. In both cases, the target of empathy in the novel has murder as his major —although not unique— violation of morality. If we take into account that, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, murder is considered the worst crime that can be committed,[14] both novels present radically immoral characters whose acts —multiple murder and mass murder—, even if very

[13] See Ortells 2009: 24.
[14] The moral imperative "thou shalt not murder" appears in the Decalogue as the first morally-related comandment, prior to other immoral acts as adultery, robbery, false testimony, and envy.

different in their execution, are apparently motiveless, and consequently, inexcusable. Therefore, negative empathy is demanded of the narratee, in both cases, under extreme circumstances that make it more difficult for empathy to be constructed and achieved successfully. In fact, the second reason for the election of these novels is the way in which both narratives deal with Evil. In *In Cold Blood*, as well as in *Les bienveillantes*, Evil does not appear as a remote possibility, a secondary theme or a moral warning confronted with a paternalistic tone. On the contrary, and as will be analyzed next, both novels situate immorality, at once, at the heart of humanity and at the heart of the narrative, turning the encounter with Evil into an aesthetic experience whose violence aspires to "truly inform thinking" (Bennett, qtd. in Pedwell 2014: 11). Finally, and in the third place, I regard the thematic and formal differences between the two novels as an advantage, in the sense that the study and posterior comparison of the diverse ways in which they construct negative empathy is variated enough to bring about a more complete panoramic view of how negative empathy may arise in narrative literature in general.

All in all, this section includes two narratological analysis, one per novel, which have been organized according to Gérard Genette's tripartite division of narratological traits in the categories of "voice", "mood", and "tense" (Liveley 2019: 196). Moreover, an examination of the thematic structure of the novels has been included at the end of each formal study with the goal of examining how the plot's contents may contribute to generating an empathic affective response. To conclude, a brief comparative study of both works will be conducted to elucidate how narrative, in general, may have the potenciality of, via its narratological choices, "rectify antagonisms" (Pedwell 2014: 94) by challenging the sense of moral decency that, in Coplan's words, "limits our capacity to empathize with those who perform atrocious acts" (2011a: xlvii).

4.1. "THE RICH NEVER HUNG": TRUMAN CAPOTE'S *IN COLD BLOOD*

Published in 1966, Truman Capote's masterpiece, *In Cold Blood,* is a narrative fictionalization of the multiple murder of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. Taking the whole case as its theme, the plot follows the crime, its investigation, and the posterior trial and sentence of the murderers. Hence, the events narrated in the novel cover from the final hours of the clan —formed by Herbert and Bonnie Clutter and their children, Nancy and Kenyon— and the previous journey of their killers, Perry Smith and Eugene "Dick" Hickock, until the execution by hanging of the latter. In order to present the episodes that took place during the six years that separate these two series of deaths in a chronological and structured way, the narration is divided into four chapters of equal length: "The Last to See them Alive", "Persons Unknown", "The Answer" and "The Corner". "The Last to See them Alive" alternates a description of the last day of the Clutters with the Perry and Dick's journey from Kansas City to Holcomb, where the ranch of the Clutter family stands. The daily routine of the bourgeois family, as well as the road trip of the pair of ex-convicts, serves as an excuse to present the characters, their interpersonal relationships and their background. Portrayed as the paradigm of the nuclear family, the Clutters "represent everything people hereabouts really value and respect" (Capote 1966a: 84), particularly Mr. Clutter, the *paterfamilias*, and his adolescent daughter Nancy, "the town darling" (4), on whom the description of the family will mainly concentrate. Meanwhile, the ex-cell partners reunite, a while after they are granted their parole, to carry out the "perfect score" (43) that Dick has been planning for months. This first chapter ends with the car of the criminals reaching the Clutter's farm, to follow straight with the finding of the corpses the morning after,

therefore eliding the events of that fateful night. The second section starts by introducing Al Dewey, the KBI agent in charge of the Clutter case, whose investigations of the killing, together with the impact of this case on the Holcomb community, will occupy this section. Additionally, "Persons Unknown" follows the steps of Perry and Dick in their escape across the States and in Mexico, travels during which the narration elucidates, mainly, Perry's lifetime and his familial past. The next chapter, "The Answer", continues describing the criminals' voyage and biographies but, as this section's title indicates, Dewey finally finds "the answer" to his enquiry and captures the murderers thanks to the denunciation of a fellow prisoner. During the interrogations, Dick confesses and blames his partner for the four murders. Afterwards, Smith assumes his responsibility and provides the detailed description of the crimes that closes the section. The last part of the novel, "The Corner", focuses on the murderers' incarceration and, specially, on the subsequent trial process, in which the defendants are condemned to the death penalty. Finally, after a brief account of the five years' time spent by Perry and Dick on the Death Row, both are executed by hanging.

The apparently strictly chronological order of the events in the story responds to the initial plan for the novel to be "a journalistic narrative that employed all the creative devices and techniques of fiction" (Capote, qtd. in Norden 1968). However, as will be exposed in the following narratological analysis, these formal techniques, together with fictional structures such as the use of symbolism, will be deployed in the diegesis with the intention of orienting the "stream of empathy" towards the fictional characters[15] that are initially understood as "negative" or antagonistic. In order to examine more closely

[15] Even if the characters are based on real-life people, taking into account Doležel's possible-worlds semantics, once people are fictionalized, they belong to the realm of the "possible" fictional world and no longer of the "real world", despite their original reference. As the theorist explains it: "Fictional individuals are not dependent for their existence and properties on actual prototypes. It is irrelevant for the fictional Robin Hood whether a historical Robin Hood existed or not" (1988: 482). Therefore, from now on, all figures appearing in *In Cold Blood* will be treated as fictional characters.

the specific "empathy builders" that generate this peculiarity in the novel's tone, which would contradict the original premise of the objectivity of the literary project, this analysis will be divided, as has been explained, in accordance with Genette's tripartite division of narratological traits in the categories of "voice", "mood", and "tense" (Genette 1980: 29-31). At the end, the thematic structure of the novel will also be commented in order to illustrate how the novel's plot would also work towards fostering a potential humanization of Evil, that is to say, towards treating Smith and Hickock "as men, not as murderers" (Capote, qtd. in Norden: 1968).

3.1.1 VOICE: REALISTIC OBJECTIVITY

As Genette presents it, the category of "voice" stands, technically, for the "mode of action of the verb in its relations with the subject" (1980: 31). When applied to narrative, then, it refers to the level of involvement of the narrating subject in the events of the plot. Even if the narrative "voice" in *In Cold Blood* does not constitute an "empathy builder" in itself in the construction of the diegesis, it is relevant to start the present analysis by referring to it because of its impact on the aesthetic tone (Adorno) of the novel. In the case of *In Cold Blood*, the degree of subjectivation provided by the "voice" is at its minimum level, as the narrator is an example of what Genette calls the "heterodiegetic-extradiegetic paradigm" (1980: 248): the third-person narrator deploys a traditional omniscience[16] that will determine the use of the novel's "mood" and "tense" because, as will be further evaluated in the subsequent sections, it gives the narration access to past and future events as well as to the character's thoughts. As several critics have remarked, this diegetic aspect brings the novel close to the style of the French realistic novels of the 19th

[16] "Capote is completely omniscient throughout *In Cold Blood*" (Pizer 1971: 114).

century,[17] an influence that is to be felt especially at the beginning of the novel, which opens, in a very Flaubertian manner, with a contextualizing gradual description first of Holcomb's surroundings, then of the village itself, and finally, of the Clutter's house. Nevertheless, the demiurge in Capote's novel, unlike those of the realistic movement, is an "omniscient narrator without authorial incursions" (Genette, 1980: 187): a characteristic that approaches the "voice" more to the "form of fact" (Kazin 1980: 210) typical of journalism than to literary realism. The great influence of the reportage in the novel's "voice" is manifested in the narrative devices used to preserve the impression of faithfulness to fact, that prevails in the novel despite its combination with a poetical and sensitive rhetoric (Nance 1970: 184). One of the most resounding "voice" techniques that journalism abides by would be the inclusion of testimonies given to a witness that is referred to as "an acquaintance", "a friend" or "a journalist" or whose identity is directly omitted[18] in order to avoid the intervention of a first-person narrator acting as an interviewer. All in all, the usage of these journalistic techniques, according to D. Pizer, gives *In Cold Blood* the status of a "documentary narrative" (1971: 106) whose realism is accomplished not only by means of literary devices as the latter, but also through the "filmic construction" (Murray 1973: 132) of the novel, a deployment of cinematographic traits that will be further addressed in this analysis. In what the category of "voice" is concerned, this intersemiotic transposition (Aktulum 2017: 33) between literature and cinema is noticeable in the similarity between the "voice" and a film camera (Nance 1970: 186), that seems to display the plot's events in a rigorous and depersonalized way. In addition to reverberating in the style of the novel by delimiting the employment of the

[17] For instance, Castro observes that, with this use of the narrative voice, the author "actuó de acuerdo con los mecanismos de sustento temático del viejo realismo francés del s. XIX" (Castro, qtd. in Ortells 2009: 108).

[18] Some examples from the novel would be: "he later informed a friend" (312), "Hickock said, talking to a journalist with whom he corresponded and who was periodically allowed to visit him" (323), "Perry once recalled" (129).

narratological traits needed for the wanted effect, the pretended objectivity of this silent "panoptical" (Hickman 2005: 465) "voice" will also have a chief effect in the novel's reception, as it creates a pseudo-filmic documental illusion in the reader. Then, as Pizer argues, the "documentary" aspect of the novel, that starts in the machine-like transparency of the "voice", "not only creates authenticity but also permits theme to be introduced implicitly rather than explicitly. Theme emerges out of what characters reveal about themselves in conversation and out of what other people say about them" (1971: 112). Unlike in the case of narratives like *Les bienveillantes*, where, as will be explained later, the authoritarian presence of an I-narrator triggers a critical distance (Gadamer) from the narrator's diegesis, here the apparent absence of an interventionist guiding voice makes the readership feel at liberty to develop their own impressions. As in documentary cinema, the characters in the novel seem therefore to be naturally "re-created as they are in life" (Capote 1966b :60) by means of their voices and acts.[19] Because of the mentioned absence of an external intrusion, these direct speech testimonies, the thematic structure of the novel, and its narrative techniques remain as those in charge of conveying an impression on the reader.[20] Thus, as the analysis of the "mood" will display, the lack of a first-person narrator forces the affective contents of the text and its inherent subjective tone to be located not only in the character's speech, but also in the less obvious realm of the narratological and the aesthetic.

[19] E. Ortells marks that: "Capote pretendió crear, mediante la utilización de un narrador en tercera persona que intentara pasar lo más inadvertido posible, y que se situase por tanto, fuera del relato, la ilusión de estar simplemente transponiendo al medio escrito una realidad exterior no mediatizada por ningún agente" (2009: 109).

[20] "El riguroso uso de la omnisciencia neutral que hace Capote no elimina la mirada y el juicio del autor sobre la historia que relata, pero sí que los torna tácitos, subterráneos; en lugar de opinar abiertamente, Capote lo hace de modo implícito en el acto de escoger, configurar y presentar el material de la historia" (Chillón 1999: 218).

3.1.2 MOOD: MULTI-PERSPECTIVISM AND THE FOCALIZATION ON THE OTHER

If the category of "voice" responded to the question "who speaks?", and therefore referred to the act of *telling*, the category of "mood" discusses the *showing* of a narrative by answering the question "whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?" (Culler 1980: 10) or simply, "who sees?". The difference between both usually mistaken narratological areas (Culler) is made clear in *In Cold Blood*, where, whereas the "voice" of the novel remains constant, the "mood" variates continuously: the narrative perspective, or focalization (Genette 1983: 189), adopts the point of view of multiple characters during the diegesis. In fact, the dynamic nature of the novel's "mood" seems to contradict the "no-mediatization" of the narrator (Ortells, 2009: 106) by taking the form of a "variable internal focalization" (Genette 1983: 191). That is so because, even if the use of multi-perspectivism has traditionally been tackled as a literary technique promoting objectivity,[21] as Ortells argues, the focalization in *In Cold Blood* is generally not "multiple", but "variable", that is to say, that the events are not evoked several times by different points of view, but the points of view follow one another forming a chronological sequence[22] which gives an impression of multiplicity. In this way, the narration combines the indirect style, typical of the novelistic genre, with direct testimonies that give the account a false sense of journalistic objectivity, as the focalization is alternated depending on the interest that a piece of information, opinion or emotional response may have for the plot. All will be now examined, the novel's

[21] "Capote's use of multiple varying points-of-view is also consistent with traditional journalism in that a reporter also promotes objectivity by presenting differing viewpoints in stories involving conflicting positions and beliefs on issues or the perception of events" (Newgaard 2004: 11).

[22] "Si bien la presentación de una multiplicidad de puntos de vista es una de las tretas a las que recurre el autor a la hora de crear la ilusión de neutralidad, en la mayoría de ocasiones, no se nos ofrecen diferentes versiones de un mismo incidente, sino que diversos individuos nos relatan las múltiples fases de las que consta un determinado acontecimiento" (Ortells 2009: 110).

"skillfull manipulation of point of view" (Hallowell, qtd. in Cañadas, 499) has several implications on the "stream of empathy" contained in the text, as the category of "mood" is the main repository of "empathy builders" in the narratological construction of *In Cold Blood*.

Before approaching these "empathy builders", however, it seems necessary to comment briefly on the most remarkable modal construction in the novel: the division of the diegesis in two narrative lines and two opposed perspectives. This "method of parallel editing" (Murray 1973: 132), that Murray considers the main cinematographic influence in the text, although explicitly maintained during the first three chapters, is particularly relevant in the first one, "The Last to See Them Alive",[23] in which the focalization oscillates between the last hours of the Clutters —with Mr. Clutter and Nancy as the main focalizers— and the killers' trip across Kansas, explained through the perspective of both young men. Despite being, in essence, a technique concerning the narrative "mood", this particularity of the diegesis will be further explored in the following section of this MA thesis, that deals with matters of narrative "tense" because, as will be explained, the effect that this dual construction fosters is, eminently, a temporal one. Nevertheless, at a "mood" level, this filmic use of the point of view equates the importance of both visions: a horizontalization that lays the foundation for a swinging focalization that, throughout the narrative, will progressively tip the scales in favor of the criminals, and more specifically, in favor of Perry Smith.

In addition to the use "parallel editing", the most relevant characteristic of the use of focalization in *In Cold Blood* is its application of multi-perspectivism. This multiplicity

[23] In fact, the title of this chapter seems to be already alluding to the two narrative lines at the same time: on the one hand, the pronoun "them" obviously makes reference to the Clutters, whose dairy routine is mostly re-constructed to the testimony of those friends, neighbors, and witnesses who indeed "saw" them on their last day. However, on the other hand, the *very* "last to see them alive" were, inevitably, Dick and Perry. Then, the naming of the section constitutes a premonitory prolepsis of the chapter's end.

of perspectives will be especially relevant during the first two sections of the novel, when the story includes the point of view of different Holcomb inhabitants in order to give a complete panoramic of the crime effects over the Kansas village and its community.[24] In addition to its importance in the presentation of the plot, one of the effects that this multi-perspectivism produces on the reception of the novel is that the readership forms their own opinion both about the events and about the characters, based on the different appreciations coming from characters that have a more or less substantial role in the novel. Therefore, the objectivity of the narration remains ambiguous, because, despite the absence of an intrusive narrator, the readership's reception is partially conditioned by the valuations of the characters acting as focalizers. The most significant consequence of this biased multi-perspectivism for the present study is the production of what I will call here an "intradiegetic empathy" directed to the figure of Perry Smith, that is, an ensemble of instances in which another character in the novel projects a positive, or even empathic, emotional response towards Perry. This input, that molds the figure of Perry in the text, will help the readership in building their conception of the character, and so it functions as a clear "empathy builder".

Apart from the many pleas for Christian forgiveness and empathic understanding that the novel includes —which in fact start already in the paratext[25]—, during the narrative, many characters will express the opinion that, despite his criminal acts, Perry possesses "something rare and salvable" (Capote 1966a: 41). These compassionate valuations start, in fact, with the first in-depth analysis of Smith, provided by the farewell letter written by his best friend in prison, Willie Jay, who qualifies Perry as a "man of extreme passion [..]

[24] For instance, when narrating the discovery of the Clutters's corpses (56-84) the narration turns to six different perspectives, namely those of Nancy's best friend Susan, her boyfriend Bob Rupp, Mr. Helm, Larry Hendricks, Mother Truitt, Mrs. Hartman and Mr. Johnson.

[25] The epigraph for the novel is an extract from a poem by François Villon, "Balade des Pendus" ("Ballad of the Hanged Men"), whose theme is the importance of showing mercy towards criminals and sinners.

striving to project his individuality against a backdrop of rigid conformity" who, nonetheless, "is his own enemy" (42). Willie Jay's initial evaluation will indeed set a precedent for the following instances of "intradiegetic empathy", one of the most explicit ones being the one highlighted by Nance (1970: 207), in which the motherly figure of Mrs. Hickock, who previously distrusted Perry, changes her opinion, and even ventures the possibility that Mrs. Clutter would have partaken of her sympathetic vision of Perry: "And this boy Perry. It was wrong of me to hate him; I've got nothing but pity for him now. And you know—I believe Mrs. Clutter would feel *pity*, too" (279, my emphasis). However, perhaps the most relevant evaluation of Perry is that of Al Dewey, not only because he is a personal friend of the Clutters and chief investigator of their assassination, but specially because his first thoughts about Perry come right after hearing the criminal's extensive explanation on how he committed the crimes. Thus, after the confession, Dewey asserts that "he found it possible to look at the man beside him without anger—with, rather, a measure of *sympathy*— for Perry Smith's life had been no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely progress toward one mirage" (239, my emphasis). As Pizer points out, this emotional realignment, coming from a character "whom we have come to admire and trust" (1971: 117), is to be maintained until the end of the story: when Dewey assists to the murderer's execution, after having manifested no pity for Dick's death, the narrator points out that, for the inspector: "Smith, though he was the true murderer, aroused another response, for Perry possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded, that the detective could not disregard" (340). As we can see in the quotes above, the emotions that Smith arouses in the other characters, "pity" and "sympathy", are in the spectrum of empathy: a compassionate understanding that informs the characterization of the criminal and is expected to be assimilated by the narratee. Al Dewey's emotional reaction is remarkably

revelatory considering that, as Newgaard affirms (2004: 14), he is the only one among the three primal viewpoints of the novel that has some connection to the Clutters. Despite the described multi-perspectivism of the novel, the focalization, especially in the last three chapters, will be particularly centered in three figures, who are the protagonists of the investigation and the penal process that constitute the center of the plot: Al Dewey, Dick and Perry. Importantly for the direction of the "stream of empathy", and like Newgaard also notices,[26] this perspective-taking leaves the Clutters' circle aside and focuses its attention on the criminals, and above all, on Perry, who, in his role as the main focalizer, stands, in Heyne's words, as the "thematic and aesthetic heart of the book" (1987: 486).

According to De Bellis (1979: 521), when the pages devoted to him and to his past are taken into consideration, Perry Smith is clearly the character with the highest amount of testimonies, the main object of the novel's focalization and its primary interest. In relation to this, if we are to follow Keen's notes on the empathic effects of literary devices, the primacy of Perry's point of view would stand as a main "empathy builder" in the text. According to Keen, "what narratologists call narrative situation (including point of view and perspective)" constitutes "the second formal quality most often associated with empathy" (2007: 29), due to its representation of the character's consciousness. The relevance of focalization for empathic engagement with fictional characters, that Coplan also highlights,[27] is only preceded, in Keen's opinion, by a detailed "character identification" (2007: 29), a presentation of the figure's antecedents and thoughts. In the case of Perry, this profound characterization will be equally provided by the prioritization

[26] "As we can see, none of those three focalizers have a direct connection to the 'victims', the Clutters, but with their 'corpses', while they obviously guard a relationship to the 'criminals'" (2004: 14).
[27] "Most of the philosophical questions regarding the relationship between readers and characters have focused more on the emotional dimensions of point of view" (2004: 142).

of his perspective that, in Newgaard's words, triggers the readership's sympathy by offering "extensive personal background information" (2004:34).

Thus, by means of the novel's focalization, the reader is informed that Perry, described as "a poet" (Capote 1966a: 41) and a "sentimental" (95), comes from a dysfunctional background: abandoned by his alcoholic mother and mistreated by his errant father —a familial panorama that cost the lives of two of his three siblings—, he grew up in boarding schools and reformatories where, being half-Cherokee, we has bullied because of his race. After having spent some time in the army and being without money, a case of thievery leads him to prison, where his dreams of becoming an artist and a traveler will definitely come to an end. This wretched biography, that is revealed for the first time along the twenty-three pages that constitute the two letters written by his father and his sister Bobo to the Kansas State Parole Board, will be repeated up to three more times, and in two of those occasions, in the words of Perry himself.[28] This continuous repetition of Perry's "conditions of emergence" (Butler 2005: 8), which have constructed his subjectivity, works within the novel as what Judith Butler coined as "an account of oneself". For Butler, an "account of oneself" can be defined as a speech act in which "I come into being as a reflexive subject in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself when I am […] prompted to address myself to the one who addresses me" (2005: 15). Hence, an account of oneself, that according to Nietzsche, "follows only upon an accusation" (qtd. in Butler 2005: 11), necessarily requires an addressee to whom the speaking subject explains the "conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen" (2005: 19) and that help comprehend this subject's acts and motivations. In Perry's situation, this explanatory narrative is essential, as his explanations about his life of poverty and abandonment almost take the form of social determinism (Ortells 2009: 112) in the way

[28] See Capote (1966a: 106, 173 and 265)

the novel links this traumatic past to his wasted diegetic present via a lack of opportunities that the young man himself denounces when he tells his sister: "Please, Bobo. Please listen. You think I like myself? Oh, the man I could have been!" (178). The role of the interpellated addressee, that in the case of Perry's account of himself would be embodied by the readership, consists therefore in providing an ethical response by recognizing and validating the other's subjectivity. In *In Cold Blood*, this account is an indispensable rhetorical device for the readership to be able to empathize with Perry, because, as Morton claims, understanding "the motivation of deeds that one would not consider doing oneself" (2011: 324) constitutes a crucial step towards empathising with those who do evil. Moreover, as Goldie also explains, the "substantial characterization" of the evil Other, with this Other as the narrating conscience, stands as a necessary condition for an empathic response (2000: 195). Regarding this, it is also crucial for its reception to have the turning point of the novel's plot —the murder of the Clutters— narrated through Perry's direct speech because, paradoxically, the events of that night are essential in characterizing Perry's nature, as his signs of kindness —tucking Nancy in to appease her, respecting Bonnie's desire to keep her wedding ring, seeking Herbert and Kenyon's comfort—, previously identified by Dewey,[29] display his contradictory good-heartedness. The narrative focalization on Perry, by which becomes the most important character in the novel precisely by acting as its main focalizer, reveals itself as the most transgressive thematic gesture in the novel, makes it possible for the narratee to be familiarized with the negative character's ideas and perceptions, as well as to access his troublesome conditions of emergence, from which his violence springs: an ensemble of life experiences that "do not excuse what he did […] but it do help explain it" (Capote, qtd.

[29] "Dewey had become aware of several particulars that reinforced his conviction that at least one of the murderers was emotionally involved with the victims, and felt for them, even as he destroyed them, a certain twisted tenderness. […] a murderer now and again moved by considerate impulses" (99).

in Norden 1968). Nevertheless, even if Perry's point of view predominates throughout the novel, the perspective of Dick, his partner in crime, is, as has been previously pointed out, deeply influential as well. The alternation between these two criminal perspectives gives room to a comparison between the personalities of both convicts whose effect, after the "intradiegetic empathy" delivered by multi-perspectivism and the main focalization on Perry, appears as the third "empathy builder" concerning narrative "mood" in *In Cold Blood*.

Since their presentation, the two young men are described as having, physically, "little in common" (28): in clear contrast with Perry, whose "enthralling" face of a "gentle romantic" is said to be full of a "roguish animation" (14), Dick is characterized as having a "serpentine [left eye], with a venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature" (Capote 1966a: 29). As this last quote suggests, and Ortells also points out (2009: 130), the narration employs here the naturalist determinism of the 19th century tradition to match the criminals' external appearance to their internal ways of being.[30] In this way, whereas Perry's face reveals his "dreamy" and "sensitive" interiority (Capote 1966a: 157), Dick's facial features already insinuate the malicious and devious personality that his posterior acts will confirm. Hence, by this metonymical portrayal, the novel introduces the differences between Perry's and Dick's ways of being, an opposition that, as González de la Aleja stresses, will increase progressively along the novel.[31] Specifically, it will be through the *road trip* format that their multiple divergences will be

[30] This naturalist comparison between the protagonists will be employed once again in the novel, in a passage in which Al Dewey's wife compares Dick's face to that of Perry: "and she thought the eyes, with their moist, dreamy expression, rather pretty—rather, in an actorish way, sensitive. Sensitive, and something more: 'mean.' Though not as mean, as forbiddingly 'criminal,' as the eyes of Hickock, Richard Eugene. Marie, transfixed by Hickock's eyes, was reminded of a childhood incident" (157).

[31] "Conforme avanza la novela Dick se va convirtiendo en un personaje cada vez más odioso, mientras que Perry sufre la transformación opuesta" (González de la Aleja 1990: 85).

further explored (Ortells 2009: 83). Therefore, their escape will serve to contrapose their backgrounds and, most importantly, to capture the asymmetrical nature of their comradeship: while Dick is only interested in Perry because, due to a lie, he believes Perry to be a "natural killer" whose gifts "can help his ambitions" (53),[32] Perry sees in their association an opportunity to establish a real intersubjective bond. Consequently, the union of the criminals is presented as being the result of Dick's ruse, by which he takes advantage of Perry's need for proximity and of his blind trust in his friend, that leads him to innocently believe that "whatever had to happen won't happen" as long as he and Dick "stick together" (120). Dick's stratagem becomes obvious when he betrays their mutual pact of silence during the interrogations in order to blame Perry: *"*It was Perry. I couldn't stop him. He killed them all" (222).[33] Some pages later, Perry admits to having murdered the family. Nevertheless, the robbery at the Clutters' house was "Dick's idea, his 'score'" (12) in which Perry accepted to participate not only because he was "afraid to leave Dick; merely to consider it made him feel 'sort of sick'" (120) but also because he was willing to visit his friend Willie Jay in Kansas. Finally, Dick, the real artificer of the crime, will confess his secret motivation: "I think the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl. That is one reason why I never wanted to turn back when we started to" (270). As a result, the novel's contrast between Perry, who will prevent this rape from happening, and Dick, who fools his comrade into committing a murder, serves to partially redeem the former.[34] From this perspective, Dick would function as the true criminal mind

[32] "Dick became convinced that Perry was that rarity, 'a natural killer' (…) It was Dick's theory that such a gift could, under his supervision, be profitably exploited. Having reached this conclusion, he had proceeded to woo Perry, flatter him—pretend, for example, that he believed all the buried-treasure stuff" (53).

[33] Later on, when they both plan to escape from prison, the different projections that each one has of the relationship are again displayed: Perry cannot conceive the jailbreak without his partner and considers that "all preparations must include him" (257), whereas Dick plans to leave "alone, of course, Perry's future did not concern him" (255).

[34] "El contraste que el autor establece entre este y su compinche Dick le va a servir para confirmar al primero como víctima y establecer la verdadera responsabilidad del crimen" (González de la Aleja 1990: 81).

on whom the blame is put, while Perry's responsibility for the crimes would be relativized: an effect that turns this character comparison into one of the thematic "empathy builders" in the narrative. In addition, the unequal terms in which they established the relationship with one another, which brings about Dick's breach of Perry's trust, increases the perception of the latter as an emotionally vulnerable subject, and therefore accentuates his benevolent qualities: for instance, despite Dick's cruel behavior and his treason, Perry manifests no hard feelings for his partner-in-crime, but still considers him his closest relationship until the end. In fact, during their separate incarceration, Perry reports that he "missed Dick" and his great desire was "to talk to Dick, be with him again", because, as he puts it, "they at least were of the same species, brothers in the breed of Cain" (251). In effect, after their arrest at the end of the third chapter, "the Answer", Perry and Dick are caught up in a judicial and penal path towards a shared end, announced in the title of the last section: "the Corner", a term used in jail slang to refer to capital punishment. However, because of the novel's temporal structures, Perry and Dick's fate, as well that of the Clutters, give the impression of having been progressively approaching since the beginning of the story: an employ of the narrative "tense" that transforms the six deaths into a symbolic "inevitable destiny".

3.1.3 TENSE: AN INEVITABLE DESTINY

In spite of the importance of the narrative "mood" for the research conducted in the present MA thesis, the most extraordinary formal devices deployed by *In Cold Blood* are to be found in its use of the narrative time and its alternations, which influence significantly the ordering and reception of the diegesis. As Morrissette points out, it is precisely in this temporal choices that the inspiration of cinema over the novel is most perceptible: "in order to 'fictionalize' his materials […] [he] employs most of the chief

techniques of the *nouveau roman* and of cinematic *découpage* as found in the new cinema, including reversals of the chronology of events, parallel or alternating sequences, flashbacks, and the like" (1970: 161). Thus, although the narration follows a strict chronological order, the sustained insertion of pauses, ellipsis, speed variations and, specially, "chronological anachronies" (Genette 1983: 35) turn the novel's narrative time into an intricated structure. So as to make remarks on the main "tense" particularities of the diegesis, this section will divide them according to Genette's sub-division of temporal dynamics into duration, frequency, and order (Liveley 2019: 196).

Broadly speaking, in terms of duration, the narration mixes scenes and summaries, two diverse speed modes that are combined to highlight the importance given to each episode: for instance, while the judicial process in recounted in detail, other apparently significant events, like the burial of the Clutters or the years spent by Dick and Perry awaiting for their execution in prison, are quickly summarized. Besides, the novel also employs recurrent pauses, in a way that the central line of the narrative is frequently interrupted to insert biographical documents —a medical report, a journal entry, a letter etc.— in an example of another relevant device that relates the novel to the journalistic tradition of the reportage. On the other hand, pauses are sometimes used, also, to introduce a specific character,[35] what constitutes a narrative necessity if we take into account the already mentioned multi- perspectivism. The plot also presents two complete ellipsis of information, that of the moment of Perry and Dick's arrest (208) and that of their first two years in Lansing's prison. In relation to this, even if, as Murray asserts, "the tempo of the book is faster than the average novel —thanks to its filmic structure" (1973: 35), after Perry's confession, the narrative time becomes more and more

[35] For instance, the third chapter starts by providing the biography of Floyd Wells, Dick's former cell partner, who is about to inform the KBI about the authorship of the Clutter's case: "The young man's name was Floyd Wells, and he was short and nearly chinless. He had attempted several careers, as soldier, ranch hand, mechanic, thief…" (152).

elliptical, a tendency that reaches new heights during the time in Death Row, where two "explicit ellipsis" (Genette 1980: 106) can be identified: "Two years passed" (313), "another three years passed" (328). Concerning the night of the crimes, which has been previously described as another elided sequence, it could be considered, from the point of view of narratology, as a case of partial ellipsis or an "enigma" (Genette 1980: 57), as it will be filled later on in the text by Perry's confession monologue, which functions as an internal analepsis providing "deferred or postponed significance" (57) to the previously omitted scene. This gap is the most important one for the novel's plot, as it plays a strategic double role in the story, affecting its reception: it maintains the readership's interest in the police investigation, leaving the *who* and *how* of the case unresolved and so, it also makes the blame for the crimes ambiguous, as the reader ignores which percentage of that blame should be ascribed to each of the criminals. This dramatic "enigma" plays an important role in the empathic engagement with the negative figure of Perry, as it is one of the "empathy builders" present in the temporal construction of the novel. That is so because, as Pizer observes, this timing makes it possible for the narration to "characterize Perry Smith in depth before revealing his actions at the Clutter home" (1971: 116), a structure that makes it easier for the readership to humanize Perry and establish a "parasocial" (Oatley) bond with him, as they ignore his degree of implication on the murders. Therefore, when the truth is revealed —importantly, once again, through Perry's own explanatory words—, the narratee is already biased by the sympathetic portrait of the murderer, and is prompt to, as has been said in the last section, regard Dick as truly responsible for the crimes.

Besides being used, as in this last example, to give "postponed significance" to previously void signifiers, the retrospective structure is sometimes employed to retell already explained sequences. This chronological structure, studied in the category of frequency,

is what Genette coins as the "iterative" time, meaning "a type of narrative where the recurrences of the statement do not correspond to any recurrence of events" (Genette 1980: 116). Due to the novel's resorting to the use of multi-perspectivism, these re-examinations of the plot will appear throughout the novel, generally under the form of multiple testimonies relating the same episode. For instance, during Dick and Perry's interrogations (Capote 1966a: 208-239), both criminals retrace all their escape travel for the policemen, summarizing honestly or lying about the events already narrated, from the perspective of the murderers, in the previous two sections. However, despite the multiplicity of particularities in the diegesis' duration and frequency, the most persistent and distinctive temporal asynchronies in *In Cold Blood*'s narrative time are those related to its order, that is to say, its analepses and prolepses.

On the one hand, analepses occupy, overall, more than a third part of the narration. These flashbacks can be either "external analepsis" elucidating the characters' past —mostly Perry's, whose importance for negative empathy has already been explained—, or "internal analepsis" (Genette 1980: 61), that is, dealing with events of the plot, which are integrated on an iterative structure. On the other hand, prolepses are used to announce upcoming events, a device that reinforces the omniscient nature of the narrator's voice, who has access to the characters past as well as to their future.[36] Moreover, the flash-forwards, which are specially present at the beginning of the narrative, collaborate with the "method of parallel editing" (Murray 1973: 132) in conveying "the sense of awe we generally feel in the presence of tragedy, in this case a naturalistic tragedy" (Murray 1973: 134).

As has been previously introduced, the division of the diegesis into two narrative

[36] "He was 'in poor health' (poorer than he knew; he had less than four months to live)" (Capote 1966a: 116).

perspectives is remarkably relevant in the first section, "The Last to See Them Alive" where, thanks to a skillful manipulation of chronological order and duration, the combination of the stories of the victims and the perpetrators creates an effect of fated disaster. To juxtapose those actions, the novel creates a double chrono-topic dialogue alternating between both the focus on the two groups of people and the focus on their present and past. By combining their actions with their memories, each one of the six characters is introduced in detail[37] through a literary construction that combines perfectly the horizontal rhythm of journalism and the vertical deepening of fiction described by Steinem.[38] Despite the analeptic pauses, that appear mostly during the first chapter, the speed of the alternation of scenes increases gradually, as in a countdown, as the action approaches the moment in which "four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended *six human lives*" (Capote 1966a: 3, my emphasis) could be heard. In this way, the accelerating rhythm of the story seems to rush those two opposed realities towards a collision whose results will be equally fatal, as the quote asserts, for the six characters. Apart from the narrative speed, at least four other devices in the novel help create this impression of imminent disaster. First, the dramatic irony[39] that results from the anticipation present in the novel's self-explanatory subtitle —"A true account of a multiple murder and its consequences"—, which tells reader about the fate of the Clutters and, hence, to perceive some of their actions as premonitions. An example of these signs would be Mr. Clutter's signing of a life insurance the same morning of his death and the playful comment of the

[37] This is the case of the presentation of Mrs. Clutter, who suffers from a mental illness and who takes a miniature from her collection and recalls, "Daddy gave them to me; I had a lovely childhood", which allows the narration to introduce a brief biography, "[t]he only daughter of a prosperous wheat grower named Fox…" (25).

[38] "El periodismo se mueve en un plano horizontal, contando una historia, mientras que la ficción, la buena ficción, se mueve verticalmente, profundizando más y más en el personaje y los acontecimientos" (Steinem, qtd. in Ortells 2009: 32).

[39] The term "dramatic irony" refers to a literary technique, usually employed in theatre, "by which the full significance of a character's words or actions is clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character" (Cambridge Dictionary).

insurance agent on Mr. Clutter expected longevity,[40] or the admonition on Mrs. Clutter's Bible bookmark, "[t]ake ye heed, watch and pray: for ye not know when the time is" (28). Secondly, the tragic atmosphere transmitted by those symbolic instances is ratified first, by the description of the inhospitable atmosphere of Holcomb that opens the narration.[41] In the third place, the anguish triggered by the surroundings is confirmed through the insertion of harsh prolepses that announce, explicitly, the forthcoming death of the family members. Thus, for instance, when Nancy prepares herself for the following day, the narrator adds, "she set out the clothes she intended to wear to church the next morning […] a red velveteen dress—her prettiest, which she herself had made. It was the dress in which she was to be buried" (55). In the fourth place, the description of those last moments of the bourgeois family is usually alternated with that of the parallel action of the ex-convicts by connecting both realities through shared factors[42]or circumstances, a technique that Murray, employing cinematographic terminology, calls "match-cuts" (1973: 135).[43] This filmic resource works as a unifying thread between "dos mundos muy distintos y condenados a no entenderse" (González De La Aleja 1990: 81), but which are also destined to coincide in an inevitable encounter.

As Pizer points out, although this chrono-topic juxtaposition achieves an especially dramatic result during the first section, in which it is oriented towards the narrative climax of the novel, this double structure is to be maintained during "Persons Unknown" and "The Answer", which "juxtapose fleeing criminals and pursuing police" (1971:113).

[40] "You're a young man. Forty-eight. And from the looks of you, from what the medical report tells us, we're likely to have you around a couple of weeks more" (46).
[41] "The keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles" (3).
[42] The first transition between both scenarios, which introduces the character of Perry, starts by comparing his actions to those of Mr. Clutter: "Like Mr. Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a café called the Little Jewel never drank coffee" (12).
[43]"A number of match-cuts are introduced in order to impose unity on the apparent discontinuity of the action; for instance, as Herb Clutter bends down to wash his face in a sink. Perry Smith, who is to kill him later that day, pops up suddenly into the frame as he showers himself in the terminal" (Murray 1973: 135).

Moreover, as the critic asserts, "Part IV contains a less obvious dual sequential narrative" (1971:113), deployed through the sustained reference to the gallows, "the Corner" that is Perry's and Dick's destiny. Thus, throughout the whole novel, "Capote creates an effect similar to that in the first three parts —the inexorable coming together of two groups or units separated spatially but fated to converge" (1971:114). As will be now argued, this aesthetic tone (Adorno) of a "inevitable destiny", generated by a specific interweaving of "voice", "mood", and "tense" techniques, affects the representation of, first, the confrontation between the Clutters and the criminals, and then, of the legal battle between the latter and the American penal system. Hence, this omnipresence of "a shaping destiny [that] controls all life" (1971:114) makes the theme of the novel transcend, widening it scope from a novel dealing with an isolated case of murder, to one that stands as a parable of, as the title of this section suggests, the whole American society. This symbolic interpretation, that will be elucidated below through the Foucauldian ideas on the genealogy of power, has an extraordinary significance for the present analysis of the construction of negative empathy in *In Cold Blood*. By regarding the novel as a parable, its representation of Evil acquires a universal dimension, and so, Perry's fault is scaled down: entrapped in this fatalist an inexorable metaphor in which he is a mere symbolic figure, the criminal stops being an agent to become, as González de la Aleja puts it, "la víctima de un engranaje legal que acabará matándolo" (1999: 89).

3.1.4 THEMATIC STRUCTURE: FACING THE BOURGEOIS ORDER

The collision that the novel weaves patiently during the first section represents, then, not only the convergence of two actions, but the clashing of the opposite poles of society,

co-dependent on and yet ignorant of each other, which can be seen as epitomizing the categories that Foucault recognizes within the Bourgeois Order: the Other and the Same.[44] As Miguel Morey argues in *Lectura de Foucault* (2014:55) the primary thesis of Foucault's study of the social configuration of madness, *Historie de la folie* (1961), is that the current appreciation of madness is a "produit d'institution" (Foucault 1975: 352) constructed by the psychiatric discourse which developed during the 19th century. Under this light, the Bourgeois Order, a social organization constituted by a series of dispositives, designs the discourse of the mad person as the Other in contrast to which the Same can be defined and placed at the core of the Bourgeois Order. From this perspective, the Same and the Other are interdependent in their configuration[45] but, as Foucault states, "selon à la classe où appartient les individus les conduiront au pouvoir ou à la prison" (1975: 338-9). The figure of the Other, embodied in *In Cold Blood* by Perry and Dick, is related to class issues and adopts multiple shapes, as the criminal or the mad person. Whatever its incarnation, the Other is always condemned to the social exclusion and stigmatization that we see exemplified in Perry's account of himself. Hence, the Other at the margins of society functions as the condition of possibility for the Bourgeois Order as well as its main enemy, that the Order must isolate and mend. Miguel Morey argues in *Lectura de Foucault* that, "los beneficios que se obtienen por la constitución de un delincuente-objeto son múltiples y todos apuntan a mantener un equilibrio disimétrico de clase: el Orden Burgués" (2014: 373). However, *In Cold Blood* problematizes this radical separation between the Same and the Other and the stigma on the latter not only by giving a voice to the criminal Other, whose first punishment for

[44] The terms "Same" and "Other" are extracted from the terminology used by M. Morey in *Lectura de Foucault* (Morey 2014: 78).

[45] "Así, hacer la historia de la locura es un modo de historiar la articulación de nuestra modernidad, esa partición que ordena lo real en dos mitades complementarias, una de las cuales, habiendo sido hasta hoy límite absoluto de la otra, empieza a ser comprendida como su secreto fundamento" (Morey 2014: 69).

his alterity, according to Foucault, is being denied his right to produce discourse,[46] but also because the narrative puts face-to-face "dos mitades complementarias" (Morey 2014: 69), suggesting that their only ontological difference lays, indeed, in their conditions of emergence: either the American dream, or the American nightmare.

This symbolic side of the murders becomes more tangible via the aura of irremediable fate that, as has been explained, the novel surrounds the killings with. The destiny of the protagonists is transmitted by the mentioned series of "premonitory" devices, but most importantly, it is also evoked by Perry's explicit acknowledgment, as, before committing the crime, he feels that "he was here, and embarked on the present errand, not because he wished to be but because *fate had arranged the matter*" (40, my emphasis). Certainly, what Perry feels like pre-ordained will be nothing more than the confirmation of the augury that his friend Willie Jay writes to him in a farewell letter. The document, included in the first part of the novel, constitutes a premonition not only of the crime, but of the entire story and its symbolic reading. Therefore, it is meant to resonate in the readers' ears throughout the narrative:

> You are strong, but there is a flaw in your strength, and unless you learn to control it the flaw will prove stronger than your strength and defeat you. The flaw? Explosive emotional reaction out of all proportion to the occasion. Why? Why this unreasonable anger at the sight of others who are happy or content, this growing contempt for people and the desire to hurt them? All right, you think they're fools, you despise them because their morals, their happiness is the source of your frustration and resentment. (42)

[46] En el Clasicismo, la voz del loco se condena a la reclusión puesto que se desarrolla el binomio locura-verdad, se la reduce al silencio. Mediante el Encierro en el Clasicismo, la locura se constituye como 'lo otro', aquello que le niega al sujeto la posibilidad misma de pensar" (Morey 2014: 78).

This omnipresence of Destiny, recognized also by Pizer or González de la Aleja,[47] promotes empathy towards the figure of Perry, as the feeling of a superior arranging force puts distance, again, between him and his responsibility for the crimes: Perry is transformed into a puppet not in control of his own destiny, who encounters in Holcomb the *denouement* that all his unsuccessful life had been preparing him for. He is no longer the murderer, but one of the murders' victims, one of the *six* human lives that the shotguns ended.

According to González de la Aleja, within this fatal catastrophe that includes Perry, a parallelism is established between Perry's role as victim and that of Nancy Clutter, both used as focalizers of their respective narrative line. This implicit comparison, in fact, remarks the arbitrary nature of the in fact opposite conditions of the Same and the Other. Hence, the critic affirms that in the novel, "[l]a intención […] no es contraponer a Nancy y a Perry, sino todo lo contrario: unirlos como víctimas de una misma tragedia, como si el destino hubiera cruzado inevitablemente sus pasos con el resultado que el lector ya conoce" (González de la Aleja 1990: 75). This comparison with Nancy could be read as another "empathy builder" for Perry because it presents as equal the tragedy of these two subjects who are condemned to see their life end because of the contrary "conditions of emergence" (Butler 2005: 8) to which they are subordinated. Nonetheless, even if both are portrayed as victims in the novel, this comparison brings to the forefront, above everything, the fact that, despite their shared fate, their place within the Bourgeois Order is opposed: Nancy is a paradigm of the Bourgeois Order, of this "happy and content" people[48] that Perry's miserable life has led him to envy and hate. In this regard, and

[47] "Todos los personajes de Capote aparecen atrapados de una forma u otra por el destino" (González de la Aleja 1990: 86).
[48] "She was pretty and popular […] she just made everybody feel happy about themselves" (Capote 1966: 48).

following González de la Aleja's conclusions,[49] we could still identify another association between Perry and the Clutters, which highlights once again this disparate sociological hierarchy: a comparison between the practical and successful Mr. Clutter and the dreamy, socially stigmatized figure of Perry. The contrast between these characters status is clear once their life stories are narrated: Mr Clutter is the head of an exemplary bourgeois family,[50] constantly referred to as a model for his community and "a proud man" that "made something of his life" (Capote 1966: 73), while his killer, Perry, is a young man that, as the narrative constantly repeats, has no family, no friends and no material possessions.[51] The contrasting nature of their biographical and material situations is, moreover, echoed in their intersubjective relations: while Perry is presented as having "few personal relationships with other people" but "a great need of friendship" (289), Mr. Clutter is presented as an outstanding man in his community, but a cold and authoritative figure for his children and wife, whose love he seems to take for granted.[52] As a result, Perry and Mr. Clutter are portrayed as the two sides of the same coin: in a metonymical movement, each one of them embodies a different side of the binary opposition that is, according to Foucault, at the base of The Bourgeois Order: the opposition between normality—the order of the Same for Morey— and abnormality — the order of the Other.

In fact, throughout the narration, Perry questions his own normality and worries about "a notion that he 'might not be normal, maybe insane'" (Capote 1966: 257), a

[49] See González de la Aleja (1990: 80-81).
[50] Talking about the Clutters, Nancy's boyfriend, Bobby Rupp, voices the feeling of the whole Holcomb community: "There wasn't any family like them" (48).
[51] During his trip with Dick to Holcomb, Perry ruminates: "He did give a damn—but who had ever given a damn about him?" (43). Later in the novel, the psychiatric examination establishes that: "his childhood […] was marked by brutality and lack of concern on the part of both parents. He seems to have grown up without direction, without love, and without ever having absorbed any fixed sense of moral values" (Capote 1966: 288-289).
[52] Right after labelling him as "the community's most widely known citizen" (3), the narration depicts Mr. Clutter forcing Nancy to break up with his boyfriend for being a Roman Catholic, arguing that "his laws were his laws" (6).

preoccupation he often shares with his partner-in-crime, to whom, when they are discussing the murders, he says: "There's got to be something wrong with somebody who'd do a thing like that" (90). Moreover, Perry also recognizes, just like Dick, his alienation from the Bourgeois Order, a distance from conventionalism that his friend Wille Jay makes explicit by describing him as "an individual without the constant threat of conventional pressures" whose ideas are "opposed to conventionalism" (139). Therefore, to use Agamben's terminology, Perry will become conscious of his condition as *homo sacer*: a subject unworthy to be sacrificed but whose life can be taken with impunity, because it is a *bare life*, a valueless life.[53] This *homo sacer* at the margins of society is directly opposed to the figure of the *sovereign subject* at the core of it, whose rights are fully recognized: a category that Mr. Clutter embodies in the novel. Hence, understanding himself as distanced from social morals and having lost every right because of his *bare life*, Perry develops a feeling of hatred, already diagnosed in Willie Jay's prophecy, towards those who have had the opportunities that society denied him. Symbolized through the leitmotif of the parrot in his dreams, "an avenging angel who savaged his enemies" (258), Perry's sense of injustice deriving from his lack of opportunities and education generates in him a violent frustration and resentment, that he projects towards those integrated in the Bourgeois Order: a motivation for the crimes that the novel's plot itself seems to validate.

In this way, from the beginning on the novel, the murders are constantly described as being "apparently motiveless" (75) by the KBI investigators, who nevertheless consider the death of Mr. Clutter to be "the criminals' main objective" (149), an opinion shared by the Holcomb community because "he was the most abused" (76). The thesis

[53] "*Homo sacer* presents the figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted.[…] What is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: *homo sacer*"(Agamben 1998: 53, emphasis in the original).

maintained by Al Dewey about the crime's absurdity seems to be corroborated by Perry's confession of the crimes,[54] in which he testifies, "I didn't want to harm the man. I thought he was a very nice gentleman. Soft-spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat" (237). Nevertheless, as the narrative line moves forward, the crimes begin to bepresented as a consequence of an emotional breakdown that makes Perry lose control of himself and be driven by a so far repressed impulse towards punishing the Bourgeois Order: the social organization that condemned him to a *bare life* and which is personified in the Clutters, and specially, in the figure of Herbert Clutter. A scientific article called "Murder Without Apparent Motive", included in the novel, will confirm this idea, arguing that when killing Mr. Clutter, Perry was "under a mental eclipse", destroying "a key figure in some past traumatic configuration" (294). Thus, when he ends with Clutter's life, Perry is attacking nothing but the *sovereign subject*,[55] the personification of all the authoritative figures in his life that belonged to a bourgeois disciplinary dispositive (the nuns that tortured him at boarding school, the doctors that treated his physical disability, the agents and guards in prison, etc.), whose discourses constructed him as the Other and condemned him to suffering the exclusion inherent to the abnormal. Most importantly, Perry himself will finally recognize the assassinations as an unconscious revenge against the whole Bourgeois Order, in a moment of *anagnorisis* that is reproduced twice during the narration: "And it wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. *Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it*" (282 & 294, my emphasis).

Then, the novel's explanations of the causes behind the crime end up turning it into an

[54] Reflecting on Perry's confession, the agent Al Dewey asserts: "The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightning" (239).
[55] Ortells seconds this idea by arguing that: "El ataque a los Clutter es el ataque al corazón de América no sólo geográfica sino también socialmente […] El tema que se subyace a toda la obra, pues, es el de la violación del paraíso por fuerzas externas y el cuestionamiento de las normas por las que se rige dicha comunidad" (1999: 81).

irremediable collision between the two polarized Americas: "America, desperate, savage, violent America in collision with sane, safe, insular even smug America — people who have every chance, against people who have none" (Capote, qtd. in González de la Aleja, 1990: 81). This "interpretative detour" (Doležel 1988: 477), by which the novel's "fictional particulars" are taken as embodiments of "actual universals" (Doležel 1988: 477), prevails as the major "empathy builder" in the novel's thematic structure: by explaining his apparently amoral actions like an unescapable outcome and by turning him into the representative of a universal condition, Perry starts to be perceived as a victim, an individual who, as Ortells says "es el resultado de un determinismo social que lo condena irremisiblemente a un submundo de incomprensión, violencia y locura" (1999:82). Moreover, as this implicit universalist configuration also reveals that Mr. Clutter's position as *sovereign subject* is possible at the expense of the *bare life* imposed on the *homo sacer*, it finally seems that the one ending with the lives of Mr. Clutter and his family is the discriminatory social order in which he actively participates, the same that is to kill Perry. Thus, in Foucault's words, "[l]'homme qui vous donne la mort n'est pas libre de ne pas vous la donner. Le coupable, c'est la société, ou pour dire plus vrai c'est la mauvaise organisation sociale" (1975: 336). This apparent inversion of the binary opposition criminal-victim, that alters the readership's appreciation of Perry as a negative character, could therefore lead to transform the "negative empathy" for him into empathy for a subject who is vulnerable in front of that "mauvaise organisation sociale". The ensemble of dispositives enabling that organization, will be portrayed, precisely, in last section of *In Cold Blood*, "The Corner", where the institutional apparatus of the Bourgeois Order will evaluate, diagnose, judge, and execute Dick and Perry. This last section will therefore depict the second "inevitable destiny" in the novel, that is, the encounter between the Other and the punishing discipline. This cause-consequence

structure, by which Perry murders the Clutters because of his social conditions and society murders him because of his crimes, is, as Ortells puts it, "una demostración de la circulación de la venganza" (1999:82): an "eye for an eye" that dissolves the puritan Manichean distinction between good and bad that regulates America in such a way that pure Evil is no longer recognizable.[56]

"The Corner", which narrates the criminals' trial, incarceration, and execution, contains the clearest examples of Foucault's theories on disciplinary power and its dispositives in *In Cold Blood*. In those final pages, Perry and Dick become the personification of Agamben's *homo sacer*, in front of which the Bourgeois institutions and discourses are all-powerful. This uneven distribution of power, which appears as the thematic core of this section, is once again expressed and reinforced via its formal expression, as the zero focalization of an omniscient narration, that supplies explanations on the functioning of the penitentiary, judiciary, and psychiatric dispositives being portrayed, is combined with Perry's focalization, which gives access to his thoughts and his diary entries and vindicates the criminal's protagonist role in the narration. Because of this dual perspective, although described in a detailed and documented manner, the trial is presented as an absurd and unfair process in which, as in other achievements in universal literature such as Kafka's *The Process* or Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the sentence seems to have been passed before the allegation, as the "popular jury" is selected according to their endorsement of capital punishment.[57] This sense of injustice, that contributes to the creation of empathic engagement, will be once again textualized by the use of multi perspectivism, as it is explicitly denounced in a conversation

[56] "Si bien el enfrentamiento entre el bien y el mal, tan característico de la literatura norteamericana como reflejo de la dualidad existente en el mundo, pervive tanto en sus primeras narraciones como en *A Sangre Fría*, las conclusiones a las que parece llegar en esta obra desmienten la tradicional división maniqueísta" (Ortells 2009: 32).

[57] "Another twenty won dismissal […] because they opposed capital punishment" (Capote 1966: 264).

between two journalists:

> "It's unfair." "What's unfair?" "The whole trial. These guys don't stand a chance." "Fat chance they gave Nancy Clutter." "Perry Smith. My God. He's had such a rotten life—" Parr said, "Many a man can match sob stories with that little bastard. Me included. Maybe I drink too much, but I sure as hell never killed four people in cold blood." "*Yeah, and how about hanging the bastard? That's pretty goddam cold-blooded too*. (298, my emphasis)

This dialogue is particularly relevant not only because of it being an instance of "intradiegetic empathy" and for acting like a manifesto against capital punishment, but because it reveals the double entendre behind the novel's title: like Perry states, "he's not the only killer in the courtroom" (280). As Foucault asserted, the bodies of the criminals are objectivized and "sont maintenant un bien social" (1975:129): as they embody the "abnormal" Other, Dick and Perry are the enemy of all the social body, which has the right to take "revenge".[58] Then, the criminals will be not only dispossessed of their right to freedom,[59] but of their right to live, as the penalty imposed to them is death, requested by the jury "not in vengeance, but in all humbleness…" (Capote 1966: 295). In this way, Perry and Dick become officially "human victims who may be killed but not sacrificed" (Agamben 1998: 53), deprived even of the control over their own existence, as Perry will be prevented in prison from committing suicide. Finally, after having been confined in their Death Row cells "almost two thousand days" (Capote 1966: 329) that Perry describes "as though he existed 'deep underwater'" (313), both are executed by hanging, a method that conforms with Mably's principle, as it is "une

[58] In Death Row, Dick says: "They [these people that write letters to the newspapers asking for death penalty]'re mad 'cause they're not getting what they want—revenge" (Capote 1966: 328).
[59] Perry writes in his diary, "It is almost impossible for a man who enjoys freedom with all its prerogatives, to realize what it means to be deprived of that freedom" (143).

exécution qui atteigne la vie plutôt que le corps" (Foucault 1975: 19).[60] Perry, then, finally gets to the place his live has been taking him, but, importantly for the present analysis, before facing death, his last words of apology arise as a final plea for comprehension and empathy: "It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize" (333). In contrast, Dick's final words —"You people are sending me to a better world than this ever was" (331)— constitute a denunciation of an unequal social organization in which, as Perry writes in his diary, "the rich never hang. Only the poor and friendless" (249).

The complete panoramic vision that the novel offers of the coldness and cruelty of the American legal system through its thematic structure, narrated, for the most part, from the point of view of its victim, Perry, functions as the novel's final thematic "empathy builder": the readership follows Perry in his plot trajectory and witnesses the dehumanization that the Bourgeois Order imposes on the Other. After having humanized Perry and explained his motives through several narratological devices, analyzed in the present MA thesis as "empathy builders", the novel turns its attention to the Evil equally present in an excluding and polarized system,[61] whose acts finally appear to the narratee to be as morally reprehensible and aleatory as the Clutter murders. This symbolic interpretation, that allows the novel to give a universal value to a particular case, turns *In Cold Blood* into a heterodox portrait of the American Dream and its society, which, as F.R. Karl considers, "was ready to define itself in terms of its murders and its ability to murder" (1983: 579). The merciless representation of America in Capote's work seems to invite the readership to, on the one hand, "dwell on the social and ethical

[60] In relation to that, the novel reproduces a conversation between two journalists who discuss the physical suffering of the criminals during the execution, that brings Mably's principle to mind: "Uh-huh, but he don't feel nothing. Wouldn't be humane if he did." "Well. And I suppose they feed them a lot of pills. Sedatives" (332).

[61] "We are now moved by the fate of the murderer rather than that of the murdered, and we condemn the force that kills this wounded animal in cold blood" (Pizer 1971 :117).

problems present in the death of a murderer" (Pizer 1971: 118), and on the other, to interpret Perry's crimes, symbolically, as an inevitable gesture, symptomatic of his environment, in which:

> matar y morir es *el único gesto significativo* que se le permite a esta gente sin palabra, excluidos desde siempre de todo discurso […] en esta obra ya no es el magistrado —el delegado del poder, el Mismo— quien habla en nombre de ese Otro terrible y lejano, sino que es el propio criminal, el Loco, quien toma la palabra. (Morey 2014: 302, my emphasis)

All in all, by taking, as Morey's quote says, the perspective of the Evil, the Other, Capote's masterpiece invites its readership, through the "possible world" (Doležel) it constructs, to widen their ability to understand, offering a literary "safe" opportunity to liberate their empathic engagement from the "cultural distinctions, social norms and political practices of exclusion" (Pedwell 2014: 2) that limit it in everyday life. Despite its chronologic, stylistic, and thematic distance, this same ethical purpose can be found, as will be now explored, in the novel of a contemporary American-born author: *Les bienveillantes*, by Jonathan Littell.

4.2. "LE VRAI DANGER POUR L'HUMANITÉ": JONATHAN LITTELL'S *LES BIENVEILLANTES*

Categorized within the innovative label of "perpetrator literature" (Bird 2019: 302), Jonathan Littell's major work, *Les bienveillantes* (2006), consists of the fictional memoirs of a former SS officer, Maximilien "Max" Aue, who collaborated on the execution of the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* —"final solution to the Jewish question" —. Having been compared on several occasions with W. Groom's Forest Gump for his omnipresence in

the most important scenarios of Nazi Germany during the Second World War,[62] Aue recounts his experiences during more than nine-hundred pages, which are divided into seven chapters named after different baroque dances, following the sequence of a Bach suite. This intersemiotic transposition (Aktulum 2017: 33), by which the narrative of each chapter is influenced by the rhythm of its correspondent dance, allows the reader to compartmentalize and tackle the otherwise overwhelming plot.

In the first chapter, "Toccata", that I will examine more in depth in the following section, the protagonist, Maximilien Aue, introduces himself as a middle-aged man and an ex-nazi officer who has "tombé en bourgeoisie" (Littell 2006a: 19): he is currently running a lace factory somewhere in the north of France, and, despite his manifest homosexuality, is married to a woman "avec une certaine répugnance" and, "malhereusement" (Littell 2006a:19), as he regrets, he is also the father of twins. In this prologue, chronologically placed sometime in the seventies, Aue also announces his intention to write his war memoirs down, not as a self-justifying gesture —"je n'ai rien a justifier" (12)— towards his readership,[63] nor to be pardoned, but merely, as he insists, to entertain himself. Like the musical piece after which it is named, this section works as a prelude, is freer in its introspective style and enjoys a considerable independence from the rest of the work. Aue's long analepsis starts in "Allemandes I et II", where he depicts his experiences as a member of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the East Front, covering Ukraine, Crimea and the Caucasus, where his task was to report the mass murders of Jews and Bolsheviks. The *allegro* of the rapid succession of events at the beginning of this second chapter, "Allemande I", contrasts with the posterior quiet *moderato* of the successive "Allemande

[62] See David Gates, "The Monster in the Mirror", *The New York Times*, March 5th 2009 or Laila Lalami, "The Kindly Ones by Jonathan Littell", *Los Angeles Times*, March 15th 2009.

[63] "Si je me suis résolu à écrire, après tous ces années, c'est pour mettre les choses au point pour moi-même, pas pour vous" (11).

II", that corresponds to Aue's stay in a balneary due to his continuous psychosomatic crises of vomit, fever and diarrhea. After his partial recovery, and as a punishment for his disagreement about a massacre and for the growing rumors about his homosexuality, he is sent to the Battle of Stalingrad in "Courante". In this chapter, as fast and agile as the jumping dance that it evokes, Max is shot in the head, being saved and brought back to Germany by his loyal friend Thomas. In Berlin, he will spend a period of convalescence whose oneiric nature reflects the sinuosity of the chapter's movement, "Sarabande". After his recovery, Aue uses his military leave to go to Antibes to visit his mother and stepfather, with whom he has a conflictive relation. On arrival, he mysteriously discovers their corpses. Next, "Menuet (en rondeaux)" recounts, with a moderate and repetitive pace, the protagonist's service at the Ministry of Interior of the Third Reich in Berlin, where he strives to improve the productivity of the work camps in collaboration with personalities such as Himmler or Eichmann, a job that also leads him to visit the extermination camps in Poland. In this chapter, Weser and Clemens, two French policemen who start pursuing Max for being the main suspect of his mother's murder, make their first appearance. As the composition that entitles it, the following chapter, "Air", is a one-voice piece describing Max's two weeks of solitude in his brother-in-law's mansion in Pomerania, where he will engage in an autoerotic orgy, evade Weser and Clemens once again and be rescued from his confinement by Thomas, while, simultaneously, the Russian Army invades Germany. In the final chapter, "Gigue", a name that evokes a fast and complex choreography with an unexpected ending, Thomas and Max arrive in Berlin to witness the city's bombing, its siege, and the corresponding disbanding of the Third Reich. Finally, after having gotten rid of the two French inspectors harassing him with Thomas' aid, Aue murders the latter to steal a false French passport from him and ensure himself an escape from the Allies.

As the referred-to synchronization between the baroque dances and the diegetical rythm advances, *Les bienveillantes* stands as a highly technical narrative exercice whose formality remains inseparable from the general thematic and ethical sense of the novel. Many of the stylistic tools deployed in the narration are oriented, as has been mentioned, towards familiarizing the readership with the novel's protagonist, Max Aue, towards whom the "stream of empathy" of the text is directed. However, as will be addressed during this analysis, this conflicting affective investment, that "puts both author and reader on uncomfortable ethical ground, and on uncomfortable aesthetic ground as well" (Suleiman 2009: 2), leaves space for a "critical distance" (Gadamer) that, as Meretoja argues, "allows the reader to engage emotionally with an ethically problematic lifeworld without uncritically adopting the protagonist's perspective" (2016: 371).

4.2.1. VOICE: "JE VOUS DIS QUE JE SUIS COMME VOUS"

Within the ensemble of "empathy builders" that Little's artwork congregates, those concerning the narrative "voice" stand out because of their explicitness and affective strength. Following Genette's terminology anew, the single voice in *Les bienveillantes* can be clearly classified as, on the one hand, "homodiegetic", as Max is "a character in the story he tells" (Genette 1980: 245); and, on the other hand, "intradiegetic", because the former SS-agent "tells his own story" (Genette 1980: 248). In this "homodiegetic-intradiegetic paradigm" (Genette 1980: 248), the textual "voice" appears as an archetypical instance of the first-person self-narration that, as has been previously remarked in this MA thesis, is recognized by narrative theorists as the most obvious literary device "supporting character identification and contributing to empathic experiences" (Keen 2007: ii). The intimacy that this subjectivation fosters in an "almost

automatic call to empathy" (Suleiman, 2009: 2) is boosted in the text mainly through two moral demands made by Aue to his readership: the recognition of the humanity he has in common with them and the acceptance of their role as confidants. These two premises, that the narrator regards as necessary requirements to pursue the reading,[64] are already laid bare in the prelude, which, as Sanyal indicates, functions as a "reading contract" (2010: 48) and, I would add, as a veiled request for empathy. Consequently, in order to tackle the "empathy builders" concerning narrative "voice" in *Les bienveillantes*, I will be focusing on this revelatory first chapter of the novel in the following pages.

As Sanyal brilliantly argues (2010: 30), it seems no accident that this inaugural section is entitled "Toccata", as Aue's voice, situated now in the extradiegetic first narrative,[65] adopts an overt conative function (Jakobson) to "touch" the reader. This direct interpellation appears indeed in the novel's first line: "[…] laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça s'est passé" (11), a petition that he justifies alleging that his story concerns the reader directly: "vous verrez bien que ça vous concerne" (11). Therefore, Maximilien conceives his memoires as a "conte moral" (11), a lesson on humanity that should be known by all of his fellows "frères humains" (11) because, as he warns the reader, "vous avez peut-être eu plus de la chance que moi, mais vous n'êtes pas meilleur" (26-27). Through this equalizing movement, Aue locates himself within the "hommes ordinaires dont est constitué l'État" (27) and so, he justifies his actions by contextualizing them in the historical frame it was his fate to live. This will constitute one of his on-going strategies as an immoral first-person narrator: to assert that "he and the Nazis were not outside 'the human' but within it" (Suleiman 2009: 4). The initial denial of the reader's

[64] "Et si vous n'en êtes pas convaincu, inutile de lire plus loin. Vous ne comprendrez rein et vous vous fâcherez, sans profit pour vous ni pour moi" (Littell 2006a: 28).

[65] According to Genette's description of narrative levels, "Toccata" is situated in the time of the "narrative act" (1980: 227), corresponding to the extradiegetical "first narrative", while the rest of the novel, the narrator's memories, would constitute the diegesis stemming from this first narrative, therefore a metadiegetical "second narrative" (see Gennette 1980: 227-243).

position of moral superiority,[66] that will be constantly reiterated during the narration,[67] reveals itself as an obvious and paramount "empathy builder" if we take into consideration that, as Oatley puts it, "the sense of a shared humanity", so troublesome to assume in the case of a perpetrator of mass murder, lays the foundation for identification with fictional characters (2016: 623). This *captatio benevolentiae*, which has been compared with Baudelaire's famous incipit «Hypocrite lecteur/mon semblable/mon frère!»,[68] will also serve, as I will develop lately, as the ground for the final moral of Aue's testimony: "le vrai danger pour l'homme c'est moi, c'est vous" (27-28). All in all, it constitutes the base for this introductory "touching" of the narratee's sympathy, this *invitation à la lecture* whose ending claims once again: "je suis un homme comme les autres, je suis un homme comme vous. Allons, puisque je vous dis que je suis comme vous !" (30).

Having openly presented his readership with this binding contract as the starting point of their parasocial relationship (Oatley), the narrator makes another request of his "kindred reader" (Sanyal 2010: 48): if "voice" is, like Benveniste theorized, "the subjectivity of language" (cit. in Genette 213), Aue's narratee must accept to be the repository of his conflictive subjectivity. Thus, the "voice" in Littell's novel, with a transparent honesty, takes the intimacy inherent to the intradiegetic narration to an extreme by involving its receiver not only in his war memories, but also, as he warns in the prelude,[69] in his more personal experiences and thoughts. This second "empathy builder" inside the narrative category of "voice", which seeks to increment the reader's complicity, is already

[66] Littell himself specified in an interview with *La Libre Belgique* that his decision to approach perpetrator's literature from Nazism was motivated by a desire to "ancrer ce récit chez des gens comme nous pour empêcher le lecteur de prendre de la distance" (Jonathan Litell 2006b: entretien avec Guy Duplat).
[67] "On a beaucoup parlé, après la guerre, pour essayer d'expliquer ce qui s'était passé, de l'inhumain. Mais l'inhumain, excusez-moi, cela n'existe pas. Il n'y a que de l'humain et encore de l'humain" (543).
[68] See Ercolino 2018: 253, Meretoja 2016: 385 or Koppenfels 2012:142.
[69] "Je ne regrette rien : j'ai fait mon travail, voilà tout ; quant à mes histoires de famille, que je raconterai peut-êtra aussi, elles ne concernent qu'à moi" (Littell 2006a: 12).

exploited in "Toccata", in which the narrator-character confides some of his deepest secrets to his now "equal" confidant, as his hatred for his mother (28), the existence of a life-long "interdit" (29) love, his desire to have been born a woman (29) or his homosexuality (19). From this collection of taboos, that will become thematic *leitmotifs* in Aue's sustained introspection, S. Roussel (2010) highlights the last one as the main promotor of the complicity between character and reader. Being a participant in an ideology as homophobic as Nazism, Max's sexuality, if discovered, would signify an immediate death sentence, a Sword of Damocles that swings during the whole narration and whose menace motivates the reader to suffer with the protagonist and empathize with him, at least, in this respect. As a result, as Roussel concludes, the most personal side of the testimony, unknown to every character but not to the reader, adds a humanizing factor to the narrator and grants the receiver's partial solidarity, because "le récit fonctionne ainsi sur la détention et la préservation du secret […] et les lecteurs sont dans la confidence" (156).

Even if we are told Max will pour his heart out during the following one thousand pages, and he certainly does by revealing the events of his traumatic childhood and his horrifying acts as an *Einsatzgruppen* officer, the narrator assures us that he does not want his sins to be expiated with the reader's pardon. Like he himself claims in the first page, "ne pensez pas que je cherche à vous convaincre de quoi que ce soit" (11). Despite his reiterations that "c'est n'est pas de culpabilité, de remords qu'il s'agit ici" (15), the general self-justifying tone of this introduction —generated through his own constant contradictions,[70] his comparisons of the *Shoah* with other historical massacres (21) and, overall, the already

[70] "Si j'ai enfin décidé de d'écrire, c'est bien […] pour éclaircir un ou deux points obscurs, *pour vous* peut-être et pour moi-même" (13, my emphasis).

mentioned assertion of his humanity[71] and of his inevitable subordination to his circumstances[72]— clearly say the opposite. Then, as Delorme puts it, "[o]r, en dépit du discours que tient le narrateur-écrivain au début du roman, la culpabilité sous-jacente aux confessions du personnage tisse un impossible projet : écrire pour réparer la perte" (2010 : 45). In this sense, Aue's façade of cynicism cracks slightly in "Toccata",[73] as it will repeatedly do during his following testimony, to reveal a repressed sense of guilt that does not go unnoticed by the narratee, who becomes conscious of a suffering so deep that, as the narrator beautifully illustrates, "si jamais vous arriviez à me faire pleurer, mes larmes vous vitrioleraient le visage" (23). These inconsistencies in the narrative "voice" that, as Ercolino also indicates,[74] conceal an unconscious request for empathic understanding, become the third "voice"-related "empathy builder", as they may provoke compassion towards the confused narrator, who is apparently uncapable of dealing with his own memories.[75] Besides, these early impasses between what Max says and what the text leaves implicit anticipate the last particularity of the novel's "voice", to wit, Max Aue's progressively becoming an "unreliable narrator" (Genette 1980: 188).

In this way, as is anticipated in "Toccata", the intimate sincerity that underpins the "voice" of the I-narrator during the first half of the novel will progressively decay thenceforwards, corrupted by the protagonist's lacunae. This unreliability threatens both the complicity that has been established as the main "mode of narration" and the resulting

[71] As Ercolino states, "[m]ost disturbingly, Aue repeatedly tries to cancel the supposed human and moral distance between himself and the reader, indirectly arguing against the alleged historical singularity constituted by Nazism" (253).

[72] "Comme la plupart, je n'ai jamais demandé à devenir un assassin. […] Qui, de sa propre volonté, à part un fou, aurait choisit le meurtre ?" (28).

[73] "les remords […] cela aussi existe, sans doute, je ne veux pas le nier" (15).

[74] "However, despite his statements, what Aue actually *does*, particularly in the first section of the novel, 'Toccata', looks like a sly self-apology" (252).

[75] With regard to Aue's incapacity to bear his past, Meretoja specifies that, for the ex-nazi, "[t]he process of narrating is an attempt to confront and tame aspects of himself –and of humanity– that resist taming, like the scratching, volatile cat to which he compares his memories" (395).

"strategy of reading that this mode requires" (Sanyal 2010: 47), which was based on trust and understanding and constituted a basic "empathy builder" within the novel. Critics as H. Meretoja (2016) or Y. Ferdjani (2010) have related this change in the "voice's reliability to the gunshot wound that Max receives during the battle of Stalingrad, arguing that "the wound in Aue's head marks a turning point in the narration: afterwards, the sense of narrative mastery increasingly begins to break down" (Meretoja 2016: 394). In effect, after his oneiric period of convalescence, between "Courante" and "Sarabande", Max's capacity to interpret his own past decreases dramatically, affecting especially his family-related memories. Hence, for instance, in "Sarabande", Aue visits his mother in the south of France and he makes the acquaintance of two teenage twins (477), who have been raised in the family house and whose origin is unknown to the narrator. The following day, after a heated argument with his mother, Max discovers hers and her husband's corpses and abandons the scene of the crime with "une envie panique de fuir" (Littell 2006a: 488). Even if, as the literary critique has stressed,[76] every evidence incriminates Aue not only as guilty of matricide and murder but also as the father of the twins, who would be the result of his incestuous relations with his own twin sister,[77] Aue will claim to ignore who was the murderer of the couple and who are the parents of the twins. Therefore, he will defend his innocence and his lack of awareness of the truth during the whole novel, regardless of Weser and Clemens's incriminating proofs and the reader's certainty of his culpability. Thus, the narrator's unreliability[78]—a postmodern trait within a generally realistic narrative "voice"— transforms the character-narrator into, in F.

[76] See Delorme (2010: 42) or Roussel (2010: 161).
[77] "In his personal history, Aue represses the evidence of his murder and matricide, but also of his incest, since the mysterious twins are probably the outcome of his relations with his sister Una" (Sanyal 2010: 55).
[78] In fact, the narrator's confusion will do nothing but degenerate in the section "Air", described by Ercolino as "a powerful textual generator of empathic distress" (254). Aue's confusion between reality and imagination is admitted by himself when he argues: "Voilà ce don't je me souvenais, or il semble que les choses ne se soient pas passées ainsi" (798).

Holmes's words, "the text's first and worst reader" (2015: 232), consequently turning the reader into a better interpreter of the story than the protagonist himself. This hermeneutic imbalance, which translates into dramatic irony, has two main effects on the empathic perception of the fictional character: on the one hand, it adds realism to the narration and, on the other, it transmits the protagonist's distress, "that seems to know no bounds" (Ercolino 2018: 254). At first, Aue's increasing uncertainties do not undermine the trust on which the parasocial relation has been built and that has been maintained and reinforced during more than four hundred pages.[79] Far from eroding this bond, narratologists have claimed that the contradictions in the diegesis often give naturality to the narrative "voice".[80] Certainly, in *Les bienveillantes*, this formal aspect seems to humanize the protagonist, as it confirms the referred-to suspicion of his repression of the memories that, as he puts it, asphyxiate him like a mountain of stones upon his chest (Littell 2006a: 13). The reader's position of dramatic irony, that opens in this distance between what is said and what is understood, is highly significant for empathic reception, as it allows the reader to perceive Max's feelings of guilt and shame of which he himself is unaware. These instances of veiled meaning in the novel, which are detached from the perception of the narrator himself, will do nothing but multiply through the modal structure of the testimony, that is characterized by the employ of paralepses (Genette) and by the perspective distance given by Aue's "particular status as a perpetrator-witness" (Razinsky 2008: 15).

[79] In this sense, the novel's extension can be highlighted as another motivation for empathic attachment, an additional "empathic building" strategy already remarked by Ercolino, who claims that "the length of the exposure to Aue contributes to the creation of an empathic bond between him and the reader that, from the very beginning of the narrative, is forged by negativity and distress" (253).

[80] "This lack of certainty may be attributed to a postmodern formulation, but also, and most importantly, to the reflection of human nature […] in the workings of memory" (Lopez-Deflory 2016: 173).

4.2.2. MOOD: MONO-PERSPECTIVISM AND THE REJECTION OF THE LÉVINASIAN "FACE"

At first sight, the diegetic "mood" that Littell's novel puts into practice presents no apparent difficulties. It reunites the traditional characteristics of mono-perspectivism that usually accompanies an intradiegetical narration, even if, in the present case, this is complicated by the ideological bias of the focalizer. In general terms, the diegesis is narrated from the point of view of the character-narrator (adult Max Aue) and focalized, exclusively, by the character-protagonist (younger Max Aue). As a result, the focalization is *internal* (Gennette), because "the narrative is focused through the consciousness of a character" (Culler 1980: 11) and constantly *fixed*, as the subject of this internal focalization does not change during the whole story (Gennette 1980: 189). As a result, in P. Tame's words, Max guides us through his memories of Nazi Germany, "comme un Dante démoniaque dans cet enfer guerrier" (2010: 214). Yet, I would say, to be more precise but still in line with Tame's adequate literary comparaison, that Aue is more a Virigil than a Dante: he plays the role of the readership's guide and is the unique source of information on the hell-like panorama that he depicts. Taking into account this continual unilaterality, this section will examine the novel's mono-perspectivism as one of the technical aspects that generate negative empathy in the text. The "mood"'s mono-perspectivism would be then a main "empathy builder" because, as Ercolino suggests, having the former SS-officer as their only reference, the readership is partially "entrapped" in his personal perceptions: "Throughout the narration, pages-long paragraphs and periods, the articulated hypotactic structure of sentences, and the narrative's confessional register itself create a sense of never-ending *entrapment*; an entrapment in the turbid flow of Aue's obsessions, […] an entrapment in the endlessly repeating nightmare of history" (2018: 254, emphasis in the original). Hence, the episodes

that Aue's focalization encompasses, the zoom of the focus through which those dramatic events are reviewed and, most importantly, the attitude and moral considerations that accompany Max's point of view are essential constructors not only of the plot, but also of the reader's affective perception of the protagonist.

In general terms, Max's focalization, or his presentation of the narrative information (Genette 1980: 162), stands out for its precision and its meticulous realism. As most critics admit,[81] in what concerns his experiences as a member of the Third Reich, the protagonist of *Les bienveillantes* constitutes a "reliable historical witness", as he possesses "the intelligence and analytic ability, the emotional detachment and temporal distance" (Suleiman 2009: 5) necessary for a clear review of the historical events. In relation to this, L. Razinsky point out how Aue's job within the Nazi machinery —to gather information and to write reports— coincides perfectly with his function within the text, which is equally "[…] that of an eye. He sees. He is more often a conduit of information than active participant […] Aue functions, then, not only as a witness, but almost as in situ annalist" (2008: 71-72). Despite the passivity of the narrator, mentioned by Razinsky, and the general detached tone of his *témoignage*, Max position as an observer, as he himself recalls, does not transform him into a neutral reporter of the Holocaust:[82] he remains a perpetrator, an immoral condition that determines, irrevocably, his point of view, as it collides with the reader's sense of moral decency. Here lays, accordingly, the most problematic aspect of the novel's narrative "mood".

The ideological dilemma that this perspective poses can be easily conceptualized if, as H. Meretoja proposes, it is addressed through Gadamer's hermeneutic concepts of "horizon"

[81] Razinsky: "[…] exact in his minute details, wide-ranging in his coverage of the war almost from beginning to end, precise in his use of specific dates and reference to real events, Littell is, in a way, really writing history" (2008: 71) and Ferdjani "Heureusement, d'autres critiques ont remarqué que Aue est comme un filtre à travers lequel on peut observer la barbarie. […] Ce n'est pas tant un personnage, qu'une voix, un ton, un regard" (2010 : 264), among others.

[82] "Je considère que regarder engage autant de responsabilité que faire" (445).

and "application". From Gadamer's point of view, the "horizon" of a character, meaning "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, qtd. in Deciu 67), emerges directly from the character's focalization. When reading a fictional work, the "horizon" imposed by the novel encounters the reader's own vision of affairs —or "horizon"— in the moment of reception, which Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons" or *Horizontverschmelzung* (Gadamer 1997: 302). To resolve this distance between the narratee's and the narrator's "horizons"—that, in the case of *Les bienveillantes*, is assumed to be a considerable one—, the readership is forced, according to Gadamer, to engage in an "application", that is to say, in an adjustment of their frame of reference and temporal range to those pertaining to the perspective of the fictive other (Deciu 2016: 68). Despite all of this, as has been previously exposed in this MA thesis, the process of "application", like that of developing empathy, is dialectical, because, as Meretoja also underlines, "the ability to perceive the world from the perspective of the other does not mean letting go of one's own values" (2016: 388). This last point is essential for the creation of "negative empathy" in *Les bienveillantes*, as it helps in facing the unethical nature of the narrator's focus by making it possible to, simultaneously, "imagine an ethically problematic life-world and to retain a critical distance from this world" (Meretoja 2016: 388). Nevertheless, as will be now exposed, the protagonist's "horizon" as a criminal is not monolithically immoral, as said immorality is constantly problematized, bringing a shade of grey to his point of view, whose fissures permit the stream of empathy to filter in. In this sense, two specific uses of the novel's focalization, which dissent from Max's otherwise constant "emotional detachment" (Suleiman), will be addressed here, argue that they collaborate in converting Aue's monoperpectivism into one of the major "empathy builders" in *Les bienveillantes*: his approach to the victims and their killing, and his depiction of his fellow Nazi officers.

Gathered in the second chapter, "Allemandes I et II", when Max is in charge of documenting the Nazi's procedures in Ukraine and the Caucasus, the *Aktions* perpetrated against Jews and Bolsheviks constitute the most stunning events narrated from the point of view of a perpetrator. Even though his activity is that of an informer, the protagonist assists regularly to the killings, but, as he confesses only to his readership, they disgust him: "j'ai des doutes sur nos méthodes, je le puis en toute sincerité: j'en saisissais mal la logique" (81). As this quote displays, he justifies this secret disapproval, though, through cold economic and logical reasoning: the murder of thousands appears to him as "un gâchis humain" that causes him "une rage immense, démesurée" (126) that he interprets, apparently, as a reaction to the loss of possible workers for the Third Reich. Despite his "early revulsion for acts of war-time slaughter" (Lyle 2008: 85), he complies with the Führer's orders, apparently, without further hesitation, considering the *Endlösung* "inévitable et nécessaire" (81). This apathy is mirrored in "le regard froid de l'objectif" (De Tholozany 2010: 201) through which Aue narrates the first massacres, described with an objective and informative style. Like Razinsky points out, however, Aue's blindness to the victims is usually complicated by the focalization itself: "While most of the narration is conveyed from an indifferent perspective vis-à-vis the victim's individuality, on a few occasions, in the case of a few 'chosen' victims, Aue actually sees a human in front of him" (2008: 79). It could be said, therefore, that amid the Bosch-like detailed panoramic of hell that Max provides, his point of view sometimes *zooms* in on a specific victim, who, in an immediate symbolic gesture becomes, in Lévinasian terms, the "face of the Other" (Lévinas 2011: 87), and as a result, the "naked face" (Peperzak 1993: 83) of all the condemned.

In those instances, the novel's protagonist demonstrates a "certain moral sensibility" (Suleiman 2009:2) in front of the "nakedness and defenselessness" of the Other (Peperzak

1993:83) that, for some critics, approaches sympathy (Delorme 2010: 39) or even empathy (Razinsky, 80). Examples of such morally revealing encounters concentrate in the first half of the novel, being the most prominent ones Aue's friendship with the pianist Jew child, Yakov (104), who is finally murdered after having lost his hand in a working accident and to whom the anti-hero is "un peu attaché" (109); his concern for the little girl who looks for her mother in the mass graves (107), and that he reluctantly gives to a SS-soldier to be executed;[83] or the hanging of the partisan girl, whose "regard clair et lumineux" makes Max "éclater en flames" (171). Nevertheless, the clearest interpellation for "responsibility" (Lévinas 2011: 87) made by "the Face" in the novel is personified in a dying young girl, whom Aue individualizes and on whom he takes pity for a moment:

> […] mon regard croisa celui d'une belle jeune fille, presque nue mais très élégante, calme, ses yeux emplis d'une immense tristesse […] je voulais de tout mon coeur me pencher et lui essuyer la terre et la sueur mêlées sur son front, lui caresser la joue et lui dire que ça allait, que tout irait pour le mieux mais à la place je lui tirai convulsivement une balle dans la tête. (126)

As this last example clearly illustrates, Aue finally ignores what is, for Lévinas, the first implication of the acknowledgement of "the Face": namely, the order "thou shalt not kill" (Lévinas 2011: 89). However, this ethical irresponsiveness to the encounter with the Lévinasian Other, as Razinsky notes, "is far from mere indifference" (2008: 79) because, as is usual in the narration, Aue's behavior and musings contradict his ideological reasoning in order to "testify his ethical involvement" (Razinsky, 2008: 79) and preoccupation for the suffering of Others. In general terms, and despite his not answering "the call" (Lévinas 2011: 89), Max does not forget the responsibility that the Face entails: after having left the lost little girl, he reports feeling "le vertige, je voulais pleurer […] je

[83] "'Sois gentil avec elle', lui dis-je assez stupidement" (Littell 2006a: 106).

ressentais une collère folle" (107), he runs to the woods to cry, a place that now "me faisait peur" (108) for being the space where the massacres are executed. This copying mechanism that he comes up with is repeated after finishing the young girl off, when he hides among the trees, again, to cry (126). Also, when the partitures that he wanted to give to Yakov as a present arrive after the boy's murder, he experiences "une grande mélancolie" (141) and, two years after the execution of the partisan girl, he recalls her, sobbing, "ravagé par son souvenir, ma Notre-Dame-des-Nieges" (835). Right after, he adds: "ce n'était pas des remords, je n'avais pas des remords […] seulement je comprenais ce que cela voulait dire de pendre une fille" (835). In spite of his manifested lack of remorse, these emotional reactions to his war experiences appear to the readership, from their position of dramatic irony, as obvious manifestations of a repressed sense of guilt and of an existential suffering. In fact, what has been previously called in this MA thesis "dramatic irony" acquires, from the perspective of the narrative "mood", the category of what Genette labels "paralepsis", which refers to when the focalization gives *less* information about the transcendence of the events than what the readership can infer (Genette 1980: 199). The "paralepses" of the novel would hide, in this case, the protagonist's tribulation, essential for a sympathetic response to him because, as Ercolino notes, "the men's suffering invites empathy, and their gradual self-castigating introspection and awareness of their own culpability emphasizes their humanity and potential for moral salvation" (2018: 305). As Razinsky explains, through these moments of revelation and weakness, and also through his more general reflections on the Jews' tragic destiny,[84] Max is "unconsciously" giving testimony for the lives of the victims […] bringing their lives out of the dark" (2008: 81). Probably as a consequence of the tendency

[84] "Qui me demandais-je, pleurera tous ces Juifs tués, tous ces enfants juifs enterrés les yeux ouverts sous la riche terre noire de l'Ukraine, si on tue aussi leurs sœurs et leurs mères ? Si on les tuait tous, il ne resterait personne pour les pleurer" (Littell 2006a :113).

of the narratee to feel "compassion for the suffering hero" (Jauss, qtd. in Ercolino 2018: 248), these contradictions in the focalization trigger in the readership, on the one hand, negative empathy for the protagonist , and, on the other, a desire to witness his redemption, to see him repenting and transforming his latent bad consciousness into an active response. This expected reaction, of course, never takes place in *Les bienveillantes* which comes as a frustration for the receiver, who experiments then the "non-cathartic" (Ngai) dimension of negative empathy, qualified by Ercolino as a "regressive aesthetic experience" (2018: 244). According to the theorist, in Littell's novel, this literary effect "rests on the peculiar feeling of *permanent shock* caused by reading" (254, emphasis in the original), which is transmitted, in my opinion, by means of the novel's partial recurrence to excess and transgression (Razinsky 2008: 82). In the diegesis, this stylistic trait is patent not only in the "atrocity exhibition" (Razinsky 2008: 82) of the mass murders, but also in the eschatological focalization on Aue's medical symptoms: vomits, diarrhea[85] and anxiety attacks.[86] These maladies, as the reception of the novel has agreed on,[87] seem to be psychosomatic and therefore, would constitute another confirmation of the protagonist's veiled distress for the victims. Even if his health problems start at the same time as his testimony of the executions, normally occurring right after them,[88] and are said to continue in his old age,[89] Max is, once again, unable to relate these physical reactions to his moral guilt. Nonetheless, he manages to establish this connection when it

[85] "Je n'avais vomi qu'une seule fois ou deux, mais, régulièrement, après le repas, j'étais pris de ces haut-le- coeur degréables et fatigants" (137); "Je vomissais souvent maintenant et sentais que je tombais un peu malade,j'avais de la fièvre, pas assez pour me retenir au lit, mais plutôt de longs frisons et une sensation de fragilité, comme si ma peau devenait de cristal" (168).
[86] "la nuit, je ne dormais pas […] J'avais la vertigen, je voulais pleurer" (106) ; " De nouveau, une immense envie de pleurer me submergeait. Cela me prenait souvent maintenant" (358).
[87] See Sanyal (2010: 54) or Ercolino (2018: 254).
[88] "j'imaginais ces garçons proprets ou ces jeunes filles au charme discret sous le gaz, pensées qui me soulevaient le cœur […] et pour la première fois depuis longtemps j'avais envie de vomir, vomir mon impuissance, ma tristesse, et ma vie inutile" (724).
[89] In "Toccata", Aue interrupts his diegesis to explain: "Une breve pause pour aller vomir, et je reprends. C'est une autre de mes nombreuses petites afflictions […] C'est un vieux problème, ça date de la guerre, ça a commencé vers l'automne 1941 pour être précis, en Ukraine, à Kiev je pense, ou peut-être à Jitomir" (15).

comes to the symptomatology of his fellow SS-officers: "leurs réactions, leur violence, leur alcoolisme, les dépressions nerveuses, les suicides […] tout cela démontrait que l'autre *existe*, existe en tant qu'autre, en tant qu'humain" (142, emphasis in the original). In fact, as will be now explored, Max's internal point of view when dealing with the characterization of the other Nazi perpetrators is highly important for the humanization of his *dramatis persona*, as in those portrayals, the mono-perspectivism directs the "stream of empathy" towards Max himself.

On the one hand, the description of the brutal actions committed by his comrades gives room for the reader to establish a comparison between them and the narrator, a comparison that is favorable to the latter. On the other hand, because of the analytical perspective from which the Nazi procedures are recounted and his subsequent opinions on them, Max seems to distance himself from the national-socialist system. Thus, during the course of his career as an SS-officer in the East Front, Stalingrad and Berlin, Max observes his peers —whether officers, soldiers and bureaucrats— closely, in order to report they behavior and to categorize them in accordance with their nature:

> Je pouvais maintenant distinguer trois tempéraments parmi mes collègues […] des criminels, qui s'avaient découvert grâce à la guerre. Puis il y avait ceux que cela dégoûtait et qui tuaient par devoir, en surmontant leur répugnance, par amour de l'ordre. Enfin, il y avait ceux qui considéraient les Juifs comme des bêtes et les tuaient comme un boucher égorge une vache […] Et moi, alors ? *Moi, je ne m'identifiais à aucun de ceux trois types.* (105-106, my emphasis)

As we can see in the quote above, Aue detaches himself from his equals,[90] and considers himself, like P. Tame notes, "un marginal. Ce n'est pas un fasciste orthodoxe. C'est

[90] In relation to this, the protagonist even grows afraid of following the same path as "the others". In Stalingrad after having met a remarkably dehumanized young officer, he wonders: "Dans combien de temps, me demandai-je, serai-je comme lui ? Cette pensée me donnait envie de pleurer" (340).

d'ailleurs ce qui nous intéresse chez lui. Il incarne 'le héros problématique', type héroïque de Georg Lukács, en lutte avec lui-même et avec la société" (2010: 219). Effectively, Max will continuously manifest his disapproval of the "antisémites viscéraux, obscènes" (227), not only by sharing that opinion with the reader —"tuer sans comprendre pourquoi et sans souci non plus […] Voilà ce que je ne comprenais pas" (89)— but also by confronting the abusers directly, for instance, when one of them kills a newborn (149), or tortures a prisoner without reason.[91] Aue's dissidences from the ideology of the Third Reich, in which he started to participate actively by chance only in order to avoid a condemnation for homosexuality (74), increase in number during the narration.[92] Besides, they are accompanied by a growing apathy on the part of the narrator,[93] who becomes familiarized with this "horror piled upon horror" (Arendt 1963: 8), a moral decay of which he blames the Nazi regime: "*Voilà ce qu'ils ont fait de moi*, me disais-je, un homme qui ne peut voir une forêt sans songer à une fosse commune" (Littell 645, my emphasis). This passive distance is moreover broadened by the chronological distance between the I-narrator and the I-protagonist, that allows the first to introduce historical references extracted from his posterior readings on the Holocaust.[94] All these apparently impartial analysis of Nazi Germany —concerning the officers, the methodology and the posterior

[91] "Je rejoignis Turek en deux enjambées et le saisis rudement par le bras : 'Vous êtes devenu fou ! Cessez cela tout de suite'" (229).
[92] In "Sarabande", Aue hesitates about his commitment to Nazism in the following terms: "Un homme de convictions? Autrefois, sans doute, j'en avais été un, mais maintenant, où se tenait-elle, la clarté de mes convictions ? […] si je tentais d'en saisir une, elle me filait entre les doigts, comme une anguille nerveuse et musclée" (439).
[93] Already in Berlin, he asks himself when did he stop being affected by horror: "En Ukraine ou au Caucase, des questions de cet ordre me concernaient encore, je m'affligeais de difficultés et en discutais avec sérieux, avec le sentiment qu'il s'agissait là de problèmes vitaux. Mais ce sentiment semblait s'être perdu. Où cela, à quel moment ? À Stalingrad ? […] le sentiment qui me dominait à présent était une vaste indifférence" (525).
[94] For instance, the narrator demonstrates his posterior reading of the records of the Nuremberg trials and of Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem, when, dealing with the figure of this bureaucrat, he explains: "Si j'ai décrit si longuement ces rencontres avec Eichmann, ce n'est pas que je m'en souvienne mieux que d'autres: mais ce petit Oberstrumbannführer, entre-temps, est devenu une sorte de célébrité [...] ce n'étais certainement pas *l'ennemi du genre humain* qu'on a décrit à Nuremberg [...] il n'était non plus une incarnation du *mal banal*" (524, emphasis in the original).

literature on the subject— give to the focalization of the protagonist the qualities of that of a witness, a particularity of the "mood" that Razinsky (2008) also noticed: "This structure of simultaneous belonging and distance, so that Aue is at once wholly within the Nazi system and sufficiently outside it to see it for what it is, both historically and morally, is what defines his particular status as a perpetrator-witness" (15). On the whole, this ambiguous double-face nature in the novel's mono-perspectivism would make it easier for the narratee to, as Suleiman says, make "empathy for a perpetrator of genocide" coexist "with revulsion and moral condemnation" (2009: 2), as the protagonist himself tries to strike a balance between indignation and passivity. Finally, Max's intermediate moral position is partially resolved when, in "Menuet (en rondeaux)", he offers himself to investigate on the improvement of the life conditions in the concentration camps. Like Suleiman observes, "[t]his twist allows Littell to show Aue as being appalled and indignant at the treatment of the prisoners […] without abandoning his Nazi allegiance" (2009: 11). Like his engineer friend Osnabrugge,[95] from thenceforth, Aue will focus on constructing instead of on destroying, even if, unlike the former, he considers his present role as a perpetrator the logical outcome of a life-long tendency "à la radicalité" (95): a connection between his war experiences and his traumatic past that is inspected in the novel through the use of the narrative "tense".

4.2.3. TENSE : "LA PASSION POUR L'ABSOLU"

As has already been mentioned, *Les bienveillantes* presents a clear temporal distance between "the time of the narrating", to wit older Max writing his memories; and "the time of the story" (Genette 1980: 29), meaning the intradiegetic events in which a younger

[95] The bridge engineer confesses to Aue : "Même quand j'étais petit, j'aimais construire, alors que tous mes camarades de classe ne voulaient que casser" (631).

Max was involved.[96] This narratological structure, which affects the extradiegetic time of the narrative, seems to imitate that of oral literature, in which a character explains his past to an audience, is constantly made explicit during the "time of the story" through what Genette called "metalepses", that is to say, "the transition from one narrative level to another" (1980: 234). The incursions of the character-narrator in the diegesis, as I have pointed out in the previous sections, accomplish different tasks —from providing historical insights to manifesting his own unreliability[97]— but sometimes they simply fulfill the fatic function (Jakobson) of activating the communication between narrator and narratee. These interventions remind the latter of the presence of the "voice" in the present-time first narrative and give realism to the memoirs. The motivation of the metalepses, in which the narrator provides "addresses to the reader" (Genette 1980: 234) is, for instance, to recall their reading contract — "Je ne racontai pas tout cela à Partenau: mais à vous, je le raconte" (190)— to provide a reminder of the reader's freedom to terminate that contract —"vous disposez d'un pouvoir sans appel, celui de fermer ce livre et de le jeter à la poubelle" (720)— or even a warning —"Vous devez penser: ah, cette histoire est enfin finie. Mais non, elle continue encore" (837). Through these metaliterary comments, the text reasserts the intimacy of the narrating space, prompting an emotional engagement, but also displays the influence of the oral tradition of storytelling, in which such interpellations are common. Having defined itself as a "veritable conte moral" already in the first page (12), this self-imposed label is indeed suitable not only for the extradiegetic ordination just explained, manifested through metalepses, but also for the intradiegetic time, that is, in what the narrative "tense" of the novel is concerned, because,

[96] "Narrative is a doubly temporal sequence: There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier)" (Christian Metz, qtd. in Genette, 33).
[97] "Tout cela, se peut-il que je l'aire alors pensé? De telles idées ne me seraient-elles pas plutôt venues bien plus tard, lorsque la fin approchait, ou quand tout était déjà fini ?" (317).

as Genette points out, "folklore narrative habitually conforms, at least in its major articulations, to chronological order" (1986: 36).

In relation to the temporality of the novel, besides the asynchrony between the two narrative levels sketched above, *Les bienveillantes* deploys a very lineal and simplified temporal model. The intradiegetic time, or the time of the second narrative, covers approximately four years, from the executions by shooting in the East Front in 1941 to the Fall of Berlin in 1945. In the diegesis, all the occurrences are narrated with a regular duration, despite the usual and detailed "descriptive pauses" (Genette 1980:99) and the narrator's introspections. The "tense" of the novel approximates, then, the ideal "zero degree" of duration, "that would be a condition of perfect temporal correspondence between narrative and story" (Genette 1980: 36). Hence, in matters of narrative duration, the diegesis is constructed primarily through a succession of scenes,[98] without remarkable accelerations or decelerations, and it includes a single important "implicit ellipsis" or "chronological lacuna" (Genette 1980: 108), which concerns the night of the murder of Max's mother and stepfather. The same lack of complexity is present in what refers to the novel's temporal frequency, as the narrative events are exposed only once, if we exclude from consideration the analeptic speculations made by Weser and Clemens during their interrogations of Max on the mentioned murder.[99] Finally, considering the temporal order of the events, there is no dramatic enigma other than the nature of the "amour interdit" announced in the preface. No temporal prolepses are noteworthy either. Nevertheless, as the second and main narration starts with a 29-years-old protagonist, the diegesis will resort to analeptic anachronisms so as to give information about his childhood and early

[98] It could be argued that the main structuring principle for the novel, Bach's suite, already advances this temporal organization, as the French term "suite" translates into English as "succession".
[99] Such iterative passages are to be found in the section "Menuet (en rondeaux)", for instance in pages 675 to 677 and 693 to 694.

youth. As has been previously pointed out, such biographical details are key for an empathic engagement with the protagonist, because they signify an extension in "the representation of a character's subjectivity" (Suleiman 2009: 2), indispensable for deepening the parasocial relation. Consequently, the biographical analepses in *Les bienveillantes* would constitute another "empathy builder" in the text. In addition, in this case, his early life constitutes, for Max Aue, the traumatic baseline for his posterior implication in the Nazi regime, an implicit and subjective relation of causality that contributes to the understanding of his lifetime.

Thus, from the first chapter in the second narrative, "Allemandes I et II", Max Aue will introduce retrospections that could be classified, according to Genette's taxonomy, as external and homodiegetic analepses, because their reach is located outside the temporal field of the first narrative but they deal with the same diegetic content as the latter (Genette 1980: 61), that is to say, they are part of Max's memories. By means of these flashbacks, the readership is informed that Max's father abandoned his family in 1921 and disappeared (Littell 182), an absence that the protagonist blames on his mother,[100] who remarried a French wealthy man, Aristide Moreau and moved from Germany to the South of France with Max and his twin sister, Una. At age thirteen, in Antibes, where Max suffered from school bullying, his incestuous love with Una was discovered. As a consequence, their mother sent them to separate catholic boarding schools, increasing Max's lifelong hatred for her[101] and causing him "un cauchemar de plusieur années et qui, d'une certaine manière, *dure encore*" (190, my emphasis). After several years in the catholic institution, where he was physically and sexually abused,[102] Maximilien

[100] "Je ne l'avais pas tout de suite blâmée pour la disparition de mon père : cette idée-là ne s'est imposée que plus tard, lorsqu'elle se prostitua à ce Moreau" (343).
[101] Aue even defends that this antagonism started at birth: "Fait étrange, je m'étais révélé mortellement allergique au lait de son sein" (343).
[102] Max opens his narration of the abuses by declaring: "Tout dans cette école était déformé et perverti" (191).

expressed his desire to study Literature, but his mother forced him to start a career in Law at the university, where one of his teachers introduced him to the national-socialist ideology. Finally, having never renounced his love for his sister, he will consider her posterior marriage as treachery and that will result in his overwhelming feeling of solitude[103] and his rejection of heterosexuality[104] and marriage, as well as it will trigger his voluntary enlistment for the East Front.

Aue's biographic self-examinations, that, in a revealing structure, take place generally right after witnessing a brutal war scene,[105] show a transgressive and distressing past that, according to the narrator, is indissociable from his diegetic warlike present: "Depuis mon enfance, j'étais hanté par la passion de l'absolu et du dépassement des limites; maintenant, cette passion m'avais mené au bord des fosses communes de l'Ukranie" (Littell 2006a: 95). For him, the war trauma is just the logic continuation of the "tendance à l'absolu" that, along his life, he has learned to embrace: "si la radicalité, c'était la radicalité de l'abîme, et si l'absolu se révélait être le mauvais absolu, il fallait néanmoins, de cella au moins j'étais intimement persuadit, les suivre jusqu'au bout, les yeux grands ouverts" (95). Hence, Aue does not leave his problems, either moral or biographic, behind, but magnifies them. In doing so he generates, as Radinsky diagnoses, a thematic concordance between his upsetting past and the horror of his historical context: "Reality is excessive, and Aue's psychic world, the demons of his imagination and his metaphors are not incongruent with it" (2008: 77). Therefore, just like, in spite of his doubts, the anti-hero

[103] A recurrent phrase in the novel leads the readership to think that Maximilien feels immersed in an absolute solitude whose only remedy is his sister's presence and, eventually, that of his friend Voss: "Hélas Voss était mort, et j'étais de nouveau seul (310)", "Puis elle [Una] raccrocha et je fus de nouveau seul"(459).
[104] "Lorsque je regardais des filles [...] je me disais: À quoi bon, ce n'est pas elle et ce ne le sera jamais. Mieux vaut donc que moi-même je sois elle et tous les autres, moi" (192).
[105] For exemple, after describing a scene about the victims of an air attack in Stalingrad, Max relates the anguish of this situation to the anxiety of his own childhood memories: "À travers cette engoisse des images du passé remontaient comme des noyés après un naufrage, une par une, de plus en plus fréquentes. C'étaient des souvenirs souvent pitoyables. Ainsi, deux ans après notre arrivée chez Moreau […]" (360).

will never abandon his Nazi militance, he will not renounce his deep hatred for his mother, his search for his father[106] or his desire to be loved back by his sister again. In fact, in more than one occasion, Max tries to link his implication in the Third Reich project to his family issues, as if the first was a copying mechanism or a clue to solve the latter. For exemple, the evening before committing matricide, Max reasons: "au fond, le problème collectif de Allemands, c'était le même que le mien ; eux aussi, ils peinaient à s'extraire d'un passé douloureux, […] C'est ainsi qu'ils en étaient venus à la solution radicale entre toutes, le meurtre, l'horreur pénible du meurtre. Mais le meurtre était-il une solution?" (485). Then, as Roussel (2010) defends, the crisis of the subject merges with the historical crisis, creating an aesthetic tone (Adorno) of chaos and moral corruption that expresses the existential *cul-de-sac* in which Maximilien Aue is trapped. Even though the narrator does not explicitly justify his actions for the Reich through his conflictive past, these flashbacks sprinkle in the novel the boundless angst (Ercolino 2018: 254) of the protagonist: a tragic pathos provoked by his "passion pour le radical et l'absolu" (Littell 2006a: 95). The novel's thematic investment in this pain, conducted through external analepses, facilitates the co-suffering of the readership, that is to say their em-*pathos*, with the negative character. In addition, to stress the effect of "permanent shock" (Ercolino 2018: 254) in the reception and to go into detail in Max's characterization, his family memories are employed, by means of the hypotext (Aktulum, 34) to which they remit, to provide a moral reading of the protagonist and of the text as a whole. Therefore, an insight on the thematic aspect of the narration, based mainly on Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* and influenced by Hannah Arendt's philosophical opinions on "the banality

[106] As Roussel indicates: "les figures du père et de la mère sont omniprésentes tout au long du roman, dans les souvenirs comme dans les rêves" (163). In effect, Max seems to live in the shadow of this absent paternal figure, seeking for an impossible validation, as this passage evokes: "Tu as mûri. Ton père aurait été fier." Ces paroles *me touchèrent au vif*: 'vous croyez?'" (417, my emphasis).

of evil", will permit this narratological analysis of *Les bienveillantes* to conclude with some remarks on the literary encounter with Evil proposed by Littell as a possibly illuminating and "regressively cathartic" experience (Ercolino).

4.2.4. THEMATIC STRUCTURE: THE BANALITY OF EVIL

Turning to the metaphoric association between the text and the texile,[107] as Sanyal states (2010: 57), the character-narrator's job in the lace industry seems to anticipate the dense intertextual net that his memoirs will weave. Among the literary references that the novel incorporates, the last play of Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia*, *The Eumenides*, is the most obvious one, as well as the most relevant in thematic and hermeneutic terms. As a great part of the novel's critique has established,[108] the Aue's familial saga is a re-writing, that is, a hypertext,[109] of Aeschylus tragedy: like Orestes, Max kills his mother and stepfather to take revenge for his father's disappeareance, he has an incestous relation with his sister (Una/ Electra) and an omnipresent friend (Pylades/ Thomas) (Grethlein 2009:78). In the Greek drama, because of the murders he has commited, Orestes is pursued by The Furies: feminine personifications of revenge and justice who defend a relentless morality and apply divine retributions to criminals. In the *Oresteia*, goddess Athenea convinces the Furies to stop harassing Orestes, and, in order to prevent the fury inherent in their name, she re-baptizes them with the Greek antiphrasis "eumenides", what is to say "the kindly ones" or, in French, "les bienveillantes".

[107] As Barthes brilliantly indicated : "Tout texte est un intertexte ; d'autres textes sont présents en lui, à des niveaux variables, sous des formes plus ou moins reconnaissables: les textes de la culture antérieure et ceux de la culture environnante; *tout texte est un tissu* nouveau de citations révolues" (1974: 6, my emphasis).
[108] See Grethlein (2009) or Hall (2016).
[109] Hypertextuality can be defined as "any relation uniting a text B (that Genette calls hypertext) with a previous text A (that he calls hypotext)" (Aktulum 2017: 34).

Leaving the plot similarities aside, this hypertextual relation has been regarded as opening up multiple ethical and interpretative horizons within Littell's novel. For instance, literary theorists such as H. Meretoja (2016: 389) or J. Delorme (2010: 37) have wondered who is to assume, in this revision of Orestes's tragedy, the role of the righteous Furies. As J. Grethlein notes (2010: 79), the obvious equivalents to these ancient deities in Littell's fiction are the French policemen, Weser and Clemens, who go after Aue vigorously during the second half of the plot. Nonetheless, as the critic also states (82), this solution would be incomplete, because in the closing of the novel, right after the murder of both officers, the protagonist solemnly states:

> J'étais triste, mais sans trop savoir pourquoi. Je ressentais d'un coup tout le poids du passé, de la douleur de la vie et de la mémoire inaltérable, je restais seul avec l'hippopotame agonisant, quelques austruches et les cadavres, seul avec le temps et la tristesse et la peine du souvenir, la cruauté de mon existance et de ma mort encore à venir. *Les bienveillantes avaient retrouvé ma trace*. (894, my emphasis)

When interpreting this last paragraph, whose inclusion of the title provides the novel with a structural symmetry, all the critics cited above have coincided that the referred-to *bienveillantes* are "these sad thoughts that will haunt Aue" (Grethlein 2010: 79). In line with this, the exercise of writing his sad memories down, "s'avérerait un moyen grâce auquel l'ex-bourreau parviendrait en quelque sorte à se déprendre de ses démons mémoriels qui le poursuivent sans cesse" (Delorme 2010 :37). Without aiming to contradict these two substantiated interpretations, but wanting to take them a step forward, I identify, as it will be further developed in the next paragraphs, a third possible symbolic *bienveillantes* within the narrative act: Aue's readership.

As both Suleiman and Meretoja have pointed out, in the novel, "through the Orestes myth, the problematic of responsibility acquires a Greek dimension" (Meretoja 2016: 389). The

assumption of the Ancient Greek conception of guilt would have a dual significance. The Greeks considered that, legally, "we are responsible for our actions irrespective of whether or not we understand what we have done" (Meretoja 2016: 389). Moreover, whichever the punishment applied by men for said actions, it was also thought that only the deities —in this case the goddesses of vengeance, the Erinyes or Furies— could finally absolve the criminal. The wrath of the Furies, who would torment the guilty one to madness, could only be placated when the condemned passed a ritual by which someone willingly purified him from the sins committed.[110] The last two interpretations provided above —by which the Furies/Eumenides in the novel would be at once the officers and Aue's feelings of guilt, or the officers and the reader—, together with the conception of justice assumed by the novel, would have an impact on the narrative's "presentation of the Shoah" (Grethlein 2010: 83) but also on its plea for empathic engagement and on its subsequent reception by the readership.

First of all, this two readings, and specially the last one, regard the composition of the memoirs as an exercise of catharsis for Max, a practice whose objective would be to liberate himself from the guilt that, as this MA thesis has argued, is repressed in the protagonist but materialized through several formal aspects in the novel, such as the narrator's unreliability, the ethical deviations in his focalization or the grotesque nature of his psychosomatic symptoms. The incapacity of the I-narrator to cope with the horror of the war and to assume his responsibility in it would be, thus, already present in the title: Aue's traumatic shame, like the name of the Furies, is unpronounceable, because to

[110] See the entry "Furies" in the Encyclopedia Britannica or the entry "Eumenides" in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology* (William Smith, Ed.)

verbalize it is to confront it.[111] As a result, only the euphemism "Les bienveillantes", the suppression of remorse and sadness, can be written down.

Secondly, and in the same line of argument, if Max's memoirs are the purifying ritual that the protagonist undertakes to free himself from guilt, the reader should assume the role of the good Samaritan ready to redeem him, that is, not the role of a Fury, but that of an Eumenide, a bienveillante, who as in the *Oresteia*, finally saves the antihero or, at least, judges him through the act of reading. This interpretation is apparently, once again, seconded by the intertextual frame of the novel, because its first line[112] constitutes a reference to Villon's famous *Balades des Pendus*:[113] a poem that is, as has been mentioned, a request for indulgence towards the sinners. Taking into account my underlaying thesis that certain narrative techniques of the novel, which have been identified as "empathy builders", are there to facilitate an empathic understanding of the immoral figure of Aue, the narratee would then be bound to humanize Aue, understand him sympathetically and acquire full knowledge of his evil acts for the purpose of, in the end, judging him. This demand on the reader would indeed concord with the final reflection in the novel: only in the last line, after having apprehended the whole of his actions, "Les bienveillantes", the readership, would able to catch him, "retrouver ma trace" (894). On the whole, because of this request for an approximation to immorality, as Meretoja states, "the novel can be seen to give a literary form" (2016: 380) to the ideas of its second main intertext: Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jersusalem*, whose premise is that Evil is to be found at the core of humanity and, therefore, it is necessary to humanize it in order to fully understand it.

[111] Hannah Arendt reflects on Eichmann's lack of remorse as follows: "it is rather hard, and certainly depressing, to assume that guilt and to repent" (1964: 251).
[112] "*Frères humains*, laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça c'est passé" (11, my emphasis).
[113] See Meretoja (2016 : 385) and Ferdjani (2010: 263).

As Meretoja states, Littell's novel "does not merely illustrate Arendtian theories of the Holocaust (which are central intertexts of the novel) but contributes in its own right" (380). As has been stated at the beginning of this analysis, Max Aue bases his testimony on the insistence on his own humanity, which is what equates him to the readership. In doing so, the I-narrator is echoing the considerations of the German philosopher, who contradicted the Jerusalem jury's qualification of Eichmann as a "monster"[114] (Arendt 1964: 8) and highlighted his ordinary normality and the even more distressing "fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*" (Arendt 1964: 252, emphasis in the original). According to Arendt, then, the major philosophical quandary of the Holocaust, the greatest dimension of its horror, was not to be found in the suffering of the victims, but in the humanity of the Nazis.[115] As Agamben puts it when commenting on Arendt's work, "the 'underman' must matter to us more than the 'overman'" (1999: 21). *Les bienveillantes*, as Meretoja states, offers a fictional possible world in which Arendt's ideas on "the banality of evil" are put into practice in a sort of moral experiment. The novel demands of the reader the acceptance of immorality as part of human nature and its direct confrontation, as Max Aue says: "à la malheur, il faut s'y confronter […] fermer les yeux, ce n'est jamais une réponse" (81). By opening their eyes to immorality, *Les bienveillantes* therefore demands of the reader that s/he to "put[s] oneself at risk and engag[es] with that part of humanity and history that horrifies us and which we are tempted to demonize or repress as something completely external to us" as that, "is the only way of avoiding even more damaging blindness" (Meretoja 2016: 397). Moreover, Littell's narration does not simply banalize Evil by displaying its inherent humanity, but

[114] "And the more 'the calamity of the Jewish people in this generation' upfolded, the more grandiose Mr.Hausner's rhetoric became, the most paller and ghostlike became the figure in the glass booth, and no finger-wagging: 'and there sits the monster responsible for all this' could shout him back to life" (Arendt 1964: 8).

[115] "Suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the number of victims. Human nature as such is at stake" (Arendt, qtd. in Nelson 2004: 240).

it also universalizes it partially by anchoring it in Western thought. Like Sanyal argues, "Littell's emphasis on the points of contact between Western imperialism and the Nazi genocide echoes Arendt's analysis at numerous points" (2010: 61). In fact, by putting in contrast the number of victims of the *Endlösung* with the numbers of other European mass murders, as those committed by the Allies, Napoleon, or by France in the Algerian War (Littell 206: 20-23), the text connects genocide directly with the contemporary Western principles of nationalism and obedience, drawing a line of immorality that reaches all the way to the reader's present time. Consequently, Littell's "conte moral" extends and personalizes Arendt's observations in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and confronts the readership with a Nazi perpetrator. With this thematic and intertextual gesture, Littell's literary project exposes its final moral: "le vrai danger pour l'humanité c'est moi, c'est vous" (27-28). By means of our inescapable proximity to it, horror is portrayed in its full extent. Only to highlight the innovative and striking nature of the novel's historical engagement, it could be helpful to put this conclusive *homo homini lupus* in contrast with the moral of another "fable" dealing with the cultural memory of the Shoah, published the same year as *Les bienveillantes*: John Boyle's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Whereas Boyle assures that "nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age" (2006: 132), Littell's narration brutally warns: "Êtes-vous certains que ça n'arrivera plus? Êtes-vous mêmes certains que la guerre soit finie? D'une certaine manière, la guerre n'est jamais finie […]" (23).

To conclude, I would like to comment on some ways in which this final interpretation of Littell's novel appears as extremely valuable to the general premises of the current MA thesis. As has been exposed, the thematic structure of the novel, which rests upon a specific corpus of previous literature dealing with Evil and justice —mainly, Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* and Arendt's *Eichmann in Jersusalem*—, asks its readership to

acknowledge the "horizon" (Gadamer) of a Nazi officer in order to fully apprehend his "possible" reality (Doležel) and be able, thus, to approximate it critically from literary experience. Therefore, the diegesis positions its narratees in an "interplay between immersiveness and critical distance" (Meretoja 2016: 371) that, just as empathy does, entails emotional engagement as well as a clear "self-other differentiation" (Coplan & Goldie 2011:5). The moral and affective exigencies of *Les bienveillantes* would prove, then, that, as Bataille defends in its seminal work *Literature and Evil*, comprehensive approximations to immorality in literature do not promote moral laxity, but, on the contrary, require a "hyper-morality" on the reader's part.

Besides, the moral dimension of the novel does not open up because of its explicit material, which is monopolized by the "voice" of an I-narrator who, as has been established, contradicts the interpretation of the memoires as an act of repentance and of solicitation for negative empathy. Instead, the moral investment of *Les bienveillantes* is transmitted by means of, firstly, its formal features, that I have called "empathy builders", and have been studied in this section; and, secondly, by its intertextual frame, which "transcends the consciousness of the narrator and functions as one way in which Littell emphasizes the difference between the I-narrator and the work as a whole: the latter is not of Aue's design and construction" (Meretoja 2016: 390). Thus, recovering the metaphor of the textile, it could be said that finally, Aue's memoirs are like the lace to which he devotes his adult life: it is the absence of the textile, the blank spaces left unsaid yet suggested, more than the fabric itself, what determines the structure of the lace and gives meaning to it. By building the implicit final signification of the novel through the stylistic choices of the narrative, *Les bienveillantes* reveals itself as a perfect example of the rejection of the Kantian tradition of aesthetic formalism, that considers the sphere of the aesthetic as separate from ethics and knowledge (Meretoja 2016: 393). On the contrary,

Littell's novel constitutes, from this perspective, a paradigm of the materiality and the narratological basis of the affective side of texts, as well as a demonstration that, as the other epigraph of this MA thesis reads, "the aesthetic will be a pathway towards the fully ethical"[116] (Ridout 2009: 65).

In its ultimate expression, the tension between negative empathy and moral estrangement lies, in Meretoja's words, "at the heart of the way in which the novel deals with the ethics of representing the Holocaust" (2016: 387). Due to this unprecedent proposal, whose cutting-edge tone has been made clear when compared to Boyle's contemporary novel, *Les bienveillantes* pushes literature's negotiation of History to its limits, producing one of "the kinds of insights into history that are possible only through fiction" (Semprún, qtd. in Meretoja 2016: 371). In this way, because of its representation of Nazi Germany from the consciousness of a perpetrator, Littell's novel epitomizes how the "safe moral environment" of fiction, understood as a "moral laboratory" (Hakemulder), makes epistemological expansion possible. Moreover, and as regards this increase in what can be said and thought, *Les bienveillantes* stands as an instance of the enlightening possibilities of the Foucauldian "*pensée du dehors*" (Freudlieb 1995: 301, emphasis in the original), which, very much in accordance to Arendt's ideas on the Holocaust, establishes that it is precisely by studying what has been traditionally rejected that the whole is understood at its best.[117] All in all, Littell transforms this philosophical methodology into a textual practice that, in addition, deals with the most traumatic genocide in contemporary Western history. In doing so, the author manages to get off the ground a literary project as stylistically extraordinary as morally challenging: a novel that,

[116] As Ridout explains in detail in the pages following this quote, he subscribes to the opinion that: "Ethics does not quite displace either aesthetics or politics. Aesthetic experience becomes the condition of possibility for a particular kind of ethical relationship" (2009: 66).

[117] "Étudier ce qui est rejeté et exclu pour comprendre les positivités auxquelles ça s'oppose" (Foucault 1994 : 128).

in its affective dimension, entails at once, paradoxically, empathy for the criminal and historical justice "pour les morts", as the novel dedication states.[118]

4.3. "FRÈRES HUMAINS QUI APRÈS NOUS VIVEZ": NARRATIVES OF INMORALITY IN *IN COLD BLOOD* AND *LES BIENVEILLANTES*

After the narratological analyses carried out in the last section, which focused on the literary techniques promoting empathy —"empathy builders" —, the conclusion could be reached that, despite their thematic, stylisitc, and chronological differences, both novels present a major union bond: they constitute two literary invitations to overcome the social constraints that limit empathy to exclude those who perform immoral acts. Then, stemming from the premise that, as has been reasoned throughout the body of this MA thesis, both Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes* stand as narrative representations of negative empathy, the purpose of the present section is to compare, briefly, the form in which the two works deploy this heterodox affective engagement. The final aim of this comparison is to present a hypothesis about the way in which negative empathy is elicited in literature. Hence, without ignoring the obvious limitations of analysing only two works, this final exercice seeks to, on the one hand, provide a commentary on the previous academic work on "narrative empathy" (Keen) — etiher to refute or confirm its hypotheses; and, on the other, extract possible conclusions on the literary representation of negative empathy: a form of "parasocial relation" (Oatley

[118] I suscribe here to Sanyal's reading of the novel's epigraph, for which the narrative deployment would be dedicated to those who perished at hands of Nazism (2010:50).

2016: 623) that "dissents from mainstream empathy" (Keen 2007: 74) and is more easily evoked in the realm of fiction (Keen 2007:106).

Although both studies on the texts have been conducted in accordance to Genette's canonical tripartite division of narratological traits, it is noticeable that all the literary resources highlighted, in the analyses above, as "empathy builders" are, to a greater or lesser extent, character-related devices, meaning devices oriented towards *how* a specific "fictional particular" (*Doležel* 1988: 476) relates to the "possible world of fiction" (Doležel 1998: 15) that he/she inhabits. This common orientation in the so-called "empathy builders" is to be expected if we take into account that, being these characters the "targets" (Coplan 2004:144) of the novels "stream of empathy", their representation and individuation is key for the emergence of empathy in the text and, therefore, for the present MA thesis.

In short, when one considers the technical choices of the novels, what is revealed is that the great majority of narrative tools stimulating an empathic reading are aimed at delving more deeply into the subject's characterization, a decision that would, in fact, second the most agreed-on assertion on the narratological construction of empathy: that "empathy is more likely to arise […] when we are furnished with extensive and detailed knowledge regarding the agent and their situation" (Smith 2011: 114).[119] As many other theorists who have reached this conclusion, Coplan explains the necessity of this trait by arguing that a detailed depiction of the target constitutes the most solid background for undertaking the imaginative process that substantiates both the act of empathizing and the act of reading (2004: 146). The more we know, the more we understand, and the more we understand, the more we can empathize.

[119] Similar conclusions are reached in critical studies such as Suleiman's (see 2009: 2), Coplan's (see 2004: 146) Keen's (see 2007: 68-69) or Goldie's (see 2000: 195).

However, some critics working within the field of affect theory have directly connected this need for a complete portrayal of the character meant to be the object of the reader's empathy with the narratological category of "voice", asserting, as Goldie does, that in order to grasp the narrative of a fictive other, it is required to have "the other as narrator" (2000:195).[120] This deduction seems indeed logical given that, as has been previously mentioned in this MA thesis, the "voice" is the main repository of the text's subjectivity (Benveniste, qtd. in Genette 213). However, in the case of negative empathy, and taking into consideration the nature of the use of "voice" in the two novels analyzed here, this assertion can be called into question. As we have seen, the narrators in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*, fitting in the paradigms of the "hetero-extradiegetic" narrator and the "homo-intradiegetic" narrator, respectively, are located in the two opposite extremes of the scale of subjectivation that the narrative "voice" may present. In my opinion, both "voice" typologies collaborate, somehow, in the construction of narrative empathy. On the one hand, the first-person testimony of Max Aue, furnished with particularities like the adoption of the conative function, increments the level of intimacy between narrator and narratee, therefore inviting the latter, explicitly, to establish an emotional bond with the former. On the other hand, the depersonalization inherent to the omniscient narrator in *In Cold Blood* makes it possible for the diegesis to turn to multi-perspectivism, a "mood" trait that, in turn, allows the referred-to "intradiegetic empathy" to flourish: a subtle but powerful "empathy builder" which sets an example to the readership by demonstrating that, in the "possible state of affairs" (*Doležel* 1988:482) that the text sets up, it is viable to feel "empathy for the Devil" (Morton). After this brief juxtaposition of both uses of "voice", we could deduce that, as Keen states, in matters of narrative empathy "[c]ontrasting first person with third person puts the question too broadly, with too many

[120] See also Keen (2007: 96-97).

other variables, to reach a valid conclusion" (2007: xi). Nonetheless, from my point of view, this assertion, that could be accurate with respect to "positive empathy" (Morelli, Rameson, & Lieberman, qtd. in Ercolino 2018: 244), is not equally suitable for the problematic case of negative empathy, which presents completely different rhetoric necessities.

In contrast with the experience "positive empathy", that could be classified as one of the "potentially ennobling or morally beatific feelings" (2005: 6) enunciated by Ngai, when confronted with negative empathy, "the subject experiences a sort of resistance against what is perceived as an 'enemy request' by the object; a resistance against the introduction of something unpleasurable inside of her-/himself" (Lipps, qtd. in Ercolino 2018: 245). Thus, as it is a radical challenge to the reader's worldview, the narrative demand for negative empathy initially appears to the reader as an undesired bond or a moral aggression. Consequently, its achievement depends very much on the status of the fictional "world of the text" (Ricoeur) as a "low-threat context", where an "optimal aesthetic distance creates a safe environment to engage with characters" (Oatley, qtd. in Koopman & Hakemulder 2015: 88). Considering then that, in Caracciolo's words, "we always tend to *resist* immorality" (2013: 31, emphasis in the original), the presence of explicit moral demands on the narratee coming directly from the voice of an immoral narrator —as in the case of Max Aue's request for the recognition of his humanity— could have the counter-productive effect of transforming this "optimal aesthetic distance" into an excessive "critical distance" (Gadamer) that would disturb the feeling of a non-menacing "application" (Gadamer) necessary for negative empathy in literature. However, this "resistance" seems to slightly break down under the impression of objectivity given by an omniscient narrator as the one in *In Cold Blood*, where negative empathy is set in motion through more implicit literary devices. Then, a "non-intrusive"

"voice", like a filmic camera, provides the readership with an effect of freedom of opinion and of security that invites immersion. All in all, and despite the apparent contradiction, a comparison between the use of narrative "voice" in both novels seems to indicate that the less biased the "voice", or the more subtle its subjectivation, the more effective is the sensation of "safe moral environment" (Hakemulder) needed to generate negative empathy.

In spite of their different use of "voice", however, both novels coincide in developing a realistic internal focalization that, as has been remarked during the narratological analyses, reveals itself as key for the construction of narrative empathy. This strategic use of "mood" in the two novels seems to echo the way the study of "narrative empathy" has concentrated on the emotional dimension of "point of view" (Coplan 2004: 142), a critical tendency that claims that "an internal perspective best promotes character identification and readers' empathy" (Keen 2007: 96). This theoretical commonplace stems, probably, from the idea that, with the adoption of the worldview —or "horizon" (Gadamer)— of the fictive other that "mood" entails, the act of reading is literally mirroring the experience of "perspective-taking" of empathy, stressing therefore the similarities between both cognitive processes. In effect, in *In Cold Blood*, where the focalization from Perry constitutes the readership' firsthand knowledge of him, as well as in *Les bienveillantes*, where the internal perspective is accompanied by a first person "voice", what the protagonists witness, do, and reflect on their doings is the most direct input for the promotion of character identification. Moreover, the "showing" that "mood" implies, distinguished from the "telling" of "voice" (Genette), appears to the narratee as a more natural, less biased method of receiving information on the *dramatis personae*. Hence, for instance, Aue's momentary recognitions of the Face or Perry's acts of kindness towards his victims are probably more revelatory of their dual contradictory nature than

their direct-speech assertions on themselves. In addition, the respective use of mono-perspectivism and multi-perspectivism in the novels points in the same direction, as both techniques serve to highlight the benign qualities of the targets by means of a comparison with their milieu, establishing a contrast that directs the "stream of empathy", respectively, towards Max and Perry. As we have seen, in the first case, this effect is provoked by Aue's description of the cruel acts perpetrated by his Nazi colleagues, while, in the second case, it is achieved not only by means of the already mentioned "intradiegetic empathy", but also by the contrast between Dick's point of view and Perry's. In the same line, the realistic style of both narrative "moods" —especially obvious in Aue's status as "perpetrator-witness" (Razinsky 2008: 15) but also in both novels' frequent inclusion of detailed descriptions of certain events and of the "psychic vividness of the prolonged inside views" (Booth, qtd. in Keen 2007:96) of both protagonists' minds— appears as a key aspect for empathetic engagement, as it lays a solid foundation for the stability of the "possible world" of the text (Doležel), which is the ground on which the imaginative processes of both reading and empathizing are built.[121] Thus, a panoramic review of the use of narrative "mood" in both novels seems to, on the one hand, corroborate the opinion of affect theorists about the importance of textual perspective, and, on the other hand, to lay bare that, also in the case of negative empathy, this narratological category, if accompanied by a realistic style, becomes the most evident "cognitive prothesis" (Smith 2011: 110) for the enlargement of the empathic capacity in literature.

[121] As Ngai illustrates by comparing emotional engagement in Melville's *The Confident Man* (1857) and *Bartleby, The Scrivener* (1853) —for her, "a psychologically inscrutable character" (2005: 50)—, realism is one of the formal points that can more easily problematize affect (Ngai 2005:52). Being empathy a psychological inner process, the level of intersubjective connection that descriptive literature promotes is more appropriate for empathy awareness. Therefore, "narrative empathy" (Keen) gives preeminence to realistic literary traits such as descriptions or introspections. Because of that, in general, it is easier to empathize with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* than, for instance, with Camus's *The Stranger*.

Nonetheless, from my point of view, empathy towards "those who perform atrocious acts" (Morton 2011: 308) recquires not only an exposition of the characters' present actions, but a more explanatory and complete insight on the motives behind their offences. Hence, as "it becomes harder to identify imaginatively with important parts of human possibility" which are "alien to one" (Keen: 2007:76), the arrangement of in-text negative empathy demands a further exegesis of the target's behaviour. In my opinion, this necessity would increase, in the narrativization of this specific kind of "alternative empathy" (Pedwell), the importance of narrative "tense" and, to be more precise, of its retrospective temporal anachronies (Genette). Then, at least in the two novels studied in the current MA thesis, the strategic embedding of analepses or "flashbacks" of biographical content within the diegesis has been regarded as a crucial device for illuminating the moral deviation of the empathy focalizers. Without overlooking the fact that, as Butler puts it, to try to understand the reasons of Evil is not to exonerate Evil (2004: xiii), and therefore, that the protagonists' pasts, if they do offer explanations to their present behavior, they do not necessarily redeem them, the readership's access to Max and Perry's background has, in my opinion, a twofold effect on their empathic perception. First, considering the agreement amongst affect theorists with respect to the idea that "empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative feeling states" (Keen 2007: 179) as shame or sadness,[122] the spectacle of Max and Perry's past suffering would evoke an emotional response on the reader, because suffering usually activates in the witness "the obligation to alleviate and recognize" it (Berlant 2004:2) even if, in the cases that concern us, the protagonists are simultaneously past objects and present agents of cruelty. Secondly, the biographic retrospections offered

[122] In the same line of argument, Woodward states that "what elicits empathy is a narrative that conveys the texture of emotional experience —specifically, experience of suffering" (2004: 64), while Carroll explains that for some theorists, the emotive state triggering empathy "must be exclusively some negative experience, like pain and or distress" (2011: 163).

by both novels allow the narration to establish a logical causal sequence of continuity between the protagonists' traumatic early life and the current intradiegetic "possible state of affairs" (*Doležel* 1988: 482), marked by their immoral attitude. Therefore, from these reflections, based on the "tense" structure in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*, we could conclude that temporal analepses play a decisive role in the construction of negative empathy as they constitute, in both cases, particularly important "empathy builders". However, the relevance of these temporal devices could be exclusive to negative empathy, and not necessarily common to "mainstream empathy" (Keen 2007: 74), where the reader, prompted to engage with a character worthy of our understanding and compassion, does not need to be furnished with such extensive antecedents.

To conclude, this last particularity of the narrative "tense" of both novels, to wit, the retrospective investment in the protagonists' past, also provides the narration with a thematically uniform affective atmosphere, that is to say, with an homogeneous aesthetic tone (Adorno). From my point of view, the "affective-aesthetic idea" (Ngai 2005: 41) of tone, which has been previously explored in this paper and repeatedly alluded to in the narratological analyses, acquires, at this point, a critical importance in the holistic affective dimension of both texts. Hence, following the example of S. Ngai's study of "ugly feelings", I consider the concept of tone to be necessarily linked to the emotional potentiality of the novels and therefore, as I will now develop, to be essential for the arising of negative empathy in them.

As Ngai puts it, the idea of "tone", that "remains notoriously difficult to define", refers to "a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' the world" (2005: 29) which, encapsulating in itself all the affective quality of the object, is generated by the sum of the formal and the thematic features at work in it (2005:47). Hence, the "tone" of a novel would deal with the emotional atmosphere that the "possible world" of the text

projects for the narratee, an affective bearing which is not "reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits form its reader nor to the representations of feelings within the world of the story" (2005:41), but depends on the effect created by the technical aspects of the diegesis. As has been remarked in the interpretation of the thematic structures of both *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*, both novels transmit, through a matrix of narratological and thematic characteristics, a unitary tone that, from my perspective, helps in constructing specific fictional worlds in which negative empathy is more likely to arise. In the case of Capote's masterpiece, the multiple aspects that point at the omnipresence of an unescapable destiny —from the tragic fate of Perry's familiar saga,[123] to the manipulation of temporal duration and prolepses, and the use of "parallel editing" in perspective— produce a general effect of anxiety, of fear in front of a persistent upcoming catastrophe. On the other hand, multiple devices in Littell's *Les bienveillantes* —as the paratextual reference to a Baroque Suite, the grotesque and detailed style, and the association between the horror of the massacres and the protagonist's lifelong transgression of moral limits— give place to an omnipresent feeling of unresolved chaos and subsequent distress which is inherent to the story. As we can observe, in both cases, "tense" structures play an important role in the homogenization of the aesthetic "tone", as the analepses permit the establishment of a correspondence between the target character's past and the present "state of affairs" of the novel. As a result of these affective configurations, the "possible worlds" in both novels seem to be located in a perpetual moral "state of emergency", immanent to the text and marked, respectively, by fated tragedy and distressing chaos. Within these "tone" settings, the

[123] Once again, the presence of a curse haunting Perry in made explicit in the novel by means of a third person, in this case, Perry's sister, whose thoughts after having been interviewed by the police are reported as follows: "She had said she was afraid of Perry, and she was, but was it simply Perry she feared, or was it a configuration of which he was part—the terrible destinies that seemed promised the four children of Florence Buckskin and Tex John Smith?" (Capote, 1966a: 176).

immorality of both protagonists is in *conjunction* with the rest of the novel's environment, in a way that their wickedness appears, in the first case, as an irremediable pre-ordered circumstance, and in the second one, as another upsetting element in the midst of a mad and Evil reality. Under these fictional circumstances, negative empathy paves its own path not anymore as an "alternative form" of empathy (Pedwell), but as the sole mode of engagement in concert with the "negative" affective world deployed by the texts.

All in all, the concept of "tone" and its usefulness in clarifying how negative empathy is constructed in narrative seems to confirm the initial premise of the present MA thesis: that affects, as a whole, and negative empathy in particular, are neither an isolated effect of the reader's perception nor simply a thematic disposition of the author, but are materially generated within the text my means of a series of technical devices. As the idea of "tone" suggests, the particular disposition of those literary traits —whose functioning has been the object of study of the current thesis and especially, of this section— is what lends a novel its ultimate significance, echoing the Nouveau Roman's proposition that "it is always the form which gives to the literary work its true meaning" (Morisette 1970: 162). Therefore, and despite their multiple differences, it could be concluded that the form of *In Cold Blood* and of *Les bienveillantes* asks the readership to expand their empathetic capacity in order to undertake, contradicting their expected moral disposition and challenging the narratee's "sense of decency" (Coplan 2011: xlvii), a comprehensive gesture which is already requested in an intertextual reference significantly shared by both novels:[124]

[124] "La ballade des pendus", also known as "Villon's epitaph", appears in the paratext of *In Cold Blood* as the novel's only epigraph. In the case of *Les bienveillantes,* Villon best-known poem is referred to, with subtlety, in the first line, as the novel opens with the same call to its readership as the ballade "Frères humanins," (Littell 2006:13), as noticed by many critics (see Ercolino 2018: 385, Ferdjani 2010: 263 and Suleiman 2009: 11).

Frères humains qui après nous vivez,

N'ayez vos cœurs contre nous endurcis,

Car, si pitié de nous pauvres avez,

Dieu en aura plus tôt de vous merci.[125]

"La ballade des pendus", François Villon.

[125] "Brothers humans, who live on after us, / don't harden your hearts and turn away, /for if you take pity on wretches like us, / the sooner will God have mercy on you." (Villon 2013: 175) (David Georgi, trans.).

5. CONCLUSIONS

As has been established in the introduction, the objectives of the current MA thesis were to give a material dimension to the premises of affect theory, to explore negative empathy as a narrative emotion and, through these two exercises, to vindicate the status of literary texts as "parasocial" worlds where affective and moral experimentation is promoted. In effect, a narratological approximation to *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* has allowed us to examine negative empathy as an emotional effect triggered by the use of a set of literary devices. In this sense, it could be concluded that narrative empathy is indeed motivated by the formal techniques, arranged in the textual practice, which construct literary affects —in this case, negative empathy— just as they give form to the "possible world" of the text (Doležel 1988:489). Moreover, inasmuch as this emotion is, as has been consistently argued, initially contrary to the will of the narratee, the mere possibility of negative empathy would serve as an instance of how literary affects do not respond to the reader's disposition, but constitute an integral part of the novel's "'set toward' the world" (Ngai 2005:29). In the same line, a study of negative empathy has also clarified how entering a "possible world of fiction" (Doležel) may signify, as George Elliot beautifully wrote, *"*a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (qtd. in Keen 2007: 54). Nonetheless, this broadening f our capacity to grant humanity to others that the "parasocial" status of literature permits could be seen as contradicting the "negative" value of the type of empathy we have been discussing in this MA thesis. As a result, I would like to conclude this project by pondering over the possibility of evaluating negative empathy as an ultimately positive and, as Ercolino stresses, "cathartic" (2018:244) literary experience.

Usually conceived as an unwanted and heterodox emotional response, the empathic comprehension of Evil characters may be perceived, during the reading act, as a "disgusting" reaction, to the point that it may give place to adverse affective "meta-responses"[126] (Feagin, qtd. in Ngai 2005: 10) as "discomfort, shame, or self-censorship" which stem from "identifying or feeling with the 'wrong' character" (Keep: 2007: 13). However, as Ngai notes, disgust and desire are "dialectically conjoint" in that the former has the power to allure us, particularly for its being "an object created by social taboos and prohibitions" (2005: 234). Thus, negative empathy is a sort of affective "counter-discourse" (Foucault) that, at least in the case of the novels analyzed in this MA thesis, appears integrated in an equally "counter-discursive" literary world, in which injustice, horror, and depravity are constantly manifested and, somehow, denounced. However, as we have seen especially through *Les bienveillantes*, negative empathy complicates the given parameters of empathy as an emotion not only in what the traditional schema of willing empathizer/worthy target is concerned, but also because the understanding of the Evil other does not necessarily entail a subsequent redemption or a naturalization of his dreadful deeds: "you can imagine the other's suffering […] you might empathize with a person who has committed a terrible crime, yet feel no sympathy for you think he thoroughly deserves his punishment" (Coplan 2004: 145). Nonetheless, even if the final reaction towards the immorality of a "fictional particular" *(*Doležel) signifies a return to the reader's moral pre-conceptions, in the internal process of "application" (Gadamer) and understanding of that fictional other, the "investment in social norms" (Ahmed 2014: 56) that empathy, as all emotions, implies, has necessarily been reversed and modified in order to encompass the "horizon" of the character. Hence, regardless of the reader's final

[126] As Ngai explains it, "meta-responses" (Feagin) designate emotions which arise as a response to another emotion, for instance, "a meta-feeling in which one feels confused about *what* one is feeling" (2005:14, emphasis in the original).

judgement, negative empathy constitutes always "a different way of knowing beyond traditional rationalist/positivist frameworks which have functioned historically to exclude or devalue marginalized people's knowledge" (Pedwell 2014: 83). As we have explored during the analysis of the thematic structure of *In Cold Blood*, negative empathy would be, as a result, an affective form of the Foucauldian "pensée du dehors" (Freudlieb 1995: 301), as its emphasis is put on the usually disregarded voice of Evil, echoing the idea that, regardless of their nature, "everyone has the right to speak out and make sense of his fate" (Kertész 1997: 5) and I would add here, the right to be listened to and understood. All in all, because it expresses an alternative aspect of reality and asks the reader to face it, negative empathy could be analyzed, uncannily, as an aesthetic experience that revitalizes and magnifies the democratic potentiality of empathy as an emotion. This ultimate capacity of negative empathy would, once again, demonstrate that reading literature is a "controlled experiment" that "enables us to 'tame' —i.e., reduce— the dissonance that is at the core of the human condition" (Caracciolo 2013: 24).

Besides, the "expansionism" (Smith) that negative empathy proposes is not only affective, but also epistemological, as empathy acquires, as a whole, "le statut de catégorie philosophique crédible, non sentimentale" (Dupuis 2010: 13). As Ahmed recalls, deconstruction has taught us that "what is relegated to the margins" —in this case, immorality— "is often […] right at the center of thought itself" (2014: 4). In effect, through their implementation of negative empathy, *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* do *reverse* what is expected from their correspondent plots: the story of a crime is recounted from the murderer's perspective, and the Holocaust is explained by a Nazi officer. Because of this, the interest and innovation of both novels is very much determined by the moral position they assume, which not only makes readers learn "that actions that we do not consider to be morally tenable can be undertaken without their

fictional agents necessarily losing their human status (their humanness) in our hearts" (Reichman 2006: 306) but also gives knowledge about *another side* of reality, presented in the novels as a permanent and real "possibility" (Doležel) at the core of experience, whose humanness becomes terribly undeniable.

As a consequence of the broadening of the reader's affective and epistemological capacity, it could be concluded that, in the case of negative empathy, if the "empathic" aspect truly works, if understanding really takes place, the "negative" side of the experience is counteracted by the cathartic outcome that such "expansionism of the mind" (Smith) may suppose. This conclusion would be in line with Lipps's idea that "negative empathy" is, in its ultimate extent, conceptually impossible, as "the artistic representation of the negative would *ultimately* affirm the positive" (Lipps, qtd. in Ercolino 2018: 246). Thus, the present MA thesis coincides with S. Ercolino when he asserts that, as a whole, even if the process of "negative empathy" cannot possibly be integrated in the category of the "ennobling or beatific feelings" (Ngai 2005: 6), its outcome may reveal itself as regressively "positive and life-affirming" (Ercolino 2018: 246). Then, as the literary theorist puts it: "Even in the depiction of what is miserable or disturbing, works of art allow us to feel the human. Art cannot turn the negative into the positive, but it can allow us to perceive negativity as beautiful by bringing its human dimension to the fore" (Ercolino 2018: 246).

Nevertheless, a complete study of the philosophical and sociopolitical implications of negative empathy, which have been simply sketched above, would be the object of another longer and more detailed research. From this perspective, although the current MA thesis has attempted to produce an insightful approximation to the creation and functioning of negative empathy through the examination of two novels, this analysis has obviously not covered all the potential that, in my opinion, the study of this form of

empathy may have for literary theory in general. In this sense, in addition to the elaboration of a genealogy of the representation of negative empathy in literature, it would also be interesting to delve deeper into the reception of this emotional response. Such a hermeneutical perspective would allow us to study, for instance, the possibility of a posterior prosocial action, motivated by the engagement with fictional criminal particulars. On the other hand, if we take into account that both *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* are based on real-life events, it would also be enriching to investigate how the fiction/non-fiction ambiguity that both novels put into place may problematize the text's quality as a "safe moral environment" (Hakemulder) and thus affect the reader's empathic engagement with the characters, who are initially based on "actual universals" (Doležel 1988: 476). Moreover, this intersection between mimetic theory and hermeneutics could also foster a reflection on how the specific and universal nature of the crimes committed in each of the novels respectively —an isolated murder in Capote's text and a historical crime against humanity in Littell's— may condition "narrative empathy". Finally, in the same line of thought, further research could be devoted to the role that this empathic understanding of criminals plays in the novels' representation of the political concept of "State", and the effects that this portrayal may have in the readership's vision of it, as, in both cases, the crimes are somehow related to this form of political organization: in *In Cold Blood,* a crime against the State's morality is punished by an equally reprehensible State, whereas in Littell's novel, the protagonist's crimes rest unpunished, as they are committed by the State itself.

All in all, I consider that many avenues of inquiry are still to be explored in what negative empathy is concerned. Through a narratological reading of two narrative projects as ambitious as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*, the present MA thesis has tried to vindicate the material and creative dimension of

negative empathy in the context of the "possible worlds of fiction" that can be understood, in turn, as "parasocial worlds". From this point of view, however, the present MA thesis aspires to be only a first attempt to grasp the theoretical strength of a transgressive emotion that amplifies our conception of humanity by identifying it even where it is, at first, unrecognizable, illuminating, as a consequence, the affective and epistemological potentiality of literature and reminding us that, as Theodor Adorno said, "the value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar" (qtd. in Butler 2005: 3).

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