UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

Towards a Semantics of Narrative Emotions: The Case of Extreme Empathy

Sara Baila Bigué

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ABSTRACTS

Despite rising attention to affect and empathy in recent literary studies, the formal construction and narrative function of emotions remains underexplored. Motivated by the lack of narratological and semantic analyses of fictional emotionality, this dissertation undertakes their examination of narrative emotions through "extreme empathy": the emotional engagement with morally compromised characters.

The central objective of this thesis is to demonstrate that narrative emotions are central to fictional semantics, constructed and promoted through literary devices and, therefore, potentially analyzed through narratology. Specifically, it explores how extreme empathy functions both as a textual strategy and a phenomenological experience facilitated by fictional worlds, which I conceptualize as *parasocial worlds*—worlds whose fictionality enables an extension of the reader's emotional and moral capacities.

To mirror the three stages of the literary process—its configuration, narrativization, and reception—the thesis is structured into three interrelated Blocks, each followed by an Interlude that bridges transitions. Block I lays the theoretical groundwork of the project by introducing key concepts from affect theory and empathy studies. This section critically repositions the concept of empathy and formulates the notion of "extreme empathy", derived from "negative empathy" (Lipps, Ercolino & Fusillo). The Block concludes with a conceptual framework that situates extreme empathy as a complex and underexplored phenomenon, ideally suited for the investigation of narrative emotions. Following an examination of the metaphysical status of fictional emotions and the epistemological relationship between empathy and reading, Block II forms the theoretical core of the dissertation, as it articulates a tentative semantics of narrative

emotions. Drawing on possible-worlds theory and Lubomír Doležel's fictional semantics, I redefine narrative emotions as "elementary building blocks" of fictional worlds. The section enlarges Doležel's semantics to propose a semantic taxonomy of narrative emotions that seeks to enable their analysis. Finally, this block theorizes *parasocial* engagement in fiction, wherein readers experience fictional emotions within a morally safe narrative space. Block III constitutes the practical component of the project, as it applies the previously established theoretical model. Through the empathy-oriented narratological analyses of two contemporary novels, *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (1966) and *Les Bienveillantes* by Jonathan Littell (2006), I identify the literary devices—*empathy builders*—in the narratological categories of *voice, mood,* and *tense* (Genette) that may contribute to the emergence of extreme empathy in these case studies. The concept of *tone*—an aesthetic notion introduced by T.W. Adorno and scarcely developed in academic discourse—is also examined in relation to both novels. A comparative analysis of the two empathy-oriented readings seeks to draw broader conclusions about the construction of extreme empathy. To complete the literary pathway of fictional emotions and particularly of extreme empathy, this thesis closes with a reflection on the paradoxical impossibility of both theorizing the reception of fictional emotions and overlooking the weight of hermeneutics in their study.

The goal of establishing complete fictional semantics of narrative emotions has led this dissertation to adopt a highly interdisciplinary methodology. Hence, this research draws on various domains within literary studies, including affect theory, semantics, phenomenological hermeneutics, aesthetics, narratology, and political philosophy, thus establishing a dialogue between academic sub-fields that are seldom brought together.

In conclusion, this dissertation aims to propose a viable semantics of fictional emotions—one that treats them not as ineffable experiences but as essential elements of

narrative worlds, enabled by the unique *parasocial* conditions of fiction and transmitted through formal narrative structures. The empathy-centered formal and thematical analysis of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* advances understanding of an aspect of novels celebrated by readers but often overlooked by scholars: their emotionality.

KEY WORDS: narrative emotions, extreme empathy, fictional semantics, narratology, *tone*, *In Cold Blood, Les Bienveillantes*.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré l'attention croissante portée à l'affect et à l'empathie dans les études littéraires récentes, la construction formelle et la fonction narrative des émotions restent des sujets peu explorés. Motivée par l'absence d'analyses narratologiques et sémantiques de l'émotion fictionnelle, cette thèse entreprend l'examen des émotions narratives à travers le prisme de « l'empathie extrême » : l'engagement émotionnel envers des personnages immorales.

L'objectif central de cette thèse est donc de démontrer que les émotions narratives sont au cœur de la sémantique fictionnelle, qu'elles sont construites et transmises par des procédés formels et, à ce titre, peuvent être analysées à travers la narratologie. Plus précisément, ce projet explore comment l'empathie extrême fonctionne à la fois comme stratégie textuelle et comme expérience phénoménologique facilitée par les mondes fictionnels, que je conceptualise comme des mondes *parasociaux*—des mondes dont la fictionnalité permet une extension des capacités émotionnelles et morales du lecteur.

Pour refléter les trois étapes du processus littéraire—sa configuration, sa narrativisation et sa réception—la thèse est structurée en trois Blocs interconnectés, chacun suivi d'un Interlude assurant la transition. Le Bloc I établit les fondations théoriques du projet en introduisant les concepts clés de l'*affect theory* et des études sur l'empathie. Cette section repositionne de manière critique le concept d'empathie et formule la notion d'« empathie extrême », dérivée de l'« empathie négative » (Lipps, Ercolino & Fusillo). Le Bloc se conclut par un cadre conceptuel qui situe l'empathie

extrême comme un phénomène complexe et peu étudié, optime pour l'analyse des émotions narratives.

Après un examen du statut métaphysique des émotions fictionnelles et de la relation épistémologique entre empathie et lecture, le Bloc II constitue le noyau théorique de la thèse, car il articule une sémantique provisoire des émotions narratives. S'appuyant sur la théorie des mondes possibles et la sémantique fictionnelle de Lubomír Doležel, je redéfinis les émotions narratives comme des « blocs élémentaires de construction » des mondes fictionnels. Cette section étend la sémantique de Doležel en proposant une taxonomie sémantique des émotions narratives, destinée à permettre leur analyse. Enfin, ce Bloc théorise l'engagement *parasocial* dans la fiction, dans lequel le lecteur vit des émotions fictionnelles dans un espace narratif moralement sécurisé.

Le Bloc III constitue la partie appliquée du projet, en mettant en œuvre le modèle théorique précédemment établi. À travers des analyses narratologiques orientées par l'empathie de deux romans contemporains, *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote (1966) et *Les bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell (2006), j'identifie les procédés littéraires—les *constructeurs d'empathie*—dans les catégories narratologiques de la *voix*, du *mode* et du *temps* (Genette) qui peuvent contribuer à l'émergence de l'empathie extrême dans ces études de cas. Le concept de *ton*—une notion esthétique introduite par T.W. Adorno et peu développée dans le discours académique—est également examiné en relation avec les deux romans. Une analyse comparative des deux lectures axées sur l'empathie vise à tirer des conclusions plus générales sur la construction de l'empathie extrême.

Pour compléter le parcours littéraire des émotions fictionnelles, et en particulier de l'empathie extrême, cette thèse finit avec une réflexion sur l'impossibilité paradoxale

de théoriser la réception des émotions fictionnelles, ainsi comme de négliger le poids de l'herméneutique dans leur étude.

L'objectif de constituer une sémantique fictionnelle complète des émotions narratives a obligé cette recherche à adopter une méthodologie hautement interdisciplinaire. Elle mobilise ainsi divers domaines des études littéraires, notamment la théorie de l'affect, la sémantique, l'herméneutique phénoménologique, l'esthétique, la narratologie et la philosophie politique, mettant en dialogue des sous-champs académiques rarement combinés.

En conclusion, cette thèse propose une sémantique viable des émotions fictionnelles—une sémantique qui ne les considère pas comme des expériences ineffables, mais comme des éléments essentiels des mondes narratifs, rendus possibles par les conditions *parasociales* uniques de la fiction et transmis par ses structures narratives formelles. L'analyse formelle et thématique, centrée sur l'empathie, de *In Cold Blood* et *Les Bienveillantes* fait progresser la compréhension d'un aspect du roman célébré par les lecteurs mais souvent négligé par les chercheurs : son émotivité.

MOTS-CLES : émotions narratives, empathie extrême, sémantique fictionnelle, narratologie, *ton, In Cold Blood, Les bienveillantes*.

RESUM

Malgrat l'atenció creixent envers l'afecte i l'empatia en els estudis literaris recents, la construcció formal i la funció narrativa de les emocions ficcionals continuen poc explorades. Davant la manca d'anàlisis narratològiques i semàntiques de l'emotivitat ficcional, aquesta tesi proposa examinar les emocions narratives a través del concepte d' "empatia extrema": l'empatia amb personatges moralment ambigus o immorals.

L'objectiu central d'aquest projecte és demostrar que les emocions narratives tenen un rol essencial en la semàntica ficcional, que estan contingudes i transmeses en el text narratiu mitjançant recursos literaris formals i que, per tant, són susceptibles d'anàlisi narratològica. L'estudi mostra com l'empatia extrema actua tant com a estratègia textual com a experiència fenomenològica facilitada per mons *parasocials*—universos ficticis que afavoreixen l'expansió de les capacitats morals i emocionals del lector.

La tesi es divideix en tres Blocs que reflecteixen les diferents etapes del procés literari— configuració, narrativització i recepció —, cadascun seguit d'un Interludi a mode de transició. El Bloc I introdueix els fonaments teòrics a partir de la teoria de l'afecte i els estudis sobre l'empatia, i redefineix de manera crítica el concepte d'empatia extrema. El Bloc II desenvolupa una semàntica narrativa basada en la teoria dels mons possibles i en la semàntica ficcional de Doležel, tot redefinint les emocions narratives com a components bàsics del món fictici. El Bloc III aplica aquest model a l'anàlisi narratològic de l'empatia en dues novel·les contemporànies, *A sang freda* de Truman Capote (1966) i *Les benèvoles* de Jonathan Littell (2006), amb l'objectiu d' identificar el que anomeno *generadors d'empatia* en la *veu*, el *mode* i el *temps* narratius, així com el *to*, una noció estètica introduïda per Adorno i poc estudiada des de la seva formulació.

Aquesta recerca interdisciplinària combina narratologia, hermenèutica, estètica, semàntica i filosofia política, tot establint un diàleg entre camps acadèmics rarament connectats. Amb tot, es proposa una semàntica de les emocions ficcionals, que es re-formulen en aquesta tesi com elements essencials per a la construcció dels mons ficticis, possibilitats per les condicions *parasocials* de la ficció i transmesos al lector mitjançant estructures narratives.

PARAULES CLAU: emocions narratives, empatia extrema, semàntica ficcional, narratologia, *to, In Cold Blood, Les bienveillantes*.

INTRODUCTION

The isolated being loses himself in something other than himself. What the 'other thing' represents is of no importance. It is still a reality that transcends the common limitations.

George Bataille

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?

What atonement is this all about?

—and yet, writing words like these, I am also living.

Adrienne Rich

Preface

It seems unquestionable that a doctoral thesis is, first and foremost, an academic product. Yet, I think that the reasons that push one to compose it for years always carry more implications. A personal component, and even—hopefully—an emotional commitment. That is why, to contextualize the origin of the pages that follow, I find myself compelled to begin my dissertation with more biographical than theoretical notes, a practice so often employed by Anglo-Saxon scholars.

At the beginning of this project, when I was only a few months into elaborating my thesis, I travelled to Madrid to spend a full day with a friend at the Museo del Prado. In the late afternoon, tired and infected with a justified Stendhal syndrome, we entered a long hall, full of wide paintings belonging to the so-called historicist current within pictorial Romanticism. As is common among museum visitors, we were together, not losing sight of each other, but distanced a few steps, each guided by our own rhythm and absorbed in our contemplation.

Entering the room, I stopped at the first oil painting on the right, "La conversión del Duque de Gandía" ("The Conversion of the Duke of Gandía") by José Moreno Carbonero.[1] Like magnets drawn to what Barthes calls *punctum*, my eyes focused on the main figure, bent and dejected, crying on the shoulder of a man who, standing upright, seemed to try to match the solemnity of the moment, but whose arms hung lifeless at his sides, maintaining the distance and decorum that his companion had already lost. The other characters in the composition, guests at a funeral, were witnessing the scene of mourning with faces of indifference—the bishop—, surprise—a knight—, sympathy—a woman—, and even with a mixture of fear and rejection-—a child. An unrequited embrace, an indecorous tear. Below the painting, a quote from the Duque de Gandía explained both the title of the painting and the scene portrayed: "Nunca más, nunca más servir a señor que se me pueda morir". "Que se *me* pueda morir" [1]. I remember that it was that beautiful use of the Spanish ethical dative, a sign of embodied grief, what brought to my eyes the tears that had settled in my chest since the first glance at the scene. A reading of the explanation accompanying the painting, which told the story of the Duque de Gandía, both justified and intensified my sorrow.

Chief Steward of Empress Isabel of Portugal, when his empress died at the age of 36, the Duke of Gandía escorted the funeral procession carrying the body of the empress from Toledo to Granada, where she was to be buried in the Royal Chapel. When the procession arrived at its destination after weeks of travel, the coffin was uncovered, according to the tradition of the time, to confirm the identity of the deceased. Upon seeing his lady, considered in life as the most beautiful woman in Europe, turned into a decomposed corpse, the Duke of Gandía burst into tears. Like in Charles Baudelaire's well-known poem "Une charogne" ("A Carcass"), the ephemeral nature of beauty and the

[1] See Figure 1 in Appendix II.

futility of the material world were revealed to him. At that moment, the decided to renounce his titles and possessions and isolate himself from the world to devote his life to spirituality. The mourning depicted in the painting was not that of the empress, but that of existence itself.

Emerging abruptly from my reverie, I turned with teary eyes towards my friend to share my discovery. As I approached him, I saw that his eyes were also moist. As the only explanation, he nodded towards the central figure of the painting in front of him, "Doña Juana la Loca", by Francisco Pradilla.[2] Captured in the face of the painting's protagonist was the precise moment when she would cease to be Juana de Castilla and become Juana La Loca: facing her husband's coffin, momentarily placed on the ground during a stop of the procession accompanying him to his tomb. Both paintings, placed facing each other, portray similar scenes. Very much like that of the Duke of Gandía, Juana's mourning is represented as incomprehensible to others: the remaining members of the procession seem affected only by boredom and fatigue, oblivious to the pain they witness.

At that precise moment, both my friend and I had established a poignant connection, blending compassion and empathy, with two individuals who had lived—and wept—many centuries before us. It was a connection that defied time, a "feeling backwards" as Heather Love puts it, which, for a few moments, made us aware of our own permeability, the limits of sanity and humanity, and our *belonging* to the history of emotions. As Theodor Lipps writes in "Empathy and Aesthetic Enjoyment", that empathic union brought together all our nostalgias into one: *the nostalgia of living*.

About a year later, when someone asked me why my thesis dealt with the topic of narrative emotions, that evening at the museum came to mind. I did not say anything at

[2] See Figure 2 in Appendix II.

that moment; it is only now that I have established the connection. I believe that in my life as a reader—which is the first term I would use to define myself: a reader—novels have made me explore the full spectrum of human emotions. I have always known that those emotions were as real to me as those I felt in the "other" world, in the actual world, and for a long time that correspondence did not astonish me. In a way, however, I knew that the emotions that emerged from my books made me feel safer: there is no need to share them, to rationalize them, fear their consequences, or the judgement of others: these emotions are not mine, they just are. They reach me, pass through my body, linger for a moment, and leave me with that ineffable sensation, the sensation of belonging I felt that day at the museum.

Six years ago, in one of the university's lecture halls, Dr. Rodrigo Andrés was talking to us about the intricacies of empathy through a fragment of *Against Empathy*, whose author, Paul Bloom, discusses the potential dangers of empathizing. For the first time in that class where everyone was a year older than me, I raised my hand and asked, "What about empathizing with a criminal? Like a murderer. Like in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*." As I was asking the question, my mind was no longer there; it was in my childhood room, six years earlier, where a 16-year-old me was crying over the death of Perry Smith, feeling *that sense of belonging*. But for the first time, that familiar sensation was deeply unsettling. I remember feeling that my *suffering with* Perry Smith revealed something shameful about myself, even though the cause was fictional. The protection that fiction had always provided me with had vanished. I re-read *In Cold Blood* soon after Dr. Andrés's session, and its reading surprised me at twenty—as well as at twenty-two, twenty-five, and twenty-seven—as much as it had surprised my teenage self. Yet, the questions that had arisen for me as a teenage reader returned: How did I come to feel this

way? Who, or what, convinced me of feeling for a murderer? Where did these emotions come from? How did they reach me? Or as Toni Morrison exquisitely describes it,

> *Say who owns this house?*
> *It is not mine […]*
> *This House is strange.*
> *Its shadow lies.*
> *Say, tell me? Why doesn't its lock fit my key?*[3]

My undergraduate thesis, my master's thesis, and the dissertation you are holding in your hands have been attempts to answer the questions that haunted me about the intriguing sense of belonging I felt when reading *In Cold Blood*. Of course, I still do not have an answer to any of the questions above. In fact, over time, the questions have only multiplied. Yet, I believe that the sixteen-year-old Sara would be pleased: I like to think that, over the years, both the questions and the potential answers have become more interesting.

Evolution of the Project and Research Questions

When I began the research for my undergraduate thesis on *In Cold Blood*, I realized that the novel's popularity among the public did not align with the theoretical attention it had received. Apart from the work of Manuel González de la Aleja (1990) and Elena Ortells (1999; 2009) on the novel's structure—included in their respective revisions of Capote's whole literary production—, *In Cold Blood* lacked formal analysis. Therefore, in 2018,

[3] This fragment belongs to the poem that appears as an epigraph in Toni Morrison's novel *Home* (2012). It was also during those sessions on empathy, in which my project began to be forged, when Dr. Andrés introduced us to this poem. Since then, Morrison's words have become linked in my mind to the experience of narrative empathy and that of fiction reading in general.

this initial project took the form of a narratological analysis of the novel, accompanied by a thematic commentary conducted from the perspective of Michel Foucault's ideas on the genealogy of power—reminiscences of which are still present in this thesis. Nonetheless, my interest in Capote's modern classic was still centered on the comprehensive portrayal it gave of the criminals, especially of Perry Smith. My exegesis, then, became focused on how the narrative's emotionality, invested in the antagonist, was reflected in the novel's inner structure and literary devices. At that time, the emotional effect I was investigating still had no name for me. Luckily, in an advanced stage of my research, I came across an article by Stefano Ercolino, published that same year, 2018, which dealt precisely with empathy towards immoral fictional characters, what Ercolino calls *negative empathy*, where the scholar also traced a genealogy and the literary application of this emotional experience.[4]

Encouraged by the existence of an antecedent for my project, when I started working on my master's thesis, I decided to devote it exclusively to the narratological creation of Ercolino's "negative empathy", considering *In Cold Blood* a literary instance of it. Transitioning from a corpus-based project to a theoretical one required expanding my corpus. With the purpose of analyzing the narrative creation of empathy in another novel and comparing the results with those of Capote's, my master's thesis adopted a second case study: Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*. This choice was equally inspired by Ercolino's article, where he mentioned the novel as a paradigmatic case of "negative empathy". Thus, my master's thesis finally became a narratological study of this emotional response, which was composed of an empathy-based analysis of both novels above, and a final comparison of the way they each create empathy, aimed at identifying

[4] The article in question is "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", published in 2018 in volume 73 of *Orbis Litterarum* (243–262).

the literary devices that better promote engagement with those who commit immoral acts. This practical exercise is taken up again in Block III of this dissertation.

My PhD project thus emerged from the desire to continue this journey and carry out the first comprehensive study of "negative empathy" as a narrative effect. The almost total absence of precedents regarding the formal creation of narrative empathy, however, posed a challenge, as it involved undertaking an extensive project with hardly any direct bibliographic references and few open dialogues.[5] However, by the end of 2022, the publication of *Empatia Negativa* by Stefano Ercolino & Massimo Fusillo changed this trend. The monograph, derived from Ercolino's 2018 article, was evidence of how the Italian scholar's investigation and my own had departed from the same set of questions, had probably faced the same challenges, and had finally taken different paths. For while *Empatia Negativa* provided me with an invaluable direct interlocutor; its topic revolved around the history of "negative empathy" and its manifestations as an aesthetic experience in various arts, while my own research had already taken a different direction, one that attempted to address different critical gaps. Although "negative empathy" had been the primary focus of my research for three years, my thesis's project evolved to position this emotion as an example within the broader topic that had captivated my attention: the semantics of narrative emotions. Two research gaps prompted my investigation to take this new direction.

The first factor that led me to take up "negative empathy" as my case study was realizing that, if the in-text formation of narrative empathy was understudied, it was mainly because the narratology of emotions remained, in practice, an unexamined territory in academia. From a theoretical perspective, several literary scholars involved in

[5] In fact, at that moment, my sole primary reference in what narrative empathy is concerned were Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) and the volume *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan & Peter Goldie in 2011.

affect theory have delved into narrative emotions, especially from reception studies.[6] Among them, some, like Suzanne Keen (2007), even distanced themselves from the standpoint of the reader to approach the inner functioning of literary emotions. Still, one dimension these theoretical contributions have in common is the manifestation of the intrinsic difficulty in a *practical study* of narrative emotions, as well as the need to investigate in that direction. One of these critics, Sianne Ngai, summarized this situation in the following terms,

> 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' […] How is it even produced by the object from which it ostensibly emanates? (28-30)

This "how" constitutes the main research question of my thesis. Fortunately, just like the critical void that affected the study of narrative emotions was already recognized among academic circles, a tentative answer to this research question was also in circulation. Scholars concerned with the literary construction of emotions such as Sarah Ahmed (2004), Sianne Ngai herself (2005), Jill Bennett (2005), Suzanne Keen (2007), Murray Smith (2011), or Carolyn Pedwell (2014) had already argued that "figures of speech" are crucial for the emotionality of texts (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12) and that, despite the participation of the reader in the literary process, "the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work" (Bennett

[6] For instance, Batson 1998; Caracciolo 2014; Carroll 2011 or Feagin 2011.

7).[7] Although the participation of formal features in the creation of fictional emotions has been acknowledged, few studies have put this association under the spotlight or have attempted to find out *how* different emotional effects are generated and *which* literary structures work best for this purpose.[8] Given these antecedents, my project adopted two new research question, to wit: *How are narrative emotions expressed in the text? Which literary devices participate in their emergence?*

The state of the question of this dissertation will explore more deeply the historical reasons for this lack of background; for now, suffice it to say that the main reason why the narratology of emotions remains largely unexamined is that, as Lawrence Grossberg warns us, "affect is perhaps the most difficult plane of human life to define and describe, not merely because it is a-signifying (and contemporary theory is so heavily directed toward signifying practices), but also because there is no critical vocabulary to describe its forms and structures" (80). Grossberg's assessment reads almost like a diagnosis of literary studies, which not only lacks descriptions for the narratological *form* of emotions, but also for their semantic *structure*. Indeed, learning that the lack of understanding about novels' emotions not only pertained to their narratological representation but also to their semantic function was the second discovery that shaped the present thesis.

As I shifted the focus of my investigation to the narratological emergence of fictional emotions, I assumed that such research project required me to examine, first, the existing theory on the fictional semantics of narrative emotions. This research need arose

[7] Other scholars that have discussed the narratological nature of literary emotions include, for instance, Murray Smith, who in 2011 presented formal elements as "cognitive prothesis" for engaging emotionally with characters; Sianne Ngai, who hypothesized that affect was "a formal problem in the novel" (52), or Rei Terada, who asserts, in a more phenomenological tone, that "feeling is as deeply embedded in the object as it is in the subject, and the spectator experiences feeling because affective quality belongs to the object" (12).

[8] Some exceptions to this disregard of the role of formal features in the emergence of narrative emotions would be Carolina Fernández-Quintilla 2018 and Ingeborg Jandl et al. 2017.

from my believe that, for emotions to be transmitted to the reader, they must be integrated, somehow, into the fictional text. Thus, considering that all elements of the novel have been semiotically conceived before being represented textually implied that emotions also played a role in the construction of the novel's meaning. Following that train of thought, I assumed that, in order to clarify the narratological level of emotions, I had to investigate first their semantic significance within the novel. To my surprise, I learned that in-text emotions also lacked vocabulary and classification from a semantic perspective. As far as their function in the novel is concerned, emotions had been either ignored by theory of mimesis or regarded simply as part of characters' mental lives. Since the emotionality of fictional narrations was apparently a mystery at the three levels of the literary process—semantic configuration, narrative formulation, and hermeneutic reception—, and lacked any specific vocabulary, my project widened again to attempt to encompass the whole literary trajectory of fictional emotions. In this respect, the second axis that has come to vertebrate my exploration revolves around the semantics of narrative emotions, which implied a new set of research questions. To start with, it required me to investigate: *which functions do fictional emotions perform at the semantic level of novelistic construction?* and *how do they participate in the narrative system and interact with the other elements of the narrative?* Also, drawing on the assumption that throughout the literary process, the readers' emotional responses to the text and the emotions conveyed by the narrative intermingle: *how can those different emotions be classified? Are there diverse typologies of in-text emotions? How can they be accounted for at a semantic level? How do these emotions and the readerships' correlate?* And finally, assuming that the narrative emotions of the characters are transferred to the readership: *who may potentially react to them or mirror them? How does this transmission function on a relational level? What is*

the epistemological foundation underlying the character-reader relationship that allows the latter to feel emotions that do not pertain to their "actual" state?

It goes without saying that these four sets of questions are quite broad and, therefore, challenging to address fully within the confines of a thesis without a guiding case study to navigate this literary journey. For this reason, I have kept narrative empathy towards immoral characters as the focal emotion through which I will endeavor to explore the aforementioned points. As I have explained, the so-called "negative empathy" originally assumed a strategic position in my project due to its perceived centrality in the emotional fabric of *In Cold Blood*. But as my research developed, I discovered that, despite having gone unrecognized until recent years and being still significantly underexplored today, the so-called "negative empathy" is an intricate emotional response and, so, an optimal case study for my project. Both the formal construction of "negative empathy" and of narrative empathy in general remain research topics that, despite some prior scholarly attention, still require much clarification. Hence, employing "negative empathy" as an example of the transmission and role of narrative emotions in literary texts implied defining Ercolino's "negative empathy", its context of emergence, its potential targets, and outcomes, as well as attempting to elucidate how narrative empathy in general, and its "negative" variant in particular, is elicited by the fictional text.

To synthesize the open fronts regarding narrative emotions that I intend to delve into—the narratological, the semantic, the relational, and the specificity of "negative empathy"—, I would say that my PhD thesis combines two levels of investigation. I strive to take part in the theorization of the form and sense of fictional emotions in narrative; simultaneously, I attempt to contribute to the study of so-called "negative empathy" and more concretely, to the analysis of its textual expression.

Hypothesis, Objectives, and Structure

To dig into the research questions above, this dissertation draws upon the hypothesis that narrative emotions constitute elementary building blocks of narrative worlds (Lubomír Doležel), that participate in their shaping and signification. As such, I assume emotions to be on equal terms with other formative elements of narrative worlds, meaning that they are expressed in the fictional text through its formal aspects and that, as a consequence, they can be accounted for from the domain of narratology. Additionally, I argue that, due to their fictional nature, narrative worlds function as *parasocial* simulations that allow readers to experience emotions in a safer and, thus, more liberated manner, if compared to real-life social interactions. In this context, I also hypothesize that empathy for immoral characters stands out as a paradigm of the emotional and moral extension that fiction enables, as it is an emotional response made possible—maybe exclusively—by the phenomenological conditions of literature.

To summarize, and drawing on these hypotheses and the aforementioned research questions, my PhD dissertation endeavours to achieve the following main objectives:

1. To put forward a semantics of fictional emotions that illustrates their role as "building blocks" of fictional worlds and their interaction with the other elements and constructive processes of narrative.
2. To develop a vocabulary capable of defining, distinguishing, and accounting for narrative emotions, thus proving that they are not "some ineffable experience or a purely subjective feeling" (Grossberg 80).
3. To describe the phenomenological conditions that permit the *parasocial* encounter between the fictional world and its inhabitants and the reader, which, in turn, allows for an extension of the latter's moral and emotional capacity.

4. To prove, through a practical narratological analysis, that narrative emotions are present in the text; they are conveyed through formal aspects, and therefore, they can be identified and described through narratological tools.
5. To analyse the formal construction of what has been called "negative empathy"—and thus indirectly, of narrative empathy—through an empathy-oriented exegesis of two contemporary novels: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes* (2006).
6. To contribute, by means of this practical exercise, to the general formal and thematic understanding of these two literary works.

As is apparent, these objectives encompass the function, representation, and transmission of fictional emotions throughout the whole literary process—to wit, the semantic construction of the fictional world, its textual representation, and the readers' interpretation of it. Thus, the overall objective of the PhD thesis is to trace the literary trajectory of emotions through the example of empathy for immoral characters.

In line with this primary objective, the structure of this dissertation should be perceived as a journey that, through the *motif* of emotions, mirrors the narrative process and its natural progression: beginning with the semantic level, followed by the narratological level, and concluding with the hermeneutical level. This thesis is organized into three main blocks, each followed by an interlude, which serves as a hinge between the contents of one Block and those of the next. Given this tripartite division and the three-fold nature of the narrative process, one would expect Block I to correspond to the semantics of fictional emotions, Block II to their textual representation, and Block III to their reception.[9] However, considering, on the one hand, that my primary research topic—

[9] For more information on the threefold nature of fictionality, you may refer to Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 70-73; Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit I* 85-129; or Félix Martínez Bonati, *La ficción narrativa. Su lógica y ontología* 123.

narrative emotions, and specifically a form of narrative empathy—requires prior contextualization; and, on the other hand, that reception is an inescapable viewpoint in the consideration of emotions and that therefore, it underlies my entire dissertation, Block I will address narrative empathy, while the following two Blocks will focus, respectively, on semantics and narratology.

Building upon this logic, Block I introduces the theoretical framework of emotions, empathy, and what has been referred to as "negative empathy"—which I refer to as "extreme empathy".[10] After a summary of the historical treatment of emotions as topics of scholarly study, and of the change of paradigm brought about by affect theory, this Block discusses what I will be calling *transitive emotions*, and especially, the most complex among them: *empathy*. Following this state of the question, I provide the definition of empathy that I will be using for the purposes of this research project. Then, the last section of this first Block dwells on empathy towards immoral characters—from now on, "extreme empathy"—, where I define this typology of narrative empathy and review earlier approaches to its study.

Hinging between the review of the state of the arts on the academic background of narrative emotions/empathy and the study of their fictional semantics, Interlude I discusses some concepts that are key for my approach to the metaphysics of narrative emotions. Specifically, Interlude I deals with the distinction between real and fictional emotions, the advantages of narrative literature in the emergence of empathy, and the procedural similarities shared by narrative and empathy as epistemological experiences. On a more thematic basis, I briefly reflect here on literature's representations of Evil. At the end of the Interlude, I provide a recap of how literary studies have dealt with narrative

[10] In regard to this change of nomenclature, I express my gratitude to Dr. Rodrigo Andrés for highlighting the contradiction inherent in simultaneously rejecting the moral binarism of emotions and using the term *negative* empathy.

empathy thus far, in order to face Block II with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research.

Block II constitutes the theoretical foundation of my research. As already mentioned, this section is devoted to the functioning of narrative emotions at both semiotic and intersubjective levels. Within this domain of research, in Block II I articulate the significance of narrative emotions as fundamental elements in constructing fictional worlds, delving into their possible functions and interactions with other fictional elements. I also establish a method to help me classify these emotions and delve into the dynamics of the relationship between the reader and characters. All in all, this Block tackles the three first objectives announced above, which are linked to the internal structure of the fictional worlds, and aims at providing a theoretical basis to address objectives four to six of the ones listed before, which pertain to the semiotic transmission of emotions—specifically, of extreme empathy—in the narrative text.

Interlude II bridges the gap between the novel's principles of sense organization and their narratological concretization. In this transitional section, I comment on previous endeavours in the research on emotions, narrative empathy, and extreme empathy as consequences of formal elements, I introduce the methodology for the forthcoming narratological analyses, and I outline the specific goals, scopes, and potential limitations of these analyses.

If I have described Block II as the theoretical core of my thesis, Block III stands as its practical cornerstone, as it entails the application of my proposal of a fictional semantics of emotions, as well as the demonstration of the main hypothesis of my project: that literary emotions, such as narrative empathy, are generated through formal features. To bring that into effect, Block III presents a narratological analysis of the emergence of empathy for criminal characters in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and in Jonathan

Littell's *Les bienveillantes*, along with a comparative examination of their respective formal constructions of this emotion. While the empathy-oriented exegesis of both novels seeks to implement my proposed method for the analysis of literary emotions, the posterior comparison of both narratives aims at extracting conclusions on the formal construction of extreme empathy and narrative empathy in general.

Finally, Interlude III serves as a transition, on this occasion, between the narratology of emotions and their reception. In this regard, this section focuses on the previously mentioned pervasiveness of reception theory in the study of narrative emotions and empathy, as well as on the paradoxical impossibility of defining their hermeneutics with certainty. Additionally, in order to close the trajectory of this emotional response to reading, this final segment of my thesis also addresses the potential impact that extreme empathy as a literary experience may have on the readership.

As can be seen in this panoramic presentation, my thesis structure interlaces three main blocks with three transitional interludes. Just as I have explained the purpose of the three main blocks, it may be convenient to justify here the inclusion of what I have called "interludes". At first glance, these interstitial fragments fulfil no different function than combining the conclusions of one block with the introduction of the next. However, my decision to facilitate the transition from one to another through these interludes responds to two motives: a practical one and a symbolic one. On the one hand, as the Interludes' titles indicate, these fragments aim to refocus this project on its case study: the intersection between empathy and literature. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation—which I will discuss next—each block deals, as indicated, with one of three closely interrelated areas of inquiry central to fiction: theory, semantics, and narratology, while hermeneutics underlies all the above. In this journey along the literary process, narrative empathy serves as a guiding thread that allows for the exemplification of the

functioning of fictional emotions. However, given the level of abstraction that this project requires, this leading principle sometimes runs the risk of merging into the background. Thus, the practical aim of these three Interludes is to relocate my discourse on narrative empathy by showing how the Blocks' content applies to its specific study.

On a more symbolic note, the insertion of interludes aims at underscoring the narrative process as an interconnected journey, wherein understanding *macrosemantics* leads to grasping *microsemantics*, mimesis intertwines with narratology, and narratology converges with reception. Although, for the sake of clarity, each Block of this thesis focuses on a different discipline of literary studies, I do not want to neglect the intimate relationship among these categories, as the need to tackle each one of them is based, precisely, on the interconnectedness among them that narrative process demands and embodies. From this perspective, I would like the concept of an interlude to represent a passage that both facilitates and reminds us of the communication among literary categories, between text and reader, between reader and culture, between object and subject of emotion… in general, of all the exchanges and negotiations at work within any literary text. Thus, this structure ultimately seeks to mirror the communicational nature of literary texts and narrative emotions, wherein, as the sources of this thesis also demonstrate, isolated categories find no place.

Sources and Methodology

In order to encompass the various dimensions inherent in such a complex phenomenon as the literary trajectory of a narrative emotion, and to analyse the construction and functioning of extreme empathy in narrative, this dissertation combines mainly the disciplines of affect theory—itself an interdisciplinary field—, fictional semantics, and

narratology. However, as will be made apparent throughout these pages, the scope of my research topic will also lead me to draw upon theories and concepts from other fields of study such as hermeneutics, aesthetics,[11] or political philosophy.[12] The heterogeneity of my methodology, that combines fields of knowledge seldom juxtaposed—such as affect theory and semantics—or sometimes perceived as irreconcilable—like narratology and hermeneutics—is, in my view, imperative for the study of fictional emotions, and more specifically, of narrative empathy.[13] That is because, as Suzanne Keen suggests, as all fictional emotions, "narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it" (*Empathy and the Novel* 159).

To explore, precisely, the concept of empathy as well as its literary expression, I will employ multiple sources related, in one way or another, to the interdisciplinary current of affect theory. Among these references, my overarching view of both emotions and empathy is particularly influenced by sociopolitical approaches to them, such as those of Ahmed (2004), Ngai (2005), or Pedwell (2014). Regarding narrative empathy itself, I

[11] The consideration of aesthetic aspects will be here rooted on an anti-Kantian perspective, meaning one that considers the sphere of the aesthetic to be linked to ethics and knowledge. In this respect, my opinion aligns with Hanna Meretoja when she asserts that Kantian tradition "risks reducing the literary work to its production of aesthetic pleasure and ignoring how works of art also function as ethically charged modes of making sense of the world" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 240).

[12] I will particularly draw from Michel Foucault's genealogy of power and Jacques Rancière's considerations on the politics of literature.

[13] The separation of the disciplines of narratology and hermeneutics is a longstanding division that has persisted until nowadays, especially within Anglo-Saxon literary academia. In *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Rita Felski bemoans the exclusion of hermeneutics from literary theory, and attributes it to the influence of poststructuralism as well as to a misunderstanding of the field. She expresses her discontent with this neglect, stating that "given the surge of interest in questions of reading—close and distant, deep and surface—the neglect of the hermeneutic tradition in Anglo- American literary theory is little short of scandalous" (33). Similarly, Hanna Meretoja suggests that narratology's distancing from hermeneutics stems from a misguided association between hermeneutics and subjectivity, which contradicts narratology's aim of approaching literary works objectively. With respect to this, Hanna Meretoja asserts that "within narrative studies, narratology in particular has sought to distance itself from interpretation, which it has associated with unscientificity and subjectivity" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 7).

will draw upon the work of diverse scholars within what is known as the "empathic turn". Since, as I will elaborate, the interdisciplinary nature of this "empathic turn" is even broader than that of the "affect theory" from which it stems, perspectives of the studies I will employ vary significantly, ranging from more literary viewpoints—such as Suzanne Keen's (2007) or Andrea Deciu Ritivoi's (2016)—to some influenced by psychology—i.e. Amy Coplan's (2011) or Peter Goldie's (2000). While I have avoided empirical approaches to empathy in this project, some ideas from authors involved in these psychological-oriented trends—i.e. Marco Caracciolo's (2013); Jèmeljan Hakemulder's (2000)—will also inform my research. Finally, my perspective on and reinterpretation of what I have termed "extreme empathy" is primarily based, as anticipated, on a theoretical dialogue with the sole primary source on the matter: Ercolino and Fusillo's *Empatia Negativa* (2022).

Whereas the concept of empathy employed in this dissertation draws upon multiple sources, my exploration of fictional semantics is based almost exclusively on the work of two scholars capital to the field of possible-world semantics: Thomas Pavel, whose essay *Fictional Worlds* will guide, in great part, my review of the evolution of mimesis theories during the 20th century; and Lubomír Doležel, whose fictional semantics, as formulated in *Heterocosmica* (1998), constitute the foundation of the second section of my PhD thesis. Thus, as Block II will display, the method I employ to work towards a semantics of narrative emotions consists of an immersion in Doležel's fictional semantics, followed by an extension of it that seeks to include the study of narrative emotions. In what concerns the circumstances of the social and emotional encounter between the fictional world and that of the reader, my take is influenced by what I have called "theories of simulation", as those developed with different nuances in the works of Pavel 2010; Ryan 1980, and Walton 1990, as well as by the hermeneutical

understanding of "cross-world encounters" formulated by Marco Caracciolo (2013) and Andrea Deciu Ritivoi (2016). Besides, Hakemulder's concept of literature being a "moral laboratory" (2000) has also been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the interaction between characters and the reader.

In addition to the adoption of his fictional semantics, another direct influence of Doležel on my thesis is the adoption of the zigzag method. This method of literary analysis, popularized by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1970) and employed by Doležel in *Heterocosmica*, seeks to "pursue concurrently abstract theory and concrete text analysis" by combining semantic and formal evaluations (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* xi). Thus, this methodology advocates for an intimate alliance between mimesis and narratology. In the context of my project, the zigzag method creates a frame of reference that enables the analysis of both the functioning of emotions in the novel and their narratological expression. Taking this into consideration, after delineating a fictional semantics of narrative emotions, as explained above, I will try to root it in concrete narratological aspects through the examination of the empathy-oriented features of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*. To conduct these analyses, I employ, in addition to my own semantic classification of fictional emotions, Gérard Genette's narratology as it is explained, mainly, in *Figures III* (1972) and its English adaptation, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980).

Finally, the branch of hermeneutics on which my thesis is grounded is that of hermeneutical phenomenology. Although notions from thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur or Hans-Georg Gadamer will be mentioned at different stages of my dissertation, the model of literary interpretation to which I adhere is mainly Wolfgang Iser's aesthetic reception, which the German scholar puts forward in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). If I have reiterated throughout this introduction the persistence of

hermeneutics in the upcoming pages, it is because I adhere to the principle of hermeneutic phenomenology according to which issues of reception and interpretation inevitably mediate in all exegetic exercises, including the present thesis. I am aware of the fact that my thesis, although informed by the methodologies and references above, is mediated by my own research perspective.[14] In this regard, this dissertation is deeply situated within a post-Barthian perspective of literary inquiry, which acknowledges the impossibility of attaining absolute truth or certainty about any text. Instead, these pages are driven by the aspiration to expose one of the myriad ways of comprehending narrative literature, and in this case, its emotions.

Stylistic Considerations

Finally, I would like to comment on some aspects concerning the formatting and style of this PhD dissertation. Although this thesis is written in English, in order to fulfill the requirements of the international mention for the doctoral degree, some of its contents—namely this introduction, the conclusions, and the abstract—are also provided in French. Furthermore, the primary sources—chiefly, *Les bienveillantes*—and the citations will be presented in their original language, provided that this was the language in which they were originally read—which is the case for French, Italian, Catalan, and Spanish. This formal decision stems from an explicit intention not to overlook the linguistic diversity that informs this project, as well as to emphasize its bilingual nature, which is determined by the primary sources—written in English and French. To facilitate the reading of these

[14] From this perspective, literary analysis can only describe the pre-conditions of existence of fictional worlds, and not their existence itself, as it only comes to being through the individual reception of each reader. As Sara Whiteley & Patricia Canning put it, "the stylistic study of textual form and interpretative effect is grounded on the understanding of literary works (indeed, all texts) as heteronomous objects; that is, objects which are brought into being by the observing consciousness of a reader" (71).

citations, this thesis includes an Appendix—Appendix I—where all translations into English can be found. Within the main text, after each citation in a foreign language, the reader will find a call to Appendix I in brackets, which will lead them to the corresponding translation in the Appendix. The call numbers follow the order of appearance of the citations in the text, without distinguishing between the main text and the footnotes. Moreover, to facilitate readability, the numbering restarts in each section of the thesis, and the Appendix is divided accordingly. Regarding the translations, I have tried, whenever possible, to employ published translations, including their bibliographic reference in Appendix I as well as in the Works Cited page. In cases where the original source has not been translated, I will indicate that the translation is my own.

To conclude, the lack of academic precedents for many parts of my thesis has compelled me to coin numerous neologisms. To mark these neologisms within the text, they will always appear in italics, except in the case of extreme empathy, as I do not consider this term entirely my own creation, but rather the result of Dr. Andrés's observations, as previously mentioned. Moreover, the centrality of this concept in my work would lead to an excessive—and potentially confusing—use of this typographic distinction. Likewise, both these terms and their meanings are compiled in a Glossary at the end of this thesis for clarification. In some instances where the existing term for a concept did not align with my understanding of it, I have replaced it with an alternative term of my own—always outlining my reasons in the text. In such cases, my intention has not been to establish a new nomenclature to substitute others, but simply to convey the idiolect that, in my opinion, best captures my particular vision of the semantics and narratology of fictional emotions. If, in the end, some of the terms I present here prove to be of any utility, I would certainly be pleased to have contributed in some way to the

definition of narrative emotions. Nonetheless, this possibility is very distant, again, from my original intention: to try to understand, somehow, what literature can make us feel.

INTRODUCTION

Préface

Il semble incontestable qu'une thèse de doctorat soit, avant tout, un produit académique. Pourtant, je crois que les raisons qui poussent à l'écrire pendant des années ont toujours des implications plus vastes. Une composante personnelle, et même un engagement émotionnel. C'est pourquoi, pour contextualiser l'origine des pages qui suivent, je vais commencer cette thèse doctorale par des remarques plus biographiques que théoriques, une pratique souvent adoptée par les chercheurs anglo-saxons.

Au début de ce projet, alors que je travaillais à ma thèse depuis quelques mois seulement, je suis allée à Madrid pour passer une journée entière avec un ami au Musée du Prado. En fin d'après-midi, fatigués et pris d'un syndrome de Stendhal bien justifié, nous sommes entrés dans une longue galerie, remplie de vastes toiles appartenant à ce que l'on appelle le courant historiciste du romantisme pictural. Comme cela arrive souvent au musée, nous restions ensemble sans nous perdre de vue, mais marchions à quelques pas l'un de l'autre, guidés chacun par notre propre rythme et absorbés dans notre contemplation.

En entrant dans la salle, je me suis arrêtée devant le premier cadre à l' huile sur la droite, *La conversión del Duque de Gandía* (*La Conversion du Duc de Gandía*) de José Moreno Carbonero.[15] Tels des aimants attirés par ce que Barthes appelle le *punctum*, mes yeux se sont fixés sur la figure principale, penchée et abattue, pleurant sur l'épaule d'un

[15] Voir la Figure I de l'Annexe II.

homme qui, debout, semblait s'efforcer de répondre à la solennité du moment, mais dont les bras, ballants, restaient inertes, en gardant la distance et la décence que son compagnon avait, apparemment, déjà abandonnées. Les autres personnages de la composition, invités à des funérailles, assistaient à la scène de deuil avec des visages exprimant l'indifférence—l'évêque—, la surprise—un chevalier—, la compassion—une femme—, et même un mélange de peur et de rejet—un enfant. Sous la peinture, une citation du duc de Gandía expliquait à la fois le titre du tableau et la scène représentée : « Nunca más, nunca más servir a señor que se me pueda morir » (« Plus jamais, plus jamais je ne servirai un seigneur pour qu'il meure »). « Que se *me* pueda morir ». Je me souviens que c'est ce bel emploi du datif éthique espagnol, signe d'un chagrin incarné, qui fit monter les larmes à mes yeux, des larmes qui s'étaient déjà logées dans ma poitrine dès le premier regard sur la scène. Une lecture du texte explicatif accompagnant le tableau, qui racontait l'histoire du duc de Gandía, aida à justifier et intensifier ce chagrin.

Grand Chambellan de l'impératrice Isabelle du Portugal, le duc de Gandía accompagna la procession funéraire de l'impératrice, morte à l'âge de 36 ans, de Tolède à Grenade, où elle devait être inhumée dans la Chapelle royale. À l'arrivée, après des semaines de voyage, le cercueil fut ouvert, selon la tradition de l'époque, afin de confirmer l'identité de la défunte. En découvrant le corps de sa dame, considérée de son vivant comme la plus belle femme d'Europe, désormais transformée en cadavre décomposé, le duc de Gandía fondit en larmes. Comme dans le célèbre poème de Baudelaire *Une charogne,* la nature éphémère de la beauté et la vanité du monde matériel furent brutalement révélées au duc de Gandía. C'est à cause de cette révélation qu'il décida de renoncer à ses titres et possessions pour se retirer du monde et consacrer sa vie à la spiritualité. Le deuil représenté sur la toile n'était pas celui de l'impératrice, mais celui de l'existence même.

Sortant soudainement de ma rêverie, je me suis tournée, les yeux mouillés, vers mon collègue, car je voulais partager ma découverte. En m'approchant de lui, j'ai vu que ses yeux étaient eux aussi brillants. Il m'indiqua simplement du menton la figure centrale du tableau qu'il avait devant lui : *Doña Juana la Loca*, de Francisco Pradilla.[16] Sur le visage de la protagoniste, on saisissait le moment précis où elle cessait d'être Jeanne de Castille pour devenir Jeanne la Folle : face au cercueil de son mari, momentanément posé à terre lors d'une halte de la procession qui l'accompagnait à sa sépulture. Les deux tableaux, placés face à face, dépeignent des scènes similaires. Tout comme celle du duc de Gandía, la douleur de Jeanne est représentée comme incompréhensible aux yeux des autres : les membres du cortège ne semblent éprouver que lassitude et ennui, indifférents à la souffrance qu'ils ont sous les yeux.

À cet instant précis, mon ami et moi avions établi un lien poignant, mêlant compassion et empathie, avec deux personnes qui avaient vécu—et pleuré—des siècles avant nous. Un lien qui défiait le temps, un *feeling backwards* comme l'appelle Heather Love, qui, pendant quelques instants, nous rendit conscients de notre propre perméabilité, des limites de la raison et de l'humanité, et de notre appartenance à l'histoire des émotions. Comme l'écrit Theodor Lipps dans *L'empathie et la jouissance esthétique*, cette union empathique rassemblait toutes nos nostalgies en une seule : c'était *la nostalgie de vivre*.

Environ un an plus tard, lorsqu'on me demanda pourquoi ma thèse traitait des émotions narratives, cette soirée au musée me revint en mémoire. Je ne répondis rien à ce moment-là ; ce n'est qu'à présent que j'ai établi la connexion. Je crois que dans ma vie de lectrice—c'est ainsi que je me définirais en premier lieu : lectrice—, les romans m'ont

[16] Voir la Figure II de l'Annexe II.

permis d'explorer tout le spectre des émotions humaines. J'ai toujours su que ces émotions étaient aussi réelles pour moi que celles que je ressentais dans le « monde réel », dans le monde tangible, et cela ne m'a pas étonnée pendant longtemps. D'une certaine manière, cependant, je savais que les émotions issues de mes lectures me faisaient sentir en sécurité : il n'est pas nécessaire de les partager, de les rationaliser, de craindre leurs conséquences ou le jugement des autres : ces émotions ne sont pas à moi, elles sont simplement là. Elles m'atteignent, traversent mon corps, y séjournent un moment, et me laissent avec cette sensation ineffable, ce sentiment d'appartenance que j'ai ressenti ce jour-là au musée.

Il y a six ans, dans une salle de l'université, l'un de mes professeurs, le Dr Rodrigo Andrés, nous parlait des complexités de l'empathie à travers un extrait de *Against Empathy*, dont l'auteur, Paul Bloom, discute des dangers potentiels de l'empathie. Pour la première fois dans ce cours où tout le monde avait un an de plus que moi, j'ai levé la main et j'ai osé demander : « Et quand il s'agit d'éprouver de l'empathie pour un criminel ? Un assassin, par exemple, comme dans *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote. » En posant cette question, mon esprit n'était déjà plus là ; il était dans ma chambre d'enfance, six ans auparavant, où une moi de seize ans pleurait la mort de Perry Smith, ressentant ce sentiment d'appartenance. Mais pour la première fois, cette sensation familière me parut profondément troublante. Je me souviens avoir senti que *ma souffrance pour* Perry Smith révélait quelque chose de honteux en moi, même si la cause était fictionnelle. La protection que la fiction m'avait toujours offerte s'était effondrée. J'ai relu *In Cold Blood* peu après le cours du Dr Andrés, et cette lecture m'a surprise à vingt ans—ainsi qu'à vingt-deux, vingt-cinq et vingt-sept—autant qu'elle avait surpris l'adolescente que j'étais. De la même manière, les questions qui m'étaient venues en tant que lectrice adolescente sont revenues : comment ai-je pu ressentir cela ? Qui, ou quoi, m'a convaincue d'éprouver

de l'empathie pour un meurtrier ? D'où venaient ces émotions ? Comment m'atteignaient-elles ? Ou, comme l'exprime magnifiquement la romancière américaine Toni Morrison :

Dis, à qui appartient cette maison ?

Ce n'est pas la mienne. […]

Cette maison est étrange,

Ses ombres mentent.

Parle, dis-moi,

pourquoi est-ce que sa serrure correspond à ma clé ?[17]

Mon mémoire de licence, mon mémoire de master et la thèse que vous tenez entre les mains ont été des tentatives de réponse aux questions qui me hantaient à propos de cet intrigant sentiment d'appartenance que j'ai ressenti en lisant *In Cold Blood*. Bien sûr, je n'ai toujours pas de réponse à ces questions. En réalité, au fil du temps, elles n'ont fait que se multiplier. Pourtant, je crois que la Sara de seize ans serait satisfaite : j'aimerais penser qu'avec les années, les questions—ainsi comme les réponses possibles—sont devenues plus intéressantes.

Évolution du projet et questions de recherche

Lorsque j'ai entamé mes recherches pour mon mémoire de licence sur *In Cold Blood*, j'ai constaté que la popularité du roman auprès du public n'était pas proportionnelle à

[17] Ce fragment appartient au poème qui figure en exergue du roman *Home* de Toni Morrison (2012). C'est également au cours de ces séances consacrées à l'empathie, au moment où mon projet commençait à se forger, que le Dr Andrés nous a fait découvrir ce poème. Depuis lors, les mots de Morrison se sont ancrés dans mon esprit comme intimement liés à l'expérience de l'empathie narrative, et plus largement à celle de la lecture de fiction.

l'attention théorique qu'il avait reçue. Mis à part les travaux de Manuel González de la Aleja (1990) et d'Elena Ortells (1999 ; 2009) sur la structure du roman—inclus dans leurs révisions respectives de l'ensemble de l'œuvre de Capote—, *In Cold Blood* manquait d'analyses formelles. Alors, en 2018, ce projet initial a pris la forme d'une analyse narratologique du roman, accompagnée d'un commentaire thématique inspiré des idées de Michel Foucault sur la généalogie du pouvoir—dont on trouve encore des réminiscences dans cette thèse. Néanmoins, mon intérêt pour ce classique moderne chez Capote restait centré sur le portrait approfondi qu'il dresse des criminels, en particulier de Perry Smith. Mon exégèse s'est donc concentrée sur la manière dont l'émotionnalité du récit, investie dans l'antagoniste, se reflétait dans la structure interne du roman et ses procédés littéraires. À l'époque, l'effet émotionnel que j'analysais n'avait pas encore de nom pour moi. Par chance, à un stade avancé de ma recherche, je suis tombée sur un article de Stefano Ercolino, publié cette même année 2018, qui traitait précisément de l'empathie envers des personnages fictifs immoraux, ce qu'Ercolino appelle *l'empathie négative*.[18] Dans cet article, le chercheur retrace également une généalogie et une application littéraire de cette expérience émotionnelle.

Encouragée par l'existence d'un antécédent à mon projet, j'ai décidé, au moment de commencer mon mémoire de master, de me consacrer exclusivement à la construction narratologique de « l'empathie négative » telle que définie par Ercolino, en considérant *In Cold Blood* comme une occurrence littéraire de ce phénomène. La transition d'un projet fondé sur un corpus à un projet théorique m'a poussée à élargir mon corpus. Dans le but d'analyser la création narrative de l'empathie dans un autre roman et de comparer les résultats avec ceux de Capote, mon mémoire de master s'est doté d'une seconde étude

[18] L'article en question est « *Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism* », publié en 2018 dans le volume 73 de *Orbis Litterarum* (pages 243–262).

de cas : *Les Bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell. Ce choix a également été inspiré par l'article d'Ercolino, qui y mentionnait ce roman comme un cas paradigmatique d'« empathie négative ». Mon mémoire est ainsi devenu une étude narratologique de cette réponse émotionnelle, composée d'une analyse fondée sur l'empathie dans les deux romans cités, suivie d'une comparaison finale de la manière dont chacun crée cette empathie, dans le but d'identifier les procédés littéraires qui favorisent l'engagement envers des personnages aux actes immoraux. Cet exercice pratique est repris dans le Bloc III de cette thèse.

Mon projet de doctorat est donc né du désir de poursuivre ce parcours et de proposer la première étude approfondie de « l'empathie négative » en tant qu'effet narratif. L'absence quasi-totale de précédents concernant la création formelle de l'empathie narrative constituait cependant un défi, car elle impliquait la réalisation d'un projet vaste sans presque aucune référence bibliographique directe ni dialogues académiques ouverts.[19] La publication, fin 2022, d'*Empatia Negativa* par Stefano Ercolino et Massimo Fusillo a toutefois modifié cette dynamique. Cette monographie, issue de l'article d'Ercolino de 2018, a révélé que nos recherches, bien que menées indépendamment, étaient parties du même ensemble de questions, avaient probablement rencontré les mêmes difficultés, et avaient finalement pris des chemins différents. Car si *Empatia Negativa* m'a offert un interlocuteur précieux, son objet d'étude portait sur l'histoire de l'« empathie négative » et ses manifestations en tant qu'expérience esthétique dans divers arts, alors que ma propre recherche avait déjà pris une autre direction, visant à combler différentes lacunes critiques. Bien que « l'empathie négative » ait été le centre de mes recherches pendant trois ans, mon projet de thèse a évolué pour considérer cette

[19] En réalité, à ce moment-là, mes seules références primaires concernant l'empathie narrative étaient *Empathy and the Novel* de Suzanne Keen (2007), ainsi que le volume *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, dirigé par Amy Coplan et Peter Goldie en 2011.

émotion comme un exemple dans le cadre plus large qui m'a passionnée : la sémantique des émotions narratives.

Deux lacunes de recherche ont motivé ce changement de direction. La première résidait dans la prise de conscience que si la construction intra-textuelle de l'empathie narrative restait peu étudiée, c'est surtout parce que la narratologie des émotions elle-même constituait, en pratique, un territoire encore largement inexploré. Théoriquement, plusieurs chercheurs liés aux études affectives ont exploré les émotions narratives, notamment sous l'angle de la réception.[20] Parmi eux, certains comme Suzanne Keen (2007) se sont même éloignés de la perspective du lecteur/lectrice pour s'approcher du fonctionnement interne des émotions littéraires. Toutefois, ces contributions ont en commun de souligner la difficulté intrinsèque d'une *étude pratique* des émotions narratives, ainsi que la nécessité de poursuivre dans cette direction. L'une de ces critiques, Sianne Ngai, a résumé la situation en ces termes :

> Il convient de noter ici que l'attention accrue portée par la critique littéraire aux questions émotionnelles s'est concentrée principalement sur les effets émotionnels des textes sur leurs lecteurs […] mais ce qui est omis dans cette focalisation prédominante sur l'identification sympathique du lecteur aux sentiments des personnages est la question simple mais puissante de 'l'émotion objectivée' […] Comment est-elle produite par l'objet dont elle semble émaner ? (28-30)

Ce « comment » constitue la principale question de recherche de cette thèse. Heureusement, tout comme le manque d'étude sur les émotions narratives avait déjà été reconnu, une tentative de réponse à cette question était également en circulation. Des chercheurs comme Sarah Ahmed (2004), Sianne Ngai (2005), Jill Bennett (2005),

[20] Par exemple, Batson 1998; Caracciolo 2014; Carroll 2011 or Feagin 2011.

Suzanne Keen (2007), Murray Smith (2011) ou Carolyn Pedwell (2014) ont déjà affirmé que les « figures de style » sont cruciales dans l'émotionnalité des textes (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12), et que, malgré la participation du lecteur/lectrice dans le processus littéraire, « les réactions affectives suscitées par les œuvres d'art ne naissent pas d'une identification émotionnelle ou de la sympathie ; elles émergent plutôt d'un contact direct avec la sensation telle qu'elle est inscrite dans l'œuvre » (Bennett 7).[21] Même si la participation des procédés formels à la création d'émotions fictionnelles a été reconnue, peu d'études ont mis cette association en lumière ou ont tenté de découvrir *quels effets* émotionnels sont générés et *par quelles* structures narratives.[22] C'est sur cette base que mon projet a adopté deux nouvelles questions de recherche : *Comment les émotions narratives sont-elles exprimées dans le texte ? Quels procédés littéraires participent à leur émergence ?*

L'état de la question de cette thèse explorera plus en détail les raisons historiques de cette absence de tradition critique. Pour l'instant, disons tout simplement que la principale raison pour laquelle la narratologie des émotions reste largement inexplorée est que, comme nous le rappelle Lawrence Grossberg, « l'affect est peut-être le plan de la vie humaine le plus difficile à définir et à décrire, non seulement parce qu'il est a-signifiant (et que la théorie contemporaine est largement orientée vers les pratiques signifiantes), mais aussi parce qu'il n'existe pas de vocabulaire critique pour décrire ses formes et structures » (80). L'analyse de Grossberg ressemble presque à un diagnostic

[21] Parmi les chercheurs ayant abordé la nature narratologique des émotions littéraires figurent, par exemple, Murray Smith, qui, en 2011, présente les éléments formels comme une « prothèse cognitive » permettant de s'engager émotionnellement avec les personnages ; Sianne Ngai, qui avance l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'affect constitue « un problème formel dans le roman » (52) ; ou encore Rei Terada, qui affirme, dans une tonalité plus phénoménologique, que « le sentiment est aussi profondément enraciné dans l'objet que dans le sujet, et le spectateur fait l'expérience du sentiment parce que la qualité affective appartient à l'objet » (12).

[22] Quelques exceptions à cette négligence du rôle des éléments formels dans l'émergence des émotions narratives seraient les travaux de Carolina Fernández-Quintilla (2018) et d'Ingeborg Jandl et al. (2017).

des études littéraires, qui manquent non seulement de descriptions de la *forme narratologique* des émotions, mais aussi de leur *structure sémantique*. En effet, découvrir que le manque de compréhension des émotions romanesques concernait à la fois leur représentation narratologique et leur fonction sémantique a constitué la deuxième révélation fondatrice de cette thèse.

En déplaçant l'objet de mon enquête vers l'émergence narratologique des émotions fictionnelles, j'ai supposé qu'un tel projet nécessitait d'examiner d'abord la théorie existante sur la sémantique fictionnelle des émotions narratives. Ce besoin de recherche reposait sur ma conviction que, pour être transmises au lecteur/lectrice, les émotions doivent être intégrées, d'une manière ou d'une autre, au texte fictionnel. Ainsi, considérer que tous les éléments du roman ont été conçus sémiotiquement avant d'être représentés textuellement implique que les émotions jouent elles aussi un rôle dans la construction du sens romanesque. Suivant cette logique, j'ai supposé que, pour clarifier le niveau narratologique des émotions, je devais d'abord interroger leur signification sémantique dans le roman. À ma grande surprise, j'ai découvert que les émotions intra-textuelles manquaient également de vocabulaire et de classification du point de vue sémantique. En ce qui concerne leur fonction dans le roman, les émotions ont été soit ignorées par la théorie de la mimésis, soit considérées simplement comme une partie de la vie mentale des personnages. Puisque l'émotionnalité des récits fictionnels semblait être un mystère aux trois niveaux du processus littéraire—configuration sémantique, formulation narrative et réception herméneutique—, et qu'elle manquait de tout vocabulaire spécifique, mon projet s'est élargi une fois de plus pour tenter d'englober l'ensemble du parcours littéraire des émotions fictionnelles.

C'est dans cette optique que le second axe de mon exploration s'est structuré autour de la sémantique des émotions narratives, ce qui a impliqué une nouvelle série de

questions de recherche. Il m'a d'abord fallu examiner : *quelles fonctions remplissent les émotions fictionnelles au niveau sémantique de la construction romanesque ? Comment participent-elles au système narratif et interagissent-elles avec les autres éléments du récit ?* Ensuite, partant du postulat que, tout au long du processus littéraire, les réponses émotionnelles des lecteurs/lectrices et les émotions véhiculées par le texte se mêlent : *comment ces différentes émotions peuvent-elles être classifiées ? Existe-t-il des typologies diverses des émotions intra-textuelles ? Comment les appréhender d'un point de vue sémantique ? Comment ces émotions et celles des lecteurs/lectrices se correspondent-elles ?* Enfin, en supposant que les émotions narratives des personnages sont transmises aux lecteurs et lectrices : *qui peut potentiellement y réagir ou les refléter ? Comment cette transmission fonctionne-t-elle sur un plan relationnel ? Quel est le fondement épistémologique de la relation personnage-lecteur qui permet à ce dernier de ressentir des émotions qui ne lui appartiennent pas dans son état « réel » ?*

Il va sans dire que ces quatre axes de recherche sont vastes et donc difficiles à explorer pleinement dans le cadre d'une seule thèse sans une étude de cas directrice. C'est pourquoi j'ai conservé l'empathie narrative envers des personnages immoraux comme émotion focale à travers laquelle j'explorerai les points évoqués. Comme j'ai déjà expliqué, l' « empathie négative » a occupé une position stratégique dans mon projet, car elle semblait centrale dans le tissu émotionnel de *In Cold Blood*. Mais au fil de ma recherche, j'ai découvert que, bien qu'elle soit restée longtemps méconnue et encore largement inexplorée, l'« empathie négative » est une réponse émotionnelle complexe et, à ce titre, un cas d'étude optimal. La construction formelle de l'« empathie négative » et, plus généralement, de l'empathie narrative, demeure un champ d'étude qui, malgré certaines contributions, demande encore à être clarifié. Utiliser l'« empathie négative » comme exemple du mode de transmission et du rôle des émotions narratives dans les

textes littéraires implique donc de définir ce concept, son contexte d'émergence, ses cibles potentielles et ses effets, ainsi que de tenter d'élucider comment l'empathie narrative en général—et sa variante « négative » en particulier—est suscitée par le texte fictionnel.

Pour résumer les différents fronts ouverts par les émotions narratives que j'ambitionne d'examiner—le narratologique, le sémantique, le relationnel et la spécificité de l'« empathie négative »—, je dirais que ma thèse doctorale combine deux niveaux d'enquête : je m'efforce de participer à la théorisation de la forme et du sens des émotions fictionnelles dans la narration ; parallèlement, je tente de contribuer à l'étude de l'« empathie négative » et, plus concrètement, à l'analyse de son expression textuelle.

Hypothèses, objectifs et structure

Pour explorer les questions de recherche évoquées précédemment, cette thèse repose sur l'hypothèse que les émotions narratives constituent des éléments fondamentaux de la construction des mondes fictionnels (Lubomír Doležel), participant à leur élaboration et à leur signification. Je considère les émotions comme des éléments formateurs à part entière, au même titre que les autres composantes des mondes narratifs. Cela implique qu'elles sont exprimées dans le texte fictionnel à travers ses aspects formels, et qu'en conséquence, elles peuvent être analysées dans le cadre de la narratologie. En outre, je soutiens que, de par leur nature fictionnelle, les mondes narratifs fonctionnent comme des simulations *parasociales* qui permettent aux lecteurs et lectrices de faire l'expérience d'émotions dans un cadre plus sûr et donc plus libre que celui des interactions sociales réelles. Dans ce contexte, j'émets également l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'empathie envers

des personnages immoraux se distingue comme un paradigme de l'extension émotionnelle et morale rendue possible—ou même exclusivement permise—par les conditions phénoménologiques de la littérature.

Pour résumer, et sur la base de ces hypothèses et des questions de recherche exposées, cette thèse de doctorat poursuit les objectifs principaux suivants :

1. Proposer une sémantique des émotions fictionnelles qui illustre leur rôle de « briques fondamentales » des mondes fictionnels et leur interaction avec les autres éléments et processus constructifs du récit.

2. Développer un vocabulaire apte à définir, distinguer et rendre compte des émotions narratives, afin de démontrer qu'elles ne relèvent pas d'une expérience ineffable ou purement subjective (Grossberg, 80).

3. Décrire les conditions phénoménologiques qui permettent la rencontre parasociale entre le monde fictionnel, ses habitants, et le lecteur/lectrice, et qui autorisent ainsi une extension de la capacité morale et émotionnelle de ce dernier.

4. Démontrer, par une analyse narratologique pratique, que les émotions narratives sont présentes dans le texte, qu'elles sont transmises à travers des éléments formels, et qu'elles peuvent donc être identifiées et décrites à l'aide d'outils narratologiques.

5. Analyser la construction formelle de ce que l'on appelle l'« empathie négative »—et, indirectement, de l'empathie narrative—à travers une exégèse centrée sur l'empathie dans deux romans contemporains : *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote (1966) et *Les bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell (2006).

6. Contribuer, par cet exercice pratique, à la compréhension formelle et thématique de ces deux œuvres littéraires.

Comme on peut le constater, ces objectifs couvrent la fonction, la représentation et la transmission des émotions fictionnelles tout au long du processus littéraire—c'est-à-dire la construction sémantique du monde fictionnel, sa représentation textuelle, et l'interprétation du lecteur/lectrice. L'objectif général de cette thèse doctorale est donc de retracer le parcours littéraire des émotions à travers l'exemple de l'empathie envers des personnages immoraux.

Conformément à cet objectif principal, la structure de cette thèse doit être envisagée comme un parcours qui, à travers *le prisme* des émotions, reflète le processus narratif et sa progression naturelle : en commençant par le niveau sémantique, suivi du niveau narratologique, pour finir avec le niveau herméneutique. La thèse s'organise ainsi en trois blocs principaux, chacun précédé d'un interlude qui fait office de lien entre les contenus des blocs successifs. Compte tenu de cette division tripartite et de la triple nature du processus narratif, on pourrait s'attendre à ce que le Bloc I corresponde à la sémantique des émotions fictionnelles, le Bloc II à leur représentation textuelle, et le Bloc III à leur réception.[23] Cependant, en considérant, d'une part, que mon objet de recherche principal—les émotions narratives, et plus particulièrement une forme d'empathie narrative—nécessite une contextualisation préalable, et d'autre part, que la réception est un point de vue inévitable dans l'étude des émotions et sous-tend donc toute la thèse, le Bloc I abordera l'empathie narrative, tandis que les deux blocs suivants porteront respectivement sur la sémantique et la narratologie.

[23] Pour plus d'informations sur la nature tripartite de la fictionnalité, se référer à *Fictional Worlds* de Thomas Pavel (70–73), à *Temps et Récit I* de Paul Ricoeur (85–129), ou encore à *La ficción narrativa. Su lógica y ontología* de Félix Martínez Bonati (123).

Suivant cette logique, le Bloc I présente le cadre théorique relatif aux émotions, à l'empathie et à ce que l'on a appelé « empathie négative »—que je préfère désigner sous le terme d'« empathie extrême ».[24] Après un aperçu de l'évolution historique du traitement des émotions dans les études savantes et du changement de paradigme introduit par la théorie des affects, ce bloc traite de ce que j'appelle les émotions transitives, et en particulier de la plus complexe d'entre elles : l'empathie. À la suite de cet état de la question, je propose la définition opérationnelle de l'empathie que j'utiliserai dans le cadre de ce travail. La dernière section de ce premier bloc se consacre à l'empathie envers les personnages immoraux—désormais nommée « empathie extrême »—, en définissant cette typologie d'empathie narrative et en examinant les approches antérieures à son sujet.

Faisant la transition entre la revue des travaux existants et l'étude de la sémantique fictionnelle des émotions, l'Interlude I aborde certains concepts clés pour ma réflexion sur la métaphysique des émotions narratives. Il traite notamment de la distinction entre émotions réelles et fictionnelles, des avantages spécifiques de la littérature narrative dans l'émergence de l'empathie, ainsi que des similitudes procédurales entre narration et empathie en tant qu'expériences épistémologiques. Sur un plan plus thématique, j'y propose une brève réflexion sur les représentations littéraires du Mal. Cet interlude se conclut par un récapitulatif de la manière dont les études littéraires ont abordé jusqu'à présent l'empathie narrative, afin d'aborder le Bloc II avec une compréhension claire de l'état de la recherche.

Le Bloc II constitue le noyau théorique de cette recherche. Comme déjà mentionné, cette section est consacrée au fonctionnement des émotions narratives au niveau sémiotique et intersubjectif. J'articule l'importance des émotions narratives en tant

[24] Concernant ce changement de nomenclature, j'exprime ma gratitude au Dr Rodrigo Andrés pour avoir mis en lumière la contradiction inhérente au fait de rejeter le binarisme moral des émotions tout en utilisant le terme *empathie négative*.

qu'éléments structurants des mondes fictionnels, en explorant leurs fonctions possibles et leurs interactions avec les autres éléments fictionnels. Je propose également une méthode de classification de ces émotions et j'analyse la dynamique de la relation entre lecteur/lectrice et personnages. Ce bloc répond aux trois premiers objectifs annoncés, liés à la structure interne des mondes fictionnels, et fournit la base théorique nécessaire pour aborder les objectifs quatre à six, relatifs à la transmission sémiotique des émotions—en particulier de l'empathie extrême—dans le texte narratif.

L'Interlude II fait le lien entre l'organisation du sens dans le roman et sa concrétisation narratologique. Cette section transitionnelle commente les tentatives antérieures d'analyse des émotions, de l'empathie narrative et de l'empathie extrême comme effets de procédés formels. Elle introduit la méthodologie des analyses narratologiques à venir et précise les objectifs, les portées et les éventuelles limites de ces analyses.

Si le Bloc II est le cœur théorique de cette thèse, le Bloc III en constitue le socle pratique, puisqu'il applique la sémantique fictionnelle des émotions que je propose et vise à démontrer l'hypothèse principale de mon projet : que les émotions littéraires, telles que l'empathie narrative, sont générées par des procédés formels. Pour le prouver, ce bloc présente une analyse narratologique de l'émergence de l'empathie envers les personnages criminels dans *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote et *Les Bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell, suivie d'une étude comparative de leurs constructions formelles respectives de cette émotion. Tandis que l'exégèse de chaque roman vise à mettre en œuvre ma méthode d'analyse des émotions littéraires, la comparaison finale cherche à dégager des conclusions sur la construction formelle de l'empathie extrême et de l'empathie narrative en général.

Enfin, l'Interlude III assure la transition entre la narratologie des émotions et leur réception. Il revient sur la présence prépondérante de la théorie de la réception dans l'étude des émotions et de l'empathie narratives, ainsi que sur l'impossibilité paradoxale d'en définir une herméneutique certaine. Pour clore ce parcours de la réponse émotionnelle à la lecture, ce dernier segment aborde également les effets potentiels de l'empathie extrême, en tant qu'expérience littéraire, sur les lecteurs/lectrices.

Comme on le voit dans cette présentation panoramique, la structure de ma thèse entrelace trois blocs principaux avec trois interludes transitionnels. Après avoir expliqué la raison d'être des trois blocs, il peut être utile de justifier ici l'inclusion de ces « interludes ». À première vue, ces fragments assurent simplement le lien entre la conclusion d'un bloc et l'introduction du suivant. Pourtant, ma décision d'insérer ces interludes répond à une double motivation : pratique et symbolique. D'un point de vue pratique, comme l'indiquent leurs titres, ces fragments ont pour but de recentrer le projet sur son étude de cas : l'intersection entre empathie et littérature. Compte tenu de la nature interdisciplinaire de cette thèse—sur laquelle je reviendrai—, chaque bloc traite d'un des trois domaines clés de la fiction : théorie, sémantique et narratologie, tandis que l'herméneutique les traverse tous. Dans ce parcours à travers le processus littéraire, l'empathie narrative joue le rôle de fil conducteur, permettant d'illustrer le fonctionnement des émotions fictionnelles. Toutefois, étant donné le degré d'abstraction requis, ce principe directeur risque parfois de s'estomper. L'objectif pratique des interludes est donc de réancrer le discours sur l'empathie narrative en montrant comment le contenu des blocs s'y applique concrètement.

Sur un plan plus symbolique, les interludes soulignent l'idée d'un processus narratif comme parcours interconnecté, dans lequel la *macro-sémantique* mène à la *micro-sémantique*, la mimésis s'articule à la narratologie, et la narratologie rejoint la

réception. Bien que, pour des raisons de clarté, chaque bloc de la thèse se concentre sur un champ disciplinaire distinct, je ne souhaite pas dissocier les relations intimes entre ces catégories, car le besoin de traiter chacune d'elles naît précisément de leur interconnexion inhérente au processus narratif. De ce point de vue, l'interlude incarne un passage qui facilite—et rappelle—les échanges entre les catégories littéraires, entre texte et lecteur/lectrice, entre lecteur/lectrice et culture, entre sujet et objet de l'émotion… bref, tous les transferts et négociations à l'œuvre dans tout texte littéraire. Ainsi, cette structure vise in fine à refléter la nature communicationnelle des textes littéraires et des émotions narratives, où les catégories isolées n'ont pas leur place.

Sources et méthodologie

Afin d'embrasser les différentes dimensions inhérentes à un phénomène aussi complexe que le parcours littéraire d'une émotion narrative, et d'analyser la construction et le fonctionnement de l'empathie extrême dans le récit, cette thèse combine principalement les disciplines de la théorie des affects—elle-même un champ interdisciplinaire—, de la sémantique fictionnelle et de la narratologie. Cependant, l'étendue de mon sujet de recherche m'amènera également à mobiliser des théories et des concepts issus d'autres domaines, tels que l'herméneutique, l'esthétique[25] ou la philosophie politique.[26] L'hétérogénéité de ma méthodologie—qui associe des champs rarement juxtaposés

[25] La prise en compte des aspects esthétiques s'inscrira ici dans une perspective anti-kantienne, c'est-à-dire une perspective qui considère la sphère esthétique comme liée à l'éthique et à la connaissance. À cet égard, mon point de vue rejoint celui de Hanna Meretoja lorsqu'elle affirme que la tradition kantienne « risque de réduire l'œuvre littéraire à sa production de plaisir esthétique, en négligeant la manière dont les œuvres d'art fonctionnent également comme des modes de compréhension du monde, chargés éthiquement » (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 240).

[26] Je m'appuierai en particulier sur la généalogie du pouvoir de Michel Foucault et sur les réflexions de Jacques Rancière concernant la politique de la littérature.

(comme la théorie des affects et la sémantique), voire parfois considérés comme inconciliables (comme la narratologie et l'herméneutique)—me semble indispensable à l'étude des émotions fictionnelles, et plus spécifiquement, de l'empathie narrative.[27] Comme le suggère Suzanne Keen, à l'instar de toutes les émotions fictionnelles, « l'empathie narrative joue un rôle dans l'esthétique de la production lorsque les auteurs en font l'expérience, dans la simulation mentale pendant la lecture, dans l'esthétique de la réception lorsque les lecteurs et les lectrices la ressentent, et dans la poétique narrative des textes lorsque des stratégies formelles l'invitent » (*Empathy and the Novel* 159).

Pour explorer précisément le concept d'empathie ainsi que sa manifestation littéraire, je m'appuie sur plusieurs sources rattachées, d'une manière ou d'une autre, au courant interdisciplinaire de la théorie des affects. Parmi ces références, ma conception générale des émotions et de l'empathie est particulièrement influencée par des approches sociopolitiques, comme celles de Sara Ahmed (2004), Sianne Ngai (2005) ou Carolyn Pedwell (2014). En ce qui concerne l'empathie narrative en tant que telle, je mobilise les travaux de divers chercheurs associés à ce que l'on appelle le *tournant empathique*. Comme je l'expliquerai, la nature interdisciplinaire de ce *tournant empathique* est encore plus vaste que celle de la théorie des affects dont il émane. Les perspectives des études que j'emploie varient donc considérablement, allant de points de vue littéraires—tels que ceux de Suzanne Keen (2007) ou Andrea Deciu Ritivoi (2016)—à des approches

[27] La séparation entre la narratologie et l'herméneutique est une division ancienne qui perdure encore aujourd'hui, notamment au sein de l'académie littéraire anglo-saxonne. Dans *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Rita Felski déplore l'exclusion de l'herméneutique de la théorie littéraire et l'attribue à l'influence du poststructuralisme ainsi qu'à une mécompréhension de ce champ. Elle exprime son mécontentement face à cette négligence en affirmant que « compte tenu de l'intérêt croissant pour les questions de lecture—rapprochée ou distante, profonde ou superficielle—, le rejet de la tradition herméneutique dans la théorie littéraire anglo-américaine est à peine moins qu'un scandale » (33). De manière similaire, Hanna Meretoja suggère que l'éloignement de la narratologie vis-à-vis de l'herméneutique provient d'une association erronée entre herméneutique et subjectivité, qui contredirait l'objectif de la narratologie d'aborder les œuvres littéraires de manière objective. À ce sujet, Hanna Meretoja affirme : « dans les études narratives, la narratologie en particulier a cherché à se distancer de l'interprétation, qu'elle associe à l'absence de scientificité et à la subjectivité » (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 7).

influencées par la psychologie—comme celles d'Amy Coplan (2011) ou Peter Goldie (2000). Bien que j'aie évité les approches empiriques de l'empathie dans ce travail, certaines idées provenant d'auteurs rattachés à ces courants psychologiques—par exemple Marco Caracciolo (2013) ou Jèmeljan Hakemulder (2000)—ont également nourri ma recherche. Enfin, ma perspective sur ce que j'ai choisi d'appeler *empathie extrême* repose principalement, comme annoncé, sur un dialogue théorique avec la seule source primaire sur ce sujet : *Empatia Negativa* de Stefano Ercolino et Massimo Fusillo (2022).

Même si le concept d'empathie mobilisé dans cette thèse se base sur des références multiples, mon exploration de la sémantique fictionnelle repose presque exclusivement sur les travaux de deux figures centrales de la sémantique des mondes possibles : Thomas Pavel, dont l'essai *Fictional Worlds* guidera en grande partie ma relecture de l'évolution des théories de la mimésis au XXème siècle ; et Lubomír Doležel, dont la sémantique fictionnelle, formulée dans *Heterocosmica* (1998), constitue le socle de la deuxième section de cette thèse. Ainsi, comme le montrera le Bloc II, la méthode que j'adopte pour élaborer une sémantique des émotions narratives consiste en une immersion dans la sémantique fictionnelle de Doležel, suivie d'une extension visant à y inclure l'étude des émotions narratives. En ce qui concerne les conditions sociales et émotionnelles de la rencontre entre le monde fictionnel et celui du lecteur/lectrice, ma réflexion est influencée par ce que j'ai appelé des *théories de la simulation*, telles que celles développées—avec des nuances—dans les travaux de Pavel (2010), Ryan (1980), et Walton (1990), ainsi que par la compréhension herméneutique des *rencontres intermondes* formulée par Marco Caracciolo (2013) et Andrea Deciu Ritivoi (2016). En outre, le concept de littérature en tant que *laboratoire moral*, défini par Hakemulder

(2000), a également joué un rôle important dans ma conception de l'interaction entre personnages et lecteur/lectrice.

Outre l'adoption de sa sémantique fictionnelle, une autre influence directe de Doležel sur ma thèse réside dans l'adoption de la méthode en zigzag. Cette méthode d'analyse littéraire, popularisée par Roland Barthes dans *S/Z* (1970) et utilisée par Doležel dans *Heterocosmica*, vise à « poursuivre simultanément la théorie abstraite et l'analyse concrète du texte » en combinant des évaluations sémantiques et formelles (*Heterocosmica*, xi). Cette méthodologie défend donc une alliance étroite entre mimésis et narratologie. Dans le cadre de mon projet, la méthode en zigzag offre un cadre de référence qui permet d'analyser à la fois le fonctionnement des émotions dans le roman et leur expression narratologique. Ainsi, après avoir esquissé une sémantique fictionnelle des émotions narratives, comme expliqué plus haut, je chercherai à l'ancrer dans des éléments narratologiques concrets à travers l'analyse des dispositifs favorisant l'empathie dans *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote et *Les Bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell. Pour conduire ces analyses, j'utilise, en plus de ma propre classification sémantique des émotions fictionnelles, la narratologie de Gérard Genette, telle qu'elle est présentée notamment dans *Figures III* (1972) et dans son adaptation anglaise *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980).

Enfin, le courant herméneutique sur lequel se fonde ma thèse est celui de la phénoménologie herméneutique. Bien que des notions empruntées à des penseurs tels que Paul Ricoeur ou Hans-Georg Gadamer soient mentionnées à différents moments de la thèse, le modèle d'interprétation littéraire auquel j'adhère est principalement celui de la réception esthétique de Wolfgang Iser, tel qu'il l'expose dans *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). Si j'ai insisté dans cette introduction sur la présence de l'herméneutique dans les pages à venir, c'est parce que je souscris au principe de la

phénoménologie herméneutique selon lequel toute analyse interprétative, y compris celle de cette thèse, est inévitablement médiée par des enjeux de réception et d'interprétation. Je suis consciente que cette thèse, bien qu'éclairée par les méthodologies et références évoquées, est également médiée par ma propre perspective de recherche.[28] À cet égard, ce travail s'inscrit profondément dans une perspective post-barthienne de l'étude littéraire, qui reconnaît l'impossibilité d'atteindre une vérité ou une certitude absolue sur un texte. Ces pages se veulent donc une tentative parmi d'autres de comprendre la littérature narrative—et en l'occurrence, ses émotions.

Considérations stylistiques

Pour conclure, je souhaiterais évoquer certains aspects relatifs à la mise en forme et au style de cette thèse de doctorat. Bien que rédigée en anglais, cette thèse répond aux exigences de la *mention internationale* du doctorat, ce qui implique que certaines de ses sections—notamment cette introduction, les conclusions et le résumé—sont également présentées en français. Par ailleurs, les sources primaires—principalement *Les Bienveillantes*—ainsi que les citations, sont fournies dans leur langue originale, à condition que ce soit dans cette langue qu'elles aient été lues. C'est le cas du français, de l'italien, du catalan et de l'espagnol. Ce choix formel répond à une volonté explicite de ne pas gommer la diversité linguistique qui a nourri ce projet, tout en soulignant sa nature bilingue, déterminée par les œuvres analysées—écrites en anglais et en français. Afin de

[28] Dans cette perspective, l'analyse littéraire ne peut que décrire les conditions de possibilité des mondes fictionnels, et non leur existence en tant que telle, puisque celle-ci ne prend forme qu'à travers la réception individuelle de chaque lecteur/lectrice. Comme le formulent Sara Whiteley et Patricia Canning, « l'étude stylistique de la forme textuelle et de ses effets interprétatifs repose sur la conception des œuvres littéraires (et en réalité de tous les textes) comme des objets hétéronomes ; c'est-à-dire des objets qui ne prennent vie que par la conscience observatrice du lecteur » (71).

faciliter la lecture de ces citations, une annexe—l'Appendix I— regroupe l'ensemble des traductions en anglais. Dans le corps du texte principal, chaque citation en langue étrangère est suivie d'un renvoi à l'Annexe I, placé entre crochets, qui permet de retrouver la traduction correspondante. La numérotation suit l'ordre d'apparition des citations dans le texte, sans distinction entre le texte principal et les notes de bas de page. Pour une meilleure lisibilité, la numérotation recommence à chaque section de la thèse, et l'Annexe est divisée en conséquence. En ce qui concerne les traductions, j'ai tenté, dans la mesure du possible, d'utiliser des traductions publiées, dont la référence bibliographique est indiquée à la fois dans l'Appendix I et dans la bibliographie. Lorsque la source originale n'a pas été traduite, cela est spécifié, j'ai traduit moi-même le texte.

Enfin, l'absence de précédents académiques pour de nombreuses parties de cette thèse m'a conduite à forger plusieurs néologismes. Ceux-ci apparaîtront en italique dans le texte, à l'exception d'*empathie extrême,* un terme que je ne considère pas comme entièrement mien, mais plutôt comme résultant des observations du Dr. Rodrigo Andrés, comme mentionné plus tôt. De plus, la centralité de ce concept dans ma recherche rendrait un usage systématique de l'italique excessif—et potentiellement confus. Ces termes, ainsi que leur signification, sont regroupés dans un Glossaire en fin de thèse pour plus de clarté. Dans certains cas, lorsque le terme existant ne correspondait pas à ma conception d'un concept, j'ai choisi de le remplacer par un terme alternatif, en justifiant systématiquement ce choix dans le corps du texte. Mon intention n'a jamais été de créer une nouvelle nomenclature destinée à supplanter les autres, mais simplement d'employer l'idiolecte qui, selon moi, rend le mieux compte de ma vision particulière de la sémantique et de la narratologie des émotions fictionnelles. Si, finalement, certains des termes proposés s'avèrent utiles, je serais heureuse d'avoir contribué, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à la

définition des émotions narratives. Cela dit, cette éventualité reste éloignée de mon intention première : comprendre, en somme, ce que la littérature nous fait ressentir.

BLOCK I. EMPATHY AND EXTREME EMPATHY

1.1 AFFECT THEORY: A CHANGE IN THE CONCEPTION OF EMOTIONS

From my perspective, over the past few years, the term "empathy" has generated a similar effect within academic circles as "trauma" has for decades: a concept that seems fairly clear in our minds, but when asked to define it, we might find ourselves doubting our own understanding of it. Questions could arise such as, "What tradition am I positioning myself in by conceiving it this way? What alternative definitions am I rejecting? Am I oversimplifying the concept, or was my initial conceptualization correct, and I am now unnecessarily complicating it?". The uncertainties that still surround empathy today appear as remnants of the inconsistencies that governed the general study of emotions until a few years ago.

Since Plato, in one of his dialogues with Socrates, *Phaedrus*, explained the human mind as a chariot driven by the conflicting forces of two horses—Reason and Passion—, emotions have occupied a contentious space in Western philosophy. From René Descartes's *Les passions de l'âme* (1649) to Jacques Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié* (1994), most modern and contemporary thinkers have grappled with the nature of emotions, albeit from varying perspectives and depths. Despite their diverse approaches, most have been compelled to address two debates that have dominated the study of emotions from Greco-Roman times until the end of the 20th century: the natural/cultural

origins of emotions,[29] and their moral categorization,[30] both stemming from the Platonic dichotomy of reason and passion mentioned above.[31] These ongoing discussions often limited philosophical exploration of emotions to questions of their compatibility with human reason and their classification as "good" or "bad." As Rom Harré observes, "[p]ast lack of interest can be explained in part by the predominance […] of a philosophical conception of emotions as simple, non-cognitive phenomena, among the bodily perturbations" ("An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint" 2). Sianne Ngai further criticizes how this rationalist perspective of emotions, alongside with the subsequent binary taxonomy imposed to them, has caused "ennobling or morally beatific states like sympathy, melancholia and shame" to receive more critical attention than "ugly feelings", which have been discussed primarily in relation to their cathartic or didactic potential (6-7).

Nonetheless, the primary obstacle Western thought posed to the study of emotions was not so much these research limitations but rather, as Harré pointed out in the quote

[29] Especially until the 18th century, the Western rationalist viewpoint, followed by most thinkers, considered "the passions" as impulses to be controlled (Spinoza 12), as these "natural phenomena" were thought to "enslave human conduct" (Spinoza 112). This prejudice, maintained in the work of philosophers such as René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, or David Hume, was in fact inherited from the Stoics, who emphasized the importance of controlling emotions to achieve inner peace.

[30]This binary division can also be traced back to the influence of the Stoics, but it was further reinforced by Judeo-Christian morals. For an insightful exploration of the continuation of Ancient Greek theories on moral emotions by Medieval Christian thinkers, see Sarah Catherine Byers (2012). The scholar provides an account of St. Augustine of Hippo's theory of affectivity. The moral classification of emotions persisted practically unchanged until the 20th century and was remarkably perpetuated in modernity by the influence of Baruch Spinoza's work. In his *Ethica* (1677), Spinoza categorized emotions into those that are virtuous, arising from reason and imbued with the desire to live honorably, and those that are evil, diminishing our power of acting (Koistinen & Viljanen 20). Later, English materialist Thomas Hobbes and Scottish sentimentalists such as Adam Smith or David Hume rejected the idea that reason could control passions but retained the moral organization of emotions, classifying them as virtuous or vicious based on their pleasurable or painful nature (Buckle 189).

[31] Concerning the dichotomy reason/passion in relation to the nature of emotions, I use the adjective "platonic" because, although as we will see, this distinction is of Platonic inheritance, as Aristotle, the primary classic influence of Western thought, took a much more moderate position than Plato. According to Rom Harré, Aristotle considered that "while emotions give rise to affective impulses, they are generated by a state of mind, involving cognition-based construals and evaluations of some state of affairs in the world." Therefore, Aristotle granted a certain cognitive role to emotions. Nonetheless, as Harré continues, Aristotle's comments on the matter do not go any further, as he believed, like his contemporaries, that emotions were "unproblematic; and not worthy of extensive study in their own right" ("An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint" 2).

above, the "lack of interest" that this topic held for theoreticians. Not only had moralism restricted the research on "negative" emotions, but rationalism had prevented "bad" as well as "good" ones from occupying a discursive space outside the moral domain (Goldie, *The Emotions* 3).[32] If in the introduction of *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), Descartes already complained that "the most glaring defect in the sciences we have from the ancients is what they wrote about the passions" (1), more than three hundred years later, academia in the late nineties was still faced with the same problem. The difference was that, by then, the confusion surrounding the theorization of emotions was rooted in a long tradition of criticism. From philosophical and literary perspectives—two domains whose attention to the topic has evolved almost in parallel—, different schools of thought fluctuated between rejecting the study of emotions or showing a keen interest in them. While philosophical rationalism or structuralism and literary New Criticism or Bertold Bretch's *Verfremsdungseffekt* or "alienation effect" thought that emotions tended to annihilate the "objects of specifically critical judgment" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 31), other movements, such as Scottish sentimentalism, hermeneutics or phenomenology in philosophy, and Realism or Romanticism in literature, believed that emotions, as part of human subjectivity, had to be integrated into theoretical and cultural thought. With all, the conceptualization of emotions mostly remained, at the turn of the 20th century, a critical void at the heart of the humanities.

As I have suggested at the beginning of this section, the case of empathy serves as a paradigmatic example of the issues mentioned above, both in terms of its current conceptualization and its historical trajectory. The theoretical genealogy of empathy is

[32] Literature and literary studies constitute good examples of this limitation, as the affectivity contained in literary works has not been regarded as a valid parameter in textual analysis except in some isolated trends such as Romanticism or Victorian narrative, for which the ability of an author to move the readership constituted a sign of proficiency. Nevertheless, even in those literary trends, a moralist lens persisted (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 55).

shorter than that of other emotions but probably more turbulent.[33] Although the term "empathy"—*Einfühlung* in the original German—was not coined until 1903, when the German philosopher Theodor Lipps introduced the neologism to refer to the aesthetic experience of merging oneself with an artwork, the idea of an emotion resembling what we now understand as "empathy" had been circulating since at least 1677.[34] The earliest definition of this emotional response appeared in Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) where the Dutch philosopher—considered a pioneer of the modern theorization of affect (Massumi 2015)—already depicted it as an emotional experience of ambiguous nature.[35] Subsequent explorations of empathy also failed to reach a consensus regarding its functioning. In fact, despite empathy being a more recurrent topic in the history of Western thought than other emotional experiences, these definitions were generally as inconclusive as they were scarce.

[33] This brief history of the term will especially draw on two scholarly contributions: first, on Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie's introduction to their edited volume *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, in which they summarize the itinerary of the concept in philosophy; and secondly, on the third chapter of Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel*, entitled "The Literary Career of Empathy", where she delineates the evolution of empathy as a tool for literary analysis.

[34]As the specific term "empathy" was not coined until 1903, up until then, the concept was not unified terminologically and bore different labels throughout history. For instance, Baruch Spinoza (*Ethics*, 1677) made a distinction between empathy for "negative" emotions, which he called "compassion", and empathy for "positive" ones, which he called "sympathy". Later, in the works of David Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739) and Adam Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759) this emotion is presented as "sympathy", what has likely contributed to the confusion that still occurs between the two concepts today. To learn more about the concept of sympathy in the work of David Hume and John Adams, I recommend reading Basseler 2017; Buckle 2012; Hanley 2014; Morrow 1923; Raphael & Macfie 2004.

[35] As has been mentioned, Baruch Spinoza's delineation of affect still stands as a point of departure for the posterior study of the topic. More specifically, the aspect of Spinoza's work on the emotions that has more evidently left its mark on contemporary philosophy has been the distinction between *affectus*, "the force of an affecting body" and *affectio*, "the impact it leaves on the one affected" (Watkins 269). The reason why Spinoza's terms still have an impact nowadays is to be found in the work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, as naming of these two phenomena at work within the dynamics of affect was employed by Deleuze in his theorization of the relationship between the individual body and the surrounding bodies, defined as bodies' "capacity for affecting and being affected" (Deleuze 625). In turn, as most of Deleuze's theory on the subject, this point has been highly influential for subsequent affect theorists (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, *Politics of Affect* 48). As a result of Deleuze's adoption of Spinoza's terms and his recognition of the Dutch philosopher's work on affect, contemporary affect theorists have come to identify Spinoza as "the philosopher who has advanced furthest the theory of the affects and whose thought is the source, either directly or indirectly, of most of the contemporary work in this field" (Clough ix).

The analysis of emotions—particularly empathy—reached an unprecedented point of effervescence within the emergence of affect theory, spanning from 1995 to the present. Scholars engaged in this theoretical approach have not merely intensified the focus on affect to contribute to the existing critical tradition. Instead, they have actively worked to deconstruct it. Through a systematic review of the field, they completely re-conceptualized the nature of emotions. In the following pages, I will briefly examine some of the main contributions of affect theory, along with my stance on them. This introductory review serves two purposes. On the one hand, I hope it will clarify the current role of emotions in the field of literary theory, within which this research is situated, and whose latest innovations have made possible the distinctive treatment of empathy employed in this project. On the other hand, my starting from the foundations of affect theory—for instance by exposing the field's distinction of emotion, affect, and feeling, or that of empathy and sympathy—, will likely help contextualize the vision of empathy and of extreme empathy on which my thesis is based, which I will discuss in subsequent sections.

In the nineties, prompted by the growing interest of feminist and queer scholars in the body and emotions as means of sociality, a new critical movement, the "affective turn", emerged to enrich cultural criticism. Over time, this trend grew in popularity and evolved into a distinct area of research. Its purpose was to incorporate affects and emotions into cultural studies and analyze their role in society, as well as in cultural and artistic representations. The starting point of what we now know as "affect theory" can be situated in a specific year, 1995, when three renowned scholars—Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank on the one hand, and Brian Massumi on the other—published two papers that reignited interest in affect: respectively, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," and "The Autonomy of Affect" (Gregg & Seigworth 5). These publications sparked a critical

concern whose echoes were to reverberate quickly through multiple disciplines. Despite the presence of an existing critical tradition, revitalized by academics such as Silvan Tomkins and Gilles Deleuze, who had a direct influence on affect theory, these two texts were pioneer in turning "emotions, feelings, and affect," into "objects of scholarly inquiry" (Cvetkovich 133).

Perhaps the initial step towards transforming "emotions, feelings, and affect" into "objects of scholarly inquiry" was precisely to conceive these three terms as distinct concepts. Up until the early 21st century, the choice of the term *passions* (Descartes), *affects* (Spinoza) *sentiments* (Smith) or *emotions* (Hume), —among others—depended on the personal preference of each author. They were employed indistinctly, and their use was not agreed upon. Although it is difficult to determine to what extent this terminological vagueness was a cause or an effect of the inconsistent study of emotions in the Western tradition, early affect theorists recognized the need for a unified nomenclature and definition to address these concepts effectively. A consensus arrived with the publication of Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), where Massumi established a clear distinction between "affect", "emotion", and "feeling"—a framework widely adopted in affect theory today and employed in this thesis.[36] Based on Baruch Spinoza's and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's earlier insights into affect,[37] Massumi differentiates *affect* from *emotion* by the fact that, while *affect* is an "asubjective and anti-representational" force that mediates between affected bodies and affecting bodies, "an energetic dimension or 'capacity'", *emotion* is its concretization, "a selective activation or expression of affect" (Gibbs 187-

[36] As Eric Shouse synthetizes it, it is now a (quasi)unanimous opinion among academia to consider that "feelings are *personal and biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *pre-personal*" (2-3).

[37] Spinoza's conceptualization of affect was recovered by the post-structuralist philosophers Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, who characterized affect as mediating every possible relation between a body and the surrounding world (Deleuze 1992). For more information on the perception of affect as omnipresent in the thought of Spinoza and Deleuze, you may refer to Ahmed 2004 and Stewart 2007.

188). In other words, *affect* is "a non-conscious experience of intensity […] unformed and unstructured", while *emotion* is an affect identified as having a specific "function and meaning" (Massumi *Politics of Affect* 260). According to Massumi, then, emotion and affect "follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (*Politics of Affect* 27).[38] In turn, if an *emotion* refers to one of the socially recognized forms that affect may take; *feeling* encompasses an individual's experience of emotion in a given situation. Hence, the difference between the three terms lies in their level of specificity—so that, from vaguer to more concrete, *affect* is a "transindividual" force mediating between bodies (Massumi, *Politics of Affect* 205), an *emotion* is a concrete manifestation of affect (e.g., sadness, rage, hope) and a *feeling* is the way in which an individual experiences an emotion in a concrete situation. This conceptual framework not only provided a solid foundation for analysis but also reshaped theoretical approaches to *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling*. Under this new light, the study of *affect* and *emotion* became focused on two aspects from which derive the main contributions of affect theory: the omnipresent nature of affect on the one hand, which resulted in affect theory's interdisciplinary method, and the sociocultural origin of emotions on the other, which lead to a humanistic review of them.

The impact of affect on various aspects of human experience, as noted by Ahmed (2004), has sparked increased interest in its analysis across diverse fields of study. Consequently, the affective turn has fostered "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 3). As Patricia

[38] Nevertheless, as Sianne Ngai warns, the "unstructured" nature of affect does not turn it into an unattainable object of study. In her words, "my assumption is that affects are *less* formed and structured than emotions, but not lacking form or structure altogether; *less* 'sociolinguistically fixed,' but by no means code-free or meaningless; *less* 'organized in response to our interpretations of situations,' but by no means entirely devoid of organization or diagnostic powers" (27).

Clough's definition hints at, the understanding of affect as an all-encompassing force directed critical attention towards affective manifestations that are more "sociolinguistically fixed" and politically bounded: emotions (Ngai 27).[39]

The revision of concepts prompted by the affective turn led to—among other changes—the widespread adoption of a constructivist perspective on human emotions.[40] At the antipodes of naturalism, constructionism conceives emotions "not as natural responses elicited by natural features which a situation may possess, but as socioculturally determined patterns of experience and expression which are acquired".[41] According to this viewpoint, emotions "are learnt as part of the agent's introduction to beliefs, values, norms and expectations of his/her culture" (Harré, "An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint" 33). This new understanding asserts that despite the physical symptoms that may accompany them, emotions constitute "social and cultural practices" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 9).[42] By situating the origin of emotions within the "communal ethos" of their cultural context (Judith Butler), this revision of the concept dismantled the Platonic dichotomy of reason versus passion. Moreover, it also moved emotions away from their moral categorization. That is because, from a constructivist perspective, emotions are seen as "strategic" (Harré, "An Outline of the Social

[39] For more information on the changes of paradigm brought by affect theory, you may read Patricia Clough's introduction to *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007).

[40] However, it is important to point out that "constructionism" was not a new perspective on emotions. Rom Harré's edited volume *The Social Construction of Emotions*, published in 1986, gives evidence that what has been known as the "constructionist" approach to "the problem of understanding and accounting for human emotions" did not emerge with the affective turn. In fact, it was already being forged in the mid-eighties as an answer to the "disenchantment with the sterile paradigm of psychology" and its naturalist explanation of emotion (Harré "Preface" vii). Hence, the affective turn only reinforced and extended this perspective on emotions.

[41] It may be necessary to clarify that this quote by Rom Harré is an instance of the "strong constructionist" position in the spectrum ranging between naturalism and constructionism, for which "emotion is an irreducibly sociocultural product. From this it would follow that no emotion can be a natural state" (Armor-Jones 37). A "weaker" thesis of this paradigm, defended by scholars such as Claire Armor-Jones, "concedes to the naturalist the existence of a limited range of natural emotion responses" (Armor-Jones 38) and thus opts for an intermediate position to which I subscribe.

[42] For more on the physical symptomatology of emotions, you may refer to Bertelsen & Murphie 2010 or Doležel 1998.

Constructionist Viewpoint" 12), changing, and biased. Therefore, they can only be analyzed as cultural products: that is, individually and in relation to the sociopolitical context in which they arise. As such, any emotion is potentially positive or negative, depending on its alignment with the "cultural distinctions, social norms and political practices of exclusion" that it may reproduce (Pedwell 2).

The perception of emotions as sociocultural products and cultural practices quickly gained traction within academia. Gradually, the influence of social, cultural, and politico-economic factors in shaping emotions emerged as a central concern of affect theory. Given the nature of this new focus, the field of humanities—in most cases—became the primary focus of this research.[43] During the 1990s, when this academic interest surged, cultural studies dominated the humanities. Cultivated by scholars like Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall in previous decades, cultural studies provided an ideal environment for the development of affect theory: its confluence of disciplines allowed scholars to explore the multifaceted nature of affect, while diverse critical perspectives facilitated the examination of emotions through a politically engaged lens. As Sianne Ngai reflects, cultural studies embraced the constructionist idea that "emotions are strategic" and applied this concept to address pressing contemporary issues (Harré qtd. Ngai 12). These concerns encompassed not only the "ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism" that marked the beginning of the 21st century (Gregg and Seigworth 1), but also the emergence of a new global system that asked for a reevaluation of emotions. Against this backdrop, Ngai's reflections in 2005 resonate:

[43] Nonetheless, the interest in affect and emotions also resounded in scientific fields as psychology, neurology, sociology, or ethology (Armor-Jones 32). Such was the case that, as we will see below, these areas of knowledge had their own affect turn in the first decades of the 21st century, albeit particularly centered on the emotional experience of empathy, which stands as the main example of how not all emotions were analyzed mainly from the humanities.

> [I]n the transnational stage of capitalism that defines our contemporary moment, our emotions no longer link up as securely as they once did with the models of social action and transformation […] the nature of the sociopolitical itself has changed in a manner that both calls forth and calls upon a new set of feelings—ones less powerful than the classical political passions, though perhaps more suited, in their ambient, Bartlebyan, but still diagnostic nature, for models of subjectivity, collectivity, and agency not entirely foreseen by past theorists of the commonwealth. (5)

Over time, the affective turn has indeed delved into the relationship between modern experience and emotions, unlocking their potential for analyzing cultural phenomena. Yet, the evolving social landscape highlighted by Ngai demanded a closer examination of specific emotions that, under this new critical lens, began to be perceived as ambiguous social experiences whose "dynamics […] and exclusions" had to be revised (Berlant 5). Consequently, during the turn of the century and the first decades of the 21st century, there was a proliferation of monographs dedicated to individual emotions such as fear (Massumi 1993), shame (Probyn 2005), happiness (Ahmed 2010), compassion (Berlant 2004), or anger (Nussbaum 2016) or processes like depression (Cvetkovich 2012). The aim of these essays was, on the one hand, to uncover the underlying ideology behind emotional practices; and on the other, to explore the sociopolitical and cultural implications of such emotions. Throughout this critical exercise, academia focused particularly on affective encounters that, due to their relational nature, are particularly prone to reproduce structures of power. This subset of emotions/cultural practices

constitutes what I term "transitive emotions", which includes for instance pity or compassion, sympathy, and empathy.[44]

Empathy as a *Transitive* Emotion

It is a widely accepted notion among affect theorists that what sets compassion, sympathy, and empathy apart is that, while most emotions "contain an ineliminable reference to *me*" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* 52), this group of emotions arise in response to the state of—at least—another individual, often referred to as "the target" of the emotion.[45] To highlight this particularity, some scholars in the field of cognitive approaches to cultural studies[46] have labeled them as "emotional responses" (Carroll 2011; Eisenberg 2005; Keen 2007), while others classify them as "other-oriented" emotions (Coplan & Goldie xxxiv). As we can see, both labels emphasize the context in which these emotions emerge, as they refer to a "response" and an "other". Yet, while these labels serve to distinguish these emotions from others, in my opinion, they may not fully capture their idiosyncrasy. That is because the emergence these labels recall is not exclusive to this group of emotions: practically every emotion—for example, that of happiness—can flourish as a response to an external stimulus. Nonetheless, this group of emotions *only* arise after an encounter with an external cause. While I agree with the scholars above that

[44] Given the established distinction between "affect," understood as a "transindividual" force, and "emotion," which is a generic for the many concretizations of affect (Brian Massumi), empathy, together with the other so-called *transitive* emotions, will always be qualified as an emotion, although I will also be using the terms "emotional experience", "emotional response", and "emotional reaction" given that, as chapter 3 of this Block will examine, empathy is an emotion that necessarily appears as a "response" or a "reaction" to the emotional state of another individual.

[45] With the intention of adjusting my discourse to the agreed-on nomenclature among critical thinkers of emotions, throughout this thesis I will be employing the term "target" to refer to the object/subject that causes an emotion, and to which the emotion "refers" (Terada 101).

[46] "Cognitive approaches to cultural studies" are a "growing interdisciplinary field" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* xi) that aims at investigating cultural manifestations using the theoretical resources of developmental and social psychology.

this unique emergence demands a distinct critical approach, I believe that a more precise nomenclature could further elucidate their functioning. With this aim in mind, I propose categorizing emotions into *transitive* and *intransitive*.

With the *transitive* vs. *intransitive* distinction,[47] I want to suggest that much like verbs, some emotions—such as sadness or boredom—, can either be transitive or intransitive, whereas others, like jealousy or pity, always require an "object" to occur.[48] Take happiness, for example, an *intransitive* emotion: you can be happy for something specific, but you also experience happiness or joy without identifying a particular reason. From this emotional state, you may even begin to perceive what surrounds you as equally cheerful, in a kind of internal reflection process. On the contrary, you cannot feel empathy without being aware of its origin: you need an external input for an empathic outcome to emerge. For this reason, empathy is a *transitive* emotion, because it cannot be self-contained. Furthermore, unlike other *transitive* emotions—such as envy or jealousy—, when sympathy, empathy, or compassion take place, their outcome is determined by the state of the *other individual*. They constitute emotional responses that are more closely linked to the situation of this "other" than to the person experiencing them.[49] This strong

[47] With the use of the terms *transitive* and *intransitive*, I intend to refer *exclusively* to this idea, meaning that I am reducing all the particularities of transitive verbs as a syntactic category to just one of them: the fact that they require an object to be grammatical, just as some emotions need an "object" to emerge. Hence, this parallelism does not seek to completely equate the functioning of transitive verbs with that of the so-called "transitive emotions," nor to transfer all the characteristics of the former to the latter. For example, I am not implying that a "transitive emotion" modifies its object as transitive verbs do. I am simply referring here to the obligatory appearance of the object, which is common to both verbs and emotions.

[48] In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai also turns to the alliance between emotionality and language to point out that grammar indicates a lot about the functioning of emotions: it is enough to consider the prepositions that accompany them, and that work as collocations that remark the inner structure of each emotion. In her own words: "disgust is always *toward*, in the same way that envy is envy *of*" (22). For the same reason, we can remark that compassion, sympathy, and empathy are always "for" something or someone, and that, from the perspective of grammar, this prepositional complement following them is compulsory. Therefore, in accordance with Ngai suggestion, we could conclude that the *transitivity* of these three emotions is reflected at a grammatical level.

[49] This explanation of how emotional responses that emerge from compassion, sympathy, and empathy are adapted to the other's situation, and not to one's own, is inspired by Martin Hoffman's description of the outcome of empathy as "more appropriate for another's situation than one's own" (4). If this quote is not explicitly referenced in the body of the text, it is because I find the adjective "appropriate" slightly

dependence on an "other" makes them complex emotional responses that require a certain level of intersubjectivity and that, by extension, may reflect dynamics of power.[50] In fact, the openness to the other inherent in these *transitive* emotions is what gave them, from the Enlightenment onwards, the praiseworthy status of philanthropic approaches to society, universal to the human condition, and even necessary for a sane ontology (Darwall 262). Nevertheless, given that cultural studies has been particularly interested in the power dynamics underlying emotions as social practices, it is precisely this focus that has brought sympathy, empathy, and compassion into the spotlight of affect theorists.

In line with this reasoning, the "notion of responsivity to the experiences of another" (Davis 3) at the basis of compassion, sympathy, and empathy aroused both the interest and the suspicion of academia, which undertook their reevaluation from a sociopolitical perspective. Each review of these three *transitive* emotions led to distinct reinterpretations. In the case of compassion, scholars swiftly detected the "ethics of privilege" (Berlant 1) that its practice may entail and proceeded to deconstruct it. In *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2004), Berlant defines compassion as a "social relation between spectators and sufferers" (1) whose power imbalance is, as this definition suggests, inherent to the emotion.[51] As Martha Nussbaum further elaborates, because compassion entails a momentary will to "hook our imaginations to the good of others and to make them the object of our intense care", it can easily turn into

misleading to describe emotions, as it seems to remit to a communal *ethos* that should regulate emotional responses to the "other."

[50] When I refer to the complexity of *transitive* emotions, I am not only pointing at the fact that they concern the emotional state of not one, but two subjects; but also, to the fact that this particularity, theoretically speaking, adds (at least in the case of sympathy and empathy) at least another layer in the analysis of the emotion. While in an *intransitive* emotion, like sadness, the main exegetic elements would be the subject of the emotion and its cause, as well as the relation between them, in the case of sympathy and empathy we should also consider the target's emotion and its effect on the subject.

[51] The publication of the monographic *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, edited by Lauren Berlant in 2004, was key in spreading the perception that this response, evaluated in the Judeo-Christian tradition as pious and humanitarian, ran the risk of morphing into "inequality, charity or patronage" (Garber 23).

an “emotionally gratifying condescension” (“Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion” 14). As a result, in a compassionate response “the pain of someone else provides an access of *pleasure* for the compassionate one” (Garber 20, my emphasis).

The *transitive* emotion of sympathy has been the subject of extensive discussion in recent decades, particularly in relation to “compassion” and “empathy”. Unlike compassion, sympathy is not limited to the target’s painful emotions but encompasses the entire emotional spectrum, much like empathy. Hence, while we cannot feel compassion for the happiness of others, we can sympathize with their contentment. Furthermore, sympathy involves “thoughts about and feelings towards” the other (Goldie, *The Emotions* 214). Then, it is not just an emotional reaction, but an imaginative exercise that requires envisioning the other’s situation. Its cognitive and emotional nature turns sympathy into a more *transitive* reaction compared to compassion, which needs no comprehension of the target’s state beyond the perception of their pain. Nevertheless, when prompted by a state of suffering, sympathy translates—as much as compassion does—into “feeling sorrow or concern for the distressed or needy other” (Eisenberg “Empathy and sympathy” 678) and prioritizes the alleviating of those difficulties, regardless of other ethical considerations (Goldie, *The Emotions* 214). Additionally, even if there is an approach to the circumstances of the target, a full understanding of the other’s emotions is no required to experience sympathy: a decontextualized approximation to the other’s state is enough to sympathize with them (Goldie, *The Emotions* 214). Because of these last considerations, Peter Goldie, in his essay *The Emotions: A Philosophical Explanation* (2000), boils down contemporary criticism on sympathy to two main points: its partiality, as sympathy implies taking the side of the target, and its lack of epistemological insight, as it is not preceded by a deep comprehension of the target’s situation (Goldie, *The Emotions* 214). These two

characteristics help in differentiating sympathy from another emotion with which it is "regularly and rightly contrasted" and normally confused (McFee 190): empathy, the *transitive* emotion this thesis will focus on.

In the edited volume *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (2011), Coplan offers a definition of empathy that encapsulates the most agreed-on traits of this *transitive* emotion. According to Coplan, empathy can be described as "a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states, both cognitive and affective, while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (Coplan, "Understanding Empathy" 5). This broad definition brings together the key aspects of empathy: that 1. empathy is an emotional process performed through a conscious imaginative exercise, that 2. the empathizer is aware of the otherness of the target and that 3. they have a clear understanding—a "substantial characterization" (Goldie, *The Emotions* 195)—of this target's state and context. Moreover, Coplan's description eases the distinction between empathy and sympathy, as it underlines empathy's "self-other differentiation", a key characteristic that distinguishes it from sympathy, which is inclined to partiality. The first trait that differentiates both transitive emotions is that empathy does not imply "taking sides" with the target, just "feeling with" them. Stoker provides a clear illustration of this distinction: "you can imagine the other's suffering, yet simply disregard it […] you might empathize with a person who has committed a terrible crime yet feel no sympathy for you think he thoroughly deserves his punishment" (Stoker 214). This illustrates the "moral detachment" inherent in empathy, from which derives the second difference between empathy and sympathy: the fact that "the emotions of empathy" are not the target's emotions or their imitation, but the empathizer's own feelings in response to the imaginative comprehension of the emotional state of the other. Although Coplan describes empathy as an act of "simulation", it is

essential to recognize that this "simulation" is always filtered by the empathizer's own subjectivity. Therefore, empathy is always a biased and personal simulation, rather than a perfect "mirroring" of the target's emotions.[52] This does not mean, however, that empathy is an egocentric emotion. On the contrary, empathy's "self-other differentiation" highlights its intersubjective nature. While in sympathy or compassion the will to help the target can lead to relief and self-enhancement, empathy is non-eudemonistic: it rarely contributes to the empathizer's well-being. [53] Instead, the emotional response for the other—normally distress—usually persists, maintaining the intersubjective reference and avoiding the empathizer's personal catharsis.

As this first contact with the functioning of empathy has probably displayed, this transitive emotion is characterized by its theoretical complexity. If, as Grossberg puts it, "affect is perhaps the most difficult plane in human life to define and describe" (80), this is magnified in the case of empathy due to its characteristics, its *transitivity*, and the power structure it implies. Still, the challenge presented by empathy has not diminished academic interest in this emotional response; instead, it has become one of the most prolific focuses within affect theory.

From 1996 onwards, the attention directed towards empathy has been such that it has given rise to a transdisciplinary "empathic turn" within the broader affect turn (Pedwell 61). Within affect theory, the phenomenon of the "empathic turn" stands out not only due to the fervor of scholarly discourse but also because of two distinctive features setting it apart from the study of other emotions. The first of these two particularities is

[52] This conception of empathy can already be perceived in the work of the 19th phenomenologist Max Scheler, who conceived empathy as the way "one's sense of one's own identity to some extent *merges* with one's sense of the identity of the other" (18). Nowadays, this notion is still defended by a portion of theoreticians within cognitive studies, such as Goldman (2006) or Decety & Jackson (2004).

[53] I employ here this Ancient Greek term in dialogue with Martha Nussbaum's idea that "the emotions appear to be eudaimonistic, that is, concerned with the person's flourishing," as formulated in *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions* (2008).

that the academic enthusiasm for empathy originates from a specific event: Giacomo Rizzolatti's discovery of mirror-neurons in 1996, which provided empirical evidence for empathy's "biological foundation" (Jurecic 11).[54] This discovery caused the emergence of the so-called "science of empathy" (Pedwell 40), which attracted interest towards this intersubjective emotion from scientific fields such as neuroscience, anthropology, and psychology. From 1996 on, then, well-known researchers such as Simon Baron-Cohen (*The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty* 2011), Frans de Waal (*The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* 2009), Amy Coplan and Nancy Eisenberg attempted to theorize the effects of empathy on the mind. This "science of empathy" coexisted with its counterpart in cultural studies, which examined empathy as a cultural practice and its representation in cultural manifestations (Pedwell ix).[55] The co-occurrence of scientific and humanistic insights brings about the second distinctive feature of the "empathic turn": unlike other emotions such as compassion, which were predominantly analyzed through a sociocultural lens, the study of empathy merged cognitive and social constructivist approaches (Hjort & Laver 6). The cross-pollination of these two perspectives gave rise to two interdisciplinary research approaches employing psychology for literary purposes: "reader response studies" (Koopman & Hakemulder 80) and the so-called "cognitive approach to literary studies" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 27).[56] Although the methodology and concept of empathy in this

[54] Mirror neurons, observed in primate species and in humans, activate when a being observes an action performed by another, making the brain react as if the observer was the one performing the action. Equally, it has been demonstrated that the same neurological reaction takes place in the case of emotional reactions, so that, when witnessing the emotionality of another being, the brain reacts as it would do if the emotion were felt by the subject him/herself (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 207). The discovery of these neurons, apart from having other applications in fields such as linguistics or theory of mind, led neuroscientists such as Marco Iacoboni to affirm that there was a biological base for the capacity for empathy of primates and humans.

[55] These manifestations include all forms of narrative arts, but as we will see in relation to Ercolino & Fusillo's *Empatia Negativa*, special attention has been paid to the visual arts or architecture. Gregg & Seigworth, in their 2010 introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, identify, as the most relevant names in this trend, Ahmed 2004; Azoulay 1997; Berlant 2004 and Boler 1997.

[56] Both sub-fields are situated at the intersection between psychology and literary studies. The difference between them is their primary focus. On the one hand, "reader response studies" conducted by

thesis significantly differ from these subfields, it is essential to situate them, as literature associated with them will be cited and sometimes resorted to in this project. This is not only because their literature has made significant contributions to the study of narrative empathy but also because, in recent years, "reader response studies" and "cognitive approach to literary studies" have dominated the "empathic turn" as a research area.

As the concept of empathy was "frequently used with insufficient clarity" and usually confused with sympathy and compassion (Goldie, *The Emotions* 195), the primary objective of this "empathic turn"—comprising the aforementioned two sub-fields, as well as the mentioned scientific approaches and cultural studies—was to propose "a narrow conceptualization of empathy" (Coplan, "Understanding Empathy" 5). Nearly three decades later, there exists a somewhat consensual description of what is commonly referred to as "mainstream empathy" (Keen 2007; Pedwell 2014), that corresponds to Coplan's definition provided above, by which empathy stands as a "a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states, both cognitive and affective, while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (Coplan, "Understanding Empathy" 5). Yet, although this broad characterization of empathy can help us to get our bearings, each aspect mentioned by Coplan remains a subject of contention within the "empathic turn". Despite its extensive interdisciplinary output, the "empathic turn"—that Pedwell even qualifies as an "obsession" ("Introduction" ix)—has yet to achieve consensus regarding the key characteristics of empathy: its self-other distinction, its scope, its process and nature, its effects, or its morality continue to be shrouded in various controversies to this day.

psychologists such as Keith Oatley, Amy Coplan or Peter Goldie, aim at elucidating the mental processes that may generate empathy in the reading of literature. So, it analyses literature from a psychological perspective. Its counterpart within literary studies, "cognitive approach to literary studies" employs the contributions of natural sciences to examine emotions *in* literary expressions (Nussbaum 2001; Keen 2007).

Nonetheless, since empathy serves merely as a case study within my research, I believe that delving into the intricacies of each of these debates lies beyond the scope of my thesis. Considering the breadth and diversity of the "empathic turn", such an endeavor would likely prove tedious and unnecessary, ultimately diverting my discourse from the primary focus of my research: the semantics of narrative emotions. Therefore, having already provided a broad overview of the state of empathy within academia, I will now proceed to explain my own understanding of empathy and its position within the surrounding discourses. Naturally, this will involve acknowledging opposing viewpoints at each juncture, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the current discourse surrounding empathy. Concurrently, articulating my perspective on empathy will facilitate the presentation of the specific manifestation that I will be examining in my study: narrative empathy towards immoral characters.

1.2 A WIDE APPROACH TO EMPATHY

As I have mentioned before, *transitive* emotions have been historically portrayed as virtuous reactions towards others, which serve as "an affective bridge between the individual and the social world" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals Of Thought* 66). In the case of empathy, the most complex *transitive* emotion, this praise has elevated it almost to the status of a democratic ideal (Pedwell 93). It seems incontestable, then, that "a person who displays empathy is, it appears, to be congratulated for having fine feelings" (Pedwell 24). Despite ongoing debates surrounding the conceptualization of empathy, its inherent goodness is perhaps its most universally accepted characteristic. Curiously, the criticism aimed at it from affect theory has not damaged its reputation as a humanitarian emotion.

As Pedwell argues in *Affective Relations: The Transnational Politics of Empathy* (2014), "where compassion quickly tripped in the direction of inequality, charity or patronage", empathy "has remained […] a condition of equality affinity" (24). One of Pedwell's main purposes in *Affective Relations* is indeed is to dismantle the notion of empathy's inherent goodness, which she contends persists in both popular thought and academic discourse.[57] In my view, the notion that empathy is inherently good not only endures but has even strengthened due to widespread theories like the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 173).[58] Pedwell's main criticism against this stereotype is that such idealization oversimplifies the complexities of empathic encounters, presupposing that individuals involved fit into the categories of the "benevolent empathizer"—eager to comprehend the other and emotionally prepared to do so—, and the "needy target"—willing to be understood and worthy of empathy. For Pedwell, such visions of empathy neglect the fact that this transitive emotion only takes shape "as a part of a web of other feelings, subjects, objects and forces" and that it is, thus, "inherently multiple" (Pedwell 190) in theory as well as in practice. In accordance with this, Pedwell proposes to work towards a "multiple, ambivalent and relational idea of empathy" (5). In line with Pedwell's perspective—which I enthusiastically support—, my understanding of

[57] In the last decades, only two authors have explicitly exposed the political perils of the idealization of empathy: Paul Bloom, in *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (2016), and Carolyn Pedwell herself, in her monograph *Affective Relations. The Transnational Politics of Empathy*. Besides these two publications, we must add the criticism of mainstream empathy coming from postcolonial and decolonial studies, which has appeared in the last years of the affective turn. For more information on the postcolonial and decolonial criticism of empathy, you can refer to Ashcroft et al. 1989; Elze 2018.

[58] This principle, defended by a wide range of theorists within the empathic turn, assumes that there are "potential links between empathy and social justice" (Pedwell 10), meaning that the former is seen as a pathway towards achieving the latter. To mention just some of its most ardent advocates, we may refer to theorists such as Elizabeth Spelman (1997), Megan Boler (1999) and Kimberly Chabot Davis (2004) or Jèmeljan Hakemulder (2000). In the sub-field of "reader-response studies" (Koopman & Hakemulder) the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" has turned into a commonplace. Most scientific contributions in this area have been devoted to proving the veracity of empathy's philanthropic implications, without any conclusive result. Other academics that have tried to prove the altruistic consequences of empathy include Michael R. Andreychik & Nicole Migliaccio (2015), Daniel Batson (1998), Nancy Eisenberg (2002), Hakemulder (2000), Koopman & Hakemulder 2014) or Janet Strayer & Marianne Schroeder (1989). For a criticism of this hypothesis, you may refer to Pedwell (2014).

empathy aims to embrace its diverse manifestations, reflecting and celebrating the complex and multifaceted nature of this emotional experience.

Definition and Gradation

From my point of view, *empathy is a transitive and morally neutral emotion by which a subject recognizes the humanity of the Other, understands their situation through an epistemic and imaginary process, and experiences an emotional response based on it, whose posterior effects vary from one occurrence to the other*.

This definition of empathy, to which the present thesis subscribes, carries several theoretical implications, as it owes to the input of multiple schools of thought within empathy studies, while it contradicts the arguments of many others. Moreover, it is a multi-layered characterization, some of the aspects of which may not be immediately evident. To clarify this definition, I will now briefly outline the personal perceptions that have led me to adopt this idea of empathy and thus, the assumptions underlying my vision of this emotion.

1. *Empathy is a morally neutral emotion.* This assessment is based on two underlying assumptions. First, and as I will elaborate on in point 4 of this list, I consider that this emotional response does not necessarily translate into changes in the actions of the empathizer. Secondly, I posit that the emergence of empathy can be involuntary: the empathizer cannot always choose the target. This arbitrariness makes empathy, as Ann Jurecic warns, "dangerous" (12), as it can lead the empathizer to engage with a subject whose predicament infringes their initial moral principles. Therefore, it is incoherent to qualify as "good" an emotion whose outcomes—if any—are unforeseeable. Given the

variety of its manifestations, it seems accurate to affirm that empathy is a "morally neutral" experience (Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* 302), meaning that it cannot be definitively classified as either moral or immoral, positive, or negative in ethical terms; it can only either arise or not.

2. *Empathy requires the empathizer's recognition of the target's humanity.* The ontological and intersubjective conditions for the emergence of empathy have been central to scholarly debate. For instance, while most scholars assume that the only requisite for empathizing is self-other distinction, others argue that identification with the target is the foundation of this emotion. From my perspective, however, prior identification with the target undermines empathy because, if taken to its ultimate consequences, it threatens the very transitivity of empathy, as identities blur. Conversely, the concept of self-other distinction remains vague, as it leaves unspecified who this "other" might be. As an alternative to these two models, I propose that anyone can potentially be the target of empathy if the empathizer consciously recognizes their humanity. Thus, I advocate for the recognition of humanity, the acknowledgement of a shared human precariousness "coextensive with birth itself" (Butler, *Frames of War* 14) as the only prerequisite for empathy to occur.
3. *Empathy is an epistemic and imaginary process.*[59] In my estimation, this double nature translates into an equally twofold process, whereby empathic engagement consists of two phases. First, an epistemic phase in which the empathizer seeks to comprehend the situation of the other through a combination of imagination and prior knowledge of the world, which

[59]Although, from a structural point of view, empathy is, as I indicate here, a process; from a phenomenological point of view, in my opinion, it constitutes an "emotional response" or an "emotional reaction" to the state of the target. Therefore, as I have indicated before, throughout this thesis I will use interchangeably "emotional response", "emotional reaction", or "emotional process" to refer to empathy.

collaborate to fill the information blanks that otherness entails.[60] This epistemic effort is followed by a second phase, an emotional one, wherein the empathizer feels an emotional reaction that has to do more with the situation of the target than with his/her own emotional state. Hence, although empathy is experienced by the empathizer, it has a solid foundation on the perceived reality of the target.

4. *The effects of empathy vary from one occurrence to another.* As empathy's orientation remains towards the empathizer, who experiences the emotion, the result of the empathic process is subjective and personal. Its implications depend on the circumstances of each occurrence. Thus, it may trigger a plethora of different reactions, but not necessarily lead to material or practical consequences, or even a "return" to the target-cause, as the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" assumes.[61] Still, this does not render it a sterile emotion: if it does emerge, empathy always signifies an epistemological effort, more or less challenging, which, in turn, could result in the subject broadening their empathic focus or even questioning their own *Weltanschauung* (Dilthey) by influence of the efforts made in the understanding of the target.[62]

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[60] By considering empathy as both a cognitive and an imaginative process, I am in fact blending two perspectives regarding the nature of empathy, which is another essential aspect of empathy under dispute. In general, the debate is between its emotional or cognitive nature, although the range of opinions on this matter expands. For instance, to mention just some of them, many scholars interpret that this process consists in sharing the other's feelings though an imaginative effort (Goldie 2000; Scheler 1954), while others, like Susan Leigh Foster, see empathy as the "'*understanding*' of someone's feelings, not the 'sharing' of them" (163, my emphasis). Others, like Simon Baron-Cohen, move away from this epistemological/imaginative dichotomy and regard empathy not as a determinate emotional response, but just as "the drive to identify another person's emotions and thoughts, and to respond to them with an appropriate emotion" (*The Science of Evil* 2).

[61] As Diana Tietjens Meyers argues, "empathizing with another person presupposes some degree of concern for that person but without accepting others' wishes uncritically nor granting others whatever they demand" (31).

[62] Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the most eminent thinkers of hermeneutics, incorporated empathy in this area of study. In 1883, Dilthey famously divided the exegetic exercise between *Naturwissenschaften*—science of nature—and *Geisteswissenschaften*—science of the spirit. Later, he determined that the way to approach the science of the spirit was through Lipps's idea of *Einfühlung* or, what is the same, becoming one with the object of study (Steiner 249). This proposition led later philosophers in the hermeneutic tradition to

As I hope has been inferred through these points, my vision of empathy is insistent, as I have said, on not limiting its occurrences to a single "mainstream" model. Rather, my intention is to embrace its flexibility, which entails both understanding and imagining, whose morality is variable, and whose instances are unpredictable both in their origins—who we empathize with—and in their subsequent consequences.

With this same intention to establish a plural perspective on empathy, in *Affective Relations*, Pedwell puts forward the term "alternative empathies" (93). With this concept, the scholar seeks to encompass all those forms of empathy that challenge the model of "mainstream empathy", that is, those that, in her words, escape from the "repeated mapping of categories of empathizer and sufferer" (95). As I have previously asserted, I share Pedwell's interest in shedding light on these "affects at the margins" (95) that are sometimes overlooked for the benefit of a simplified vision of empathy.[63] Despite this common purpose, I find the term "alternative" somewhat problematic. As I see it, the term "alternative" implicitly contains the idea that, beyond this "marginal" manifestations of empathy, there remains a "orthodox" one. Somehow, this nomenclature takes me to the image of a circle with a center and a periphery, which preserves, therefore, the episteme of a referential notion of empathy. Instead, I prefer to view empathy along a horizontal gradient, acknowledging the multitude of empathic expressions without privileging any over the others.

consider, to a greater or lesser extent, emotional responses to texts as part of the "hermeneutic circle" (Heidegger). For a deeper insight into Dilthey's use of empathy, you may refer to *Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History.*

[63] As a way of illustrating a type of "alternative empathy" by approaching its cultural manifestations, Carolyn Pedwell analyses, for example, the model of empathy displayed in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988). The writer from Antigua uses this emotion as a political tool, giving rise to what Pedwell calls a "confrontational empathy" (103): a "fiercely dehumanizing" (110) affect by which the reader is not invited to co-feel the misery described in the text, but to "confront it" and reflect on the reader's own collaboration in the power asymmetries.

This conceptual gradation would have, in one extreme, "mainstream empathy", the one that takes place between subjects who can easily identify with one another and who are willing to understand and be understood: an empathic engagement that does not entail a great effort. From this extreme, the gradation would approach its center with the appearance of differential factors that complicate empathic comprehension: the target's situation being a genderized one, the target being geographically remote, or someone who belongs to a culture unknown to the empathizer, and so on.

This image "orders" empathic encounters according to the challenge to social preconceptions that their emergence involves. Then, it draws attention to the fact that emotions in general—and empathy in particular because of its intersubjective nature—, "circulate […] via established networks of social and cultural investment" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*). As a result, they may reproduce discriminations of gender, sex, class, and race. In this line, this image aims at recognizing the challenge that some practices of empathy pose, and the fact that not all of them are equivalent in their difficulty, *but all of them are valid*—since my assumption is that all empathy that adheres to the premises indicated, and therefore, that functions, is valid. Hence, this gradation points towards a wider and more complex concept of empathy, one capable of covering the shortages that postcolonial and feminist thinkers have identified in empathy and of responding to questions such as "How are the possibilities of empathic engagement depending on time and material resources? Who cannot be empathic and what does it mean to be excluded from these prevailing affective injunctions?" (Pedwell 60).[64]

[64] Feminist and postcolonial scholars have critiqued the Western concept of empathy for its tendency to reinforce existing power structures and perpetuate inequalities. They argue that empathy, as traditionally understood in Western contexts, often reflects the perspectives and experiences of dominant groups while erasing those of other communities. Beyond Sara Ahmed's and the already mentioned postcolonial contributions, feminist scholar bell hooks, for instance, critiques empathy in *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000) because of its failure to address the intersections of race, gender, and class, especially in the context of feminist solidarity.

With this conceptualization, I aim to embrace the full spectrum of empathic experiences in a non-hierarchical manner, recognizing that some instances require more cognitive, imaginative, and emotional effort and may significantly impact the empathizer's worldview. The underlying goal is to offer a nuanced and inclusive understanding of empathy, revealing its diverse manifestations. While academia has explored many forms of empathic engagement involving different cultural identities, others remain largely unexamined.[65] One such overlooked form is empathy towards individuals who commit immoral acts, a complex—and little explored—emotional dynamic that occupies the opposite end of the spectrum from "mainstream empathy" in the aforementioned gradation. This thesis will delve into this intricate form of empathic engagement as a specific case study.

1.3 EXTREME EMPATHY: AN EMOTION AT THE MARGINS

As previously highlighted, the understanding of emotions as cultural practices represents a significant advancement brought about by the affective turn. Viewing empathy through this lens has been particularly advantageous, revealing how its expression is "radically shaped by historical relations of power" (Pedwell 30). As a result, empathy can inadvertently perpetuate prejudice, as, when described with a "narrow focus" (Bloom 31), it tends to favor people "that we find attractive or and who seem similar to us" (Bloom 2). The constraints that limit empathic capacity can be caused by multiple prejudices. If

[65] In the past few years, multiple studies have been devoted to the experience of empathy in the context of identity politics through the perspective of sexuality (Freeman 2010), gender (Ahmed 2004; Ahmed 2010; Gorton 2007), race (Alcoff 1995; Kelsall 2009) or geopolitics (Fortier 2008; Pedwell 2014).

we consider that the initial step for empathic arousal is to recognize the humanity of the other, and to understand them, said recognition and comprehension are equally restricted by society's sense of morality, a shared "internalized code of behavior" (Morton 318). Amongst the forms of empathy that have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream "spotlight" (Bloom), one paradigmatic case is that of the empathy felt for "people who do evil," whom we are "prone to dehumanize" because of our pre-given moral principles (Bloom 181). This omission at the heart of empathy remains mostly unnoticed. Probably, because it appears not to derive from a discriminatory attitude, but from "common sense": the "moral barriers" that leave immoral subjects outside the scope of empathy are so deeply rooted in social subjectivation that their overcoming is exceptional. Moreover, the empathizer does not normally want to cross them. In this regard, if I have asserted before that this type of empathy would be the perfect opposite to "mainstream empathy", it is precisely because its schema unwilling-empathizer/unworthy-target completely subverts the "mainstream" logic of willing-empathizer/worthy-target. In fact, my interest in exploring this type of empathy stems, among other reasons, from its inherently transgressive nature as an experience, which challenges established moral and emotional boundaries. In focusing on this empathic experience, I am driven in part by a broader aspiration to widen the scope of empathy by addressing one of its overlooked aspects. Even though, to my mind, this emotional experience has been sufficiently neglected to be regarded as a "blind spot" within the empathic turn, my research is far from being a completely isolated phenomenon. Conversely, empathy for the immoral, untheorized until a decade ago, has gained some critical attention within the context of the latest revisions of empathy. In recent years, some scholars have begun to explore the limits of empathy, aiming to expand the scope of intersubjectivity beyond social categorizations.

Amidst this critical review, some theorists have focused on the case of what has become known as "negative empathy".

It is paradoxical to note that, although "negative empathy" has traditionally received "little attention by scholars" (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 244), its first formulation traces back to the very origin of the term "empathy". When Theodor Lipps introduced the aesthetic concept of empathy in 1903, he already acknowledged the existence of both positive and negative forms of this emotion. Yet, his first conception of "negative empathy" is far from our definition as "empathy for those who commit immoral deeds". Instead, the German philosopher envisioned "negative empathy" as "empathy for others' negative emotions" (Morelli et al. 47). But the genealogy of the concept pretty much ends here, because, despite Lipps's early insights, the academic discourse surrounding "negative empathy" remained largely stagnant until 2011. Throughout the 20th century, literary critics delved into the literary representation of immorality without explicitly considering the concept of empathy or revisiting Lipps's ideas.[66] Similarly, affect theory, emerging towards the century's end, did not address this critical gap. In the first two decades of the 21st century, only two scholars dealt with this empathic experience: Adam Morton and Stefano Ercolino. In 2011, Adam Morton contributed to the key edited collection *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* with a chapter entitled "Empathy for the Devil". In this text, Morton investigates the reader's *identification* with negative fictional characters and the moral complexities it entails. It is necessary to note, however, that Morton does not explicitly use the term "negative empathy" in this article. The second contribution came from S. Ercolino's article, "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism" (2018), which is the first ambitious

[66] On the depiction of evil in literature, you may refer, for instance, to Bataille 1957; Gimelli 2016; Horne 2003; Luque 2020 or Rae 2019.

attempt to "propose a theory of negative empathy that is able to highlight its heuristic potential for the purpose of literary analysis" (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 244).

In the second decade of the 21st century, when these two texts were published, a research trend emerged, spearheaded by Pedwell, which focused on "radically 'unsettling' affective experience(s)" that may suppose a challenge to the "transnational hierarchies of power" (Pedwell 73)—a description aptly suited to empathy for immoral subjects. In this context, a few scholars, and critical currents—such as Suzanne Keen, Paul Bloom, or "perpetrator studies"—identified this type of empathy as paradigmatic of emotional complexity but did not delve deeper into it.[67] "Negative empathy" seemed to remain, again, out of the spotlight. Until very recently, the theoretical backdrop of this part of my thesis would have been limited to these. Fortunately, the silence surrounding "negative empathy" ended in 2022 with the publication of the monograph *Empatia negativa. Il punto de vista del male*, by Stefano Ercolino & Massimo Fusillo—the only extensive publication devoted entirely to this emotional experience. This essay, developed and expanded from Ercolino's 2018 article "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", is devoted to the analysis of "negative empathy" as an aesthetic experience.[68] Ercolino & Fusillo theorize the concept and evaluate their hypotheses

[67] Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), one of the most complete examinations of the intersection between narrative and empathy, does mention the possibility of co-feeling with antagonistic figures, but without acknowledging previous works on the concept or commenting it further (you can refer to Keen 74-77 & 131-136). Something similar occurs with Paul Bloom's essay on the moral limitations of empathy, *Against Empathy* (2016), in which the author elaborates a pugnacious critique of empathy, arguing that it is depends on a previous "moral evaluation" of the target (70). Thus, he concludes that empathy is a biased practice whose moral limitations can end up deepening prejudice and reinforcing the *status quo*. Because of his preoccupation for those who are not the conventional targets of empathy, those who are not attractive for or similar to the empathizer (Bloom 2), the American psychologist mentions the paradigmatic case of the so-called "negative empathy", but he does not develop it. Finally, different authors within the edited volume *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, as, for example, Stephanie Bird (301-311), contemplate the possibility of finding empathy for a perpetrator in literature.

[68] Stefano Ercolino's article was published in *Orbis Litterarum* in 2018. As Ercolino makes clear in the introduction of *Empatia negativa*, the first two chapters of the book—which deal respectively with the history of the term and its theorization, and with the analysis of "negative empathy" in the novel *Les bienveillantes*—are based on that previous publication (18).

through a range of case studies comprising artworks from diverse artistic disciplines.[69] This selection responds to their ambition of employing the study of "negative empathy" to "ricollocare al centro del dibattito critico, teorico ed estetico la questione del potere tellurico, sovversivo, antigerarchico e, insieme, sublimante e catartico dell'arte" (13) [1]. Although my project focuses solely on narrative empathy, the shared subject, common objectives, and overlapping viewpoints make *Empatia Negativa* a primary reference for my work, particularly in the ensuing pages. Luckily, this publication has sparked interest among other researchers in "negative empathy", leading to an expanded study of this emotion. This subtle theoretical shift, in which my thesis is embedded and to which it aspires to contribute, reflects thus a growing scholarly interest in "negative empathy" catalyzed by Ercolino & Fusillo's groundbreaking work.[70]

Integrating Immorality: from "Negative Empathy" to Extreme Empathy

In the introduction of *Empatia Negativa,* Ercolino and Fusillo revise the existing literature on "negative empathy", to finally position themselves within the critical trend that I have earlier identified in Pedwell's work.[71] Towards the end of their introduction, and with the intention of compiling their ideas about this emotion, the Italian scholars propose their own definition of "negative empathy":

[69] Except for the first chapter, which is devoted to theory, each of the following five chapters analyses a source from different art spheres; to wit, narrative, drama, painting, photography, and cinema. In addition, the authors comment on the possibility of finding representations of "negative empathy" in cultural products belonging to music, performances/happenings, or architecture.

[70] For example, although from more cognitivist than literary perspectives, scholars like Carmen Bonasera (2023) have contributed to expanding the study of "negative empathy".

[71] "Il nostro lavoro si inserisce all'interno di questa *new wave* di riflessione *critica* sull'empatia, tesa a rilevarne i limiti. Tuttavia, anziché screditare o rigettare la nozione di empatia, noi ci occuperemo di una sua espressione specifica, l'empatia negativa, appunto, nel tentativo di pervenire a una comprensione più amplia e più sfumata dei fenomeni empatici, e di mostrate come quella di empatia in generale rimanga una nozione cruciale per l'estetica e per le *Humanities*" (11) [2].

> l'empatia negativa è un'esperienza estetica consistente in un'*empatizzazione catartica* di personaggi, figure, performance, oggetti, composizioni musicali, edifici e spazi connotati in maniera *negativa* e *seduttiva* in modo *disturbante*, o che evocano una *violenza primaria destabilizzante*, capaci di innescare una profonda *angoscia empatica* nel fruitore dell'opera d'arte, di chidergli insistentemente di intraprendere una *riflessione morale*, e di spingerlo ad *assumere una posizione etica* [...] L'empatia negativa può essere, inoltre, caratterizzata come un'esperienza estetica variablemente *aperta* o *neutra* in termini di *agency* [...] o che può rimanere confinata nella vita interiore del soggetto empatizzante. (70-71) [3]

This extensive depiction of "negative empathy" aligns with many aspects of my own understanding of the emotion. Namely, those concerning the nature of its process: its highly disturbing and anxiety-provoking quality, its seductive factor, and its potentially ethical but indefinite consequences. Yet, there are several key points where this definition diverges from the concept of empathy towards immoral characters that I will employ in this thesis.

The first and most significant distinction lies in the nature and target of this emotion. As their description makes clear, Ercolino and Fusillo approach "negative empathy" as an aesthetic experience, a "relazione empatica che stabiliamo con *oggetti estetici*" (104) [4]. As they specify in the quote above, these aesthetic objects, the targets of their concept of "negative empathy", might be "personaggi, figure, performance, oggetti, composizioni musicali, edifici e spazi" [5]. In contrast, in this thesis, I will explore this typology of empathy as an intersubjective emotional experience, occurring between real people—readers—and fictional people—characters—rather than directed toward an object. Thus far, I have referred to this emotion as a specific form of empathy because, in my view, "negative empathy", although it exhibits all the characteristics I

have previously ascribed to empathy in general, is different from it because its target is an entity perceived as immoral by the empathizer *before*, *throughout*, and *after* the empathic act. Beyond this particularity, empathy for an immoral being implies, from my perspective, intersubjectivity—involving the understanding and empathizing with another complex subjectivity—as well as empathy's cognitive and imaginative quality, its neutral morality, and its unpredictable effects. These last two traits—empathy's unforeseeable effects and its neutral morality—, lead to the other two aspects in which my vision of this form of empathy differs from that of Ercolino and Fusillo.

With reference to empathy's unforeseeable effects, they share my opinion that "in termini di *agency*", "negative empathy" remains "variablemente aperta o neutra". Yet, they also believe that empathy has a clear effect on the empathizer: it is *cathartic*.[72] In my opinion, this difference likely arises from their perception of "negative empathy" as an aesthetic experience, rather than an intersubjective one. Nonetheless, while catharsis may be one possible effect of "negative empathy", I do not consider it *inherent* to this emotion when it is dealt with from an intersubjective perspective. Instead, I believe that "negative empathy" may also manifest as what Ngai calls "ugly feelings"—emotions that are "*a*moral and *non*cathartic, offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release" (6). It is true that, due to the *subversion* that this emotion involves, it does not leave the feeler indifferent, it always entails some sort of effect. Still, as I see it, this effect can range from the ethical reflections mentioned by Ercolino & Fusillo to Susan L. Feagin's "meta-responses": unpleasurable feelings that we experience

[72] In addition, Ercolino & Fusillo complement this assumption by affirming that "negative empathy" is also "regressive" in a Freudian sense, meaning that: "I lettori di romanzi […] possono liberare emozioni negative o pulsoni aggressive represse perché autodistruttive o socialmente inaccettabili, empatizzando con personaggi che soffrono" (60) [6]. As in the case of catharsis, I agree that this can be the case, but it appears to me to be only one of the multiple outcomes of this type of empathy, and not necessarily one of its distinctive traits.

because of a previous "morally degraded and seemingly unjustifiable" emotional status (Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* 10).

As I have advanced, the third difference between my vision of this form of empathy and that of Ercolino and Fusillo's is related to the term they have chosen to describe this emotion, "negative empathy", which, for me, endangers the neutral morality of this emotional experience. Throughout their essay, the Ercolino and Fusillo reject the Manichean division between positive and negative aesthetic emotions and highlight the "positive" cathartic after-effects of "negative empathy". Yet, they persist in using the label "*negative* empathy", inherited from Lipps—probably, to give continuity to the already existing terminology, which dates back, as we have said, to the first formulation of empathy. From my standpoint, however, this term perpetuates a binary taxonomy of affects but also implies that empathy can be positive or negative in moral terms—a notion I contest in this thesis. To omit binary oppositions that I deem as counterproductive for the study of emotions, I suggest the term "extreme empathy" instead. By using the adjective "extreme", I aim to encompass the various connotations of the word: the one that that refers to an amount ("very great in degree"), or to the unusual ("not considered acceptable or reasonable, involving risk, not ordinary or usual"), or to the marginal ("as far as you can go in one direction").[73] Therefore, this term points out, respectively, three distinctive characteristics of this emotional experience. Firstly, it emphasizes my hypothesis that empathy cannot inherently be positive or negative; rather, its occurrences vary in their level of challenge. Secondly, it highlights that extreme empathy, due to its capacity to test the moral framework of the empathizer, may initially appear as *not reasonable* and *involving risk.* Finally, the idea of an empathy "at the margins" evokes the figure of the horizontal gradation, where extreme empathy is at the opposite end from

[73] Definition extracted from the online Cambridge Dictionary of English.

comfortable empathic encounters. All in all, this last meaning summarizes, precisely, what I consider to be the greatest attraction of extreme empathy for the general study of emotions: its expansion of the scope of empathy, as it pulls this *transitive* emotion towards its moral, political, and social limits. But in what context can this expansion of empathy's scope, this liminal experience, take place? The few publications devoted to "negative empathy"—here extreme empathy—appear to point us towards a single answer.

The original significance that Lipps gave to the term "negative empathy" was "empathy for other negative emotions". From a scientific standpoint, this distinction between empathy for positive and empathy for negative emotions is preserved (Ercolino & Fusillo 22). That is because recent studies in neuroscience have proved that each one of them activates different brain regions and are associated to different cognitive reactions (Ercolino & Fusillo 20). Nonetheless, this scientific evidence does not prevent this distinction from being sterile at a cultural and aesthetic level. Consequently, within the humanities, where this concept has been studied in more detail, extreme empathy has assumed, as we know, a new connotation: empathy for those who commit immoral deeds. In turn, this meaning has led this emotion to be associated with and studied from a very specific context: fiction.

Although this emotional experience was originally labelled by Lipps within the study of aesthetics, the three texts mentioned above—Morton's, Ercolino's and Ercolino and Fusillo's—have shifted the perspective of extreme empathy, situating it within literary studies. Morton and Ercolino's articles, pioneers in the theorization of what I have termed extreme empathy, approach it through the lens of empathizing with immoral literary characters. Although Ercolino and Fusillo later broaden the concept to encompass various artistic narratives, their focus largely remains on intersubjectivity with fictional characters, a perspective that persists in recent studies. Due to this almost singular

approach, extreme empathy has been practically equated with the empathic reception of immoral characters, positioning it as a transgressive experience inherent—or exclusive—to fiction.[74] As Keen asserts, literary studies has been particularly prolific in the study of empathy (*Empathy and the Novel* 38), thanks to the proliferation of re-readings of literary texts from the prism of empathy, by which many texts have been "revitalized, unveiled in their emotional implications and became, thus, readable in new ways" (Pedwell 8). Considering how, on the one hand, affect theory has tended to focus on those emotions that, as cultural practices, may result problematic, and on the other hand, how literature has historically dealt with human (im)morality as one of its main themes, it is only natural for literary scholars to have adopted extreme empathy as an emotional reaction inherent to their domain of research.[75]

Therefore, for scholars like Morton and Ercolino—as well as others such as Keen (2007) or Hannah Meretoja (2017)—the strong association between empathy, literature, and the latter's exploration of evil seems evident. Indeed, literature and empathy can be seen, in many ways, as intertwined processes. Having established my vision of empathy and introduced its extreme version, the upcoming pages will delve precisely into this intersection. However, before approaching the specific case of narrative empathy or

[74] In a 2017 article, Michael Basseler commented on this phenomenon in the following terms: "It is only in the past ten years or so, that empathy has also received considerable attention form literary scholars. Despite this late arrival, the concept has already produced a considerable number of monographs, collections of essays, and individual articles" (156).

[75] As Georges Bataille asserted, literature "incessantly evokes" the derangements and lacerations of evil (55). From this perspective, literary works are "one of a number of 'counter-discourses' partly associated with the experience of madness and opposed to an all-encompassing Reason" (Freundlieb 301). As a result, they often offer the opportunity to examine the "thinking from without (la pensée du dehors)" (Freundlieb 307) through the multiple immoral characters that inhabit their pages. In a similar fashion, Michael Foucault determined that "il y a une curieuse affinité entre littérature et folie" (*Dits et écrits. Vol II* 132) [7]. In the first pages of *Empatia Negativa*, Ercolino & Fusillo provide a list of popular fictional characters that exemplify this intimate link between immorality and narrative representation: Max Aue in J. Littell's *Les Bienveillantes*, Nikolaj Stravrogin in Dostoevsky's *The Demons*, Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*, or Walter White in the popular TV series *Breaking Bad*. Personally, I would add Perry Smith from Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the Devil in John Milton's *Lost Paradise*, or Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to the selection.

empathy in literature, it is crucial to clarify the complex relationship between emotions and literature. As previously mentioned, this relationship has been historically marked by misconceptions that have hindered its exploration, particularly within “formal” fields like narratology. Because of these longstanding problems, in order to provide a solid foundation for my theory on narrative emotions and their place in both fictional worlds and texts, it is necessary to discuss various aspects that traverse the relationship between extreme empathy and narrative literature. These include the conceptualization of fictional emotions, the expression of empathy in narrative arts, the similarities between the processes of empathizing and reading fiction, the representation of evil in literature, and finally, the critical voids that persist in research on narrative empathy.

INTERLUDE I: LITERATURE AND EMPATHY, FROM THEORY TO CONFIGURATION

Real and Fictional Emotions

In 1966, Roland Barthes opened his article "Introduction à l'analyse structural des récits" by stating: "Innombrables sont les récits du monde" (1)—"countless are the narratives of the world"—, to which we could add: as countless as the worlds of narrative are. One of the main arguments of the present thesis is that all the narratives of the world and all the worlds of narrative mobilize emotions. Just like the actual world, but in a more concentrated manner, narratives display, interpret, and provoke a wide range of emotions through their multiple layers. Emotions are intrinsic to the composition of any fictional world, and because of this, literary criticism has never been able to completely overlook them. Nonetheless, as already stated, many theoretical approaches have viewed narrative emotions with suspicion and have relegated them to a marginal space within criticism. Among the rationalist ideas that have supported this posture, there is the notion that the emotions induced by fiction are fictional, and therefore distinct from the "real ones" originated in "our actual mental lives" (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 254). Although I will further discuss the boundaries between the realm of the real and that of the fictional in the next section, this misconception cannot be left unaddressed as it has persisted to this day and poses a threat to the coherence of the upcoming pages, like the sword of Damocles hanging over them.

In my opinion, any attempt to classify emotions under the binary logic fiction/reality is a general misinterpretation of their nature. From my point of view,

emotions are "real" if they are "really felt" by the subject, regardless of whether their cause is rooted in reality or not. As Greg Currie and Ian Ravenscroft argue, "imagination is transparent to emotion", in a way that "the states generated in imagined scenarios are genuine emotions" (190).[76] Moreover, to distinguish between the emotions that stem from an actual reality and those that do not would imply, by the same logic, to disregard all those everyday emotions that have a virtual component, as their target is no longer real (for example, nostalgia) or not real yet (anxiety, hope). Hence, the very nature of emotions *implies fictionality*, as many of our emotional states are provoked by non-existent events created by our minds. In fact, a large part of our daily emotions are named and processed as a result of the human need to narrativize life in order to reconcile the past and the present, to confront the future, and to weave them together into a coherent story.[77] As I see it, the only difference between these virtual emotions and the narrative ones is the authorship of the plot that triggers them.

When it comes to the emotion to which this thesis is devoted, empathy, the separation of real and narrative emotion becomes even more futile. I believe that empathy is a paradigmatic proof that emotions do not need to be "real" to be felt, that they are

[76] In fact, an antecedent to this hypothesis can already be found in Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, where, as he ponders over the diverse origins of what he called "the passions", the Dutch philosopher determines that mental images do not differ from real events. In his words: "the body is *affected* by the image of the thing in the same way as if the thing were actually present" (40, my emphasis).

[77] This idea comes from an ontological theory advanced by philosophers such as Frank Kermode or Paul Ricoeur, and contemplated by Friedrich Nietzsche, which assumes that the creation of stories is part of the human need to attribute meaning to live and its changing states. This ontological theory, which Ricoeur called "narrative identity" (1990), establishes that "humans have a natural tendency to give narrative shape to stories and lives" (López-Deflory 173) so that we "make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (Kermode 17). In other words, these narrative structures allow us to synthesize the heterogeneity of life experiences. Therefore, according to the logic of "narrative identity," we would always explain our emotions—to others and to ourselves—through narrative structures and resources. This conception of emotions, consequently, would turn their relationship with narrative into an inseparable one. For more information on Ricoeur's "narrative identity", you may refer to his Cinquième Etude ("L'identité personnelle et l'identité narrative" 137-166) and Sixième Etude ("Le soi et l'identité narrative" 167-198) in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). For more on Kermode's philosophy on narrative, you may refer to *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967). On the Nietzschean proposal to attain the understanding of the self through narrative, which influenced both Kermode and Ricoeur, you may refer to Nájera Pérez 2006.

blind to reality. For instance, a rationalist mind could argue that, ultimately, suspense in the face of a threat is experienced most intensely when that threat can actually harm us, whereas in the case of art representations, we can always ease the anxiety by reminding ourselves that the suspense we are feeling is a response to a "false" threat. Therefore, when consuming narratives, the bodily tension, albeit it also exists, cannot be justified rationally. In the case of empathy, however, virtuality is the rule, and if stepping back is always an option, it is necessarily at the cost of breaking the empathic bond.[78] Thus, the experience of "actual" empathy and that of narrative empathy—that is, an empathic bond in which the empathizer is a reader of fiction and the target a fictional character—are not significantly different for the person who experiences them. Therefore, neither should their study be undertaken in different ways.

Empathy, as we have depicted it so far, affects the emotional system of the empathizers, but never stems from *their* reality. Due to its *transitivity*, both real-life empathy and narrative empathy 1. always involve an Other and 2. require a hermeneutic and imaginative process of understanding. But these two characteristics not only suit empathy, but are also true for fictional narratives. In fact, I argue that both processes present several analogies in their functioning, in a way that the above mentioned are only two of the parallelisms that I find between the pair of sociocultural experiences this thesis is devoted to: empathy and narrative literature. Thus, the advantages of studying empathy for my research on narrative emotions are, precisely, the mentioned equivalence between real-life empathy and narrative empathy, and its structural similarity to the narrative process: a similarity that, as I see it, favors the emergence of this emotional response

[78] I have previously argued that empathy is an involuntary emotional reaction. In my opinion, its unpredictability does not conflict with the idea that this response can be interrupted once it has been initiated, by detaching from a feeling that "is not ours" or, for instance, by refusing to reflect on it, on its origin, or on its ethical or political implications.

during reading. In this section, I aim at explaining, first, how literary narrative stands out as an artistic means for conveying empathy, and how the structural resemblances of both processes translate into "environmental supports" (Murray Smith) for the emergence of narrative empathy. After that, I will expound how, as a result, and also because of its potential as a counter-discourse, narrative literature may *enlarge* the empathic spectrum and allow the representation of hidden realities and unlikely emotions like extreme empathy, which can, in turn, be analyzed as a narrative construction.

Empathy in the Narrative Arts

I have previously stated my premise that narrative arts have the capacity to evoke intersubjective empathy. Of course, they do so differently, depending on their representational modes. To start with, we could consider the cases of the theater and the cinema, which have been regarded as particularly potent arts for eliciting empathy straightforwardly (Ercolino & Fusillo). Criticism on emotional contagion in art had its starting point in Aristotle's comments regarding dramatic *catharsis*. From then on, theater has always had a strong regard for the emotional experience of the spectators, and has molded it, by means of its imminence, for the benefit of dramatic effects. The proliferation of studies on the intersection of empathy and theater/performance, as is the case with the research project "British Theatre in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis, Affect, Community" (2017-2021) is evidence of this intimate relationship.[79] Ercolino & Fusillo point out that, among the emotional reactions that theatre may produce, empathy stands

[79] The research project, led by Dr. Mireia Aragay, focused part of their investigation on the dramatic mobilization of empathy, with results entirely devoted to that emotion, such as Aragay's chapter "Feel and Think, Think and Feel: Complicating Empathy in debbie tucker green's *hang*" (2021), included in *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre. Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage,* edited by Aragay, Delgado & Middeke.

out as "una componente fondamentale, potremmo dire strutturale" (115) [1], which is attained through a combination of identification and distance.[80] In what cinema is concerned, the Italian scholars also notice how "nonè forse un caso che la nascita del cinema e il dibattito critico sull'empatia siano contemporanei" (288) [2], suggesting that if the cinema and the studies in empathy emerge at the same time, it could be because of some concern of the times. Beyond their many differences, what unites theater and cinema is their shared phenomenology: albeit one is experienced in person and the other is deferred, both convey information through moving images. As stressed by Ercolino & Fusillo among many others, the capacity of images for unleashing *transitive* emotions is as effective as natural: the spectator is provided with human faces—"affective transmitters" according to Ngai (78)—and their corresponding facial expressions, which work as direct "sources of motivating feedback" (Tompkins 90).[81] The advantage of theater and cinema in evoking empathy extends beyond their depiction of or use of human figures because, unlike photography, which testifies to an inert past presence—what Barthes calls the "*ça-a-été*" (*La Chambre claire*)—, these narrative arts imply motion and, often, also speech. Their verbal component is also key for the emergence of empathy, as it provides information that is inexpressible by image alone but fundamental for an emotion like empathy, which requires a certain amount of contextual depth. Hence their verbality, together with their physical phenomenology, turns theater and cinema into effective media for empathic engagement with characters.[82]

[80] For an in-depth analysis of how empathy in general, and "negative empathy" in particular, is evoked in drama, see Chapter 2 of Ercolino & Fusillo's *Empatia Negativa*, "Nel ritmo della scena" (115-148).

[81] "Le immagini sono capaci di provocare, di far provocare empatia, di muovere a compassione fino alle lacrime, di innalzare, avvilire, di riattivare, preservare, sconfessare o ingannare la memoria, di spingere all'azione o di paralizzare, a causa del terrore che possono indurre. Le immagini possiedono, infatti, un'*agency*" (188) [3]. For more information on the intersection between images and transitive emotions, you may refer to Freedberg 1991; Morgan 2018; Sontag 2004; Tompkins 2010.

[82] Many studies within affect theory bear witness to the fruitfulness of the intersection of empathy with cinema and theatre. In the case of the former, you may refer to Grodal 1997; Plantinga & Smith 1999; Smith 1995; Stadler 2017. In relation to theatre and empathy, see Aragay & Monforte 2014 and Tomlin 2019.

In narrative literature,[83] the physicality of theatre and cinema is lost, but the importance of verbal expression is amplified. In most cases, the format and time conventions of performing arts such as cinema or theatre may prevent them from delving into the psyche of the characters in the extensive way that narrative does: from a material point of view, the time we spend on a film or a play is approximately two hours, while a novel often absorbs us for dozens of them. Consequently, albeit the directness of theater and cinema may ease the emergence of empathy, descriptive literature may be more appropriate for arising complex forms of intersubjective empathy because of the level of introspection and interpersonal bonding that it allows.[84] As I will explain later, the time of exposition to characters is one of the ways in which novels foster empathic engagement. However, before enumerating the narrative aspects that favor empathy, I consider it necessary to highlight the procedural similarities shared by narrative and empathy as epistemological experiences, because, as we will see, it is from this overall correspondence that derive all the advantages of narrative in the production of empathy.

To Read the Other, to Understand the Other. Literature and Empathy Intertwined

[83] From now on, I will be using the term "narrative" to refer, exclusively, to the literary genre which encompasses texts "in verse as well as in prose" that deal with "changes in situation and characters" but which, instead of showing these changes, as drama does, tells them (Clancy 489).

[84] In fact, character introspection is, for many, at the heart of narrative's quest. The idea that characters and their comprehension are the most relevant part of novels has been a commonplace in the history of literary criticism. To provide only a few examples, William Wordsworth famously said that, through literature, "daily were my sympathies enlarged" (74). Indebted to the Romantic poet, George Eliot similarly referred to narrative as "a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (271). The popularity of this notion has increased because of *the affective turn*. Hence, from a more theoretical perspective, the latest trends on "reader response studies" have attempted to demonstrate the accuracy of this opinion: Mar & Oatley (2008), for instance, 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" (qtd. in Koopman & Hakemulder 97).

Since the characteristics of empathy have been discussed in the previous section, to avoid repetition, I will limit myself to enumerating—and briefly commenting—the aspects of the novel that match, precisely, these characteristics. Hopefully, the sketching of these parallelisms will allow me to show how narrative becomes an optimal space for arousing empathy in the reader, as its inner structure synchronizes with empathy's conditions of emergence. After revising both experiences, I identify the traits of fictional narrative that mimic this *transitive* emotion as follows:

1. *Narratives affect readers, but are not related to them*. Narratives are ways of entering another world and approaching its subjects while "temporarily shifting our own reality out of focus" (Deciu Ritivoi 68). Our way of engaging with novels mirrors, thus, the cognitive process of empathy, because, albeit we are both subjects and addressees of the reading act, we are not related to the contents transmitted; we are just circumstantially concerned by them. This, in turn, implies that,
2. *Readers can always cancel the "reading contract*" *and renounce its emotional influence*. The reader's immersion in fictionality offers "an opportunity for emotional transactions of great intensity" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 168). Nonetheless, as Keen adds, our involvement with this other-reality is a "no strings-attached" one, in a way that, for instance, "the novel reader discomforted by empathic overarousal might well simply stop reading and might avoid similar fiction in the future" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 19).
3. *Literary reading is an imaginative and epistemic process conducted through the hermeneutic method*. When consuming a novel, readers are given external and detailed pieces of information to process and combine with their own mental

projections. Through this operation, readers come up with a vivid narration. In order to balance these cognitive and imaginative components, readers unconsciously position themselves in an intermediate point between their own "familiar frame of reference—assumptions and expectations—" and "the frame of reference proposed by or contained in the object of interpretation". Then, while reading fiction and when "understanding someone else's experience" in the actual world, we assume an in-between point between ourselves and the Other, from where to understand the meaning of the narration provided (Deciu Ritivoi 60). Also, if we become involved with the story, an emotional reaction may appear as a response to this Other,[85] as

4. *Fictional narratives always imply the understanding of an Other.* As has been hinted at in the last point, both empathy and narrative constitute an "imaginative reconstruction of the experience of others" (Deciu Ritivoi 63). Thereby, both experiences share a common object, encompassing not only other subjectivities, but also the world they inhabit. Furthermore, in what subjectivities are concerned, fictionality does not prevent complex engagement, because characters, as noted earlier, are endowed with complex subjectivities.[86] Nonetheless, when engaging with fictional persons, readers must bear in mind that,
5. *Besides pleasure, the only prospect that narrative may offer as an experience is the possibility of "epistemic gain".*[87] Like empathy, narrative reading is a form of

[85] When dealing with the affective component of fictional narrations, Wolfgang Iser reflects that "practically every discernible structure in fiction has this two-sidedness: it is verbal and affective. The verbal aspect guides the reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary; the affective aspect is the fulfillment of that which has been pre-structured by the language of the text" (21).

[86] On the profundity of characters and the possibility of engaging with them, Amy Coplan & Peter Goldie point out that "not only are these characters the intentional product of the artist, but they also have a life of their own, so to speak, which is in many ways like ours, and which is to be understood and, perhaps, empathized with" (XXXVIII).

[87] This notion stems from the thoughts of hermeneut William C. Downing, for whom the only promise that narrative experience can make to its readers is that of a momentary "alteration of consciousness" that may lead to an "epistemic gain" (16).

> approximation to an Other in which openness to interpretation makes its results unforeseeable. If any, the consequences that the consumption of fictional literature may have on the reader's subjectivity would probably be related to the hermeneutical operation explained above, which may give place to "an 'enlarged mentality'", precisely because it "offers access to thoughts and feelings that do not originate in us and are not a direct response to our own experience" (Deciu Ritivoi 70).

As I have suggested in the third point of this enumeration, emotions—"the cement that keeps audiences connected to the artworks" (Carroll 191)—are not the arbitrary choices of readers, but an integral part of the reading experience, and the *pointers* that lead us to some specific emotions and not others are already present in the text. In the specific case of empathy, many voices within the "empathic turn" contend that its significance in fiction reading is particularly pronounced.[88] My argument is that happens precisely because of empathy's phenomenological resemblance to the act of reading. If we consider the analogies just listed to be valid, it becomes evident that they constitute the basic way in which literature facilitates the emergence of narrative empathy. Because of these resemblances, upon entering a fictional world, readers are already predisposed to empathize with those who inhabit it. Therefore, even if this predisposition does not materialize, when entering the world that the novel deploys, readers are instinctively mimicking an empathic posture: they are embracing the reality presented to them, filling the informational gaps with their imagination, and are open to understanding the circumstances of other peoples' lives.

[88] Scholars from various academic disciplines, including reader response studies, cognitive approaches to literary studies, literary theory, and cultural studies have put forward this hypothesis with varying levels of emphasis and specificity. I want to acknowledge particularly the contributions of Hakemulder (2000), Keen (2007), Caracciolo (2013), Pedwell (2014), and Deciu Ritivoi (2016), whose works have influenced this section.

At a practical level, the five characteristics of narrative discussed above not only assist empathy on a theoretical, abstract plane, but also appear as internal mechanisms that create an "environmental support" for fostering empathic engagement (Smith "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 106). Considering everything we already know about this *transitive* emotion; I will now detail how narrative fiction *systematically reproduces* its conditions of emergence. As we are about to see, the ideal circumstances surrounding fiction-reading may not only facilitate empathy, but also *enlarge* it and *diversify* it, opening the possibility for unexpected manifestations of it, like extreme empathy.

Narrative Fiction as an Empathic Environment

To my mind, the first aspect of fiction that supports empathy is that, given that *its events affect readers, but are not related to them*, self-other distinction is guaranteed. As pointed out, empathy requires self-other differentiation, as it "allows for the optimal level of distance from the other", that is, a separation by which "we are neither fused nor detached" (Coplan, "Understanding Empathy" 16). In the context of fiction, "critical distance" ensures this separation as well as the imaginative engagement that bridges it over, because when consuming fictional texts, "we take on the perspective of another human being (in this case, a fictional character) without giving up our own everyday perspective" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 27). Fiction's inherent "critical distance" leads us to the second advantage of narrative in fostering empathy: that it bestows a sense of security upon readers, which *increases* their empathic capacity. The protective quality of fiction, which we will explore later in more detail, can be summarized by Keen's observation that, "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" (*Empathy and the Novel* 168). As a result, narrative environments balance the possible differences between readers and characters through the ontological barrier separating the real and the fictional. Such barrier acts as a "safety zone" where readers feel out of "real" danger and where, in case of empathic distress, they can *cancel the reading contract* without further implications. With all, we may conclude that these conditions *increase* the text's capacity to generate empathy, as they allow readers to withhold the moral rules that restrict real-life empathy and thus to "adopt experiential perspectives that they would be less likely to relate to in real intersubjectivity" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 29).[89]

Moreover, the narrative expansion of empathy is often accompanied by many opportunities to put it into practice, given that the third way in which fiction promotes empathyis by providing us with "a wide range of types of persons" to empathize with (Smith, "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 111). This third characteristic grants narrative the capacity to, in addition to *enlarge* empathy, *diversify* it. That is because, as we have seen, *fictional narrations always imply the understanding of an Other*, but this "other," in fiction, often extends beyond the individuals we typically encounter in our daily lives. Such display of a "wide diversity of people" (Rorty 141)—together with the already-mentioned way in which fiction can generate a safety zone for the reader—makes it possible for fictional narratives to confront us with "affective relationships that move beyond what 'we' already think we know, or feel is true or inevitable" (Pedwell 92). But, besides making the reader feel sheltered by fictionality,

[89] Curiously, the notion that fictionality provides freedom of emotion and imagination was already suggested by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, in the "Second Discourse" of his *Complete Works*, argued that drama arouses "sympathy" in subjects that would not react to the real tragedy of others and thus concluded that "theatrical pity outlives natural pity" (qtd. Terada 37).

when it comes to creating intersubjective bonds with such disparate characters, how do narratives convince readers, as Pedwell points out, to rethink their own assumptions and challenge their perspective of the world? (161). How do narratives build such well-formed subjects that we can establish unusual empathic bonds with them? My assumption is that the answer to these questions lies in narrativity itself, which I consider to be fiction's fourth and greatest tool for eliciting empathy. As I have implied before, narrative literature's capacity for detail and for character introspection are probably the greatest advantages that this art form presents in the creation of intersubjective empathy.[90] But as we are about to see, beyond these specific literary conventions, the mere structure of narrativity reinforces the link between narrative literature and empathy.

As implied above in relation to emotions in general, narrative structure is as inherent to the novel as it is to the process of empathy. In fact, for Deciu Ritivoi, empathy can in fact be regarded as "the product of a situated understanding uniquely tied to narrative" (61). That is because, to negotiate the comprehension between the Self and the Other in which it is based, empathy requires narrativity. More specifically, it requires a narrative account of the Other's circumstances for the empathizer to use it "as a background to the imaginative project" that precedes empathy. Ideally, this characterization will be as complete as possible, and "will include facts about the target's character, emotions, moods, dispositional tendencies, and life experience" (Coplan, "Empathic engagement with narrative fictions" 146). The primary advantage of the narrativity of literary fiction in generating empathy lies in this need for profound characterization, as the portrayal of the Other required by empathy generally coincides

[90] In the case of novels, these two characteristics—literature's capacity for detail and for character introspection—are reinforced by length, which extends the "cohabitation" between reader and character. The relevance of narrative's length in the emergence of narrative empathy will be further assessed in section 3.3 of this thesis.

with the characterizations provided by literary fiction. Therefore, while in the "actual world" it is not always easy to have encounters with Others that include a detailed account of their circumstances, fictional novels tend to invest their "style and substance", precisely, in exploring life stories (Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* 161), in a way that their format and contents usually set out the perfect conditions for empathic perspective-taking. With reference to the advantages of the emergence of "narrative empathy" in comparison with that of "real" life one, Jèmeljan Hakemulder comments:

> Reading literature is often believed to affect readers' empathic ability, that is, their ability to form an impression of another person's thoughts and emotions. In daily life, it is often hard to obtain reliable information about someone's motives and feelings. Usually, we can only guess what his or her true motives are. In many literary works, we get a unique opportunity to study motivations of people 'from within.' (11)[91]

In effect, from a narratological point of view, narrative fiction builds an empathic environment in at least three ways.

First, although not necessarily by making use of a first-person perspective,[92] we have commented how novels generally grant access to the thoughts, emotions, and

[91] In fact, one of Jèmeljan Hakemulder's purposes in *The Moral Laboratory* (2000) was to prove that "reading narratives enhances the ability to make psychological inferences about the emotions, thoughts, and motives others have in certain situations" (13), a thesis equally defended by scholars such as Batson (1991) or Bortolussi & Dixon (2003). Although Hakemulder could not gather evidence of this specific hypothesis, one of his social experiments demonstrated that narrated accounts generate more empathy than non-narrative ones. As a result of this discovery, Hakemulder concluded that: "a narrative presentation causes stronger effects on our beliefs about the emotions and thoughts of others (social perception) than a non-narrative presentation with approximately the same contents… Both texts probably primed the same memory schemata, […] but it seems to take a text with a character personifying the issue to change subjects' beliefs" (29).

[92] As I will explain in detail in the section devoted to narratology, many reasons lead us to believe that, as far as novels are concerned, the focus on character is not as related to *voice* (the narrator's position) but to *mood focalization*. Thus, if the focalization of the narration falls on a character, the reader "feels with the emotions of the involved dramatis personae, witnesses their interactions, and experiences their points of view…" and, to sum up, is exposed in a way that propels an empathic relationship with the focalizer (Bertman 341).

motivations of their most relevant characters: an introspection that can easily result in an empathic response from the reader, as "empathy is more likely to arise […] when we are furnished with extensive and detailed knowledge regarding the agent and their situation" (Smith, "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 114). Secondly, as Ercolino & Fusillo notice (56), the detailed characterization of fictional particulars is frequently accompanied by a well-defined knowledge of their environment, the "fictional world" to which they belong. In Ercolino & Fusillo's words,

> *Storytelling* possono fornire al fruitore molte informazioni sugli oggetti e sugli individui che reppresentano, come i movimenti delle azioni di un personaggio e svariati dettagli sulle situazioni che vive e che gli richiedono di agire. Nelle forme d'arte narrativa, complessi spaccati storico-sociali e motivazionali possono essere riconstruiti con un elevato grado di precisione, offrendo un contesto ben definito [...]. (56) [4]

This full portrait often includes all sort of social, spatial, and biographical information, as the modulation of narrative *tense* allows novels to show the characters' past—and sometimes even their future—, contextualizing even more their present actions and decisions. Together with the space for introspection and the detailed contextual description, a third resource of fictional narrative has been related to the evocation of empathy: its rhetoric dimension.[93] Rhetorical devices, that hold the persuasive power of language, "move a reader's affections", and, once the reader is familiarized with the characters and their world, these rhetoric devices may also "affect his judgment; they move him to feel intensely, to will, to act, to understand, to believe, to change his mind" (Tuve 18). In Ercolino & Fusillo's opinion, the union of rhetoric and "critical distance"—

[93] You may refer to Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Hakemulder 2000; Tuve 1947.

or as they call it, "*distanziamento ambivalente*" (60)—is essential for generating empathic bonds with conflictive characters, as the ones that emerge in the case of extreme empathy. That is so because the combination of persuasion and a sense of security can enhance "la capacità degli oggetti estetici in generale di manipolare la nostra attenzione, portandoci a concentrarci maggiormente sugli aspetti seducenti di un personaggio immorale" (59) [5]. Hence, extreme empathy appears as an ultimate instance of the power of narrative to enmesh readers in its affective net.

A revision of the narrative aspects that promote empathy has shown how this emotional reaction may be increased, extended, and diversified within fictional worlds. As described above, by means of the feeling of safety that access to empathy through a fictional world offers, its introspective and descriptive quality, the varied range of subjectivities it presents, and its use of formal devices and rhetoric, narrative fiction 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 4). Nonetheless, as Ercolino & Fusillo notice, these "ways of feeling empathy" can include relations with depraved subjects with whom, because of their behavior, we may not have wanted to empathize in the first place. In narrative fiction, the "moral barriers" that protect us from those unpleasant encounters fade, and often, fictionality makes us feel like restoring them is not as urgent as it is in the "actual" world. The absence of these barriers allows the reader to create unexpected bonds and access unusual "realities" because, as I will develop now, novels not only *enlarge* empathy and emotions, but they also *expand* the reader's experience. In general, fictional narratives construct fictional worlds that constitute *extended* and *barrier-free* "realities". Literary tradition has taken advantage of this epistemic, moral, and emotional autonomy to explore precisely, as Ercolino & Fusillo suggest, the close bond between humanity and Evil. I now propose to delve deeper into

the connection between the freedom of fiction and its representation of Evil through the analysis of extreme empathy, one of the possible emotional reactions to the fictional portrayal of immorality.

Literature as an Emotional and Representational Counter-discourse. The Representation of Evil

Within his method of "practical theorizing", Michel Foucault defined counter-discourse as "a practical engagement in political struggles" by which "the formerly voiceless begin to speak a language of their own making, a counter-discourse, which allows them "to resist the power seeking to oppress them" (Moussa & Scapp 89).[94] Throughout history, critical thought has often regarded fictional narratives as "one of a number of 'counter-discourses' partly associated with the experience of madness and opposed to an all-encompassing Reason" (Freundlieb 301).[95] In the preceding pages, I have attempted to illustrate that the counter-discursive nature of the narrative is not only thematic, but also emotional. Clearly, both spheres are interrelated: fiction allows us to experience extra-ordinary emotions because it examines extra-ordinary realities. Due to its enlarged emotionality *and* thematic freedom, narrative fiction becomes "the ideal space to investigate ugly feelings" (Ngai 2) as well as "ugly", uncomfortable topics.

[94] "Practical theorizing" is, as its name indicates, a method of criticism that attempts to have a material effect in the discursive space and change the paradigm of how the subject under examination is lived and discussed. As Mario Moussa & Ron Scapp define it, the main goal of Michel Foucault's "practical theorizing" is "to clear a discursive space in which those who were previously silenced might speak up […] that is, produce their own counter discourse" (90). Probably, the clearest instance of this method is to be found in Foucault's trilogy *Histoire de la sexualité.* You may also refer to Moussa & Scapp 1996.

[95] I am thinking here, mainly, about Michel Foucault's comments on literature, especially Foucault 1967; 1988; 1970; 1972; but also, about Bourdieu 1993; 1996; Derrida 1991; Rancière 2007.

In the case of empathy, this "ugliness" often means an understanding approach to wicked figures, as, in Keen's words, narrative fiction "provides safe spaces within which to see through the eyes of the psychopath, to occupy the subject position of the oppressive racist, to share the brutalizing past of the condemned outcast" (*Empathy and the Novel* 131).[96] A proof that narrative's counter-discursivity is at once emotional and representational is that the depiction of such unethical subjects has an impact on both the concept of empathy and the politics of literature. On the one hand, by presenting such subjectivities, fiction challenges the expectations of the conventional "target reader". On the other hand, for Ercolino & Fusillo, to address disagreeable forms of empathy highlights the political component of fiction, returning it to its essential role as a "forza destablizzante" which, in their opinion, is nowadays less and less promoted despite its omnipresence in literary history. According to the Italian critics, then, literature is becoming more and more constructive, as the market tries to transform literary discourse into a "discorso più o meno edificante al servizio di categoriche e manichee agende internazionali del bene comune" (12) [6]. With this opinion, Ercolino & Fusillo coincide with Paul Bloom (2016), who argues that most literature is prone to repeat the general tendencies of conservative thought. In fact, Bloom opposes the idea that literature may open the door to new manifestations of empathy because, from his viewpoint, most authors decide to center the audience's emotions on a previously appealing or likeable character whose reality does not conflict with their expectations, thus implicitly reinforcing "mainstream" forms of empathic comprehension. According to Bloom, as most popular authors prioritize subjects that will "resonate with a popular audience",

[96] Besides extreme empathy, an example of a troubling manifestation of empathy with a clear political intention would be what Carolyn Pedwell terms "confrontational empathy" (97). As a practical exercise in her work *Affective Relations*, Pedwell analyses the strategic use of this kind of empathy in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, in which an explicit absence of empathy is employed to "expose the limitations and risks of liberal, Euro-American narratives of empathy, as well as the significance of historical, social and geo-political positionality to the meanings and implications of affect" (97-98).

"some issues that matter to many people are hardly focused on at all. Stories about the horrific conditions inside American prisons rarely capture people's interest because, although they touch the lives of millions, most people don't care about those millions" (93).

While Ercolino & Fusillo's and Bloom's arguments hold water for a portion of the literature being consumed today, which is in effect diminishing its transgressive discourse, I believe that narratives maintain, if not necessarily an overt "counter-discursive" quality, at least a tendency to contradict "compulsory happiness" (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*). Therefore, Georges Bataille's assertion that "les romans décrivent indéfiniment la souffrance, à peu près jamais la satisfaction. À la fin, la vertu du bonheur est faite de sa rareté" rings true—and valid for a substantial part of narrative fiction to this day (105) [7]. Of course, as far as emotionality is concerned, the term "suffering" encompasses a whole variety of feelings such as grief, guilt, anxiety, or nostalgia. It is evident that these emotions emerge in response to a variety of painful experiences that remain central to fictional representation: death, loss, crime, mental illness, and more. In this sense, literature has always focused—and continues to focus—on representing the harshest facets of human existence, which we wish to understand but not experience firsthand. Among these realities, in my view, is Evil. Throughout history, fictional worlds have consistently delved into the universal question of pure Evil, either as a central theme or in relation to the subjects listed above. In Bataille's opinion, the universal question of sheer Evil and the attempts to understand it constitute "la pure essence de la poésie" (71).[97] Even if Bataille's statement may be seen as hyperbolic, numerous voices within academia argue that the portrayal of Evil and its resulting

[97] I assume, by the context of the quote and the overall tone of the essay, that by "poetry", Georges Bataille is not referring here to poetry as a literary genre, but to the poetical function of language in general, therefore including all literary manifestations.

emotions have played—and still play—a significant role in fictional narratives: a role that is at once political, epistemological, moral, and aesthetic.

The political significance of fictional representations of Evil was especially analyzed by French critic Georges Bataille in *Literature and Evil* (1956). Echoing the notion of narrative fiction as a counter-discourse, Bataille defends in this essay that literature not only has the right to expose the forbidden, but the *responsibility* to do so, as "seule la littérature pouvait mettre à nu le jeu de la transgression de la loi (…) *indépendamment d'un ordre à créer*". Because of its exceptional status, the French critic concludes that, in opposition to non-fictional discourse, literature "peut tout dire": a freedom of speech that turns it into "un danger" (20) [8]. Half a century after the publication of *La littérature et le mal*, another French thinker, Jacques Rancière, reinforced the political dimension of Bataille's argument. According to Rancière, literature's responsibility to address "the realm of the Other" is a political one, as literary activity participates in the 'partage du sensible', defined by Rancière as "cette distribution et redistribution des espaces et des temps, des places et des identités, de la parole et du bruit, du visible et de l'invisible […]". For Rancière, "le partage du sensible" is redistributed by means of political activity, which in turn, is inherent to literature, as "elle introduit sur la scène du commun des objets et des sujets nouveaux. Elle rend visible ce qui était invisible" (12) [9]. In my view, narrative contributes to the political "partage du sensible" at a representational *and* at an emotional level, because its challenge relies on its potential to both *say* everything and *make readers feel* everything. Fiction can bring to light emotions that were previously out of focus as happens, for instance, as said above, when it elicits types of empathy that escape the "mainstream" schema.

Also, from an epistemological point of view, the "irrésistible attrait" (Bataille 105) of fiction towards the representation of the transgression of moral rules should neither be

disdained nor be read as morbid curiosity or mere pleasure for rule breaking. Instead, I read this "attraction" as a symptom of fiction's general will to grasp human nature in its entirety, or, as novelist Salman Rushdie puts it, "to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit" (1). Hence, if literature is more given to "transgresser la loi morale", it is because this quest to inquire into the nature of humanity requires the exploration of thought and feeling outside "les limites de la raison" (Bataille 24). Fiction's evocation of the terrible experiences and emotions that we instinctively avoid in our lives lacks practical consequences, beyond rendering them visible. Nevertheless, for Bataille and for Ercolino & Fusillo, representations of "ces désordres, ces déchirements" (Bataille 52) [10] have the epistemological value of displaying the dark parts of humanity and, therefore, end up also having a moral value, as our approximation to them may bring about "una profonda e *catartica* riflessione morale sui limiti dell'umano" (113) [11].

If we think in terms of "the moral limits of humanity", it is only logical for narrative fiction to be inclined to the side of the moral spectrum where the definitive "Other"—Evil—stands. The immorality of Evil is at once the opposite side of the "Order of the Same" (Foucault) and the silence at its center.[98] Evil is at odds with rational "common sense" but remains a constituent part of human nature. From my perspective, this reflection is what induced Bataille to assert: "Le Mal—une forme aiguë du Mal—

[98] In Michel Foucault's philosophy, "The Order of the Same" and "the Order of the Other" are the two spheres of civil society that conform the Bourgeois Order. According to Foucault's analysis of the biopolitics of liberalism, from the 16th century onwards, society became divided between the "Same", that is to say, the bourgeois portion of society that holds sovereignty, and thus controls the "dispositifs" of power and the production of discourse (Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* 10); and the "Other" at the margins of culture, which must therefore be excluded and enclosed to reduce its alterity (Morey 2014). According to Foucault, the Order of the Other defines, by contraposition, what is at the center of the Order of the Same. This terminology appears for the first time in Foucault's doctoral thesis and first impact publication, *L'Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961), devoted to "the Order of the Other". Foucault worked on this distinction throughout all of his production: it appears in both his genealogy of power and his archeology of knowledge, for instance, in *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), which constitutes an analysis of the production of knowledge by "the Order of the Same". For more information on this biopolitical division, you may refer to Higuita Peña 2008; Jordana 2018.

dont elle est l'expression, a pour nous, je crois, la valeur souveraine. Mais cette conception ne commande pas l'absence de morale, elle exige une 'hypermorale'" (9) [12]. It demands hypermorality because it raises fundamental moral questions for the readers, it faces them with a part of their nature that resists comprehension but demands recognition.

The most evident proof of the importance of immorality as a literary topic is the omnipresence of "negative" characters in narrative fiction. As outlined in this sub-section, the presence of these characters gives them political visibility, may challenge the emotionality and epistemology of readers, and demands of them a "hypermoral" approach to the text. But these are not the only attractions that immorality holds for the literary project. From an aesthetic point of view, the representation of Evil can increase both the psychological depth of the novel and, as this thesis aims to illustrate, the technical tools it invests in keeping the readership involved in the narration. From this perspective, reflections and affects around immorality may not only favor narrative at the level of content, but also at the level of form.

As Ercolino & Fusillo point out, immoral actors have always populated fictional worlds, but their relevance increased notably from pre-modern and modern literature onwards. According to the Italian scholars, this was a result of the improvement in the description of the characters' psychology (83). In those centuries, authors became aware that the characterization of antagonists or morally flawed characters enabled them to develop complex and ambivalent psychologies, whose expression made rhetorical and formal features stand out. As an example of this phenomenon, Ercolino & Fusillo comment on two well-known antagonists of modern literature, and more specifically, of modern poetry and drama respectively: Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Iago in Shakespeare's play *Othello* (circa 1603). In the case of Iago, Ercolino & Fusillo

affirm that the antagonist constitutes "uno degli elementi di maggiore fascino dell'Otello" (87) [13], as his monologues contain the most famous lines of the tragedy, which illustrate the ambiguity that the psychology of antagonists makes it possible to express, and its resulting fascination: "Demand me nothing, what you know, you know: From this time forth I will never speak a word" or the well-known statement "I am not what I am" (qtd. 87). In the case of *Paradise Lost*, Satan's moral doubts—and the rhetoric displayed to convey them—monopolize the interest of the poem over the voices of God, Eve, and Adam. Examples as these two illustrate how, in modernity, the inverted correspondence between morals and technique was disclosed: the lower the moral principles expressed, the more sophisticated the narrative technique voicing them had to be so that these characters were believable, profound, and, above all, relatable to the audience (Luque 96). In *Las cosas como son y otras fantasías. Moral, imaginación y arte narrativo*, Luque discusses at length, precisely, the co-relation between narrative technique and the "testing" of the reader's morality, to conclude that "la moral es escalar, y cuanto más bajo caemos en ella más alta es la exigencia técnica de la novela que nos contamos para intentar excusarnos" (96) [14]. Additionally, Luque also explains that, besides the manipulation of language, the literary investigation of immorality demands a balanced measurement of the horror narrated to achieve the right level of impact: one where the readership feels uncomfortable and questions their principles, but are not shocked enough to abandon the reading act (97). A balance, achieved through narrative resources, that requires a certain level of narrative mastery, as it deftly exploits the exceptional circumstances of fiction discussed above to make readers fascinated with villains and come to understand their misdemeanors. This inverted correspondence between morals and technique brings us back to our formal investigation on extreme empathy, because the link that unites

immorality and literature is at once political, moral, and epistemological, but its emotional outcome ultimately relies on aesthetics.

As we have seen throughout this interlude, the phenomenological similitudes between empathy and narrative, together with the inner structures of the latter, turn fictional narratives into optimal spaces for empathic comprehension, which allows literature to explore "alternative" realities and subjectivities, like immoral ones, and even arouse empathy for them. Extreme empathy is the paradigmatic result of this series of characteristics. As I see it, the possibility of this emotional reaction evinces literature's capacity to address uncommon emotions and moral stands. As evident from the numerous bibliographical references informing this section, the correlation between literature and empathy has undergone extensive study in recent decades. Yet, these studies have often neglected to consider how narrative empathy is intimately tied to the formal aspects of the novel.

The arguments presented above are mostly a compilation and a subsequent analysis of previous critical work regarding narrative and empathy. In recent times, the intersection between empathy and immorality has also received some attention (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Morton 2011). Therefore, while the focus of this research is not on the *description* of narrative empathy and extreme empathy, I do aspire to reconsider, to the extent possible, the focus and methodology from which narrative empathy—and extreme empathy within it—have been analyzed.

Narrative Empathy and Extreme Empathy: from Affect Theory to Narrative Theory

In my revision of the theorization of empathy, I mentioned two interdisciplinary subfields that have especially dealt with the effects of this *transitive* emotion in literature: "reader response studies" and "cognitive approach to literary studies". I also commented on how these subfields have dominated the study on empathy (Pedwell 190), centering it on the interests of cognitive psychology, the field at the basis of both approaches. As far as narrative empathy is concerned, this discursive slant has centered criticism of said emotional experience on the *reader*, the reader's *responses,* and the *effects* of empathy on the readership. From my perspective, the dangers of this approach are twofold. First, much of this psychological literature on empathy is, as Deciu Ritivoi warns, "predicated on the assumption that another's experience can be studied, replicated, and standardized" (65), and relies on an empirical method to study literary reception (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 99), thus leaving aside the multiple readings that literature allows. Secondly, these perspectives have ousted from the academic spotlight other aspects of narrative empathy, as its literary representation. The research on the topic has been so focused on narrative empathy as a *cause of* readers' reactions, that it has neglected it as an *effect of* narrative technique. Consequently, the analysis of the nature of the representation of empathy in novels is nowadays practically deprived of critical tools.

Despite that, and although they do not refer exclusively to empathy, some voices within affect theory have made explicit the necessity of tackling emotions as "a formal problem in the novel" (Ngai 52) and have even pointed out the importance of "figures of speech" in producing the emotionality of texts (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12). On her side, Pedwell considers the analysis of the production of fictional emotions as a necessary step within the reform of empathy, since for her, the fictionalization of emotions could shed light on the politics of emotions in general. In her words,

> Exploring the ways in which emotions—including empathy, but also melancholia, anger, shame, love, generosity and hope—are produced both within literary texts and via their circulation and reception is precisely to address the affective qualities of textuality and the ways in which literature participates in the materialization of political relations of feeling. (4)

Despite these manifestations, none of these scholars has undertaken the task of approaching emotions from a narratological perspective. In the case of narrative empathy, besides Ercolino's brief exegesis of "negative empathy" in *Les Bienveillantes*, the project that comes closest to a narratological approach is that of Keen in *Empathy in the Novel* (2007), where the scholar aims at addressing all the aspects of this emotion, including the identification of the "narrative techniques that tend to evoke empathic responses" (65). To determine these techniques, Keen, whose method combines narrative theory and developmental and social psychology (xi), puts forward nine hypotheses on the evocation of empathy in narrative. However, these premises, based on readers' testimonies (72), ultimately relate more to the readers' perception of novels rather than to formal aspects, as they are concerned, for instance, with the overall quality of the narrative (hypothesis 9), the moment of its publication (hypothesis 6 & 8), or the readers' previous experiences (hypothesis 7). With all, Keen's analysis of the narrative techniques that favor empathy ends up being, again, more a contribution to reader response studies than to narratology.

Considering these antecedents, my proposal is to address extreme empathy—a form of narrative empathy—as a literary creation that is represented in the fictional text, instead of tackling it exclusively as a reading experience. This change in perspective demands, of course, a corresponding change in methodology: regarded as an element of the novel, and thus an effect of formal devices, extreme empathy will become an object of narratological analysis in my thesis. The aim of this methodological focus is to

demonstrate, through the case of extreme empathy, the capacity of literary studies to apprehend and analyze the emotional tissue of novels. In turn, this purpose is motivated by an underlying wish to challenge the current psychological orientation of "empathy studies" by advocating for literature's competence to interpret, in its full depth and complexity and with its own tools, one of its historically central themes: the aesthetic evocation of emotions. Part of my assumption is that for emotions to be aroused in the reader, they must be integrated into the fictional text. This is because all elements of the novel, including emotions, have been semiotically conceived within the fictional world before being represented textually, since the fictional text is but "the medium of fictional world making" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 24). Thus, before attempting to describe how narrative empathy is manifested at a formal level, it is crucial to address how narrative emotions exist at the semiotic level and which role they play in the construction of the fictional world. This inquiry leads us to work towards a fictional semantics of emotions, because, as Doležel asserts, "there is no other way to decide what exists and what does not exist in a semiotic world than by inspecting how the world has been constructed" ("Truth and Authenticity" 11).

BLOCK II. MIMESIS. EMOTIONS AS NARRATIVE BUILDING BLOCKS

2.1 CARTOGRAPHY OF POSSIBLE-WORLD SEMANTICS

The Collapse of Traditional Mimesis: Classical Segregationism and Speech-Act Theory

"There is only one world, the 'real' world: Shakespeare's imagination is part of it" (Russell 3). If taken out of context, this statement by the philosopher of language Bertrand Russell appears to be out of all discussion—even redundant. With this maxim from "Descriptions"—a foundational text for Russell's theory of descriptions—, Russell is implying that non-existent entities simply *do not exist*.[99] Consequently, Hamlet would be only a fantasy of the once-real William Shakespeare, an idea based on its author's knowledge of the "real" world and expressed as a "description in words" (Russell 2). Then, every sentence—or emotion—related to him, would be automatically *false,* as it would lack a reference to a real being. Far from being an individual idea, Russell's conception of the fictional, sketched here, is an echo of the "ancient but persistent doctrine of mimesis" for which the fiction theorists of the end of the 20th century reserved their

[99] Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions, initially put forth in "On Denoting" (1905) and reexamined in later texts as this "Descriptions"—a chapter in *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919)—, is Russell's major contribution to the philosophy of language. It concerns "the analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions" (Kaplan 277), which, following this theory, are considered false if they do not have a real reference, if they describe more than one referent, or if they are ambiguous. Applied to literature, the theory of descriptions considers that "statements about fictional entities are false" because they refer to nonexistent individuals, to which Bertrand Russell Russell denies "any ontological status" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 14).

"strongest criticism". In this regard, Lubomír Doležel argued that "mimetic reading […] is one of the most reductive operations of which the human mind is capable: the vast, open, and inviting fictional universe is shrunk to the model of one single world, actual human experience" (*Heterocosmica* x). Affirmations on the metaphysical status of literature such as Russell's have divided fiction theorists throughout the last century and continue to do so.

The conception of mimesis to which Russell ascribes, still rooted in the Aristotelian equation of fictional art as "imitation", and thus dependent on a fiction-reality dichotomy, began to be called into question during the seventies, with the emergence of new theoretical perspectives that shifted the analysis of this dichotomy from ontology to pragmatics and semantics (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 18). The will to conceptualize fiction as an *alternative* to the actual world, instead of as a representation of it, motivated continuous reexaminations of traditional mimesis. This movement led, in the eighties and nineties, to a theoretical practice that, from my perspective, meant the ultimate revocation of the traditional mimetic doctrine: possible-world semantics (Eco 1994; Doležel 1998; Pavel 1986; Plantinga 1976; Ryan 1985). However, before studying thoroughly this critical movement—on which the present thesis bases its reflections on the mimesis of emotions—, I find it necessary to reassess the principles of traditional mimesis and the ways in which this latter group of scholars critiqued them, to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind possible-world semantics

In their critical review of traditional mimesis, theoreticians Thomas Pavel and Lubomír Doležel came up with different terms to illustrate the historical understanding of fiction inherited from Ancient Greece. On his seminal essay *Fictional Worlds* (1986), Pavel suggested the label "segregationists" to refer to the approaches to fiction that "segregate" it from reality, thus relegating it to the status of a "representation" of the latter

(*Fictional Worlds* vii). In turn, Doležel introduced a terminology closer to possible-world semantics to refer to the same notion. He opted for the term "one-world frame" to designate the system of thought that sustains traditional theories of fictionality in which fiction is irremediably linked to the only world within our reach: "the actual world" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica*). Both terms, though, point towards the same monolithic schema: art imitates life, or, as Balzac famously metaphorized with reference to the novel, "le roman c'est un miroir". From the perspective of traditional mimesis, fiction, like a mirror, can only be valued in relation to how accurately it portrays "the real". Its meaning is to be found outside of its textual frame, in its real-world reference. At an exegetic level, this translates into a rejection of the uniqueness of fictional elements, including fictional characters that, denied any ontological status (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 14), are regarded by classical segregationism only as "imitations or representations of actually existing entities" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 6).

The hegemony of this mimetic mode of interpretation is rooted, of course, in its deep reliance on Western logocentrism—an idealism "opposed to accidents and deviations" that, as Pavel observes through his reading of Derrida, "has characterized Western metaphysics since its beginnings" (*Fictional Worlds* 26). Sheltered by this epistemological frame and practically unchallenged, segregationism governed literary criticism until the 20th century, when new ideas started to deviate from it.[100] Nevertheless,

[100] Although classical segregationism was indeed the rule until the 20th century, Thomas Pavel mentions some theoretical discourses that dissented from it, as Peter Frederick Strawson's, who criticized Bertrand Russell's view for not taking into consideration that truth conditions change over time, what gave "classical segregationism a supplement of flexibility" (*Fictional Worlds* 18); or those deriving from Meinongian theories, that questioned the non-existence of fictional objects (*Fictional Worlds* 27-31). But just as it happened with these alternative positions, the tendency to question traditional mimesis during the 20th century did not represent a real schism within 20th-century mimetics. As Stephen Halliwell alerts, ideas belonging to the mimetic tradition were not subject to "sheer repudiation", but rather to a "reinterpretation and transformation" (360), in a way that the questioning of segregationism did not mean, in any case, its extinction, but rather a polarization of opinions around a model that pervived in Marxist "social realism", Eric Auerbach's universalist mimetics, or literary movements such as structuralism, among others (Halliwell 371).

it is difficult to designate which current of critical thought triggered the definitive questioning of a doctrine that had dominated art criticism from its origins. In a discreet—but in my opinion accurate—manner, Pavel locates this turning point outside the artistic-literary sphere and identifies it with the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) and the linguistic turn that followed it. When Saussure claimed that the meaning of the linguistic sign rested upon its internal structure of *signifiant*/*signifié*, he displaced the meaning of language from the reference to reality, rendering language "independent of the structures of the world" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 5). At a literary level, Saussure's semantics implied a possible detachment of language, maker of the fictional text, from any reference to the real; and thus, bestowed self-referentiality on literature, a move which was reinforced some decades later, when, describing the functions of language, Roman Jakobson asserted that the purpose of the poetic function—the quintessence of literature—was language in itself.[101]

The change in the conception of language brought about by the linguistic turn prompted a burst of new perspectives on fiction that examined it through this lens, and which progressively paved the way for a semantic approach to literary theory. As Ruth Ronen puts it, it is at this point when "interdisciplinary models that were not originally meant to explicate literary phenomena […] emerged in the literary research domain to serve the acute need to explain a notion of fictionality" (3). To briefly trace the development from the linguistic turn in literary criticism to the outburst of possible-world semantics, I will follow the critical chronology proposed by Pavel in the first chapters of his book *Fictional Worlds* (1986).

[101] For more on this, see Jakobson 1960. For a critical review of Roman Jakobson's notion of "poetic function", you can refer to Félix Martínez Bonati's chapter "Algunos tópicos estructualistas y la esencia de la poesía" in *La ficción narrativa. Su lógica y ontología* (13-33).

The interdisciplinary encounter between linguistics and literary criticism had already started, in a sporadic way, at the beginning of the 20th century, when thinkers such as Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein started to develop philosophies of language and logic and to apply them to the field of fiction (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 1). One step ahead of Russell's theory of descriptions sketched above, Frege employed the distinction between sense and reference to separate "language of cognition", provided of sense and a "real" reference; and "language of fiction", which, even if deprived of reference, nevertheless had sense, and was "neither true, nor false" (Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 8), and therefore simply distinct from factual knowledge. All in all, explanations of the phenomena of fiction such as Frege's or Russell's, centered on the linguistic aspects of the binary opposition reality/fiction, were clearly still enclosed in the one-world framework, as can be inferred from their attachment to "truth" values.

Later, in the fifties and early sixties, the influence of Saussure's work yielded its clearest results when its best-known academic consequence, structuralism, also developed its own method of literary criticism, completely based on the centrality of the text and its linguistic structure.[102] Classic structuralist poetics, exemplified famously by Claude Lévi-Strauss's attempt to reduce Greek myth to a repetitive schema, did indeed divorce fiction from reality, but in doing so, reduced fiction to a material result of linguistic craftwork.[103] As Pavel indicates, in its more linguistic version, structuralism failed to account for the fact that fictional works are "complex constructions, overloaded with meaning" and consequently neglected "those literary and artistic features that

[102] For more on this, you can refer to Culler 1975.
[103] For more information on Claude Lévi-Strauss's exercises on poetry, you can refer to "The Structural Study of Myth" by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955). For a general account of the poetics of structuralism, you can refer to Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (1975).

transcend purely structural properties: style, reference, representation, global meaning, expressiveness" (*Fictional Worlds* 8).

The Romanian theorist reserves a similar criticism of shortsightedness for the other great method of literary analysis motivated by the linguistic turn: speech-act theory. Closely linked to the philosophy of language that John Langshaw Austin had initiated with *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), his disciple, John Searle, developed an approximation to language around Austin's concept of "speech-acts", which both scholars defined as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle 16). Searle, together with other philosophers such as Gottfried Gabriel (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 18), considered that speech-acts could explain the conditions of linguistic communication (Iser 54). In their attempt to interpret fictional discourse as a linguistic act, speech-act theory relied on pragmatics, and more specifically, on the position of the speaker, to explain the idiosyncrasy of fiction: according to them, literary discourse differs from current speech in that its producer, the author, *pretends* to use referential language in the context of a simulated communicative situation. From this perspective, the language of fiction would no longer be contrary to the language of cognition, but one of the multiple pragmatic deviances that the latter admits. In Pavel's terms, "the speech-act theory derives fictionality from the linguistic attitude of the speaker; and since virtually any sentence or sequence thereof can be uttered as mere pretense, Searle's and Gabriel's arguments appear to play down the existence of intrinsically fictional discourse" (*Fictional Worlds* 20). In comparison with the prior mimetic logics of classical segregationism or the schematic method of structuralism, the vision of speech-act theory contributed to a change of perspective by perceiving literature as a distinct linguistic phenomenon. Nonetheless, critical revisions of the theory have classified speech-act theory as just a refreshment of segregationist postures (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 18), as it

preserves literature's dependency on reality by considering fiction a fallacious copy of it.[104] As Wolfgang Iser meditates, "in their reflections on the nature of literary language, Roman Ingarden, J.L Austin, and John Searle have one thing in common: they all regard this mode of language as an imitation of and not a deviation from ordinary speech" (63).

In fact, one of the two main critiques of speech-act theory relates to this attachment to actuality, and more specifically, to its attributing the "pretended assertions" that construct literary texts to "a member of the actual world" (Ryan, "Fiction, Non-Factuals and the Principle of Minimal Departure" 409). Several arguments problematize this take on fiction. On the one hand, from a linguistic perspective, Félix Martínez Bonati argues that neither can fiction be read as a speech-act, nor the author perceived as the speaker. The Chilean scholar considers that speech-acts require a personal responsibility that authors do not bear, as they produce "el discurso imaginario de un hablante imaginario" (*La ficción narrativa* 36) [1]. On the other hand, and from an epistemological angle, Pavel turns to Jacques Derrida's "deconstructionist rejection of meaning control" to discard the possibility of the author performing the speaker's role. Pavel evaluates instead that "there are few areas where the Cartesian notion of a subject-speaker is less appropriate than literary utterances" (*Fictional Worlds* 22). His reflections on the matter end up being, more than a response to speech-act theory's opinions on the nature of literature, a claim against the representative logic and the cult to the figure of the author that have historically constrained art criticism:

[104] As a matter of fact, this perception has persisted in approaches to fiction such as Kendall Walton's "theory of make-believe", exposed in *Mimesis as Make-Believe. On the Foundations of Representational Art* (1990). As I will describe later in this chapter, Walton equates fictional narratives with dreams, daydreams, and games of make-believe, attributing to them an ontological status equivalent to that of illusions and thus, somehow perpetuating, in my opinion, the preeminence of reality in the study of fiction (Walton 63).

> To show that the Cartesian image of a well-individualized speaker in full control of his voice does not fit the production of literary fiction, it may be enough to think about the complexity and elusiveness of the originating voice in literary discourse. The writer as an individual, the authorial voice, the narrator, reliable or not, the voices of the characters, distinct from one another or more or less mixed together, undercut any attempt to comment on fiction as if it had one well-individuated originator. (*Fictional Worlds* 23)

Pavel's acknowledgement of literature's polyphony and intricacy somehow echoes the second criticism made to speech-act theory, formulated by Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978).[105] Aligning with the overall argument of this essay, Iser claims that the literary text escapes the category of "speech act" because it transcends normal communication, given that, in his opinion, the reader collaborates actively in the creation of the text through the act of reading.[106] Consequently, for Iser the literary text cannot be considered a simple speech act delivered by a single emissary, but "a dynamic interaction" that has "the character of an event" (67) and that, as such, produces a different result in each repetition. Iser's understanding of the semantics of the fictional text is then opposed to the principles of speech-act theory, as he perceives this textual typology not as a formed message, but as the *instructions* to form a message. In the words of the German critic, "the iconic signs of literature constitute an organization

[105] In *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), German theorist Wolfgang Iser laid the foundation, in parallel with the work of Hans-Robert Jauss, for the "theory of aesthetic reception". Drawing on Roman Ingarden's phenomenology as well as on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, this theory of literary reception transformed the field of hermeneutics by giving the reader a central role in the reception process, and by considering the act of reading as an event in which the creation of meaning is the result of an intersubjective exchange between reader and text.

[106] For more information on the dynamic role of the reader in Wolfgang Iser's reception theory, you can refer to chapters III and IV of *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*: "Phenomenology of Reading. The Processing of the Literary Text" and "Interaction between Text and Reader. The Communicatory Structure of the Literary Text".

of signifiers which do not serve to designate a signified object, but instead designate *instructions* for the *production* of the signified" (65).

Iser's model of the fictional text as a collaborative communicative experience paved the way towards new transdisciplinary practices in the field, as it emphasized semantics instead of pragmatics as the differential linguistic trait of fiction. Two decades after the publication of Iser's essay, Lubomir Doležel, indebted to the former's work, built on his ideas to come up with the theory of "literary transduction", which aimed at characterizing narrative as a linguistic act.[107] A rewriting of the Saussurean model of communication applied to literature,[108] "literary transduction" interprets fiction as the result of two consequential communicative acts: the author's writing of the text and the reader's reconstruction of it. Both the author and the reader make creative semantic exercises.[109] As Doležel puts it, "transduction takes the literary work beyond the communicative act into an open, unlimited chain of transmission" (*Heterocosmica* 205). With this hypothesis, Doležel—as well as many of his contemporaries—was pursuing similar objectives to those implied in Iser's manifesto against classic speech-act theory: to correct the second "major fault" of Searle's critical movement, the fact that "it presumes that reading is a passive 'decoding' of the text", and that "it does not notice that a fictional world is transmitted through the message" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 203).

[107] Figure 3 in Appendix II.
[108] Figure 4 in Appendix II.
[109] Lubomír Doležel's scheme of "literary transduction" clearly derives from Iser's theory of aesthetic response. In fact, we can already glimpse the idea of "transduction" in the latter's division of the literary work in two poles, the artistic and the aesthetic: "the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism […] If the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself" (21).

To sum up, while speech-act theory appeared as a possible solution to classic segregationism, it presented two limitations, inherited in turn from the mimetic tradition: it located the origin of fiction in reality and attributed its creation exclusively to the author-speaker. For Doležel, these two flaws are echoes of the principal limitation of speech-act theory, also appliable to all segregationist theories of fiction: restricted to the one-world frame, they could not account for fictionality, as fiction is not concerned with reality, but with possibility, and "the possible is wider than the actual" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 19).

The Claims of Possible-World Semantics: Fictional Beings and Active Readers

Having realized the incapacity of the one-world model frame to grasp fiction in its full complexity and looking for "powerful and elegant models for literary semantics", innovative perspectives arose in the field during the seventies. Among these, possible-world semantics put forward a new framework that revitalized literary theory (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 9). As Marie-Laure Ryan summarizes, this school of thought had its seed in two parallel academic gestures: the utility that structuralist narratologists such as Tzvetan Todorov (1975) found in concepts borrowed from the philosophical theory of possible-worlds to explain narrative features; and the use of Gottfried Wilheim Leibniz's thought, by academics such as Alvin Plantinga (1976), to refer to fiction (528). Informed by these first critical references, a group of "pioneering" scholars—namely Umberto Eco, Thomas Pavel, and Lubomír Doležel—began to build a method to apply Leibniz's theory of possible worlds to literary semantics. Thereafter, possible-world semantics was systematically developed and employed for fifteen years but lived its apogee in academia in the second half of the nineties (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory"

528). Beyond its immediate antecedents, noted above, the way for possible-world semantics had been made possible as a result of the interdisciplinary exchange between logical philosophy, linguistics—in this case, semantics, and literary studies. More specifically, as Pavel recognizes, possible-world semantics is directly indebted, paradoxically, to speech-act theory, as the success of the latter "encouraged contacts between analytical philosophy and literary criticism", which "served as a basis for a semantic approach to fiction" (*Fictional Worlds* 18). Despite what can be perceived as their common origin, possible-world semantics emerged as an alternative to solve the analytical shortcomings of previous mimetic models. These shortcomings are, at the end, magnified versions of the flaws of speech-act theory reviewed above: on the one hand, its incapacity to understand fictional texts as independent systems and, consequently, to embrace their possible outcomes and account for their inhabitants, fictional characters; and on the other hand, its inattention to the role of the reader. In this sub-section, I delve into these two aspects from the reformative perspective of possible-world semantics. Since, as I have noted above, this method was born as a practical response to the limitations of the preceding tradition—which have already been mentioned in the previous section, the following pages inevitably reiterate much of what has been said with respect to mimetic currents, and especially to speech-act theory. However, this partial reiteration serves a two-fold purpose: first, to contextualize the point of departure of possible-world semantics, and secondly, to lead up to its untangling of these problematics that were once at the heart of literary studies.

To start with the constraint posed by mimetic tradition's denial of the autonomy of the text, both Pavel and Doležel diagnose that "the theoretical failure of mimetic semantics is not fortuitous; it is a necessary consequence of its adherence to the one-world model frame" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 9). Focused on preserving the "ontological purity"

of the actual world (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 10), mimetic models as the ones examined above are forced to return to the world of experience in their exegesis of fiction as representation. This "restricted scope" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 9) may go unnoticed in the case of narrative texts that clearly rely on references to the actual world or even seek to create an illusion of reality, as is the case, for instance, with 17th century *roman à clef* or 19th century Realistic novels. However, the restrictions of mimetic semantics become obvious when it comes to applying the one-world frame to narratives that diverge from or contradict reality: a common practice even in seemingly realistic literature, which "will miss no opportunity to subvert its own foundations" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 160). Narrative, from chivalric romance to postmodern metafiction, indeed deals frequently with non-existent and impossible circumstances. In these cases, segregationism is bound to "marginalize phenomena that do not fit its framework" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 26), simplify these non-referential fictional materials, and employ the hermeneutical techniques that it *does* have. Thus, in this paradigm, phenomena intrinsic to literature, like the rupture of the norms of the actual world, end up being evaluated as shortcomings in the literary attempt to represent reality. As a result, the creativity from which any literary text springs—and, by extension, its autonomy—is dismissed.

For Doležel, the worst consequence of this anchoring to reality is how it affects the analysis of fictional beings. In effect, this is a relevant deficiency if we consider, like the Czech scholar does, that the content of the novel is *social* and *interactive* (*Heterocosmica* 97), and that, as so, the presence of a fictional subjectivity to be understood—and from which to understand the story—is the minimum requirement in a fictional narrative. From Doležel's perspective, then, characters constitute the very heart of the narration: an assessment that the mimetic tradition had ignored. Indeed, a direct consequence of the segregationist perception of fiction was the neglect of the so-called

"character studies", that is, the analysis of fictional characters as essential elements of the narrative. The theorists influenced by possible-world semantics saw in this critical void the incarnation of every problem within the "one world frame", and so, they counteracted this legacy through a shared concern for the figure of the fictional character. Clear evidence of this research preoccupation is the fact that in both Pavel's (1986) and Ryan's (1991) main studies, after contextualizing and presenting their respective views on possible-world semantics, the authors dedicate a section to the question of characters, identifying it as the first issue to be amended in the study of narrative worlds.[110] In Pavel's case, the second chapter of *Fictional Worlds*, titled "Fictional Beings" (11-43), offers an in-depth examination of the incompatibilities between the study of fictional characters and the literary theories derived from the mimetic mindset. Similarly, Doležel devotes the incipit of his referential article "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" (1988) to a critique of the mimetic semantics' approach to fictional characters. However, the significance Doležel places on characters is even more evident in *Heterocosmica,* which is structured around this narrative element, in a way that in the first chapter, the critic explores one-person worlds, describing them as the most "precarious structure" (37) in narrative; and from there, he progressively introduces other elements that interact with characters, such as actions, motivations, multiperson worlds, interactions, and power dynamics.

All of these gestures emphasize the prominence that characters hold in possible-world semantics, opposite to the usual stance in previous criticism, which denied the singularity of fictional beings. As Doležel exposes in "Mimesis and Possible Worlds", from a segregationist logic, all fictional beings are extracted from reality, "they are imitations or representations of actually existing entities" (6). This belief restricts the

[110] The chapter by Marie-Laure Ryan I am referring to here is "Fictional Entities, Incomplete Beings" is included in her book *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, published in 1991 (108-144).

mimetic explanation of characters to two possibilities: either they are exact copies of "actual prototypes", or they personify "actual universals" as, for example, historical types, cultural identities, and so on ("Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 6-7).[111] As Doležel expounds, this model not only annihilates the fictional characters' condition of genuine creations, but it also presents logical limitations:

> If mimetic criticism attempts to move beyond this domain, it finds itself in a double bind. If it insists on interpreting all fictional entities as representations of actual ones, it is forced into a universalist interpretation, which deletes fictional particulars. If fictional particulars are preserved, they are not explained as representations of actual entities but taken as pre-existent; a source of representation is assumed to have recovered them. These moves either substantially alter (in the case of the universalist function) or make vacuous (in the case of the pseudomimetic function) the doctrine of mimesis. ("Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 9)

This "fatal defect of all one-world semantics of fictionality" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 10) is a clear instance of how this doctrine nullifies itself by means of its own restrictive principles. Ultimately, the cause behind the failure of mimesis is to be found, once again,

[111] Lubomír Doležel refers to the first possibility, by which each fictional entity is assigned an "actual prototype" as "the mimetic model" and expresses its logic through the rule: *Fictional particular P(f) represents actual particular P(a).* The second possibility, that we may call "the universalist model"—*fictional particular P(f) represents actual universal U (a)*—, would be a result of the limitations of the first one and, obviously, of those of the one-world frame. Defined by its own restrictions, the mimetic model resorts to an idea similar to that of Honoré Balzac's *types*: "Since no actual particulars can be discovered behind most fictional entities, mimetic criticism is forced into an interpretive detour: fictional particulars are taken as representations of actual universal psychological types, social groups, existential or historical conditions" (*Heterocosmica* 6-7). As Doležel indicates in a 1988 article, "a rich source of examples of the universalist interpretation of fictional particulars" is Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946). In this well-known essay, the German philologist recovers this interpretative mimetic function to apply it to different fictional particulars featuring in classics of the Western literary tradition. From this point of view, characters as Ulysses, Madame Bovary, or Don Quixote turn into representations "of an entire human existence" (Auerbach 488) in a way that, for instance, Gustave Flaubert's heroine becomes the paradigm of all bourgeois provincial wives disenchanted with their lives.

in its most basic tenet: its alignment with the one-world model, a measuring rod that cannot fully seize its object of study.

The second shortcoming of the mimetic model is, just as the first one, a consequence of the one-world frame and of ignoring yet another agent that, like fictional characters, plays a starring role in the literary process: the reader, who, as has been previously explained in relation to speech-act theory, was left unattended to by traditional literary studies. Whether in classical segregationism, in which the reader stands as the spectator of a representation of reality, or in speech-act theory, in which they are understood as the receiver of a message, mimetic theories have always relegated the reader to a passive role. Nonetheless, if we consider the literary text in Iser's terms, as transmitting "the *instructions* for the *production* of the signified" (65, my emphasis), it is necessary to give the reader a creative responsibility as the ultimate decipherer of these instructions. As we have glimpsed in our overview of Doležel's theory of literary communication, transduction, the theorists of possible-world semantics realized that the mimetic tradition had failed in analysing not only the content of fictional texts, but also their transmission. Perceiving that fiction was social and interactive at an internal level—to do with the importance of fictional characters—as well as at an external one—it relies on the readership's interpretation—, these scholars stressed the value of semantics and hermeneutics in their theory, as their goal was to interpret the fictional text as a self-referential system, opened to exegesis.

On the ground of all the difficulties mentioned so far, academics of the seventies realized that "fictionality cannot be understood as an individual feature" because "it encompasses entire realms of beings". Their resulting will for renewal found in Leibniz's legacy a possible solution to this state of crisis: the theory of fiction had to "turn to fictional worlds" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 42).

The Absence of Emotions in Traditional Mimesis

Before approaching possible-world semantics, however, I would like to contribute to the revision of traditional mimesis by bringing into focus a third critical aspect that has been missing from this approach to fiction, one that, in turn, affects equally the study of fictional particulars and the reader's exegesis of the fictional text: a literary theory of emotions. The beliefs that have historically relegated emotions to an anecdotic position within literary studies, which coincide with the general impediments for their formal consideration in most areas—the difficulty of describing in objective terms the "subjective experiential (phenomenological) nature of emotions" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 65) or the belief that "nothing about the emotions is really *well* understood" (de Sousa xix)—clearly have their starting point in the doctrine of mimesis. In the schema of thought of traditional mimesis, by which fiction is considered a representation of the actual world, both the emotions expressed in the novel and those aroused in the reader as a response will be regarded as "fictional" or even—if that is possible—more fictional than fiction itself. As such, they fall outside the category of what can be studied empirically and therefore, are of little significance *per se*. As we know, according to this logic, from Aristotle's catharsis to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, emotions in art have usually been considered exclusively for their repercussions in "reality": such as whether the fictional characters' feelings have a real moral value for the readership or whether the readers apply these teachings to their daily lives. Besides limiting emotions to a didactic role, segregationism also shared the Cartesian view that relegates emotions to the body and thus, it separated emotions induced by fiction from

"our actual mental lives" (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 254).[112] Consequently, and as Doležel synthetizes, emotions have mostly been "analyzed by being eliminated" (*Heterocosmica* 65). As reductionist as this binomial logic may sound, it has persisted in some contemporary segregationist viewpoints. For instance, Kendall Walton's "theory of make-believe" concludes, in relation to emotions, that: "we do not actually pity Willy Loman or grieve for Anna Karenina or admire Superman, I have suggested, nor do we feel contempt for Iago or worry about Tom Sawyer and Becky lost in the cave. But it is fictional that we do" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 249). Up until nowadays, a sector of the academic work done on emotions coincides then with the diagnosis of the mimetic school of literary interpretation: all the emotions present in the literary process are as fictional as literature is.

Iser's theory of aesthetic response, previously outlined, distanced itself from tradition and included affect amongst the factors that influence narrative response. Based on the idea that literary texts contain "intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production", Iser investigates the agents that cause the same textual instructions to lead to a "whole variety of different experiences and hence subjective judgments" (25). The explanation he offered considers that the literary text presents formal and thematic structures that mobilize its interaction with the reader, who assimilates them, among other filters (epistemological, moral, experiential, etc.), through an affective bias, as in any other intersubjective encounter (158). Thus, Iser resolved that "practically every discernible structure in fiction has this two-sidedness: it is verbal and affective. The verbal aspect guides the reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary; the affective aspect is the

[112] An important critical gesture for the reinforcing and updating of this segregationist viewpoint was that of T. S. Eliot's, who attempted to separate "personal emotion" from "art emotion," which, as Sianne Ngai quotes, he described as a mixture or cocktail producing "feelings which are not in actual emotions at all" (23).

fulfillment of that which has been prestructured by the language of the text" (21). In this way, the German theorist bestowed a decisive function on affect by concluding that the intersubjective structures in a literary text, dependent on the reader's interpretation, "do not fulfill their function until they have affected the reader" (21).

This promising change of paradigm in the study of emotions in literary analysis left, however, many questions unanswered: Which are these intersubjective structures and how do they incorporate affect? Are these literary emotions equivalent to the ones that emerge in "our actual mental lives" (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 254)? Although Iser does incorporate the emotions of the reader, how can we analyze the ones that appear within the novel? What relevance do they have at a plot level? How do they interact or influence the readership's affects? These and many other unsolved theoretical queries were inherited by the theorists of possible-world semantics. In this regard, their proposed literary method had to provide a space for the study of the affective dimension if they wanted to clarify an aspect of fictional worlds that had been neglected (just like the study of fictional entities or the creative role of reader) because of its independence from reality, its subjectivity and diversity and, all in all, because of the challenge it poses to empirical analysis.

Possible-World Semantics

In 1998, having worked in narrative semantics for more than twenty years, Lubomír Doležel published *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds*. His objective with this work was to summarize his life-long work applying possible-world semantics to the field of fictional narrative (xii). In the paratext, we find an introductory quote by Andrew Cecil

Bradley that, in fact, advances many of the theses that possible-world semantics will endorse:

> The nature of a work of art is to be not a part, nor yet a copy of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but *a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous*; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other worlds of reality. (qtd. in Doležel, my emphasis)

Although the Shakespearean critic was not pointing in the same direction as possible-world theorists, Bradley uses the term "world" with the same underlying motivation with which Doležel, among others, will employ it as a theoretical concept: to remark the independence of fictional literary creations. Conscious that the one-world frame was the root of every problem that restricted the study of literature, theorists of possible-world semantics realized that the only productive subversion of traditional mimesis had to imply a transformation of the cosmovision that framed it. This new view had to accommodate the ontological condition of literature: fictionality. For the first time, fictionality was not taken for granted, and became instead a key aspect that required, in order to be examined, an interdisciplinary dialogue (Ronen 2).[113]

Meanwhile, since the late sixties, Leibniz's concept of "possible worlds" had often become an analytical tool in natural, social, and human sciences (Allén 1989; Doležel 1998; Ronen 1994). In its more basic definition, the theory of possible worlds proposes a "multiple-worlds frame" in which infinite "sets of possible states of affairs" co-exist, but only one—the actual one—exists materially (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds"

[113] "Until the mid-seventies fictionality was an object of separate disciplinary pursuits: it was interpreted as a property of texts by literary theorists and either excluded as logical abnormality or entirely ignored by philosophers" (Ronen 1).

482).[114] We need to take into account, however, that this contemporary expansion in the use of the term was facilitated by two modifications of the original Leibnizian concept (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 14). First, whereas in its 18th century formulation, the origin of possible worlds was in the will of a divine consciousness, modern-day thinking refuses the metaphysical idea of a demiurge and postulates that possible worlds are "artifacts" produced by human mental activity. Secondly, possible worlds are now believed to be total states of affairs, infinite in "size, number and variety", which means that they can be managed by logic, but are "beyond the reach of empirical theories and research methods" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 14-15). To conceive possible worlds as human creations with countless possible variations deprived the concept from its metaphysical encumbrance and thus made it useful for hypothesis-making and critical thinking in areas like semantics, physics, historiography, or philosophy.[115]

The theory of possible worlds percolated through literary studies from the discipline of philosophical logic (Ronen 1) which, as has been explained, influenced the study of literature from the sixties onwards. Applied to fiction, this new perspective permitted critics to apprehend fictional works as "*artifacts* produced by activities […]

[114] As Lubomír Doležel acknowledges at the beginning of *Heterocosmica,* such a model "cannot preserve ontological innocence" and leave the ontology of the actual world intact but implies a "fundamental split in ontology" regarding the status granted to this actual world in relation to possible worlds. As Marie-Laure Ryan explains, two interpretations have prevailed among possible-world theorists: on the one hand, possibilism, elaborated by David Lewis, by which "from an absolute point of view, what we call the real world has no privileged status in the modal universe" (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 530) and, on the other hand, actualism, defended by Nicholas Rescher, which states that "the actual world differs in ontological status from merely possible ones in that this world alone presents an autonomous existence. All other worlds are the product of a mental activity: dreaming, imagining, foretelling, etc." (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 530). Faced with this dilemma, Doležel reads fictional existence from the point of view of actualism. Thus, his fictional semantics derives from the idea that "there exists an empirically observable world" (*Heterocosmica* 10). Nonetheless, the Czech scholar makes clear that actualism differs from more essentialist visions of this ontological question, such as Bertrand Russell's: "While agreeing with Russell that the problem of the existence of imaginary objects or states of affairs has to be formulated differently from the problem of existence in the actual world, we do not have to accept his radical conclusion: 'There is only one world, the 'real' world'" (*Heterocosmica* 2). For an introduction to the theory of possible worlds, you can refer to Allén 1989 and Bradley & Swartz 1979.

[115] For further information on the application of the concept of possible worlds in different scientific and humanist disciplines, you can refer to Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 15.

constructed by semiotic systems", and therefore, as semiotic objects that project a "non-actualized" but accessible world (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 14). In literature, these "integrated systems" (Ronen 101) are referred to as "fictional worlds of literature" or also "narrative or fictional worlds"—which are the terms I will be using for the sake of brevity.

Narrative worlds present distinct traits in comparison to other types of possible worlds. For instance, they are incomplete (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 486; Ronen 89) and are not "semantically homogeneous" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 486), in the sense that they might contain contradictory states of affairs (Linde 1989; Walton 1990). Among their singularities, two characteristics are especially relevant for their theoretical conceptualization. These particularities concern their *narrativity* and their *fictionality* (Ronen 13). In the first place, fictional worlds of literature, constructed by human art craft, have written language as their semiotic channel, which means that they are "aesthetic artifacts constructed, preserved, and circulating in the medium of fictional texts" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 16). That implies that the fictional worlds created in literature have a forced co-dependency on the text that transmits them. Even if they are "distinct […] from the complete list of sentences kept in the book about the world" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 50), their conditions and particularities are created through narrative structures. In Ronen words, "narrative worlds' intra-world organization is determined by *narrativity*" (12, my emphasis). As she continues, "each fictional domain hence functions both as an ontological domain and as a structural domain", and the access to the former is granted by the latter, meaning that it is through the information processing of narrative that readers gain access to the "state of affairs" of the fictional world. Reading a fictional narrative is, from this perspective, an "inter-world relation"—between the world of the book and the world of the reader (Ricoeur 1983)—that is

conditioned by the "conventions for fiction-reading" (Ronen 12). At this point, it becomes necessary to weave into the description the second differential characteristic of narrative worlds, the *fictionality* that characterizes their "ontological domain". In Ronen's opinion, the reading of literature implies that "the fictional world is grasped as logically autonomous relative to any notion of reality (although it might heavily rely on such reality notions)" (12). Narrative worlds differ from other possible worlds in that, whereas possible worlds are "based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs", fictional worlds "are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to the actual world" (Ronen 8). As a result, narrative worlds can be defined as "a small possible world shaped by specific global constraints" that do not have to "conform to the structures of the actual world" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 20). Their ontological independence, however, is not absolute, as Ronen last quote insinuates. As many theorists alert us of, narrative worlds maintain a sort of "parasitic relation" (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 255) with the actual world: during the process of transduction, the author "draws on the actual world in many ways" to create a fictional world (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 21).[116] In turn, the readership executes the same process in reverse, as they base their comprehension of the fictional world on their knowledge of the actual one.[117] As we will see, however, from an epistemological perspective, the relationship between the actual and narrative worlds can sometimes be seen as one of symbiosis more than a parasitic one: although they are "logically and

[116] For more on this, you can refer to Doležel 1998; Eco 1987; Tsatoulis 2012.

[117] This "parasitic relation" represents a controversial point in academia. While scholars such as Marie-Laure Ryan, with her "principle of minimal departure" (1980), posit the actual as the reference for the interpretation of every possible world, others reject this idea, arguing that it assumes that reality is stable (Eco 1979; Ronen 1994). Instead, Umberto Eco advocates for facing fictional worlds from the actual-world situation understood as a cultural construct, that is, as a reality that is "not stable but in fact defined by the 'ad hoc' situation of the reader and their beliefs" (*The Role of the Reader* 222). In this project, I opt for this last perspective.

ontologically *parallel*" (Ronen 1-2), literature needs reality to be shaped and perceived, and reality needs literature to shed light on some of its nooks.

Even though the process of creation and "transduction" (Doležel) of narrative worlds is partially related to actuality, the study of literature from a multiple-world model frame provided for the first time "a philosophical explanatory framework that pertains to the problem of fiction" (Ronen 6-7). This conceptual change alone fixed the great structural limitations of traditional mimesis concerning its dependence upon the values of "true" representation, and the range of literary works that it could encompass. In terms of the real/false dichotomy that had traditionally distorted the study of fiction and fictional entities, Doležel unfolds a classification that explains the idiosyncratic position of fiction in the matter. Drawing on the idea that "the actual world exists prior to, and independently of, textual activity", Doležel establishes a distinction between world-imaging texts (I-texts) and world-constructing texts (C-texts). I-texts are representations of the actual world, while C-texts, the typology to which fictional texts belong, "are prior to worlds; it is textual activity that calls worlds into existence and determines their structures". As a result, fictional texts, and the narrative worlds to which they give rise, "are outside truth-valuation; their sentences are neither true nor false" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 24).[118] This special status of their truth-conditions made fictional worlds accountable for their own structures and inhabitants and thus, it made the analysis of all of them possible regardless of their agreement with factual truth. For many scholars, this is the biggest advantage of the possible-worlds semantics over other methods: the fact that "it does not exclude fictional worlds analogous or similar to the actual world, but it also accounts for the most fantastic worlds, far removed from, or contradictory to, reality" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica*

[118] For an extensive explanation of the differences between I-texts and C-texts, you can refer to Espezúa 2006.

19). The new ontological perception of fiction also helped, at least theoretically, with those shortcomings of traditional mimesis that affected the role of the reader and the study of characters.[119] Readers were assigned the role of ultimate interpreters of the narrative world, whose *dramatis personae*, freed from the limitations of real reference, started to be examined more in depth, with attention to their unique subjectivity and actions, as we will see through Doležel's fictional semantics (Deciu Ritivoi 2016; Doležel 1980; Tsatoulis 2012).

As has already been mentioned, possible-world semantics did not reach mainstream literary studies until the nineties. Yet, from then onwards, it has re-oriented it towards questions of ontology and representation (Ronen 5) and has contributed enormously to sub-fields such as theory and semantics of fictionality, genre theory and typology, narrative semantics, theory of character, and poetics of postmodernism (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 529). Amongst the theoretical possibilities that this framework opens, two of them are of particular interest to my project: its attention to inner-world modes of organization and its understanding of characters—and the possibilities it brings to readers' response to them. To these two areas of interest, I must add a methodology of literary analysis whose implementation is not generalized in possible-world semantics, but is specific to Doležel's work, which combines the theoretical and its material realization. Given that the "narrative world is *fully determined* by the text in which it is described" (Doležel, "Extensional and Intensional Narrative Worlds" 196), possible-world semantics, as it is understood by the Czech scholar, must forge an intimate alliance between mimesis and narratology, which makes it possible to study both meaning and form from the textual resources that convey them. To understand

[119] For more details on the role of the reader in possible-world semantics, you can also refer to Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 202 or Eco 1979.

how possible-world semantics can favor the elaboration of a theory of textual emotions, we will now contemplate its approach to the inner structure of fictional worlds and to fictional entities as it is laid out in Lubomír Doležel's *Heterocosmica* (1998). Although a general explanation of possible-world semantics in literary theory has already been provided, I consider it useful to center my discourse momentarily on Doležel's vision of narrative worlds, as it will help in laying out how the aims of his study are suitable for the present investigation.

2.2 DOLEŽEL'S FICTIONAL SEMANTICS

Heterocosmica: Macrostructures and Fictional Particulars

As Doležel sketched in his article "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" (1988), he envisages fictional worlds as "unlimited and maximally varied" sets of possible states of affairs, which are constructed *ex nihilo* "in the activity of poiesis" (489). For the Czech author, every narrative act determines a possible world of fiction, which possesses its own internal logic and stands as a self-contained alternative reality (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 491). 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, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 482) but who are, as the rest of the fictional world, "accessible from the actual world" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485). In Doležel's opinion, this accessibility is viable because, even if the possible world that the narrative enacts is parallel to the actual state of affairs, it is also at the same ontological and epistemological level. Because 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". For the Czech theorist, the act of reading, through which the possible world of fiction materializes, allows 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, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485).

It can be inferred from the foci of his explanation that, while other contemporaries employing the same framework devoted their work to either the history of the study of fictional worlds (Pavel) or to their hermeneutics (Eco), Doležel is interested in pure fictional semantics. More particularly, he is invested in the "narrative macrostructures" that compose fictional worlds at an internal level and in their inherent *social* nature (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 33). Doležel's life-long project, culminated in *Heterocosmica*, was thus to elaborate a complete guide of fictional semantics using the theory of possible worlds. With this ambitious purpose in mind, he takes the "macrostructural conditions of story generation" as a starting point, because he assumes that, from the perspective of possible-world semantics, the basic concept of narratology is not "story", but "narrative world". By this logic, it becomes imperative to portray how "narrative worlds" are generated and organized at a macro-level to be able to approach its micro-elements (or *motifs*) (*Heterocosmica* 31). As my objective in this section is precisely to locate one narrative element, narrative emotions, within the structure of narrative worlds, Doležel description of the procedures and structures that determine their functioning may provide an appropriate frame of reference. There are two other reasons behind this choice. First that, as noted above, the theorist gives character study a preeminent position throughout his works, which shows that he shares—and I would say even accentuates—the general

concern in possible-world semantics with the analysis of fictional entities. Moreover, to elucidate the functioning of narrative macrostructures and fictional characters, Doležel uses in *Heterocosmica* the zigzag method, which, as indicated in the introduction, allows him to keep the abstraction of theory rooted in concrete narratological aspects (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* xi). The main benefit of this work method is that it allows Doležel to avoid one criticism commonly made against possible-world semantics, which concerns its practical applicability. Conscious of the Achilles heel of this model of mimesis, Marie-Laure Ryan closes her article on "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" (1992) by explaining how, from this point of view, possible-world semantics is "the exact opposite of deconstruction", in the sense that deconstruction functions with individual texts, but is difficult to define in theoretical terms, whereas possible-world semantics is difficult to apply to concrete cases. In Ryan's words, "PWT does not offer a critical ideology, but a collection of analytical tools applicable to many disciplines, in the service of many purposes" ("Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 550). Doležel's use of Barthes's zigzag method helps him to ground possible-world semantics specifically in the internal workings of fictional texts.

Extensional and Intensional Semantics

Doležel divides his monograph into extensional and intensional semantics of fictional works. For the needs of the present thesis, it will be enough to clarify that, in broad terms, extension and intension correspond, respectively, to Frege's constituents of verbal expressions: reference and sense (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 135). As Marie-Laure Ryan puts it, the "extensional narrative world" consists of a set of "compossible narrative agents" (i.e., agents created by the same text) together with the actions and properties

ascribed to these agents. Extensional semantics are studied through the analysis of the inner structures of the text. The intensional narrative world, on the other hand, is roughly the sum of the meanings expressed by the text, and can be approached through the intensional functions, to wit, the mechanisms that provide sense to the text. Extensional and intensional semantics are related because "the objects in the extensional narrative world function as the referents of the expressions whose senses are gathered in the intensional narrative world" (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 534). In the narrative process, then, authors conceive the extension of the fictional world first (they invent the characters, plan the plot, settle it in a specific time and space and so on) and, when these ideas have materialized in a specific text, the text provides the "intensional shape of the world" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 143). The readership, conversely, face the text and then reconstruct the extensional structure from it.

Extensional Semantics: Selection and Formation of Elementary Building Blocks

Doležel reenacts the pathway of the author and initiates his exploration of narrative worlds by the mapping of their extensional semantics. Extensional semantics concern the elements of a narrative world, which is an ordered macrostructure determined by "global restrictions". According to the theorist, there are two macro-operations that organize narrative worlds: "The first, *selection,* determines which constituent categories will be admitted into the world under construction […] the second, *formative operation*, shapes narrative worlds into orders that have the potential to produce (generate) stories" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 113). In other words, the first operation chooses the elements of the world, and the second one establishes a series of norms by which the world and its constituent categories will be regulated. With these "constituent categories" that are first

selected and then *formed* by rules, Doležel is in fact referring to what he has previously called the "elementary building blocks of narrative worlds", that is to say, "the categories of person, nature force, state, event, action, interaction, mental life, and so on" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 113).

Among them, according to the Czech scholar, the category of person-agent, or fictional character, is the minimum requirement for a narrative world to exist (*Heterocosmica* 37). The author can choose, through the operation of selection, if the fictional world will be a one-person or a multiperson world, but at least one individual is needed, as from it derives what is commonly known as "the story", a succession of actions and events.[120] Inspired by action theory, the critic understands characters as the performers of actions—including attempts of acting or voluntary omissions of actions—and the victims of nonintentional events, such as natural phenomena or accidents (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 55-62).[121] The inclusion of the theory of action in the analysis of the plot as an extensional structure allows Doležel to emphasize not only that characters are inseparable from the dynamics of narrative, but that these dynamics are linked to the intentions of characters, since actions are defined as "intentional changes of state" (57). With this gesture, Doležel identifies the intentions of fictional subjects with the fuel that drives the narrative forward. As a result, he moves on to scrutinize the factors in the mental life of characters that may affect intention and consequent action, which he designates as "motivations" (63). Nonetheless, when carrying out this exercise, it must be

[120] For more information on one-person fictional worlds, you can refer to Chapter I, "One-Person Worlds" in *Heterocosmica* 37-55. On multiperson worlds, you can refer to Chapter III, "Multiperson Worlds" in *Heterocosmica* 74-96.

[121] Founded by the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik Von Wright, "the modern logic of action" derives from analytic philosophy with the aim of, as its name indicates, study the effects of action as an event in a given state of affairs (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 55). Lubomír Doležel's interest in this theory stems from its intersection with the possible-world framework, by which "from any given initial state the agent can proceed toward two or more possible end states […] a person's life history is a vector in multidimensional space" (*Heterocosmica* 56). With this in mind, Doležel employs Von Wright's work to describe the circumstances that surround actions and accidents in a narrative plot (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 55-74).

considered that the will of the characters is not usually exercised in isolation, but rather, since novels are "social worlds" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 110), their mental lives are in constant interaction with each other. Because of that, I propose to divide the motivations exposed by Doležel into the categories of individual and social, depending on whether they imply interaction or not.[122]

Regarding individual motivational forces, Doležel identifies drives (such as hunger, thirst, or avoidance of pain), practical reasoning and cognitive factors (decision-making and "prescribed sequences" in compound activities), and finally, emotions (*Heterocosmica* 63-69). As he puts it, these three motivational systems "can be isolated in theory, but in the practice of living they operate jointly" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 70). So do they in narrative, where they generate entangled motivational clusters that create internal conflict in characters, leading to different action modes, classified depending on the forces that end up dominating the characters' will. Doležel mentions rational, impulsive, akratic, irrational, or insane acting (*Heterocosmica* 70-73) and relates each first to the main motivation that drives the character to them and then to the effect that they may have on the narrative. For instance, when there is a predominance of emotion—over drives and practical reasoning—the text is believed to "fluctuate between the rational and the impulsive modes" (*Heterocosmica* 72) and may generate constant shifts and dynamism in the narrative action (69). Of course, individual motivational forces do not only intermingle among them. Another layer of conflict arises when they cohabit with social motivations in multiperson worlds, that is, narrative worlds inhabited by more than

[122] In his explanation of the different motivational factors of fictional worlds, Doležel does not use this nomenclature. Indirectly, however, he distinguishes motivations that involve only one subject from those that arise collectively by explaining the former in Chapter II, right after speaking of one-person worlds, and the latter in Chapter IV, following the description of multiperson worlds. I have inferred this classification and made it explicit for the sake of clarity in my explanation, and also to highlight the consonance between Doležel's conception of motivational factors and my own taxonomy of narrative emotions, inspired by it and developed later in this chapter.

one character. Multiperson worlds entail "radically different" conditions of acting, as they involve "a network of interpersonal relationships" and thus *interaction* amongst fictional entities and their intentions (96). As Doležel puts it, in multiperson worlds "motivational systems are enhanced by two additional components, absent in the one-person world: interpersonal relations and social representations" (101). Simultaneously, these two components carry with them a range of social motivational factors influencing action, such as power (hierarchy, impositions of power as norm giving or influence, dispossession) and erotic, which powerfully combines power and emotions. According to this logic, for Doležel, multiperson worlds increase the complexity of motivational factors and, more specifically, amplify the role of emotions, as the more people, the greater the importance of "emotional relations [and] the diverse and changing reciprocal or nonreciprocal emotional links between persons" (*Heterocosmica* 101).

Although I have only sketched them in here, Doležel devotes several sections of *Heterocosmica* to define characters' actions and motivations, in an exercise that leaves behind "the split that traditional narratology created by separating story from character" (55). As hinted at above, the importance of characters as building blocks of the extensional semantics of narrative only deepens as the number of people who participate in the social world of the novel increases, given that, for the theorist, "the semantics of narrative is, at its core, the semantics of interaction" (97).

Up until now, we have briefly revised the inner workings of the "constituent categories" of persons, actions, motivations, and events that any given author selects to build the narrative world and configurate the story. However, as has been stated above, after the process of *selection*, narrative worlds are further shaped by a *formative operation*, which settles "rudimentary and unescapable constraints" that condition the existence of these elementary building blocks and thus "have a direct impact on acting"

(113). These constraints, unique for each narrative world, appear as different modal systems that are imposed on the macrostructure of the novel (114). These modal systems or modalities, previously studied only by von Georg H. Wright (1968) and "recognized implicitly by V. Propp and explicitly by A. J. Greimas" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 114), usually diverge from the ones of the actual world and structure the narrative world and its "building blocks" by defining what is possible-impossible (alethic modality), permitted-prohibited (deontic), known-unknown (epistemic) and good-bad (axiological) within it.

Nonetheless, even if the readership can partially infer information on the elementary building blocks (for instance, the motivations of a character or the morality that prevails in the narrative world), how is the internal truth of the world determined in the narrative? How can the readership make meaning of the extensional level of the fictional world?

Intensional Semantics: The Authentication Function

As has been mentioned before, to answer these queries, Doležel turns to the intensional functions that provide the elements listed above with sense. The intensional function to which the critic has devoted the most effort throughout his study—and the one which is of particular interest for the purposes of my investigation—is the function of authentication, which holds "the power to grant fictional existence" within the world of the text (*Heterocosmica* 145).

For Doležel, authentication is, together with saturation, the main intensional function of the literary fiction-making enterprise (*Heterocosmica* 143).[123] As the critic

[123] The other intensional function, that of saturation, regulates the density of information given by the fictional text about the fictional world. Depending on how the saturation is distributed, the text presents in

sees it, fictional discourse is "exempt from truth-valuation" because it functions like Austin's performative speech acts, in the sense that it creates its own truth, settles its own "reality" by means of its sheer utterance (146). Within this paradigm, the performative force of fiction is executed through the authentication function, which distributes the power to create fictional truth amongst the narrative voices. As an intentional function, authentication is universal, "it operates in all narrative texts as a basic world-forming procedure" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 204). Considering that, as has been repeatedly said, the novel is *social*—contains a "plurality of discourses" (*Heterocosmica* 147)—, each narrative world distributes authentication differently among its many *voices* (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 147; Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 533). Within the logics of narratology, the different capacity for authentication allotted to each fictional *voice* does not only determine the internal veracity of its discourse, but also the strength of its fictional existence. The more present the *voice* is, the more existence is given to its bearer. Doležel explains this intensional phenomenon in the following terms:

> Authentication function links the diversity of narrative discourses and the modes of fictional existence. The claim that fictional existence is an intensional phenomenon has radical consequences for fictional semantics. It means that fictional existence is not confined to the polarity of actual existence ("to be or not to be"). *To exist fictionally means to exist in different modes, ranks, and degrees.* This is one of the main principles of our semantics of fictionality and finalizes its divorce from the mimetic doctrine. (*Heterocosmica* 147)

different proportions gaps (zero texture), implicit, or explicit information. The variations in saturation force the readership to apply different interpretative methods and attitudes in order to reconstruct what the Czech scholar calls "the fictional encyclopedia", that is, the sum of "knowledge about a possible world constructed by a fictional text" (177) that is characterized, precisely, by being bounded to incompleteness (169). For more information on the saturation function, you can refer to Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 169-185.

Nonetheless, how does the readership discern the level of existence and authority of the different narrative *voices*? In other words, how is authentication transmitted? In his 1980 article on "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative", Doležel states that authentication is "established and maintained through speech-act conventions, rules of narrative modes and devices of texture" (20). In the case of fictional narrative, conventions tend to grant the narrator the performative force of fictional discourse. Consequently, as Martínez Bonati puts it, to believe in the authenticity of the narrator's *voice* is, in Kantian terms, a condition of possibility of the narrative experience that the readership unconsciously accepts (*La ficción narrativa* 37). However, as mentioned, authentication is not unipersonal (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 533), and characters dispute it with the narrator, dynamizing the construction of fictional existence. Doležel identifies different types of authentication, depending on how it circulates in the fictional world: dyadic authentication, which combines an impersonal 3rd person narrator with the direct speech of characters; or graded authentication, that presents different levels of subjectivity, as, for instance, the Subjectivized Er-form or the Personal *Ich*-form.[124]

To illustrate how this function works, we can turn to a famous example of dyadic authentication, mentioned by both Doležel ("Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 13) and Matínez Bonati ("Die logische Struktur der Dichtung" 186). In Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, during the famous passage in which Don Quixote mistakes the windmills for giants, the readership knows that what in fact exists in the narrative world are windmills, and thus the confusion of the main character becomes laughable. According to both Doležel and Martínez Bonati, if the readership understands that the windmills are present and the giants are a delusion, it is not because Sancho says so—his discernment is also dubious

[124] For more detail on the different types of authentication, you can refer to Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 147-159.

sometimes—or because it is the explanation that adjusts to the parameters of "the actual world"—it is the fictional world of *Don Quixote*—, but because the narrator says they are. Doležel and Martínez Bonati resort to the same example, but their approach to authentication diverges in a key theoretical aspect which brings us, once again, to the traditional debate about the truth-status of fiction. On the one hand, both Doležel and Martínez Bonati coincide in discerning the author from the narrator.[125] On the other hand, however, Martínez Bonati equates the narrator's affirmations with the "truth" by stating that: "Las afirmaciones del narrador acerca de las particularidades del representado mundo ficticio son irrestrictamente verdaderas. Las afirmaciones de los personajes, si tienen sentido, son verdaderas o falsas, como las de todos los seres humanos" (*La ficción narrativa* 39) [3]. Doležel's position, instead, is that "the narrator's statements cannot be assigned truth-values, since they do not refer to a world, but rather *construct* a world" ("Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 13). In fact, the Czech scholar adds that his interpretation, a consequence of perceiving fictional discourse as performative, represents another fundamental difference between a mimetic and a possible-world semantics approach to narrative fiction ("Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 13): a debate illustrated here by the different perspectives held by Doležel and Bonati.[126] Despite this divergence, the conclusion both critics reach on the connection between fictional truth

[125] Lubomír Doležel makes this distinction explicit while dealing with authentication, when he defends that "the actual producer of the entire text is its author; yet its texture, its formal, semantic, and illocutionary features, are determined by the opposition of the narrator's and the characters' discourse" (*Heterocosmica* 147). As for Félix Martínez Bonati, he devotes several pages of his essay *La ficción narrativa* to this conceptual difference (52-67). His position can be summarized with the following passage: "Las frases de una novela son actos plenos, completos y serios de lenguaje, efectivos y no fingidos, pero son meramente imaginarios y, en consecuencia, no son actos del autor de la novela. El autor de una novela, qua talis, ni habla ni finge hablar. Tampoco escribe, si entendemos por escribir, comunicar o efectuar sus actos de lenguaje por escrito […] La regla fundamental de la institución novelística consiste en aceptar un hablar ficticio […] Pero este hablar es de un 'otro', que no es propiamente el autor" (*La ficción narrativa* 66) [2].

[126] As a consequence of this comparison, it can be assumed that Lubomír Doležel coincides with Marie-Laure Ryan when she evaluates that Félix Martínez Bonati's work is "related in the spirit (if not in the letter) to PWLT" ("Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 539) in the sense that the Chilean theorist shares many of the principles of possible-world semantics, but he neither subscribes to all of them nor does he include himself in this current of thought.

and authentication is the same: the truth of the narrative is the truth *in* the narrative, and it is subordinated to authentication (Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 15). In the case of the example above, authentication functions straightforwardly: the main characters, Don Quixote and Sancho, possess a questionable veracity, and the omniscient narrator holds the performative power to produce "authenticated narrative facts" (Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 15), in a way that the truthfulness of the assertions of the two main characters will be judged in accordance with their agreement with those of the omniscient narrator. The authority is well established, and the readership has no trouble in discerning the truth of the narrative world.

However, it is well known that literature turns the boycott to its conventions into an achievement (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 493), and authentication is no exception. As many of the theorists who have studied this function warn (Doležel 1988; Martínez Bonati 1992), the boycotting of authentication has been a widespread aesthetic strategy during the last century.[127] The narrative game of metalepsis is already a threat to the stability of authentication, but probably the most direct attack on it is the so-called "unreliable narrator", present in works such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2003), Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), or the second case study of this dissertation, *Les Bienveillantes* (Jonathan Littell, 2006). This typology of narrative *voice* could be

[127] Instead of commenting on the well-known phenomenon of the "unreliable narrator", Lubomír Doležel presents two other cases in which "the authenticating act is abused by not being performed 'seriously'" (*Heterocosmica* 161): "skaz narrative" and "self-disclosing narrative". In the case of *skaz* narrative, native of Russian literature, authentication is abused by moving constantly the same narrative *voice* "from the 'omniscient' to the 'limited knowledge' posture" (*Heterocosmica* 161), in such a way that the narrator's authority is constantly called into question. The examples given by Doležel of this "ironic voiding of the conventional procedures of authentication" (*Heterocosmica* 162) are Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol's stories "The Overcoat" and "The Nose". The case of "self-disclosing narrative", as its name indicates, concerns postmodern narratives in which, through a metafictional game, the authenticated narrator overcomes the natural limitations of the narrating act by reporting their own death. Therefore, "the authenticating act is voided by being 'laid bare'" and "fiction making procedures are overtly exposed" (*Heterocosmica* 162). Both groundbreaking literary practices demonstrate how, as Ruth Ronen comments with respect to Doležel's examples above, "literature […] turns this destructive process into a new achievement. Fiction-making becomes overtly what it has been covertly: a game of possible existence" (493).

explained as an extreme manifestation of graded authentication, in which the subjectivity of the intradiegetic narrator is so present that it—willingly or unwillingly, explicitly or implicitly—manipulates narrative events.[128] In many cases, as in the two first examples provided above, this "abuse" of the authentication function responds to the narrator's intention of hiding or altering the events that generate emotions of guilt or shame in them. For this reason, to understand the postmodern manipulation of authentication may require an intertwining of the analysis of this intensional function with the study of character's motivations, discussed in the previous section. This suggests that the mental and emotional world of the characters may play a key role also in the comprehension of the truth of the narrative world, which turns them and their selfhood into an elementary building block of the narrative that is truly central for most steps of the literary enterprise (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 113).

Indeed, Doležel largely fulfills what, as has been said, was his main determination: to develop a semantics of fictional worlds capable of grasping "fictional particulars"

[128] Wayne C. Booth, the American critic specialized in rhetoric who coined the term "unreliable narrator" in 1961 (Zerweck 151), characterized this figure as "one that does not speak or act in accordance with the norms of the literary work" (Booth 158). Beyond this general definition, many narratologists agree that, just as with real people, "narrators exist along a wide spectrum from reliability to unreliability" (Phelan & Martin 96). Within the side of this spectrum more inclined to unreliability, we can distinguish several categories of untrustworthy narrators. For instance, Monika Fludernik (1999) has proposed a tripartite model of unreliability, which Greta Olson explains as follows: "According to her analysis, narrators can be unreliable because of their 'factual inaccuracy,' their 'lack of objectivity' as first-person narrators, or their 'ideological unreliability'" (76-77). In the first case, the narrator may lie consciously or may not have access to accurate information; in the second case, the narrator is subject to the "epistemological restrictions" (76) typical of homodiegetic narration or may be morally unreliable (for instance, racist). In the third case the narrator's actions and evaluations may be consistent to herself but discordant with the "world view" of the reading audience" (Olson 100). For instance, in the two first examples provided in the text, extracted from 21st century British narrative, we find two narrators that are unreliable due to their "lack of objectivity" as participants in the action: one is an explicitly unreliable narrator, that is, one who overtly recognizes her manipulation of the story—*Atonement*—and the other is an implicit one—*The Sense of an Ending*. In addition, contemporary literature in English offers many examples of unreliability caused by a neurological condition suffered by the narrator, a case that would fit within Fludernik's category of "ideological unreliability"—there's a split between the narrator's perception of the events and the "word view of the reading audience"—, but which, nonetheless, is a non-ideological, unwilling, and implicit form of unreliability. One contemporary example of this literary exercise, also British, would be *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), whose 1st person narrator, Christopher, has Asperger syndrome. A canonical antecedent of Christopher's *voice* would be Benjamin "Benjy" Compson, one of the narrators of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), who has autism, a condition that is transmitted to the readership through a non-chronological and sometimes disorienting narrative discourse.

("Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 480; *Heterocosmica* 10). From the critic's point of view, "it is worlds with persons or, better, persons within worlds that generate stories" (*Heterocosmica* 33).[129] This maxim seems to be at the core of his theory, as a concise summary of what I have explained so far can confirm: to recapitulate, drawing on the assumption that one "person-agent" is the minimum requisite of a narrative (37), Doležel structures *Heterocosmica* through a first partition of fictional worlds into the categories of one-person and multiperson worlds. In order to determine the nature of these two types of macrostructures, he makes use of action theory to leave behind "the split that traditional narratology created by separating story from character" (55): a key change that bears at least two consequences in Doležel's semantics, it "radically psychologizes the story and, at the same time, features fictional characters as persons for and in acting" (*Heterocosmica* 55). The result of these two factors is that, as we have observed, fictional persons occupy the epicenter of both Doležel's extensional *and* intensional semantics. As a result, the evaluation of fictional particulars and their personal circumstances becomes indispensable to comprehend individual narrative actions and the plot, the power dynamics of the fictional world, its constraints, and modal systems, and even its particular truth, granted to characters—and manipulated by them—through the authentication function.

With all, Doležel's work contributes greatly to his generation's initial will to resolve the limitations of traditional mimesis. First, his development of the possible world's framework enables the analysis of narrative as a self-referential system and

[129] According to Ercolino & Fusillo, the re-valorization of characters as determining elements for literary analysis, which started in the last decades of the 20th century and has Doležel as one of its main exponents, resonated in the academia and altered the praxis of literary interpretation. In their words: "Caduto l'interdito teorico e ideologico di matrice formalista (in senso lato) contro la diffusa pratica academica di considerare i personaggi letterari come delle mere entità fittize, in anni ricenti si sta riscoprendo la loro importanza sia per quanto riguarda l'analisi di determinati aspetti formali dei testi, sia per ciò che concerne la compresione del quadro assiologico delle opere e i problemi del coinvolgimento del lettore e della sua *agency*" (41) [4].

allows the study of all its possible manifestations. Secondly, he bestows a vital theoretical function upon characters, which construct fictional worlds by inhabiting them. Nevertheless, the primary subject of *Heterocosmica*—mainly concerned, as we know, with "fictional worlds/narrative macrostructures" (33)—leaves little space left to elucidate the role of the reader in the narrative process, a role identified by the critics as the third aspect of traditional literary theory in need of academic revision (Eco 1979; Iser 1978). The Czech scholar does not neglect the relevance of response: in his scheme of "transduction", he includes the readership as reconstructor of the narrative world (*Heterocosmica* 202) and describes how said world is accessible to them via "semiotic mediation". The factors that determine this encounter and how it may alter the perception of intensional and extensional structures (and vice versa) are, however, topics that fall outside the focus of his study. Despite that, when he affirms, as a result of the idea that "the Self exists only in dynamic relation with the Other" (MacMurray 17), that "the semantics of narrative is, at its core, the semantics of interaction" (97), I interpret that he is not only referring to the interaction among fictional characters, but also to the one occurring between characters and readers. The analysis of these two types of literary interactions—which could be named, respectively, *intra-world* and *inter-world* interactions—requires, in my opinion, the scrutiny of another neglected subject, already announced in the interlude: narrative emotions.

Emotions in Doležel's Fictional Semantics

Provided that it is "persons within worlds that generate stories" (*Heterocosmica* 33) and, consequently, that narrative semantics are essentially a semantics of interaction (*Heterocosmica* 97), if we adhere carefully to Doležel guidelines, emotions must occupy

a central position in narrative semantics. As I have stated in Interlude I, fictional or not, the presence of subjectivity or intersubjectivity entails affects and emotions. Though more implicitly than explicitly, *Heterocosmica* seems to be imbued with this conjecture. Just as his comments on Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*—which serve him to illustrate the dynamics of multiperson worlds—emphasize how the characters' "intense emotionality" dominates the plot (77), Doležel also notes how the presence of emotions inevitably comes to the fore even in worlds inhabited by a single individual. When examining Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River", the critic notices how, faced with solitude, nature becomes the main source of the protagonist's emotions (47) and, in the case of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, he comments on how the "emotional impact" that art has on Des Esseintes ends up being the main subject of this one-person fictional world. Emotions are a manifestation of the mental life of every character, and these examples show how they make their way as an unappealable force. The universality of emotion as a narrative topic is such that, in the absence of other fictional people to engage with, characters respond to objects, accidents, or even nature. If the presence of a character is the precondition for the creation of a fictional world, then emotional life also is. In the same vein, the importance of character in Doležel's fictional semantics goes necessarily hand in hand with the subjacent presence of emotions: intertwined with erotics and power, as mobilizers of the plot, or perverting the authentication function. Yet, this omnipresence is only readable between the lines in Doležel's text. The fact is that emotions occupy a very concrete and limited position within Doležel's fictional semantics: as has been previously mentioned, they are counted, together with drives and cognitive factors, as motivational factors for action (*Heterocosmica* 65).[130] When dealing with emotions,

[130] In this sense, it is worth noting that, just like the whole of his fictional semantics, Lubomír Doležel's comments on emotions are highly influenced by Arthur Danto's theory of action. Danto's association between emotionality and motivation, which lays the foundation for Doležel's interpretation of emotions within literary semantics, is in fact part of a long tradition. As Sianne Ngai notices, thinkers from Aristotle

however, Doležel does not simply indicate they can be a motivational factor—as he does with drives and cognitive factors—; he also points out their implication in the narrative, going into detail and devoting a few pages to the narrative representation of emotions, or rather, to the difficulty of their study (*Heterocosmica* 65-70).

Through the work of several contemporary psychologists and philosophers, Doležel reviews the problematics that have historically hindered the analysis of narrative emotions, namely: the influence of Descartes's rationalism, their "subjectivity" (65) and ambivalence, their (un)intentionality (66) or the "qualitative variety" that complicates their classification (67). Quoting Roland de Sousa, Doležel agrees then that the paradox of emotions lays in that they fluctuate between "the rational and the irrational, the objective and the subjective, the active and the passive, the real self and the persona, and even determinism and indeterminism" (qtd. Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 67).[131]

Overall, other than subscribing to Arthur Danto's division between concrete and abstract emotions,[132] and highlighting the importance of emotions in fictional semantics (67), Doležel simply sums up the reasons that had led to the academic commonplace of stating that emotions "elude theoretical grasp" (65). Unfortunately, in doing so, he

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to Audre Lorde have highlighted the centrality of emotions in action, and more specifically, for the pursuit of political action (35). This linkage emotion-action was equally central to Spinoza's viewpoint, who described emotions as "waverings of the mind" that could either increase or diminish one's power to act (Ngai 2), and has been carried forward to this day not only by the philosophy of action (Dalton) or feminist critique (Lorde), but also through the constructivist theory of emotions, whose basic tenet, among others, is that "emotions are strategic" because "they play roles in the form of actions" (Harré "An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint" 12).

[131] Roland de Sousa is a contemporary Canadian philosopher whose essay *The Rationality of Emotion* (1987) constitutes one of Lubomír Doležel's main references on the matter. Other than Ronald de Sousa's and other philosophically-oriented approaches like Arthur Danto's, Herman Parret's, or Paul Ricœur's, in his review of the theoretical attention given to emotions, Lubomír Doležel intertwines contemporary psychological studies by authors such as William Lyons, Joseph de Rivera, and Seymour Epstein with commentaries on the philosophical tradition on the topic, including René Descartes and John Locke.

[132] Echoing the distinction established by the analytical philosopher of action Arthur C. Danto, Lubomír Doležel reproduces here the division of emotion into the categories of concrete, that is, caused by a particular circumstance; and abstract, such as spleen or melancholy, which alter the vision of reality as they "tinge the whole world for the sufferer". According to Danto, abstract emotions can easily translate into "philosophical postures in which depression or anxiety have as objects the whole of reality, taken as absurd or empty or fearful" (160).

partially perpetuates this stigma. He reproduces this well-known pessimistic discourse on emotions, and, in addition, when he ponders the ways in which emotions manifest in fictional texts, he simply turns back to the "physical expressions" (68) that accompany them, thus falling into the Cartesian view that, as he himself had noted a few pages before, "reduces emotions to (bodily) sensations" (65).[133]

However, the fact that Doležel does not try to fill this critical gap—an inaction that is evident, given that the main concern of his study are narrative macro-structures—does not mean that his theory does not contribute to the semantics of narrative emotions. On the contrary, I consider that his fictional semantics, deployed in its entirety in *Heterocosmica*, could lay the foundations for a possible analysis of emotions in the novel. In fact, possible-world semantics, and particularly Doležel's approach to it, allows us to overcome some of the barriers on the study of narrative emotions listed above. Contemplating everything that has already been developed in this chapter, several points lead me to this reevaluation of Doležel's work on emotions:

- First, possible-world semantics considers narrative worlds to be at the same ontological level as the actual world (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485); that allows for the analysis of all their facets according to logics similar to those of the "real" world. From this premise, if affect theorists consider affect and emotion to be omnipresent forces that permeate existence (Ahmed 2004; Deleuze 1992; Stewart 2007), we can consider that a similar phenomenon occurs in fictional worlds, albeit in different conditions. The additional advantage provided

[133] Faced with the question of how emotions can be inferred from the fictional text, Lubomír Doležel provides the following answer: "Emotions are often accompanied by spontaneous physiological events, such as increased pulse rate, palpitations, twitches, and so on. When the events are observable (blushing, sparkling eyes, gestures) or audible (laughing, crying, exclamation of pain, tone of voice), they become signs (indices) of emotions (crying=grief, laughter=joy) […] the symptoms are a powerful device for constructing fictional emotions: inner, inaccessible subjective emotional states are posited indirectly by their observable or audible 'objective correlatives'" (*Heterocosmica* 68-69).

by Doležel's theory is that it focuses on the internal structure of fictional worlds, the functions that regulate it and the limitations that circumscribe it. In so doing, the critic provides tools for the analysis of every aspect comprised in narrative worlds, including, potentially, narrative emotions.

- Secondly, in a framework in which fictional worlds are "logically and ontologically *parallel*" (Ronen 1-2) to the actual world, fictional characters "are regarded as life-like persons" (Ronen 546). Therefore, they are "endowed with inner states, knowledge and belief sets, memories, attitudes and intentions—that is, a consciousness, interiority and personhood" (Margolin, "Character" 455). The semantic relevance bestowed on characters and their mental lives—which, as we have seen, is even more accentuated in Doležel's fictional semantics—, invites us to delve into their emotions—that I shall call *intra-world* emotions—and into the effect these may have on the totality of the created world.
- Thirdly, possible-world semantics also legitimizes the examination of the readership's emotions vis-à-vis the characters and the narrative world as a totality. On the one hand, Doležel believes narrative worlds, as well as their inhabitants, to be accessible through a "semiotic encounter" that the readership experiments in epistemological conditions equal to those of "reality" ("Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485). This principle implies that readers interact with characters that "exist objectively" in that world, and "can gain access to them, fear or feel pity for them, talk and argue about them at any time" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 23-24). As we will see in more detail, in their semiotic encounter with fictional persons, what I shall call *inter-world emotions* are mobilized in the readership. On the other hand, and although, as already noted, the role of the reader in the literary process is not treated in depth in *Heterocosmica*, Doležel's "transduction" situates the

narratee as the reconstructor of the fictional world. This scheme suggests that the theorist, as Iser and many of their contemporaries, shared the idea that "a fictional world contains both what is explicitly claimed by the author […] and what is imposed on the text by readers' beliefs and thereby reflected in their understanding of that world" (Ronen 95). In this line, the emotional reception of the narrative world by the readership would influence its final signification, becoming then a relevant factor in the literary process.

- Moreover, the modern reformulation of Leibniz's concept of "possible worlds", to which both Doležel and his contemporaries subscribe, assumes that fictional worlds and what relates to them are "beyond the reach of empirical theories and research methods" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 15) and, so, analyzable mainly through semantics. The rejection of empirical and measurable methodologies creates an optimal framework for the study of emotions since it minimizes the "negative" impact of their subjectivity and variability.
- Finally, as has been pointed out, Doležel also advocates for a constant theoretical dialogue between the construction of the fictional world (mimesis I) and the formal aspects of its corresponding text (mimesis II). This method creates a frame of reference that enables the analysis of both the functioning of emotions in the novel and their narratological expression.

Grounding my research on this theoretical basis and presenting it as both a reformulation and a continuation of Doležel's fictional semantics—to which my work is indebted—, my purpose in the upcoming pages is to delve into the position of narrative emotions within fictional worlds. My study defends that narrative emotions constitute elementary building blocks of narrative worlds that participate in their shaping and

signification (*Heterocosmica* 113).[134] As such, I assume emotions to be on equal terms with other formative elements of narrative worlds, meaning that they are 1) principles settled down by the creator of the fictional world 2) regulated by the intensional functions of authentication and saturation 3) formally expressed in the fictional text and 4) susceptible to the readers' interpretation.

Besides the intrinsic interest of trying to clarify the role of emotions within fictional worlds and their interaction with the reader, my ultimate goal is to develop a methodology that enables the narratological analysis of the formal aspects that convey emotions in the text. To do so, I will focus my research on one specific emotional experience, extreme empathy, selected, as has been explained in the first chapter, for its exceptional literary nature. To undertake the formal analysis of extreme empathy as an instance of the representation of literary emotions in mimesis II, however, it is necessary to investigate first, in my opinion, the creation, function, and transmission of emotions in mimesis I, that is, at the level of fictional semantics.

2.3 TOWARDS A FICTIONAL SEMANTICS OF EMOTIONS

Narrative Emotions as Elementary Building Blocks: Semantics and Taxonomy

[134] In fact, Doležel does include the "mental life" of characters, in general, among these elementary building blocks (*Heterocosmica* 113). In addition, he also considers "nature force" as one of them, even when he had already listed it as one of the main motivations in non-intentional and non-actional events (59). This could indicate that one narrative element can be at once a motivational factor and an elementary builidng block, making these categories non-exclusive. Considering all of this, it would be possible to imagine Doležel including emotions, another motivator, as building blocks included under the broader term "mental life". However, he does not make this inclusion explicit anywhere in his writing.

To argue that narrative emotions are elementary building blocks of fiction *and* "motivational factors" for acting does not have to be inconsistent. Doležel's fictional "building blocks" (*Heterocosmica* 113) are the fictional elements that most frequently appear in narrative, and that construct it; whereas "motivational factors" are one of the functions that these "building blocks" may have within the structure of the fictional world. Emotions seem to perform this double role. On the one hand, they apparently conform to the implicit condition of elementary building blocks: if there is—even only—one entity inhabiting the narrative, affects and emotions are mobilized, so they can be regarded as inherent to the existence of the possible world, however minimal its extension. On the other hand, their role as motivational factors is evident, as their major function is to dynamize both the characters' mental lives and their (inter)actions. It could be argued, per the last two assertions, that emotions do not have to be elementary building blocks *per se*, but that they are just inherent to and indivisible from the characters' subjectivity. Nonetheless, the different emotions that saturate the novel usually transcend the frontiers of the individual to influence the plot, the perception of time and space or even the general interpretation of the fictional world. Borrowing Doležel's words, the characters' emotions "participate in the shaping of the fictional world by creating the domains of opinions, beliefs, social representations, and so on" (*Heterocosmica* 26). Everything seems to indicate that emotions and affects are indeed elementary building blocks of fiction *per se*.

At a procedural level, to understand narrative emotions as elementary building blocks means to assume, on the one hand, that they are already determined in the composition of the fictional world and, on the other hand, that literary operations regulate them within this macrostructure. In what their pre-established presence is concerned, I consider that, just as each possible world formulates its laws and regulations, it equally deploys a unique emotional system that is contained and expressed in the fictional text.

As will be exposed below, the emotional system of fictional worlds is composed of different typologies of emotions that are open to the reader's interpretation, always in relation to their degree of saturation in the narrative.[135] In terms of the control that extensional and intensional functions exercise over emotions, these, as all building blocks, are regulated by the selection and formation procedure, as well as by the authentication and saturation functions explained above. Nevertheless, as several typologies of emotions participate in the literary process, to comment on these procedures without differentiating them would be falling into a misleading generalization. To develop a functional semantics of narrative emotions, I propose a taxonomy that considers their origin, purpose, and other structural features.[136] Apart from allowing me to theorize a possible semantics of narrative emotions, this classification will be very convenient for a precise narratological analysis and identification of said emotions.

As any constructing element of fictional worlds, narrative emotions are not a part of a completed message, but instructions to produce one (Iser 65), whose realization takes place in the *inter-world* "semiotic encounter" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485) between the "world of the reader" and "the world of the text" (Ricoeur 1983). Bearing in mind that emotionality runs through the entire literary process, maybe the first

[135] Considering that all the elements of the narrative structure are, to a lesser o greater extent, open to interpretation (Barthes 1966), my opinion is that the exegetic openness of narrative emotions constitutes a trait shared with all other building blocks, only perhaps magnified by the inherent subjectivity of emotions. Nonetheless, other elementary elements of the narrative, which tend to be more rigid and absolute in their expression, such as the spatial and temporal context of the plot, are sometimes left for the reader to imagine, whereas emotions, more subtle, can be explicitly expressed and constantly demonstrated throughout the course of the action, becoming, somehow, one of its more stable components. If this were true, the texture and saturation devoted to each element would vary as part of the literary game, regardless of the nature of the element itself. To give an example that I have already referred to in relation to its textual use of authentication, in one of the most well-known narrative worlds, *Don Quixote*, neither the spatial coordinates — "in a certain village of la Mancha, whose name I will not recall" (Cervantes 1)—nor the diegetic time of the action —when Chivalric romance was still in vogue—are clearly defined. At the level of emotions, maybe the percentage of cheerfulness or compassion that *Don Quixote* as a novel may inspire depends on the reader's interpretation of the parody at work in the text; but the loyalty that Sancho feels towards his master, for instance, is reiterated throughout the pages, and thus out of discussion.

[136] For a schema of my taxonomy of narrative emotions, you can refer to Figure 5 in Appendix II.

criterion to classify narrative emotions should be whether they are included in these primary instructions or are, instead, part of the process of production of the final message. Or what is the same, whether they stem from the fictional world or from the "world of the reader". As advanced some pages ago, I suggest the terms *intra-world* and *inter-world* emotions, respectively, to stress the difference between those emotions that appear *inside* the narrative world and those that arouse in the encounter *between* the latter and the reader.

Intra-world emotions. *Intra-world* emotions refer to the narrative emotions conceived by the author of the text to have an impact on the fictional world dynamics. They constitute elementary building blocks and, as a result, are organized by the extensional macro-operations of selection—which determines their inclusion in the fictional world—and of formation—which delimits them within it.[137] Their signification and openness to interpretation, on the other hand, will depend on the authentication and the saturation function, which, as has been explained, make their meaning dependent on the form in which they are expressed in the fictional text. As they are subjugated to authentication, the credibility given to a certain narrative emotion will depend on the authority granted to the one manifesting it. As any other fictional element, then, *intra-world* emotions depend on the text's performative capacity to grant them fictional existence and thus they can "exist in different modes, ranks and degrees" (Doležel,

[137] The operation of selection can establish which *intra-world* emotions will appear in the fictional world. Nonetheless, the way in which selection usually affects narrative emotions—characters' or readers'—is not direct, but indirect. That is to say, the selection of the other elements that are to exist in that world reverberates on its emotions. For instance, the *exclusion* of a maternal figure may cause sadness in a fictional character and in the reader, while the *inclusion* of a rabid dog in the garden may cause them fear. In what the macro-operation of formation is concerned, it is true that, normally, the whole range of emotions is available for characters to experiment with. However, on some occasions, modal operators prevailing in the fictional world delimit one emotion for a certain character, which generates tensions in interaction and animates the plot. For instance, a character's emotionality can be restricted by deontic operators (Juliet's love for Romeo is *prohibited*) or axiological operators (it is *immoral* for Humbert Humbert to desire Lolita) and, in some extreme cases, even by epistemic operators (the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz* do not *know*, respectively, courage and love) or alethic ones (it is impossible for *Star Trek*'s Spock to feel any emotion at all).

Heterocosmica 147). Therefore, through the non-authenticated discourse of some characters, *intra-world* emotions can be false or misleading in relation to the truth as established by the fictional world.[138] In a similar fashion, they are also structured by the intensional function of saturation. As an element of an incomplete human construct (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 169), not all the *intra-world* emotions mobilized in the novel are explicitly registered in the fictional text. In fact, according to Doležel, emotionality, as well as everything related to the subjectivity of the characters, is a main source of inference, that is, it is more often implicitly than explicitly revealed (*Heterocosmica* 176). As the Czech theorist continues, the main mechanisms to express emotions in a text are often the description of the physical signs that tend to accompany them, and certain actions that can be interpreted as indices of the emotion motivating them. In both cases, to decode these "spontaneous physiological events" and actions and translate them into emotions is to grasp them by inference (*Heterocosmica* 68), which forces the reader to recover their meaning and interpret it and to be cautious about that interpretation, as, given that emotions are subordinated to authentication, "corrections might be necessary, especially if it is discovered that the acts that served as the source of the inference were pretended, insincere, or deceiving" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 176). In addition, in order to challenge the narratee and kindle their interest, a portion of the emotional life of fictional persons is usually omitted, forming "emotional gaps" that the readers have to fill (*Heterocosmica* 169-70). Both inference and "emotional gaps" are exegetical demands of

[138] An example might be useful here to understand how emotions are subjugated to authentication. Once again, in *Don Quixote*, the mockery of secondary characters towards the protagonist pair implies, on many occasions, applying dramatic irony to the emotions at play, so that Don Quixote and Sancho believe some emotional inputs to be true that the reader, well informed by the narrator, knows to be false. Thus, for example, in the second part of the novel (chapters 30 to 57) a couple of aristocrats express their admiration and devotion to Sancho Panza and offer him to be governor of the Isle of Barataria. Sancho, shocked by the dukes' praise, accepts, while the reader knows that behind these false sentiments, there is only mockery, cruelty, and contempt. Because of dynamics such as this, among many others, the reader learns not to trust the emotions of third parties if they are reported by Don Quixote or Sancho and instead wait for the narrator's comments.

the fictional text that highlight the playful role of *intra-world* emotions in the dynamics of the fictional world as well as in its semiotic interaction with the reader.

Having described these traits and operations, common to all *intra-world* emotions, I consider that they can be sub-classified into two broad categories, depending on their target: *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions. *Individual intra-world* emotions are those felt by one fictional person. To use the distinction suggested by Doležel (*Heterocosmica* 66), *individual intra-world* emotions can be particular—a response to a specific object or event—or abstract—which "tinge the whole world of the sufferer" (Danto 160). What singles them out, however, is that they do not involve more than one subjectivity, even if, of course, in a multiperson world, many individual emotions are considered at the same time. On the contrary, *social intra-world* emotions are those that imply some form of intersubjectivity, that is, emotional responses from one (or multiple) fictional person towards other (or multiple others). This category, then, encompasses all the emotional connections that relate characters among themselves, from the "interpersonal passions such as love, hatred, and envy" that for Doležel, "dominate interaction in many fictional worlds" (101), to non-mutual emotions, as the compassion of one character for another. To sum up, both *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions are triggered by an element external to the subject: the difference lays in the fact that the second are transitive, while former are reflexive and individually felt, which does not imply that they cannot be perceived by other fictional particulars, nor that they cannot mobilize and transform the emotional dynamics of the fictional world.

Finally, in addition to *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions, I would like to contemplate the existence of a third category of emotions within fictional worlds, pre-given by them, but more imprecise and difficult to theorize: what Theodor W. Adorno calls the affective *tone* of the artwork. First theorized in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1958)

and further developed by Ngai in *Ugly Feelings* (2005), the "affective-aesthetic idea of tone" (Ngai 41) seeks to resolve the "long-standing problem in philosophical aesthetics" (Ngai 29) with the general emotionality of literary texts.[139] The concept of "tone" separates the emotional content of the work 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 43). Adorno and Ngai are not referring to the ensemble of emotions that appear in the plot, but rather to an overall emotion that covers the texture of the fictional world,[140] which may coincide with *intra-world* emotions or not, but that certainly influences the reader's response to the text. The challenge of defining *tone* lays mostly in the indeterminacy of its source, as it is "reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to

[139] It is important to point out that, before the idea of "tone", there had been previous efforts in aesthetic theory to elucidate the affective quality of artworks, especially in the field of visual arts. Ercolino & Fusillo mention the work of the German philosopher Moritz Geiger, member of the Munich phenomenological school (circa 1900). Dwelling on the origin of aesthetic affects, Geiger attributed the emotional texture of the artwork to its essence, to a "sentimental tone" [*Gefühlson*], an atmosphere unique to each piece or, as Ercolino & Fusillo put it "un certo tono emotive, una *Stimmung* caratteristica dell'opera" (68) [5]. Later, when visual artists such as Wassily Kandinskij and Georg Simmel applied Geiger's ideas to their creations, this theory evolved and went so far as to assert that each color possessed "un suo 'carattere [*Charakter*]' peculiar, una sua *Stimmung*, non determinate da una proiezione psichica dell'osservatore" (qtd. Ercolino & Fusillo 204) [6]. Following this logic, the global *Stimmung* of the artwork would be the result of combining these different *Charakters*. With this thesis, Geiger contradicted Lipps, who located the emotional response to art exclusively on the spectator's subjectivity. Within the specific domain of literary criticism, there had also been several antecedents to Theodor W. Adorno's attempt in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) to theorize the general affect of literary works. According to Sianne Ngai, T. S. Eliot's concept of "stance" pointed towards a similar idea, while the New Critics—specifically Ivor Armstrong Richards (1929)—referred to the text's affective disposition as the "attitude of the speaker" or just the "attitude" which, however, they divorced from emotionality. Afterwards, in his revision of the contributions of New Criticism, William Empson (1989) re-baptized "attitude" as the "mood" of the artwork. The term of "mood" is here inherited from Heidegger's phenomenological notion of "mood", understood as the "ambience" that surrounds an event. In Rita Felski's words: "Mood, as discussed by Heidegger and others, refers to an overall atmosphere or climate that causes the world to come into view in a certain way. Moods are often ambient, diffuse, and hazy, part of the background rather than the foreground of thought. In contrast to the suddenness and intensity of the passions, they are characterized by a degree of stability: a mood can be pervasive, lingering, slow to change. It 'sets the tone' for our engagement with the world, causing it to appear before us in a given light. Mood, in this sense, is a prerequisite for any form of interaction or engagement; there is, Heidegger insists, no moodless or mood-free apprehension of phenomena" (20). Contemporaneously to Theodor W. Adorno, other critics like Gérard Genette or Mikel Dufrenne developed aesthetic concepts similar to *tone*. To know more about these and other studies, you may refer to Sianne Ngai's chapter on "Tone", included in *Ugly Feelings* (38-89).

[140] I use the term "texture" here with the same meaning that Lubomír Doležel gives it, that is, as "the result of the choices the author makes when writing the text" (*Heterocosmica* 169).

representations of feelings within the world of its story" (Ngai 40). Faced with this uncertainty, Ngai attempts to delineate this aesthetic concept in the following terms:

> It should be clear that by "tone" I mean […] a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or "set toward" its audience and world. In other words, I mean the formal aspect of a work that has made it possible for critics of all affiliations (Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, historicist) to describe a work or class of works as "paranoid" […] "euphoric" […] or "melancholic" […] and much more importantly the formal aspect that enables these affective values to become significant with regard to how each critic understands the work as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations […] There is a sense in which tone resembles the concept of collective mood frequently invoked by historians ("Cold War paranoia" and so forth), but poses the additional difficulty of aesthetic immanence. (43)

From my point of view, returning to fictional semantics, this emotional *tone* is equally determined by extensional and intensional procedures, but it is more related to the spatial and temporal conditions of the narrative world than to its inhabitants. Two well-known literary examples may help illustrate this *intra-world* emotion: *Hamlet*'s initial assertion that "something is rotten in Denmark" (4.1) and the famous first paragraph of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair […]" (3). The first raw evaluation is uttered by a character, Marcellus, who apparently describes the space in which the action will take place, whereas the latter sequence of oxymora is uttered by a third person narrator to depict the historical context of the narrative. Nonetheless, both fragments are cataphoric

for the emotional atmosphere that, despite the variety of emotions that will appear throughout the action, will envelop their respective fictional worlds: suspicion and expectation in the case of *Hamlet*, and uncertainty and ambivalence in *A Tale of Two Cities*. While its expression through formal aspects makes it possible to classify tone as an *intra-world* emotion, its subtlety makes its transmission even more dependent on the interpretation of the narratee. In turn, due to its importance for the whole of the fictional world, *tone* could determine the readership's predisposition towards the narrative itself and thus influence what I call *inter-world emotions.*

Inter-world emotions. The term *inter-world* emotions alludes to the narrative emotions that are not native to the fictional text but arise in the readership as a response to it. Whereas *intra-world* emotions are conceived as part of the building blocks of the text, and semiotically transmitted through narrative, *inter-world emotions* appear during the act of reading. These emotional reactions to the narrative world are not pre-figured by it, but are determined by the circumstances of each reader, in a way that each "world of the reader" gives place to a unique inter-world "semiotic encounter" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485) and to a particular combination of *inter-world emotions*. I propose a classification of *inter-world emotions* in two distinct categories, according to their fictional target: *concrete inter-world emotions* and *emotional impression*. From my perspective, *concrete inter-world emotions* would integrate all the emotional responses of a reader towards a specific element of the fictional world: a single event, a plot-twist, a house, a description of a landscape... However, within this category, I would like to open a subgroup to single out those emotions that arise within the framework of the relationship established between the reader and a fictitious person, as a response to the subjectivity of the latter. These emotions, hereafter called *parasocial emotions*, are of special relevance for the present study, and so, their occurrence will be discussed in depth

in the pages that follow. It goes without saying that *parasocial emotions* rely largely on the reader's *Weltanschauung*, experiences, personal character preferences and other subjective factors because, as Koopman & Hakemulder warn, "no text ever has the exact same emotional impact on all readers" (91). Yet, I believe that *parasocial emotions* can be boosted and directed via narratological resources and that, in fact, they are influenced by both *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions. From this perspective, the emotional state of characters guides the readership's response towards them, just like *social intra-world* emotions—among characters—, if they do not contradict the reader's judgment, may lead him or her to mimic them, as will be illustrated in the next chapter of this thesis.

Alongside *concrete inter-world* emotions, I consider that the act of reading may give place to another emotional reaction: the *emotional impression* of the fictional world. The *emotional impression* of a narrative refers to the possible set of emotions that the reader experiences towards the narrative as a macro-structure, considering all its aspects.[141] Broadly speaking, it may be defined as the *inter-world* counterpart of *tone*, as it also concerns the fictional world in its entirety. As I see it, *emotional impression* is the most abstract—and the least studied—of all narrative emotions listed above, as it relies heavily upon the readership's actual emotional state, their tastes, their prior personal or reading experiences, and so on. Moreover, *emotional impression* does not necessarily have to match the count of *concrete inter-world emotions* felt during the reading process. On the other hand, it may have an intimate correlation with *tone*, which could be

[141] The nomenclature "impression" pretends to establish a parallelism between the acquisition of an *emotional impression* in literature and the appreciation of impressionist paintings. As in this pictorial current, the emotional vision of the narrative to which I refer here is not equivalent to the sum of small brushstrokes—*concrete inter-world* emotions—that we can observe in the artwork seen up close, but refers to the whole composition perceived in perspective, through the distance that the act of reading confers, once it has concluded.

characterized as the instructions of the text to produce a particular *emotional impression* on the reader.[142]

This last intimate correlation between *tone* (intra-) and *emotional impression* (inter-), as well as the possible dialogue among *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions and *parasocial* ones, insinuates that *inter-world emotions* are neither entirely spontaneous and unpredictable nor detached from *intra-world* emotions. In "transduction", just like in any other semiotic act, the content of the message conditions the response of the receiver, and that means that *inter-world* emotions are somehow bound to maintain, at whatever level, some correspondence with the *intra-world* emotions proposed by the text. Therefore, even if the present thesis subscribes to the idea that there are as many textual interpretations as readers exist, I defend that the textual resources that the fictional world transmits favor some emotional receptions over others. Still, however, the final significance of these resources is given by the emotional reception of the receiver. This association between *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions, in which the formal aspects of the text work as a link, is a consequence of a "mode of grasping" which is "unique to literature" (Iser 109). Both Iser and the theorists of possible-worlds semantics regard the phenomenology of reading as "a dynamic interaction between text and reader" (Iser 107) whose outcome is brought about by the text but produced by the "imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader", who must "adjust and even differentiate his own focus" (Iser x). As a result, more than an object-subject relationship,

[142] A well-known example of how *concrete inter-world* emotions and *tone* may collaborate in the emergence of a particular *emotional impression* could be *Anne Frank's Diary.* The reading of *Anne Frank's Diary* can bring about a great variety of *concrete inter-world* emotions as it constitutes, after all, a coming-of-age narration, in which the protagonist shares loving moments with her family, quarrels with her roommate, learns languages, shares her readings, falls in love for the first time…. In short, actions accompanied by everyday *intra-world* emotions that probably provoke beatific *inter-world* ones. Nonetheless, although it does not monopolize in the narrator's account, anguish (generated by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the action, the fear of arrest, and the imminent menace of the war) does monopolize the *tone* of the story. This anguish, probably accompanied by sadness, will probably influence more the reader's final *emotional impression* of the narrative than all the emotions that the narrator has transmitted throughout the story.

the liaison that the reader establishes with the fictional world is an intersubjective one, and one that demands a great emotional adaptability, for the receiver becomes "a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend" (Iser 109). *Inter-world emotions*, then, emerge under unique circumstances that alter the emotional capacity of readers and are far removed from those of the actual world.

Now, having explained how the different types of narrative emotions at work within fictional semantics and how they may relate to each other, I would like to ponder the exceptional emotional situation that fictional worlds establish, which gives rise to *inter-world emotions*. Also, understanding the phenomenology of the emotional encounter reader/character is essential to address extreme empathy, the emotional response on which the present thesis focuses, and which finds its optimal conditions of emergence in fictional worlds. For this purpose, I will have to leave Doležel's terminology behind for the time being and broaden my theoretical horizon in search of approaches concerned with the relational and emotional implications of *inter-world* "semiotic encounters", capable of explaining, as the Czech theorist puts it, why these encounters are experienced just as the actual world is (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485).

Phenomenology of the *Inter-World* Encounter: *Parasocial* Relations in the "Moral Laboratory"

Throughout the history of literary studies, the metaphor that literature is "la vraie vie qui est absente" (Levinas, *Étique et Infini* 11) has been a commonplace. The singularity of the reading experience, which entails visiting different ambiances and establishing contact with unknown people, has been object of allegories, reflections, and admiration.

Iser himself declares, in the development of his theory of aesthetic response, that the interaction between text and reader is so demanding that it is lived by the latter as an "event" that creates "the impression that we are involved in something real" (67). The Chilean scholar Martínez Bonati comments on this same phenomenon, but he moves away from Iser's amazement to border almost incredulity:

> La paradoja fundamental reside en el hecho de que entramos en el mundo de la ficción sabiendo que se trata de ficciones, individuos inexistentes, cuya realidad es ilusoria y está para siempre fijada en una presentación aspectual. Y, sin embargo, una vez dentro de ese mundo, lo vivimos como si fuese parte del mundo real y poseyese todas sus propiedades básicas. (Martínez Bonati, *La ficción narrativa* 109)

As it seems appropriate to study the *inter-world* encounter "fictional world/reader" from the framework of possible-worlds semantics, several semanticists of possible worlds have attempted to explain this encounter beyond its basic semiotic explanation.[143] In *Fictional Worlds*, Thomas Pavel reproduces some of the responses from this school of thought to the questions of how and why fictional worlds are experienced as if they were factual. For instance, the Swiss theorist Marie-Laure Ryan justifies the readership's investment on the fictional world through her "principle of minimal departure", by which, in her words, "we construe the world of fiction and of counterfactuals as being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid" ("Fiction, Non-Factuals and the Principle of Minimal Departure" 406). According to Ryan's judgement, then, the fictional is lived as

[143] Here I am referring to the semiotic rule by which "fictional worlds are accessed through semiotic channels and by means of information processing" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 20). For more information on the semantics of literary reception, you may refer to Eco 1979.

real because the reader makes it so by bridging gaps as far as possible. To complement Ryan's view, Pavel also alludes to Kendall Walton's "theory of make-believe".[144] In *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990), Walton conceptualizes the encounter with the narrative world as a participation in a "game of make-believe", not dissimilar to the ones we play in childhood (Walton, "Appreciating Fiction" 12). From this perspective, Walton defends that readers participate in the fictional world not as mere spectators, but "by projecting a fictional ego who attends the imaginary events as a kind of non-voting member" (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 85). In this manner, while readers are "located *within* the fictional world", they perceive both the world and its inhabitants as real (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* 55). For Walton, this virtual *extension* of the reader explains why we can feel "a psychological bond to fictions, an intimacy with them, of a kind which normally we feel only toward things we take to be actual" (6). As Pavel notices, Ryan's and Walton's descriptions of the phenomenology of fictional reading coincide in that they "treat impersonation as the key act in passing from actuality to the fictional realm" (*Fictional Worlds* 89). Pavel points out how this hermeneutical movement has a limited scope, as a reader may find no difficulty adapting a fictional world to the "actual" one when their circumstances (spatial, temporal, deontic etc.) more or less align; but impersonation and "minimal departure" may reveal themselves useless when it comes to face worlds as the ones unfolded by *Gulliver's Travels* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Moreover, Pavel continues, in resituating fiction within the domain of reality both Ryan's and Walton's strategies serve "the purpose of changing the ontological setting" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 89) of fictional worlds, and I would add, of turning difference into sameness. From my point of

[144] Although I have referred to him, along with Marie-Laure Ryan, with the label "semanticists of possible worlds", Kendall Walton's belonging to this group is in doubt. In their review of reception theories formulated within possible-worlds semantics, both Marie-Laure Ryan (1992) and Thomas Pavel (1986) include Walton, even though, as Ryan admits, the author himself denied belonging to this theoretical field (Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory" 535). I personally include him here because of his theoretical and terminological consonance with this school of thought.

view, besides their practical limitation, this reduction constitutes the main weakness of Ryan's and Walton's theoretical propositions: either by reducing fiction to reality (Ryan) or by adapting reality to fictional conditions (Walton), both absorb the otherness of the narrative world instead of recognizing its singularity. This translates into a re-appropriation of fiction that brings these positions close to traditional mimesis.[145] But in my opinion, such neutralization of otherness also constitutes a rejection of the potential ethical implications of the interaction between text and reader. If the difference of the fictional is not dealt with, in Levinasian terms, the distance between worlds is not recognized and negotiated, in a way that the encounter becomes nothing more than a reiteration of the ego. In this regard, the reality-based hermeneutics which Ryan advocates is echoed in the work of scholars such as Martha Nussbaum, who take this interpretation even further by conceiving the act of reading as an experience of "self-examination" for the reader (*Love's Knowledge* 2).

To illustrate the variety of explanations that have been advanced to grasp the conditions for this inter-world encounter, let us approach a theory that is diametrically opposed to the preeminence of the subject-reader. Unlike the two above, this explanation of the encounter between text and reader is not rooted in possible-worlds semantics but was originally proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre and later defended by Georges Bataille. In Sartre's view, "partout où la littérature est manifeste", the author—to create the work—and the reader—to apprehend it—suppress themselves for the benefit of the literary encounter. For Sartre, this is intrinsic to poetic communication, in which the participants "lecteur et auteur s'annulent en même temps, s'éteignent réciproquement pour que,

[145] As has been previously stated, another point that brings Kendall Walton close to segregationism is his opinion than emotions caused by fiction are fictional and thus, different from the ones we experiment in "real" life. In his own words, "We do not actually pity Willy Loman or grieve for Anna Karenina or admire Superman, I have suggested, nor do we feel contempt for Iago or worry about Tom Sawyer and Becky lost in the cave. But it is fictional that we do" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 249).

finalement, le Verbe seul existe" (qtd. Bataille 139) [7]. As much poetic force as this image may contain, from a theoretical point of view, it presents the same problem as Walton's or Ryan's, now inverted: if the interiority of the reader is completely suppressed, what remains of the encounter is the space in-between, the text—"le Verbe" for Sartre—, which, without an interpreter, is empty of meaning. All in all, these brief consideration of some of the hypotheses that have emerged to give an account of the interaction between the "world of the reader" and "the world of the text" seems sufficient to illustrate my point: that the obstacle in its theorization resides in preserving both the uniqueness of the text and the immanence of the reader.

The theoretical approach to the inter-world encounter in which I will frame the present project is not distant from some of the ideas presented above. In fact, I would say that it is located in some intermediate point between Bataille's and Sartre's suppression of the reader, and Walton's idea of a fictional alter-ego, since it consists of a variation of what could be called "the theory of simulation" (Hakemulder 2000; Keen 2007; Oatley 2012; Oatley 2016; Pavel 2010). I employ this term, not recognized as a unitary trend of thought, to encompass the work of authors—mainly from the fields of literary studies and cognitive approaches to fiction (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 23)—who, in the last two decades, have attempted to explain readers' involvement with fictional worlds by conceiving it as a sort of social "simulation".[146] For Pavel, the

[146] In his article "The cognitive science of fiction" (2012), Keith Oatley quotes Stephen Halliwell's theory that, etymologically, the Greek word "mimesis" could also be translated as "simulation": "The central term in Aristotle's *Poetics* was *mimesis,* which is invariably translated in English as 'imitation', 'copying', 'representation', or the like. This is the term from which derives the adage 'art imitates life'. Halliwell, however, has shown that this was just one family of meanings of the term. In a second family, *mimesis* meant world construction or simulation" (426). The idea that the "theory of simulation" is an interpretation close to Kendall Walton's theory of "make-believe", but which considers the idiosyncrasies of fictional worlds, hinted at in the text, seems to be suggested also by Oatley in this same article, in which he compares the metaphor of "simulation" to Gerrig's conceptualization of reading as a "transportation" very similar to Walton's. In Oatley's words, "In *Experiencing narrative worlds,* Richard Gerrig argued that reading narrative involved what he called transportation to fictional worlds. In a fourth book, *Such stuff as dreams,* I proposed that fiction is not description of the world of a kind that may be dismissed by psychologists as lacking validity or reliability. It is a kind of simulation" ("The Cognitive Science of Fiction" 425).

hypothesis of simulation allows us to reconcile the premise that fictional worlds are *parallel* to the actual world and the idea that, despite that, the readership participate in them as if they were real. As a simulation, narrative worlds are "built for the human eye" and "aim at persuading our mind that it engages them as living experience" (Pavel, "Immersion and Distance in Fictional Worlds" 99). Nonetheless, most of the scholars dealing with "the theory of simulation" go beyond Pavel's ideas and maintain that fictional worlds do not simulate to be *equal* to the actual world but rather to be *enlarged* versions of it. This would be caused by the fact that, aware of the simulative nature of the fictional world, the reader would momentarily suspend their disbelief and increase their moral, epistemological, and emotional acceptance (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 21). In this sense, "the theory of simulation" has proven to be a major contribution to the analysis of both the social bond between readers and characters and the emotions that arise from it—referred to here as *parasocial* emotions—which are essential to this thesis. Still, under which circumstances does this phenomenon take place? The definition of the literary procedures that enable the reader to engage in this enlarged literary world has been, precisely, the focus of the work of two scholars who, in their two respective articles, have attempted to enlighten it by reconciling the literary and cognitive approaches to "simulation theory": Andrea Deciu Ritivoi ("Reading Stories, Reading (Others') Lives: Empathy, Intersubjectivity, and Narrative Understanding", 2016) and Marco Caracciolo ("Patterns of cognitive dissonance in readers' engagement with characters", 2013).

Starting off from Doležel's conception of the narrative text as an independent cosmos, Deciu Ritivoi and Caracciolo have tried to clarify how the "cross-world identification" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 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 Ritivoi puts forward how the process of engaging with the "possible world" of the diegesis can be understood by employing the German philosopher's narrative concepts of "horizon" and "application". For Gadamer, "application" is the weaving of the novel's "new situation to what we already know" (Deciu Ritivoi 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 Ritivoi 60). Even if this adaptative movement does not signify the readership's complete abandonment of their perspective, as Sartre and Bataille defended, but rather an expansionist "revision of what we have come to expect based on our experiences" (Deciu Ritivoi 59); "application" does indeed imply a tendency towards "stillness", an effect of "critical distance" (Gadamer) in observation. "Stillness" can be defined as "the slowing down of readers' perceptions of the fictional world" caused by defamiliarization (Koopman & Hakemulder 80). As Koopman & Hakemulder add, "stillness is not reflection itself" but is a key "precondition for reflection" (80), as it suspends the readership judgement during reading (Deciu Ritivoi 80). The readership enters the narrative and accepts the conditions that it proposes, without, however, projecting themselves as another fictitious character (Walton), but maintaining instead the awareness of their position as a spectator in a simulacrum (Pavel, "Immersion and Distance in Fictional Worlds" 103). Faced with the possibility of this "relaxed" hermeneutic posture, several academics within the "simulation theory" have been interested in how it may affect the reception of fictional characters. This interrogation has derived in the hypothesis that, because of the moral and emotional laxity

they permit, fictional worlds may function as *parasocial* worlds, that is, alternate and privileged spaces for affect transmission (Caracciolo 2013; Keen 2007; Oatley 2012).

In general, it is commonly agreed upon among critics that novels are often invitations to socialization (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 97) or, from the perspective of "simulation theory", "simulations of selves in interaction" with whom the reader "becomes emotionally involved" (Oatley, "Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 617). Keith Oatley explains the *parasocial* quality of fictional texts in the following terms:

> Fiction is the simulation of selves in interaction. People who read it improve their understanding of others. This effect is especially marked with literary fiction, which also enables people to change themselves. These effects are due partly to the process of engagement in stories, which includes making inferences and becoming emotionally involved, and partly to the contents of fiction, which include complex characters and circumstances that we might not encounter in daily life ("Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 617)

In Oatley's words, these "cross-world" relationships between reader and character, from now on "parasocial relations" ("Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 623), are exclusive to the reading act not only because they are one-directional, but also because the "parasocial" world that the diegesis opens appears, as has been expounded, as more open-minded than real life socialization. As Keen puts it, "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" (*Empathy and the Novel* 168). Drawing from these arguments, especially on the effect of "stillness", literary theorist Jèmeljan Hakemulder has described narrative fiction through the accurate metaphor of the "moral laboratory": a realm where moral judgment is suspended or, in the words of Milan Kundera, a place that "stands against the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and

everyone; of judging before, and in the absence of, understanding" (7). With the term "moral laboratory", Hakemulder aims at highlighting precisely this potential of narrative to become an alternative social space where "plausible implications of human conduct can be studied in a relatively controlled and safe way" (Hakemulder 150). For Hakemulder, if the literary effect of "stillness" is key in this process is because it sets apart the circumstances of fictional narratives, in a way that "while role-taking can take place for all types of narratives, literary and fictional narratives may evoke the type of aesthetic distance (stillness) that leads to a suspension of judgment, adding to a stronger experience of role-taking and narrative empathy" (Koopman & Hakemulder 80). While reading fiction, the safety is ensured by fictionality itself, as it frees readers "from responsibility to protect ourselves through skepticism and suspicion" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 106), what in turn allows them "to experiment more freely with taking the position of a character different from themselves, also in moral respects" (Koopman & Hakemulder 79). The possibility of establishing *parasocial* relations with fictional subjects who differ from our daily connections or are even *hors-norme* is, in my opinion, reinforced by another two factors. On the one hand, by the fact that the "possible state of affairs" of a novel displays its own moral rules (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 482) under the form of deontic and axiological constraints (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 114), which allows the text to deal with social taboos. On the other hand, this is complemented by the promptness of the readership to consent to such moral propositions due to the "stillness" inherent to the process of "application" explained above. The combination of these two premises results in that "optimal aesthetic distance" (Koopman & Hakemulder 88) that makes fiction "lead readers to experiment with forms of intersubjectivity they

would tend to disfavor in daily life" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 27).[147]

Extreme Empathy: The Epitome of *Parasocial* Emotions

Considering all of the above, it seems that both the conception of the novel as a *parasocial* world and its quality as "moral laboratory" lead to the idea that the *inter-world* encounter between reader and character may result, in turn, in an invitation to empathy.[148] In fact, in Keen's view, one of the most interesting effects of the *parasocial* nature of narrative is that it may extend the reader's empathic capacities, because the "fictional status" of narrative as a simulacrum (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 106) acts like a "safety zone" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 29). Hence, the narrative world would become an optimal space not only for experimenting with empathy as an emotional response, but also for facing forms of empathy that, in "real intersubjectivity" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 29), are often impeded by morality. Although, as Caracciolo states, "we always tend to *resist* immorality", as he himself notes, "in imagining that something might be the case in a fictional world, we seem to be relatively freer than in accepting a perspective on the world that we consider immoral" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 31).[149] As has already been said, a

[147] These two circumstances of fictional worlds can be seen, then, as the theoretical explanation of the "literary tendency to represent Evil" that I have discussed, from a philosophical perspective, in Interlude I.
[148] For more on this, you can refer to Bloom 2016; Ercolino 2018; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Hakemulder 2000; Morton 2011.
[149] Ercolino and Fusillo also emphasize the concept of empathic freedom within the aesthetic domain. More specifically, they discuss how philosophers such as David Hume, Edmund Burke, and Hans-Robert Jauss have considered distance an incentive for establishing empathy toward 'negative emotions in real-life situations, as it can function "come un meccanismo di protezione essenziale contro emozioni negative particolarmente coinvolgenti" (Ercolino & Fusillo 49) [8]. They then challenge this perspective by drawing on the contributions of scholars like Peter Goldie (2012) and Adam Morton (2011), who argue that such moral protection is unnecessary in fiction. This leads them to conclude that, indeed, "nel dominio estetico, la stessa barriera della moralità potrebbe, invece, non porre (quasi) *alcun* limite alla nostra risposta empatica" (54) [9].

paradigmatic example of the emotional transgressions that literature enables is that of extreme empathy, an emotion that has even been depicted as being only tolerable in "the fictionality of narrative's world-making" (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 250). If extreme empathy is reduced to the fictional context is precisely because fictional worlds blur the "moral barriers" (Coplan, "Introduction" xlvii) that normally delimit our practices of empathy, and that allows readers to experiment freely with moral limits. Moreover, the aesthetic distance that fiction allows eases the exposure to emotions that we may find "dangerous" in everyday life. As the English philosopher Edmund Burke already noted, "terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close" (57). Finally, novels also provide us with *quality time* alongside the target of empathy that we hardly ever get in other contexts, and which translates into an amount of information that is essential for boosting empathy.[150] Extreme empathy has been catalogued as a narrative emotion, probably, because only fiction can reunite the difficult conditions that it needs for it to appear. Nonetheless, if this emotion were to appear, it would carry within it the potential to change our perspectives on persons "who might otherwise seem subhuman" (Pinker 48), and to challenge, as a result, our pre-conceptions of humanity. For Iser, it is only in such cases when literature reaches its highest form: "when the familiar is transcended or undermined" (132). Extreme empathy enlarges the reader's "horizon", and in so doing, appears as the epitome of the empathic growth that novels enable—and, I would add, of the literary experience itself. For these reasons, extreme empathy stands out among *parasocial inter-world emotions* as the optimal case study for them all: it is an

[150] As Ercolino & Fusillo put it, "La quantità di tempo che 'trascorriamo' con Nikolaj Stravrogin leggendo *I demonî* di Dostoievkij è incomparabilmente maggiore del tempo che, presumibilmente, trascorreremmo con un vero criminale, o con un individuo immorale. L'empatia negativa che si potrebbe provare per il primo, difficilmente potremmo provarla per il secondo" (57) [10].

emotional response made possible by the very foundations of literature as a semantic construct and as a phenomenological and emotional experience.

Following the path traced along this chapter, only in the last decades, the study of fiction has abandoned the rigid perspective of traditional mimesis and has managed to embrace narrative worlds in all their extension. This has enabled literary theory to approach all the elements that conform to their macro-structure. In turn, this development of fictional semantics has provided tools for the study of one of its most abstract inner elements, what I have called *intra-world* and *inter-world* emotions, and for the description of the latter's emergence in the *inter-world* encounter between reader and characters. Finally, thinking of this *inter-world* form of intersubjectivity as a *parasocial* "moral laboratory" allows us to fully grasp the conditions in which extreme empathy arises. With all, this sort of empathic understanding reveals itself as a direct result of a series of circumstances specific to narrative worlds: first, the protective distance that the fictional "possible world" of the novel grants (Doležel) turns the text into a "moral laboratory". Secondly, its moral freedom, which allows the narrative to transgress taboos and deal with immoral subjectivities. Finally, the readership's relegation of their "horizon of expectations" in the process of apprehending this alternative "parasocial world" and its inhabitants, which opens the door to the appearance of *inter-world* emotions.

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" ("Negative Empathy" 250). It has also been reiterated throughout these pages that, even though the readership is the one in charge of "reconstructing" the fictional world by attributing its ultimate signification to it (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 203), their sense of the meaning of a text is constricted by "a network of possible connections" provided by the fictional text (Iser 126). As happens with the

"building blocks" of narrative worlds, also *inter-world* emotions in general, and extreme empathy in particular, are effects that are "neither of the text nor of the reader" (Iser ix), but potential emotional responses that may come to being through the semiotic processing of a narration. All the just-mentioned pre-conditions for an empathic reception of immoral characters, that concern exclusively the moments of narrative conception and reception, are then not enough for the creation of extreme empathy. Instead, they only represent the conceptual framework from which this literary and emotional experience can be thought through. The moment of narrative creation—the construction of the diegesis—is the most determinant procedure in the affective orientation of a literary work, as it deploys, among many other elements, the "instructions" to produce a potential emotional response. In the specific case of extreme empathy, in addition to the formal aspects, the thematic content of the diegesis bears a particular relevance given that, as previously stated, narrative offers a level of introspection and description of the subjectivity of an Other that is normally unattainable in real-life empathic experiences.

Having tried to elucidate in this chapter the place that emotions occupy in the construction of fictional worlds, I propose to move on to the study of their transmission in the fictional text. The body of the next section is then occupied by a broad narratological analysis of the expression of extreme empathy in two novels: *In Cold Blood* (1966), by Truman Capote, and *Les Bienveillantes* (2006), by Jonathan Littell. That exegetic exercise, which will be preceded by some theoretical considerations on the textual transmission of narrative emotions, comprises the core of the present thesis, and aims at demonstrating that narrative emotions in general—and extreme empathy in particular—are materially constructed and promoted via their formal aspects, and consequently, can fruitfully be studied through narratology.

INTERLUDE II. LITERATURE AND EMPATHY, FROM CONFIGURATION TO FORMULATION

From Macrosemantics to Microsemantics of Narrative Emotions

In Block II, we have examined the role that narrative emotions play as building blocks of fictional worlds. Now, the current project demands us to continue their literary trajectory. We will now move from the conceptualization of narrative emotions to their manifestation within literary texts. In Doležel's terms, we are shifting from a *macrosemantic* approach to emotions—concerned with their "global principles of sense organization"— to address their microsemantics in this third block, meaning their "texture", "the 'wording' of the text" (*Heterocosmica* 201).

As mentioned at the end of Block II, up until now, I have exclusively dealt with the Ricoeurian moments of mimesis I and III, which lay the foundation for evoking emotional responses in literature.[151] Yet these conditions alone do not suffice for the emergence of an *inter-world* emotion like extreme empathy. As we know, *inter-world* emotions are reader responses to the fictional characters and their own *intra-world* feelings, which are in fact captured in Mimesis II—the construction of the diegesis. Mimesis II emerges as the most crucial part of the narrative process in shaping a literary work's affective orientation, as by making it accessible to a readership, it guides its reception and enables its final signification. In fact, many scholars concur that one reason

[151] In the first volume of *Temps et Récit* (1983), the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur offers a reinterpretation of the Aristotelian notion of mimesis by dividing the process into three moments: 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 (85-129).

literary fiction is "especially good for […] understanding other people's minds" (Oatley, "Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 625) is "its style and substance" (Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* 161).

From the perspective of possible-world semantics, fictional worlds of literature are constructs of textual activity. Everything that exists in the world of fiction appears on its semiotic channel: the literary text. Doležel, for instance, asserts that the relation between fictional worlds and their semiotic channel is one by which "the narrative world is *fully determined* by the text in which it is described" (Doležel, "Extensional and Intensional Narrative Worlds" 196). Per this logic, the affective charge such texts bear as well as the *parasocial* relationships they promote are, like all other elements of the fictional world, manifested through formal and aesthetic characteristics inherent in the textual practice (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 488). This principle implies—and that is one of the main theses of the present dissertation—, that emotional responses are contingent not only upon the author's or the reader's predispositions but are also elicited through the specific manipulation of written language—that is, through the "style" mentioned by Feagin. Moreover, Feagin also mentions "substance", which seems to denote the evocative quality of literary texts, where the written word "changes into sensations, pictures, sounds, smells, and even tastes in our brains", capable of arousing emotions just like any "actual" event (Ekman 35).[152] At the same time, this evocative capacity is reflected in the depth of introspection often present in character portrayals—an insight usually unattainable in real-life empathic encounters. The "substance" of the fictional world hinges thus on the "style" with which it is conveyed, that is, the *selection* of literary devices. If applied to narrative emotions, this means that literary devices serve

[152] The capacity of the written language to evoke emotions is also discussed in Chapter 3 of Suzanne Keen's *Empathy in the Novel*. For experimental demonstrations of how, in Ekman's terms, words "change into sensations" (35), you may consult Oatley 1992 or Zwaan 2004.

as vehicles for shaping the *instructions* for an emotional response (Iser). My purpose from now on is to unravel *which* literary devices work as *instructions* for evoking the *inter-world* emotion of extreme empathy and *how* they mold the reader's emotional orientation towards the fictional world and its targets of empathy.

Both inquiries are subjects that literary criticism has previously attempted to tackle. Many scholars have speculated about the primary role of form and style in the "emotionality of texts" and have explored the possibility of "figures of speech" being "crucial to affect transmission" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 13). For decades, a considerable section of academia has grappled with the notion that narrative emotions are not tied to the author but are rather embedded within the narrative itself. As early as 1978, Iser suggested that readers' emotional responses to the fictional world are predetermined by the formal aspects present in the text. In *The Act of Reading*, he contemplated that those narrative emotions, "must be of a complex nature, for although they are contained in the text, they do not fulfill their function until they have affected the reader" (21). At the end of the 20th century, the affective turn continued with this line of thought, with many of its participants agreeing that narrative structures and devices underpin narrative emotions.[153] However, this belief has not necessarily been translated into subsequent study. Despite the growing conviction that literary emotions may fall within the realm of narratology, as Patrick Colm Hogan laments in the introduction to *Affective Narratology*, "narratological treatments of emotion have on the whole been relatively undeveloped, at least in comparison with other aspects of narrative theory"

[153] Among many other scholars commenting on this, Coplan & Goldie also agree that emotions are an effect provoked by the book (Coplan & Goldie 201), while Jill Bennett considers that "the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work" (7). On the importance of literary devices for narrative emotions, you may also consult Keen 2007; Iser 1978; Miall 1988 and 1995; McFee 2011, or Pedwell 2014.

(1).[154] Other critical voices, such as Alan Palmer's or Suzanne Keen's, have identified the same critical gap.[155] However, despite the studies above or more recent projects like Fernández Quintilla's (2018) or the volume *Writing Emotions* (Jandl et al., 2017), the narratological creation of emotions, that is, their position in Mimesis II, is still unclear.

This paradoxical situation, in which literary devices are deemed crucial for text emotionality while their connection to it remains unexplored, becomes even more pronounced in the case of narrative empathy. As noted in Block I, the intersection between empathy and literature has been a vibrant area of inquiry since the advent of affect theory in literary studies. Within this trend, scholars like Murray Smith have drawn their attention to the role of formal features in fostering empathy, concluding that certain formal elements "are especially relevant to empathizing with characters" to the point that they become "cognitive prostheses" that help in the process of "other-focused personal imagining" ("Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 109). In the case of an emotional response that relies heavily on the depth of introspection and intimacy established with the target, it becomes evident that the textual aspects conveying this information to the reader assume paramount importance. Consequently, for both Smith

[154] In 2011, Patrick Colm Hogan published his essay *Affective Narratology. The Emotional Structure of Stories*. Although it intertwines narratology and affect theory, his book focuses on "how story structures are fundamentally shaped and oriented by our emotion systems" (1). Thus, his study topic is quite literally opposite to mine: instead of studying how emotions are constructed in fictional text, he reviews how textual structures are constructed by emotions. However, Colm Hogan introduces his essay with an enlightening state of the arts on the study of emotions in the field of narratology, in which he tries to explain the "relative neglect" that this subject has suffered. For instance, he points out that one of the reasons that had led narrative theory to disregard emotions is because, in the last century, this discipline "has tended to draw on linguistic models, which largely ignore emotion" (15).

[155] For instance, Alan Palmer points toward the relatively limited treatment of emotion in narratology when he explains that "a good deal of work has been done within narrative theory on fictional consciousness"; however, "very little has been done specifically on the emotions" (115). As Suzanne Keen explains, to prove his point, Palmer mentions the lack of attention that emotion gets in collective studies such as the *Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (ed. David Herman), a scholarly volume that is representative of the best current theoretical approaches to narrative, and where narrative emotions are mentioned in just one page. In what the work of Keen is concerned, as explained in Block I of this thesis, in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), Keen attempts to sketch "the narrative techniques that tend to evoke empathic responses" (65) although, as I have previously commented, her comments on the topic constitute more a contribution to reader response studies than to narratology.

and Keen, the realm of narrative representation enhances the optimal conditions for empathy fostered by the macrostructures of the novel discussed earlier. Within the *parasocial* simulation of fiction, literary devices inform readers about the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of the target. Thus, they collaborate in setting environmental support for empathy to happen and facilitate the fostering of this emotional response.

Even though there has been a lack of specific discussions regarding the types of devices that ease the formation of an empathic bond with characters, some critics have provided some isolated theoretical contributions to the narratological construction of literary empathy. For example, Murray Smith concludes his article "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" (2011) with some vague remarks on the significance of "voice or perspective" (159), the validity of which will be examined at the end of this Block. Yet, most academics in the field of affect theory confine their studies on the topic to theoretical frameworks, overlooking its practical implications. This limited focus may stem from the widespread 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 80). Consequently, and like Caracciolo regrets, "we know relatively little about the textual strategies that can encourage recipients to empathize with a character" (*Experientiality* 155). Much of the research on the impact of textual phenomena on readers' empathy has been conducted, in fact, from an empirical perspective—perhaps due to the "lack of vocabulary" mentioned by Grossberg, or simply because of the predominant interest in narrative empathy within this field.[156] Then, the scant knowledge we possess on this subject is disconnected from the field of narratology,

[156] As Fernández-Quintilla explains, however, only three empirical studies to date have considered the role of textual phenomena in generating empathic effects in readers (15). According to Fernández-Quintilla, who digs into these antecedents in section 2.7 of her thesis, these studies are László & Smogyvári (2008), van Lissa et al. (2016), and Kuzmičová et al. (2017).

which should be, in my opinion, the primary area concerned with the literary creation of emotions. Despite the lack of narratological studies, it is undeniably advantageous to have extensive prior theorization on the matter. For instance, one of the hypotheses that have sprung from this theoretical interest is that, as believed by most of the scholars mentioned here (Caracciolo 2014; Keen 2007 or Morton 2011), *the more challenging the empathic understanding demanded by the fictional world, the more relevant the formal resources employed by the text become* in achieving the empathic effect. This correlation principle is crucial for analyzing the emotion that serves as my case study: extreme empathy.

As argued in the conclusion of Block II, I consider extreme empathy to be a demonstration of how the possible worlds of literature function as alternative and privileged spaces for affect transmission (Caracciolo 2013; Keen 2007; Oatley 2012). As we already know, the challenge of empathizing with a fictional individual is heightened when the character is portrayed as immoral. As Liran Razinsky articulates, "it is not easy to accept any text spoken by a perpetrator, even if it is fictional" ("We Are All the Same" 140). Per the hypothesis presented, and as Ercolino highlights, narrative form plays an even more significant role in fostering this "unnatural" empathic response (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 251). To establish extreme empathy, the narration must sufficiently stimulate readers' imagination to overcome the "moral barriers" that typically prevent such empathic understanding in real-life scenarios (Coplan, "Introduction" xlvii). Or in Ercolino's terms, literary rhetoric must possess here the ability to "transform the individual, making them believe impossible things and compelling them towards good or evil deeds" ("Negative Empathy" 251). This increased challenge may explain why the narratological creation of empathy towards immoral characters has received, in recent years, a proportionally higher level of attention compared to its generic counterpart, mainstream empathy. Scholars such as Ercolino & Fusillo (2022), Carmen Bonasera

(2023) or Christine Berberich (2020) have focused on narrative structures that invite empathic reception of criminal characters. Despite the valuable insights offered by their respective studies, they are often constrained by either a broader scope of analysis than fictional narrative (Ercolino & Fusillo) or a more analytical rather than narratological focus (Bonasera; Berberich). Following their initiative, I aim to delve, in the following pages, into the formal expression of narrative emotions. Given that a narratological analysis of the entirety of *inter-world* emotions exposed in a fictional world would be a tedious and almost impossible endeavor, I shall focus specifically on extreme empathy.

Consequently, the objective of this Block is to analyze, using the specific example of extreme empathy, the construction of emotions in Mimesis II. Thus, after attempting to delineate narrative emotions at the extensional level of macrosemantics, I aim to complete the semantics of narrative emotions by trying to isolate their microsemantics. However, this primary purpose encompasses several secondary objectives:

1. Firstly, through this practical exercise, I want to demonstrate that despite its variability, the narratology of emotions is, as I see it, neither "ineffable" nor "purely subjective" (Grossberg 80) but is governed by a series of causes and effects.
2. Secondly, while endeavoring to identify the literary devices that promote extreme empathy, I will continue Keen's project of addressing "a series of claims that have been made in the literature, mainly by narratologists and literary scholars, about the potential of certain textual devices to influence readers' empathic engagement with characters" (*Empathy and the Novel* 1-2). Therefore, especially in the final comparison between the representations of empathy in both novels, I intend to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how narrative empathy in general, and extreme empathy in particular, are generated in literature.

3. To further explore the semantics of narrative emotions presented in Block II, my third goal is to utilize the analysis of the corpus to examine not only how *intra-world* emotions manifest, but also how they may relate to *inter-world* responses in the moment of Mimesis III, the act of reading. Although *inter-world* emotions largely depend on the reader's *Weltanschauung*, experiences, preferences, and other variables, I believe they are influenced by both *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions. I aim to delve, also, into the nature of this correlation.
4. Finally, this narratological analysis will enable me to conduct an emotion-oriented study of *In Cold Blood* and *Les Bienveillantes*—a critical perspective that has not been applied to Capote's novel, and never so extensively as I do here to Littell's. Moreover, in the case of Capote's novel, I hope this exercise will contribute—despite its limitations—to promoting its narratological value.

To address these topics, Block III primarily consists of the narratological analyses of these two novels, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes* (2006), whose affective resonance, in my estimation, points towards extreme empathy. Both analyses will concentrate on identifying the narratological elements within the novels that, in my view, encourage an empathic response towards their criminal protagonists. I have termed these devices "empathy builders". Inspired by Doležel's notion that "fictional worlds of literature are constructs of textual activity" ("Possible Worlds" 489), the concept "empathy builders" intends to underscore the material construction of narrative emotions through formal aspects. To clearly identify each of these empathy-triggering devices within the context of their respective fictional worlds, I present one narratological analysis per novel. Moreover, these two analyses will

be internally organized according to Genette's tripartite division of narratological traits in the categories of *voice*, *mood,* and *tense*.[157]

Although the focus of this thesis—especially in Block III—is on narrative form, I do not want to disregard that form only acquires significance in conjunction with content. The themes addressed in the novels have an evident impact on both *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions, while the development of the plot plays a pivotal role in eliciting empathic responses. For these reasons, I will conclude the formal study of each novel with an examination of its thematic structure. Following the two analyses, I will conduct a brief comparative study of both works. This concluding exercise primarily aims to fulfil the second goal outlined above: to contrast my conclusions with previous assertions regarding the formal creation of narrative empathy and its extreme variant. Through this comparison, I aim to contribute—using the case studies at hand—to an exploration of how novels, through their narratological choices, "rectify antagonisms" (Pedwell 94) by expanding the boundaries of morality, which often "limits our capacity to empathize with

[157] As Mieke Bal explains in her guide *Narratology,* narrative theory has been divided between "classical" and "postclassical" narratology. The former is represented by figures such as Gerard Genette, Algirdas Julius Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, and Roland Barthes, whose work is still influenced by Saussure's and Jakobson's linguistics, along with Claude Levi-Strauss's anthropology, whose structuralist approaches, as Suzanne Keen notes, inspired "the search for systematic ways of studying narrative that would not be limited by the individual work" (*Narrative Form* 11). "Postclassical" narratology, in turn, includes the work of scholars of gender studies, psychoanalysis, and cognitive science from the 1990s onwards (Bal 15). As Mieke Bal reflects, these new perspectives on narratology, contrary to what "classical" narratologists tended to do, see it as "a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty" (xiii). Moreover, "postclassical" narratology has reformed this field of knowledge to accommodate it in the field of cultural studies. That is because, as feminist narratologists such as Susan Lanser and Robyn Warhol argue, classical narratology's binary reasoning fails to account for the complexities of gender and subjectivity in narrative analysis. As Warhol & Lanser explain, "postclassical" narratology "maintains structuralism's focus on identifying patterns among narrative forms of story and discourse" (340) but centers on the representation of cultural identities in those discourses. For instance, feminist narratologists use narratological techniques, mostly, "to observe the workings of gender in texts, and it asks how gender is produced through narrative" (Warhol & Lanser 343). While I agree with the criticism directed towards classical narratology, and I consider these contemporary revisions to be highly enriching, they do not directly contribute to the specific focus of my research. As a result, I have decided to use Gérard Genette's narratological taxonomy, which unifies the contributions of Todorov and Barthes, among others, and remains foundational for narrative approaches—even for "postclassical" ones. The decision to use Genette's formulation in this thesis is motivated by two reasons: because it is "very powerful and comprehensive" (Chatman 368); because it remains the most well-known and clearest approach to literary form, which makes it accessible to a wide range of scholars and readers.

those who perform atrocious acts" (Coplan, "Introduction" xlvii). Moreover, the comparison of the creation of extreme empathy in both novels will include a description and contrast of their respective *emotional tones*, that is, the emotional atmospheres conveyed by the narratives. As argued in Block II, the *inter-world* emotion of the *tone* theoretically arises from the amalgamation of narratological and thematic aspects of the novel. Therefore, I have decided to include the consideration of aesthetic *tones* as part of this final comparison since, having already delved into form and content in the analyses and reviewed them during the comparison, it will be more manageable to tackle such a complex and understudied *inter-world* emotion.

To summarize, Block III will consist of the following parts: a formal analysis of the *empathy builders* in *In Cold Blood* and its thematic structure, the analysis of *empathy builders* identified in *Les bienveillantes* and its thematic structure, and a comparative of both mobilizations of extreme empathy, including a consideration of their respective *emotional tones*.

With all, it is nonetheless evident that, when it comes to provide a material demonstration of the topics discussed in Blocks I and II, this narratological exercise is subject to obvious limitations. One such limitation concerns its mode of exposition, particularly the isolation of *empathy builders* during analysis, as this structured approach may not fully capture their functioning *within* the narrative context.

For the sake of clarity, in the following pages, the *empathy builders* of each novel are classified and explained within their respective narratological categories (*voice, mood*, or *tense*). However, during "transduction" (Doležel)—and hence, when these *empathy builders* come into play—, these categories do not work in isolation, but are intertwined, as they foster empathy in unison. As we will observe, the analysis of a novel's emotionality—and possibly, of any other "elementary building block" (Doležel)—lays

bare how a novel operates as a world-system of its own, in a way that every narrative element—such as empathy—is interconnected with others, which participate in its formation. Moreover, "emotions and feelings are never isolated phenomena, but multistratified and variously interrelated complexes" (Knaller 18): a functioning that, as we will see, narrative structures imbued with emotions necessarily mirror.[158] Although textual coherence prevents me from capturing this "narrative dynamics", we will often encounter instances during these analyses where it becomes impossible to separate one category from another—for example, *voice* structures that enable *mood* techniques or aspects of *mood* that bring about *tense* asynchronies. The overlapping nature of narratological elements and the fact that emotions permeate the entire fictional world will often lead us to confront *empathy builders* that consist not only of a single literary device but imply entire systems formed by various formal and thematic features: an analytical demand of the text that might be, in itself, a contribution to the study of empathy-triggering narrative structures, because as Keen puts it, "with the exception of appraisal of causality, virtually nothing about the role of plot structure has been associated with readers' empathic responses" ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 94). However, and despite these instances of "compound" *empathy builders* in this project, *empathy builders* are mostly analysed and compared individually. I hope, however, that these attempts to unveil their internal correlations, along with the analysis of the aesthetic *tones* in which all these characteristics converge, will be sufficient to counteract this structural limitation.

[158] In this sense, I adhere to James Phelan's idea of "narrative dynamics," an approach that "views narrative as a progressively unfolding, interconnected system of elements rather than as a succession of discrete elements" (353). This approach is therefore close to structuralism, if we consider that structuralist narratology, according to Mieke Bal, assumes that "relations between classes of phenomena form the basis of the narrative system of the fabula" (220). For a comprehensive understanding of Phelan's concept of narrative progression, you may refer to his book *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989) or to Brian Richardson's edited volume *Narrative Dynamics*: *Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames* (2002).

The second constraint in my narratological study of extreme empathy is one that inherently affects every exercise of literary analysis: the generalization of the reader's perspective. As we know, the existence of the fictional world only materializes when accessed by a reader who interprets it. Resultingly, any description of an "elementary building block" in a novel, such as narrative emotions, will always deal with their *pre-existence*: it is deemed to be a description *avant-la-lettre,* as we are unaware of the final significance of fictional elements. It is readers who determine the emotionality of the text during Mimesis III, in a way that, as Meretoja—among others like Ingarden 1973; Keen 2007; Fernandez-Quintanilla 2018; Stockwell 2002; or Whiteley & Canning 2017—reminds us, "engagement always takes place within worldly contexts and involves everything that the reader brings into play in the dialogic encounter with the narrative (his or her values, commitments, understanding of the world, and so on)" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 225-226). Narrative empathy is indeed a "highly flexible" phenomenon shaped by the interplay between textual and readerly factors (Fernández-Quintilla i). Here, I focus on the text's instructions rather than the reader's response, since, as narratologist Mieke Bal explains, while interpretation gives a text significance, its underlying structure can be analyzed through narratology (11). Though predicting extreme empathy with certainty is impossible, we can examine its *intra-world* counterparts and *parasocial* conditions in the text, thus exploring how empathy is written and the conditions for its reception. Such is the goal of my project: to identify literary devices that foster empathy for immoral characters, linking narratology and literary emotions. As I acknowledge that literature and empathy are inherently subjective and allow for multiple interpretations, this analysis does not seek to establish empirical rules. Instead, it aims to explore one possible emotional reading of these novels.

Finally, the third limitation of this empathy-oriented exercise pertains to the extent of my corpus. While several other examples will be referenced throughout the analyses, my corpus is confined to two contemporary novels, published sixty years apart: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes* (2006). The reasons behind the selection of this corpus are threefold. First, given the pervasive role of emotions in any novel, and thus the extensive analysis required to identify them, describing more than two novels in detail could exceed the ideal length of this thesis and risk overwhelming the reader. Furthermore, as the aim of these analyses is to illustrate the semantics of narrative emotions as described thus far, I have considered that two examples will suffice for this purpose, which leads me to my next reason for their choice. Both novels significantly differ in how they orient the narrative towards an empathic reception of Evil. Their thematic and formal disparities ensure, in my opinion, that their study and subsequent comparison offer a varied perspective on how extreme empathy can be narratologically constructed. Lastly, the third reason is more thematic than formal, as it concerns the form of Evil that both protagonists epitomize, and how the novels deal with immorality as a literary topic. In both cases, the novel's target of empathy is a character whose major transgression against morality is murder. Considering that, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, murder is considered the gravest crime, both novels introduce characters who commit radically immoral acts—multiple murder and mass murder—without any apparent motive, inexcusably. So, extreme empathy is demanded from the reader in both instances in circumstances that render the fostering of this emotional response notably challenging. Additionally, in *In Cold Blood* as well as in *Les bienveillantes*, Evil is not presented as a distant possibility or a peripheral theme. Instead, as we will see next, both novels position immorality at the center of humanity and at the center of their fictional world, transforming the encounter with Evil into an aesthetic

experience whose violence aims to "truly inform thinking" (Bennett 55). Despite their chronological, thematic, and formal differences both narratives converge on a key aspect relevant to my research: the dominance of extreme empathy within their *parasocial* worlds, which invites the readership to tame "an aspect of our humanness that we tend to be terrified of and which we are tempted to repress—the human capacity for evil" (Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling* 243).

BLOCK III. NARRATOLOGY OF EMOTIONS. THE CASE OF EXTREME EMPATHY

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

Summary of the Novel and Critical Reception

Truman Capote's masterpiece, *In Cold Blood,* was published in 1966. The novel is a narrative fictionalization of the multiple murder of the Clutter family that occurred in Kansas in 1959. The narrative revolves around the entire case: its plot follows the crime, its investigation, and the posterior trial and sentencing of the murderers. In total, the narrative spans from the final hours of the Clutter clan to the execution of their killers, Perry Smith, and Eugene "Dick" Hickock. To provide a clear presentation of the events spanning the six years between these two series of deaths, the novel is structured into four chapters of similar length: "The Last to See them Alive", "Persons Unknown", "The Answer", and "The Corner".

"The Last to See them Alive" alternates between a description of the last day of the Clutters' and Perry and Dick's travel from Kansas City to Holcomb, where the ranch of the Clutter family stands. The family routine and the road trip of the ex-convicts serve as a backdrop to present the characters, their interpersonal relationships, and their backgrounds. On one hand, the Clutters are portrayed as the paradigm of the 1950s American nuclear family. As the novel remarks, Mr. Clutter, his wife Bonnie and their children Nancy and Kenyon "represent everything people hereabouts really value and respect" (Capote, *In Cold Blood* 84)—particularly Mr. Clutter, the *paterfamilias,* and his

adolescent daughter Nancy, "the town darling" (4), upon whom the focalization will mainly concentrate. On the other hand, a while after being granted their parole, the ex-cell partners Perry and Dick reunite to carry out the "perfect score" (43) that Dick has been planning for months. This first chapter ends with the criminals' car reaching the Clutter's farm, followed immediately by the discovery of the corpses the morning after. The night of the murders is therefore elided. The second chapter, "Persons Unknown" introduces a new protagonist, Al Dewey, the KBI agent in charge of the Clutter case. The KBI's investigation of the killings, together with the impact of the case on the Holcomb community, occupies a significant part of this chapter. Yet, this chapter also combines the narrative line of the police investigation with another simultaneous narrative: Perry and Dick's escape across the United States and Mexico, intertwined with a description of Perry's lifetime and his familial past. The next chapter, "The Answer", continues the description of the criminals' journey and their biographies. Nonetheless, as the title of the chapter indicates, Dewey finally finds "the answer" to his enquiry and captures the murderers thanks to the report of a fellow prisoner. During the interrogations, Dick confesses and blames his partner for the four murders. Afterwards, Perry assumes his responsibility and provides a detailed description of the crimes that closes the third chapter. The last part of the novel, "The Corner", focuses on the murderers' incarceration and the subsequent trial process, in which the defendants are sentenced to death. Finally, after a brief account of the five years spent by Perry and Dick on Death Row, both are executed by hanging.

With regard to the novel's critical reception, the seven years that Capote devoted to researching the case in close contact with its protagonists and to crafting the novel were swiftly rewarded. *In Cold Blood* achieved instantaneous success both commercially and critically. What started as Capote's interest in a newspaper's column on a rural crime led

him to fulfill his ambition of writing a "non-fiction novel",[159] and consolidated his literary career.[160] *In Cold Blood* was acclaimed as "a remarkable work, psychologically penetrating and brilliantly written" (Kerrigan 1), with critics praising its precise prose, its poetic rhetoric, and its depiction of the fragility of life. However, the reception of the novel quickly centered on the innovative genre it introduced, thus leaving aside its formal quality. Halfway between realistic fiction and journalism, the narrative unfolded sentimentally, but it also created the documental illusion of a reportage (González de la Aleja 65). Therefore, Capote's experimental approach monopolized the interest of criticism and academic research to the point that, even today, *In Cold Blood* is primarily discussed in relation to its genre,[161] its position in the fact/fiction dichotomy (Cañadas 1999; Fraser 2012; Heyne 1987; Newgaard 2004; Russell 2000); the accuracy of the narrated events (De Bellis 1979; Miller 2013; Nance 1973; Noel 2011; Tompkins 1966; Weber 1980) or its use of journalistic devices (Chillón 1999; Davis 2012; Lyons 2015; Morissette 1970; Murray 1973; Pizer 1971). Another of its most commented-upon aspects, its literary inheritance, also discusses mainly its mixture of fact and fiction (Karl 1983, Kazin 1973; Hollowell 1977; Mainwright 2014; Smart 1985). This is because, in

[159] The first mention of the Clutter case appeared in a brief column published in *The New York Times* on November 15, 1959, which simply reported "Wealthy Farmer, Three of Family Slain: H.W. Clutter, Wife and Two Children Are Found Shot in Kansas Home". As Morrisette (1970) highlights, the origin of the novel's plot aligns with the 19th c. realist tendency to draw inspiration from newspaper's *fait divers*. The difference with works such as Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is that, in those instances, the authors used the news as the basis for fictionalization, thereby detaching their work from the factual events.

[160] As he famously declared in a *Playboy* interview, Truman Capote's formal purpose in *In Cold Blood* was to "write a journalistic narrative that employed all the creative devices and techniques of fiction to tell a true story in a manner that would read precisely like a novel" (Capote, "Playboy interview" 56). For him, a "non-fiction" narrative had to possess "the credibility of fact, the immediacy of film, the depth and freedom of prose and the precision of poetry" (Capote 1968). Capote had tried his hand at the "non-fiction novel" before *In Cold Blood* in the travel guide *Local Color* (1950), the documentary report *The Muses are Heard* (1956) and his controversial interview with Marlon Brando, *The Duke in his Domain* (1957). For more information on these formal antecedents, you may refer to González de la Aleja 1990.

[161] For the sake of brevity, I will not delve into the discussion about *In Cold Blood'*s genre. It will be enough for the purpose of this thesis to make clear that, despite the original conception and the subsequent reception of this work as a "non-fiction novel", I will approach Truman Capote's text, following Lubomír Doležel's lead, as the expression of a fictional world, because, semantically, "we execute *In Cold Blood* in the same way we execute a novel" (Pratt 207). For more nuanced arguments supporting this interpretation, you may refer to Chillón 1999; Culler 1984; Luque 2021; or Pratt 1975.

view of the mixed genre that *In Cold Blood* founded, Capote's *chef d'oeuvre* has been considered—together with the work of authors such as James Baldwin, William Burroughs, or Henry Miller—a direct antecedent of New Journalism, a literary trend developed by figures like Tom Wolfe or Norman Mailer that dominated American narrative in the 1970s. As literary historians such as Alfred Kazin (1973) or Harold Bloom (2005) remark, the importance of *In Cold Blood* for American narrative lays in its pioneering role, as New Journalism followed Capote's proposal of combining journalism and fiction-writing to achieve a "noninterpretive, direct contact with actuality" (Zavarzadeh 210) through literary creation.[162]

Overall, the critical reception of *In Cold Blood* can be summarized in two key points. Firstly, despite its popularity among readers, academic engagement with the novel is limited, with only one book fully dedicated to it.[163] Secondly, as hinted earlier, the existing critical literature predominantly focuses on the work's ambiguous categorization or on its relevance for New Journalism. As a consequence, and as Elena Ortells indicates, "el hecho de que Capote declarara en todo momento que él describía fielmente los sucesos acontecidos desvió la atención de la crítica hasta el campo de la investigación contrastiva con la realidad, dejando un tanto de lado el valor literario y artístico de sus obras" (*Truman Capote: Un camaleón ante el espejo* 22) [1]. An exception to this critical commonplace can be found in the publications by Ortells herself (1999; 2009) and in Manuel González de la Aleja's *Ficción y Nuevo Periodismo en la obra de Truman Capote* (1990), where both researchers offer more nuanced insights into the novel's structure and

[162] For more insight into the shared characteristics of *In Cold Blood* and the subsequent New Journalist texts, you may refer to Newgaard 2004.

[163] The sole book exclusively devoted to *In Cold Blood* is *Truman Capote and the Legacy of* In Cold Blood (2015), by Ralph Voss. However, this publication does not belong to the field of literary criticism. It is a sociological study of the consequences of the crime in the town of Kansas where the murders took place. Voss's investigation, as well as many of the articles on the subject, focuses on the author's research conducted while writing the novel and on his possible manipulation of the facts. Therefore, the critic falls back into the commonplace of the narration's veracity.

literary techniques. Other than that, Ortells's remark is precise: *In Cold Blood* has attracted attention, but academia has not provided it with a proper formal analysis, thus disregarding it as a literary feat. While discussions about the novel's accuracy have always acknowledged its emotional engagement with the criminals and its strategic use of rhetoric "for maximum emotional impact" (Hollowell 71; Noel 2011), neither its emotional dimension nor its deployment of extreme empathy have been researched. Considering all the above, the following formal analysis may not only serve my main purpose of contributing to the study of how the *inter-world* emotion of extreme empathy is created in the *parasocial* world of *In Cold Blood*. I would like to believe that it may also contribute, to the extent possible, to the formal consideration that, in my opinion, both this narrative and its emotional dimension deserve. As mentioned earlier, both goals are contingent on the narratological exercise of identifying and describing the *empathy builders* that, in *In Cold Blood*'s use of *voice, mood, tense,* and *theme,* seem to humanize Evil by urging readers to perceive Perry Smith and Dick Hickock "as men, not as murderers" (Capote 1968).

***Voice*: Realistic Objectivity**

In narratology, *voice* stands for the "mode of action of the verb in its relations with the subject" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 31). When applied to literary narrative, it denotes the narrator's degree of involvement in the plot events. In *In Cold Blood,* this engagement is at its minimum level, as the narrator exemplifies what Genette calls the "heterodiegetic-extradiegetic paradigm" (248): a third-person narrator who deploys a traditional omniscience. In Doležel's terms, this means that the authentication—the performative force of fictional discourse—rests entirely on the narrator's *voice,* who grants fictional

existence to the narrative agents. As Mario Castro Arenas notes, this classical use of *voice* brings the novel close to 19th century Realism (27). Such influence is particularly visible in the opening of the novel, where a gradual description unfolds—first of Holcomb's surroundings, then of the village, and finally, of the Clutter's house. To attain further objectivity, this narrative aspect goes beyond Realism by incorporating journalistic elements. For instance, the demiurge-narrator dispenses with the "authorial incursions" characteristic of literary realism (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 187) and opts instead for the "form of fact" of the reportage's format (Kazin 210).

The novel's *voice* reflects the influence of journalism through narrative techniques designed to create a sense of factual accuracy, which remains present even as it blends with poetic rhetoric (Nance 184). One of the most striking journalistic techniques is the inclusion of testimonies from witnesses whose identity is either described vaguely or left out entirely. To reduce the story's subjective tone and avoid a first-person narrator's direct involvement, the narrative presents these witnesses through phrases like "he later informed a friend" (Capote 312) or "Hickock said, talking to a journalist with whom he corresponded and who was periodically allowed to visit him" (323). Another reportage feature is the insertion of short biographies of the witnesses, which gives a feel for the research underlying the writing. Such narrative techniques, among others, give *In Cold Blood* the status of a "documentary narrative" (Pizer 106). Besides, Capote's novel also displays the influence of cinematographic conventions, increasing the novel's factualism that permeates the entire narrative. In what *voice* is concerned, this combination of literary, journalistic, and filmic elements translates into a parallelism between the mode of narrating and a film camera (Nance 186). The novel appears to display the plot's events in a depersonalized way, thus reinforcing a sense of *apparent* objectivity.

Even if the narrative *voice* in *In Cold Blood* does not constitute an *empathy builder per se*, it is relevant for the current analysis in two ways. Firstly, since all the "constituent categories" of the narrative world are interconnected (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 113), the mode of *voice* settles the conditions of representability of other categories that *directly* influence narrative emotions. For example, the narrator's omniscience, as we will explore, allows for the *mood*'s multi-perspectivism or for the presence of *tense* anachronies, thus shaping the aesthetic *tone* of the novel. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the format in which the diegesis is recounted shapes the way in which it is received. Therefore, the *voice* has an impact on the *parasocial* world of the novel and the emotions that it encompasses.

In the case of *In Cold Blood*, the subjectivity and emotionality "[emerge] out of what characters reveal about themselves in conversation and out of what other people say about them" (Pizer 112). As in documentary cinema, the fictional particulars appear to be "re-created as they are in life" by means of their voices and acts (Capote, "In Cold Blood'…An American Tragedy" 60). As the narrator's authentication validates these "direct" testimonies without contradicting them, they become—alongside the thematic structure of the novel and its narrative techniques—the elements responsible for communicating with the reader. Unlike in the case of narratives where the authoritarian presence of an I-narrator raises suspicion and may trigger critical distance (Gadamer), here the absence of an interventionist *voice* makes the readership feel they are at liberty to develop their own impressions. Both Albert Chillón and Ortells warn, however, that this absence is nothing more than an appearance. Ortells remarks that, through the strict use of an neutral omniscient narrator, "Capote *pretendió* crear […] la *ilusión* de estar simplemente transponiendo al medio escrito una realidad exterior no mediatizada por ningún agente" (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 109, my emphasis) [2];

while Chillón warns that such a narrative illusion, "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" (218) [3]. Yet, at a *parasocial* level, this "direct" report generates the impression of *intra-world* emotions being at once "authentic" and mostly transmitted implicitly, compelling the reader to infer them. As I have suggested in Part II of this thesis, *inference* might be the optimal method for interpreting narrative emotions, as it makes readers engage with the characters' ethos and leads them to believe that they have been the ones that have unearthed the *intra-world* emotions through an act of interpretation. By means of *inference,* readers are then made to believe that characters' *individual* and *social intra-world* emotions are part of their own personal repertoire. When inferred, the emotionality of the text feels "safer" to readers, as it is partially their own making. Thus, readers are more predisposed to answer these *intra-world* emotions through their own as *inter-world* emotions, for instance, in the form of empathy. The interpretative freedom provided by the *voice* in *In Cold Blood* could help create the "safe environment" needed for extreme empathy to develop. What is evident is that, as the analysis of the novel's *mood* will illustrate, the lack of a first-person narrator compels the emotionality of the text to be conveyed not only through the characters' speech, but also through the less obvious realm of the narratological and the aesthetic, which, as a result, gain emotional weight.

Mood: Perspective of All, Focalization on the Criminal

If the category of *voice* answers to the question "who speaks?"—and is, thus, associated with *telling*—, the category of *mood* is concerned with the *showing* of a narrative, and

seeks to determine "who sees" the events. In most first-person narrations, the roles of *telling* and *showing* are typically performed by the same agent, which leads to the frequent confusion of these narratological areas (Culler, "Foreword" 10). Yet, in *In Cold Blood*, *voice* and *mood* are easily discernible. While the *voice* of the novel remains constant throughout the narration, its *mood* undergoes continuous variation, except for some rare instances when it uses the zero-focalization of omniscience.[164] Therefore, the narrative perspective—from now on focalization—adopts the point of view of multiple characters during the diegesis. This shifting of focalizations is known as "multifocalization" (Genette, *Figures III* 277). Capote's novel employs a unique form of multifocalization known as "variable focalization". Whereas in multifocalization the same event is narrated by multiple focalizers, thus producing an overlapping that provides different perspectives; in "variable focalization" focalizers follow one another, each covering a different event in a chronological sequence in a way that, at the end, they cover the diegesis in its entirety. For instance, when narrating the discovery of the Clutters' corpses (56-84), *In Cold Blood* turns to seven different focalizers—Nancy's best friend Susan, her boyfriend Bob Rupp, Mr. Helm, Larry Hendricks, Mother Truitt, Mrs. Hartman, and Mr. Johnson—whose accounts are sequenced, so that the focalization of each character dominates a scene, and no scene is repeated from different points of view. As the primary *mood* structure in the novel, "variable focalization" allows for the insertion of other *mood*-related traits that contribute to the construction of *In Cold Blood*. Among these modal elements, the method of "parallel editing" stands out for its structural, stylistic, and symbolic significance.

The Method of "Parallel Editing"

[164] Instances of zero focalization can be found, for example, in descriptive passages, and it is only maintained for more than a few pages during the account the trial of Perry and Dick in the last chapter.

Structurally speaking, "parallel editing" involves the division of the diegesis in two narrative lines with opposed focalizations. As alluded to in the summary of *In Cold Blood*, although this division of viewpoints is maintained during the first three chapters, it is particularly relevant in the first one, "The Last to See Them Alive", in which the focalization oscillates between the Clutters—with Mr. Clutter and Nancy as the main focalizers—, who tell their last hours; and their killers, who explain their trip across Kansas. Stylistically, the use of "parallel editing" represents the primary cinematic influence on the text as well as its main formal innovation. "Parallel editing" is a literary adaptation of a filmic construction known as the "match-cut". In video edition, a match cut is "a transition between a pair of shots that uses similar framing, composition, or action to fluidly bring the viewer from one scene to the next", thus "a powerful visual storytelling tool used to create a connection between two scenes" whose relation is not —or not yet—evident to the viewer (Chen et al, 2115). As Edward Murray points out, before *In Cold Blood*, the literary equivalent of "match-cut", "parallel editing", had never been applied "so consistently throughout the entire length of a novel" (132).

Symbolically speaking, the resulting double chrono-topic dialogue, maintained throughout the first three chapters, equates the importance of both narrative focuses: victims and murderers. The world of the Clutters and that of their murderers are presented in unison, as the equivalent parts of a whole. This symbolic equivalence is reinforced by the titles of the novels' chapters, which allude to the two narrative lines at the same time. In "The Last to See Them Alive" the pronoun "them" obviously refers to the Clutters, whose daily routine is mostly re-constructed through 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 chapter constitutes a premonitory prolepsis of its end. The following two chapters, equally structured through "parallel editing", also present a double sense in their titles: "Persons Unknown" denominates at once the citizens interviewed by the KBI during the investigation and the "unknown" identities of the true murderers, Perry and Dick. Lastly, while "The Answer" obviously alludes to the resolution of the investigation, if the time devoted to Perry's background is considered, the title could also refer to "the answer" that explains his criminal impulses. In this way, it seems that the paratext is used to reinforce the symbolic "doubleness" that "parallel editing" brings to the structure of the text. A detail that seems to confirm this hypothesis is that this paratextual game is at work only when "parallel editing" is in use. The chapter whose title does not allow for a dual interpretation, the fourth and final one, is also the only one that, instead of being structured by "parallel editing", follows a single narrative line: that of the criminals, waiting for their sentence in "The Corner"—the gallows.

As this last paragraph suggests, despite being in essence a *mood* technique, the importance of "parallel editing" transcends this category and permeates the entirety of the diegesis. For this reason, it will be further explored in the next section, as the emotional effect it fosters is eminently conveyed through narrative *tense*. In terms of *mood*, then, it is sufficient to consider that this swinging focalization creates a horizontal balance that will progressively tilt towards the side of criminals. As previously stated, although "parallel editing" plays a crucial role in constructing the fictional world, it is rooted in the main characteristic of *In Cold Blood*'s *mood*: its variable perspectivism.

"Variable Internal Focalization", or the False Claim of Objectivity

From what has been said earlier, one could infer that this plurality of focalizations encompasses only the point of view of the Clutters and that of Dick and Perry. Nonetheless, as the example of the finding of the corpses has illustrated, Capote complicates this formal resource by reproducing the testimonies of various secondary characters. The use of multiple focalizers is particularly evident in "The Last to See them Alive" and "Persons Unknown", chapters which provide the focalizations of different Holcomb inhabitants to create a panoramic of the crime and its impact on the community. As has already been pointed out in the previous section, the panoramic depicted in the novel's first chapters—which is combined with the criminals' storyline—is outlined through "variable internal focalization" (Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* 191). This *mood* technique creates an *impression* of multiplicity without truly promoting the objectivity traditionally attributed to "multifocalization", as it does not present contrasting versions of the same event. This idiosyncrasy of *In Cold Blood*'s *mood* is identified by Ortells in *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el Espejo,* where she describes this narrative use in the following terms: "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" (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 110) [4]. In her examination of this *mood* technique, Ortells also contends that it contradicts the narrator's apparent desire to avoid mediatization (106). Her argument, which I subscribe, is that the focalization alternates depending on the interest that a piece of information, opinion, or emotional response holds for the plot and its impact on the reader. In relation to this, I have previously argued in this thesis that narrative emotions, as fundamental building blocks, are shaped by the macro-level operation of selection,

which determines what is incorporated into the fictional world. I have also suggested that selection typically influences emotions given that the specific elements that appear in the story will be the ones shaping the resulting emotions of both the characters and—more importantly in this case—the readers. As I see it, in *In Cold Blood*, the selection of the focalization from which a segment of an event is reported, as commented by Ortells, constitutes a clear instance of how selection affects the readers' reaction and, consequently, their *inter-world* emotions. For example, to have the finding of Nancy's corpse narrated by her teenage best-friend is more emotional for the reader than it would have been if any of the other two characters accompanying her in the discovery had narrated it instead. With all, this presentation of narrative events is especially key when considering that, as described in relation to the novel's *voice*, the absence of an intrusive narrator compels readers to interpret both the fictional world, and its inhabitants, based on the appreciations of the characters acting as focalizers. This mechanism exposes how the categories of *voice* and *mood* collaborate to generate, as Ortells emphasizes, a *false* claim of objectivity.

Naturally, this use of *voice* and *mood* carries several implications for the narrative's emotional semantics, and more specifically, for its empathy. As it happened with the novel's *voice*, "variable internal focalization" is not an *empathy builder* in itself. Yet, its structuring role in the narration turns the category of *mood* into the main repository of *empathy builders* in the text. As I will elaborate below, the "skillful manipulation of point of view" (Cañadas 499) allows the novel to progressively center its focus on its target of empathy, Perry. This focalization is twofold, meaning that Perry ends up prevailing both as the subject-focalizer and as the object-focalized—that is, the object of other characters' focalization. As we will see in this section, Perry's role as object-focalized allows the novel, through the perspective of secondary characters, to

draw comparisons between Perry and other fictional figures like Dick. In the same vein, this *mood* method is employed in the novel to convey, by means of these comparisons or through isolated comments, other characters' appreciations of Perry, which seem oriented towards favoring the reader's *parasocial* disposition towards him. In this section, I will present the empathy-oriented *mood* effects generated by Perry's roles of subject-focalizer and object-focalized, which I have identified as four different *empathy builders*: *intradiegetic empathy*, Perry's role as focalizer, his "account of himself", and the comparison established between him and Dick. Among these *empathy builders*, what I have termed *intradiegetic empathy* may best illustrate how *intra-world* emotions may function as *instructions* for eliciting specific *inter-world* emotions.

Intradiegetic Empathy

"Intradiegetic empathy" refers to an *intra-world* emotion by which a character experiences empathy for another inhabitant of its fictional world. I first came up with this emotional dynamic and coined the term when dealing with *In Cold Blood*'s emotionality. It emerged as an analytical need when I realized that, throughout the novel, not only some but many characters, at one point or another, project some sort of empathic response toward the murderer, Perry. The *concrete intra-world* emotions that Perry arises in other fictional particulars mold his figure within the text and they are also inputs that help readers in forming their conception of him. Thus, *intradiegetic empathy* functions as a clear *empathy builder*. It might be argued that this phenomenon is not entirely new, as relationships between fictional characters have already been recognized as a method of

characterization.[165] Yet, these "reported" appreciations gain significant value for the current research when viewed through the lens of the semantics of narrative emotions. On the one hand, in this case, *intradiegetic empathy* illustrates clearly how formal devices shape and enable empathy. In *In Cold Blood*, the expression of empathy as felt by multiple characters—which may in turn give place to *inter-world* empathy—is made possible only by the previous selection of "variable focalization" as the novel's main *mood* trait, and by Perry's function as object-focalized. On the other hand, *intradiegetic empathy* reveals the intimate connection between *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions. Per this connection, *inter-world* emotions would not be random responses mostly dependent on the reader's *ethos*, but partial answers to the *intradiegetic empathy* textualized in the narrative. With all, the hypothetical operation of *intradiegetic empathy* would demonstrate that *intra-world* emotions are enabled by carefully selected narrative elements, and that *inter-world* ones tend to mirror them.

When dealing with extreme empathy, I consider the "exemplarity" of in-text empathy to be key, as the existence of characters willing to feel for the criminal may "authorize" the readership to emulate this emotional response despite their own moral barriers. In Capote's novel, this influence on the reader is "extreme" in itself. That is because, as we are about to see through some examples, *intradiegetic empathy* is usually performed in the book by characters that, given their beliefs or their involvement in the action, should be reticent to empathize with Perry.

In *In Cold Blood*, the plea for empathic understanding is already present in the paratext, which settles the *emotional tone* of the novel. The novel's epigraph is an extract from a poem by François Villon, "Balade des Pendus" ("Ballad of the Hanged Men"),

[165] For instance, Dutch narratologist Mieke Bal asserts that "[r]epetition, accumulation, *relations to other characters*, and transformations are four different principles which work together to construct the image of a character" (126, my emphasis).

whose translation revealingly says: “Men my brothers who after us live/ have your hearts against us not hardened. For—if of poor us you take pity/ God of you sooner will show mercy”. Throughout the narrative, various characters will express the belief that Perry possesses “something rare and salvable” (Capote, *In Cold Blood* 41) despite his criminal acts. These judgments first appear in an analysis of Perry’s subjectivity in a letter from his prison friend Willie Jay, transcribed at the start of the first chapter. Willie Jay inaugurates the tone of the novel’s empathy when he qualifies Perry, a convicted criminal, as a misunderstood man with an exceptional nature and a big heart, a “man of extreme passion [...] striving to project his individuality against a backdrop of rigid conformity” (42).[166] After Willie Jay’s, other examples of characters expressing some sort of empathy for Perry come from increasingly unexpected sources. Among them, William Nance (207) underscores the positive opinions of the murderer held by “exemplary” motherly Christian figures such as Mrs. Meier or Mrs. Hickock. During Perry’s stay in the ladies’ cell of Finney County Courthouse, Mrs. Meier, the sheriff’s wife, becomes fond of the criminal and befriends him. Upon Perry’s arrival, the woman “decides”, after a “kind smile” on Perry’s side, that “he wasn’t the worst young man” and she describes him to her husband as “gentle” (245). When Perry leaves for Kansas State Penitentiary, she confesses to “a friend” that she feels bad about Perry’s leaving, because they “got to know each other really well” (300). She also pities Perry’s luck—“The worst part was saying goodbye. When you knew where he was going, and what would happen to him” (301)—and narrates how she held his hand and cried after the verdict. Similarly, Dick’s mother,

[166] As we will see later in more detail, Willie-Jay’s reflections in the letter also have a prophetic value at a plot level, as they seem to anticipate the murder of the Clutter family and the explanation of it that the novel will offer later. Willie-Jay anticipates Perry’s violent nature and refers to it as “the flaw” in Perry’s character: “You exist in a half-world suspended between two superstructures, one self-expression and the other self-destruction. 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” (42).

Mrs. Hickock, who initially mistrusted Perry and blamed him for her son's corruption, changes her mind upon learning about Perry's life. She says, "And this boy Perry. It was wrong of me to hate him; I've got nothing but pity for him now". Then, she goes even further and ventures the possibility that Mrs. Clutter, the victim, might have shared her sympathetic view of Perry had she lived to meet him: "And you know—I believe Mrs. Clutter would feel *pity*, too" (279, my emphasis)".[167] Later, Dick himself, while in Death Row and estranged from Perry, also finds himself unable to avoid feeling pity for his former partner: "Sometimes you got to feel sorry for Perry. He must be one of the most alone people there ever was" (328).[168]

However, the most remarkable instance of *intradiegetic empathy* is that of Al Dewey, the KBI agent in charge of the Clutter case. Dewey is not only chief investigator of the assassination but is also a friend of the Clutters and a "model" protagonist, "whom we [the readers] have come to admire and trust" (Pizer 117). Contrary to what one might expect of the officer of the law in charge of capturing the criminals responsible for such hideous crimes, Dewey empathizes with Perry. His perception of the killer is pivotal for the narrative's empathy not only because of his role in the plot but because of the occasions in which he manifests his empathy. The inspector's emotional responses towards Perry are strategic because they appear to "soften" the reception of the latter's crimes at two key moments: his confession and his execution. In the first case, right after hearing Perry's explanation of how he committed the crimes, Dewey states that "he found it possible to look at the man beside him without anger—with, rather, a measure of

[167] As seen in this example and those that follow, the novel does not explicitly use the term "empathy", but other *transitive* emotions within the same spectrum, such as "sympathy" or "pity". However, I unite these emotions under the umbrella of *intradiegetic empathy* for two reasons. First, because I believe that, in these cases, these emotions result from epistemic understanding and affective comprehension. And secondly, because the term "empathy" was not as widespread as it is today in the early 1960s, when it was used as a clinical term.

[168] Perry and Dick's relationship of cohabitation in Death Row is beautifully summarized in the novel as one of "mutual toleration: the acceptance of uncongenial but helpless Siamese twins" (310).

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). This sympathy is reaffirmed at the hanging of the criminals, another crucial narrative event. While Dewey does not manifest pity after witnessing Dick's death, his reaction towards Perry's is different.[169] As the narrator points out, 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).

If we compare all the instances of *intradiegetic empathy* mentioned above, we find a common trigger: each focalizer empathizes with Perry after learning about his life, seeing his past misery as having turned him into a "wounded creature" (340). Therefore, the narrative not only uses the characters' *intra-world* emotions to propose a given *inter-world* emotion for Perry—extreme empathy—, but also provides a justification for this emotion. To recreate this emotional and epistemic approach to the murderer and evoke a similar reaction in the readership, the novel furnishes detailed information about Perry's past and character. With this purpose, the "variable" focalization in *In Cold Blood* is not homogeneous, as the novel primarily concentrates on the protagonists of the Clutter case: Al Dewey, Dick, and Perry. The exclusion of the Clutters' circle from this narrative focalization may seem surprising, as it reverses the standard representation of a detective case, where victims are considered, and killers are treated only in relation to their crimes. Yet, the novel's unique *mood* and empathy stem from this deliberate silence, which allows the voice of the criminals—especially Perry's—to emerge. This schema unveils the main *mood*-related *empathy builder* in the novel: Perry's position as both subject-focalizer and object-focalized.

[169] Dewey's different response to Dick and Perry in this scene is also an instance of a *mood empathy builder* that I will comment on later in this section: the comparison between both criminals, that is also established, among other techniques, through their perception by other characters.

The Criminal: Subject-Focalizer and Object-Focalized

In his analysis of *In Cold Blood*'s thematic focus, Eric Heyne concludes Perry Smith is the "thematic and aesthetic heart" of Capote's novel (486). From the perspective of fictional semantics, his statement has a valid basis. As explained in Block II, not all characters exist equally. Instead, they exist "in different modes, ranks, and degrees" (*Heterocosmica* 147) depending on their participation in the action, their visibility, and their introspection. Considering this, we can affirm that the murderers and Dewey exist on a superior level to the rest of fictional particulars. But within this schema, if we factor in the amount of diegetic time devoted to Perry and his past—either through his viewpoint or that of others—, he stands out as the character that exists *the most* within the fictional world.[170] Perry Smith is undoubtedly the novel's primary focalizer and object of focalization. This *mood* choice can be qualified as a main *empathy builder* in Capote's text, as the primacy of Perry's point of view includes an immersion in the murderer's subjectivity that directs readers' empathy toward him. This is not, of course, a new idea. As has been previously indicated in this thesis, the correlation between focalization and empathy has been studied by affect theorists such as Amy Coplan (2004).

In fact, focalization constitutes "the second formal quality most often associated with empathy", only preceded, in Keen's opinion, by a detailed "character identification", that is, the presentation of the figure's antecedents and thoughts (*Empathy and the Novel* 29). In *In Cold Blood*—as in many novels with an omniscient narrator—both *empathy builders* go hand in hand. Given that focalization is what allows the representation of

[170] For an analysis of the number of pages of *In Cold Blood* dedicated to Perry Smith, you may refer to De Bellis 1979.

consciousness, the prevalence of a given character's focalization usually translates into a greater "character identification" with said character. Consequently, Perry's role as main focalizer is pivotal for the novel's construction of empathy because it provides the reader with ample narrative time to become acquainted with the protagonist and gain access to "extensive personal background information" (Newgaard 34), ultimately eliciting empathy for the target.

By means of the novel's focalization both *on* and *by* him, the reader is thus informed that Perry—described as "a poet" (41) and a "sentimental" (95)—comes from a dysfunctional background. Abandoned by his alcoholic mother and mistreated by his errant father—a self-proclaimed "Lone Wolf"—, Perry grew up in boarding schools and reformatories. In these institutions, he faced severe abuse from authorities due to his mixed heritage identity—half-Cherokee—and his health issues, caused by starvation during the Great Depression. After serving in the army, Perry returns to the States and suffers a motorcycle accident that will cause him pain and mobility problems for life. Jobless, moneyless, and without a proper education, Perry reunites with his father. Unfortunately, madness leads the latter to an attempt on his son's life. After months of wandering alone through the country, a minor thievery lands him in prison. From then on, he starts a criminal career that shatters his dreams of becoming an artist and a traveler. While narrating this vital trajectory through his own memories and the testimonies of other characters, the narrative shows how Perry blames his family history for it, as well as for the suicides of two of his three siblings and his subsequent trauma for these violent deaths.[171]

[171] His remaining sister, Barbara "Bobo" Johnson, is the only member of the Smith clan to have, in Perry's words, "entered ordinary life" (106). However, after the visit of the KBI agents who are looking for her brother, the narrator explains that Mrs. Johnson also fears her past and is traumatized by the tragic destiny of her family. The end of the scene reads as follows: "The front door was locked, but not the door to the

Readers encounter this troubled biography for the first time in "Persons Unknown", thanks to the transcription of two letters: one written by Perry's father to the Kansas State Parole Board, and the other by Perry's remaining sister Bobo and addressed to him. These letters occupy a total of 20 pages (121-141), and provide a detailed account of Perry Smith's life. However, his story is reiterated three more times throughout the novel. Significantly for the arousal of *inter-world* extreme empathy, in two of these instances, Perry's past is conveyed in reported speech style, using his own words.[172] The plurality of voices that participate in accounting for Perry's life demonstrates thus how the focalization on the criminal is double, meaning that even when he is not acting as subject-focalizer, he prevails as object-focalized. As I see it, this continuous repetition of the "conditions of emergence" that have shaped Perry's subjectivity works in the narrative as what Judith Butler calls "an account of oneself" (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 8). This term, rooted in Nietzschean ethics, defines a speech act that "follows only upon an accusation" (11). It involves an individual coming "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" (15). In an "account of oneself", the "accused" explains to an addressee the "conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen" (19) to clarify their present state, which, in Perry's case, translates into his criminal actions. My argument is that *In Cold Blood* recreates this ethical encounter through instances where Perry's role as a subject-focalizer is used to clarify his "conditions of emergence" as a criminal. Consequently, the reader is invited to assume the role of the addressee, compelled to recognize the circumstances and, particularly, the humanity of the accused.

garden. The garden was white with sea-fog; it might have been an assembly of spirits: Mama and Jimmy and Fern. When Mrs. Johnson bolted the door, she had in mind the dead as well as the living" (180-181).

[172] See pages 73 and 265.

In terms of the fostering of extreme empathy, I consider Perry's "account of himself" to be an *empathy builder*. More specifically, a *thematic empathy builder* within a broader *mood empathy builder*: his roles as both subject-focalizer and object-focalized. But besides giving rise to the "substantial characterization" that stands as a necessary condition for an empathic response (Goldie 195)—a requirement that, as we known, gains importance if the target contradicts the reader's morality— how does Perry Smith's role as both primary focalizer and object-focalized create extreme empathy? As we will see, Perry's position as object-focalized allows for the emergence of *mood empathy builders* like those discussed in the previous sub-sections, while his role as focalizer provides additional insight into his perspective.

Mainly, Perry's focalization enables a direct style that removes the narrator's interference, directly appealing to the reader's sensitivity. In this sense, having Perry explain the turning point of the plot—the murder of the Clutters—is crucial for how the reader perceives him. The version of the crime that the reader receives is Perry's, which paradoxically benefits him, as the events of that night are key to understanding his nature. While narrating the course of the crime, Perry expresses his constant desire to abandon the "job",[173] his insistence on not hurting anyone, and his feelings of "shame" and "disgust" (238). These feelings are introduced in the scene through a beautiful symbol of Perry's frustration. During his confession, Perry recounts a scene that occurred before the murders, as both ex-convicts were inspecting the Clutter's house in search of money:

> I frisked the girl's room, and I found a little purse—like a doll's purse. Inside it was a silver dollar. I dropped it somehow, and it rolled across the floor. Rolled under a

[173] In those moments, Perry's desire to leave intermingles with his superstition, which will be further analyzed in relation to the novel's *tone* and its thematic analysis: "[…] that really put bubbles in my blood. I told Dick to count me out. If he was determined to go ahead with it, he'd have to do it alone. He started the car, we were leaving, and I thought, Bless Jesus. *I've always trusted my intuitions*; they've saved my life more than once" (228, my emphasis).

> chair. I had to get down on my knees. And just then it was like I was outside myself. Watching myself in some nutty movie. It made me sick. I was just disgusted. Dick, and all his talk about a rich man's safe, and here I am crawling on my belly to steal a child's silver dollar. One dollar. And I'm crawling on my belly to get it. (233)

Later on, he adds, "I knelt down beside Mr. Clutter, and the pain of kneeling—I thought of that goddam dollar. Silver dollar. The shame. Disgust" (238). Right after that, Perry kills Mr. Clutter violently. Despite the cold-blooded nature of the murders, during the investigation, the KBI quickly identified signs of kindness toward the victims, which led the agents to believe 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" (99). Narrating the night of the murders in the first person allows Perry to reveal himself as a murderer paradoxically "moved by considerate impulses" (99). He describes how, that night, he tucked Nancy in to comfort her, respected Bonnie's wish to keep her wedding ring, and tried to ensure Herbert's and Kenyon's comfort. As a result, Perry's contradictory good-heartedness shines even in the darkest moments of the narrative.

If on the one hand, this focalization allows for the expression of Perry's discordant nature; on the other hand, his repeated "account of himself" justifies it. In this way, this underlying *empathy builder*, originated in focalization, completes the immersion in the character, establishing a connection between his present and his past. Perry's "accounts of himself" are an indispensable rhetorical device for empathy, and in these enunciative situations, readers are prompted to understand "the motivation of deeds that one would not consider doing oneself" (Morton 324): an explanatory narrative capable of eroding the moral barriers that complicate extreme empathy. In Perry's case, this "explanation" consists in a life of poverty and abandonment, coupled with lack of opportunities: a reality 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). As this instance displays, and as Ortells also observes, in *In Cold Blood*, the connection between the criminal's traumatic past and his diegetic present is so emphasized that it almost takes the form of social determinism (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 112).

With all, Perry's focalization—together with his role as object-focalized, and the ethical demand both aspects generate—emerges as the most transgressive ethical gesture in the novel. Through it, the narratee gets access to a double structure of exposition and explanation that contextualizes Perry's actions without necessarily justifying them. In an interview with Playboy US, author Truman Capote defended himself precisely from the accusation of "excusing" Perry Smith by answering that, "of course, in Perry's case—and in the case of the thousands like him—the arbitrary act of violence springs from the poverty of his life, its deep insecurity and emptiness. That doesn't excuse what he did, of course, but it does help explain it" (Capote & Norden 1968). As the author puts it, the choice of Perry as the focus and "heart" of the novel does not ask for forgiveness, but for understanding. By establishing a correspondence between the lack of affection in Perry's early life and his emotional instability, the novel also resorts to the topic of the mistreated child who develops into a psychopathic adult. This literary and psychiatric commonplace connects readers to an already-known frame of reference that further helps them in understanding Perry's character.[174] Perry's childish attitudes,—such as sucking his thumb

[174] In literature, the "myth" of the mistreated child/revengeful adult is also represented, for instance, in John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952). Embodied in the "evil" character of Cal—a rewriting of biblical Cain—, this "myth" is beautifully explained in the novel: "The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt —and there is the story of mankind" (Steinbeck 271). In the field of philosophy, there are many correspondences between the character of Perry Smith and that of Pierre Rivière, Michel Foucault's well-known case study in his essay *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère: un cas de parricide au XIXe siècle* (1973). Like Perry, Rivière attributes his corruption to the abandonment of his parents—"personne ne s'appliqua à donner une bonne direction à son esprit"— (72) [5]; the violence of his childhood—"toute la vie il a eu l'spectacle des querelles domestiques de ses parents" (82) [6]— ; and his frustrated desire to have an education—" j'avais toujours les idées de m'instruire et de m'élever" (158) [7]. Just like Capote's character, Rivière shows a great need to love and to be loved, a wish that, in the case

or calling for his father—are an instance of how he personifies the trope of the abused boy whose traumatic past prevents him from being a fully developed adult.[175] These character traits contribute to portraying Perry as a "wounded" and vulnerable creature, thereby inviting empathy.

Although the narrative is dominated by Perry's position as subject-focalizer and object-focalized, his viewpoint is interspersed with Dick's, his crime partner. As I will explain below, the coexistence of both criminal focalizations in the narrative gives room to a comparison between the convicts' personalities. The effect that this contrast has on the reception of Perry appears as the fourth and last *empathy builder* concerning narrative *mood* in *In Cold Blood*.

Character-comparison as a Trigger for Extreme Empathy

Since their introduction, the two young men are depicted as having, physically, "little in common" (28). In contrast to Perry—whose "enthralling" face, that of a "gentle romantic", is said to be full of a "roguish animation" (14)—, Dick is portrayed with 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, *In Cold Blood* 29). This naturalist description—that, as Ortells identifies, harks back to 19th century determinism (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 130)—already suggests that their external differences will translate into equally

of Perry, shows even when committing a murder, as his contradictory preoccupation for the Clutters' comfort displays.

[175] Among other instances, readers are informed that "Perry could be 'such a kid' always wetting his bed and crying in his sleep ('Dad, I been looking everywhere, where have you been, Dad?), and often Dick had seen him sucking his thumb and poring over them phony damn treasure guides" (128) or that he liked to pretend to be a "tiny little baby that can't keep his eyes open" (314).

diverse inner natures.[176] Whereas Perry's face reflects his "dreamy" and "sensitive" interiority (Capote, *In Cold Blood* 157), Dick's features insinuate the malicious personality that his actions will confirm. In fact, as González de la Aleja stresses, "conforme avanza la novela Dick se va convirtiendo en un personaje cada vez más odioso, mientras que Perry sufre la transformación opuesta" (85) [8]. Specifically, their differences gradually emerge during their escape through the States and Mexico, which Capote frames using the literary motif of the *road trip* (Ortells, *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 83).[177] From its outset, their car escape is used as a backdrop to compare Perry's and Dick's background. The juxtaposition of Dick's past and that of Perry, presented one after the other, brings about another comparison: while Perry comes from a dysfunctional household, Dick was raised in a poor but nuclear, loving family (158), but ambition "was the ruination of him" (159). These different origins seem to be related to their different life-attitudes: Perry, who was not loved as a child, strives to be accepted, while Dick, a beloved child and successful teenager is an individualist (158). Building on this foundation, the rest of the journey will serve to display how the convicts' personalities develop, gradually taking increasingly opposite directions. The resulting asymmetry will be visible in their respective emotional natures and, as I will now elaborate on, in their differing views on their relationship

[176] This naturalist comparison between the protagonists will be employed once again in the novel, when Al Dewey's wife compares Dick's face with Perry's: "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." (157). As Melissa Noel notices, to remark this difference even more, when describing Perry, the narrative usually "relies on pathos and uses appeals to emotion and empathy as key stylistic devices" (Noel 53). In this same line, Wöll (52) exemplifies these emotional approaches through the novel's description of Perry's pictures taken during his trip to Mexico City, when we are told that "[T]hey were remarkable photographs, and what made them so was Perry's expression, his look of unflawed *fulfilment*, of *beatitude*" (Capote 116, my emphasis).

[177] The narrative structure of the road trip is inherent to American literature. It has its origins in the importance of "the journey" or "the crossing", which dates to the stagecoach and train journeys to the West in the 1840s and became crucial again during the Great Depression. In the 1960s, this structure had gained popularity thanks to the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). As in *In Cold Blood*, in Kerouac's novel the car journey mirrored the horizontal evolution of characters and their interrelations.

Concerning the characters' nature, few positive emotions are attributed to Hickock at an extensional level. He is characterized by his envy, senseless cruelty, and perversion. In the diegesis, these inclinations are illustrated by Dick's own actions, like running down dogs for fun (108) or trying to seduce little girls (195). In some other cases, Dick's envy and ambition are explicitly mentioned by the narrator: "Envy was constantly with him; the Enemy was anyone who was someone he wanted to be or who had anything he wanted to have" (193). To display the rage and violence that stem from this ambition, the narrator exemplifies this characterization through Dick's encounter with a healthy man in a luxurious hotel: "Whatever he was, he looked as though he knew the glories of money and power. […] All that belonged to him, Dick, but he would never have it. Why should that sonofabitch have everything, while he had nothing? Why should that 'big-shot bastard' have all the luck? With a knife in his hand, he, Dick, had power" (194). Besides, whereas Perry will constantly question and repent their crimes, neither guilt nor remorse seem to be available for Dick. After committing the crime, Perry seems to feel guilty, as he keeps bringing up the events of the Clutter house, which annoys Dick, who, conversely, wants to avoid the topic at all costs: "He was annoyed. Annoyed as hell. Why the hell couldn't Perry shut up? Christ Jesus, what damn good did it do, always dragging the goddam thing up? It really was annoying. Especially since they'd agreed, sort of, not to talk about the goddam thing. Just forget it" (104). Their opposite attitude towards their deeds is maintained until their executions, when Perry's final words are an apology full of guilt, whilst Dick's are a complaint about his life conditions. In general, Perry not only lacks the "negative" emotions attributed to Dick, but when those drive to immoral actions, he opposes Dick's behavior.[178] For instance, when Perry sees his partner trying to seduce

[178] Through its portraits of Perry and Dick, *In Cold Blood* seems to be comparing two different—and opposite—paradigms of masculinity. From the perspective of what Monique Wittig would call "a mythic notion" of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 59), both Dick and Perry are pierced by gender expectations and performativity, which define their behavior and their intersubjective relation and which, ultimately, relates

a pubescent girl, he is reported to "realize Dick's purpose at once, and despise him for it; he had 'no respect for people who can't control themselves sexually'". Then, he adds, "hadn't they almost had a fist fight when quite recently he had prevented Dick from raping a terrified young girl? However, he wouldn't care to repeat that particular test of strength" (195). Thus, through a negative dialogic, Perry acts as the "positive" counterpoint in the pair. From the perspective of reception, the *inter-world* emotions that each can evoke in the reader may cause Dick to end up functioning as a kind of "repository of evil", thereby improving, in contraposition, the reception of Perry. In my opinion, this emotional reception may be intensified by the different perceptions that each one of them has of their camaraderie which reflect, in turn, the desires that, as we have seen, each one carries from childhood: Perry's lack of love and Dick's lack of money.

Through the road trip that occupies the second and third chapters —"Persons Unknown" and "The Answer"—, we see Perry's and Dick's subjectivities mirrored in the power dynamics of their relationship. On the one hand, Dick's interest in Perry stems from a misguided belief that Perry is a "natural killer" that "can help his ambitions" (53). Nonetheless, this perception is the result of a lie. When he met Dick, Perry was immediately "attracted to him" (15). This "attraction"—seemingly a form of "male homosocial desire" (Sedgwick 1985)—triggers Perry's wish to be worthy of Dick's attention. With this purpose, Perry makes up a story about killing a black man just for fun

to their violent conduct. Hence, the first definition of Hickock, given from Perry's point of view, reinforces a traditional conceptualization of masculinity, as it puts in juxtaposition attributes such as "very literal-minded", "pragmatic", "tough" or "invulnerable", and "totally masculine" if "compared to himself" (15). The foundation for the comparison lays in Perry's sense of his own vulnerability, because, in contrast with Dick's brutality, Perry is "very touchy, his feeling is very easily hurt" (124). In fact, Perry's emotional nature, which causes him to shed tears up to thirteen times during the narration for the most disparate causes—the beauty of the sunset (175), remorse (300) or because of the touching sound of an "exalted music" (195), is the source of Dick's constant criticism, who regards these susceptibilities as "'something wrong' in Little Perry" (104). From Dick's point of view, Perry is "a sentimental, too much the dreamer" (53) and "an old cry-baby" (327), who differs from his own masculine "normality". The conservative assumption on gender performativity eventually makes Dick feel "sick of […] his [Perry's] weepily womanly eyes." As the relationship between them deteriorates, Dick modifies his evaluation of Perry from immaturity to a stereotyped femininity, coming to see Perry as a "wife that must be got rid of" (208).

(108), an overt lie that indeed awakes Dick's interest, but also generates different expectations of their alliance: "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). As a result of Dick's false interest in him, Perry envisions their partnership as an opportunity to establish the genuine intersubjective bond that he longs for. Thereby, the criminals' union is portrayed as a byproduct of Dick's ruse, by which he takes advantage of Perry's need for proximity.

Dick's cunning is laid bare when, during interrogations, he betrays their pact of silence and pins the blame on Perry, declaring, "It was Perry. I couldn't stop him. He killed them all" (222). After that, Perry confesses to the murders, not without adding that the robbery was not his idea, and he only accepted to participate because he was "afraid to leave Dick; merely to consider it made him feel 'sort of sick'" (120) and because he wanted to visit his friend Willie Jay in Kansas. Perry explains how despite his repeated temptation to abandon "Dick's score" (12), his partner insisted, and he, Perry, ended up being the executor of the crime. According to Michael Wainwright, although the killing of the other three witnesses was a logical step after the first murder, the killings can be read as a result of Dick and Perry's relationship, and more specifically, of what had become the defining feature of it: their need to show the other one his sense of control (52). This silent competition seems to stem from the internal hierarchy that structures their bond, based on Dick's apparent self-confidence and Perry's fascination for it. As I see it, Perry's subordination—visible, for instance, in Dick's patronizing nicknames like "honey" (20), "beauty" (30), "sugar" (44), and "baby" (85)—stems from his own sense of inferiority. By allowing Dick to "boss him" (120), Perry seems to seek what Sedgwick terms the Freudian "masculinizing potential of subordination to a man" (24), which,

within an Oedipal framework, reflects both mimicry and rivalry with the Father. Ultimately, Perry's "envy" of Dick's masculinity, which reflects the "competitive individualism" that "saturates masculinity" (Metcalf 146), drives him toward murder. Perry appears to acknowledge this causality when he confesses that he couldn't leave the Clutter house for fear of being seen as a coward by Dick—a fear rooted in a dynamic that Perry describes as "something between me and Dick" (238). The causality of the crimes will become clearer when Dick, the true architect, reveals his hidden 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). In this context, the novel's juxtaposition of Perry, who prevents the rape and relies emotionally on Dick, and Dick, who deceives his companion into their partnership and, later, into committing murder, serves to partially redeem Perry.

To sum up, the comparison between the two, stemming from their alternate focalization, works as an *empathy builder* for three reasons. Firstly, Dick's corruption improves Perry's image, which may enhance the reader's *inter-world* appreciation of Perry and foster extreme empathy for him. Secondly, their contraposition leads to a moral interpretation of the crime in which Dick emerges as the true criminal mind, thereby relativizing Perry's responsibility for the crimes. Finally, the unequal terms of their relationship, which bring about Dick's breach of Perry's trust, increase the perception of the latter as an emotionally vulnerable subject. For instance, despite Dick's treason, Perry manifests no hard feelings for his partner-in-crime, and during their separate incarceration, Perry reports that he "missed Dick" and his great desire was "to talk to Dick, be with him again" (251). As this quote displays, contrary to Dick's, Perry's faithfulness to their bond remains until the end. Later, when they both plan to escape from prison, the different conception that each one has of their relationship is displayed again

in their plotting: 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). For Perry, on the contrary, their future is a common one, because as he remarks, they are "of the same species, brothers in the breed of Cain" (251). In effect, after their arrest, Perry and Dick share a judicial and penal trajectory leading towards a shared end: "the Corner" —the name used by the inmates to refer to the gallows.

Although their death closes the narration, Perry's and Dick's fate—as well as the Clutters'—appears to have been progressively approaching since the story's outset. As we are about to explore, this is due to the narrative manipulation of *tense*, which presents the six deaths as an "inevitable destiny".

***Tense*: An Inevitable Destiny**

Despite the significance of narrative *mood* for this research, the most distinctive aspect of *In Cold Blood* is arguably its *tense* structure. As Bal explains, the study of narrative *tense* is based on the distinction between the *story*—the events in chronological order—and the *fabula*—the narrativization of said *story* events—, which presents said events "in an order different from their chronological order" (79). The category of *tense* concerns precisely the difference between the timing of the events and that of their literary expression in the *fabula*. In *In Cold Blood*, the alteration of the *story*'s time brings about a *fabula* that significantly affects the reception of the events. In this regard, as Morrissette points out, the novel's temporal choices distance it from the alleged journalistic objectivity, and reveal once more the influence of cinema on the novel. In the critic's words, "in order to 'fictionalize' his materials […] [Capote] 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" (161). Thus, although the narration mostly follows a chronological order, the sustained insertion of pauses, ellipsis, speed variations and, especially, "chronological anachronies" (Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* 35) turn the diegetic time into an intricate structure. To grasp the novel's key temporal features and their impact on narrative emotions—particularly extreme empathy—this section will categorize them, as noted in Interlude II, following Genette's division of temporal dynamics into *duration*, *frequency*, and *order*.

Duration

The *tense* sub-category of *duration* explores the divergence in speed between the time of the *story* and that of the *fabula* that is, as Seymour Chatman defines it, the difference "between the time it takes to perceive (read, hear, see) the narrative and the time the events depicted in the story took to occur" (358). These temporal alterations can be classified from lower to higher velocity as follows: pauses; scenes (point-zero: when the duration of the *fabula* aligns with that of the *story*); summaries; or ellipsis. Like all narratological elements, *duration* influences narrative emotions, as the length of a scene usually corresponds to the level of immersion in events, thereby affecting their emotional impact.

In the case of *In Cold Blood*, the narrative *duration* generally adheres to the conventions of realism, employing a mixture of scenes—mostly dialogues in reported speech—and summaries. These two modes of speed are clearly combined to highlight the significance attributed to each episode, thereby amplifying the emotional stress provided

by its focalization. For instance, while the judicial process—essential for the readers' parallel "judgement" of the criminals—is recounted in detail, other apparently significant events, like the burial of the Clutters or the years spent by Dick and Perry waiting for their execution, are quickly summarized.

Regarding pauses, the novel employs them with two main objectives reminiscent of the journalistic tradition of the reportage. Firstly, the plot is frequently interrupted to incorporate documents—such as a medical report, a journal entry, or a letter—mainly related to Perry, thus enriching his characterization. Secondly, pauses also introduce a specific character acting as a focalizer, a narrative necessity of the aforementioned "variable" perspectivism. An example of this use of pauses would be the beginning of "The Answer", which starts by providing the biography of Floyd Wells, Dick's former cell partner, who is about to inform the KBI about 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). Except for these strategic pauses, the novel is generally characterized by its high speed. As Edward Murray asserts, "the tempo of the book is faster than the average novel": a typology of *duration* that the critic attributes to its "filmic structure" (35). As the novel progresses, the narrative time also becomes increasingly elliptical, a tendency that reaches new heights during the time in Death Row, where five years of the *story* are elided through two explicit "ellipses": "two years passed" (313) and "another three years passed" (328). In fact, the acceleration of the narrative time has a clear starting point within the *fabula*: Perry's confession. That is because his account of the murders functions as a "completing analepses" of the night of the crimes: the most relevant omission of information in the narrative. The events of that night are therefore not a complete ellipsis. In fact, the only complete ellipsis of the novel concerns Perry and Dick's arrest (208), whose events are never narrated. Conversely, the

murders are ultimately fully explained only through Perry's confession, which fills the gap by providing "deferred or postponed significance" to the previously omitted events. This structure is called partial ellipsis, "pseudo-ellipsis", or in Genette's terms, "enigma" (*Narrative Discourse* 57). In *In Cold Blood*, the killings' "enigma" is key for the novel's *tense*, its overall structure, and its possible *inter-world* empathy. In fact, my interpretation is that this "enigma" and its resolution serve as the structural foundation for the entire storyline.

One of the narrative choices that points towards this interpretation is the fact that the next paragraph after the "omission" of the murders starts right like the beginning of the novel, offering a new landscape of the village of Holcomb (56). I perceive this repetition as a second commencement of the narrative, which essentially "restarts", as the case investigation and the criminal's journey start in that moment. In terms of the narrative *tense*, by leaving the central event in the plot—the Clutters' murder—unexplained for the most part of the diegesis, the whole temporality of the novel appears to be structured around this informational "gap". In this way, as will be further discussed later, the time of the narrative seems to plunge towards the "enigma" and, after the analepsis that completes it, the temporality accelerates again towards the novel's conclusion. Within the parenthesis opened by this gap—from the night of the crimes to Perry's confession—, the "enigma" plays a strategic dual role in the novel and its emotional reception. With regard to the plot, it sustains the readership's interest in the police investigation, given that the *who* and *how* of the case remain unresolved. However, the nature of this interest differs in each storyline, where the "enigma" takes on a different form. In her manual *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985), Mieke Bal explains how ellipsis play a different role in the narrative depending on the level of information that the reader has in comparison with the characters (161). For instance, if

both parties know the same, the ellipsis does not generate suspense. In *In Cold Blood,* the method of parallel editing makes the murders' ellipsis have one significance for each plotline, which puts the reader in two different positions. On the KBI side, the "enigma" takes the shape of a "threat/riddle", typical of the detective stories, as the reader knows slightly more that the investigators. On the criminals' side, the "enigma" functions as a "secret", as they know more than the reader does at that point. In any case, this double structure, resulting of both the "enigma" and the method of parallel editing, generates a sense of "dramatic irony" as regards the investigation, as the reader has more information than the KBI. This discrepancy may unconsciously lead the readership to give more attention to Dick and Perry's plotline, as they possess the solution to the "enigma". Simultaneously, within the criminals' storyline, the "enigma" also makes who to blame for the crimes difficult to determine, because the reader knows who the criminals were, but ignores their level of participation in the murders. Hence, this lack of information transforms this "pseudo-ellipsis" into a *tense empathy builder*.

Finally, as we already know, through the *mood empathy builders* described earlier, Perry's subjectivity, background, and connection with Dick are portrayed precisely during this temporal parenthesis. This allows the narrative to "characterize Perry Smith in depth before revealing his actions at the Clutter home" (Pizer 116). Therefore, this temporal asynchrony gives the readership *time* to form an opinion of Perry, establishing a "parasocial" bond that may easily turn into extreme empathy. Since his level of implication in the murders remains a secret, the readers' sense of what is moral is not threatened, and their *inter-world* emotions are free to lean towards empathy. In this way, when the truth is eventually revealed, the narratee is already biased by the sympathetic portrait of the target, and, as a result of the comparison between the two criminals, is inclined to perceive Dick as the one morally responsible for the crimes.

Frequency

Genette's sub-category of *frequency* examines the repetition of temporal lapses within the diegesis. In *In Cold Blood,* the main reiterative structure is the "partial ellipsis" explained above, in which *frequency* is employed to give "postponed significance" to previously void signifiers. Additionally, retrospective structures are sometimes used in Capote's novel to recount already-explained sequences. Genette labels these repetitions as "recalls", meaning "a type of narrative where the recurrences of the statement do not correspond to any recurrence of events" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 116). While, as we know, the novel's multi-perspectivism is "variable" and generally avoids re-examining the same episode through different focalizations, some overlaps occur throughout the novel. For instance, during Dick and Perry's interrogations (208-239), both criminals retrace their escape for the policemen, summarizing—or lying about, thus kindling the reader's complicity—the events already narrated in the previous two chapters. However, despite the variations in the diegetic *duration* and *frequency*, the most distinctive asynchronies in *In Cold Blood*'s narrative *tense* are asynchronies of *order*: analepses and prolepses.

Order

Order delves into the *story'*s re-arrangement of the *fabula*'s sequence. Consequently, it focuses on studying the "anachronies" that disrupt the chronological order of the events, namely narrative analepses and prolepses. As we have observed throughout this analysis, these temporal alterations are common in the diegesis. Analepses, for instance, constitute

more than a third of the novel. These flashbacks can be categorized as either "external analepsis", which elucidate the characters' past before the narration's incipit—mostly Perry's, whose importance for the emergence of extreme empathy has already been explained; or "internal analepsis" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 61), which revise plot events and are integrated into the just-mentioned "recalling" structure. In contrast to analepses, prolepses serve to foreshadow upcoming events, and although, as I will now explain, they are significant for the narrative, they are also less frequent. Beyond the uses of the analepses mentioned above—either external and biographical or internal "recallings"—, anachronies are particularly relevant in the first chapter of the novel, where analepses and prolepses produce two distinctive effects.

As previously noted, in the first three quarters of the novel, the diegesis is divided into two narrative perspectives. In the case of "The Last to See Them Alive", this juxtaposition of the victims' and the perpetrators' actions is complemented by a skillful manipulation of chronological *order*, what gives rise to a chrono-topic dialogue. I use the term chrono-topic because, through a combination of *mood* and *tense*, in this chapter the narrative shifts between different points in time (past and present) and different character perspectives (victims and perpetrators). This creates a layered storytelling effect where, through the characters' present actions and memories evoked by analepses, the reader gains access to detailed introductions for each of the six characters. An instance of this can be found in the presentation of Mrs. Clutter, who, taking a miniature from her collection while speaking with a neighbor, recalls, "Daddy gave them to me; I had a lovely childhood". This information allows the narration to introduce a brief biography of her, "[t]he only daughter of a prosperous wheat grower named Fox…" (25). This use of analepses not only accomplishes the purpose of presenting the characters, but it results in a literary construction that, in Steinem terms, perfectly

combines the horizontal rhythm of journalism with the vertical deepening of fiction (79). If, in conjunction with "parallel editing", analepses deepen characterization, the incorporation of prolepsis within this same framework will impact narrative rhythm and emotional reception. That is because, in this first chapter, prolepses help in creating an effect of fated disaster that conveys "the sense of awe we generally feel in the presence of tragedy, in this case a naturalistic tragedy" (Murray 134). As I see it, at least five narrative techniques partake in creating this impression of imminent disaster.

The first and most striking of these aspects is the insertion of harsh prolepses that announce, explicitly, the forthcoming death of the Clutter family. For instance, when Nancy is engaged in preparations 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). Another example of these premonitory flashforwards would be the moments in which the narrator clarifies that the character acting as focalizer is recounting "the last time they saw them [the Clutters] alive", as the title of this first chapter reads. This happens, for example, during a scene between Nancy and Kenyon, narrated from Mr. Helm's focalization: "'Because you're silly,' he said, tossing her the head of a flower, a wilted dahlia, which she jammed into her hair. Mr. Helm picked up his spade. […] 'And that,' he was to testify the next day, 'was the last time I seen them'" (39). Another of these formal devices—which I mentioned briefly before—involves narrative speed, linked to the sub-category of *duration*. In "The Last to See Them Alive", the mentioned analeptic pauses will progressively decrease towards the end of this first chapter, while the speed of the alternation of scenes will gradually increase. This acceleration creates the impression of a countdown towards the moment when, as announced at the beginning of the novel, "four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended *six human lives*" are fired (Capote,

In Cold Blood 3, my emphasis). The accelerating rhythm of the story appears to propel these two opposed and alternated realities—the Clutters' and their murderers'—towards a collision whose result, as the quote asserts, will ultimately be fatal for the six characters. A third tragic factor is added to this accelerating pace, namely the dramatic irony resulting from the anticipation at work in the novel's subtitle: "A true account of a multiple murder and its consequences". This deliberate "spoiler" informs the reader about the fate of the Clutters even before the beginning of the narration, acting like a paratextual prolepsis.[179] Consequently, besides the explicit prolepsis, the readership is prompted to interpret some of the family's actions as premonitions, what intensifies dramatically the prevailing aura of catastrophe. An illustrative instance of these signs includes Mr. Clutter's signing of a life insurance on the morning of his death and the insurance agent's playful comment on Mr. Clutter's expected longevity: "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). In the same vein, the admonition on Mrs. Clutter's Bible bookmark reads: "[t]ake ye heed, watch and pray for ye not know when the time is" (28).

The ominous atmosphere of the fictional world, conveyed through these prophetic episodes, is corroborated by at least two other narrative aspects. On the one hand, the opening description of the inhospitable atmosphere of Holcomb, which surrounds the Clutter's house with anguish: "The keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles" (3). On the other hand, when alternating the last moments of the bourgeois family with the parallel action of the ex-convicts, the narration connects both realities through shared

[179] This early anticipation of the characters' deaths may have an impact on the creation of extreme empathy towards Perry. The idea that the murders "end *six* human lives" also anticipates Perry's tragic end and, in doing so, may facilitate the readers' empathy for Perry.

circumstances. Murray comments on these connections as follows: "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" (135). Another example of this juxtaposition would be the first transition between both scenarios, which introduces the character of Perry and opens through a comparison of 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).[180] This structuring technique—adapted, as mentioned, from cinematographic "match-cuts" (Murray 135)—works as a unifying thread between "dos mundos muy distintos y condenados a no entenderse" (González De La Aleja 81) [9], but which, as the reader knows, are destined to coincide in an inevitable encounter. In fact, in Donald Pizer's opinion, this sense of an "imminent destiny" pursuing the characters is maintained throughout the whole novel. According to Pizer, although the analyzed chrono-topic dialogue achieves an especially dramatic result during the first chapter, in which it is oriented towards the narrative climax of the novel—the murder of the Clutters—, this double structure, being as it is linked to parallel editing, is to be maintained during "Persons Unknown" and "The Answer", which "juxtapose fleeing criminals and pursuing police" (113). The critic even argues that "Part IV contains a less obvious dual sequential narrative" (113), structured around a recurring reference to the gallows—"the Corner"—which represents Perry and Dick's fate. Thus, if the first chapter unfolds as a countdown to the Clutters' death, the other three chapters repeat this structure with new victims: the murderers. Therefore, for Pizer, all the chapters in the book generate a similar effect: "the inexorable

[180] For more information about how "parallel editing" and "match-cuts" shape the relationship between the killers and their victims, you may also refer to Creeger 1969.

coming together of two groups or units separated spatially but fated to converge" (114).

Hopefully, the last pages have illustrated how the arrangement of the *story*, as well as the effective use of temporal devices—such as gaps, analepses, or prolepses—can enhance the emotional impact of fictional events and characters. The purpose of this section—and in general, of this analysis of *In Cold Blood*'s *empathy builders*—was to demonstrate that *tense*, along with *voice* and *mood*, play a pivotal role in the arousal of *inter-world* emotions like extreme empathy. Nonetheless, even though my research focuses on narratological aspects, it is important to keep in mind that, in what concerns narrative emotions, form only functions if in conjunction with content. In Doležel's terms, we would say that the extensional and intensional levels of the fictional world are inseparable.[181] Therefore, it is crucial to embrace the plot's content as well as its formal representation, as both, in consonance, shape readers' reception and—importantly for my focus—their potential empathy with characters.

In this sense, the fostering of an effect of inevitable destiny just analyzed above is a compelling example of how emotionality arises from the conjunction of the novel's themes and the formal aspects expressing them. The impression of the characters being subjected to an "inevitable destiny"—the result of a specific interweaving of *voice, mood,* and *tense* techniques—is not strictly an *empathy builder*. However, just as it occurred in the category of *voice*, it contributes directly to the general emotionality of the text and the orientation of the readers' empathy. This "menacing" atmosphere will be equally essential, as we will see, for the novel's *emotional tone*: a narrative affect that acts as a background for *parasocial* relationships between characters and readers. In addition, the atmosphere of "tragic destiny" is inseparable from the thematic content of

[181] For an insightful analysis of the interrelations between Doležel's extensional and intensional levels in fictional worlds, you may refer to Ryan 1992.

the novel, and it gains its full significance in relation to it. At a thematic level, the sense of "tragic destiny" affects the representation of both the confrontation between the Clutters and the criminals, and the legal battle between the latter and the American penal system. As both González de la Aleja (1990) and Pizer (1971) remark, the omnipresence of "a shaping destiny [that] controls all life" (Pizer 114) elevates the narrative beyond the story of an isolated case of murder, to a parable of the whole American society. This symbolic interpretation is highly meaningful for the present analysis of the construction of extreme empathy in *In Cold Blood.* If the novel is considered a parable, its representation of Evil acquires a universal dimension, consequently diminishing Perry's culpability by treating it as an example of a social pattern. As I will now attempt to elucidate by analyzing the novel's thematic content through the theoretical framework of biopower philosophy, the novel's target of empathy appears, per this reading, as a mere symbolic figure entrapped in an inexorable system. In this way, the criminal would cease being a fictional agent and instead become, as González de la Aleja puts it, "la víctima de un engranaje legal que acabará matándolo" (89) [10].

Thematic Structure: Facing the Bourgeois Order

As I see it, the novel's themes and formal elements in *In Cold Blood* work together to shape a specific politico-emotional response. Many of the stylistic features discussed earlier—such as the introduction of documents, the use of a camera-like *voice*, and the evocation of a "tragic destiny"—reinforce the thematic focus of the novel. In my opinion, this thematic focus, in turn, enhances the potential for extreme empathy by primarily revolving around two facets: the social and economic division within the United States of America; and the country's judicial and psychiatric treatment of its

criminals. Given that both critical issues are related to the impact of politics on human lives, this section will employ some ideas on biopower as formulated by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. As I see it, this theoretical framework will facilitate an analysis of the impact of the novel's subject matters on its emotional hermeneutics. Hence, this section will focus on illustrating how biopolitical thought can be applied to Capote's novel, where it generates a criticism that is crucial for its interpretation and emotional resonance.

We have already observed so far how various stylistic traits in the novel—such as the ambience of "tragic destiny", the use of "parallel editing", and its transitions between scenes—, function as a unifying thread connecting the perpetrators, Perry and Dick, and their well-off victims, the Clutters. Thematically speaking, the collision meticulously woven in the initial chapter represents not only the convergence of two actions, but also the clash between the opposing poles of society: the marginalized outcasts and the privileged wealthy. Two social groups that coexist yet remain ignorant of each other. From a Foucauldian perspective, the Clutters and their murderers can be read as epitomizing the two categories within The Bourgeois Order: the Same and the Other.[182]

Michel Foucault coined the term "Bourgeois Order" to describe a social structure that, through a network of *dispositifs* and discourses, classifies citizens into what Miguel Morey, in *Lectura de Foucault* (78), calls the "Same" and the "Other"—a classification based on whether or not they conform to what Foucault terms "the Norm." According to Morey's interpretation—oriented towards clarifying the binomial division of the Norm, in which the Bourgeois Order is based—those considered "normal" constitute the Same, while those deviating from it—such as the mentally ill, criminals, or perverts—are labeled

[182] Although not focused on the representation of the Bourgeois Order, but in other aspects of his philosophy of biopower like the Panopticon, other Foucauldian readings of *In Cold Blood* can be found in Guest 1997 and Hickman 2005.

as Others. For Foucault, "selon à la classe où appartient les individus les conduiront au pouvoir ou à la prison" (*Surveiller et punir* 338-9) [11]. The French philosopher established a mutual dependency between both sides of the Norm, by which the existence of the Other allows for the Same to be defined and placed within the core of the Bourgeois Order. Morey explains this relation of co-dependence as follows: "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" (69) [12]. This structural necessity, by which the Same depends on the existence of an Other, leads Foucault to put forward one of his most influential arguments: that madness is a construct of psychiatric discourse.[183] According to this hypothesis, the *psy*-sciences—among other *dispositifs* developed during the 19th century—would condition individuals by classifying them into the order of Same or in the order of the Other. Otherness, embodied in a criminal or a mad person, is viewed as a "produit d'institution" (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 352) created because "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" (Morey 373) [13]. The Other functions as both the condition of possibility for the Bourgeois Order and its primary adversary: it creates outcasts to then isolate them, mend them and "normalize" them. As Foucault warns, their reintegration into the Order is practically unattainable, as the first punishment for the Other's alterity is the prohibition of producing discourse. Commenting on this aspect of Foucault's description of the Other's condition, Morey explains how the Other, whatever its incarnation, was denied, at the onset of modernity, their right to produce discourse: "En el Clasicismo, la voz del loco se condena a la reclusión puesto que se

[183] This thesis is a transversal idea in Michel Foucault's bibliography; however, it is mainly developed in his study of the social configuration of madness, *Historie de la folie* (1961).

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" (78) [14]. From what has already been disclosed in the formal analysis of the novel, certain aspects of the Bourgeois Order can already appear as central in the fictional world of *In Cold Blood*. For instance, Perry's account of himself, when viewed through this lens, emerges as a depiction of the social exclusion and stigmatization to which the Other is subjected. It is also apparent how, through Perry's position as focalizer and focalized, and the orientation of the novel's empathy, Capote's narration deviates from the paradigmatic representation of the Bourgeois Order by putting aside the characters that embody "the Same". Besides giving the voice to the figure of the Other, *In Cold Blood* provides a more nuanced representation of this social organization. On the one hand, the narrative puts face-to-face these "dos mitades complementarias" (Morey 69) [15] embodied by the Clutters and the ex-convicts. On the other hand, it vividly illustrates the power mechanisms employed by the Bourgeois Order to perpetuate the latter's existence on the fringes of society. As I will elaborate in this section, the novel's portrayal of each of these aspects gives rise to a corresponding *empathy builder* that will shift the blame from Perry to the Bourgeois Order. This depiction of the Same and the Other transforms the novel into a universal social tale with a clear moral: the only difference between both groups lies in their conditions of emergence—in this case, either the American dream or the American nightmare.

The Same and the Other, Two Sides of the Same Coin

The novel's first reference to the Bourgeois Order—the confrontation between the Other and the Same—is primarily conveyed through two techniques that I have previously

described and which are linked to the novel's *tense* and *mood*: the evocation of a fateful atmosphere and the comparison between two characters—one embodying the Same and the other representing the Other.[184] Concerning the first of these narrative devices, the aura of inevitable fate augurs the killings, and it does so by emphasizing their symbolic nature. We observed earlier how some devices—narrative rhythm, prolepsis, match-cuts or spatial descriptions—transmit the protagonists' destiny, as if they were confronting a force greater than themselves. Additionally, two other narrative choices signal Perry Smith, the novel's ultimate exponent of Otherness, as the one called to fulfill this destiny and perish at the hands of the Bourgeois Order. On the one hand, the superstitious young man explicitly acknowledges in more than one occasion that, before committing the crime, he senses 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). Perry's superstitions are in fact a narrative leitmotif, being also reflected, of instance, in his thoughts of leaving the Clutter house during the night of the murders: "And I thought, Why don't I walk off? Walk to the highway, hitch a ride. I sure Jesus didn't want to go back in that house. And yet—How can I explain this? *It was like I wasn't part of it. More as though I was reading a story. And I had to know what was going to happen. The end.*" (234, my emphasis). On the other hand, his perceived pre-ordination aligns with Wille Jay's letter, reproduced in the first pages of the novel, whose content is meant to resonate in the readers' ears throughout the novel. In his farewell letter, Perry's friend had already warned him that his perdition would be his "his desire to hurt" those who, unlike him, "are happy or content" (42). This document constitutes, thus, not only a first insight into Perry's complex character, but also a prediction of the crime and the reasons behind it.

[184] The comparison between the novel's members of the Same (the Clutters) and the Other (Perry) has been previously explored in González de la Aleja 1990, whose work has influenced the upcoming comments on this aspect of *In Cold Blood*.

As a result of Wille Jay's words and his own premonitions, Perry appears as a puppet without control of his own destiny that encounters in Holcomb the *denouement* that all his unsuccessful life had been preparing him for.[185] In these terms, he is no longer the murderer, but one of the murders' victims: one of the *six* human lives that the shotguns have ended.

According to González de la Aleja, the second mechanism employed to transform the Clutter case into a symbolic representation of the effects of an asymmetrical social order is the novel's set of comparisons between those characters that represent the Same, and Perry, who embodies the Other. The latter, the target of empathy, is a key element in these comparisons, which relate him, respectively, to Nancy and Herbert Clutter. In relation to the first comparison, González de la Aleja argues that Perry and Nancy assume identical roles in their confronted narrative lines: both are the primary victims of a shared catastrophe. The similarities between the two characters are evident in the first pages, and they are manifest in their final conversation: while speaking with the teenager, Perry realizes that both are promising artists, sensible beings, outdoor people, and animal lovers (235-236). Despite these shared qualities, Perry and Nancy occupy opposing social positions. The Clutters' daughter is defined by her neighbors as a "pretty and popular" girl that "made everybody feel happy about themselves" (48). She is a paradigm of the Same, this "happy and content" people that Perry's miserable life has driven him to resent. Consequently, this implicit comparison highlights the arbitrary nature of the Bourgeois Order and underscores the injustice of the Norm by bringing together, in tragedy, two similar individuals with divergent lives whose outcomes are shaped by their "conditions of emergence" (Butler, *Giving an Account of*

[185] This aspect is also identified by Manuel González de la Aleja, who states that "[t]odos los personajes de Capote aparecen atrapados de una forma u otra por el destino" (86) [16].

Oneself 8). As González de la Aleja argues, the ultimate purpose of this comparison "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" (75) [17]. After this analysis, González de la Aleja identifies another association that also illustrates the polarizing functioning of this system, although through a set of differences: those between the practical and successful Mr. Clutter and the dreamy, socially stigmatized figure of Perry.

The presentation of Perry's and Mr. Clutter's respective lives and personalities already reveals the differences between them. Mr. Clutter is the head of the "perfect" bourgeois family, whose exemplarity is reiterated several times in the novel. For instance, talking about the Clutters, Nancy's boyfriend, Bobby Rupp, voices the feeling of the whole Holcomb community when he declares that: "There wasn't any family like them" (48). Among other examples, this admiration will be made explicit again through the testimony of a schoolteacher, who relates the effect of the Clutters' murders in Holcomb to their embodiment of the Norm: "Feeling wouldn't run half so high if this had happened to anyone except the Clutters. Anyone less admired. Prosperous. Secure. But that family represented everything people hereabouts really value and respect, and that such a thing could happen to them—well, *it's like being told there is no God*. It makes life seem pointless" (84, my emphasis). The head of such ideal family, Mr. Clutter is equally depicted as a model for his community and "a proud man" that "made something of his life" (73). Conversely—as the narrative constantly repeats—, his killer has no family, no friends, and no material possessions. Perry expresses his solitude when he ruminates: "He did give a damn [about his own life]—but who had ever given a damn about him?" (43). Later in the novel, his 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" (288-289). Perry's and Clutter's material situations are also reflected in their interpersonal relations with other characters: while Perry is said to have "few personal relationships with other people" but "a great need of friendship" (289), Mr. Clutter is presented as an outstanding man in Holcomb, but an authoritative figure for his children and wife, whose love he seemingly takes for granted. This contrast between Herbert Clutter's public image and his private life is highlighted in the narration. For example, right after labelling him as "the community's most widely known citizen" (3), the novel depicts Mr. Clutter forcing Nancy to break up with his boyfriend for being a Roman Catholic, arguing that "his laws were his laws" (6). In relation to this, Melissa Noel defends that the contraposition between Perry and Mr. Clutter is generated not only through their actions, but also via the novel's rhetoric. Comparing Perry's and Mr. Clutter's description, the critic comments that in the latter, "the voice is far more detached […], and the diction is less expressive. The syntax, too, is less complex" (52). From this perspective, the coldness of the farmer, and his portrait, would be influenced by the novel's linguistic choices.[186] With all, although Perry's and Mr. Clutter's characters are never directly compared in the novel, their multiple differences—concerning their social and material positions, their personality, or their aspirations, which are sprinkled throughout the narrative, turn them into contraries. Within the logic of the Same and the Other, each one seems to be embodying a facet of this differential distribution at the heart of the Foucauldian Bourgeois Order. As a result of this contrast, the reader may perceive Perry and Mr. Clutter as two sides of the same coin: an allegory of the asymmetry of the American social system.

[186] The use of rhetoric to manipulate the reader's response towards a character has been further reviewed in Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, where this literary phenomenon and its effects on empathic reception are studied through extracts of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (74-77).

A Symbolic Interpretation: from Motiveless "Fictional Particulars" to Revengeful "Actual Universals"

We have observed how the novel first depicts the Norm by turning Perry into the paradigm of the Other: an Other predestined, as anticipated by the premonitions, to attack the Same because, as the comparisons described above settle, he was born in opposition to its members. As I mentioned at the beginning of the section, this thematic representation turns the novel's "fictional particulars" into "actual universals" which stand for their social position and their adherence to the "Norm" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 477). Indeed, Perry's social "abnormality" is a persistent subject throughout the narration, a concern that he even verbalizes: "a notion that he 'might not be normal, maybe insane'" (257). In the same vein, he and Dick also recognize their alienation from the Bourgeois Order and gradually become aware of how the system has marginalized them to preserve its stability and is willing to eliminate them for the same reason. In terms of the philosophy of biopower, the value assigned to their lives turns Perry and Dick into embodiments of both the Foucauldian Other, and what Agamben calls the *homo sacer*.

As outlined by the Italian thinker, the *homo sacer* is a subject unworthy to be sacrificed but whose life can be taken with impunity, because it is a *bare life*, a valueless life. Conversely, the *sovereign subject*—the category to which Mr. Clutter and his family belong—exists in direct contrast to the *homo sacer*, as his rights are fully recognized. Therefore, to take the life of a sovereign subject is a crime, whereas the *bare life* of the *homo sacer* is valueless. This contrast is suggested in *In Cold Blood* since the beginning. According to George Creeger, one subtle way in which Capote starts indicating the

cruelty to which the criminals are subjected is by episodes in which the Holcomb community mistreats animals. Indeed, the novel includes descriptions of hunting and relates the death of Kenyon Clutter's horse, which died from exhaustion. For Creeger, the novel establishes then a simile between the condition of the animals and that of Perry and Dick. Therefore, the scholar seems to agree with the current biopower-oriented reading when he expounds that:

> All of this attention paid to "real" animals is, of course, part of Capote's narrative strategy: in detailing the attitudes assumed towards animals (and frequently the violence done to them) by his characters, he prepares us for understanding more fully the relationship between the criminal-animal and the community. Put discursively, this relationship may be defined as follows: in denominating the criminal as animal, the community affectively separates him from its own conscious self-image—that of the group of human beings. (96)

As Perry recognizes the value that society gives to his animal-like *bare life*—determined by his origins and exacerbated by a lack of opportunities—, he develops a sense of injustice that he projects towards the *sovereign subjects*. Throughout the novel, this sentiment is symbolized through the leitmotif of the parrot in his dreams, described as "an avenging angel who savaged his enemies" (258). Perry's desire for revenge ultimately motivates the crimes: the Clutters represent the *sovereign subject* and are killed for this reason—an interpretation reinforced by the novel's plot. This conversion of *In Cold Blood*'s protagonists into "actual universals" brings about an "interpretative detour" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 477) that constitutes the first—and paramount—*empathy builder* within the novel's thematic structure. Through its lens, Perry is not the perpetrator of the Clutters' murder. Instead, he is the Other that punishes the Same for having withheld a life of privilege and opportunity from him.

From the novel's outset, the Clutter murders are characterized as "apparently motiveless" (75) by the KBI. During the investigation, the detectives and the Holcomb community also believe the death of Mr. Clutter to be "the criminals' main objective" (149) as he was clearly "the most abused" (76). One could think that Perry's confession of the crimes—the resolution of the murders' "enigma"—corroborates the thesis of the crimes' randomness, as, regarding Herbert Clutter's demise, the perpetrator attests: "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). The brutal absurdity of this sentence lies, of course, in the sharp contrast between the initial appreciation of the victim and the subsequent violent action. However, this formulation is a clue to understanding how the narrative shifts from an interpretation of the crimes as the senseless violence of one individual on another, to a symbolic explanation oriented towards the revenge of the underdog on the Bourgeois Order. This "interpretative detour" once again centers on Perry, and more specifically, on the revelation of his involvement in the murders and the motivations underlying them. Until Perry unveils the truth, the novel not only suggests that the crimes lack a clear motive, but also implicitly signal Dick as the executing hand. This implication arises from the commented contrast in the characterizations of Dick and Perry, which leads readers to "fill the void" of the events at the Clutter house in alignment with these characters' predominant attitudes. Based on the information provided by the narration, we may interpret that Dick is responsible for the murders. However, this interpretation is discredited by Perry's analeptic confession. To understand the revelation that unfolds in that moment, it might be useful to turn to Doležel's reformulation of action theory, intended to interpret the nature of characters' actions. According to the Czech theorist, actions can be divided into four modes—rational, irrational, impulsive, or akratic—plus "insane" acting, which falls outside the taxonomy, as it equates to the force

of nature (*Heterocosmica* 71).[187] When lacking all the facts—for instance, because of some form of ellipsis—readers tend to fill the informational void through rationality, thus guessing that the action mode of the characters during those events was rational and coherent with their nature. In *In Cold Blood,* this hermeneutic logic, if applied to the pseudo-ellipsis of the crimes' night, probably results in the belief that the compassionate gestures towards the victims are Perry's doing, while Dick is accountable for the murders. Through Perry's confession, the readership learns that the murders did not result from Dick's rational mode of action, but from Perry's akratic one. From the perspective of action theory, then, Perry's immoral deeds can be read as examples of "akratic" actions—those motivated by a dominance of impulsive emotions and natural "drives" over the "practical reasoning" of which the doer is, nevertheless, conscious (*Heterocosmica* 72). Overall, the revelation of Perry's culpability prompts the narrative to abandon the theory of the crimes' randomness to confront a new set of questions: what motivates Perry's akratic acting? How can the impulsive killer prevail over the previously depicted sensitive man? To answer these queries, the novel turns to an exploration of Bourgeois Order, thereby exonerating its target of empathy.

From that point onward, the crimes are interpreted as a consequence of Perry's repressed rage towards the Bourgeois Order: the social organization that condemned him to a *bare life,* and that, as noted before, is personified by the Clutters, particularly by Herbert Clutter. This interpretation of the murders is reinforced by several *mood* devices in the novel, such as official documents, Perry's direct speech, and Al Dewey's focalization. Dewey strengthens this reading, for example, when he reflects on Perry's

[187] According to Lubomír Doležel's definitions, "rational" acting is "guided" by reason, whereas in "irrational" acting, "the import of cognitive factors and practical reasoning is minimal". In between these two poles, we find "impulsive" acting, which is "motivated by drives" that suppress reasoning because of a "reflex"; and "akratic" acting, by which "the person is aware of the rational path but is deflected from it under the pressure of drive or passion" (*Heterocosmica* 71-72).

confession and concludes that "the crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act" (239). Yet, the aspect that most clearly demonstrates this "interpretative detour" in the narration is the first one in the list: the insertion of archival documents, more specifically, a scientific article titled "Murder Without Apparent Motive". This document conjectures that, during the assassinations, Perry was "under a mental eclipse" that made him perceive his victim as "a key figure in some past traumatic configuration" (293). While commenting this article, the narrator explains this interpretation of the murders as follows:

> When Smith attacked Mr. Clutter he was under a mental eclipse, deep inside a schizophrenic darkness, for it was not entirely a flesh-and-blood man he "suddenly discovered" himself destroying, but "a key figure in some past traumatic configuration": his father? the orphanage nuns who had derided and beaten him? The hated Army sergeant? The parole officer who had ordered him to "stay out of Kansas"? One of them, or all of them. (294)

From the perspective of biopower, this quote implies that, the night of the crimes, Perry was in fact destroying nothing but the *sovereign subject.*[188] The victim would no longer be Mr. Clutter, but a personification of all authoritative figures within a disciplinary apparatus whose discourses have constructed Perry as the Other, and condemned him to exclusion: a category the novel suggests may even include his own father.[189] Ultimately, Perry himself will acknowledge the murders as an unconscious revenge against the entire system. In a moment of *anagnorisis* reproduced twice during the narration, the young

[188] Elena Ortells seconds this idea by stating that: "El ataque a los Clutter es el ataque al corazón de América no sólo geográfica sino también socialmente […] El tema que 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" (*Ficción y no-ficción* 81) [18]

[189] In fact, George R. Creeger identifies a parallelism between Mr. Clutter and Mr. ("Lone Wolf") Smith, father of the murderer, based on the idea that "both men are loners, partly by inclination, partly because neither seems able to fully love or to elicit love" (98).

man admits that: "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, my emphasis).[190]

In this way, the Clutter case becomes a symbol of the collision between the Other and the Same, or, in Capote's terms, between "America, desperate, savage, violent. America in collision with sane, safe, insular even smug America—people who have every chance, against people who have none".[191] In summary, the novel's thematic content gives place to an interpretation by which Perry embodies the universal condition of this "desperate" Other, whose immoral actions are predetermined by the injustices experienced and thus, unavoidable.[192] At this juncture, it becomes evident how the thematic structure of *In Cold Blood* cultivates extreme empathy for Perry. It turns the target into a symbol, a marionette at the hands of his origins and emotions, to the extent that the reader is almost compelled despite all odds, to feel empathy. However, the deconstruction of Perry's initial identity as "a criminal" does not conclude here. The universalist configuration at work in the novel is highlighted by another representation of the Bourgeois Order: the one that emerges from the encounter between the Other and the ensemble of *dispositifs* that sustain this social structure. In turn, this second thematic aspect gives rise to one final *empathy builder*: a rewriting of the binary opposition criminal-victim. Perry and Dick—alongside the Clutters—emerge as victims of the true perpetrator: the Bourgeois Order and its "mauvaise organisation sociale".[193] To close this analysis, I will turn my attention to the last chapter of Capote's novel, "The Corner".

[190] The literal repetition of this sentence can be found on page 294.
[191] Capote, qtd. in González de la Aleja 81.
[192] For Elena Ortells, Perry is mainly portrayed as a victim, an individual who is "el resultado de un determinismo social que lo condena irremisiblemente a un submundo de incomprensión, violencia y locura" (*Ficción y no-ficción* 82) [19].
[193] "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" (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 336) [20].

In this last part, the State's punitive apparatus will evaluate, diagnose, judge, and execute Dick and Perry for their actions. This process is depicted as the end of a cause-and-effect structure, in which Perry murders the Clutters because of his social conditionings, and, in turn, society murders him because of his crimes. As Ortells points out, this consecution appears as "una demostración de la circulación de la venganza" (*Ficción y no-ficción* 82) [21]: an "eye for an eye" scenario that dissolves the puritan Manichean distinction between good and bad that supposedly regulates America; as a result, pure Evil is no longer recognizable.[194]

"As Surviving Deep Underwater": Disciplinary *Dispositifs* against the Other

Foucault's theories on the modern disciplinary power find a vivid illustration in the novel's concluding pages. To elucidate the functioning of the *dispositifs* that will punish the criminals, the narration once again employs form to reinforce content: to offer a complete portrayal of the penitentiary, judiciary, and psychiatric powers, "The Corner" combines the intimacy of Perry's focalization, which includes even his diary entries, with the "zero focalization" of the narrator's *voice*. Apparently, the omniscient narrator serves here to describe the disciplinary processes in a documentary fashion, thereby minimizing the subjectivity of this chapter. However, the reportage-like detail of the omniscient narrator ends up reinforcing the satiric depiction of the trial, in a way that it comes across as a pantomime not far from the representation of the justice system in novels such as

[194] With reference to Truman Capote's bibliography, Elena Ortells claims that "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" (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 32) [22].

Franz Kafka's *The Process* or Fyodor Dostoevsk's *The Brothers Karamazov.* Stephen Wöll explains this effect as follows:

> For instance, the text gives an almost comedic degree of attention to the look and dress of people at court, through which they seem to signal and overcompensate their belonging to the same dominant or "correct" reality of the authorities who hierarchically and discursively preside over them. On the other hand, the local Kansan characters are seen as being occupied in their exercise and confirmation of moral justice, rationality, and common sense as the founding pillars of middle-class identity. (58)

Besides this satiric use of zero focalization, the narration explicitly presents the trial as biased. For instance, the sentence seems to have been passed before the allegation, given that the "popular jury" is selected precisely because of their endorsement of capital punishment: "Another twenty won dismissal […] because they opposed capital punishment" (264). Clearly, the main injustice that *In Cold Blood* condemns is the death penalty, the epitome of how, in René Girard's words, "les décisions de l'autorité judiciaire s'affirment toujours comme le dernier mot de la vengeance" (29) [23]. However, I believe Capote's novel denounces not only capital punishment, but the arbitrariness of the law in general. Ortells seems to point towards the same interpretation when, commenting on the trial's irregularities, she concludes that "la novela encierra una dura crítica al sistema judicial norteamericano, cuestionando una práctica que no resulta equitativa" (*Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 279) [24]. This more general rebuke becomes evident when, during the trial, the judge refuses to accept the psychiatric assessment of the doctors, to the disbelief of the narrator, who nonetheless chooses to include the evaluation in the story (286). It is also apparent when the narrative pauses to include self-explanatory

passages criticizing the American prison system and its despotic nature.[195] By portraying the law as a "legitimate fiction", the novel acquires a new philosophical perspective, as it echoes the long-standing philosophical concern with what Derrida calls "the mystical foundation of authority" which characterizes the institution and enforcement of laws as acts based on "a performative and therefore interpretative violence" (Derrida, "The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" 13). This perception of injustice contributes to empathic engagement, and is explicitly denounced in the novel through an instance of *intradiegetic empathy*: a conversation between two journalists that unfolds as follows,

> "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 manifesto against capital punishment is pivotal for thematic analysis, as it presents the Bourgeois Order as the ultimate criminal in the novel. Indeed, the hermeneutic significance of this dialogue extends even to the paratext, as it reveals the double entendre behind the novel's title: as Perry states, "Those prairiebillys, they'll vote to hang fast as pigs eat slop. Look at their eyes. I'll be damned if I'm the only killer in the courtroom" (280). Nevertheless, in comparison with how they murdered the Clutters, the State's murder of Dick and Perry will be slower and more brutal.

During the trial and the events that follow it, Perry and Dick will gradually fully

[195] For example, "In the disposition of capital cases in the United States, the median elapsed time between sentence and execution is approximately seventeen months. Recently, in Texas, an armed robber was electrocuted one month after his conviction; but in Louisiana, at the present writing, two rapists have been waiting for a record twelve years" (323).

embody the condition of *homo sacer*. The omnipotent Bourgeois institutions will ultimately reduce them to "human victims […] killed but not sacrificed" (Agamben, *Homo sacer* 53), since sacrifice implies a loss for society, while Perry and Dick are regarded as dispensable. As enemies of the social body, both criminals are objectified as "un bien social" (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 129) [25], dispossessed of their freedom and of the control over their own existence—underscored by the prison's thwarting of Perry's suicide attempts. The social *dispositifs* identify Perry and Dick as Others, dictate over their bodies and, as the disciplinary power exercises society's right to take "revenge", it finally condemns them to death, ironically requested by the jury "not in vengeance, but in all humbleness…" (295). In fact, Dick recognizes this "eye-for-an-eye" logic and, while waiting in the Death Row, 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, *In Cold Blood* 328).

After enduring "almost two thousand days" (329) in the Death Row cells—described by Perry as surviving "deep underwater" (313)—, he and Dick are executed by hanging, a "merciful" technique that does not inflict physical suffering, as two journalists comment during Dick's execution: "'Uh-huh, but he don't feel nothing. Wouldn't be humane if he did'/ 'I suppose they feed them a lot of pills. Sedatives'" (332). The use of a "painless" method is also significant from the perspective of biopower, as it conforms to Mably's principle. According to Foucault, the contemporary penal *dispositif*, generalized in the 19th century, punishes by following Gabriel Bonnot de Mably's principle: "Que le châtiment, si je puis ainsi parler, frappe l'âme plutôt que le corps" (Mably 326) [26]. This principle stands as the basis of the penal system that Foucault calls "la pénalité de l'incorporel" (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 23) [27]. According to this penal system, then, sentences must not imply any physical damage for the convict, but the total annulation of

his rights. The intention to punish the criminal's interiority arises from a previous change in the object to be punished: from the 19th century on, criminality resides in the soul of the criminals and not in their material acts. For Foucault, this change is "lo que da origen a la penalidad moderna" (Morey 322) [28]. These ideas at the basis of the Bourgeois Order's *dispositifs* are widely illustrated in Capote's novel, which portraits, for instance, how these different institutions associate to punish abnormality as a social threat. Hence, the novel's trial evaluates not Perry and Dick's crimes, but their criminality itself and the danger they pose to the Norm. Such examination becomes clear, for instance, when, during the judicial process, they are asked to give "an account of themselves". In the same vein, the witnesses' depositions consist of testimonies of their impressions about the evil or good nature of the criminals beyond the crimes commited. As Foucault said, these instances display how "on juge en même temps des passions, des instincts, des anomalies, des infirmités, des inadaptations, des effets de milieu ou d'hérédité" (*Surveiller et punir* 25) [29]. The examination of the criminal's biography and soul, according to Foucault, made it necessary for the penal discourse and the psychiatric one to collaborate. This modern union is equally visible in *In Cold Blood*, in which the psychiatric discourse is represented by means of the medical examination conducted on the protagonists. The goal of this analysis is to determine if, according to the taxonomy imposed by science, the criminals are "insane, imbeciles or idiots, unable to comprehend their position" (Capote, *In Cold Blood* 258). Therefore, Dick's "paedophilic tendencies" (270), as well as Perry's "schizophrenic reactions" (290) are diagnosed and evaluated to clarify, as Esther Jordana explains, "no allò que el subjecte 'ha fet' sinó el que 'podria arribar a fer'" (42) [30]. By means of this trial and his subsequent execution, Perry finally reaches the destiny his life has been leading him to. However—and significantly for the current analysis—, his last words emerge as an apology and a final plea for 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 system in which, as Perry writes in his diary, "the rich never hang. Only the poor and friendless" (249).

The panoramic view that the novel offers of the cruelty of the American legal system—primarily narrated from the viewpoint of its victim, Perry—functions as a final thematic *empathy builder*. After having humanized Perry and turned him to a personification of Otherness, the narrative strengthens the possibility of empathy for him by shifting its focus to the Evil equally present in a social system whose acts may appear to the narratee to be as morally reprehensible as the Clutter murders. As Pizer puts it, by the end of the novel, we are "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 117). Thus, as we have observed in the last pages, an analysis of *In Cold Blood* demonstrates how the intensional/thematic and extensional/formal levels mutually reinforce each other to generate a well-defined *parasocial* structure that traverses the entire fictional world. In this case, the *parasocial* relations that the novel proposes to the readership are conditioned by unique emotional demands. Through the various *empathy builders*, the narrative suggests a reversal of the "hegemonic" emotional reception of a crime story: sympathy for the victims and anger towards the perpetrators. Instead, *In Cold Blood* directs both its emotional and discursive focus on the Other and ends up proposing an interpretation that *necessitates* the emotional understanding of the criminal. In so doing, Capote's fictional world offers a new perspective of the hegemonic social order in which, in Morey's words,

> 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. (302, my emphasis) [31]

By making the "immoral" discourse emotionally available, Capote's prose proposes, from the perspective of narrative emotions, new empathic possibilities; and from the perspective of epistemology, a reflection on human Evil that participates in what Jacques Rancière calls "le partage du sensible", as it *"*rend visible ce qui était invisible" (12) [32].

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

> Ceux qui tuent sont des hommes, comme ceux qui sont tués, c'est cela qui est terrible. [1]
>
> Max Aue

Summary of the Novel and Critical Reception

Les bienveillantes (2006), by Franco-American writer Jonathan Littell, presents the fictional memoirs of a former Nazi agent, Maximilien "Max" Aue. In his career as a SS officer, Aue participated in the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* or "final solution to the Jewish question", an experience that—among many others—he revisits in the narration. This unconventional protagonist is framed within an equally unusual narrative structure, divided into seven chapters that follow the sequence of a Bach suite. Through this

intersemiotic transposition, the prose of each chapter is influenced by the rhythm of the dance that names it—from toccata to gigue.[196] This division not only provides the novel with exceptional variability but also assists readers in navigating Aue's trajectory. As the following summary will illustrate, without the division into seven chapters, the novel would be overwhelming.

The first chapter of *Les bienveillantes*, titled "Toccata", unfolds in the present of the narrating act, sometime in the seventies. Maximilien Aue, now a middle-aged man who has "tombé en bourgeoisie", runs a lace factory in the north of France. Despite his manifest homosexuality, he is also married "avec une certaine répugnance" to a woman and, "malheureusement", he is also the father of twins (Littell 19) [2]. In this prologue, Aue also announces his intention to write his war memoirs, therefore setting the stage for the analepsis that occupies the rest of the novel. The purpose of his secondary narrative is equally proclaimed in this introduction: he writes his experiences as Nazi officer neither as a way of justifying himself in front of his readership—"je n'ai rien à justifier" (12)—nor to be pardoned. As he declares, "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) [3]. Instead, he insists, he writes merely to entertain himself. Like the musical piece after which it is named, this chapter works as a prelude, is freer in its introspective style, and enjoys considerable independence from the *story* that follows it. Aue's long analepsis starts in the following chapter, "Allemandes I et II", where he depicts his experiences as a member of the *Einsatzgruppen*—mobile killing squads—in the East Front. In this first stage of his career, his task was to report the mass murders of Jews and Bolsheviks in Ukraine, Crimea, and the Caucasus. The *allegro* of the rapid succession of events at the first part

[196] For more information on intersemiotic transposition, you may refer to Aktulum 2017. For a deeper insight into the influence of Bach's symphony in the narrative, you can consult Littell & Millet 2007.

of this second chapter, which would be “Allemande I”, contrasts with the posterior quiet *moderato* of “Allemande II”. This variation of rhythm that appears to divide the chapter into two different “allemandes”, starts when Aue’s frenetic war actions are interrupted by a calm stay in a balneary, where he tries to heal from his psychosomatic crises of vomit, fever, and diarrhea. After his partial recovery, and as a punishment for his disagreement about a Jew 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, saved, and brought back to Germany by his loyal—and only—friend Thomas. In Berlin, he will spend a period of convalescence whose oneiric nature reflects the sinuosity of the chapter’s movement, “Sarabande”. Having ameliorated from his wounds, Aue uses his military leave to go to Antibes to visit his mother and stepfather, with whom he has a troubled 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. From this position, he strives to improve the productivity of the work camps in collaboration with personalities such as Himmler or Eichmann. This job also leads him to visit the extermination camps in Poland. During those events, we are introduced to the characters of Weser and Clemens, two French policemen who pursue Max for being the main suspect in his mother’s murder. As the composition that entitles it, the following chapter, “Air”, is a monologic piece. It covers 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, and be rescued from his confinement, once again, by Thomas. 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, Max, with Thomas's aid, gets rid of the two French inspectors harassing him. Then, he murders his only friend to steal from him a false French passport and ensure himself an escape from the Allies.

Despite the challenge posed by its magnitude—more than nine hundred pages—, Littell's novel achieved significant commercial and critical success. A proof of this acclaim is its reception of the Prix Goncourt 2006, the highest award in French literature for a prose work. This public recognition prompted academia to approach *Les bienveillantes* with great interest, resulting in multiple papers and even a monograph devoted to it: the monographic volume *Writing the Holocaust Today. Critical Perspectives on Jonathan Littell's* The Kindly Ones, edited by Barjonet & Razinsky in 2012, which alludes to many of the novel's main critical issues, as its adherence to "perpetrator literature" (Razinsky 2008, Coquio 2012) or to the historical genre (Popkin 2012, Hahn 2012), its aesthetics of violence and incest (Nivat 2012, Kuon 2010), and its intertextuality (Von Koppenfels 2012). Not all literary critics praised Littell's exhaustive project. As noted by Barjonet & Razinsky, *Les bienveillantes* managed to "overcome the so-called Holocaust fatigue of so many audiences" (8), and it did so through an innovative approach to the Shoah. As a result, precisely, of its transgressive form and perspective, the novel faced criticism for its "pornification of violence," its "simulation of authenticity" (Manoschek 2008) and for inducing empathy for the perpetrator (Jonge et al. 2022; Richards 2009). As follows from what has been sketched here, criticism has mainly focused on two aspects of the narrative: its "ethically questionable" *voice*, and its "lack of realism", which, returning once again to the reality-fiction binary, has sparked controversy around the novel's genre classification (Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling* 218). In the following paragraphs, I will tackle these critical debates in a general manner.

This approach not only serves as a fitting introduction to Littell's intricate narrative, but also as a first approach to its efforts in fostering extreme empathy.

In terms of historical accuracy, Max Aue's involvement in most of Nazi Germany actions—evoked by the summary above—has led critics to draw a comparison between *Les bienveillantes* and Winston Groom's *Forrest Gump* (Gate 2009; Lalami 2009). The protagonist's implausible omnipresence during the Second World War, combined with his many unbelievable experiences, has raised doubts about the narrative's credibility and, consequently, its classification as a "historical novel", even though these imaginative elements coexist with an almost absurd level of historical detail, reflecting the thorough background research typical of the historical sub-genre.[197] This paradox has prompted Raffaello Palumbo Mosca to propose categorizing *Les bienveillantes* as a "hybrid novel" halfway between the historical and the fantastic sub-genres. According to the Italian scholar, hybrid novels differ from documentary ones in that, while the latter "simply aim to chronicle facts in order to check their truth and eventually rectify vulgate interpretations of them"; hybrid novels "start of historical facts but transcend mere facts in order to convey a deeper archetypical, meaning of human history" (2-3). But it is not easy to achieve the balance between the specific and the universal that hybrid novels strive for. According to historian Jeremy D. Popkin, in *Les bienveillantes*, the combination of historical elements with unlikely ones complicates this portrait of the "Nazi" as an "actual universal" (Doležel). In Popkin's words:

> One cannot have it both ways: if *The Kindly Ones* is meant to tell us something about what actually happened in Nazi-occupied Europe between 1941 and 1945,

[197] Barjonet & Razinsky refer to this thorough background research and unveil that "before writing the novel, Littell is said to have read some two hundred history books and, having worked for several years with the NGO 'Action Against Hunger' in conflict-ridden areas, to have drawn on his personal experiences of war and barbarism" (7).

> then Littell can legitimately be taken to task for ignoring the historical knowledge we now have about the perpetrators; if it is to be understood as a nonreferential exercise of the imagination, then it is risky to regard it as a source of factual insight into their psychology. (198)

Amid this blend of "historical facts" and their deeper meaning (Mosca), what is clear to Popkin and other scholars like Hannah Meretoja is that the ultimate object of Littell's narrative—the universal reference to which the fantastic elements of the novel would ultimately point, according to the definition of "hybrid novels" above—is the psychology of the Holocaust's perpetrators. For Popkin, Littell aims at demonstrating, more specifically, how the perpetrators of the Holocaust "were, in most respects, rather ordinary individuals, whose extraordinary behavior can be explained in terms of mundane psychological processes of rationalization, conformity to group norms, and obedience to authority" (197).

In a sense, *Les bienveillantes*' hybridity (Palumbo Mosca), as well as its transgressive portrayal of a historical episode that, until then, had been narrativized within defined ethical boundaries, appear to resonate with the artistic practices of the so-called "postmemory" generation, which has left its mark on literature since the beginning of this century. Coined by Marianne Hirsch in 1992,[198] the term "postmemory" refers to "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that

[198] Marianne Hirsch coined the term in her study of Spiegelman's *Maus*, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory" (1992). Later, she delved into the implications of the term in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997). Although "postmemory" is represented in works such as Spiegelman's *Maus*, it is not a literary trend and does not imply any specific style. Instead, it describes the fictionalization of past events by a generation that did not suffer them directly. Therefore, it applies to artworks that are based on this trans-generational relationship, which, according to Quilez, are "necessarily governed by different semiotic principles" than first-person testimonies (62). Even if Hirsch's "postmemory" is the term that has been popularized among academia, as the critic herself points out ("The Generation of Post-Memory" 105), the same idea can also be found referred to as "absent memory" (Fine 1988), "inherited memory," "belated memory," "prosthetic memory" (Lury 1998, Landsberg 2004), "mémoire trouée" (Raczymow 1994), "mémoire des cendres" (Fresco 1984), "vicarious witnessing" (Zeitlin 1998) and "received history" (Young 1997).

preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them" (Hirsh, "The Generation of Post-Memory" 103). This "inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge" has given place to narratives of the past whose creativity transcends the documental or testimonial to reconcile past facts and present interpretation, memory, and imagination (Hirsh 107). "Postmemory" advocates then for bridging the gap between fiction and memory. Specifically, as Hirsh explains, it concentrates on "traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension" which "happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present", a description in which the Shoah fits ("The Generation of Postmemory" 107). It is true, however, that the conditions of emergence of *Les bienveillantes* distance from the paradigm of postmemory literature. As specified in Hirsh's definition, "postmemory" requires a direct personal implication of the author with the narrated events and, although of Jewish descent, in this novel, Jonathan Littell is not fictionalizing a specific real experience, but inventing the life story of a character. Yet, on the other hand, the aesthetic strategies of Littell's novel align with "postmemory": the stylistic proposition and ethical distance of the novel—as well as its date of publication, during the climax of "postmemory" literature—coincide with those of this category. As Fernando Aínsa explains, literature influenced by postmemory—among which I include *Les bienveillantes*—takes advantage of the temporal distance from the historical events it deals with to abolish "la tradicional distancia épica" (45) [4] and explore new horizons of representation. In this way, in "postmemory" literature temporal distance helps bridge that "distancia épica": the moral gap between the historical event and its contemporaries, which prevented them from questioning history and experimenting with its representation. In effect, *Les bienveillantes* invests in "lo transgenérico, lo híbrido, lo fragmentario, lo ambivalente, lo autorreflexivo, lo irónico, borrando las fronteras entre lo real y lo ficticio, entre la verdad

y el simulacro, entre el juego y la investigación rigurosa" (Quílez 69) [5]. In the case of Littel's novel, this experimental freedom translates into breaching the accurate telling of the actual historical referent, the Shoah, with the aim of capturing the entirety of its horror. For instance, to portray the Third Reich in its full magnitude of dread, the protagonist must be everywhere, moving from one front to another, which implies, on a narrative level, endowing the protagonist with somewhat "unreal" abilities.

In terms of how these "unreal" abilities impact the novel's taxonomy, my viewpoint diverges slightly from Palumbo Mosca's. Rather than categorizing *Les bienveillantes* as a hybrid novel, I prefer to regard it as an expansion of the classical historical genre, a "hyper-historical" novel. Three arguments have brought me to this stance, upon which the current analysis of Littell's novel will rest. The first argument hinges once again on the principle of possible-world semantics by which "fictional worlds do not have to conform to the structures of the actual world" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 19). Of course, the maxim "in fictional writing there is no life before the life story" (157) gets complicated when a fictional *story* recreates actual *history*. However, all textual worlds establish their own truth, even those that are heavily reliant on "extratextual" actuality or "repertoire" (Iser). As mentioned in relation to fictional semantics, what the Prague structuralist called "extratextual reality" always serves—to a greater or lesser extent—as the basis for the construction of the intratextual world. Iser refers to these "actual" references present in novels as their "repertoire", that the German theorist defines as "all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (69). For Iser, the function of the "repertoire" is to incorporate "a specific external reality into the text and to link the reader's ideational activity "to the answer which the text attempts to give to a specific historical or social problem" (212). The

"repertoire" and its functions are highly present, even saturated, in *Les bienveillantes*, which is no less fictional because of it, and to which the maxim described in Block II can still be applied, according to which fictional worlds of literature remain exempt from any accusation of implausibility.[199] The second argument that leads me to reject the classification of *Les bienveillantes* as a hybrid novel—and therefore, one with fantastic elements—is rooted in the concept of "realism" as articulated by theorists such as Pau Luque or Jacques Rancière, by which Littell's novel is strictly realist and cannot be classified as fantastic. According to these contemporary formulations, which align with possible-world semantics, the classification of literature as "realistic" is not contingent upon the veracity of its elements but rather upon its formal choices. In Luque's words, "lo que hace que una novela sea realista es usar una técnica realista, no que tenga como objeto o escenario algún estrato de realidad" (Luque 62) [6].[200] Although more poetically expressed, Rancière seems to point at the same direction when he says: "le réalisme, c'est le sacrifice de la perfection de l'intrigue au profit de la profusion des détails" (148) [7]. Consequently, a realistic novel is one that seeks to "say everything"—"tout dire" (Rancière 49): an abundance of detail that indeed saturates *Les bienveillantes*. The third argument, which draws again on Doležel's fictional semantics, posits that Aue's narration does not strictly contradict "the laws of the actual world". In fact, among all the modal systems governing the rules of possible worlds, *Les bienveillantes* only expands the alethic, that is, what is possible and impossible in the fictional world, especially in terms

[199] In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière asserts that the comparison between the "truth" of fiction and that of history was already settled in Greek philosophy when Aristotle positioned himself against Plato by affirming that "poetry owes no explanation for the 'truth'". According to the French philosopher, the other conclusion that Aristotle derived from this is the superiority of poetry, which "confers a causal logic on the arrangement of events, over history, condemned to presenting events according to their empirical disorder". For Rancière, the aesthetic revolution—to which, as we know, Jonathan Littell's novel adheres—rearranges this ancient debate "by making two things interdependent: the blurring of the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fictions *and* the new mode of rationality that characterizes the science of history" (36).

[200] For more information on Pau Luque's ideas on "realism", you may consult Chapter II, "Imaginación", in *Las cosas como son y otras fantasías* (2020).

of "causality, time-space parameters, and the action capacity of persons" (*Heterocosmica* 117). *Les bienveillantes* expands alethic constraints, and yet it never contradicts them, because, as Doležel warns, the contrast between the natural and the supernatural is bridged by "intermediate worlds", that is, "dreams, hallucination, madness, drug-induced altered states" that are "physically possible, natural human experiences" (*Heterocosmica* 117). These intermediate states of reality indeed appear in Aue's narration, but as Doležel explains, they do not count as a real contradiction of natural laws. Therefore, *Les bienveillantes* cannot be considered an instance of "supernatural" fiction. Through Aue's constant travels and his surviving a head wound, the novel just pushes the protagonist's "action capacity" to the limit (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 115). This expansion of the "possible" serves to broaden the events that the novel can encompass.

This "deviation from the truth" is precisely what renders the novel more *novelistic* and simultaneously, *more historical*. I believe this "hyper-historicity" pursues the same objective Palumbo Mosca attributes to the hybrid novel: representing the universal. In the case of *Les bienveillantes*, as can be inferred from the summary, the universal theme would revolve around the definition of modern Evil through the Shoah: an ineffable catastrophe that Littell's novel endeavors to apprehend through the expansion of the possible described above. Aesthetics here serves ethics, as the fictional world broadens natural laws to expose a reality that these laws alone cannot evoke. As I see it, certain controversial aspects of the novel, such as the omnipresence of the protagonist, the recurrence of excess—what we have already seen Walter Manoschek called "pornification of violence" (2008)—, or the saturation of detailed *repertoire*, all point to this ethical component. Yet, this interpretation seems to conflict with a section of criticism that, as mentioned earlier, has censored the novel for being unethical. The basis of this accusation is that, beyond the controversy surrounding the novel's sub-genre, the novel

exemplifies two literary categories that, from an ethical perspective, are difficult to reconcile: perpetrator literature, and literature of testimony.

For Razinsky (2008), it is this interweaving of genres, and not the plausibility of *Les bienveillantes,* that truly complicates its reading. On the one hand, particularly when it comes to the Holocaust, any attempt to grasp the experience of the perpetrator is perceived by many readers as "the obscenity of the very project of understanding" (Lanzmann 205). On the other hand, the testimonial character of Littell's novel demands, precisely, this empathic reading because,

> unlike passive empathy, testimonial reading requires a self-reflective participation: an awareness first of myself as reader, positioned in a relative position of power by virtue of the safe distance provided by the mediating text. Second, I recognize that reading potentially involves a task. This task is at minimum an active reading practice that involves challenging my own assumptions and world views. (Boler, "The Risks of Empathy" 165)

As testimony bears witness to trauma, it inherently calls for the readers' response-ability.[201] However, in *Les bienveillantes,* this call breaks an ethical *taboo,* as it emanates from a witness that has inflicted so much pain. Although the Holocaust is a historical event that has, as Meretoja notices, "one of the persistent taboos in post-Holocaust narrative imagination has been, for a long time, engagement with the perpetrator's perspective" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 218). Even nowadays, as Jenni Adams writes, "the sense of literary and cultural unease which surrounds attempts to conceptualize or depict the Holocaust perpetrator continues" (1). In addition to the dubious morality of granting such a protagonist "the privilege of the narrative voice, given the almost

[201] For a deeper approach to the ethical implications of the link between trauma and testimonial literature, I recommend consulting Boler 1999; and Felman & Laub 1992.

automatic call to empathy that accompanies first-person narrative" (Suleiman 2), which has led many readers to dismiss the invitation "to fraternize with evil in a guided tour of the Jewish genocide" (Lacoste 46), this taboo is also caused by literary tradition. As Ricoeur puts it, in what the Holocaust is concerned, the task of fiction has always been to tell the victims' stories. In his words, "Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator… Either one counts the cadavers, or one tells the story of the victims" (*Time and Narrative vol.3* 188). Yet, as scholars have noted (Barjonet & Razinsky 2012; Suleiman 2009), Littell's is not the first fictional representation of the inner world of Nazi perpetrators. As antecedents of Littell's literary task, Susan Suleiman mentions Robert Merle's novel *La mort est mon métier* (*Death Is My Trade*, 1952), a fictionalized version of Höss's autobiography, Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Ein Deutsches Requiem" ("A German Requiem" 1949), an unrepentant monologue of a Nazi officer about to be executed, or the end of *The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H.* (1981) by George Steiner, which concludes with a monologue by Adolf Hitler himself (1). Yet, later, Suleiman adds that, despite these antecedents, Littell was indeed the first to compose "a comprehensive account of Nazi atrocities during World War II that is told entirely from the perspective, and in the voice, of a perpetrator" (5). In that sense, the author seems to go a step beyond postmemory, as he profits from the events' chronological distance not only to engage in an aesthetical renewal, but also in an ethical one, as the novel is placed within what has been termed as "perpetrator literature" (Adams & Vice 2013; Knittel & Goldberg 2020). Through this morally reprehensible perspective, *Les bienveillantes* puts its readership in a doubly uncomfortable position: they must confront an in-depth account of what is probably the most horrific episode in contemporary European history, and they must do so through the experiences of one of its agents, who, in Jakob Lothe's words, "seems unable to express any regret, or issue any apology, for the murders of all the millions of

people that he lists in 'Toccata,' and whose deaths were the direct result of the activities of the Nazi Regime he supported and supports" (115).

Therefore, Aue's radical *Weltanschauung* "puts both author and reader on uncomfortable ethical ground, and on uncomfortable aesthetic ground as well" (Suleiman 2). To offset the effects of the intimacy with such an "infamous I" (Koppenfels 113), the narrative is compelled to establish an optimal "critical distance" (Gadamer) that enables the reader "to engage emotionally with an ethically problematic lifeworld without uncritically adopting the protagonist's perspective" (Meretoja, "Fiction, History and the Possible" 371). Fortunately, as the mentioned synchronization between the baroque dances and the diegetical rhythm illustrates, *Les bienveillantes* stands as a highly technical narrative exercise. The following analysis aims to display how several of its stylistic aspects are invested in the novel's "empathic target", Max Aue. Hence, I aspire to examine how the formal features of *Les bienveillantes* serve the thematic and ethical project of the novel, based on the fostering of extreme empathy.[202] As we will explore next, this "call" for empathy concentrates especially on Aue's suffocating *voice*, which *compels* extreme empathy. The emotional demands of the protagonist are especially notorious in the the chapter Lothe refers to, "Toccata". In this chapter, right before guiding the readership through the nine circles of Hell, Aue proposes that we enter a contract with him.

***Voice*: "Je vous dis que je suis comme vous"**

[202] In contrast to the situation in *In Cold Blood*, the use of extreme empathy in Littell's novel has been previously examined by academia, albeit identified as "negative empathy", in briefer approaches. In this sense, the present research is deeply indebted to previous studies on this aspect, as Bonasera (2023); Ercolino (2018); Ercolino & Fusillo (2022); Jonge et al. (2022); Meretoja (2018).

Among the ensemble of *empathy builders* that Littell's novel deploys, those related to *voice* stand out because of their explicitness and affective potency. To begin with, the *voice* in *Les bienveillantes* embodies the "homodiegetic-intradiegetic paradigm": Aue is "a character in the story he tells", which is "his own" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 248). This *voice* format inherently acts as an *empathy builder*, as its intimacy translates into an "almost automatic call to empathy" (Suleiman 2). For this reason, affect theorists regard first-person self-narration as the most obvious literary device "supporting character identification and contributing to empathic experiences" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* ii). Italian scholar Stefano Ercolino, who also recognizes the use of first-person narrative as "una delle tecniche narrative più comuni per favorire l'identificazione con un personaggio", points out how this *voice* format is especially strategic in Littell's novel, where it propels the reader, as we will now see, "a stabilire un'angosciente relazione empatica con il 'narratore infame' di Aue; una relazione empatica negativa alla quale cercherà spesso di resistire, ma alla quale finirà, altrettanto spesso, col cedere" (104) [8].

In *Les bienveillantes*, the engagement associated with first-person narrative is partially caused by the absence of alternative *parasocial* possibilities: throughout the novel, the former SS-agent remains the sole source of authentication. When explaining how authentication works for first-person narrators, Doležel points out that this type of narrators hold "a privileged position within the set of fictional persons" because they are granted a "double speech activity": they engage in the fiction while simultaneously and exclusively fulfilling "the world-constructing function" (*Heterocosmica* 154). Nevertheless, as the Czech scholar alerts us, while the third-person narrator "receives the authentication authority by fiat", the first-person one "must earn it" (154). To this end, and to prevent his immorality from defining how he is read, Aue opens his narration with two demands on his readers: the acknowledgment of his humanity as equal to theirs and

the acceptance of their role as his confidants. These requests are presented in the prelude as *necessary requirements* for reading. Otherwise, the alternative given by Aue is clear: "si vous n'en êtes pas convaincu, inutile de lire plus loin. Vous ne comprendrez rien et vous vous fâcherez, sans profit pour vous ni pour moi" (Littell 28) [9]. After this rhetoric ruse, by which the narrator presents himself "as a victim of the reader's hostility" (Bonasera 168), the novel's introduction, "Toccata", reveals itself as a "reading contract" whose clauses include what, as we know, are two preliminary steps to empathy: the recognition of the humanity of the Other and the building of intimacy. From this perspective, both requests constitute techniques that reinforce an explicit *empathy builder*: the "reading contract" that Aue presents to us. Since these petitions—along with other affective aspects of Aue's discourse—are established in "Toccata", the present analysis of *Les bienveillantes*'s *voice* will be conducted primarily through this first chapter.

"Toccata": a Veiled Plea for Empathy

As Debarati Sanyal brilliantly argues, the title of this opening chapter, "Toccata", appears to serve not only as a musical allusion, but also as a metaphor. In these inaugural pages, Aue's *voice* seeks to "touch" the reader (30). Suleiman (2009), together with other scholars such as Meretoja (2018) or Erin McGlothlin (2016) have therefore commented on the role of "Toccata" as an unveiled "plea for empathy". His appeal emerges already in the first line, where he asks the readership to engage with his memoirs, alleging that they concern us directly: "frères humains, laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça s'est passé […] vous verrez bien que ça vous concerne" (11) [10]. With this *captatio benevolentiae*, the narrator opens the just mentioned *voice*-related *empathy builder*: the

reading contract he is about to propose to his readership. In my interpretation, the pact consists of two clauses: one concerning the ontological conditions of the agreement and the other delineating the roles of each party involved.

Regarding the first clause, Aue asks his reader to endorse two ontological assertions: the acceptance of his ordinary humanity, and the subsequent renunciation of any assumed moral superiority on the reader's part. On the one hand, the reader must accept that "he and the Nazis were not outside 'the human' but within it" (Suleiman 4), a "sense of a shared humanity" that, as mentioned, lays the foundation for empathizing with fictional characters (Oatley, "Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 623). This first clause in the reading pact is key for the emotional reception of Aue as a character because, through it, the narrator is setting down the basis for the possibility of extreme empathy. In relation to the recognition of humanity as a requisite for empathy, as explained in Block I, this emotional response constitutes, among other characteristics, a "moral or ethical choice to accept the Other as a fellow human being, complex and particular, deemed worthy of being understood" (Cameron 7). Then, as Fernández-Quintilla ventures, processes of humanization and (de)humanization are "closely related to empathy": if dehumanization "blocks empathy by reducing the other person to something less than human […] then humanization makes empathy more readily available because human qualities are attributed to the other person (i.e., the character)" (97-98). By ensuring that the reader places him within the bounds of humanity, Aue opens the narrative securing the possibility of empathy. So, in "Toccata", the narrator presents himself as an ordinary man whose historical circumstances turned him into a perpetrator of mass murder.

From this premise emerges Aue's second claim, by which, as he is one of the "hommes ordinaires dont est constitué l'État" (27) [11], there is no moral difference between him and the reader. As he puts it, "vous avez peut-être eu plus de la chance que

moi, mais vous n'êtes pas meilleur" (26-27) [12]. This the first of many attempts in which Aue will disturbingly try to, as Ercolino states, "cancel the supposed human and moral distance between himself and the reader, indirectly arguing against the alleged historical singularity constituted by Nazism" (253).

Therefore, on one hand, Aue will emphasize his humanity throughout the novel—"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) [13]. On the other hand, he will insist on morally equating himself with the reader. These ontological claims of the reading contract, which function as *empathy builders*, lead Maximilien to present the narration as a "conte moral"—a lesson on humanity that should be known by all his fellow "frères humains" (11). For Aue, the significance of his past lies in this shared human condition and the danger implied by it, which will be the ultimate moral of Aue's testimony: *homo homini lupus*, or as he says in "Toccata", "le vrai danger pour l'homme c'est moi, c'est vous" (27-28) [14]. To emphasize this idea as the narration's ultimate meaning, this *invitation à la lecture* closes by reiterating, "je suis un homme comme les autres, je suis un homme comme vous. Allons, puisque je vous dis que je suis comme vous!" (30) [15]. Through these affronts to the reader's sense of morality, as Ercolino & Fusilo point out, "Aue prova ripetutamente a cancellare la distanza umana e morale che si interpone fra lui e il lettore" and in so doing, he writes a new chapter "nella storia degli appelli provocatori al lettore nella letteratura occidentale" (101) [16].[203]

[203] Here, Ercolino and Fusillo include the first chapter of *Les bienveillantes*, "Toccata", within the tradition of confrontational openings in Western literature dedicated to the depiction of Evil. For instance, Ercolino ("Negative empathy" 253)—together with other critics such as Hanna Meretoja (2016), Martin von Koppenfels or Debarati Sanyal—highlights the resemblance between Littell's "frères humains, laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça s'est passé" (11) and Baudelaire's renowned incipit in *Les fleurs du mal* (1857): "Hypocrite lecteur/*mon semblable/mon frère*!" (3, my emphasis). Similarly, Ferdjani remarks that the syntagm "frères humains" also echoes Villon's poem "La ballade des pendus", while the second part of the

Having laid down the foundations of the reading contract, Max Aue anticipates the role the readers must assume in their *parasocial* relationship: they will be the confessor, and he, the self-confessed. Therefore, if *voice* constitutes, as theorized by Benveniste, "the subjectivity of language" (223), Aue's narratee must accept being the receptacle of his conflictive subjectivity. In "Toccata", the narrator warns his addressees that he will be sharing, with a transparent honesty, not only his war memories, but also his more personal experiences and thoughts. To cultivate the readers' complicity, the narrator employs two techniques: the inclusion of "metalepses" to maintain the *parasocial* relation, and the sharing of secrets to increment intimacy.

From the point of view of its temporal positioning, the self-referential quality of the *Les bienveillantes* turns it into an example of subsequent narrating, that is, one that implies a temporal distance between the story events and its narrator (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 221). According to Genette's description of narrative levels, "Toccata" is situated in the time of the "narrative act" 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" (*Narrative Discourse* 227). In turn, the temporal distance—or *isotopy*, as Genette calls it—between the first and the second narrative allows for the insertion of "metalepses" or "transitions from one narrative level to another" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 234). In *Les bienveillantes*, "metalepses" are employed by the Aue-narrator in the first narrative to comment on the events of the second narrative, lived by the Aue-character. These incursions of adult-Aue in the diegesis are multiple and accomplish different tasks, from providing historical insights to, in a very postmodern fashion, manifesting his own doubts

sentence, "laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça s'est passé" could be a reference to another novel analyzing the subject of Evil, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), which begins with a similar assertion: "Ça a débuté comme ça" (263).

— “Tout cela, se peut-il que je l’aille 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) [17]. Most of the times, however, Aue’s metalepses fulfill Jakobson’s phatic function, activating the communication between the narratee and himself. In those cases, these interventions remind the former of the presence of the *voice* and of its subjective filter. In so doing, they also give realism to the memoirs. Beyond their phatic purpose, these “addresses to the reader” have different motivations (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 234). For instance, they are a reminder of the reading contract—“Je ne racontai pas tout cela à Partenau: mais à vous, je le raconte” (190) [18]; they insist readers are free to terminate that contract—“vous disposez d’un pouvoir sans appel, celui de fermer ce livre et de le jeter à la poubelle” (720) [19]; and they even warn them of the novel’s length—“Vous devez penser: ah, cette histoire est enfin finie. Mais non, elle continue encore” (837) [20]. Through these metaliterary comments, the text reasserts the intimacy of the narrating space and the proximity of the *voice*. In short, they function as *empathy builders* as they prompt emotional engagement by keeping the direct contact between both parts of the *parasocial* relation.

In addition to the metalepses, the narrator-character highlights the intimacy of the intradiegetic narration by confiding some of his deepest secrets to his now “equal” confidant, the reader. These private revelations, already present in “Toccata”, include his hatred for his mother (28), the existence of a life-long “interdit” love (29), his desire to have been born a woman (29) or his homosexuality (19).

This collection of secrets, known exclusively to both parties of the contract—the reader and Aue—, add a humanizing element to the character. Thus, they may foster the reader’s partial solidarity. Among these shared confidences, Stéphane Roussel (2010) considers the protagonist’s homosexuality to be the main promotor of the reader’s

complicity. This hypothesis is based on two arguments. On the one hand, although Max already sympathized with the ideas of National-Socialism, his active participation in the Nazi party is an indirect consequence of his sexuality.[204] At the beginning of the novel, the narrator tells us that, after a sexual encounter with another man, he was approached by a policeman who arrested him. Once in prison, an SS agent blackmailed the protagonist: if he wanted to avoid being convicted for his homosexual activities, he had to serve the Third Reich. On the other hand, as a participant in an ideology as homophobic as Nazism, Max's sexuality, if discovered, would signify an immediate death sentence. Then, the protagonist's homosexuality serves as a Sword of Damocles that hangs over his head during the entire narrative, and whose menace motivates the reader to *suffer with* Aue, at least, in this regard. Roussel coincides that this information reinforces the reader's role as a confidant because "le récit fonctionne ainsi sur la détention et la préservation du secret […] et les lecteurs sont dans la confidence". At the same time, the critic adds, the intimacy of these secrets supports the ontological basis of the reading contract, as it transforms *Les bienveillantes* into a confession in service of a truth that is not so much historical, from a narrative standpoint, as it is primarily human: "Aussi, pour que les lecteurs continuent, il s'agit pour eux d'être impérativement les 'frères humains' du narrateur, de ressentir à son égard une proximité, une solidarité […]" (156) [21].

Nonetheless, the proximity of Aue's *voice* has a double edge. By sharing his secrets, the narrator seeks to foster an atmosphere of trust that promotes the reader's confidence. Yet, honesty is intermingled in "Toccata" with the narrator's attempts to

[204] Although to my knowledge critics have not addressed this aspect of the novel, I am fully aware of how problematic the correlation established in the work between Nazism and homosexuality is. This correlation is not directly causal, as at no point are we told that Aue is a Nazi because he is a homosexual or vice versa. To avoid being imprisoned for sexual preferences prohibited at the time, Aue is forced to join the Nazi party. However, it is a delicate aspect of the plot that, in my opinion, and as I will argue later, is included to emphasize the arbitrariness of Aue's participation in the SS and to highlight his position as a subject limited by the difficulties of the historical context in which he lives. Aue's forced joining of the SS is recounted on pages 70-76.

persuade readers of his perspective. In addition to the previously mentioned *captatio benevolentiae*—"frères humains […] ça vous concerne"—, and the sharing of his personal secrets, Aue tries to foster the readers' sympathy by downplaying the magnitude of Nazi crimes through a biased comparison with other 20th century massacres.[205] All of these strategies, when considered together, demonstrate that, as Razinsky notes ("We Are All the Same" 147), Max Aue's discourse ultimately serves one purpose: seduction. In this manner, "Toccata" also introduces the third *voice empathy builder* in *Les bienveillantes*: Max Aue's rhetoric. As Razinsky points out, "perhaps the greatest problem with what Aue has to say concerns the intertextual aspects of his style. For his rhetoric, much more than his content, is often Nazi" ("We Are All the Same" 147). Ercolino & Fusillo, in their analysis of Littell's work, also single out the narrator's slippery use of language as one of the main formal devices fostering what they call "negative empathy". Furthermore, they assert that Aue's rhetorical capacity is not uncommon for an immoral protagonist, but rather "un tratto che caratterizza con una certa stabilità i personaggi letterari in gradi di suscitare una empatia negativa", like, for example, Nabokov's Humbert Humbert (93) [23].

Continuing with Ercolino & Fusillo's analysis of "empatia negativa", the scholars also emphasize the importance of spoken monologues in eliciting empathy in theatre productions. They argue that these expressions of subjectivity give readers direct access

[205] In pages 20-23, Aue juxtaposes the death toll of what he refers to as the *Endlösung* (Final Solution to the Jewish Question) with those occurring during various events of the Second World War, including the Nazi attempts to invade Russia, the Berlin bombings, and the battles and massacres on the Eastern Front. Ultimately, he draws a parallel between the Nazi massacre and the French war in Algeria, directly addressing a hypothetical French reader: "Par exemple, si vous êtes français, considérez votre petite aventure algérienne, qui a tant traumatisé vos concitoyens". After revealing the number of deaths caused by the Algerian war, Aue employs irony to accuse the hypothetical reader of disregarding French responsibility in this conflict: "[…] je ne comptabilise évidemment pas les morts algériens: comme vous n'en parlez pour ainsi dire jamais, dans vos livres et vos émissions, ils ne doivent compter pas beaucoup pour vous. Pourtant vous avez tué dix pour chacun de vos propres morts, effort honorable même comparé au nôtre" (23) [22].

to the characters' consciousness, while allowing the characters to fully deploy their rhetoric in support of their viewpoint (124–126). Considering that the novelistic equivalent of a dramatic soliloquy would be either an interior monologue or *stream of consciousness*—in a third-person narrative—, or a homodiegetic-intradiegetic narration, it is evident how the *voice* format of Aue's memories, a 900 pages-long monologue, amplifies the importance of his rhetorical abilities. For almost one thousand pages, the reader is presented solely with Aue's words, his opinions, and his recollections. The absence of any contrasting perspective makes the reception—almost—entirely dependent on the discourse of the former Nazi agent. Consequently, during the reading, addressees are compelled to remind themselves of the immoral nature of his perspective to keep a critical distance (Gadamer). Within these narrative dynamics, "Toccata" functions as a preliminary "defensive self-justification" (Lothe 108) in which Aue attempts to minimize, precisely, the readers' critical distance. With this purpose, he appears to counteract the already mentioned demands of attention—the *captatio benevolentiae*, his position as a writer who confesses his past, or the belittling of the Shoah—with rhetorical elements aimed at "distracting" the readers' sense of morality. For instance, from a rhetorical perspective, the narrator employs a *captatio malevolentiae*—"Et si vous n'en êtes pas convaincu, inutile de lire plus loin"—or even an apophasic ironic *captatio*, that is, a warning to the readers about the horrors that will unfold, which works in fact as a veiled invitation to stay and a way to awake the readers' curiosity: "Pardonnez-moi de vous entretenir de détails aussi scabreux: j'ai bien le droit de me plaindre un peu. Et puis si vous ne supportez pas ça vous feriez mieux de vous arrêter ici" (13) [24].[206]

[206] The use of this apophasic ironic *captatio* seems reminiscent of the author's warning in one of the masterpieces of Evil literature: Marquis de Sade's *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* (1904), which reads, "C'est maintenant, lecteur ami, qu'il faut préparer ton cœur et ton esprit à la plus impure des histoires qui aient jamais été racontées depuis le commencement du monde, un pareil livre n'existant ni chez les anciens ni chez les modernes. Imagine que tous les plaisirs honnêtes—ou tous ceux qui sont permis par cette bête dont on parle toujours, bien que vous ne la connaissiez pas, et que vous appelez la nature—imagine, dis-je,

These contradictory messages are, therefore, evidence of the narrator's rhetorical power: a third *voice*-related *empathy builder*, which, along with the reading contract and its ontological demands, and the intimacy sought by the narrator through metalepsis and secrets, transforms "Toccata" into a sort of spiderweb: in it, the narrator weaves many of his empathy-triggering techniques with the purpose of capturing the readership's interest and trust. Then, he will leave them ensnared in a discourse that will reveal itself to be indeed much like a spider's construction, as it is "sticky" (Ngai) and made mostly of holes. As we will see below, despite Aue's rhetorical powers, these holes will become more and more manifest, therefore jeopardizing the reliability of the narrative *voice*.

Beyond Aue's *Voice*: Guilt and Unreliability

A careful examination of "Toccata" reveals the contradictions in which the narrator's *voice* entangles itself. Although Aue insists on capturing the reader's attention and stressing the importance of his story, he paradoxically claims that he is not writing to be read—"Même si je m'adresse à vous, ce n'est pas pour vous que j'écris" (16) [26]. Similarly, he initially downplays Nazi crimes by labeling them as "war crimes" and minimizes his own role by portraying himself as just a bureaucrat. However, despite these constant justifications, he later states that he will not justify his actions—"Encore une fois, soyons clairs: je ne cherche pas à dire que je ne suis pas coupable de tel ou tel fait" (26) [27]. The ambiguity of Aue's arguments and intentions also reverberates in the emotional state he transmits. On the one hand, "Toccata" seemingly adopts a confessional tone, as Max shares details of his traumatic childhood, his horrifying acts as an

que ces plaisirs seront soigneusement exclus de cette collection et que, si par hasard tu en trouves, ce ne sera que parce qu'ils seront accompagnés de quelque crime ou colorés de quelque infamie" (69) [25].

Einsatzgruppen officer, and his present malaise. *Implicitly*, this tone suggests a desire for the reader's empathetic understanding. On the other hand, the narrator explicitly states that he does not feel guilty—"Je ne regrette rien: j'ai fait mon travail, voilà tout" (12) [28]. Consequently, he argues that he neither seeks the reader's understanding nor their forgiveness: "ne pensez pas que je cherche à vous convaincre de quoi que ce soit" (11) [29]. As Ercolino & Fusillo point out, these ambiguities persist throughout the diegesis in a way that "nell'intero arco della narrazione, Aue dichiara a più riprese di non volersi giustificare e di non cercare la complicità del lettore [...] eppure, il suo discorso suona spesso, sopratutto nella prima sezione del romanzo, Toccata, come una sottile auto-apologia" (100) [30].

Due to the consistent mismatch between what the *voice conveys* and what it *seems* to express, the initial pages of *Les bienveillantes* already put the credibility of Aue under the spotlight. Uncertainty surrounds the intentions of his writing project as well as his emotions regarding his past. Moreover, Aue is narrating in the present what he remembers about what he lived in the past and his interpretation of those experiences while he has living them. Just because of this, the truthfulness of his discourse could already be in doubt. Indeed, this untrustworthiness will be confirmed as the narration unfolds. Despite the openness and the promises of transparency Maximilien makes in "Toccata", whether due to his faulty memory or his own self-interest, his discourse gradually turns "devious" apparently making "only partial use of the truth" (Razinsky, "'We Are All the Same'" 147).

Aue's memoir opens with a display of "narrative authority"—"laissez-moi vous raconter comment ça s'est passé (11) [31]—, a "mode of narration" that is inherent to the reading contract. According to Sanyal, this straight-out style requires readers' trust as the "strategy of reading" (47), so that "Toccata" implicitly establishes a *parasocial*

communication based on the narrator's factual accuracy and the reader's confidence. Despite Maximilien's rhetorical and moral ambiguity, this *parasocial* relationship indeed underpins the first half of the novel. Nonetheless, the I-narrator's *voice* will become gradually unstable from the battle of Stalingrad onwards. In "Courante", Aue participates in the battle of Stalingrad, where he receives a gunshot. Immediately after that, the protagonist's lacunae begin to appear. Scholars such as Hannah Meretoja (2016), Youssef Ferdjani (2010) or Liran Razinsky (2010) have considered the gunshot wound as "a turning point" in the *voice*'s reliability, as after it, "the sense of narrative mastery increasingly begins to break down" (Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling* 394). In effect, after the oneiric convalescence period that is covered in "Courante" and "Sarabande", Max shows signs of not being able to interpret the events in which he partook after the battle, his being wounded and his convalescence with the same clarity with which he has interpreted everything that happened before. According to Razinsky, one aspect that conveys how Aue gradually loses control of his discourse is that the *metalepses*, or intrusions of the present-Aue in his memories, will decrease gradually throughout the narration, displaying how he can no longer rationalize his past ("We Are All the Same" 149-150). In addition to this new interpretative difficulty and this lack of comment, the memory of the Max-narrator in the frame narrative also declines significantly, particularly affecting his family-related memories.

A clear example of these memory gaps appears in "Sarabande", when Aue visits his mother in the south of France. In the family house, he encounters two teenage twins whose origin is unknown to him (477). Upon his arrival, Max has a heated argument with his mother, whom he accuses of his father's disappearance, and even of having killed him herself (481). The following day, after another argument—now on the Nazi treatment of Jews, about which the overwhelmed mother questions Aue—, Aue helps his stepfather

cut firewood with an axe, has lunch with him and his mother, and goes for a walk. Upon returning from his walk, he finds their corpses in the house: his mother, strangled, and his stepfather, struck with an axe. He abandons the scene of the crime with "une envie panique de fuir" (488) [32]. As many critics have stressed (Delorme 2010; Roussel 2010; Sanyal 2010), all the evidence incriminates Aue not only as guilty of matricide—driven by his confessed hatred for his mother—but also as the father of the twins, born from an incestuous relationship with his twin sister Una—the forbidden love he had announced in "Toccata".[207] Despite the signs of his culpability, which are evident for the readership and personified in the diegesis by Weser and Clemens—the French policemen in charge of his mother's and stepfather's murders, who pursue the protagonist—, Aue will claim to ignore the identity of the murderer and the origin of the twins throughout the rest of the diegesis.

The inconsistency of the narrative *voice* at this critical point in the plot reveals the narrator's unreliability, which had already been suggested from the first chapter, *Toccata*, through Max's memory lapses and his contradictory emotions and opinions. This narrative instability reinforces these signs, suggesting that both the narrator and his control over the story have been shaped by the passage of time and the lingering effects of trauma. According to Estefania López-Deflory, this overt breakdown of the narrator's authority reflects "human nature […] in the workings of memory" (173). As might be

[207] Max's relationship with his twin sister, Una, is a topic that tinges the whole narration. Una appears first as a recurrent image during the protagonist's moments of pain (380; 390). Then the reader learns that the twins were in love during their childhood: "moi et ma soeur jumelle Una, le regard et les deux mains qui se touchent sans que personne s'en aperçoive, et l'amour alors encore plus vaste et sans fin que cette mer bleue et que l'amertume et la douleur des années meurtries, une splendeur solaire, un abîme volontaire" (373) [33]. Then, as teenagers, their relationship starts including sexual practices, until their mother discovers them: "Et puis un jour, comme je l'ai dit, on nous surprit. Il y eut des scènes sans fin, ma mère me traitait de cochon et de dégénéré. Moreau pleurait, et ce fut la fin de tout ce qui est beau" (190) [34]. As a result, Aue is separated from his sister and is sent to a boarding school, but he will never forget his love for her, and they will meet often during their adulthood. A proof that the twins are the result of their incestuous relationship is that, when Max tells Una about their mother's murder, her first reaction is to ask about the twins: "Lui expliquai en peu de mots ce qui s'était passé. Elle n'eut qu'une question, frénétique, affolée: 'Et les jumeaux ? où sont les jumeaux?'"(491) [35].

expected from a perpetrator recounting crimes committed 30 years earlier, Aue's memory is fallible, and his narrative *voice* highly inconsistent. Then, as said, from Stalingrad onwards the narrator's confusion becomes increasingly dominant in *Les bienveillantes*, culminating in severe degeneration in certain episodes. For instance, in the chapter *Air*, Aue takes refuge in his brother-in-law's mansion in Pomerania, where he repeatedly masturbates while fantasizing about his sister in a state of constant confusion between reality and imagination that leads him to openly question his own reliability: "Voilà ce dont je me souvenais, or il semble que les choses ne se soient pas passées ainsi" (798) [36]. As I see it and as I will defend in what follows, this idiosyncrasy in the *voice* enhances the novel's realism, contributing to its "hyper-historical" quality: Aue's testimony moves away from the imposed realism of the historic genre in favor of a subjective—and paradoxically, more accurate—account of Nazi Germany. In addition, this unreliability may deepen the hermeneutic and emotional implications of Max Aue's memoirs, as I will now discuss.

While criticism has often attributed the protagonist's unreliability to the gunshot wound, some scholars have also related it to a deeper metaphysical injury stemming from Aue's participation in the Holocaust (Berberich 2020; Bonasera 2023; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022). Among these critics, Ferdjani sees both wounds—physical and psychological—as interconnected. From this perspective, the bullet hole in Aue's head would be a symbol of "son mal existentiel", which is "le vide central" in his memoirs (273) [37]. Ferdjani's metonymy appears to be confirmed by the narrator himself when he describes his injury, to which he confers a nihilistic dimension:

> J'avais le sentiment que le trou dans mon front s'était ouvert sur un troisième œil […] dirigé vers les ténèbres, doué du pouvoir de regarder le visage nu de la mort, et de le saisir, ce visage, derrière chaque visage de chair, sous les sourires, à travers

> les peaux les plus blanches et les plus saines, les yeux les plus rieurs. Le désastre était déjà là et ils ne s'en rendaient pas compte, car le désastre, c'est l'idée même du désastre à venir, qui ruine tout bien avant l'échéance. (634) [38]

If we consider that Aue will later refer to the *Endlösung* as "un trou noir de l'esprit" (901) [39], the root of his sorrow, symbolized by the gunshot, becomes evident. If the bullet from Stalingrad has physically penetrated the protagonist's head, his role as a perpetrator has metaphorically pierced his spirit, causing damage to the memories associated with the *Endlösung*. Yet, Aue's discourse never explicitly confirms this correlation. In fact, the text leaves the reader uncertain about whether Aue feels guilt for his Nazi crimes. This emotional ambiguity towards his past deeds is already evident in "Toccata", where three pages after denying any remorse—"Je ne regrette rien" (12) [40]—, Maximilien admits to feeling guilty and paradoxically refuses to conceal it: "ce n'est pas de culpabilité, de remords qu'il s'agit ici. *Cela aussi existe*, sans doute, *je ne veux pas le nier*" (15, my emphasis) [41]. Throughout the memoirs that follow this preamble, Aue's emotional state remains equally unclear. While his initial reaction to the *Endlösung* is one of absolute horror, the emotional rejection that the massacres generate in him, as we will explore, never translates into concrete action. As if the protagonist, aware that accepting his guilt would make it impossible for him to live with it, were in denial, while his unreliable and inconsistent discourse reveals this internal struggle, this unspoken suffering. In short: the psychological consequences of his criminal actions. With all, even though guilt is never overtly manifested in the fictional world, scholars have recognized it as the underlying reason for the increasing unreliability of the *voice*. What allows critics to read beyond the text is the fact that, as anticipated, this unreliability impacts

hermeneutics: it deprives the narrator from the authentication function, in a way that the reader is free to interpret the novel beyond Aue's testimony.[208]

As Frederick Holmes elucidates, one of the primary effects of unreliability is the transformation of the character-narrator into "the text's first and worst reader" (232). Consequently, the reader appears as a better interpreter of the story than the protagonist himself. This hermeneutic imbalance results in a dramatic irony that establishes a hierarchy in the *parasocial* relationship between the reader and the character, wherein the reader feels more knowledgeable about the character's own story. As I see it, this effect also alters the perception of narrative emotions at both the *intra-world* and the *inter-world* levels. As readers cannot trust the character's explicit expressions of his emotions because of his unreliability, *intra-world* emotions are to be interpreted through a puzzle of actions, interactions, or formal choices that the reader must decipher. In this way, *intra-world* emotions must be read through *inference*, while *inter-world* emotions, arising as a response to inference of *intra-world* ones, become equally dependent of this method of exegesis. In *Les bienveillantes*, this interpretative freedom might lead the reader to believe, as Julie Delorme suggests, that "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" (45) [42]. From the perspective of the reader-interpreter, now free to infer Aue's emotions, his façade of cynicism is less

[208] This method of characterization, by which the character is read between the lines, is not approved by all currents of literary criticism. In *Narrative Form*, Suzanne Keen explains the debate around this characterization in the following terms: "Can counterfactual speculations about what characters might have done or said in extratextual situations *ever* contribute to a formal discussion of character? Generations of New Critical, structuralist, and some post-structuralist critics would have answered 'no,' but reader response critics, genre critics, some feminists, and many practitioners of cultural studies have good reasons to move beyond the strict conception of character as purely textual. Making room for reading against the grain, historically contextualized reading, and reading that acknowledges the open-endedness of interpretation requires a more flexible interpretation of character, including characters as entities which readers understand as related to people […]" (Keen 56). My analysis agrees with Keen when, later in her essay, she asserts that characters can also be interpreted "indirectly", "as when the reader deduces from actions, speech, or context key traits of the character" (64).

convincing than the various indicators of his distress. Even in "Toccata", certain words from the narrator reveal a repressed guilt, such as his assertion that "si jamais vous arriviez à me faire pleurer, mes larmes vous vitrioleraient le visage" (23) [43]. These expressions do not go unnoticed by the narratee. Thereafter, Aue's presumed shame turns into an interpretive key to the novel's ambiguous emotional texture. From this viewpoint, many elements in the diegesis—such as Aue's internal conflicts, some of his comments on Nazi actions, or his physical symptoms—appear to the reader as confirmatory signs of his distress.

Consequently, as the novel unfolds, it accumulates textual markers that allow for an interpretation of Aue's unreliability as stemming from his repentance, which leads him to repress the war memories that, as the narrator poignantly expresses, asphyxiate him like a mountain of stones upon his chest (13). As we will see later in detail, scholars such as Meretoja go further and assign an ethical role to this rupture of "narrative mastery", alleging that, through it, "the novel demonstrates how the Holocaust resists explanation, how it persists as an unanswerable question, haunting humanity and demanding interminable reflection" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 242). From this perspective, the *voice*'s inconsistency would ultimately be the formal expression of the ineffability that haunts the protagonist, who says "pour moi, comme pour la plupart des gens, la guerre et le meurtre sont une question, une question sans réponse, car lorsqu'on crie dans la nuit, personne ne répond" (30) [44].

This interpretation of the novel's *intra-world* emotions, as well as the chain of formal and hermeneutical aspects that give rise to it—unreliability, dramatic irony, and *inference*—, holds enormous significance for the novel's empathy for at least three reasons. First because the narrator's unreliability, regardless of the conclusions drawn from it, adds naturalness to his *voice*, thus humanizing him. Aue's contradictions and

uncertainties complicate perceiving the former Nazi agent as entirely "outside the human" (Suleiman 4) and as we already know, the acknowledgement of the Other's humanity is a prerequisite for empathy, especially in the case of immoral characters. Secondly, unreliability derives, as mentioned, from dramatic irony—an epistemological hierarchy between readers and narrator that, in turn, may establish a hermeneutical dynamic especially conducive to empathy. The unreliability of the *voice* invites readers to take charge of interpretation while Aue, less aware of his reality and emotions than the readers, becomes a sort of hermeneutic object, which makes him an intriguing riddle to solve. Hence, a sense of "critical distance" (Gadamer) asserts itself between narratee and narrator, and maybe even between narratee and narrator's discourse. That is because, occupied in interpreting Aue's entire character, including his emotions toward his criminal past, the reader may pay partially less attention to the immoral nature of Aue's actions, in a way that *inference* of the fictional "truth" would give rise to a "safety zone" (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 29) in which readers may feel safe to empathize with a protagonist whose immorality and centrality in the novel would otherwise hinder empathy. But as discussed in the previous chapter, this is not the only advantage that *inference* presents for the emergence of *inter-world* emotions. *Inference* emerges as an effective method for interpreting narrative emotions because by engaging in this process, readers actively participate in discerning Aue's *intra-world* emotions, making them feel less imposed by the narrative. As a result, readers feel "safe" to respond with their own *inter-world* emotions. In *Les bienveillantes*, if Aue's remorse were explicitly stated, readers might be more inclined to doubt its sincerity. However, if readers themselves infer this *intra-world* emotion from text clues, they are more likely to accept Max Aue's *concrete* and *abstract intra-world* emotions of guilt and shame, of which he himself seems to be unaware, and respond with empathy. This leads to the third reason

why the unreliability in Aue's *voice* promotes empathy. According to Meretoja, 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" ("Fiction, History and the Possible" 395). If Aue's difficulty in dealing with his memories is indeed interpreted as a symptom of repressed trauma, readers would be attributing emotions to him that can easily foster empathy. That is because, as mentioned in Part I of this thesis, empathetic responses arise more easily in reaction to painful emotions; and Aue's implied distress, if inferred, would appear to the receiver as a pain that "seems to know no bounds" (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 254).

Because of all these reasons, the narrator's unreliability—and the resulting discrepancy between what he expresses and what the text leaves implicit—emerges as the fourth *voice*-related *empathy builder* in *Les bienveillantes*. Nevertheless, both this narrative aspect and the suggested hermeneutic method create only subtle fissures in the omnipresent—and almost suffocating—first-person discourse of a perpetrator. Despite Max Aue's inner doubts, his narrative remains that of a perpetrator throughout the novel, as his actions, as previously noted, remain immoral until the very end. For instance, as Ferdjani points out, "pour Aue, la guerre a une dimension diabolique et il est horrifié quand on leur annonce qu'ils devront tuer tous les Juifs, y compris les femmes et les enfants" (273) [45]. Yet, this rejection will not prevent him from participating in the *Aktions* and from narrating them in detail.

As I will analyze in the following section in relation to the novel's *mood*, Aue participates in the war from the "particular status" of a "perpetrator-witness" (Barjonet & Razinsky 15). During "Allemandes I et II", for instance, Aue works as a documentalist for the *Einsatzgruppen*, assessing the operations of the mobile killing squads responsible for mass shootings on the Eastern Front. Despite his initial disapproval of the Nazi

atrocities, he narrates the *Aktions* with the same detached style that he could use in his official Nazi reports. Initially, amidst this coldness, the protagonist sometimes expresses his discontent to the reader in an isolated manner, conveying his repulsion towards the horrors of war. But as he delves deeper into the chaos and brutality of the conflict, his perspective transforms gradually, and his criticism of the Third Reich becomes more isolated. The constant experience of violence seems to desensitize him, eroding his emotional responses.[209] As a reflex of his adaptation to the brutal reality that surrounds him, his viewpoint becomes progressively unexpressive. Just as with the narrative *voice*, the novel's *mood*—marked by contradictions—reinforces the ambiguity of Aue's emotional state. Thus, both *voice* and *mood* transform the protagonist's *intra-world* emotions into an element open to the reader's interpretation. Moreover, Maximilien's "immunization" to the war can even extend to readers at some point. In Meretoja's words, "the reader's emotional engagement is also likely to involve sharing Aue's feeling of growing numbness—as the initial shock of terror turns into gradual habituation—and his experience of dizziness and disorientation after extended immersion in the world of atrocity" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 222). In relation to *mood*, we will study how readers, infected with the protagonist's growing insensitivity, may reach a state of "stillness" (Gadamer) in the reading that can favor the arousal of extreme empathy.

***Mood*: the Ethical Fissures of Indifference**

[209] In fact, this tendency of Aue's emotional shock to disappear as the narrative progresses has been empirically demonstrated by Carmen Bonasera, who has employed Sentiment and Emotion Analysis to explore the lexical representation of emotions in *Les bienveillantes* (Figure 6 in Appendix II). Computational analysis leads Bonasera to conclude that "In *The Kindly Ones*, fear and trust predominate over the long and unreliable narrative, but higher peaks of fear, sadness and disgust are found in the detailed depiction of the protagonist's involvement in the massacres. While approaching the end, the overall emotional content declines steadily" (183).

"Art always says 'And yet!' to life."

George Lukács

At first glance, the *mood* in Littell's novel presents no narratological difficulties. It displays the prototypical characteristics of mono-perspectivism, which typically accompanies intradiegetic narrations: the diegesis is narrated from the viewpoint of the character-narrator—adult Max Aue—and it is exclusively focalized on the character-protagonist—younger Max Aue. Consequently, the focalization—or presentation of the narrative information (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 162)—is simultaneously *internal*, as "the narrative is focused through the consciousness of a character" (Culler, "Foreword" 11), and *fixed*, as the roles of subject-focalizer and object-focalized are performed by the same character throughout the entire story (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 189).

For Peter Tame, mono-perspectivism conveys the impression that Max is guiding us through his memories of Nazi Germany "comme un Dante démoniaque dans cet enfer guerrier" (214) [46]. While Tame's literary comparison is fitting, I view Aue more as a Virgil, with the readership akin to Dante: the narrator guides us through the hell-like panorama he depicts and serves as the only source of information during our descent into this Tartarus. Because of this unilaterality, the novel's mono-perspectivism should be seen as a primary *empathy builder*. Nonetheless, we must consider that, as indicated earlier, from a narratological perspective, the use of an *internal fixed* focalization relies on the homodiegetic-intradiegetic format of the *voice*. Therefore, I regard both *voice* and *mood* as a unified *empathy builder*, that being the omnipresence of the narrator-focalizer, governing both what is said and what is seen in the fictional world. In this formal tandem, monoperspectivism holds significant importance because, as previously mentioned, the focalization through the former SS officer remains the reader's only perspective on the narrative events. In Ercolino's opinion, this leads to the primary effect of the narrator-

focalizer's omnipresence—namely, the "entrapment" of the readers in Aue's personal perceptions, which the Italian scholar describes as follows:

> 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. ("Negative Empathy" 254)

As Aue's focalization encompasses all the narrative episodes, the cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientations of the narrator, which accompany his perspective, serve as constructors of the plot. More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, they also inform the reader's affective perception of the protagonist and his circumstances. To comprehend the implications of Maximilien Aue's monoperspectivism in the readers' reception of his memoirs—and in their construction of a *parasocial* relationship with the character—this section will delve into the main idiosyncrasies of *mood* in *Les bienveillantes*: its overall detached realism and the contrastive emergence of isolated episodes portraying Aue's ethically ambiguous perspective, which hints at the suffering underlying his testimony. Again, both characteristics resemble those viewed in relation to the novel's *voice*, in the sense that they transmit an apparent assurance, wrapped in the rhetoric of the perpetrator, and simultaneously, a set of contradictions that jeopardize this "narrative mastery". As we are about to see, the effects of this *mood* contradictions will also be similar to those of *voice*: on the one hand, the documentary style of Aue's witness will dangerously "absorb" the reader; and on the other hand, the occasional ruptures of his indifference will cast doubt on the protagonist's *intra-world* emotions.

The Perspective of the Perpetrator-Witness

In general terms, Max's focalization stands out for its precision and its meticulous realism. Critics concur that, regarding his experiences as a member of the Third Reich, the protagonist of *Les bienveillantes* constitutes a "reliable historical witness" (Suleiman 5). For instance, Razinsky highlights how Maximilien Aue's focalization is "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" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 71), whereas Ferdjani, for his part, goes a step further and argues that, in his role as focalizer, Aue "n'est pas tant un personnage, qu'une voix, un ton, un regard" (264) [47]. This is partly because Aue's diegetic role as a narrator-focalizer *aligns* with his intradiegetic job within the Nazi machinery—to gather information and to write reports. If Aue's possesses "the intelligence and analytic ability, the emotional detachment and temporal distance" required for a clear review of the historical events (Suleiman 5), it is because his narrative perspective transcends that of a "mere" witness: he is a professional one. As Razinsky notes, Aue functions then as an "in situ annalist" for the readers much as he once did for the Third Reich. His function is "that of an eye" and as a result, for most of the narrative, he is more "a conduit of information than active participant" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 71-72). Aue himself explains, in "Allemandes I et II" how in the Eastern front he feels like a camera, an object that cannot find the reason behind his actions: "c'était comme si une caméra se trouvait fixée au-dessus de moi, et j'étais à la fois cette caméra, l'homme qu'elle filmait, et l'homme qui ensuite étudiait le film. Cela parfois me renversait, et souvent, la nuit, je ne dormais pas, je fixais le plafond, l'objectif ne me laissait pas en paix. Mais la réponse à ma question continuait à me fuir entre les doigts" (106) [48].

Despite Aue's mentioned "passivity" as a witness, his role as an observer does not make him a neutral reporter of the Holocaust. As he himself reminds his addressees, "regarder engage autant de responsabilité que faire" (445) [49]. He remains a perpetrator, an immoral condition that inevitably shapes his point of view, colliding with the readers' sense of moral decency. In this sense, readers must bear in mind that if Aue constitutes a perfect "historical witness" (Suleiman 5) it is also because, in fact, he participated in the action, what turns him into "perpetrator-witness" (Razinsky, "History, Excess and Testimony" 15). Thus, what I have identified as the novel's main *empathy builder*—Aue's dominance over both *mood* and *voice*—poses a distinct challenge: the ideological bias of the narrator-focalizer. Despite this moral dilemma, as I have suggested above, the omnipresence of the narrator-focalizer "absorbs" the readers, just like—as has also been implied and will be further explained—his "immunization" against the hell-like panorama he describes may equally extend to them. Such moral allowances can be explained by revisiting, momentarily, the hermeneutical concepts of "horizon", "application", and "stillness" presented in Block II of this thesis in relation to the fictional worlds' condition as "moral laboratories" (Hakemulder, 2000).

For Gadamer, the "horizon" of a character refers to "the range of *vision* that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 301, my emphasis). The "horizon", emerging directly from the character's focalization, also encompasses the character's opinions and moral considerations of the events, as well as the significance he or she attributes to them. When engaging with a fictional work, the reader's own vision of affairs—or "horizon"—encounters the focalizer's "horizon" in what Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons" or *Horizontverschmelzung* (302). Following Gadamer's conceptualization, to bridge the gap between the narratee's and the narrator's "horizons"—that, in *Les bienveillantes,* is assumed to be a considerable one—, the

readership is compelled to engage in a process of what Gadamer labels "application": an adjustment of their frame of reference to the perspective of the fictive other. Yet, this adjustment is not tantamount to complete "absorption". As discussed in Block II, the process of "application", like that of empathy, involves a dialectical negotiation because "the ability to perceive the world from the perspective of the other does not mean letting go of one's own values" (Meretoja, "Fiction, History and the Possible" 388). What "application" does imply, however, is a tendency towards "stillness", that is, an effect of "critical distance" in observation which suspends judgement on the reader's part (Deciu Ritivoi 80). Consequently, when confronted with the horizon of a perpetrator like Aue, readers do not forsake their sense of moral values; rather, they momentarily suspend it, as they are aware of the novel's status as a simulacrum and, therefore, of the fictional nature of their gesture.

However, as anticipated, this hermeneutic process is not the only factor mitigating the effects of Aue's immorality on the reader. Aue's "horizon" is not monolithically immoral. Instead, the corruption of the narrator-focalizer is constantly problematized by his own contradictions. Just like with the category of *voice* in "Toccata", the "emotional detachment" of Max's focalization also exhibits fissures that allow for empathy filter in. The indifference of Aue's perspective is often inconsistent, as his reactions and thoughts on the massacres frequently undermine his initial promise of non-repentance and his repeated emphasis on practicality rooted in Nazi rhetoric. Following this thread, the next two sub-sections will comment on the protagonist's approach to two specific focalized objects whose treatment deviates from Aue's pretended objectivity: the description of the victims and of the way they were killed, and that of his fellow Nazi officers.

Ethical Recognitions of the Levinasian "Face of the Other"

In the second chapter of *Les bienveillantes*, titled "Allemandes I et II", Max narrates his experiences as an inside-analyst of the Nazi killing squads in the Eastern Front—that is, in Ukraine and the Caucasus. In general, he documents the *Aktions* perpetrated there against Jews and Bolsheviks. These massacres and executions are gathered at the beginning of the novel and constitute the most shocking events narrated in it. Because the role of the protagonist at that point of the diegesis is that of an informant, he is expected to observe the killings to produce objective reports. Since his first formal invitation to a massacre, Aue confides to the reader his disgust and reluctance to participate, even passively, in the *Aktions*. This attitude persists for some pages, during which the narrator confesses only to the reader-confident, "j'ai des doutes sur nos méthodes, je le puis en toute sincérité: j'en saisissais mal la logique" (81) [50]. Yet, as this quote indicates, Aue justifies this secret disapproval through practical reasoning. For him, the "rage immense, démesurée" that he feels in the face of the murder of thousands can be explained in economic terms: he perceives the massacres as "un gâchis humain", a loss of possible workers for the Third Reich (126) [51]. But his rage will not last long. As anticipated, despite his "early revulsion for acts of war-time slaughter" (Lyle 85), Maximilien Aue will gradually lean towards considering the *Endlösung* as an unavoidable effect of the conflict. As is always the case with Aue, however, the shift from considering the massacres as something repulsive to viewing them as necessary war crime is not sudden, but rather unfolds as a change of opinion filled with contradictions. If at one point he reflects that "nous tuions beaucoup de gens. Cela me semblait un malheur, même si c'était inevitable et nécessaire" (81) [52], two pages later, when another comrade refers to the execution of Jews as "nécessaire"—"'C'est nécessaire, vous comprenez? Dans tout ça, la souffrance humaine ne doit compter pour rien'"—, Aue contradicts his opinion, even if

he seemed to share it two pages ago, and answers him: "'Oui, mais tout de même elle compte pour quelque chose'". Right after that, the protagonist reflects on the injustice of that human suffering: "C'était cela que je ne parvenais pas à saisir: la béance, l'inadéquation absolue entre la facilité avec laquelle on peut tuer et la grande difficulté qu'il doit y avoir à mourir. Pour nous, c'était une sale journée de travail; pour eux, la fin de tout" (83) [53]. Nonetheless, Aue's moral doubts gradually fade as the novel progresses, to the point where, from the second half of "Allemandes I et II" onward, he appears to comply with the Führer's orders without further hesitation. At a formal level, this apathy is mirrored in "le regard froid de l'objectif" (De Tholozany 201) [54] through which Aue narrates the massacres, described in an informative style.

Therefore, the narrator's initial distress is replaced by an unemotional, flat tone when recounting these violent passages. From the perspective of perpetrator studies, this shift in Aue's attitude is difficult to interpret and almost inconsistent, as it would be more coherent either to show Aue's indifference to the massacres from the outset, to maintain his moral doubts throughout the narrative, or to explain this change in the representation of the Shoah directly through the first-person *voice*. However, this same emotionally detached tone, along with the protagonist's unacknowledged change in attitude, can be easily understood within the framework of trauma studies. This, of course, opens a new problematic in the interpretation of *Les bienveillantes*, as it paradoxically invites us to apply the logic of trauma to a text that does not belong to a survivor of the traumatic experience, but to one of its perpetrators. Nevertheless, and despite acknowledging the tricky nature of this interpretive gesture, the temporary use of trauma studies aligns with and accounts for my thesis, which suggests that the narrator's sudden adoption of a cold tone in these passages can be seen as an indicator of his unconscious distress.

Among scholars specializing in trauma, it is an agreed-upon fact that "people who recalled their trauma from the observer vantage point tended to use a rather journalistic style of reporting their experience" (McIsaac & Eich 251). That is because their lack of emotional closure impedes any personal connection with the recalled life-events, limiting the narration of memories to the matter-of-fact reporting that Aue also employs. Taking this—as well as his initial rejection of the massacres—into account, one could consider Aue's cold focalization as, counterintuitively, a sign of his overinvolvement. Even if this hypothesis already points at the presence of a somehow traumatized witness, the novel's *mood* presents more evident signs of Aue's ethical and emotional implication which, hopefully, will partially justify this controversial turn to trauma studies.

Before continuing with the novel's *mood,* however, it may be necessary to briefly reflect on its intricate representation of the Shoah, which, in my opinion, the previous interpretation brings to light and which cannot be overlooked. Although I will delve deeper into the novel's style later, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section in relation to the novel's critical reception, the issue with fictional testimony of the Shoah in *Les Bienveillantes* is not only *who* delivers it, but also *how* it is delivered: an aspect that of course, is related to the s*howing,* the *mood,* of the narrative. In terms of form, to understand Aue's focalization, it is crucial to consider not only the detached realism explained above, but also the fact that this realism presents a tendency toward excess, bordering on the grotesque and the scatological. This representational mode has led the novel to be accused, as previously mentioned, of being a "pornification of violence" (Manoschek 2008). However, in my view, both Aue's cold and "traumatized" gaze to the *Endlösung* on the one hand, and this extremely raw portrayal of the historical disaster on the other, ultimately aim to convey the horror of the Holocaust. Or rather, the impossibility of portraying that horror. From this perspective, both narrative elements

would be pointing to the notion that Littell's novel grounds its representation on the Shoah in the idea that, as Vargas Llosa said, "el abismo del horror *sobrepasa* los límites del entendimiento" (2006, my emphasis) [55]. In that case, *Les Bienveillantes* could be read, from a formal standpoint, as an experimental approach to the ineffable, and also, from a representational perspective, as a highly problematic subversion of previous Holocaust literature. Why? Because, just as many writers dealing with the Shoah have resorted to a disengaged perspective to transmit the surrealism of the events, or have opted for not omitting any of their related experiences regardless of their cruelty, many have linked these narrative choices to the opinion that this episode defied rationality and, therefore, that its narrativization depended on the realm of the fictional and the aesthetic. In this vein, echoing Vargas Llosa's quote above, philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben (1999), essayists as Jean Améry (1980) or cineasts as Claude Lanzmann (1995) have agreed that, where human understanding ends, fiction must intervene, because in what the Shoah is concerned, maybe, as Jorge Semprún affirmed "únicamente el artificio de un relato dominado conseguirá transmitir parcialmente la verdad del testimonio" (25) [56]. Hence, for them, if art cannot make the horrors of Shoah comprehensible, it must at least try to remember the victims, to testify to them. This delicate exercise of memory is, in my opinion, reproduced in Littell's novel, paradoxically, from the opposite perspective: that of the murderers. Aue could never testify to the victims, but what he *does* do is to testify—although in a deeply unsettling way—to their having existed. Even if this is a side-effect to his narration, by textualizing and listing their deaths, the text keeps a spectral memory of the victims. Hence, although from the other side of morality and of literary tradition, Maximilien Aue's first-hand *showing* of the Holocaust manages to navigate the ineffable by transporting the reader to an incomprehensible hell on Earth.

But more than the possible readings of the detached and grotesque style that characterizes Aue's focalization, the ethical implications of the novel's *mood* become evident in certain narrative events: the moments when the protagonist becomes fully aware of the Jews' tragic destiny. In line with his initial rejection of the *Endlösung,* Aue will sometimes share with the readership his concern for the suffering inflicted on the Jewish population by the Third Reich. As I see it, such considerations highlight his twisted indirect testimony, described in the last paragraphs. On some occasions, these reflections appear in the abstract, right after a massacre. For instance, at one point in the narration, he asks his addressee, "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" (113) [57]. Nonetheless, most of Aue's anagnorises of the agony that the Jews are enduring stem from his recognition of the vulnerability of an individual victim. These moments occur in the narration in the few moments when the former SS agent distances himself even more from his ideology and his pretended indifference and his focus individualizes a victim.

At certain points in *Les bienveillantes,* then, the focalization's usual disregard for the victims is interrupted in a way that, "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" (Razinsky, "History, Excess and Testimony" 79). For scholars such as Meretoja (2017) or Razinsky (2008), when, amidst the Bosch-like detailed hell, Aue's focalization zooms in on a specific victim, that person symbolizes the Levinasian "face of the Other". In Emmanuel Levinas's ethics, the Face of the Other carries an ethical imperative: the commandment "thou shalt not kill", that Levinas expresses as follows:

> Le “tu ne tueras pas” est la première parole du visage. Or c’est un ordre. Il y a dans l’apparition du visage un commandement, comme si un maître me parlait. Pourtant, en même temps, le visage d’autrui est dénué; c’est le pauvre pour lequel je peux tout et à qui je dois tout. Et moi, qui que je sois, mais en tant que ‘première personne’, je suis celui qui se trouve des ressources pour répondre à l’appel [...] Elle est le présupposé de toutes les relations humaines. (*Étique et infini* 84) [58]

The Face summons an essential responsibility, linked to the subject’s humanity: the responsibility to acknowledge the equal humanity of the Other and care about them. The following examples from the novel will show how, at times, Aue recognizes this responsibility, which Levinas refers to as “the call” (*Ethics and Infinity* 87-89).

Most of the ethical zooms-in of Aue’s focalization occur during the Eastern Front massacres, primarily in “Allemandes I et II”. Among the most notable instances, we find Aue’s friendship with a Jew child named Yakov (104), who works as a pianist for the SS agents and whom the protagonist helps with his music. Against the advice of the other Nazis, Aue admits to being “un peu attaché” to the boy (109) [59]. When he learns that Yakov has been murdered after losing his hand in a work accident, he deeply mourns his death. Another example is his concern for a little girl who searches for her mother among the corpses in the mass graves, whom he reluctantly hands over to a SS-soldier to be executed, asking him to treat her kindly—“Sois gentil avec elle’, lui dis-je assez stupidement” (106) [60]. Later, the hanging of a partisan girl with a “regard clair et lumineux” makes Max “éclater en flames” (171) [61]. Nevertheless, the most poignant episode of an ethical zoom-in on Aue’s side takes place during the Babi Yar massacre in Ukraine—one of the largest in WWII—, when Aue takes pity on a dying young girl:

> 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 cœur

> 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) [62]

This last example illustrates how, even after recognizing the Face of the Other and feeling the ethical impulse to alleviate her pain, Aue decides to ignore "the call". Whether to silence the Face's commandment or to spare her further suffering (Jonge et al. 155), the protagonist decides to execute the young girl. According to Razinsky, this episode of the Babi Yar massacre "sounds like a parodic response to Levinas's ethics of the encounter with the face of the other" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 79): contrary to Levinas's opinion, Max's behavior proves that "the call" can be ignored. Yet, as Razinsky continues, the protagonist's ethical irresponsiveness to Other is "far from mere indifference" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 79). Instead, Maximilien's anagnorises, in which he recognizes and laments the "nakedness and defenselessness" of the Other (Peperzak 83) will leave their mark on his emotionality. Aligned with this idea, critics have offered different interpretations of the protagonist's *intra-world* emotions during these ethical encounters. Suleiman suggests that they simply demonstrate a "certain moral sensibility" (2) on the part of the protagonist, while Delorme argues they constitute genuine moments of sympathy (39). In Razinsky's opinion, these encounters always imply a glimpse of comprehension, which would turn them into instances of empathy ("History, Excess and Testimony" 80). Taking my cue from Razinsky's interpretation, what this passage of the novel evinces is that, despite not having answered "the call", Max has not forgotten the responsibility that the Face brings with it and that he still harbors *concrete intra-world* emotions of guilt and frustration, as his posterior reactions to the killings demonstrate.

First, moved by the affection he feels towards Yakov—the Jewish pianist boy—, Aue orders some sheet music from Berlin to give to the boy as a gift. When the sheet music arrives at the front, already after the child's murder, the protagonist reads his gesture towards the little boy as follows: "Cela *avait été une bêtise, une naïveté sentimentale*; néanmoins cela m'emplissait d'une grande mélancolie" (141, my emphasis) [63]. Also, after having left the lost little girl with an SS agent, he reports feeling "le vertige, je voulais pleurer […] je ressentais une colère folle" (107) [64]. To conceal his distress from his colleagues, Aue runs to the woods to cry. Once in there, he admits that that natural settling, the space where the massacres are executed, "me faisait peur" (108) [65]. He also uses this coping mechanism after finishing off "la jeune belle fille" (126). The killing of the partisan girl may be the one that haunts the protagonist the most. After having hung her, Aue remembers her image, now idealized, for weeks: "Des jours durant je réfléchis à cette scène étrange […] elle me semblait fabuleusement belle, habitant la mort comme une idole, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges. […] je la trouvais toujours couchée sur mon passage […] Cela dura des semaines" (171) [66]. The vividness of this memory is such that, even two years after the execution of the partisan girl, Aue still remembers her. Once, overcome with emotion, he evokes her memory, sobbing, using the epithet he had given her at the time: "de quel droit l'avions-nous pendue, comment pouvait-on pendre cette fille, et je sanglotais sans fin, ravagé par son souvenir, ma Notre-Dame-des-Neiges" (835). Right after narrating how he cried for her, the adult-Aue, the narrator, adds: "ce n'était pas des remords, je n'avais pas des remords, je ne me sentais pas coupable […] seulement je *comprenais* ce que cela voulait dire de pendre une fille" (835, my emphasis) [67]. As the last quote illustrates, here, the narrator fully *understands* the significance of his criminal actions: that, in Aue's own words, "ceux qui tuent sont des hommes, comme ceux qui sont tués" and that "c'est cela qui est terrible" (30) [68]. At these moments, the

protagonist becomes fully conscious of the point he makes over and over throughout the novel, although in an abstract, moral-like manner: the fact that "celui qui tue, tue avant tout son frère" (Ferdjani 266) [69]. This is the source of the real horror: to fail in dehumanizing the Other, to hear their "call" and nevertheless ignore it. In close relation to this, later in the novel, Aue will give to the readers the following explanation on the relation between violence and dehumanization:

> J'en suis arrivé à la conclusion que le garde SS ne devient pas violent ou sadique parce qu'il pense que le détenu n'est pas un être humain; au contraire, sa rage croît et tourne au sadisme lorsqu'il s'aperçoit que le détenu, loin d'être un sous-homme comme on le lui a appris, est justement, après tout, un homme, comme lui au fond, et c'est cette résistance, vous voyez, que le garde trouve insupportable, cette persistance muette de l'autre, et donc le garde le frappe pour essayer de faire disparaître leur humanité commune. (574) [70]

This consideration, along with the protagonist's focus on certain victims, is infused with Levinasian ethics. As Meretoja observes, this quote reveals how "the protagonist's logic of destroying the other echoes Levinas's thinking on the Face". For Aue, murder is not committed by *ignoring* "the call", but precisely *because* he can hear it. As the zoom-ins explained above may exemplify, Aue recognizes the existence of "the call" and the responsibility it demands: a responsibility that becomes so unbearable, that the only way out is to kill the bearer of the Face, "pour essayer de faire disparaître leur humanité commune". According to Meretoja, then, "the sadism of the soldiers and officers is ultimately linked to the unbearable task of having to kill fellow human beings" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 224). From this perspective, Razinsky's previously-mentioned interpretation, by which Aue's answer to these zoom-ins "sounds like a parodic response to Levinas's ethics of the encounter with the face of the other" ("History, Excess and

Testimony" 79), takes on a new meaning: the cruel irony lies in the fact that, at the end, "the call" can be rejected, but it cannot be *unheard*. The protagonist will not be able to forget it, and this will take its toll. Aue empathizes with the victims and, as we will see, his failure to take responsibility for this empathy will haunt him until the narrative present. Despite his manifest indifference—when crying for the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, the narrator stresses again that he feels no remorse—, as is customary in the narrative, the ethical zooms-in of the focalization explained above, together with Aue's subsequent distress, contradict his own reading of them. In fact, they demonstrate his concern for the suffering of others and thus, his conflictive "ethical engagement" (Razinsky, "History, Excess and Testimony" 79).

Consequently, the protagonist's emotional responses to his wartime experiences may be interpreted by readers, from their standpoint of dramatic irony—that is, their interpretive superiority over the protagonist—, as indicative of a repressed sense of guilt and existential anguish. Indeed, several scholars (Berberich 2020; Bonasera 2023) have remarked how the infamous episode of the Babi Yar massacre serves as an "essential piece of insight into the construction of such an ambiguous character" as in it, "the narrator's physical and mental discomfort" offers "a new dimension of 'humanity' in Aue's dark soul" (Jonge et al. 155). Aue's moments of recognition of the victims are essential *empathy builders*, because, as Ercolino also notes, they reveal Aue's pain and, as a result, his humanity. With reference to immoral protagonists, the Italian scholar stresses, "men's suffering invites empathy, and their gradual self-castigating introspection and awareness of their own culpability emphasizes their humanity" ("Negative Empathy" 305). Furthermore, Carmen Bonasera and Christine Berberich, in their respective articles, view the Babi Yar passage as illustrative of the hermeneutical process—of "horizon", "application", and "stillness"—which, as I have previously

explained, facilitates the development of extreme empathy. On the one hand, for Bonasera, this narrative episode demonstrates how extreme empathy arouses from a skillful combination of attachment and distance or, as she puts it, "a distressing oscillation between the character's (and, possibly, the reader's) empathic engagement with the victim, and his self-imposed detachment from the horror he is perpetrating" (180). Besides, Berberich emphasizes how this oscillation leads to "stillness", as, when faced with it, "the reader cannot distance herself from the narrative, unless she stops reading, because the ekphrastic, vivid description of the scene involves [her] too much" (176).

But, according to Ercolino, the ethical deviations in Aue's focalization not only serve the narrative function of leading the reader to believe in his pain and in his humanity, but also to consider his "potential for moral salvation" ("Negative Empathy" 305). In response to Aue's implicit distress, the narratee may feel "compassion for the suffering hero"—a natural tendency among readers, as noted by Jauss (13-21)—and thus, a desire to see him repent and transform his latent bad consciousness into a redemptive response. Yet, his expected reaction never materializes in *Les bienveillantes.* Aue's failure to achieve moral atonement comes as a source of frustration for the receiver, who, as a result, experiences the "non-cathartic" (Ngai) dimension of extreme empathy explained in Block I of this thesis. However, for Ercolino, the discomfort associated with reading *Les bienveillantes* stems from the fact that the entire narrative aims to evoke a "peculiar feeling of *permanent shock*" in its readers ("Negative Empathy" 254). As previously mentioned, to achieve this effect, the novel relies on a pervasive use of excess, intensifying it to such a degree that it evokes what Ngai terms "stuplimity"—a peculiar blend of shock and, paradoxically, boredom due to the narrative's stillness (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 255). If the readers' reception includes *inter-world* emotions of stuplimity and boredom, this response may favor extreme empathy, as both emotional

responses "anesthetize" readers against the protagonist's criminal deeds, thus minimizing the rejection they may feel towards the perversion that dominates the novel.

Within the elements that Maximilien's focalization encompasses, stuplimity and boredom are patent not only in the commented-on "atrocity exhibition" of the mass murders (Razinsky, "History, Excess and Testimony" 82), but also in the eschatological focus on Aue's constant medical issues including vomits,[210] diarrhea,[211] and anxiety attacks.[212] Interestingly, these health problems start at the same time as his testimony of the executions, often occurring immediately afterward,[213] and are reported to persist into his old age. For instance in "Toccata", the narrator, adult-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) [77]. Critics have interpreted these symptoms as obvious psychosomatic manifestations of the protagonist's veiled distress for the victims (Ercolino 2018; Sanyal 2010). Despite that, this connection is not made explicit in the novel, as its protagonist is unable to relate these physical reactions to any moral guilt even if, as the quote above evinces, he locates the origin of the problem in his times on the Eastern Front. Nonetheless, proving anew to be a better witness than he is an interpreter of his own experiences, Max Aue manages to establish this connection when it comes to

[210] "Je n'avais vomi qu'une seule fois ou deux, mais, régulièrement, après le repas, j'étais pris de ces haut-le-coeur désagréables et fatigants" (137) [71]; "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) [72].
[211] "[…] je ne m'essuyais pas, mais me branlais debout dans l'escalier de service, frottant contre la rambarde mes fesses merdeuses dont l'odeur m'assaillait le nez et me démontait la tête; et en jouissant je manquais basculer dans les escaliers, je me rattrapai de justesse en riant et regardai les traces de merde sur le bois" (834) [73].
[212] "la nuit, je ne dormais pas […] J'avais le vertige, je voulais pleurer" (106) [74]; "De nouveau, une immense envie de pleurer me submergeait. Cela me prenait souvent maintenant" (358) [75].
[213] "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) [76].

the symptomatology of his fellow SS-officers. Drawing on Levinasian-like terms, he concludes that,

> Aussi brutalisés et accoutumés fussent-ils, aucun de nos hommes ne pouvait tuer une femme juive sans songer à sa femme, sa sœur ou sa mère, ne pouvait tuer un enfant juif sans voir ses propres enfants devant lui dans la fosse. Leurs réactions, leur violence, leur alcoolisme, les dépressions nerveuses, les suicides, mes propres tristesses, *tout cela démontrait que l'autre existe, existe en tant qu'autre, en tant qu'humain, et qu'aucune volonté, aucune idéologie, aucune quantité de bêtise et d'alcool ne peut rompre ce lien, ténu mais indestructible*. Cela est un fait et non une opinion. (142, my emphasis) [78]

In fact, Max's focalization on the behavior of other Nazi perpetrators appears, alongside with his zooming in on certain victims, as the second *mood*-related *empathy builder*. As will be further explored now, the comparison that the novel establishes between Max and his colleagues is crucial for humanizing his *dramatis persona*, as those portrayals ultimately direct the novel's empathy towards Max himself.

"Ces antisémites viscéraux, obscènes": Aue as an Outsider within Totalitarianism

In his role as former informant for the Third Reich/current informant for the reader, Max closely observes his peers—whether officers, soldiers, or bureaucrats—during his tenure as an SS-officer on the Eastern Front, in Stalingrad, and in Berlin. In what the arousal of readers' extreme empathy is concerned, the protagonist's scrutiny of the SS agents and their doings yields a dual effect. On the one hand, the description of the brutal actions committed by his comrades allows readers to draw comparisons between them and the narrator—comparisons that are favorable to the latter. On the other hand, because of the

analytical perspective from which he recounts Nazi procedures, as well as his subsequent criticism of many of them, the protagonist seems to distance himself from the National Socialist system. Furthermore, this passive disconnection is accentuated by the chronological gap between the I-narrator and the I-protagonist, which enables the former to incorporate historical references extracted from his posterior readings on the Holocaust. For instance, adult-Aue demonstrates his familiarity with the records of the Nuremberg trials and with Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* as he sometimes compares these works with his own experiences.[214] All these seemingly impartial analyses of Nazi Germany—concerning the officers, methodologies, and the posterior literature on the subject—give a detached tone to the novel's *mood*, thus bolstering the witness quality of Aue's focalization. Such particular perspective is enabled by the protagonist's situation in the Nazi system, one of simultaneous belonging and distance, that allows him to be at once wholly within it and sufficiently outside it to see it for what it is, both historically and morally (Razinsky, "History, Excess and Testimony" 15).

Overall, the ambiguous nature of the novel's mono-perspectivism, which oscillates between that of a witness and that of a murderer, would make it easier for the narratee, as Suleiman says, to simultaneously experience "empathy for a perpetrator of genocide" and "revulsion and moral condemnation" (2). In fact, by doing so, the reader would be replicating Max's own perception of his peers: the protagonist himself, when dealing with the other Nazis, attempts to strike a balance between indignation and passivity or, between *shock* and the *boredom* created by habit. For instance, the horror and detachment that underlies Aue's description of his partners can be exemplified

[214] For instance, dealing with the figure of Eichmann, Aue 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'était certainement pas *l'ennemi du genre humain* qu'on a décrit à Nuremberg [...] il n'était non plus une incarnation du *mal banal*" (524) [79].

through an excerpt in which the protagonist reports his colleagues' behavior and categorizes them according to 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) [80]

As we can see, Aue explicitly distances himself from his equals. In the same vein, in more than one occasion, Aue expresses his inability to dehumanize not only the Jews, but all the victims of the Third Reich.[215] In that sense, the protagonist even grows afraid of changing and following the same path as the rest of the Nazi officials. For instance, while in Stalingrad, he encounters a particularly alienated young officer and wonders: "Dans combien de temps, me demandai-je, serai-je comme lui? Cette pensée me donnait envie de pleurer" (340) [82]. These reflections display how, among the Nazis, Max considers himself "un marginal" (Tame 219). As Peter Tame notes, the novel highlights then how Aue "Ce n'est pas un fasciste orthodoxe. C'est 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" (219) [83].

Indeed, Max embodies the archetype of the "héros problématique"[216] by frequently positioning his focalization against that of other perpetrators. Moreover, his

[215] For instance, in page 102, Aue questions the tenets of Nazism when he reflects that: "Notre propagande répétait sans cesse que les Russes étaient des Untermenchs chiens, des sous-hommes; mais cela, je refusais de le croire. J'avais interrogé des officiers capturés, des commissaires, et je voyais bien qu'eux aussi étaient des hommes comme nous, des hommes qui ne souhaitaient que le bien, qu'aimaient leur famille et leur patrie" (102) [81].

[216] As Lucien Goldmann exposes in *Pour une sociologie du roman* (1964), according to Gyorgy Lukács, the classical novel structure is based on a constitutive opposition between the nature of the hero and that of

disapproval of the "antisémites viscéraux, obscènes" (227) [86] extends beyond private remarks to the reader—"tuer sans comprendre pourquoi et sans souci non plus […] Voilà ce que je ne comprenais pas" (89) [87]—and sometimes, his actions match his emotions. Occasionally, the narrative evinces Aue's "rebellious" attitude towards Nazism by depicting the protagonist confronting the perpetrators directly. For instance, when one of them kills a newborn (149), or when another one tortures a prisoner without reason and Max intervenes to stop them—"Vous êtes devenu fou! Cessez cela tout de suite" (229) [88]. Aue's dissent from the ideology of the Third Reich—a regime with which, as we know, he started participating actively to avoid condemnation for homosexuality (74)—, increases throughout the first half of the narration. He grows progressively more aware of the *inertia* that propels his immoral actions, which, unlike those of his colleagues, are not rooted in a strong ideological belief. The protagonist expresses this lack of conviction 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) [89].

Nonetheless, as the novel progresses, the realization that he is not committed to Nazism becomes less and less significant, and rebellion transforms into apathy. As Aue gets familiarized with the horrors of war, lethargy gradually consumes him until he is

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the world (understood as the world of the novel). Thus, the novel possesses a "dialectical nature" that confronts the hero's ideas and those imposed by his environment. Within this logic, Lukács defines the problematic hero as one who seeks "valeurs authentiques dans un monde de conformisme et de convention" (Goldmann 17) [84]. So, for Lukács, the novel is the story of "la recherche de valeurs authentiques par un héros problématique, dans un monde dégradé" (qtd. Goldmann 18) [85], a novelistic world characterized by degradation, by a "mal ontologique" (Goldmann 19). Thus, the protagonist of *Les bienveillantes* would be an example of a problematic hero since his internal struggle oscillates between adapting to Nazi Germany (the "convention" of his environment) and silently rejecting its practices. Often, the problematic hero undergoes a transformation that leads to a vertical transcendence in relation to disruption (as happens, for instance, to Madame Bovary). As we already know, however, this purification never occurs to Aue, who assimilates with his corrupt surroundings.

dominated, in his own words, by "une vaste indifférence" (526) [90] in the face of the suffering of others. As anticipated, this "immunization" to horror also extends to readers, although in this case, it probably never transforms into indifference. However, as readers subtly "acclimate" themselves to the inhuman aspects of this fictional world, the effect of stillness may crystallize. In this regard, the moral decay personified by the protagonist and by his counterparts, as well as the mere reading experience demanded by the novel, turn *Les bienveillantes* into a practical manifestation of Hannah Arendt's ideas on totalitarianism. Through its focalization, *Les bienveillantes* illustrates the annihilation of the individual and their will, which, as the German philosopher exposes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, lies at the foundation of totalitarian movements such as Nazism. As Arendt articulates, in totalitarianism, "the Movement […] is above state and people, ready to sacrifice both for the sake of its ideology" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 266). According to Arendt, then, totalitarianism is not based on the excess of ideology but on the contrary, on the *total absence* of it, which reduces citizens to "slave-like-souls" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 457). Aue already foreshadows the peril of losing one's subjectivity for the sake of totalitarianism in "Toccata", when he warns his reader that,

> La guerre totale, c'est cela aussi: le civil, ça n'existe plus […] la guerre, il s'agit d'un phénomène collectif: le génocide moderne est un processus infligé aux masses, par les masses, pour les masses […] Tout comme, selon Marx, l'ouvrier est aliéné par rapport au produit de son travail, dans le génocide ou la guerre totale sous sa forme moderne l'exécutant est aliéné par rapport de son action. (24-25) [91]

That is Aue's conclusion: when death turns into a routine, you alienate yourself from it. Over eight hundred pages, the novel will illustrate this point through Aue's personal corruption and that of his colleagues. At the same time, the reading of this corruption will equally demonstrate to the reader how we can also get used to immorality. However,

while readers maintain their *Weltanschauung* in constant dialogue with the protagonist's *horizon*; Aue, enthralled by the Third Reich, loses control over himself and his initial capacity for critical thinking (Lyle). The comparison he draws between himself, and other party members gradually makes him aware of his own corruption. At the end of the novel, already in Berlin, he wonders when he ceased to be 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) [92]

Later, he blames the Nazi regime for this moral decay: "Une bouffée d'amertume m'envahit. *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" (645, my emphasis) [93]. As this quote displays, Maximilien Aue unconsciously distances himself from Nazism by interpreting his own corruption as something passive, something that *has been done to him:* a process in which he is also a victim and that will turn him, in his words, into a "coquille vide, un automate" [94]. This perception of the motivation for his own criminal acts, along with the portrayal of his SS comrades, further distances him from them. While he depicts many of them as if they had been born to work with death and do so willingly; he presents himself as an alienated being, absorbed by circumstances, whose intentions and whose actions are, against his will, at odds. According to Louis Lyle, through this portrait of the protagonist as an "héros problématique", *Les bienveillantes* illustrates precisely the process discussed above: the loss of individuality in favor of ideology. Such moral degradation is illustrated by means of Aue's evolution as a character, defined by Lyle as that of*:*

> An (outwardly, at least) normal young man whose early revulsion for acts of war-time slaughter results in recurring episodes of nausea and insomnia, is progressively transformed into a cold-blooded killer capable of ruthlessly dispatching those close to him, including (probably) his mother and step-father, his former lover and his trusted best friend, among others. (85)

Finally, Max attempts to stop this corruption and resolve his conflicted moral position between revulsion and acceptance when, in "Menuet (en rondeaux)", he offers to work towards the improvement of the life conditions in the concentration camps. As 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" (11). In my opinion, through this change, Aue seeks to further separate himself from his companions by becoming—ironically—more constructive than destructive. Aue wants to distance his work for the Third Reich from the massacres, just like his engineer friend Osnabrugge, who confesses to never having wanted to participate in the human desire for destruction: "Même quand j'étais petit, j'aimais construire, alors que tous mes camarades de classe ne voulaient que casser" (631) [95]. But unlike Osnabrugge's, Aue's inclination to "create" is not innate. Instead, when he reflects on his moral corruption and his current role as a perpetrator, he always concludes that both are logical outcomes of a lifelong tendency "à la radicalité" (95): a connection between his wartime experiences and his traumatic past that the novel examines through its narrative *tense*.

Tense: "Un veritable conte moral"

Arguably, the most distinctive *tense* structure in *Les bienveillantes* is the temporal distance between its two narrative levels. In terms of *tense*, these levels imply the coexistence of an extradiegetic time, or "time of the narrating"—with an older Max recounting his memories—; and an intradiegetic time, or "time of the story" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 29)—encompassing the events involving a younger Max. The thirty-year temporal distance—or range of the *isotopy*—between both times indicates that the narrating is *subsequent*, a common occurrence in first-person narratives (*Narrative Discourse* 228). This *subsequent* structure, by which Aue reports his past to the audience, when combined with the presence of an explicit moral within the story, imbues the novel with a dynamic characteristic akin to oral literature. Moreover, the tale-like style of the novel is also accentuated by the insertion of metalepses, which are, as mentioned in the relation to the novel's *voice*, "transitions from one narrative level to another". Metalepses involve the character-narrator intruding into the diegesis, for instance, to comment on it, or to remind the reader of their intimacy (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 234). Such interventions reflect the influence of the oral tradition of storytelling, where such interpellations to the audience are common. Overall, when the narrator describes his story as "un veritable conte moral" (12) [96] on the first page, he indeed points at one of the novel's influences at a *tense* level. In this sense, *Les bienveillantes* not only has a final moral, and the double temporal structure typical of orality, but, like a tale, it "habitually conforms, at least in its major articulations, to chronological order" (*Narrative Discourse* 36).

As follows from the brief description above, *Les bienveillantes* presents a very lineal and simplified chronology. The intradiegetic time—or the time of the second narrative—spans approximately four years, from the executions by shooting on the Eastern Front in 1941 to the Fall of Berlin in 1945. In terms of narrative *duration*, the

diegesis is primarily constructed through a succession of scenes. 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". Similarly, the accelerations and decelerations of pace established by the musical compositions that name the different chapters, more than implying sudden changes, affect the overall rhythm of the chapter. For example, in "Menuet (en rondeaux)" the rhythm is calmer and more stable, while in "Gigue", it is faster and abrupt. Being composed mostly of scenes, the great majority of events are nonetheless narrated with a regular duration,[217] in a way that the variations come, mostly, from the recurrence of "descriptive pauses" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 99) and the narrator's introspections.[218] Therefore, the *tense* of the novel approximates the ideal "zero degree" of *duration*, which would entail "perfect temporal correspondence" between the time of the *fabula* and that of the *story* (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 36). Despite this almost perfect correspondence, the diegesis includes a single "implicit ellipsis" or "chronological lacuna", which concerns the night of the murder of Max's mother and stepfather. It also presents an enigma or "pseudo-ellipsis": the nature of the "amour interdit" announced in the preface, a signifier that is later filled by Aue.

[217] By "regular duration", I refer to the perfect correspondence between the narrative time and that of the story. As Gérard Genette explains in *Narrative Discourse,* this is the pace that characterizes the narrative movement of the "scene" which includes. for instance, dialogue; and which "realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story" (95).

[218] If in "scenes" the time of the story equates to the time of the narration, in "pauses", the time of the narration exceeds the time of the story, so that the progress of the novel does not correspond to the progression of narrative events. As Gérard Genette explains (*Narrative Discourse* 99), pauses occur typically during descriptive passages—what he calls "descriptive pauses"—or in the moments when the thoughts of one of the characters are transcribed. In *Les bienveillantes* both descriptive pauses and introspective moments are very frequent. For instance, when Aue enters a library, the narration of fictional events pauses momentarily while the narrator focuses on describing the entrance of the room and its interior: "Le portail s'ouvrait sur une petite cour pavée, entourée de coquettes bâtisses passées à la chaux ; à droite, il y avait un second étage érigé sur une remise, avec un escalier extérieur, la bibliothèque se trouvait là" (246) [97]. An instance of one of the narrator's introspections would be, for instance, on pages 542-546, where the character shares his thoughts on colonialism and the idea of individual responsibility through a reflection that starts with, "On a beaucoup parlé, après la guerre, pour essayer d'expliquer ce qui s'était passé, de l'inhumain […]" (542) [98].

The novel's temporal *frequency* is also characterized by its simplicity, with narrative events presented only once. The only exception concerns the analeptic speculations made by Weser and Clemens when they interrogate Max regarding his family murder, when they re-construct with the protagonist the hours before and after the crimes, already known by the reader.[219]

Finally, concerning the *order* of events, no temporal prolepses are noteworthy either. Conversely, the narration will introduce several analepses that the narrator uses to shed light on his life before the war, from his childhood to his entry into the SS. These flashbacks contribute greatly to the construction of *extreme empathy*, as they enrich the reader's understanding of Aue's life and thus, of his becoming a perpetrator.

"La passion à l'absolu": The Correspondence between Aue's Past and his Present

When the second and main narration begins, Maximilien Aue, the character-protagonist, is 29 years old. To provide readers with a more complete overview of the life of the Nazi agent, the diegesis resorts to analeptic anachronisms that reveal information about his childhood and early youth. As pointed out, these biographical details are crucial for fostering empathy with the protagonist: they extend "the representation of [the] character's subjectivity" (Suleiman 2), which, as we know, nourishes *parasocial* relations and empathic understanding. Consequently, the biographical analepses in *Les bienveillantes* appear as an *empathy builder*, the only *tense*-related one in the text.

Thus, from "Allemandes I et II" on, Max Aue will occasionally introduce retrospections within the narration of his memoirs—which is itself a long retrospection.

[219] Such repetitive passages appear in "Menuet (en rondeaux)", in pages 675-677 and 693-694.

Both these intermittent analepses and the one that conforms the whole of the second narrative level are *homodiegetic*, meaning that they deal with the same content: Aue's past. However, the first ones are also *external* analepses, as they extend beyond the temporal scope of the second narrative, which constitutes the diegesis *per se* (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 61). By means of these *external* flashbacks, readers are informed about the details of Aue's biography. This enables them to reconstruct the entire profile of the character and, as is customary in Littell's novel, to establish connections among his various life experiences. In fact, the general empathy-triggering capacity of biographical analepses seems to increase in the case of Max Aue. That is because he appears to present his early life as the traumatic foundation for his posterior implication in Nazism, thus suggesting an implicit causal relationship between his past experiences and his diegetic present that could help readers in understanding his character development.[220]

Max's father abandoned his family in 1921, when the protagonist and his twin sister Una were nine years old, and disappeared forever (182): an absence that the protagonist blames on his mother, who remarried a French wealthy man, Aristide Moreau. Referring to his mother, Aue says: "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) [99]. As a result of this second marriage, of which Aue always disapproved, the family moved from Germany to the South of France. In Antibes, Max suffered from school bullying—among other reasons, for being German in the context of post-Great War France. At age thirteen, his incestuous love with Una was

[220] Here, I will employ the term "diegetic present" to refer to the present of the second narrative or narrative level, that is, young-Max's experiences in the Second World War. With this, my intention is to dispel a possible confusion with what would be the extradiegetic present, that is, the time of the first narration, in which Max-adult, already in his seventies and in France, is writing his memoirs.

discovered. As a consequence, their mother sent them to separate catholic boarding schools, increasing Max's lifelong hatred for her: an antagonism that, according to Aue, started at birth—"je m'étais révélé mortellement allergique au lait de son sein" (343) [100]. His time in the boarding school is described by the narrator as "un cauchemar de plusieurs années et qui, d'une certaine manière, *dure encore*" (190, my emphasis) [101]. Besides being separated from the only person he loved, there he was physically and sexually abused by both classmates and educators because, as he puts it, "Tout dans cette école était déformé et perverti" (191) [102]. After several years in the catholic institution, Maximilien expressed his desire to study Literature, but his mother forced him to start a career in Law. At university, back in Germany, one of his teachers introduced him to the national-socialist ideology. When Max, who had never renounced his sister's love, learns about her marriage, he considers it an act of treachery. At that time, he also undertakes, without his sister's support, the search for his biological father, which will never yield results. These tragic events cause him an overwhelming feeling of solitude that becomes a leitmotif in the novel: his recurrent expression "de nouveau seul" displays how Maximilien feels immersed in a feeling of absolute solitude only remedied by 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) [103]. Throughout the narrative, Aue will present that loneliness and his sister's absence as the underlying reasons for many of his posterior "decisions": his rejection of heterosexuality and his initial refusal to marry—"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) [104]—, his distrust of others and, from his perspective, even his enlistment in the SS and his participation in the campaign on the Eastern Front.

As exposed above, Aue's external analepses portray a distressing past that he perceives as indissociable from his present, which unfolds against a war scenario. In the second chapter of the novel, the protagonist realizes that his participation in the *Endlösung* is the logic continuation of the "tendance à l'absolu" that has been the unifying thread of his life and explains it in the following terms:

> Je réfléchissais. Je pensais à ma vie, au rapport qu'il pouvait bien y avoir entre cette vie que j'avais vécue […] et ce qui se passait ici. De rapport, il devait bien y en avoir un, et c'était un fait, il y en avait un. […] Depuis mon enfance, j'étais hanté par la passion de l'absolu et du dépassement des limites ; maintenant, cette passion m'avait mené au bord des fosses communes de l'Ukraine […] 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 persuadé, les suivre jusqu'au bout, les yeux grands ouverts. (95) [105]

As reflected in this quote, Aue not only accepts the radicality of the historical events he finds himself involved in, but he even embraces and magnifies it. In doing so, he establishes a thematic coherence between his troubled past and the dreadful historical context he finds himself in. As Razinsky observes, "reality is excessive, and Aue's psychic world, the demons of his imagination and his metaphors are not incongruent with it" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 77). The consistency between Aue's morals and his material conditions of existence, mentioned by Razinsky, is largely favored by the protagonist's passivity and his reluctance to change. Despite his doubts and his implicit pain, Littell's anti-hero persists in his immoral decisions: just as he never abandons his Nazi militancy, he refuses to relinquish his deep hatred for his mother, his search for his

father,[221] or his longing to be loved back by his sister once again. Consequently, Aue's past and diegetic present are intertwined not only through their immorality, but also through his approach to them, which pushes their radicalism to the extreme. Additionally, two other aspects reinforce the coherence of Aue's past and present within the novel. First, the recurrence of excess in the character's trajectory is reflected formally by the almost grotesque style that, as has already been explained, permeates the entire narration. Secondly, the moments in which the novel intercalates *external* flashbacks with the main narrative *reinforce* the connection between them, thereby creating a thematic continuum in Aue's life trajectory.

Significantly, Max's examinations of his life story and the hallucinations tied to his past typically occur immediately after witnessing a brutal war scene, linking the anguish of the conflict to the anxiety of his childhood memories. For exemple, following a description of the victims of an air attack in Stalingrad, he reflects: "À travers cette angoisse 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" (360) [108]. By doing so, the novel, like its protagonist, explicitly connects his involvement in the Third Reich with his family issues, almost as if the former were a coping mechanism or a key to resolving the latter. The evening before he presumably kills his mother, Max ponders: "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) [109]. Here Max seems to equate matricide as

[221] As Stéphane 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) [106]. In effect, Max seems to live in the shadow of this absent paternal figure, seeking 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) [107].

vengeance for an unhappy childhood, and the Holocaust as a remedy—from the National Socialist perspective—to Germany's equally unhappy past.[222] As Roussel also suggests (2010), the protagonist's personal crisis intertwines then not only with his participation in the war, but with the historical crisis of his country and Europe in general. As we will see later in depth, this continuity—emphasized by the arrangement of flashbacks—fosters an emotional *tone* of chaos, immorality, and distress, that conveys the existential *cul-de-sac* in which Maximilien Aue—like Germany, Europe, and the world during World War II—finds himself.

However, it is important to note that here explaining is not the same as justifying. While Max understands his conflictive past as the reason behind his participation in Nazism, he does not morally justify it. Again, the identified emotional coherence between both *tense* levels may be more revealing to the reader than to Max himself. In fact, it can be interpreted as a significant *empathy builder*, because the *external* analepses sprinkle the novel with the "boundless angst" of the protagonist (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 254), provoked by the "passion pour le radical et l'absolu" that unifies the whole diegesis (Littell 95). The novel invests deeply in Max's present and past pain, confirming suspicions that the reader has been harboring since "Toccata": that Aue is, as described by Ercolino & Fusillo, a character of Miltonian descent, a demon filled with doubts (99). By the end of the narrative, as readers become acquainted with Max Aue's private and

[222] Max is not the only character who notices a co-relation between his familial past and his affiliation to the Nazi party, and war crimes. As Jakob Lothe notes, the protagonist's mother relates the hatred she detects in her son towards her to the SS uniform he is wearing "tu me hais, je le sais, je le vois. Tu es venu dans cet uniforme pour me dire combien tu me hais" (480) [110]. According to Lothe, through this association, "the implied author makes a minor character link the perverse action of an individual—Aue, her own son—to hatred as a constituent element of the SS and of Nazi ideology" (114). In a way, and in line with Lothe's argument, the mother identifies hatred as the defining characteristic of Nazism, while at the same time reproaching her son for his enduring hatred toward her—the defining trait of their relationship. Thus, both Aue and National Socialism are defined by the same feeling, suggesting that the protagonist's adherence to the Nazi movement could be a logical extension of his inherent, lifelong hatred, his "boundless angst" as Stefano Ercolino puts it ("Negative Empathy" 254).

public experiences, they understand why he states on the very first page that his own death would bring him great joy: "je placerais une grenade tout contre mon coeur et partirais dans un vif éclat de joie" (11) [111].

In summary, the inclusion of external analepses serves as an *empathy builder* primarily because of three reasons. First, the omnipresence of Aue's tragic pathos facilitates the readership's co-suffering—or em-*pathos*—with the immoral character. It unifies the emotional texture of the novel by turning distress into Max's predominant *intra-world* emotion, and anguish as the main component the novel's emotional *tone*, in a way that the resulting *parasocial* relationship may include empathic comprehension as a response. Secondly, as mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section, analepses also foster extreme empathy because, by presenting the *target*'s background, they deepen his characterization. The biographical nature of this insight is crucial for eliciting empathy because, as Erin McGlothlin explains, our affective identification likely occurs primarily with the perpetrator's life "outside his identity as a victimizer, which is much more available to the reader for identification" (263). The third way in which analepses promote empathy in *Les bienveillantes* is through their content. The stories transmitted by these *external* flashbacks—which include incest, paternal abandonment, maternal hatred, or sexual abuses—may intensify the readership's "permanent shock" upon reception, leading to a state of *stillness* and, in Ercolino's opinion, even of stuplimity. As suggested in the previous section, both stillness and stuplimity, as hermeneutic effects, may numb the reader's sense of morality, thus contributing to the emergence of extreme empathy. But in Littell's novel analepses not only play the role of *tense*-related *empathy builders*. Aue's family memories, more than any other element in the novel, refers the reader to one of its main literary influences or hypotexts (Aktulum 34): Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*, whose significance is underscored in the novel's title.

In *Les bienveillantes*, intertextuality serves to frame and shape the thematic content of the novel. In my opinion, the literary references at work in the narrative are responsible for providing a moral interpretation both of the protagonist and of the text as a whole. Consequently, to conclude this narratological analysis of *Les bienveillantes*, I will examine its thematic structure through the texts that inform the exploration of Evil proposed by Littell, influenced by two primary hypotexts—Aeschylus's *The Eumenides* and Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

Thematic Structure: An Intertextual Genealogy of Evil

As Barthes famously explained, "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*" ("Texte (théorie du)" 6, my emphasis) [112]. As Sanyal remarks, Littell seems to have been guided by this well-known metaphor that links the textile and the textual when he chose Aue's profession, as his ownership of a lace industry seems to foreshadow the intricate intertextual net that his memoirs will weave (57). Critics have already discussed the importance of literary allusions in *Les bienveillantes*, often linking intertextuality with the intervention of an "implied author".[223] Introduced by Wayne C.

[223] In relation to the literary allusions in the novel, besides the previously noted references to Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (1857) and Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), and the two main hypotexts I will be commenting in this section, Jonas Grethlein identifies up to two more intertextual relations in the text. In the scholar's own words: "Littell's novel unfolds a dense intertextual net. For example, Max Aue, narrator and hero, talks with a linguist in the Caucasus about Mikhail Lermontov and *A Hero of Our Time*. Later, on his Odyssey-like return from Pomerania to Berlin, Aue reads Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*, whose hero, Moreau, he resembles more and more in his apathy" (77) and, I should add, whose name is the same as that of Aue's stepfather, which could be seen as a nod to this intertextual reference. Concerning the relation of the "implied author" with these intertextual choices, you may consult Ferdjani (2010); Janßen (2012); Meretoja (2016); Nivat (2012); Razinsky (2012); Sanyal (2010); Toker (2012) or Von Koppenfels (2012).

Booth, the "implied author" represents "the person who writes the text in a particular manner (encoding process) and to the textual message of this writer for the reader to infer (decoding process)" (Shen 89). In Littell's novel, it has been suggested that the implied author would use intertextuality for two main purposes. First, Meretoja argues that, since "the novel's intertextual, mythical frame transcends the narrator's consciousness", intertextuality could be employed to draw "the reader's attention to the nature of the text as a literary composition". Therefore, the implied author would gather literary references, partially, to "remind the readers that they are reading imaginative discourse, a narrative that is conceived not by a real SS officer, but by an author who does not share the views of his narrator" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 229). Intertextuality would thus help anchor the narration in fictional territory, reinforcing the novel's status as a *parasocial* simulacrum, a "safety zone" to experiment with emotions (Caracciolo, "Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 29). Similarly, Lothe agrees with Meretoja and argues that intertextuality in *Les bienveillantes* acts as a layer that covers the narrative and separates its ethical position from the opinions of its narrator-protagonist. Therefore, from Lothe's perspective, the hypotexts of the novel offer an opportunity for the reader to interpret "an alternative ethos" (116), once again transcending Aue's testimony.

The Oresteia and the Greek Concept of Guilt

The Eumenides, the last play of Aeschylus's trilogy *The Oresteia*, stands out prominently among the literary references in *Les Bienveillantes.* As many scholars have noted, Aue's family saga is a re-writing of Aeschylus tragedy (Eagleston 2017; Grethlein 2009; Hall 2016; Janßen 2012; Meretoja 2017). Just as Orestes, Max kills his mother and stepfather to avenge his father's disappeareance (Agammenon), engages in an incestous relationship

with his sister (Electra/Una) and has an unconditional and sole friend (Pylades/ Thomas). In *The Eumenides*, Orestes is pursued by The Furies—feminine embodiements of revenge and justice who uphold an unyielding morality and mete out divine retribution to wrongdoers. In Aeschylus's play, the goddess Athenea persuades the Furies to cease their persecution of Orestes, and, to mitigate their vengeful nature, transforms them and renames them with the Greek name "eumenides", that is to say, "the kindly ones" or, in French, "les bienveillantes". Thus, according to the Greek drama, the Furies and the Kindly Ones are the same goddesses, only with two different visions of justice: the Furies believe in punishment, while the Kindly Ones believe in forgiveness. As I will discuss later in relation to the title's interpretation, it is important to consider that the novel bears the name of the second version of these divinities, those who, enlightened by Athena's wisdom, believe in clemency and equity as the foundations of justice.

However, explicit references to this hypotext are not confined to the novel's title. Instead, Aeschylus' play is alluded to in the novel on at least two occasions. Early in the narrative, one of Aue's acquaintances playfully likens the protagonist and his friend Thomas to Orestes and Pylade (78). Later, in a meta-literary maneuver, Aue himself reads a work by Maurice Blanchot that reviews, among others, the myth of Orestes (460-461).[224] Such details directly associate Aue with Aeschylus's anti-hero, with whom he shares several parallelisms beyond their familial tragedies. According to Trousdell, Orestes is a "passive hero", oscillating between acceptance of his murderous fate and the terror it instills. Hence, Orestes murders his mother despite the horror that his own actions instill in him, and Aue, as we know, witnesses multiple massacres as it is his job to report them, although—especially at the beginning—these events produce in him an enormous

[224] The book in question is Maurice Blanchot's *Faux Pas,* published in 1943, which consists of a collection of fifty-four short essays on literature that had originally appeared in various literary journals.

physical and psychological rejection. If Littell's protagonist attributes his present detachment to his traumatic childhood—particularly his relocation to France, separation from his sister Una, and his forced isolation in a boarding school—, Orestes "knows a great deal about neglect, lack of compassion, and not being heeded" because, as Aue, "he was sent away from home as a boy by his mother to suffer the soulless life of an exile" (Trousdell 22). Besides, the similarities between Littell's and Aeschylus's plots and protagonists are equally reflected in their style, and as we will see later, in the themes they explore. In terms of style, the rhetoric of *The Oresteia* is invested in expressing the agony of its anti-hero as a "descent into the depths, complete with ghostly visions of the dead and avenging Furies from hell" (Trousdell 9). In *The Eumenides*, like in *Les bienveillantes*, "passion's destructiveness is everywhere, disrupting house, city, and cosmos" (Euben 29).

Before discussing the thematic implications of *The Eumenides* in *Les bienveillantes*, it might be useful to explore how their plot and style similarities open various ethical and interpretative perspectives within Littell's novel. As we have seen, the parallelisms between the characters in the Greek drama and those in *Les bienveillantes* are evident, revealing the latter as a symbolic reimagining of the former. However, the refiguration in Littell's text of one of the main characters of Orestes's story, the Furies/the Kindly Ones, is yet to be identified. Personally, the way in which the novel functions as a perfect hypertext of the Orestes myth leads me to believe that "les bienveillantes" are also embodied figures within the narrative, an opinion shared by critics such as Hannah Meretoja (2016), Julie Delorme (2010), or Jonas Grethlein (2012). However, just as the identity of the righteous Furies evolves in the Greek classic to the Kindly Ones, they could similarly transition within Aue's story and thus be represented by more than one narrative

element. To study this aspect of Littel's reimagining of Orestes's tragedy, it might be useful to review some of the scholarly hypotheses on this matter.

Initially, Grethlein suggests that Weser and Clemens—the policemen who, in the latter part of the narrative, pursue Aue as a suspect of matricide—could be seen as the modern equivalents of these ancient deities (79). Grethlein bases this interpretation not only in the thematic similitudes between the policemen and the Furies, but also in their names, as, according to the scholar, "*clemens* can serve as a Latin translation of the Greek *eumenês*" (79). Nonetheless, right after this, Grethlein himself admits that the novel challenges this hypothesis (82). This is evident because, following the murder of Weser and Clemens, the protagonist concludes his narration by solemnly stating:

> 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) [113]

The prose in this paragraph is both impressive and insightful. It encapsulates several narrative aspects discussed so far, including Aue's lifelong melancholy, his solitude, or the stylistic inclination towards chaos and the grotesque. Yet, it also contradicts the notion of Weser and Clemens embodying the figure of "les bienveillantes" as Aue suggests that these deities find him only at the end of his memoirs, after the agents have been murdered. When he factors in this element in the novel, Grethlein revises his initial interpretation and, like Delorme (2010), proposes that the *bienveillantes* could instead be "these sad thoughts that will haunt Aue" (Grethlein 79), that are referenced in the final line of the novel as pursuers who still torment the protagonist. Therefore, both Grethlein's and Delorme's hypothesis, which I subscribe, is that Weser and Clemens are the embodiments

of the Furies in the novel, as they are the characters in charge of pursuing Aue for his crimes. However, when he kills the agents, the Furies, as symbols of vengeance for the evil perpetrated, do not disappear, but instead remain with Aue, now disembodied, and continue to haunt him. By the end of the novel, then, the Furies are the anxiety-producing emotions that Max harbors as a result of the war experiences and of his traumatic past. Nonetheless, the title does not refer to the Furies, but to their "evolution", their positive counterpart: *les bienveillantes*. Building upon Grethlein and Delorme's insights, I believe that their interpretations leave a loose end: if Weser and Clemens first, and Aue's feelings of guilt later, embody the Furies, then, who personifies the Kindly Ones in the novel? My reading is that the role of "les bienveillantes" or "the Eumenides" is to be assumed by us: Aue's readership.

Since references to these mythological figures frame the novel, appearing both in the title and in its concluding line, their symbolic significance proves pivotal for interpreting the novel. A brief consideration of how the novel would be interpreted if indeed we consider that the role of the Kindly Ones falls upon the reader will demonstrate how the interpretative gap surrounding the identity of these deities opens numerous possible readings of the text. As I mentioned earlier, the similarities in plot and characters between Aeschylus's work and Littell's novel also imply thematic correspondence. In my opinion, in order to understand how it would affect the reception of the novel if we, the readers, were the Kindly Ones, it is necessary to discuss first how the main themes of the third volume of *Oresteia* inform Littell's text, as the hypotext deals precisely with the notions of justice, guilt, and responsibility.

As Meretoja observes, with the inclusion of the myth of Orestes into the novel, "the problematic of responsibility acquires a Greek dimension". In ancient Greece, the concept of responsibility implied that "we are responsible for our actions irrespective of

whether or not we understand what we have done" ("Fiction, History and the Possible" 389). Besides, it was believed that even though human laws might impose punishment for immoral deeds, only the avenging goddesses, the Furies, held the power to absolve the wrongdoer. In Aeschylus's work, the harassing presence of the Furies in dispelled by the intervention of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Athena organizes a public trial, and with her characteristic rationality, she listens to Orestes. Afterwards, she convinces the Furies that the culprit must always be judged humanely. Therefore, the goddess installs a new notion of justice: one that includes understanding and acceptance. Through this gesture, the Furies assume this new idea of justice, transform themselves, and become The Kindly Ones. Thus, Aeschylus's play represents a shift in Athenian politics: the transition from the relentless harassment by the gods to the intervention of human rationality, which proposes that the guilty party be listened to, while the judges must attempt to understand the culprits' motives before judging them. Ultimately, Aeschylus's play suggests that, if someone willingly purifies the condemned of their sins through listening and undestanding their circumstances—as Athena does in Orestes' case—the Furies can transform into The Kindly Ones. But again, how do these Greek principles of responsibility and justice apply to Littell's fictional world?

If indeed the novel adopts this conception from its hypotext, the symbolic reading of *Les bienveillantes* is laid bare: Max Aue emerges as "an Orestes figure who does not know it; […] blind to his own actions and yet guilty" (Meretoja, "Fiction, History and the Possible" 390). His Furies, his "haunting demons", are his sorrowful memories and emotions: the guilt that, as argued throughout this analysis, remains repressed within the character but manifests itself through narratological elements such as the *voice*'s contradictions, the *mood's ethical* zooms-in, or the protagonist's psychosomatic symptoms. Then, in alignment with this interpretation, Max's composition of his memoirs

becomes, as Delorme explicates, an exercise of catharsis for the perpetrator, "un moyen grâce auquel l'ex-bourreau parviendrait en quelque sorte à se déprendre de ses démons mémoriels qui le poursuivent sans cesse" (37) [114]. Therefore, Aue's writing of his memories equates, in Aeschylus's work, to Athena's organization of a public trial: an act in which the criminal sins are exposed, and whose objective is to calm the Furies—in Aue's case, to alleviate the presence of the feelings of guilt that still weigh upon him. The role of this narrating act is then like that of goddess Athena in the play: it seeks to impose rationality and understanding upon the crimes and to present them to the reader from this perspective. Having attended the trial/narration, the reader is invited to assume the role of *a bienveillante* prepared to comprehend Aue—and perhaps even redeem him—through the act of reading.

This interpretation, then, aligns with the thesis defended so far: that Aue's memoirs constitute a veiled plea for empathic comprehension, requiring readers to engage in an epistemological and emotional response that must be inferred, as it is not explicitly demanded by the text. But even if the text does not request such *inter-world* emotion, the intertext does. This empathy-oriented exegesis seems to find support in the novel's first literary reference, Villon's renowned "Balades des Pendus", the opening verse of which is reproduced in the initial line of *Les bienveillantes*—"frères humains, […]" (11). This classical French poem is a well-known request for mercy and empathy for sinners. Its inclusion at the outset of the novel could be interpreted as a subtle declaration of its ethical and hermeneutic intentions, as Ferdjani also claims: "Aue, le narrateur créé par Littell demande à ses lecteurs, comme Villon, de faire preuve d'indulgence et de compassion. Il leur demande de ne pas juger mais de comprendre" (263) [115]. After this plea to bring Aue back to the realm of humanity, his memoirs, although they present the crudity of Aue's experience from Aue's unrepentant focalization, covertly pursue this same

objective: through narrative techniques identified here as *empathy builders*, and through the exploration of Aue's immoral but contradictive nature, readers are bound to humanize him.[225] This demand on the narratee would indeed concord with the novel's end: only in the closing line, after grasping the entirety of Aue's actions, could "les bienveillantes", the readership, be able to understand him, or in the narrator's worlds, to "catch him"—"retrouver ma trace" (894). From this perspective, the central theme of the novel, exposed by the "implied author" in a veiled way, would revolve around the comprehension of Evil and the possibility of extreme empathy.

Yet, this reading leaves a crucial question unanswered. While from a moral standpoint, it may seem that the central theme explored by Littell's novel is Evil, it delves deeper into a specific form of Evil: totalitarianism in general and Nazism in particular, with a specific focus on the human catastrophe it brought about. *Les bienveillantes* is essentially a "presentation of the Shoah" (Grethlein 83). So, where do the victims of the Holocaust fit into the interpretation of the novel outlined above? What role do they occupy in Littell's agenda? To address this question and further elaborate on my hypothesis concerning the relationship between the theme and the ethical implications of *Les bienveillantes*, I propose to turn to the paratext once more.

The first piece of information that *Les Bienveillantes* offers to its readers is its dedication: "Pour les morts". This dedication, being paratextual and external to the

[225] In a way, the idea that to truly achieve justice, we must humanize the criminal and judge them with empathy could also be an element extracted from the *Oresteia*. Thus, for example, for Richard Trousdell, the "deeper lesson" of *The Eumenides* is that "real transformation only happens when the gods themselves are transformed by learning the civilizing importance of reciprocal feeling. In this dialectical process, the gods evolve in response to an essential human need for empathetic relationship" (24). Similarly, Peter J. Euben believes that, when Athena sides with Orestes and not with the Furies despite the humanity of the former and the divinity of the latter, Aeschylus is indicating to his audience that "judgment is a question of balance and proportion, of evidence and reflection, of looking backward and forward. It involves the capacity to see things from another person's point of view and so accept the human condition of plurality-and to practice what Hannah Arendt calls representative or political thinking" (28). Drawing on Euben's last reference, the two main hypotexts of *Les bienveillantes*, *The Eumenides* and *The Banality of Evil*, would promote the same idea of justice.

fictional world of diegesis, cannot possibly be Aue's. Instead, as Sanyal also defends (50) it seems to work as a declaration from the implied author, referencing the victims of the Holocaust. This seemingly contradicts the novel's thematic focus, which revolves, as we know, around the wartime memories of a perpetrator. Similarly, and building on the interpretation presented above, the title would be dedicated to the ex-agent and, more specifically, to his emotional trauma and to those responsible for alleviating it through empathic understanding—his readership. As has been reviewed at the beginning of this section, this fictional approach to the Holocaust, which presents a Nazi as the focalizer and potential *target* of empathy, has led a substantial part of literary criticism to believe that Littell's novel constitutes an affront to those who perished in the hands of Nazism. However, for Meretoja—whose analysis of the novel has influenced my interpretation so far—, this ethical interpretation of the novel does not neglect the memory of the victims. On the contrary, the scholar argues that this exercise in extreme empathy, coupled with the moral message of the novel, serves, unexpectedly, as a unique homage to them. In her words,

> Here the Kindly Ones seem to allude to the haunting of a past that does not let go of us, maybe also to the "dead" to whom the novel is dedicated and to whom we have an obligation to try to understand the past, not from the perspective of vengeance—hence the reference is to the Kindly Ones, not to the Furies—but in order to end the vicious circle of violence. (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 238)

Thus, from Meretoja perspective, Littell's narrative proposes a paradoxical moral challenge: by empathizing with the perpetrator, it may protect the memory of the victims, as it is through "humanizing" Evil that we can prevent its perpetuation. This logic appears to answer the tenet of *Les bienveillantes*, as announced in the prologue: *homo homini lupus* or as protagonist phrases it, "ceux qui tuent sont des hommes, comme ceux qui sont

tués, c'est cela qui est terrible" (30) [116]. The answer the novel provides, following Meretoja's logic, is that, to stop men from being wolves to men, we must stop conceiving men as wolves. However, the ethical implications of *Les bienveillantes* become more profound when viewed through the novel's second hypotext: Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), to which Littell's fictional world seems to grant "a literary form" (Meretoja, "Fiction, History and the Possible" 380).

To conclude this section, I will briefly comment on the novel's connection with its main philosophical reference: Hannah Arendt's denunciation of the banality of evil. As discussed, the thematic structure of the novel is built upon previous literature addressing Evil and justice—mainly, Aeschylus's *The Eumenides* and Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. While this first hypertext appears to urge readers to understand the "horizon" (Gadamer) of a Nazi officer and apprehend his "possible" reality (Doležel); the second hypertext clarifies the role of the memory of the Holocaust and its victims within this call for extreme empathy. The influence of Arendt's thought is crucial to understanding the interplay between form and theme, ethics, and emotions in Littell's novel.

As discussed at the beginning of this section, a central point of the critical reception of *Les bienveillantes* has been its classification as a historical novel, especially in terms of its depiction of the Holocaust. Throughout this narratological analysis, I have highlighted several formal aspects of the novel that could be seen as encouraging extreme empathy. These include the narrative *voice*'s unreliability and its contradictions, the *mood*'s coldness and increasing apathy, the persistent excess conveyed through *tense* analepses, or the novel's grotesque aesthetic. From my perspective, these narrative choices not only shape the *parasocial* relationship between the reader and Aue but also

imbue it with ethical significance, as they transform this *parasocial* bond into an exploration on the Arendtian banality of Evil.

Fictionalizing Arendt's Banality of Evil

As Meretoja points out, Littell's novel "does not merely illustrate Arendtian theories of the Holocaust […] but contributes in its own right […] to the understanding of the banality of evil" ("Fiction, History and the Possible" 380).[226] Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, first published in 1963 and later revised in 1964, emerged from her coverage for *The New Yorker* of the trial of the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann. This coverage evolved into a broader exploration of evil, as put forward in the essay's subtitle, "A Report on the Banality of Evil". In it, Arendt argues that Eichmann's actions, which stemmed from the influence of totalitarianism at both the state and individual levels, exemplified the "normality" of the perpetrator rather than any extraordinary malevolence. Through this study, the German philosopher aimed to show that understanding the horror of Nazism and preventing similar catastrophes required acknowledging that evil does not reside in "monsters"—as the Jerusalem jury characterized Eichmann—but in ordinary individuals. It is a potential inherent to human nature itself. Arendt thus posited that the most difficult aspect for humanity to accept about the experience of the Holocaust was not only the suffering of the victims but the human condition of the perpetrators. In her own words, "Suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the

[226] Several other scholars agree with Hanna Meretoja on this point. For instance, Liran Razinsky also remarks how *Les Bienveillantes* is a hypertext of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* and he does so in the following terms, "None of this, of course, is essentially new. One recognizes the philosophical and historical sources of such reasoning in Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem"* (Razinsky, "We Are All the Same" 142). In "Notes on Hybrid Novels", Raffaello Palumbo Mosca notices that the first half of Littell's novel "è pensata come un'ambigua variazione sul tema della banalità del male" (103) [117].

number of victims. Human nature as such is at stake" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 458-459). Consequently, as Agamben observed about Arendt's essay, the crucial lesson from the Third Reich's rise for future generations was not to fear the "overman" but rather the "underman" (*Remnants of Auschwitz*). Because after all, as Arendt famously remarked, Eichmann was not merely following "orders", but he was in fact obeying "the law" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 135).

As if translating these ideas into fiction, much like Arendt urged us to see Eichmann as a human being rather than as a monster, Littell's novel begins with a former Nazi agent demanding recognition of his humanity as a prerequisite for the reader to continue reading. Their critical stance aligns: Evil is not external to humanity but a possibility within it. Throughout his memoir, Aue repeatedly reminds his readers, his "frères humains", of his humanity. Interestingly, despite the novel's detailed portrayal of the Holocaust, the protagonist is neither a soldier nor a camp commander, but a bureaucrat like Eichmann—one of the "hommes ordinaires dont est constitué l'État", as Aue describes himself in "Toccata" (27). Presenting himself, like Eichmann, as a bureaucratic cog in a vast machinery, the narrator emphasizes—first by *explaining* it in the prelude and then by *showing* throughout the diegesis—the industrial-like division of labor behind the *Endlösung*, which desensitized workers to the moral implications of their actions. In "Toccata", the narrator overtly equates the work distribution in the Endlösung with an industrial assembly line, reflecting that: "C'est aussi, dans le cas qui nous préoccupe, un processus segmenté par les exigences des méthodes industrielles. Tout comme, selon Marx, l'ouvrier est aliéné par rapport au produit de son travail, dans le génocide ou la guerre totale sous sa forme moderne l'exécutant est aliéné par rapport au produit de son

action" (25) [118].[227] Passages like this make it clear that, as Ferdjani observes, "ce qui intéresse Littell est l'aspect bureaucratique du processus d'extermination, analyser le rôle de la bureaucratie en tant qu'acteur du génocide" (269) [120]. This theme, which stems from Aue's role in the Nazi regime, shows how Littell's novel connects with Arendt's criticism of the banality of Evil, while, in my view, it also stresses the ethical significance of Aue's narrative.

In "Toccata", the narrator stresses that one of the key messages of the novel's final moral—"le vrai danger pour l'humanité c'est moi, *c'est vous*" (27-28, my emphasis) [121]—is the possibility of human disasters similar to Nazism happening again. By highlighting the obedient and apathetic nature of a bureaucrat, the novel underscores the ongoing threat of totalitarianism today, as repeatedly emphasized by Aue in the prologue. While not downplaying the horror of the Third Reich or disguising what he did, Aue warns that the principles that led to Nazism still exist in modern societies. As the ex-Nazi agent warns us, "Je suis coupable, vous ne l'êtes pas, c'est bien. Mais vous devriez quand même pouvoir vous dire que ce que j'ai fait, vous l'auriez fait aussi" (26) [122]. From this perspective, Aue's initial assertion about how his story "nous concerne" takes on a new meaning: it does not just refer to our past but to our present as well, because in his opinion "la guerre n'est jamais finie" (23) [123].[228] Building on "the banality of evil" and

[227] Right after this reflection, Aue illustrates how this moral alienation worked in the Third Reich through the following example: "Un autre exemple, tiré de l'abondante littérature historique plutôt que de mon expérience personnelle: celui du programme d'extermination des handicapés lourds et des malades mentaux allemands, dit programme 'Euthanasie' ou 'T-4', mis en place deux ans avant le programme 'Solution finale'. Ici, les malades sélectionnés dans le cadre d'un dispositif légal étaient accueillis dans un bâtiment par des infirmières professionnelles, qui les enregistraient et les déshabillaient; des médecins les examinaient et les conduisaient à une chambre close; un ouvrier administrait le gaz; d'autres nettoyaient; un policier établissait le certificat de décès. Interrogée après la guerre, chacune de ces personnes dit: Moi, coupable? L'infirmière n'a tué personne, elle n'a fait que déshabiller et calmer des malades, gestes ordinaires de sa profession. Le médecin non plus n'a pas tué, il a simplement confirmé un diagnostic selon des critères établis par d'autres instances. […] Le policier suit sa procédure, qui est de constater un décès et de noter qu'il a eu lieu sans violation des lois en vigueur. Qui donc est coupable? Tous ou personne?" (25-26) [119].

[228] The political implications of this reading of the novel's moral will be further explored in section 3.3 of this Block.

the threat it poses, the narrator-character seems to invite us, even before unfolding his story, to read it as a moral lesson about how Evil arises from "normal" ideas like that of obedience. This approach, reinforced throughout the novel with references to other genocides—such as the Algerian War (23), English colonialism, or American colonialism (590)—, suggests an underlying aim: to comprehend the nature of Evil in order to prevent its recurrence in the future.

By turning the memories of a Nazi into a story with a moral lesson, *Les bienveillantes* reveals itself as a literary project as morally challenging as it is stylistically extraordinary: a novel that, in its affective dimension, entails both empathy for the criminal and justice for the victims. Only by adopting the perspective of a perpetrator can we grasp the workings of immorality and strive to prevent its recurrence, and thus, to prevent "les morts" to whom the novel is dedicated from increasing in number. Analyzed from this perspective, Littell's novel also pushes literature's exploration of History to its limits, offering one of the kinds of insights into history that are possible only through fiction, as Semprún notes (35).

Nevertheless, the groundbreaking exercise that the novel proposes depends, in my opinion, on a more subtle upheaval: the one concerning narrative emotions, whose construction I have attempted to unravel in the preceding pages. From this perspective, Littell's novel emerges, as I have anticipated at the beginning of this subsection, as a prime example of several of the key ideas I have advocated so far concerning the semantics of narrative emotions.

Narrative Emotions in *Les bienveillantes*

The novel's treatment of the Holocaust, influenced by Arendtian philosophy, navigates a delicate balance between the humanization of the perpetrator and the unabridged representation of the crimes in which Aue is complicit. This fragile equilibrium, as scholars have observed, lies "at the heart of the way in which the novel deals with the ethics of representing the Holocaust" (Meretoja "Fiction, History and the Possible" 371). Similarly to Meretoja's perspective, Razinsky characterizes the novel's distinctive approach to the Holocaust as follows:

> The tension between evil and banality is also central to the text. One of the results of bringing perpetrators, normal people, and even victims down to the same level is that the crimes are compromised, normalized. They become, as a result, less of a crime. Therefore, if Aue's position is to insist on the dangerous potential of the human, he must render these crimes outrageous again, and that is why another line in the text continuously points at the extreme evilness and radicality of the Nazi crimes. The text of *Les bienveillantes* takes a complex tack. It suggests the perpetrators' common ground with the normal and at the same time underlines the severity of the acts, *for otherwise the importance of the claim is lost*. ("We Are All the Same" 151-152)

As Razinsky brilliantly observes, the ethical claim of the novel rests on what Meretoja identifies as its "interplay between immersiveness and critical distance" ("Fiction, History and the Possible" 378). From my perspective, this "immersiveness" relates to the reader's involvement in the fictional world, particularly their emotional connection with the protagonist. Without this *parasocial* bond, it would be difficult for the novel's ethical message to resonate, as it hinges on humanizing Aue. Without the unpleasant intimacy with the character-narrator, the transcendent significance of the novel's portrayal of the Holocaust would be lost. However, as we will now explore, the potential for extreme

empathy for the protagonist also relies heavily on the representation of the Shoah advanced by the narrative. Thus, the ethical, historical, and emotional dimensions of the novel reveal themselves interdependent.

We have seen how the *parasocial* world of *Les bienveillantes* sets the stage for generating one *inter-world* emotion: extreme empathy. As explained in the analysis of this novel's *mood*, the few scholars who have addressed this narrative emotion (Berberich 2020; Bonasera 2023; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022) agree that this emotion emerges from a constant shift and a balance between emotional connection and critical distance. In Littell's novel, in effect, the same stylistic and thematic elements that prompt readers to reflect ethically on Arendt's notion of the banality of evil also compel them to feel extreme empathy for Maximilien Aue. Within this framework, certain elements of the novel—such as the intimacy of the *voice*—can lead us to humanize Aue and empathize with him, while others—like his involvement in the Shoah—elicit straightaway condemnation. According to Bonasera, this constant interplay between realizing the humanity of Evil and condemning it turns *Les bienveillantes* into a prime example of a narrative dynamic that "allows the reader to engage emotionally—but without uncritically taking the protagonist's perspective—with an ethically problematic lifeworld" (399-400).[229]

In this regard, Littell's novel appears as a perfect instance of several hypothesis defended in this thesis until now. First, it exemplifies how the workings of fiction may trigger both the clear "self-other differentiation" (Coplan & Goldie 5) *and* the engagement necessary for extreme empathy, an experience that can only be safely encountered in the

[229] Besides Littell's novel, the literary corpus that Carmen Bonasera uses to analyze the dynamics of what she refers to as "negative empathy" also encompasses works such as Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and *Demons* (1872), and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955).

"moral laboratory" of fiction. Secondly, the moral and affective demands of *Les bienveillantes* underscore that, as Bataille argues in *Literature and Evil*, comprehensive approximations to immorality in literature do not promote moral laxity, but on the contrary, they require a "hyper-morality" from the reader, who must bear the proximity of an immoral *horizon* (Gadamer). Thirdly, considering how the *intra-world* emotions of the protagonist shape the potential critical reception of the novel, I regard *Les bienveillantes,* also, as an example of the ethical potential of extreme empathy as a narrative experience. However, what is most pertinent to my project is how the novel exemplifies my main thesis: that narrative emotions stem from the text's formal choices.

If we consider only what the explicit plot describes, *Les bienveillantes* narrates, in the first person, the memoirs of a Nazi officer who, despite his initial discomfort with the *Endlösung* remains committed to the Third Reich and participates in most of its wartime actions. Estranged from his mother for separating him from his twin sister, towards whom he harbors incestuous desires, he presumably kills both his mother and stepfather. Finally, upon the Allies' entry into Berlin, he murders his best friend Thomas, steals his French passport. In this way, he avoids a trial for his crimes against humanity, for which he never verbally expresses remorse. It is evident that none of these elements elicit empathy. *Les bienveillantes* differs significantly, for example, from Hugo's *Les misérables*, which Ercolino & Fusillo cite as an example of "easy" narrative empathy. Max Aue, obviously, is no Colette. But as the target of an extreme form of empathy, neither is he the Rodion Raskolnikov whom Bonasera, for example, addresses in her analysis of literary examples of what she refers to as "negative empathy". Raskolnikov's repentance and moral dilemmas are expressed so clearly that they become the focal point of his fictional world. Unlike the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment,* Aue is—at least for the

most part of the novel—a passive transmitter of the immorality surrounding him, in which he participates.

The apparent emotional "sterility" of Littell's text is precisely what better displays how the semantics of narrative emotions operate at a diegetic level. The emergence of empathy is not dictated by the thematic content of the novel, and it is not even a response one could expect from the reader, if we take the nature of the subject matter into consideration. Yet, through a combination of what the narrative *does* say, the formal aspects employed to say it, their disposition, and the intertextual net upon which the narrative rests, the reader seems to be provided with *instructions* for the emotional—and ethical—response to the text that I have presented above. If we look at the content and formal aspects of the novel, we see that, on the one hand, the novel's theme, its recurrence to excess, its grotesque style and the protagonist's personality generate distance. Yet, on the other hand, the identified *empathy builders* provoke the opposite effect: the unreliability of the narrator's *voice*, some ethical instances in his focalization, his somatic responses to the horrors he witnesses, his criticism of his Nazi comrades or his seemingly traumatic relationship with his past invite readers to *feel with* the protagonist. However, the emotionality underlying *Les Bienveillantes* is not only expressed by these *empathy builders*. Littell's fictional world delves even deeper into the narratological construction of emotions by relying on some signs that the narrator interprets differently from the reader, who is made to believe she knows more that Aue does. For instance, Aue's suppressed guilt—a key *intra-world* emotion to arise extreme empathy—appears, from the reader's perspective, to manifest in the protagonist's dreams and in his apathetic evolution, even if he never acknowledges such connections. With this gesture, the novel dispossesses the I-narrator of the interpretative power associated with the *authentication* function and instead grants it to the reader.

With all, I consider that *Les bienveillantes* stands as literary evidence of how narrative emotions are constructed through stylistic choices. Precisely because of how it is constructed—through an intricate interweaving of the aesthetic, the emotional, and the ethical realms of the novel—, Littell's work also displays how *inference* emerges as the optimal method of reception when it comes to narrative emotions (Doležel 1998; Iser 1978). *Inference* focuses on what the fictional world and its inhabitants *do*, and not in what they *say*. Therefore, this hermeneutical technique requires readers to draw upon their "knowledge about the world", to direct their attention to subtle clues, and to continuously re-formulate their interpretative hypotheses (*Doležel*, *Heterocosmica* 177).[230] From my perspective, only through these hermeneutic exercises can we fully grasp the emotionality of a fictional world where, as in the lace produced by its protagonist, the structure of the artwork is not revealed by the fabric inasmuch as by the holes in it—the black spaces left unsaid yet suggested.

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

The narratological analyses conducted in the last two sections have focused on identifying the literary techniques that appear to promote "extreme empathy" in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*. As reiterated throughout this thesis, the goal of these practical exercises has been to demonstrate how narrative emotions are

[230] For more information on *inference* as a method of interpretation, you may refer to Margolin 1986 & 1987.

rooted in formal elements and, consequently, how they can be apprehended through narratological analysis. Despite the differences in thematic content, style, and narrative elements between the two novels I have examined, my conclusion is that both *parasocial* worlds are formally predisposed to trigger empathy towards their respective criminal protagonists. Therefore, they can be viewed as representative of extreme empathy, or as illustrations of how fictional possible worlds *expand the spectrum* of emotionality. From my perspective, both circumstances are equivalent, because the enlarged emotionality that literary *parasocial* encounters offer is an essential part of what enables extreme empathy. However, precisely because of the exceptionality of this emotional response, and the scarce attention it has received in the domain of narratology, I refuse to treat it only as an example of the semantics and narratology of literary emotions. Instead, and as announced in the introduction, I aim for the analyses conducted in this chapter to contribute, to the extent possible, to the study of extreme empathy. With this goal in mind—and to refine the premises established in the preceding pages—I will conclude this chapter by comparing how extreme empathy is fostered in *In Cold Blood* and in *Les bienveillantes.* While acknowledging the inherent limitations of analyzing only two works, this final exercise serves two purposes. On the one hand, it seeks to provide a commentary on the previous narratological study of "narrative empathy" (Keen)—either to refute or confirm its hypotheses. On the other hand, it aims to draw possible conclusions about how extreme empathy is elicited in literature. To reconcile both perspectives in an organized manner, I will resort once again to Genette's tripartite division of narratological traits employed so far. Furthermore, to delve into both the general emotional aspect of the novels and the implications of extreme empathy within them, I will include an analysis of the emotional *tone* of both works, as well as a consideration of the typology of Evil that each novel puts forward.

However, before delving back into the realm of narrative *voice*, it would be useful to revisit the *empathy builders* identified in both Capote's and Littell's novels and outline some initial observations. Hopefully, a comprehensive understanding of the common features between these two instances of extreme empathy can assist us in effectively comparing them.

First, it is evident that, regardless of the narratological category to which they belong, many of the literary resources related to empathy are character-related devices. They are oriented towards the specific "fictional particular" that acts as target of the novel's empathy. Without necessarily burdening this character with all the emotional weight of the narrative, various diegetic aspects grant us access to their behavior, and, more importantly, to the subjectivity behind their actions. Of course, this common orientation in *empathy builders* is to be expected, given that individuation is key for the emergence of empathy (Coplan, "Empathic engagement" 144). Thus, the formal choices of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* seem to confirm the most widely accepted assertion regarding the narratological construction of empathy, namely, that this emotional reaction is more likely to arise "when we are furnished with extensive and detailed knowledge regarding the agent and their situation" (Smith 114), a conclusion also reached in studies such as Coplan (2004); Goldie (2000); Keen (2007) or Suleiman (2009). As discussed in Interlude I, novels lack the immediacy and visual qualities of other narrative arts such as theatre or cinema. Consequently, their best tool for fostering empathy is to take advantage of their capacity to delve into the target's actions and emotions. Therefore, in what narrative literature is concerned, it seems that detailed characterization indeed constitutes the most solid foundation for the imaginative process that underpins both the act of empathizing and the act of reading (Coplan, "Empathic engagement" 146). In my view, both Capote's and Littell's novels serve as evidence of

this premise. However, as an addition to this postulate, I would specify that, while the importance of character representation is common to all manifestations of narrative empathy, it is *necessarily* crucial in the case of extreme one, where readers' engagement hinges on the primacy of the criminal character's self *over* their actions. As I see it, then, narrative empathy is enhanced by a thorough characterization, while extreme empathy heavily relies on it.[231]

Pulling on this thread, I would dare to assert that what sets apart the role of characterization in narrative empathy from that in extreme empathy is not only its level of importance but also the significance that *intra-world* emotions have in it. Generally, literary narratives can be viewed as an exploration of the human soul and behavior. Nonetheless, I consider that in *In Cold Blood* as well as in *Les bienveillantes*, the protagonist's past and present emotional state has a predominance in their portrayal that can verge on the repetitiveness or excess. In this sub-section—especially in relation to the novels' *emotional tone*—I will examine how the *intra-world* emotions of Perry Smith and Max Aue occupy a considerable portion of their respective fictional worlds, permeating them to the extent where the other elements of the novel seem to *align with* the conflicting interiority of the protagonist. Therefore, and considering the examples of similar fictional particulars—the Miltonian Devil, Raskolnikov, *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert or Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*—, I perceive that this "emotional baroqueness" may be an idiosyncrasy of the literary creation of extreme empathy. In effect, Ercolino & Fusillo seem to bear this inherent complexity of Evil characters in mind when they point out that

[231] In general, this hypothesis seems to suggest that the research of this range of narrative emotions would greatly benefit from the perspective of character studies, an area of literary theory with which the narratology of narrative empathy directly interacts. After all, empathy is a *transitive* emotion, centered on the target, and in turn, "characters, as potential targets of empathy, are shaped by textual linguistic choices, which influence readers' interpretation and responses" (Fernández-Quintilla 102). Willie Van Peer also highlights this co-dependence of narratology, character studies, and empathy studies when he defines a character as "what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs, and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist" (9).

antagonistic characters are often the most admired by critics and audiences due to the formal effort required in portraying their psyche (93). Thus, as hinted at in certain points of the analyses, I interpret the prominence of *intra-world* emotions in these novels as an invitation for the readership to engage in a *parasocial* bond and respond to it with empathic engagement.

As I see it, at least two other characteristics enhance this desired effect for empathic reception. Firstly, in most cases, the immoral targets of empathy—and by extension, the fictional worlds they inhabit—are laden with painful emotions. The portrayal of their present and past pain contextualizes their immoral deeds, but also demands the reader's (response)ability. As we know, states of suffering are the most effective in evoking empathy, as they compel the addressee to "[feel] sorrow or concern for the distressed or needy other" (Eisenberg et al. 678). As Ercolino & Fusillo eloquently express it, "la forza della risposta empatica del lettore sembra essere in parte *subordinata* all'instensità della sofferenza psicologica manifestata dal personaggio con il quale questi empatizza" (82) [1]. Moreover, due to character-related *empathy builders*, the reader is likely more *parasocially* connected to the empathic target than to any other fictional character in the novel. Consequently, I believe that in *parasocial* worlds like those in *In Cold Blood* or *Les bienveillantes*, the omnipresence of the target's emotional suffering may easily lead readers to focus on their pain over the pain these characters have inflicted on others, which, however, is never fully forgotten in the novels analyzed here. Despite being the focus of the emotional texture of their novels, these immoral characters are, probably, never free from suspicion. Drawing upon the empathic targets of *Les misérables* and *Lolita*, Ercolino & Fusillo describe the additional difficulty that extreme empathy entails in the following terms:

> Tuttavia, empatizzare con Cosette ed empatizzare con Humbert sono due cose ben *diverse* [...] empatizzare e soffrire con Cosette non gli crea alcun problema di ordine morale, e quindi, di allegiance, mentre farlo con Humbert, sí. Abbiamo a che fare qui, infatti, con due forme distinte di sofferenza empatica: quella per Cosette deriva dall'instaurazione di un normale legame empatico con lei; quella per Humbert, dall'*intensa esperienza estetica sempre sospesa tra tremante adesione e sdegnoso allontanamento*. (83, my emphasis) [2]

Considering that the *intra-world* emotions of "evil" targets must respect this "*sdegnoso allontanamento*", I would further affirm that not only do these emotions have a greater prevalence in narratives aiming to evoke extreme empathy, but their expression in such texts is more *nuanced* than in others. What I mean by this is that despite the omnipresence of the targets' emotionality, these characters are not granted the monopoly on their emotions' expression. Instead, it diversifies and is transmitted to the reader through different sources. Although this diversity of clues or "instructions" is common to narrative empathy in general, I believe it to be more pronounced in the case of extreme empathy. This is because, in these instances, the authentication function of these characters may be discredited due to their immorality. In addition, we have observed that in both Capote's and Littell's novels, the veracity of the protagonist is contentious, and it is further called into question by factors that affect how they perceive themselves, such as victimhood (Perry), unreliability (Aue), or past traumas (both). Another example of this correspondence between immorality and unreliability, extracted from contemporary literature, could be the protagonist of Emmanuel Carrère's *L'adversaire* (2000), Jean-Claude Romand, who is portrayed as a mythomaniac with a distorted image of himself. In the absence of a reliable authentication on the part of the criminal-protagonist—and because of the critical distance it may provoke in the reader—the novel's formal elements,

as we have seen, gain relevance as drivers of *inter-world* emotions. Therefore, *abstract inter-world* emotions are prioritized over *particular* ones, and all of them become more independent of the target's explicit expression than usual.

In my opinion, the second technique used to convey the emotional state of the target without arousing the reader's "suspicion" is through *intra-world social* emotions, that is, interactions between fictional particulars. As I see it, *parasocial* worlds oriented towards extreme empathy especially exploit the use of other characters' perceptions of the target to *shape* the reader's reception in an indirect manner. Moreover, as demonstrated by the *intradiegetic empathy* in *In Cold Blood*, these fictional relationships may even serve as examples of extreme empathy for the reader to emulate.[232] On the other hand, as we will explore in more depth in relation to the intersection between empathy and *mood*, this use of *intra-world* sociability also operates in reverse. That is to say that the opinions and behaviors that immoral targets have towards other fictional characters, which are revealing of their *Weltanschauung*—Perry's considerate gestures for the Clutters or Aue's zooms-in on certain victims—, as well as the comparisons drawn between them and others—Perry and Dick, Aue and the other Nazi agents—, are also employed to indirectly describe the target's subjectivity, by prioritizing their *concrete* emotions and behaviors over *their* abstract ones.

These indirect invitations to extreme empathy have led me to reaffirm two ideas. First, that, as I had suggested in Interlude II, the more challenging the empathic understanding demanded by the fictional world, the more relevant the formal resources employed by the text become in achieving the empathic effect. And secondly, that due to

[232] Again, we could consider the example of Emmanuel Carrère's Jean-Claude Romand, with whom the narrator empathizes—"je me retrouvais choisi (*c'est empathique, je sais,* mais je ne vois pas le moyen de le dire autrement) par cette histoire atroce, entré en résonance avec l'homme qui avait fait ça" (46, my emphasis) [3]—, or of Rodion Raskolnikov, protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, who receives the support of other characters such as Sonya, his friend Razumíkhin, and his sister Dunya.

this relevance bestowed to formal resources, *inference* appears as the optimal method for interpreting complex narrative emotions such as extreme empathy. When dealing with characters who commit immoral deeds, the narrative tends to entrust characterization to less overt elements than, for instance, the narrator's *voice*. As a result, extreme empathy appears to demand a reading approach that combines attention, flexibility, and a pre-existing *repertoire* on human emotions and their signals.

To summarize, we face the comparison of *empathy builders* in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* already considering that:

1. The importance of characterization for narrative empathy increases in extreme empathy,

2. in extreme empathy, this characterization exhibits a "baroqueness" in the representation of the target's *intra-world* emotions,

3. these emotions are typically painful and expressed more subtly through formal aspects and *intra-world social* relations, and they are grasped through *inference*.

Such particularities, along with the specific formal aspects we will revisit shortly, function, in my view, as "cognitive prostheses" (Smith 109). They help readers overcome their moral barriers, leveraging fiction as a medium to become acquainted with the *ethos* and *pathos* of a criminal—and perhaps, ultimately, to empathize with Evil. After all, the more we know, the more we understand; and the more we understand, the more we can empathize.

Voice

In the introduction above, I have specified that narrative empathy depends on access to the target's subjectivity, which various diegetic elements can facilitate. Nonetheless, within the field of affect theory, several scholars consider *voice* to be the main expression of a character's subjectivity and thus, the most important category when it comes to eliciting empathy (Goldie 2000; Keen 2007). Suleiman, for instance, considers first-person *voice* to be an "almost automatic call to empathy" (2). However, what the optimal *voice* format to evoke empathy is, and just how important it is, are subjects of debate. Some scholars are forceful in their defense of the primacy of the homo-intradiegetic *voice* and regard it as a *conditio sine qua non* for this emotional reaction to occur. Goldie, for instance, argues that to grasp the narrative of a fictive other, it is required to have "the other as narrator" (*The Emotions* 195). Yet, for others like Keen "[c]contrasting first person with third person puts the question too broadly, with too many other variables, to reach a valid conclusion" (*Empathy and the Novel* xi). The attention given within the "empathic turn" to the preeminence of one *voice* format over another appears logical given that, as previously mentioned, *voice* serves as the main repository of the text's subjectivity (Benveniste 223). From my perspective, the above-mentioned opinions are enunciated with a form of "positive empathy" (Ercolino & Fusillo 195) in mind, and may be more or less accurate with this "potentially ennobling or morally beatific feelings" (Ngai 6).

However, the validity of these affirmations in what extreme empathy is concerned might not be equivalent. In my opinion, the main difference between the expression of narrative *voice* in the first or third person, concerning the subjectivity of the characters, is the directedness in the act of *telling*. In a "positive" kind of empathic engagement, in which the target's subjectivity is embraced by the reader, the straightforwardness of the invitation to empathy—depending on whether the target speaks in the first person or is

described by an external narrator—might affect the intensity or mode of empathy, but it is unlikely to jeopardize it. This is because the reader is not threatened by the proximity of the fictional target, but supposedly feels comfortable with the idea of *feeling with it*. However, if *voice* is indeed the source of the text's subjectivity, if that subjectivity is difficult to assimilate or understand because it is problematic for the reader—as in the case of an immoral character—then its source of expression, the *voice*, may need to be more nuanced if the goal is, indeed, to elicit empathy toward that character.

When confronted with the emotions of an immoral character, readers often experience "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 107). Hence, as suggested, the assumptions mentioned above may not be equally applicable to the challenging case of extreme empathy, which presents entirely different rhetoric needs. In this regard, Meretoja also questions whether these hypothesis regarding the role of *voice* in narrative empathy can be transferred to its extreme version. In her analysis of *Les bienveillantes*, she wonders, "[t]he first-person perspective is certainly likely to humanize the protagonist, but does it automatically invite empathy? It seems evident that *Les bienveillantes* does not provoke simple, straightforward empathy of the type evoked by sympathetic characters with whom we can easily identify" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 233). To follow Meretoja's lead, and considering the exceptional nature of extreme empathy, I aim to briefly juxtapose the uses of *voice* in *In Cold Blood* and Les *bienveillantes* to try to elucidate the advantages and disadvantages each generates in promoting this reader response. Fortunately for this purpose, each novel represents one of the opposite extremes of the scale of subjectivation that the narrative *voice* may present. While the omniscient *voice* of *In Cold Blood* fits into the paradigm of the "hetero-extradiegetic", Max Aue's discourse constitutes a perfect example of "homo-

intradiegetic" narration. In my estimation, and as their analyses have displayed, both *voice* typologies collaborate in some way in the construction of extreme empathy.

On the one hand, Max Aue's first-person testimony establishes a direct and long one-to-one dialogue with the reader, inviting a *parasocial* bond that is further strengthened in Littell's novel through the *empathy builders* reviewed. These include the insertion of phatic metalepsis (Jakobson)—allowed by the *isotopy* inherent in first-person narratives—, the establishment of a reading contract, the sharing of confidences, and the exploitation of the protagonist's rhetoric. Enabled by the "homo-intradiegetic" *voice* format, such formal choices significantly enhance the intimacy between narrator and narratee, pushing the latter to emotionally engage with the former.

On the other hand, *In Cold Blood* employs an "hetero-extradiegetic" *voice* paradigm, which offers its own set of advantages. First, the authentication of the fictional discourse is solely entrusted to the omniscient narrator, who, unlike Max Aue, does not need to *earn* this performative force as it is granted by literary conventions. Also, the camera-like depersonalization of the *voice* creates an *impression* of objectivity that reinforces the "moral safety" of the fictional world. Without an apparently interventionist guiding *voice*, the readership feels empowered to draw what they believe to be their own conclusions. Although this *voice* typology lacks the emotional immediacy of "homo-intradiegetic" narration, as seen in Section 3.1, it fosters extreme empathy by indirectly enabling key *mood empathy builders* and creating the "safe environment" necessary for this emotion to emerge.

In my view, to face this comparison between the use of *voice* in both case studies, we must first bear in mind that, as Caracciolo states, "we always tend to *resist* immorality" ("Patterns of cognitive dissonance" 31). Secondly, we must consider that, as Bonasera (2023) and Ercolino & Fusillo (2022) have proved, the narrative dynamics demanded by

such moral "resistance" involve a delicate combination of attachment and critical distance, fascination, and estrangement. In this fragile balance, if estrangement outweighs attachment and fascination, the emotional texture of the novel risks producing a counterproductive effect. This is because if the *voice*'s subjectivity creates excessive "critical distance", the essential sense of non-threatening "application" required for extreme empathy may be disrupted by the reader's moral resistance to adopting the perspective of a perpetrator. Consequently, I agree with Keen's assertion that "sometimes the potential for […] readers' empathy *decreases* with sustained exposure to a particular figure's thoughts or voice" (*Empathy and the Novel* 96). As I see it, this is particularly relevant when dealing with extreme empathy, where the explicit moral demands placed on the narratee, directly emanating from the *voice* of an immoral narrator, may be perceived as a threat.

The analysis of *voice* in *Les bienveillantes* in 3.2 has revealed that the intimacy demanded by Aue—especially in "Toccata"—forces *voice* to "self-regulate" to *counteract* this moral affront to the reader. Consequently, from my perspective, only the inclusion of the narrator's unreliability and doubts enables the reader to endure the monologue of the former Nazi agent. That is because, as we already know, these "fractures" in Aue's "narrative mastery" transfer the authentication of the first-person narrator to the reader, who can thus interpret *beyond* the discourse imposed by the *voice*. In my opinion, without the resulting dramatic irony, which equalizes the hierarchy between the narrator and the reader, the proximity of Max Aue would cancel out any possibility of an empathic response. Conversely, in *In Cold Blood*, the risks posed by an immoral *voice* are avoided. As we have seen, the "hetero-extradiegetic" paradigm does not eliminate subjectivity but *conceals* it. The strategic instructions for eliciting a particular emotional response manifest instead through elements more indirect—and

therefore, less suspicious—than *voice*, such as changes in focalization, analepses, descriptions,[233] or even the inclusion of external documents. Both novels invite empathy for their criminal protagonist, but at the level of *voice*, this invitation is formulated in very different ways, and places the reader in very different positions.[234] In Capote's novel, the reader can be led to feeling attached to Perry almost without realizing it—as the character himself does not explicitly ask for forgiveness or mercy until his execution. Therefore, while the reader's moral "resistance" is negotiated in *Les bienveillantes* through a constant give and take with the *voice*, the same "resistance" in Capote's novel appears to slightly break down under a false impression of objectivity, as the "non-intrusive" journalistic *voice* provides the readership with a sense of security and freedom of opinion that encourages immersion.

All in all, a comparison of the use of *voice* in both novels suggests that, despite the apparent contradiction, the less biased the *voice*—or the more subtle its subjectivity—the more effective is the sensation of "safe moral environment" that extreme empathy requires (Hakemulder). Thus, I believe that when constructing extreme empathy, *voice* is likely to prioritize "a mode of representation that relies on implicitness and suggestiveness" (Jandl et al. 43). That is because, unlike in the case of more "comfortable" narrative empathy, when this *voice* speaks about an immoral *target*, it

[233] Narratologist Mieke Bal alerts of the biased nature of descriptions in realism in the following terms, which, in my opinion, perfectly fit the use of description in Truman Capote's novel: "Working from the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula, the ways in which descriptions are inserted characterize the rhetorical strategy of the narrator. In realistic narrative, insertion necessitates motivation. If, as Zola argued, the novel should be objective, this notion of objectivity necessitates naturalization—that is, making those interruptions known as descriptions seem self-evident or necessary. This so-called objectivity is, in fact, *a form of subjectivity in disguise*" (37, my emphasis).

[234]In this regard, Hannah Meretoja reasons that another factor defining the reader's "uncomfortable" position in *Les bienveillantes* is the fact that the narrator puts himself in a place of power and expertise. As Meretoja interprets it, by establishing this epistemological hierarchy, Max Aue seeks to subordinate his readers to his interpretations and knowledge. As the scholar puts it, "he positions himself as an expert who not only worked during the war as an intelligence officer, compiling reports about the events and their underlying forces, but also as someone who holds a doctorate in law and has studied 'quite a few books' on the Holocaust" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 226).

seems to me that indirect approaches "may be more effective for raising readers' empathy than straightforward presentations or thematizations" (Nünning 43).[235]

Mood

Although they differ in their uses of *voice*, both case studies coincide in many of their choices regarding *mood*. While Capote's novel employs variable focalization and Littell's uses the classical monoperspectivism of first-person narratives, both develop a realistic internal focus that, in both cases, has been likened to documentary cameras. As we will see, this *mood* format, which activates several *empathy builders*, plays a crucial role in shaping empathic reception in both novels.

As suggested in the last sub-section, due to its demands on the moral structure of readers, extreme empathy tends to prioritize suggestiveness over more directs calls for comprehension. In this regard, the "showing" of *mood* may appear to the narratee as a more natural, less biased method of receiving information on the *dramatis personae* than the "telling" of *voice.* In this vein, in *In Cold Blood*, focalization on Perry and by him constitute the readership's firsthand knowledge of the criminal. In *Les bienveillantes*, *mood* is as monopolized by Aue as *voice*, but, unlike the latter, it is not contaminated by the narrator's unreliability. Thus, *mood* also becomes here the narrative category that can more faithfully inform the reader about Max Aue's reality. In both novels, then, the actions and reflections of the protagonists are the most direct input for character identification.

[235] Originally, Vera Nünning's assertion does not explicitly address extreme empathy, but rather speculates on narrative empathy in a more general manner. Nonetheless, I wanted to include her quotation as it reflects a broader suspicion about the fostering of empathy, which, I believe, finds its confirmation in the specific context of *voice* within extreme empathy.

This, of course, brings us back to the idea of *inference* being the most suitable method for decrypting the text's *empathy builders*. Rather than listening to what the immoral characters say, both case studies ask the readership to interpret what they *do*. Therefore, as we have seen, Aue's focalizing zoom-ins on the Levinasian Face or Perry's acts of kindness towards his victims or his friends appear as more revealing of the contradictory nature of these characters than their direct-speech assertions on themselves. In this respect, *mood*'s quality as an interpretative space is particularly significant in *Les bienveillantes*, in which Aue's focalization provides the reader with information about the nature of the narrator that his *voice* has repressed, and that, in fact, it often contradicts. Somehow, in Littell's novel, *inference* transforms *mood* into the most revealing source repository of Aue's subjectivity.

Mood most effectively promotes empathy through its most evident effect: immersing readers in the protagonists' perspective. Through Max's and Perry's focalizations, we gain the "psychic vividness of the prolonged inside views" (Booth 377-378) of their minds, which form the foundation upon which the imaginative processes of both reading and empathizing are built. *Mood* implies adopting the perspective of the fictive other. Therefore, through it, the act of reading mirrors the experience of empathy, stressing the similarities between both cognitive processes. Considering this parallelism, many scholars have rejected the mentioned primacy granted to *voice* in the study of narrative empathy to instead concentrate on the emotional dimension of "point of view" (Coplan, "Empathic engagement with narrative fiction" 142). This critical tendency—also defended by scholars such as Ercolino & Fusillo (286), Hakemulder (73), or Basseler (162)—claims that "an internal perspective best promotes character identification and readers' empathy" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 96). Given the number of empathy builders it encompasses, a panoramic review of *mood* in *In Cold Blood* and *Les*

Bienveillantes appears to corroborate affect theorists' view on the importance of textual perspective. In fact, *mood* may be even more crucial in the case of extreme empathy, which demands, as I have argued, a subtler access to the *target*'s interiority than that of the *voice*.

In addition to the general use of *mood* for character description, as I have anticipated, the respective multi-perspectivism and mono-perspectivism of the novels coincide in their style and in some of the *empathy builders* they develop. In this sense, I have identified at least three similarities in the *mood* of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*. First, focalization is employed in both cases to compare the empathic *targets* with other inhabitants of their fictional worlds, establishing a contrast between them that serves to highlight the benign qualities of Perry Smith and Max Aue, and to direct the novels' empathy towards them. As we have seen, in the case of *Les bienveillantes*, this effect is provoked by Aue's description of the cruel acts perpetrated by his Nazi colleagues, those "antisémites viscéraux, obscènes" whom he rejects and distances himself from (227). In *In Cold Blood*, *mood* enhances Perry's "amiable" nature by constantly contrasting him with his bad-tempered partner, Dick, and even, indirectly, with his victim, Mr. Clutter—two comparisons that end up favoring Perry. The Clutters' murderer is also *equated*, in his role as a *victim* of tragedy, with Nancy Clutter, with whom, as we are informed through focalization, he shares common traits. Moreover, variable focalization is, in *In Cold Blood*, further exploited for the benefit of extreme empathy. *Mood* is by far the narrative category that most promotes engagement with Perry Smith, as it also allows "intradiegetic empathy" to flourish. A subtle but powerful *empathy builder*, "intradiegetic empathy" may be one of the most interesting effects of *intra-world* emotions reviewed in this thesis. It sets an example to the readership by demonstrating that, within the "possible state of affairs" that Capote's text sets up

(Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds 482), it is viable to feel "empathy for the Devil" (Morton). Furthermore, emotional responses to both the *target* and the novel are guided in *In Cold Blood* by its shifting focalization, which changes depending on the desired emotional impact of the narrative events.

Secondly, both novels employ mood through a realistic style. This shared feature brings to mind Murray Smith's thesis, which argues that the combination of internal focalization and a realistic style serves as the most evident "cognitive prosthesis" for triggering narrative empathy (110). At first glance, the fact that both Capote's and Littell's novels depict events realistically and that their emotionality aims to elicit extreme empathy seems to support Smith's hypothesis. However, the specifics of these realistic perspectives must be examined before trying to draw a conclusion. In what realism is concerned, the variable focalization of *In Cold Blood* is unified by a simple, matter-of-fact style, that nevertheless allows for certain poetic licenses. On the other hand, the mono-perspectivism employed by *Les bienveillantes* is one of the few stable elements in a formally convoluted narrative, rich in details and references. The realistic "mode of representation" of both novels is evident, for instance, in their frequent inclusion of detailed descriptions of events, characters, and settings. In addition, as both are fictional worlds inspired by "actual" events, their realism is reinforced by references to an external *repertoire* (Iser), which informs the narrative. In *In Cold Blood*, this reliance on "the archive" manifests itself through explanations of United States laws and legal processes, scientific articles on psychiatry, and transcripts from diaries of some of the real-life protagonists of the crime. In Littell's novel, the narrator-protagonist makes constant references to existing literature about the Holocaust and its aftermath, establishing a dialogue between his experience as narrated in the possible world of fiction and the real historical episode on which it is based.

A third characteristic shared by the novels' focalization is its intention to capture not only the conscious "horizon" of their protagonists, but also their subconscious one. Hence, without undermining the realist effect, but rather expanding it, both case studies incorporate the existence of "intermediate worlds" of "dreams, hallucination, or madness" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 117). In fact, this could be a common characteristic of narratives that propose an empathic perception of the antagonist. In addition to Raskolnikov, whose dreams populate *Crime and Punishment*, expressing his anguish, Ercolino & Fusillo also identify that "Nel Macbeth di Shakespeare l'empatia negativa si incrocia con una serie di temi correlati: il sogno, il soprannaturale, l'allucinazione, la notte-inconscio" (148) [4]. As I see it, this tendency towards the dreamlike would be a way to delve even deeper into the subjective complexity of immoral characters, providing greater access to their perspective and the underlying motives for their actions. All in all, both the inclusion of "actual" documents and the immersion in the target's subconscious highlight the realistic perspectives of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*. However, in general terms, the common use of realism and linearity in both novels leads us to wonder if indeed, as Smith suggests, empathy—in this case extreme empathy—benefits from a realist style or even requires it.

In general, critics have not reached a consensus on whether a realistic narrative enhances the likelihood of engaging empathically with fictional particulars or not. A brief consideration of the arguments from both perspectives will help us assess the potential application of this hypothesis to the specific case of negative empathy. On the one hand, critics such as Miall & Kuiken (1995; 1998; 1999) or Keen (2007) see empathy as a "companion to defamiliarization", arguing that "unusual or striking representations in the literary text promote foregrounding and open the way to empathetic reading". This thesis might imply that "more difficult and discontinuous texts promote empathy more

effectively than their simpler relatives" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 87). As I understand it, this hypothesis would indicate that formal difficulty may contribute to creating the "critical distance" needed for empathy. However, the question arises: how much difficulty is too much? If the style of the novel is too fantastic, convoluted, abstract or its chronology non-linear, it may hinder reading to a point where the individualization and recognition of characters—and therefore subsequent empathy—would no longer be possible. This is the danger another group of academics, including Bourg et al. or Goldie, warn us about. They consider that "intelligibility can outstrip imaginability" (Goldie, *The Emotions* 209).

Amid this debate, my take lies at an intermediate point. It is based on the analysis of my case studies, as well as on Ngai's ideas on the perception of *intra-world* emotions in literature. At one point in *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai compares the possibility of emotional engagement in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (1857) and *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1853). She concludes that the lack of details about Bartleby—whom she defines as "a psychologically inscrutable character" (50)—makes emotional engagement much more likely in *The Confidence-Man,* where the protagonist is depicted realistically. This comparison leads Ngai to consider realism a key formal element in triggering *inter-world* narrative emotions and to view realistic narrative as an invitation to emotional engagement (52). Considering that, as reiterated throughout this thesis, empathy—especially extreme empathy—depends on having as much knowledge of the target as possible, I find Ngai's conclusion highly relevant. Thus, I argue that the descriptive and introspective qualities of realistic literature may be particularly well-suited to fostering "narrative empathy" (Keen). This perspective would explain why it is probably easier to empathize with Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* than, for instance, with Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. But if I have identified by position in this debate as "intermediate"

is because, in my opinion, this preference does not exclude formal innovation or metaliterary or intertextual games—all of them present, as we know, in *Les bienveillantes*—or chronological alterations of the time of the *fabula*—as the ones at work in *In Cold Blood*. Simply put, I suggest, in line with Ngai, that the complexity and linearity of the narrative should be sufficiently accessible for the reader to easily *access* the character's subjectivity, that is, the focus of empathy. The only condition, in my opinion, would be for the cognitive effort of understanding the novel not to overshadow the potential emotional effort of understanding the character. Of course, this premise would gain importance in the case of extreme empathy, where this second effort is supposed to be even greater.

In conclusion, and to summarize the ideas gathered on the role of *mood* in narrative and extreme empathy, I have argued that what matters most in the production of empathy—especially in the case of extreme empathy—is for the character who acts as the *target* of empathy to serve as the main focalizer of the narrative. Especially in the case of extreme empathy, where the category of *voice* can create excessive "critical distance", *mood,* in my opinion, emerges as *the most important element* in fostering the reader's adopting the perspective of the immoral character and potentially establishing an empathic parasocial bond with them. On the other hand, the comparison between the different *mood* formats proposed by *Les bienveillantes*—monoperspectivism—and *In Cold Blood*—variable focalization—does not reveal, from my perspective, any advantage of one over the other. They just present two different ways of engaging the reader in the character's point of view. However, after analyzing the focalization in both novels, I have hypothesized that a *realistic and linear style*—in their case, reinforced by the inclusion of "actual" documents and by the access to the target's subconscious—may facilitate empathic understanding, especially when dealing with immoral fictional particulars.

Tense

As the two last sub-sections have hopefully illustrated, although much remains to be done with respect to the role of *voice* and *mood* in the arousal of narrative and extreme empathy, there is a theoretical basis from which to continue their study, as evinced by works such as Colm Hogan 2016; Keen 2006 or Keen 2007. However, we cannot say the same about the narrative category of *tense*. The shortage of literature relating *tense* and literary empathy is probably caused by the fact that the category of *tense* is not as related to the expression of emotions as those of *voice* and *mood*, which are, as we know, recognized repositories of subjectivity. As a result, *tense* could be regarded as the narrative category that contributes *the least* to the formal creation of the *parasocial* bond between characters and readers. However, I consider that the case studies examined in this Block have revealed several ways in which narrative *tense* contributes to the reader's empathic engagement with fictional particulars. To clarify this correlation, in this subsection, I will draw some conclusions from the *tense*-related *empathy builders* identified in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*. Furthermore, based on them, I will compare here another temporal aspect that, in my opinion, could influence the emotional perception of immoral protagonists: the length of the novel. So, I will briefly tackle here the following *tense* aspects: the organization of *story* time with respect to *fabula* time (that is, narrative *order*) and its ellipses, the role of analepses in characterization, their implication in the creation of the novels' *emotional tone*, and finally, the possible effect of the novel's length in extreme empathy.

In the only essay entirely devoted to the emotional experience of extreme—or, as they call it, "negative"—empathy, *Empatia negativa* (2022), Ercolino & Fusillo identify,

based on the model of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a pattern in the *order* in which immoral characters are characterized in dramatic works:

> troviamo nella fase iniziale monologhi che attivano un'adesione emotiva nei confronti delle sue esitazioni di fronte al delitto; mentre, nella seconda parte del dramma, il protagonista si trasforma sempre più in un tiranno sanguinario, è l'identificazione svanisce progressivamente. *È una tecnica frequente*, che condensa il carattere paradossale di questa esperienza estetica: l'autore suscita all'inizio empatia per un personaggio negativo, *mostrandone motivazioni, sfondi sociali e familiari, conflittualità interiore,* e poi lo porta a un punto limite di malvagità che non permette più nessuna forma di adesione. (126, my emphasis) [5]

If we think about the moral development of the protagonists in Capote's and Littell's novels, we find out that the *order* technique identified by the Italian scholars is applied equally in both novels. In *In Cold Blood*, because of the arrangement of the *story*'s fictional events, the reader is fully acquainted with Perry Smith's personality and past before discovering that he was the perpetrator of the Clutters' murder. Similarly, although in the prelude of *Les bienveillantes*, "Toccata", the character-narrator already reveals his past as a Nazi agent, he also informs the readership of the circumstances that pushed him to that situation—the threat of reprisals for his homosexuality, and his emotional desperation; and make us participants in some of the darkest parts of his life—his hatred for his mother, his forced marriage and fatherhood, and his desire to have been born a woman. Moreover, "Toccata" already displays Aue's contradictions and possible remorse for his criminal actions, making readers suspect right from the start that the character's interiority is more complex than what he himself expresses. Additionally, if the explanation of Perry's life experiences appears with anteriority to that of his criminal deeds, *Les bienveillantes*' exploration of Aue's past mostly appears in the first chapter of

his memoirs, "Allemandes I and II", that is, before the remaining 800 pages on his crimes during the Third Reich.

Therefore, in both cases, empathy is cultivated *before* readers fully grasp the extreme effort that this emotional connection is going to demand of them. This strategic placement of *empathy builders* is particularly evident in *In Cold Blood*, where they precede the full explanation of the crime. While this deliberate arrangement may not be as conspicuous in Max Aue's memoires, this novel similarly predisposes the reader to understand and *imagine* the true essence of the criminal before delving into his criminal acts. Both examples demonstrate how this temporal disposition of the target's characterization promotes empathy by manipulating the reader's expectations. Because of their early deployment of *empathy builders*, these novels aim at creating an emotional investment in the character that, in time, generates an expectation. As a result of this expectation, in *In Cold Blood*, readers anticipate Perry's innocence in the murders; while in *Les bienveillantes*, they long for Aue's redemption. In both cases, the expectation is frustrated. But regardless of deception, through these expectations, readers become more deeply engaged with the characters: as they expect their redemption, they pay closer attention to their actions and moral development. Consequently, these ultimately unmet expectations not only intensify readers' engagement but also heighten reading *tension*. That is crucial because, according to Keen, tension further amplifies the readers' emotional involvement, as it "provokes physiological responses of arousal" in them ("A theory of narrative empathy" 57). Moreover, considering that the plots of my case studies already involve a certain level of tension due to the central crimes of the narratives, the tension that may arise from expecting some transformation in the characters' behavior would *add* to the inherent tension of the stories' plots. But a third layer of tension is added to the previous two: besides the tension stemming from the narratives' core crimes, in

both novels, the stability and survival of the *target* depend on the preservation of a secret. In the case of Perry, who is on the run from the police with Dick, that secret is their whereabouts; while in the case of Aue, it concerns his hidden homosexuality and forbidden love. These secrets, known to readers but concealed from other characters, increase the novels' tension and, most importantly, deepen readers' involvement in the characters and their fates.

Another *tense* feature promoting both tension and engagement is, as examined, the novels' respective ellipsis of information. As the analyses have shown, ellipsis emerges as a crucial *tense* technique that serves several narrative functions. It allows for the characterization of criminals before confirming their guilt, creates expectations of their potential improvement, and generates tension both at character and plot levels. Both novels employ the elliptical structure of the "enigma". Yet, in the case of *In Cold Blood* this structure functions as a central organizing principle of the plot, which reinforces even more the reader's potential engagement. As we know, in Capote's novel the enigma sustains the readers' interest in the crimes by keeping the specifics of their execution unknown, and at the same time, it postpones the revelation of Perry's participation in the crimes, providing readers time to empathize with him. But despite their differences, both the use of enigma in Capote's novel and in *Les bienveillantes*, where it revolves around the nature of Aue's "forbidden love" and his troubled childhood, demonstrate how *story* gaps not only arouse curiosity and allow for characterization, but also generate emotional involvement (Iser 57). The absences of content Roman Ingarden called "places of indeterminacy" enhance readers' participation and interaction with the text, as they prompt readers to fill in the gaps with their interpretations based on their existing knowledge (Ingarden 50). As I have hypothesized in relation to the central enigma in Capote's novel, if the novel indeed fosters an empathic engagement with its *target*, our

filling of this informational gap would be biased by such *parasocial* relation. Finally, the presence of ellipsis also encourages *inference* as a reading technique, thus awakening readers' attention and involvement. Overall, ellipsis constitutes a paradigmatic example of the emotional impact that the chronological arrangement of the *story* can have. Furthermore, I would say that a strategic disposition of fictional events becomes essential in fostering extreme empathy, as ideally, the creation of a *parasocial* bond with the character should *precede* the full revelation of their crimes. Both case studies—especially *In Cold Blood*—effectively use *tense* tools, including foreshadowing, flashbacks, and pacing, to enhance the emotional resonance of the narrative. Among all these *tense* elements, *analepses* stand out for directly contributing to empathic engagement.

In *In Cold Blood* as well as in *Les bienveillantes*, the strategic use of analepses or "flashbacks" containing biographical details has been considered crucial for revealing the moral deviation of the criminal *targets*. As stated earlier in this comparative section, all instances of narrative empathy benefit from thorough characterization and, thus, from the depiction of the *target*'s background. However, in my view, empathy towards "those who perform atrocious acts" (Morton 308) could never be elicited solely from the exposition of the characters' present and past actions. Extreme empathy *requires* a more explanatory insight of the *target* and their life story, as "it becomes harder to identify imaginatively with important parts of human possibility" which are "alien to one" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 76). Therefore, I posit that rather than merely serving as an optional addition to the character's portrayal, retrospective temporal anachronies (Genette) become a hermeneutic necessity for extreme empathy. Hence, it is possible that the relevance of these temporal devices may be exclusive to extreme empathy and not necessarily common to "mainstream empathy" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 74), where the reader, prompted

to connect with a character worthy of being understood, may not need to be furnished with such extensive antecedents.

Both Capote's and Littell's novels seem to acknowledge this need, as they both devote a significant part of their narrative to elucidating the "conditions of emergence" that have shaped their respective protagonists' subjectivities (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 8). Curiously, many of Perry's and Max's childhood and youth experiences coincide. Both were raised in dysfunctional families; with absent fathers and mothers they came to resent. Because of their family circumstances, they grew up in institutions where they were abused, among other reasons, for their backgrounds. Both have lost—in one way or another—their beloved siblings, and feel isolated and friendless, uprooted from the world. They also share a troubled relationship with their sexuality, as well as frustrated literary aspirations. Most significantly, both feel that they are fated, from birth, to the moral decline depicted in their respective novels.

As Judith Butler puts it, to try to understand the reasons behind Evil is not the same as trying to exonerate it (*Precarious Life* xiii). In the same vein, although in both *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* the protagonists' pasts are presented as intricately linked to their present behavior, the novels do not necessarily redeem them because of it. With this in mind, I would now briefly delve into the reasons that led me to consider temporal analepses a decisive *empathy builder*. Hopefully, a review of the employment of analepses will also reveal the direct involvement of *tense* in the creation of narrative emotions.

In addition to granting readers access to Max's and Perry's backgrounds, I regard analepses as having two other effects on empathic perception. First, given the consensus among affect theorists that "empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative feeling states" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 179), such

as shame or sadness, the depiction of Max's and Perry's past suffering would likely evoke this *transitive* emotion in the reader. This is because sadness and vulnerability typically trigger in the observer "the obligation to alleviate and recognize" it (Berlant 2). In my opinion, even in the cases under consideration—where the protagonists are both past victims and present perpetrators of cruelty—the tendency to recognize vulnerability outweighs the immorality of the target's current actions. Secondly, through biographic retrospections, both narratives establish a logic of continuity between the protagonists' traumatic early lives and the current "possible state of affairs" marked by their immoral attitude (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 482). As mentioned, neither of the novels imposes an explanatory or deterministic relationship between the upbringing of the characters and the diegetic events. However, their live-long sadness magnifies the *targets*' feeling of distress, which acquires existential magnitude in the reader's eyes. Finally, in my opinion, the emotional continuity between the target's past and their present shapes the *emotional tone* of both novels. As I will explore in the following subsection, the investment in the protagonists' pasts would then provide both novels with a uniform emotional atmosphere that affects their *parasocial* worlds.

However, before exploring the novels' *emotional tone*, I will quickly discuss a fourth *tense* aspect that may influence the fostering of extreme empathy: the length of the novel. This is not a formal choice which concerns, as the ones reviewed until now, the time of the *story*—or diegetic time—, but rather the time of the *narrating* act (Bal 38), or more precisely, of its corresponding *reading act*. In Block I of this thesis, I have mentioned how Ercolino & Fusillo proposed that extreme empathy is likely an *exclusively* narrative emotion, because, as they put it, the time we spend with a Dostoyevsky character is superior to any time we will spend, probably, with any "actual" murderer (57). A few pages later in *Empatia Negativa*, Ercolino & Fusillo relate again the duration of narrative

and the level of empathy it attains. In this case in relation to *Les bienveillantes*, they state that "la lunghezza dell'esposizione ad Aue contribuisce a creare un legame empatico fra lui e il lettore" (105) [6]. With these assertions—though not further developed by the authors—Ercolino & Fusillo appear to apply a general principle of empathy to the specific case of empathy for an immoral character: that due to its complexity, empathy is an emotion that requires time to develop. Therefore, the Italian scholars would be suggesting that the extension of a novel, and thus, the duration of the *reading act*, may impact empathy in a way that the more narrative time spent with a fictional criminal, the greater the chances of empathizing with them.

Indeed, several academics dealing with narrative empathy have underscored how novels offer us a unique opportunity to spend *quality time* alongside the *target* of empathy, an experience difficult to replicate in other contexts. This prolonged engagement translates into a wealth of information crucial for fostering empathy (Caracciolo 2014; Ercolino 2018; Keen 2006; Meretoja 2017; Nussbaum 1990).[236] For example, in *The Experientiality of Narrative* (2014), Caracciolo discusses this possibility through the lens of "simulacrum theory" and argues that akin to the "actual world", the importance of the novel's length is not merely about acquiring information on characters but also about becoming familiar with them. The more time readers "invest" *parasocially* with a fictional particular, the more likely they are to get used to them and, by extension, adopt their perspective through "application" (45).

Turning back to my corpus, I wonder: does this mean that the length of a novel like *Les bienveillantes* can be considered an advantage in promoting extreme empathy,

[236] For instance, drawing on Nussbaum's opinion that "empathy-inducing novels are invariably long" (*Love's Knowledge* 230–231), Suzanne Keen agrees with her that "the length of the immersion is a vital component of the empathic process, permitting intensity, dreaming, and desiring that develops the reader's loving heart" (Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 228).

especially when compared to *In Cold Blood*, more than five-hundred pages shorter? Does it imply that if there was more narrative time focused on a character like Perry in *In Cold Blood*, it would deepen the *parasocial* relationship and increase the possibility of empathizing with him? I believe that extreme empathy is influenced by multiple factors beyond just the length of the text, and so, it would be simplistic to reduce it to this aspect. However, I share the opinion of Ercolino & Fusillo—among other scholars—when they affirm that *narrating/reading* time is an influential factor in shaping the emotional responses of the readers. In fact, many scholars have considered *Les bienveillantes* as a clear example of how the time spent with an immoral character can affect the *inter-world* emotions that we develop towards them. For instance, Bonasera includes Littell's novel in a comparative study aiming to illustrate the effect of the length of novels in their arousal of what she calls "negative" empathy.[237] This comparative exercise, inspired by Ercolino's previous work,[238] leads Bonasera to conclude that "the longer we remain

[237] Besides *Les bienveillantes*, Carmen Bonasera's corpus also includes other long novels such as Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *Demons* (1872), which are compared to his novella *Notes from Underground* (1864); and to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) which is, as *In Cold Blood*, a novel of "standard" length. According to Bonasera, it is not casual that the first three examples of what she refers to as "negative empathy" (*Crime and Punishment*, *Demons*, and *The Kindly Ones*) are over 15,000 sentences long—*Les bienveillantes*, for instance, being 22,699 sentences long. Instead, she argues that this length allows for a prolonged immersive experience, which is "a feature associated with inducing the intensely cathartic aspect of negative empathy" (166).

[238] As exposed later in this paragraph, before his collaboration with Fusillo in *Negative Empathy* (2022), Ercolino had already commented on the effect that the length of *Les bienveillantes* may have on its empathic reception in his article "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism" (2018), in which Littell's novels serves as the only case study. Nonetheless, Stefano Ercolino's interest in the length of novels surpasses this specific consideration. Three years before the publication of this article, in 2015, the scholar had published *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's* Gravity's Rainbow *to Roberto Bolaño's* 2666, a long essay partially inspired by Tom Le Clair's *The Art of Excess* (1989) and Frederic Karl's idea that "the Mega-Novel is the principal American narrative form after World War II". In this early publication, Ercolino identifies the "maximalist novel" as a contemporary narrative genre. For Ercolino, this genre's characteristic length "is not a neutral material fact" but rather a characteristic that defines a type of novel which possesses "a very strong morphological and symbolic identity" (19). Besides their shared extent, Ercolino identifies nine other elements that define "maximalist novels": "their encyclopedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, ethical commitment and hybrid realism" (xiii-xiv). It is evident that many of the aspects that Ercolino identifies as being typical of "the maximalist novel" appear in *Les bienveillantes*—to wit: the length, the encyclopedic mode, exuberance, completeness, ethical commitment, and hybrid realism. Nonetheless, many other characteristics—multiperspectivism, omniscience, or intersemioticity—, as well as other traits mentioned by Ercolino later in his essay—as the diversity of topics and social perspectives, the insertion in the American tradition or the will to portray the American society—seem to exclude it from the label. In conclusion, as happened with the label of "posmemory" literature—and as we will also see in

exposed to the motives and the interior struggles of a character, the more we would be capable of resonating with their perspective—without necessarily liking them" (167). Similarly, other scholars such as Caracciolo (2014), Ercolino (2018) or Meretoja (2017) also argue that the length of *Les bienveillantes* is key for empathizing with Max Aue, as the extension of his discourse ends up "entrapping" the reader (Ercolino, "Negative Empathy" 254) who, by the force habit, may almost unconsciously, "side with him" (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 45). On her part, Meretoja explains the implications of the novel's length in the following terms,

> The *sheer length of the book* and the astonishingly detailed depiction of "the production of the day-to-day of the genocide" (Eagleston 24) is ethically crucial. The readers' *emotional investment intensifies* as the story unfolds and the effects of war on human integrity become apparent […] the reader's emotional engagement is also likely to involve sharing Aue's feeling of growing numbness—as the initial shock of terror turns into gradual habituation—and his experience of dizziness and disorientation *after extended immersion* in the world of atrocity. (222, my emphasis)

Meretoja's insight suggests that the novel's extension not only familiarizes readers with Aue's *Weltanschauung*: it also immerses them into the fictional world and its emotional atmosphere, governed by the "feelings" of Aue. With this reference, Meretoja seems to point towards the last narratological aspect I will be discussing: the *emotional tone* of the novels, a narrative emotion whose influence permeates the rest of *intra-world* and *inter-world* emotions.

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relation with the aesthetic category of "the grotesque"—, Littell's novel displays confluences with Ercolino's "maximalist novel" without, in my opinion, completely aligning with it.

Emotional Tone

As Sianne Ngai contends, the concept of *tone* "remains notoriously difficult to define" (41). While the study of narrative emotions is, in general, intricate because of their nuanced nature, the challenge intensifies when addressing the *emotional tone* of novels. In *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai describes it as "a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' the world", which is generated by the sum of the formal and thematic features present in the artwork. As the American scholar explains in the chapter she devotes to *tone* (29-47), the added difficulty of the project lies in the fact that this "affective bearing" is "reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to representations of feelings within the world of the story" (41). Instead, it depends on the effect created by the technical aspects of the diegesis and thus, it demands its own analysis.

Ngai retrieves the aesthetic concept of *tone* from Adorno, one of the few scholars that has delved into this complex aesthetic-emotional idea from a theoretical standpoint. Unluckily, the field of narratology has overlooked this concept. For instance, Genette, whose narrative theory I have relied on so far, seems to adopt something similar to Adorno's definition of *tone* in his formulation of what he calls the "aesthetic predicates", which he describes as the "qualities reflecting the negative or positive feelings which a work inspires in the viewer and which the viewer then phantasmatically appends to the work" (*The Aesthetic Relation* 82). As this definition displays, *tone* is here intertwined with what I have called *emotional impression*, in a way that disregards potential differences between the projection of the work and that of the reader. As a result,

Genette's concept of "aesthetic predicates" remains too ambiguous to account for the distinction between *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions established in this thesis.

Drawing consequently only from Ngai and Adorno's works, in Block II I have similarly defined *emotional tone* as the emotional atmosphere that the "possible world" of the text projects for the narratee. Within my taxonomy of narrative emotions, I have classified *tone* as an *intra-world* emotion, as it derives from the extensional choices of the text and their expression. However, I have argued that, as an *intra-world* emotion, *tone* is neither *parasocial* nor *individual* nor *social*, as it does not result from the characters' mental states, but from the fictional world itself. Thus, it is more subtle than *intra-world parasocial* emotions and, as a consequence, more dependent on the interpretation of readers. Finally, I have also suggested that *tone* is more related to the spatial and temporal conditions of the narrative world than to its inhabitants. An examination of the *emotional tone* derived from *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* may partially validate or refute these hypotheses. Likewise, it may help us clarify the effect that *tone* may exert on other narrative emotions, a relation that also defies clear definition.

In this regard, I have also proposed that the *inter-world* counterpart of *tone*, that is, the readers' emotional response to *tone*, would be what I refer to as *emotional impression*. Iser posited that "we comprehend a fictional text through the experience it makes us undergo" (189). In terms of narrative emotions, *emotional impression* would be the overall result of the emotional experience conveyed by the narrative, in other words, what the reader ends up feeling towards the novel as a macro-structure. Therefore, following Iser's notion, *emotional impression* should, as a part of our reading experience, impact on how we emotionally grasp the text. In my opinion, this implies that although *intra* and *inter-world* emotions do not determine the *emotional impression* of the text—

and therefore, its *tone*, from which it emanates—, *emotional impression* does have an effect on both our perception of *intra-world* emotions and our own *inter-world* ones. According to this hypothesis, then, both *tone* and its counterpart, *emotional impression*, would serve as an unconscious lens/factor in the formation of *parasocial* emotions. As abstract as this may sound, perhaps revisiting one of the examples used in Chapter II to illustrate *tone* may clarify this presumed correlation between *tone* and *emotional impression* on the one hand, and *intra-world* and *inter-word* emotions on the other. In Block II, I mentioned the example of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In this classic play, we are forewarned from the outset that "something is rotten in Denmark" (4.1), which announces an *emotional tone* that will indeed be laden with sadness, alertness, and chaos. Within this *emotional tone*, the madness and melancholy of one of its characters, Ophelia, do not surprise readers. Ophelia's emotions do not disrupt the play's *emotional tone*; they only contribute to it. Amidst the tumultuous state affecting the entire Danish court, Ophelia's *intra-world* emotions are just one more piece that homogenizes the *tone* of the work and the *emotional impression* it leaves us with. In contrast, in a novel like Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, where rationality prevails over emotions, with justice and love being primary feelings, the emotions of Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic, are perceived more as an affront, a drastic shift in the novel's *emotional tone* whose emergence likely leaves a greater impression on the reader, immersed in a fictional world where Bertha Mason's anguish and rage have no precedents.

With these ideas in mind, I argue that a complete analysis of extreme empathy requires an understanding of *tone* and *emotional impression*. As I see it—and that is my last hypothesis concerning *tone*—the readers' response to extreme empathy may be more easily elicited in a novel whose *tone* is already invested in "extreme" emotions. Indeed, as suggested in the examination of the thematic structures of *In Cold Blood* and *Les*

bienveillantes, I believe that both novels convey, through a matrix of narratological and thematic characteristics, a unified *tone* that turns both fictional worlds into *parasocial* spaces where extreme empathy is more likely to emerge.

Emotional Tone **in** ***In Cold Blood***

In the analysis of *In Cold Blood*'s *tense* and thematic structure, I have emphasized how Capote's masterpiece is imbued with a sense of unescapable destiny which ensnares both its protagonists and the readership. From a thematic perspective, this overall feeling is conveyed through the tragic fate of Perry's family saga. Throughout the novel, the presence of a kind of "curse" haunting the *target* of empathy is constantly manifested by Perry himself, and even by other characters like agent Al Dewey, who describes Perry's life as "no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely *progress toward one mirage*" (239, my emphasis). Likewise, following her interrogation by the police, Perry's sister's apprehensive thoughts are ominously articulated 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?" (176, my emphasis). After the Clutters' murders, Perry himself seems attuned to this sense of upcoming danger. During their frantic escape from the police, Perry is consumed by constant fear and remorse, which he repeatedly shares with his partner: "It's just I don't believe it —that anyone can get away with a thing like that. Because I don't see how it's possible. To do what we did. And just one hundred per cent get away with it. I mean, that's what bugs me—I can't get it out of my head that *something's got to happen*" (105, my emphasis). Nonetheless, as I have pointed out in the novel's analysis, the omnipresent anguish induced by this fate is

particularly evoked by the novel's manipulation of *tense* and, to a lesser extent, by the atmosphere of the settings in which the plot unfolds.

In terms of the extensional *selection* of spaces (Doležel), I have previously discussed how, from the novel's outset, the village of Holcomb is depicted as a place forgotten by the world, a town isolated at the very heart of the country. We are told that "the village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call 'out there'" and that, "until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb" (1-3). Holcomb is moreover characterized by a hostile atmosphere, surrounded by inhospitable plains and wind-blown fields of grain.[239] A decadent aesthetic further underscores this sense of abandonment:

> After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—DANCE—but the dancing has ceased, and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window—HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933 […] (1)

In a similar fashion, the reader is later informed that, "Situated at the end of a long, lanelike driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms", atop a solitary hill, stands River Valley Farm, the Clutters' home, which "impresses" the townsfolk (7). After the morning of the murders, the "handsome" farm becomes the bloody crime scene and, later, a sort

[239] From a paratextual perspective, I consider that many of the covers that have been chosen to frame different editions of *In Cold Blood* throughout the years echo this inhospitable atmosphere that construct the tone within the narrative. You may consult, for instance, Random House 1992 edition (Figure 7 in Appendix II), Vintage 1994 edition (Figure 8 in Appendix II), the Spanish translation *A sangre fría* published by DeBolsillo in 2016 (Figure 9 in Appendix II), the French translation *De sang-froid* published by Gallimard in 2005 (Figure 10 in Appendix II) or even the graphic cover proposed by Penguin Essentials in the 2012 edition (Figure 11 in Appendix II).

of haunted house, where both Mr. Helm and Susan Kidwell believe they have glimpsed the ghosts of the deceased at some point. Adding to this eerie setting, other locations in the novel include Kansas State Prison, which persists as a shared memory for Dick and Perry, and later, Lansing Prison and its claustrophobic Death Row, where "the cell windows are very narrow, and not only barred but covered with a wire mesh black as a widow's veil" (302). In my estimation, the ultimate elements in this evocative catalogue are the "non-places" (Augé 1992) inhabited by the criminal duo in their flight: gas stations, barns, motels, service stations, and, above all, the wide roads of the western and southern United States. This progression of inhospitable spaces amplifies the fatalistic atmosphere conveyed throughout *In Cold Blood*, an effect transmitted to the reader through richly descriptive, adjective-laden passages. As I see it, if feelings of anguish and entrapment arise from such descriptions, it is because the descriptions of spaces in Capote's novel are, in general, already oriented towards these specific emotions.

Although fictional spaces contribute to shaping the narrative *tone*, I have suggested in this thesis that in *In Cold Blood* the feeling that the narrative events are controlled by fate is primarily constructed through a skillful manipulation of *story* time. As we know, the *mood* and *tense* structure crafted through parallel editing instills a sense of impending collision between both plot lines—that of the criminals and that of the victims. The insertion of formal elements such as prolepses foreshadowing the Clutters' demise or *match-cuts* merging both realities into a single destiny—among others—evoke anguish in anticipation of an imminent catastrophe. This general anxiety is notably emphasized by the novel's temporal *duration*: before the night of the crimes, the alternation of scenes will gradually increase in its speed, accelerating the story's rhythm and propelling the collision between victims and perpetrators. After the Clutters' murders, the same technique is employed to depict Dick and Perry's evasion from—and ultimately,

confrontation with—the police. Finally, during the third and final clash of forces between the criminals and capital punishment, the pace reaches its zenith. The narrative, so far detailed, becomes elliptical, so that the sensation generated by the end of the book is like that of freefalling into an abyss. As explained, Keen argues that tension amplifies the emotional engagement of readers by eliciting physiological responses of arousal in them ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 57). Because of the *tense* modulations commented so far, Capote's novel creates a structural tension in *tone* throughout the narrative. If Keen's theory regarding the amplification of emotional engagement through heightened expectations holds true, the pervasive tension in *In Cold Blood* would significantly impact the overall emotional *tone* of the work.

What seems evident to me is that Capote's novel presents an aesthetic homogeneity in its fictitious settings. This atmospheric coherence appears to collaborate with a particular use of the *story* chronology, whose anachronisms and rhythm modulations highlight the inevitability of the plot events and, overall, create a sense of inexorable progression towards a predetermined outcome. The spatiotemporal choices of the novel, reinforced by an interweaving of *voice* and *mood* techniques, seem to bring about an *emotional tone* marked by a sense of fatal destiny, and thus, by emotions of anguish and powerlessness. This fatalistic *tone*—which matches the vicissitudes of the characters, inexorably headed towards violent conclusions—may elicit an emotional state of involvement, anxiety, and tension in readers. As implied above, in my view, these emotions are structural to Capote's fictional world, affect its dynamics and, consequently, its general interpretation and emotional reception by readers. Regarding the effects that the *emotional tone* of *In Cold Blood* may have on readers' extreme empathy, I suggest evaluating them after discussing the *emotional tone* of our second case novel, *Les*

bienveillantes, since in my opinion, both *tones* impact on the empathic reception of their respective targets, Perry Smith and Max Aue, in a similar way.

Emotional Tone in *Les bienveillantes*

In Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*, emotional tone revolves around the representation of the Holocaust, portrayed in the novel as a widespread and unfathomable horror. While *In Cold Blood* is structured around a single crime, *Les bienveillantes* presents one crime against humanity after another. Brutality saturates the entire fictional world. Through a lineal chronology—more characteristic of the moral tale than of the contemporary novel—Max Aue leads us through over ten key scenarios of Nazi Germany, recounting the war's effects in each. This structure implies constant descriptions of massacres and the ravages of war as well as continuous shifts in location: two narrative elements that, combined, convey a profound sense of chaos. That is because the protagonist's incessant travels through war-torn Europe contribute to a *tone* of generalized madness, and because, although the setting of the novel constantly changes, horror itself remains a constant. Moreover, this chaotic configuration is echoed by the Bach Suite that structures the narrative. In the musical piece, just like the novel, rhythms change from one movement/chapter to another, the parts vary, but the composition remains the same. Therefore, Aue's constant movements, unified through war landscape and symbolically, also through the "movements" of the musical suite, create the sensation of being in a confusing, multi-faceted hell. To this spatial element, another *tense* effect is added, which reinforces this *tone*: the association between the massacres and the protagonist's lifelong transgression of moral limits, established through analepses, which also adds to this sense of chaos and distress inherent in the story. But despite the various spatial and temporal

devices that help define the emotional *tone* of Littell's novel, I believe that unlike in the case of *In Cold Blood*, this *intra-world* emotion is here conveyed not so much through the extensional selection of space and narrative time, but rather through the intensional expression of all its fictional elements, that is, their textual manifestation through the narrative's style.

Consistent with its representation of the Shoah and the biography of its protagonist, the aesthetics of *Les bienveillantes* are convoluted and excessive in at least two ways. First, as noted in the analysis, the novel textualizes Rancière's notion of "réalisme" by intricately detailing many facets of its fictional world. In Littell's narrative then, as Rancière put it, "l'excès des choses va de pair avec l'excès des mots" (*Politique de la littérature* 148) [7]. Secondly, in addition to this taste for the baroque, the heterogeneity of styles at work in the novel also prompts me to characterize its aesthetic as "excessive". Once more, the stylistic influences of *Les bienveillantes* mirror the psyche of its anti-hero and exhibit a distinct "tendance à l'absolu". As I have previously indicated, concerning its genre, the novel aligns with literary formats as the historical, "posmemory" narrative, journalism, or what Ercolino has termed as "the maximalist novel", without fully subscribing to any of these categories. A similar eclecticism governs the text's style, which deftly blends classical realism with the carnivalesque, the scatological, the grotesque, and paranoid writing. A brief consideration of how these various aesthetic categories function might help us understand how, as a whole, they contribute to the chaotic *tone* of Aue's narrative.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1968; 1984), what defines the "carnivalesque" aesthetic is its transgression of moral limits, brought about by the rejection of hierarchies and heterogenity, but also by eccentricity or abnormal behavior and by profanation: a category that includes blasphemy, obscenity, and a recurrence to scatological elements

(*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 122-123). The overall "transgression of moral limits" that *Les bienveillantes* presents is, in effect, achieved by the stylistic use of, among other elements, eccentricity and profanation. In what eccentricity is concerned, this trait can be identified in the novel in certain unconventional episodes such as Aue's stay in Pomerania (795-837), when he joins an army of wild children (858-867) or remarkably, in the scene in which the protagonist randomly pinches Hitler's nose (881). Another "carnivalesque" feature in *Les bienveillantes* would be, of course, the scatological, whose omnipresence in the novel has already been mentioned in relation to Aue's bouts of vomits and diarrhea, described in detail by the protagonist.

But scatology does not only appear in relation to Max Aue's constant psychosomatic symptoms. In his analysis of the aesthetics of violence in *Les bienveillantes*, Peter Kuon argues that explicit references to the body sometimes appear in the descriptions of Nazi crimes and of their psychological effects on the perpetrators. According to Kuon, these instances—viewed as a form of license—are the main reason the novel has been criticized for its unethical way of representing the Holocaust (34). Unlike the critiques mentioned by Kuon I consider that this mode of representation, from which the novel's *tone* derives, does not banalize, in any way, the events it recreates. Instead, I coincide with Razinsky, for whom the whole project of *Les bienveillantes*, "instead of comprising an abstract celebration of transgression, violence or the negative evil sublime, allows us an encounter with the historical horror that is so difficult to represent" ("History, Excess and Testimony" 75). In what concerns the specific use of the scatological, I believe it heightens the profoundly disgusting nature of the crimes, and thus, it further emphasizes the novel's chaotic *tone*. Two examples may help to illustrate this hypothesis: one relates to the description of one of the multiple executions in the novel, and the other to their aftermath. While explaining an execution by hanging, Aue

explains that “le camion s’avança, les deux hommes essayaient de garder leur équilibre, puis ils basculèrent l’un après l’autre et balancèrent plusieurs fois d’avant en arrière. Le pantalon de Kieper lui était tombé autour des chevilles ; sous sa chemise, il était nu, je voyais avec horreur sa verge engorgée, il éjaculait encore” (94) [8]. In the second instance, the scatological aims at suggesting the internal disarray of the Nazi agents, whose acts, which transgress all limits, place them in an interstice between the human and the inhuman. Right after performing their work as executioners, the soldiers reunite to have dinner and discover, horrified, that the meal of the day is blood pudding. The men, seeing rations of blood pudding, start raging, shouting, and vomiting all around (Littell 127). Kuon analyses this highly scatological scene as a uniting thread between “the world of official duties, in which the soldier is to remain unaffected by the accomplishment of his tasks, and the world of private attitudes, in which he can retrieve his humanity and display his emotions”. According to him, the blood pudding becomes here “a disruptive factor in that it links these two neatly separated worlds by means of association, which carries a dual function in the novel” (36). The line that divides the Nazis’ ontology between workers/bureaucrats and murderers, thin but crucial to maintain their “humanity” and make their existence bearable, is made evident in this episode through a use of the scatological that almost borders on the grotesque: another of the elements that participates in the heterogeneous style of the novel.

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1963), Wolfgang Kayser theorizes the fundamental attribute of the grotesque to be the power of evoking in the reader a sense of the radical alienness of the world, its “estrangement” from man, its essential absurdity: themes that highly resonate not only with the *tone* of *Les bienveillantes*, but also with the ontological state of its protagonist. With respect to this reflection about reality that the grotesque may evoke (Steig 255), Barasch has studied the use that post-holocaust writers

do of the grotesque in order to grasp the "diabolical realities of World War II", which "have gone beyond the imagination of man" (6). In such cases, as in *Les bienveillantes*, the grotesque recurrence to mass deaths, insanity, and apocalyptic panoramas almost "transmutes to the sublime" (9) in its attempt to express the ineffable level of cruelty and dehumanization that the Holocaust meant. However, Barasch, as all the critics dealing with the grotesque, highlights the comic nature of this aesthetics, which, in fact, involves the managing of the Freudian uncanny by the laughable and in the case of Holocaust literature, has been used by survivors to invoke freedom of speech (7).[240] But Aue is not a survivor, but a perpetrator. As I see it, this last drift of the grotesque style separates Littell's use of it from its "classical" implications. On the contrary, in *Les bienveillantes* these elements seem to symbolize an existential *cul-de-sac* that has nothing to do with freedom of speech but rather with the chaos of existence omnipresent in the novel, which is likewise expressed through the last stylistic device I mentioned: paranoia, which appears momentarily in the chapter "Air". According to Caracciolo, in this chapter, the narrative makes us hesitate between reality and hallucination and thus, forces us to "interrogate the ontological boundaries internal to the fictional world" (*Strange Narrators* 81) whose aesthetic *tone*, once again, moves away from the rational and leads the reader into an emotional state born of absolute turmoil.

In the opinion of Leona Toker, through the combination of all the aesthetic features described above—which includes the carnivalesque, the scatological, the grotesque and paranoid writing—Littell is in fact applying the "scorched-earth principle" to the novel's style. For Toker, this principle involves "exploring specific narrative strategies or themes to the fullest, as if to exhaust them as artistic or ideological resources"

[240] For more information on the grotesque, you can consult Blanchot (1955), Barasch (1985), Bataille (1957), Rosen (1990), Schevill (1977) or Steig (1985).

(152). The juxtaposition of aesthetic elements reviewed above allows for a narrative style rooted in exhaustion and transgression, which permeates the entire novel. Exhaustion and transgression are manifest in the depiction of the Holocaust, the protagonist's inner life, the level of narrative detail, the extensive documentation, and even the novel's sheer length. Thus, the stylistic amalgam of Littell's prose binds the novel with a *tone* of chaos and inhumanity, suffused with emotions of distress, anguish, and helplessness. As we can see, despite the differing formal devices that shape them, the *tones* of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* move within the same emotional spectrum.

However, it is important to remember here two characteristics of Littell's novel that, in my opinion, influence its *tone* and set it apart from that of *In Cold Blood*. On the one hand, as I have already mentioned, the narrative in *Les bienveillantes* transmits, an overarching feeling of "stumplimity" (Ngai): a mixture of shock and boredom caused by the already mentioned exhaustion. As Ercolino & Fusillo explain, that "excess" brings about a "sensazione di shock permanente" in reading (109) [9), a "stuplimity" that, paradoxically, renders its widespread feeling of chaos and distress more bearable for the reader. This is because, as mentioned in 3.2, the "stillness" resulting from "stuplimity" partially anesthetizes the moral and emotional barriers of readers, which, metaphorically speaking, would become weaker due to the blows received throughout the reading. In my view, this hermeneutical effect, which emerges as an unconscious response to the narrative's overall excess, is absent in the reception of *In Cold Blood*. This absence, in turn, distinguishes the emotional tones of the two novels. The second factor to consider when examining the *tone* of Les *bienveillantes*—which reinforces the first and also sets it apart from Capote's—is its length. My hypothesis is that length reinforces the *emotional tone*, but, like "stuplimity", it also makes it endurable. The longer the narrative, the more prolonged the immersion in the fictional world, the *parasocial* experience it offers, and

the *emotional tone* it evokes. As Meretoja theorizes, extended exposure to atrocities allows readers to transform the initial shock of horror into gradual adaptation, providing them with an emotional experience akin to the one Max Aue undergoes. Again, the anguish that defines the *emotional tone* varies, but it persists until the novel's closure, reminding the reader of the emotional and ethical message that, I have argued, underlies Littell's project.

As I see it, the *emotional tone* of the novel contributes to its ethical purpose, as it effectively conveys the distress surrounding the Holocaust and the war, while also strengthening the aesthetic and critical distance. Thus, in the case of *Les bienveillantes*, I interpret the *intra-world* emotion of *tone* as compelling evidence that narrative emotions serve as a means by which literature reflects upon ethics, historical memory and heritage, or discourses around perpetration. In Max Aue's memoirs, then, documentary precision intersects with the aesthetics of excess, emotional distance with constant anguish.

Emotional Tone **and Extreme Empathy: The "State of Emergency"**

The analysis of the *emotional tone* in *In Cold Blood* and in *Les bienveillantes* has suggested that both *tones* move within a similar emotional spectrum, as they evoke emotions such as anguish, anxiety, or frustration. However, the *tone* of both novels is generated through very different techniques that lead to equally distinct effects. In Capote's novel, *tone* is shaped by spatial descriptions and *tense* anachronies; whereas in Littell's novel, *tone* is primarily conveyed through "excessive" and heterogeneous aesthetics. Moreover, I have identified that two other factors separate the *emotional tone* of *Les bienveillantes* from that of *In Cold Blood*: the length of the narrative experience,

and its resulting "stuplimity", caused by the chaos that prevails in the fictional world: an effect that simultaneously *amplifies* and *monitors* the novel's emotional *tone*.

At the beginning of this section, I have put forward three hypotheses on the creation and the effect of *emotional tone*: first, that the formation of this *intra-world* emotion relies heavily on spatial and temporal elements; secondly, that it is an effect of the fictional world as an atmosphere, and not dependent on the *intra-world* emotions of characters; and finally, that it may influence the narrative's reception, that is, the readership's own *inter-world* emotions.

Starting with the first hypothesis, while I have identified that the emotionality emerging from Capote's novel stems mainly from its selection of *tense* and spatial structures and that Littell's novel also generates an effect of chaos and anguish through its constant shift of location, the tone of *Les bienveillantes* relies more on style for the same impact. Hence, in one of the two works analyzed, fictional space and time serve as the creative basis for the emotions transmitted by the fictional world as a whole. Yet, in my second case study, the spatio-temporal element is merely an addition to convey an atmosphere that is already present both in the novel's theme and its narrative rhetoric. In light of this, it may be hasty to draw any definite conclusions about the importance that the narrative building blocks of space and time bear in producing *emotional tone.*

In what the second hypothesis is concerned, it seems indeed clear that what creates the emotional atmosphere of both novels is their formal narrative elements. Whether through time, space, or style, these elements appear to be more determinant in the concretion of *tone* than the inhabitants of the fictional world and their own *intra-world* emotions.

Yet, despite the differences in their narrative projects, we must not lose sight of the fact that the textual emotionality of both novels is at once, as I have argued throughout this thesis, pointing towards the same emotion—extreme empathy—while being permeated by similar feelings of distress and helplessness that shape their respective *tones*. Considering this parallelism, it might be appropriate to ponder more carefully my third hypothesis: that *tone* helps to give form to the *parasocial* encounter between characters and readers and that, ultimately, it plays a role in fostering the *parasocial* experience at hand: extreme empathy.

In relation to this last point, I identify two aspects shared by the *tones* of both novels which could be analyzed as invitations to extreme empathy. First, I have pointed out how both novels establish, through analepsis, an emotional link between the targets' traumatic past and their present as perpetrators. I consider this almost deterministic correspondence to be a structure contributing to *parasocial* extreme empathy. On the one hand, such *tense* structure homogenizes the aesthetic *tone*. On the other hand, it further contextualizes the targets' psyche and thus, the novels' current "state of affairs" (Doležel). Secondly, I have already established that the *tones* of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* appear to be configured by the same set of emotions: in the case of Capote's novel, those are generated by the anticipation of an inevitable catastrophe and in that of Littell's narrative, by the omnipresence of death. To these similar atmospheres, the recurrence of "intermediate worlds" of "dreams, hallucinations" is added, which besides deepening the analysis of the targets' inner self, convey the sensation that the anguish lurking both in the narrative world and in the protagonists is profound, and even transcends the conscious.

As I see it, because of these emotional *tones*, the "possible worlds" of both novels seem to be in a perpetual moral "state of emergency", immanent to the text. Therefore,

within this "state of emergency", the immorality of both protagonists is in *conjunction* with the rest of the novel's environment, in a way that their wickedness appears, in the case of Perry Smith, as an irremediable pre-ordered circumstance, and in that of Max Aue, as another upsetting element amid a mad and evil panorama. Under these fictional circumstances, extreme empathy appears the sole mode of engagement in concert with the "extreme" emotional world deployed by the texts.

All in all, these two traits of *tone* that promote an empathic response to Evil—namely, the correspondence between the targets' past and present and the dominance of (even subconscious) anguish—support, in my opinion, not only my hypothesis that *tone* influences readers' emotional responses, but also the initial premise of this thesis: that narrative emotions, and extreme empathy in particular, are neither an isolated effect of the reader's perception nor simply a disposition of the author, but are materially generated within the text my means of a series of technical devices. Specifically, the analysis of the *emotional tone* of both case studies seem to suggest that extreme empathy is a narrative experience fostered by the entirety of the text: all the building blocks—the protagonists' lives and subconscious, *tense*, space, *voice*, perspective—seem to align to generate a fictional world in which Evil ceases to be an exception and becomes a possibility that the reader must experience.

INTERLUDE III: LITERATURE AND EMPATHY, FROM FORMULATION TO RECEPTION

In the introduction of this thesis, I stated that its structure intended to mirror the natural progression of the narrative process—from the exposition of the textual world to its signification through reading—via a specific element of the fictional world: narrative emotions. So far, Interludes I and II have guided us from one stage of the literary process to another: from initial theoretical considerations to the macrosemantics of emotions, and from there to their textual materialization. Therefore, it follows logically that Interlude III should transition from narrative form to its ultimate significance through the act of reading.

However, a practical paradox emerges at this juncture. I have also outlined in the introduction that I perceive the reading process as "a *dynamic* interaction between text and reader" (Iser 107, my emphasis) that preserves both the uniqueness of the text and the point of view of the reader. Consequently, delving further into reception risks compromising "la disposition de l'œuvre à l'ouverture" (Barthes, *Critique et vérité* 22) [1]. To safeguard this interpretative freedom, particularly in Block III, I have tried to concentrate on the objective aspect of the interpretative process, that is, "the structures of the text" that guide the posterior "acts of comprehension" (Iser 65). However, some parts of the analyses made it clear that reading and interpreting novels—as cultural artifacts—inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity. In such cases, I have tried to evoke the "neutral" figure of an "implied reader", a theoretical construct devised by critics precisely to navigate this juncture between objectivity and interpretability. Yet, the very existence of this imaginary "recipient" (Iser 34) serves as a reminder that every literary scholar

grapples with the dilemma of approaching the possible "acts of comprehension" that a literary work may engender without restricting them or imposing a given perspective. In addressing this challenge, Iser asserts that:

> It is evident that no theory concerned with literary texts can make much headway without bringing in the reader, who now appears to have been promoted to the new frame of reference whenever the semantic and pragmatic potential of the text comes under scrutiny […] If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. (34)

In addition to this unavoidable circumstance, my narratological analysis has faced an additional challenge, as its ultimate object was not the comprehension of the text, but rather the understanding of its emotional resonance. While delineating the implications of a text without envisioning a reader is a complex task, imagining the empathic potential of the same text without summoning a particular interpretation of it is impossible. Therefore, the paradox is as follows: it is impossible to determine the reception of narrative emotions, yet it is equally impossible to study narrative emotions without contemplating their reception. This paradox has forced me to negotiate the separation between narratology and hermeneutics—a longstanding division that has persisted especially within Anglo-Saxon literary academia. Rita Felski bemoans this exclusion of hermeneutics from literary theory, attributing it to the influence of poststructuralism and a misunderstanding of the field. She expresses her discontent with this neglect, stating that "given the surge of interest in questions of reading—close and distant, deep and surface—the neglect of the hermeneutic tradition in Anglo-American literary theory is little short of scandalous" (33). Similarly, Meretoja suggests that narratology's distancing from hermeneutics stems from a misguided association between hermeneutics and

subjectivity, which contradicts narratology's aim of approaching literary works objectively. With respect to this, Meretoja asserts that "within narrative studies, narratology in particular has sought to distance itself from interpretation, which it has associated with unscientificity and subjectivity" (*The Ethics of Storytelling* 7).

Given the impossibility of dealing with narrative emotions without referring to reception, but with the aim of properly concluding the literary path of narrative emotions, my intention in this interlude is not so much to delve into the reception and hermeneutics of narrative emotions in general, and extreme empathy in particular, but rather to explore their impossibility. This entails briefly examining the tentative hermeneutic stance within which this project has been framed, considering existing positions on the matter that have been discarded, and finally, contemplating the potential effects—if any—of engaging with literature in general, and of forming a *parasocial* bond with an immoral character in particular. These are indeed issues that have emerged sporadically throughout this thesis. Therefore, my goal in the upcoming pages is simply to gather this information together and present it to conclude this study of narrative emotions with an approach to their "realization" during the *inter-world* "semiotic encounter" (Doležel, "Mimesis and Possible Worlds" 485) between the "world of the reader" and "the world of the text" (Ricoeur, *Temps et récit Tome I*).

In section 2.2 of this dissertation, I enumerated the reasons that have led me to adopt Doležel's fictional semantics as the most suitable starting point for analyzing the function of narrative emotions. At a research level, the implementation of possible-world semantics requires a conceptualization of the reception process both capable of encompassing the ontological status that this semantics attributes to the fictional world—by which it is "logically and ontologically *parallel*" to the actual one (Ronen 1-2)—and

of aligning with Doležel's schema of literary transduction.[241] Therefore, the theory of reception underpinning a semantics of narrative emotions should mirror Doležel's perspective, which regards the narrative text as a "guide" for the "reconstruction" of the fictional world, the literary communication as an "interaction" with the reader, and the reader as an agent who experiences this "text processing and world reconstruction" as an event (*Heterocosmica* 205). This logic would allow for the study of fictional emotions as "encoded" in the text but experienced, ontologically, as "real" emotions—which is the reception of them that I have theorized based on Doležel's semantics. Moreover, the notion of literary reception as an "interaction" between textual elements and the reader, and as an event for the latter, would resonate closely with my characterization of the relationship with fictional characters as a form of *parasociality,* and of the fictional world as, simultaneously, a *parasocial* realm.

As if anticipating Doležel's later notes on the reception of fictional worlds by twenty years, in 1978, Iser described the literary text as composed by "an organization of signifiers which do not serve to designate a signified object, but instead designate *instructions* for the *production* of the signified".[242] Due to this structure, according to the scholar, the literary text acts like a "sort of living organism, which is linked to the reader, and also instructs him". This dynamic turns the reader's engagement with the text into a "dynamic process of self-correction" which "has the character of *an event*, which helps

[241] See Figure I in Appendix II.

[242] With respect to this, it is surprising not only the overall coherence between Lubomír Doležel possible-world semantics and Iser's "aesthetic reception", but also how the terms employed by both theoreticians—as "interaction", "instructions", "dialogue", or "world"—often coincide. Obviously, being an earlier publication, Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1978) does not mention either Doležel's work or possible-worlds semantics. On the other hand, despite the apparent influence of Iser—or at least of hermeneutic phenomenology—on his theory of literary transduction the Czech theorist only mentions Wolfgang Iser in *Heterocosmica* (1998) in relation to "saturation", and more specifically, regarding his contributions concerning the gaps of information in the text. You may consult pages 170-171 in *Heterocosmica*. An intermediary figure between the work of both authors is Umberto Eco, who participated in both hermeneutics (*The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts,* 1979) and possible-world semantics (*Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* 1992).

to create the impression that we are involved in *something real*" (67, my emphasis). Indeed, Wolfgang Iser's theory of *aesthetic reception* aligns seamlessly with possible-world semantics, and incorporates into the literary process a perspective on the subject's emotions that, according to Ahmed (2004), is necessary for investigating the creation of narrative emotions: a phenomenological perspective, by which the emotion does not simply belong to the reader, but is contagious and contingent, as the novel functions as an object, a body that triggers certain emotions. In fact, both following and criticizing Roman Ingarden,[243] Iser advances the phenomenology of literary reception one step further, and, moving closer to the notion of possible worlds, conceives the literary text not as an object but rather as the transmission of a world's perspective. In his words, "the relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a *moving viewpoint which travels along inside* that which it has to apprehend. This mode of grasping an object is unique to literature" (109, my emphasis). From my perspective, this notion of literary reception corresponds with the understanding of encounters with characters as *parasocial* "simulations of selves in interaction" with whom the reader "becomes emotionally involved" (Oatley, "Fiction, Simulation of Social Worlds" 617). At the same time, Iser's idea of the fictional text as presenting "a moving viewpoint" bears a striking resemblance to the concepts of a philosopher whose hermeneutic work has occasionally appeared throughout this thesis: Gadamer, who, as we know, calls this "viewpoint" the novel's "horizon" (301). This parallelism between Iser's notion and Gadamer's is not

[243] Roman Ingarden's application of hermeneutic phenomenology to literary theory is mostly developed in his *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, originally published in 1931. Although I mention Ingarden here for being the first to bring Heidegger's hermeneutic work into literary theory, and therefore being the most direct precursor of Iser's work, I will not delve into his work, since most of his contributions are already, implicitly and explicitly, present in Wolfgang Iser's.

coincidental, as both are involved, in one way or another, in what is known as hermeneutic phenomenology.

As its name suggests, this approach to textual interpretation, developed throughout the 20th century by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, brings together the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics with the purpose of understanding texts as an open dialogue between interpreter and interpreted.[244] During the second half of the 20th century, scholars such as Gadamer or Paul Ricoeur further refined this method, exploring its potential ontological implications, while others such as Ingarden, and later Iser, applied it to literary analysis, thus extending its scope from philosophy to literary theory. Given their shared inheritance, both strands of hermeneutic phenomenology—the ontological and the literary—converge in their understanding of the primary characteristics of reception: both conceive reading as a dynamic event and consider the readership and their *Weltanschauung* as crucial determinants of the text's meaning, thereby emphasizing that the encounter depends as much on the reader as on the text. As Iser puts it, from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, reading "is not a direct 'internalization' because it is not a one-way process" and therefore, the

[244] Hermeneutics, in its broadest sense, refers to the theoretical reflection on interpretation, and it has its roots back in ancient practices of textual analysis, particularly within religious contexts. Modern hermeneutics as a distinct philosophical discipline develops in the early 19th century, through the pioneering work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) who emphasized the importance of understanding texts within their historical and cultural contexts. A significant transformation occurred with the contributions of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who revolutionized the field by advocating for the inclusion of the reader in the hermeneutic process. Dilthey argued that the reader's subjectivity played a vital role in the interpretation of the humanities in general, and texts in particular. In doing so, Dilthey laid the groundwork for a phenomenological perspective on hermeneutics, highlighting the importance of subjective experience in understanding. However, despite Dilthey's groundbreaking insights, he still regarded the text as a product of the author's will. This limitation was subsequently addressed and reformulated by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who introduced an ontological dimension to the comprehension process. Later, Heidegger's pupil, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), further refined the hermeneutic process by introducing the notion of the hermeneutic circle, by which understanding is an ongoing, iterative process characterized by a dynamic interplay between the interpreter and the text. The combined efforts of Heidegger and Gadamer ushered in a phenomenological perspective on hermeneutics, which laid the foundation for subsequent developments in hermeneutical theory, influencing scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). For more information on the origins and evolution of modern hermeneutics, I recommend reading Maceiras & Trebolle 2005 and Szondi 2010. On hermeneutic phenomenology, you may consult Grondin 1997 and Rosfort 2019.

reading process must be described "as a dynamic interaction between text and reader" (107).

From my perspective, the open—and almost intersubjective—viewpoint of hermeneutic phenomenology on text reception makes it the optimal framework for studying both narrative emotions, in general, and empathy, in particular. As I have elaborated in Interlude I, this suitability between research method and topic arises from the fact that this understanding of reception emphasizes the characteristics it shares with empathizing. However, as I have noted in that initial Interlude, and as I have further elaborated in Chapter 2.3, I am not the first to recognize the coherence between possible-world semantics and hermeneutic phenomenology, nor the suitability of this hermeneutical approach for addressing narrative empathy.

In her article "Reading Stories, Reading (Others') Lives", referenced earlier in this thesis, Andrea Deciu Ritivoi merges possible-worlds semantics with Gadamer's hermeneutical tradition to elucidate the process of empathically engaging with the "possible world" of the diegesis. According to Deciu Ritivoi, the functioning of narrative empathy can be effectively theorized using Gadamer's concepts of "horizon" and "application".[245] I have employed both terms during my research, as I consider them highly illustrative and suitable for the empathic process. However, these concepts from Gadamer, along with others by Ricoeur, have been relegated to a subsidiary position in my analysis of narrative emotions, which has, as its primary theoretical framework, Iser's theory of aesthetic reception. I have chosen Iser's aesthetic reception over Gadamer's

[245] The research conducted by Andrea Deciu Ritivoi in that article indeed exerts a significant influence on my project. Essentially, my research question aligns with hers, although while I focus on narratological issues, she operates within the domain of hermeneutics. Hence, the primary inquiry of her study is: "What kind of understanding do narratives facilitate that allows them to foster empathy?". To address this question, Deciu Ritivoi grounds her article in empathy theory and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic tradition, thus establishing "a hermeneutical view of narrative understanding that links the narrative concepts of focalization and motivation to the hermeneutical concepts of horizon and application" (54).

hermeneutics—employed by Deciu Ritivoi—or Ricoeur's—which I used in the past[246]—for two main reasons: its recognition of the emotional impact of literary texts and its perspective on the effects that fiction can have on the reader.

As I have previously outlined, it is a commonly accepted notion among the aforementioned authors that the reader serves as final signifier of the fictional text. However, while Gadamer and Ricoeur appear to emphasize the epistemological aspect of this signification—wherein the readership contributes their *understanding* of the world, Iser instead highlights its intersubjective and emotional quality. In fact, Iser's conception of the literary text from its construction to its reception is grounded in affect. According to the German theorist, "practically every discernible structure in fiction has this two-sidedness: it is verbal and affective. The verbal aspect guides the reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary; the affective aspect is the fulfillment of that which has been pre-structured by the language of the text" (Iser 21). The German theorist describes this underlying verbal and emotional duplicity in the fictional text, as well as the reading dynamics it brings about, in the following terms:

> The literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism […] If the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive

[246] I employed Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in my end-of-degree thesis, "'The Rich Never Hang': A Re-reading of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*" (2019), and later in my Master's Thesis, "Negative Empathy in Narrative: Humanizing Evil in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*" (2020).

> concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself. (Iser 21)

Hence, if Iser assigned a decisive role to affect in reception, it is because, as he sees it, literary structures are partially affective, and they "fulfill their function" not merely by being *understood* by the readership, but by being *felt* by them (21).[247]

This perception of the form and reception of literary texts, therefore, validates the existence of what I have termed *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions, as well as the significance of the *inter-world* emotions within textual structures and the importance of *intra-world* ones in interpretation. Furthermore, Iser's view of fictional texts' inner structure, wherein they are both verbal and affective, opens a gap that, in my view, allows for the exploration of the semantics of narrative emotions. In my understanding, within the "dynamic interaction between text and reader" (107), there is a component that cannot be analyzed *a priori*: its affective aspect, which depends on the reader and therefore cannot be predicted. However, the discursive aspect of reception, meaning the affective predisposition of textual structures or the instructions provided by the fictional world *can* be defined, as it is part of the *extensional* level of the fictional world. Naturally, this does not imply that if the structures of a text seem to suggest a particular emotion—as I have defended here with extreme empathy—, that emotion is necessarily what is to be expected in reception. It simply suggests that it is one *possible* interpretation of the "instructions"

[247] By including affect among the facets of the reader's subjectivity that determine the reception of literature, Wolfgang Iser appears to re-incorporate an aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology that, although forgotten during the first half of the 20th century, was initially part of this method's agenda, which posited that there was an indissociable relation between affect and concept. According to Sara Ahmed, hermeneutic phenomenology originally considered the reader's emotions as an essential factor in reception. In the words of the critic, "a great deal of phenomenological work has not been based on a description of cognition or even of consciousness as a consciousness of things, but on affectivity as receptivity, as we can see in Heidegger's work on mood, and in Husserl's work on passive synthesis" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 209).

conveyed to us by the text. Instructions imbued with affect and whose study, from the perspective of Iser's theory of aesthetic reception, is perfectly feasible.

Therefore, Iser's theory offers an ideal hermeneutical framework for my proposal of a semantics of narrative emotions. Yet a final issue arises: like any other hermeneutical approach, Iser's theory of aesthetic response considers the effects that reading fiction—and experiencing its emotions—can have on the reader. In some critical contexts, this concern might seem overused or less significant, as it has become a familiar trope in literary criticism. However, within the context of this thesis, it gains renewed relevance. My corpus consists of two morally charged narratives that, as I have argued, invite extreme empathy: a transgressive narrative proposition, that, as such, must be somehow imbued with hermeneutical and epistemological implications. For this reason, I believe my research would be incomplete without addressing the implications that the act of reading may have on the addressee and without positioning my work within the broader field of existing critical approaches to this question.

To a certain extent, the scholars engaged in hermeneutic phenomenology that I have mentioned here—Hans George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Wolfgang Iser—converge in their understanding of how literary reception may impact the reader. Compelled to engage in what Gadamer calls "application", meaning the adoption of the narrative "horizon" during the act of reading—"fusion of horizons" in Gadamer (302) and "intersection du monde du texte et du monde […] du lecteur" in Ricoeur (*Temps et récit : Tome I* 109) [2]—, readers access, according to these scholars, "thoughts and feelings that do not originate in us and are not a direct response to our own experience" (Deciu Ritivoi 70). Due to this epistemological exposure to external ideas, and in alignment with the concept of the *parasocial* world as a "moral laboratory" (Hakemulder), hermeneutic phenomenology concludes that "le récit, jamais éthiquement

neutre, s'avère être le premier laboratoire de jugement moral" (Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* 167) [3].

As Ricoeur posits—and as we also find in Gadamer and Iser's works—[248] the fictional text is never devoid of an ideological bias, which is not imposed by the author but by the structural objectifications in the narration. From this perspective, the *ethos* presented by the novel's "horizon" interacts with the reader's own during reception, so that, "through this process, the reader's own store of past experience may undergo a similar revaluation to that contained within the repertoire, for the pragmatic meaning allows such adaptations and, indeed, encourages them, in order to achieve its intersubjective goal: namely, the imaginary correction of deficient realities" (Iser 85). Hence, for this group of thinkers, the hermeneutical operation may cultivate an "enlarged mentality —for Ricoeur, a potential "élargissement de notre horizon d'existence" (*Temps et récit: Tome I* 121) [4]—because, in Iser's words, "the literary text enables its readers to transcend the limitations of their own real-life situation" (79).[249] Although none of these authors specifically addresses fictional emotions—even if as we know, Iser does consider the affective level of reception—, I believe that this perspective on the potential effects of fiction can be extrapolated to the realm of fictional emotions and, more specifically, to empathy. If, according to Iser, fiction functions epistemologically for

[248] For instance, Wolfgang Iser affirms that "literary texts constitute a reaction to contemporary situations, bringing attention to problems that are conditioned though not resolved by contemporary norms" (3), while, as Gadamer states in *Truth and Method*, for him, the involvement of literature in ideology is part of a broader question about the "truth" of the arts: "If we want to justify art as a way of truth in its own right, then we must fully realize what truth means here. It is in the human sciences as a whole that an answer to this question must be found. For they seek not to surpass but to understand the variety of experiences—whether of aesthetic, historical, religious, or political consciousness—but that means they expect to find truth in them" (85, my emphasis).

[249] According to Raymond Mar et.al, Wolfgang Iser set a precedent in literary theory by pointing out literature's capacity to make us "transcend" our horizon of existence: "The emotions evoked by narrative fiction may not only alter the way we think, but may have more wide-ranging transformative influences. This idea has been around for some time, at least as far back as the writings of Iser (1978), who proposed a widely regarded framework for thinking about how fiction can have transformative influences on readers" (829).

readers as "an extension or broadening of their own reality" (79), by this same logic, it also implies an extension of their emotional range, and, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, of their empathic capacity. Therefore, up to this point, my stance regarding the aftermaths of fiction reading and fictional emotions aligns with the propositions of Ricoeur, Gadamer, and Iser.

However, my view is that the influence of narrative fiction remains *as a possibility* that, if realized, would prompt critical reflection during the act of reading, but not necessarily result in a long-term alteration of the reader's *Weltanschauung*. Regarding the plausibility and impact of this potential reflection, both Gadamer (1960) and Iser (1978) argued that the opportunity fiction provides to explore alternative viewpoints could potentially lead the reader to gain greater insight into human nature. Nonetheless, they also acknowledged that the impact of reception would vary from one case to another, contingent upon the individual reader and their level of engagement with the text. Conversely, in this regard, Ricoeur's position diverged from that of its predecessors. In *Soi même comme un autre* (1990), Ricoeur takes the effects of the hermeneutical encounter with a fictional text to an ethical and ontological dimension. In this work, the French philosopher introduces his concepts of "identité narrative" and "herméneutique du soi". Building upon the notion of the subject as constantly evolving—*identité narrative*—, Ricoeur transforms his theory of the text into a theory of the subject, the "herméneutique du soi"—"hermeneutics of the self"—, according to which the subject shapes itself through reading. According to Ricoeur, it is precisely within fictional narrative where the hermeneutics of the self finds its "médiation privilegiée" (Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* 139) since the self engages in ongoing dialogue with the narratives that surround it, and fictional narratives either reaffirm or challenge the discourses upon which the self is constructed. Therefore, Ricoeur conceives fiction as

crucial in the formation of the subject, whose continual reconfigurations occur through the act of reading, particularly during what Ricoeur describes as the final phase in the configuration of a narrative: Mimesis III, the encounter between "le monde du texte" and "le monde du lecteur".

As appealing as the notion that the act of reading shapes us as subjects may be, it seems utopian to me. In my opinion, the ontological aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology exemplifies the dangers of taking the reflective and emotional potential of narrative to its extreme and considering these potential effects as guaranteed outcomes of the *parasocial* experience that fiction offers. If I have briefly outlined Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of the self" here, it is to underscore that, contrary to its propositions, I consider the "moral laboratory" of fiction, as well as its ability to enhance the reader's empathic capacity, to be *sporadic* effects of *inter-world* encounters. This perspective is what has led me to adopt Iser's *aesthetic reception* as the hermeneutic method underlying my study. Likewise, in my view, Ricoeur's theory is the hermeneutic equivalent of a widespread opinion regarding the possible effects of empathy, which I have already refuted earlier in this thesis: the so-called "empathy altruism hypothesis" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 173).

This hypothesis posits that empathy, including narrative empathy, may foster prosocial behavior in the form of altruism. The idea that this emotional reaction prompts us to care about the feelings of others and act philanthropically is by no means an isolated concept. Well-known thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum have argued that narrative's propensity for empathy is what endows the reading of novels with the potential to cultivate heightened empathy and produce "better citizens of the world" (*Cultivating Humanity* vii). In the same vein, several scholars in the subfield of "reader response studies" have endeavored to provide scientific evidence supporting the correlation

between the experience of narrative empathy and subsequent prosocial behavior. For instance, in his essay *The Moral Laboratory. Experiments examining the effects of reading literature on social perception and moral self-concept* (2000) and in the article "Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-Reflection: A Theoretical-Empirical Framework" (Koopman & Hakemulder 2015), among other publications, Hakemulder employs empirical research and experimentation to demonstrate that narrative empathy may end in prosocial action. Even though there is no direct evidence that narrative empathy may be transferable to life, Hakemulder concludes that, still, "there are some indications that reading literature may enhance the adequacy of our ethical reflection" (*The Moral Laboratory* 148). Other academics that have tried to prove the altruistic consequences of empathy include Andreychik & Migliaccio (2015), Daniel Batson (1998), Nancy Eisenberg (2002) or Strayer & Schroeder (1989). As I see it, all these theories regarding the transformative power of narrative and the empathic encounters it facilitates implant a—perhaps well-intentioned, but nevertheless perilous—utilitarian view of literature. While, as I have previously indicated, it is unavoidable to envision potential receptions when analyzing, for instance, narrative emotions, doing so with the belief that such emotional engagement will yield long-term benefits entails distancing literature from its primary purpose: pleasure.

But then, what about the *inter-world* encounters that, as those examined in this thesis, are not aimed at readers' pleasure? What about the hermeneutics of extreme empathy? What are its purposes, its effects on the reader, if not mere pleasure? To me, empathy for characters who commit immoral deeds may function as a paradigm of the limits of the supposed "benefits" of literature. It is difficult—and unsafe—to imagine how extreme empathy may re-configure the reader's ontology (Ricoeur) or how it may translate into prosocial behavior. The form of empathy I have explored in this thesis

depends, as we know, on the "protection" granted by the fictionality of literature, which blurs the "moral barriers" that normally prevent us from engaging with Evil figures. It is indeed improbable for this type of empathy to move beyond this "safe" *parasocial* context and have a posterior impact on the "real" world. According to Pau Luque, then, the goal of these challenging forms of narrative empathy is not to give pleasure, but to "herir a sus lectores" by stimulating their moral imagination. For the Spanish scholar, those literary works that put us in contact with the immoral seek to "acceder a la maquinaria moral, a la estructura emotiva de los humanos […] la mejor manera de acceder a los engranajes de esa maquinaria es situándola más allá de sus límites […] resalta lo que queda más allá de los contornos de la moral para que nosotros lidiemos con lo limítrofe" (75) [5]. As I see it, the case of extreme empathy allows us to put aside the idealization that surrounds narrative empathy as an experience, and realize that it does not change us, but re-orients us momentarily. In this sense, I agree with Palumbo Mosca when he asserts that, "I do not advocate here, as sometimes has been done, that novel reading will necessarily make us better citizens. I do believe, however, that the empathic recognition with the other—and with the otherness within us—induced by novel reading makes us more conscious human beings" (204). Hence, while I suspect the notion that "reading changes behavior beyond the private encounter with the book" (Jurecic 13), I do believe that all forms of narrative empathy, including extreme empathy, can sometimes allow readers to "tomar distancia de la vida particular para colocarse en las situaciones que viven los personajes, […] de tal modo que la historia narrada sirva como ejemplo para pensar problemas éticos y políticos" (Jiménez & Fonegra 35) [6].

In this context, and having outlined the reception theories I draw from, I aim to elucidate two effects that, in my view, the act of reading, understood as both an epistemological and emotional phenomenon, can produce, as well as one factor that, as I

see it, may condition the specific reception of extreme empathy. One of the effects of reading that I contemplate involves the reader at an individual level, while the other concerns the broader sociocultural context in which the narrative operates. Moreover, I contend that both consequences are particularly pronounced in the experience of extreme empathy, given its inherently transgressive nature, which can more profoundly impact readers.

First, I strongly believe that narrative empathy, and particularly extreme empathy, may momentarily unsettle the reader's emotional state by producing "meta-responses" (Feagin 1996). As defined by Feagin, meta-responses are emotional reactions that we experience in response to our own initial emotional reactions, particularly when these initial emotions are morally charged, ambiguous, or emotionally intense. Such experiences often prompt introspection and self-analysis as we seek to understand and interpret our first emotional response. Thus, as Feagin emphasizes, meta-responses often involve unpleasurable feelings as discomfort, shame, sadness, or confusion (*Reading with Feeling* 384). Instances of meta-responses include, for instance, feeling embarrassed about feeling envious, feeling sad about being angry, or what interests us here, feeling afraid or ashamed about empathizing with immorality.

Secondly, at a sociocultural level, I align with Rancière's theory that literary activity plays a paramount role in shaping "le partage du sensible". As the French philosopher explains, and as has already been exposed in Interlude I, literature mobilizes discourse, and as a result, it constitutes a political activity that possesses the potential to influence the collective imagination by introducing or reimagining societal themes. For instance, explaining a murder from the perspective of the perpetrator or narrating the Holocaust through the lens of a Nazi character exemplifies, from my perspective,

literature's capacity for subversion and its ability to defy the established norms and create new spaces of representation.

Finally, the factor that, in my opinion, might condition the emergence of these potential hermeneutic effects—"meta-responses" and "le partage du sensible"—in the case of narratives inviting extreme empathy, is related to the space-time position of the reader, or in other words, their situation with respect to the coordinates of the fictional world. Specifically, my only hypotheses concerning reception and more specifically, the reception of extreme empathy is that the spatial and temporal "distance" between the novel's horizon and the reader's one determines the "fusion of horizons" or *Horizontverschmelzung* (Gadamer) discussed in this Interlude and that, in the case of extreme empathy, the greater this spatial temporal "distance", the greater the possibilities of understanding the criminal in empathic terms. But what does this "distance" refer to? Once again, the intersection between two of the theoretical pillars of my research—possible-world semantics and Iser's hermeneutic phenomenology—can help us understand this distance and its role in the hermeneutic reception of the texts.

In the chapter "Border, Distance, Size, Incompleteness" of *Fictional Worlds*, Pavel discusses what he terms the "distance" separating the implied reader's "actuality" and the fictional realm. The Romanian critic stresses the relevance of this distance for the readers' acceptance of the proposed horizon. For Iser, also, the coordinates from which the reader semiotically accesses the fictional world are essential for interpretation. That is because, as he explains in *The Act of Reading*, the perspective on the repertoire values highly depends on the position of the reader:

> For the contemporary reader, the reassessment of norms contained in the repertoire will make him detach these norms from their social and cultural context and so recognize the limitations of their effectiveness. For the later reader, the reassessed

> norms help to re-create that very social and cultural context that brought about the problems which the text itself is concerned with. In the first instance, the reader is affected as a participant, and in the second as an observer. (78)

Indeed, the spatial-temporal gap between the "world of the text" and that of the reader can either ease or complicate immersion, as remote fictional worlds often "suggest a different chain of being, another history, another geography, new epistemic regularities, unexpected moral maxims". Consequently, they are more difficult to "feel with" (90). Nonetheless, if we apply this theory to extreme empathy, we might find that this distance is in fact desirable for eliciting that emotional response.

If we return to Capote's and Littell's novels, in terms of their coordinates, both are based on actual events, meaning that they are set in a specific space and time of the "actual" world: Kansas from 1959 to 1965, and Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1945. Considering their publication years—1966 and 2006 respectively—, we see that, in the case of *In Cold Blood*, the distance between the fictional world and the original "implied reader" was very short, while in the case of *Les bienveillantes*, the temporal gap was over sixty years. Despite their contentious "empathetic focus", both novels, as we know, achieved great success among critics and, above all, among the public. But the question of *distance* invites us to consider whether *Les bienveillantes* would have received the same reception had it been published in the 1950s—whether empathy for such an immoral character would even have been possible at the time. Similarly, in the case of *In Cold Blood*, one might ask whether extreme empathy could have resonated with a reader in the year of its publication, particularly someone who knew the Clutter case firsthand. The answer to all these questions is probably negative. This once more suggests to me that, when it comes to extreme empathy, the more removed we are in time and space from the criminal, the more likely we are to be able to empathize with them and thus, to experience

a subsequent “meta-response” to the encounter that might, potentially, make us re-think the Rancièrian “partage du sensible”.

To conclude, in this Interlude, I have attempted to clarify two points on the reception of fictional emotions. First, that although the study of a narrative element like emotions may compel us to envision a reader and anticipate potential receptions, it is essential to maintain the perspective that a literary work operates as a living organism. Therefore, as Iser advocates, we can only describe structures a priori, that is, before their full significance unfolds during reception. Because of it, beyond the objectivity of literary formal features, any meaning attributed to the work is, like literature itself, a simulation within the realm of possibility. Secondly, I have aimed to articulate the stance of this thesis regarding the hermeneutic effects of literature overall and narrative empathy specifically. This has led me to counter various hypotheses about the “utility” of the literary experience and the *parasociality* it offers. With reference to this, I have opted for a vision of the “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer) as a momentary phenomenon that can destabilize, during the literary encounter, the reader’s emotional state. Furthermore, at a broader political and socio-cultural level, this “fusion of horizons”, with an adequate “distance”, can contribute to shaping the distribution of emotions and ideas within its cultural context of emergence. From this standpoint, it appears that literary theory, literature, and narrative empathy are all oriented towards a shared objective: to propose new interpretations of what can be imagined in order to uncover fresh meanings for what we already think.

CONCLUSIONS

> The book itself is not form which you see, but emotion which you feel.
>
> Virginia Woolf

After centuries of neglect, approximately three decades ago, literary theory began to regard affects, feelings, and emotions as focal points of academic research. With the expansion of ideas from "affect theory" in the field, literary scholars recognized that "emotions are not mere icing on the cake—at best a pleasurable distraction, at worst a mystifying spell to be broken so that the work of hard-nosed analysis can begin", but rather, that "affective engagement is the very means by which literary works are able to reach, reorient, and even reconfigure their readers" (Felski 177). As Felski's quote suggests, the study of narrative emotions became particularly focused on its potential effect on the target, that is, the reader. Consequently, much of the interest in this topic concentrated on reader-response studies (Andreychik & Migliaccio 2015; Batson 1998; Eisenberg 2002; Hakemulder 2000). However, beyond this practical approach, most academics in the field of affect theory have confined their studies on narrative emotions to theoretical frameworks and speculations, overlooking their practical implications. In many cases, the notion 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 80) has persisted, as literary affect has been mostly approached indirectly, and once again, a vocabulary to describe it has not been developed. This critical gap, as we have seen, is common to all literary disciplines.

Due to its necessary interdisciplinarity, my dissertation has tackled narrative emotions from various angles within literary studies. Yet, the study of the narrative nature

of emotions remains a significant challenge across these perspectives. From a theoretical standpoint, as Susanne Knaller notes, "emotions on the level of production are among those least explored" (20). Some scholars influenced by affect theory, such as Martha Nussbaum, Sianne Ngai, or Sarah Ahmed, from their very different backgrounds, have acknowledged this critical void and have emphasized the necessity to address emotions as "a formal problem" (Ngai 52). This gap in literary research becomes particularly striking in case of empathy, as it is considered one of the primary foci of interest of affect theory—especially in its application to literature (Pedwell). However, as we have seen, the few attempts to examine narrative empathy from a narratological perspective can be deemed insufficient, and often contribute more to the field of reader-response studies, again, than to narratology proper (Colm Hogan 2011; Jandl et al. 2017; Keen 2007).

If affect theory considers the narratology of emotions—and that of empathy—as a pending task, a similar situation persists in narratology, the other field engaged in this interdisciplinary endeavor. Despite recent scholarly discourse grappling with the idea that emotional elements in narratives are integral to the narrative fabric itself, the narratological construction of emotions, that is their textual manifestation, remains ambiguous. This critical gap has been identified by narratologists such as Hogan Colm (2016) or Suzanne Keen (2007), who have noticed how "narratological treatments of emotion have on the whole been relatively undeveloped, at least in comparison with other aspects of narrative theory" (Colm 1).

However, the issue surrounding the *microsemantics* of fictional emotions is merely the tip of the iceberg, as the lack of understanding about narrative emotions impacts every stage of the literary process. The challenge of describing the "subjective experiential (phenomenological) nature of emotions" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 65) and the commonplace that "nothing about the emotions is really well understood" (de Sousa

xix) have also hindered the analysis of their *macrosemantics*—the role they play in constructing fictional worlds. Even within literary reception and hermeneutics, where most studies on narrative emotions and empathy are concentrated, the unanswered questions on the matter outnumber the responses. This may be partly due to the previously mentioned lack of semantic theorization. Because their role within the novel is unclear, narrative emotions have been treated as emerging from the act of reading rather than as generated by the textual elements themselves, and consequently examined in relation to readers—prioritizing readers' feelings and reception over their function as textual structures that are both pre-established by the text and open to interpretation. Narrative empathy—which, during the "empathic turn" at the turn of the century, became almost an "obsession" for literary scholars (Pedwell ix)—exemplifies this narrow research focus: academia has been so preoccupied with narrative empathy as a *cause of* readers' reactions that it has overlooked its role as an *effect of* narrative technique. Ultimately, it seems that no discipline within literary theory has fully grasped the essence of narrative emotions, which stand as an element we recognize to be integral to the literary process, yet they "elude theoretical grasp" (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 65).

In view of these antecedents, my thesis has sought to offer a tentative answer to the semantic and formal roles that emotions play in fictional narratives. To this end, I have proposed conceptualizing narrative emotions as "elementary building blocks" of fictional worlds (*Heterocosmica* 113), which are first conceived at the semiotic level and subsequently represented formally in the fictional text for the reader to decipher and *feel* them. This viewpoint assumes that, as fictional emotions are conveyed through the text's formal structures, they can be described through narratological analysis. Furthermore, it suggests that, owing to the fact that their fictional status "protects" them, narrative worlds operate as *parasocial* simulations wherein readers can experience emotions that, while

perceived as “genuine”, unfold within a more flexible context than real-life social interactions. Hence, I posit that each fictional world articulates a distinct emotional system that is encapsulated and articulated within the fictional text.

To explore how this understanding of fictional emotions and their transmission may function throughout the literary process—that is, the semantic construction of the fictional world, its textual representation, and readers’ interpretation of it—, this dissertation has traced the literary trajectory of a specific narrative emotion: extreme empathy. Also referred to as “negative empathy” (Ercolino 2018; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Bonasera 2023), this emotion entails an empathic response toward a character who engages in immoral deeds. To encompass the various dimensions inherent in such a complex phenomenon as the literary trajectory of a narrative emotion, after providing a brief theoretical context in Block I, this project has endeavored to explore narrative emotions in general and extreme empathy in particular within the framework of three closely interrelated areas of inquiry central to fiction: semantics, narratology, and hermeneutics (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 72). In Block II, the investigation of the semantic aspects of emotions, conducted via Doležel’s possible-world theory, has resulted in a proposal for a semantics of narrative emotions. Block III has centered on the textual creation of fictional emotions by conducting a narratological analysis of the emergence of extreme empathy in Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell’s *Les bienveillantes*, along with a comparative examination of their respective formal constructions of this emotion. Finally, Interlude III has grappled with the (im)possibility of a hermeneutics of narrative emotions, as well as the effects of extreme empathy as a literary experience.

The adoption of Barthes’ *zigzag* method has facilitated the analysis of both the operation of emotions within the fictional world (Block II) and their narratological

expression in the novel (Block III). Through a combination of semantics and narratology, I have tried to create the dialogue between theory and practice advocated by Doležel (*Heterocosmica* xi). However, the demands of my research topic—namely, the participation of emotions across all literary facets—, have compelled me to adopt an interdisciplinary analytical approach. As a result, in these pages, I have explored not only semantics and narratology but also aspects of reception, fictional pragmatics, and aesthetic theory, among others. The varying levels of involvement in each field, coupled with the fact that, due to the lack of precedents, in this study, I have had to make many assumptions about fictional emotions and extreme empathy, and coin a vocabulary that did not previously exist, make it difficult to synthesize the results of my project in a few coherent lines. Therefore, I believe it will be more informative to delineate the contributions and conclusions derived from each section of this thesis.

In Block I, "Empathy and Extreme Empathy", I have traced a brief historical trajectory of emotions and the factors that have traditionally marginalized them from scholarly inquiry until the late 20th century. Then I have discussed the transformative impact of affect theory, particularly its delineation of "affect", "emotion", and "feeling" and its constructionist approach to emotions, which shifted the focus of the study of affect to cultural studies. From this general perspective, I have introduced the concept of "transitive emotions". Commonly labelled "emotional responses" (Carroll 2011; Eisenberg 2005; Keen 2007) or "other-oriented" emotions (Coplan & Goldie 2011), these emotions require a *target* to arise and their development depends more on this *target* than on the feeler. Among "transitive emotions" I have focused on empathy, exposing the most widely accepted definition, and outlining the problematics that haunt its theorization. This introductory "state of the question" has helped me to contextualize my own vision of empathy, based on Pedwell's defense for a wider understanding of this emotion (2014).

Then, I have proposed picturing empathy through the image of a horizontal gradation, which attempts to end with the idea of the existence of a "single" mainstream empathy and posit, instead, a nuanced and inclusive understanding of empathy, capable of encompassing its diverse manifestations. This conceptualization has enabled me to place, within my own understanding of this emotion, the type of empathy on which my research focuses: empathy for those who commit immoral acts, also known as "negative empathy" (Ercolino 2018; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Bonasera 2023). Building on existing literature—particularly the only detailed definition of it in Ercolino & Fusillo (2022)—I have advocated for renaming this concept "extreme empathy" to underscore its moral complexity without dichotomizing empathy into positive and negative forms. From this perspective, I view my reflections on extreme empathy as a contribution to the ongoing theorization of an emotional experience that was largely overlooked by academia until recent years, and which continues to be relatively unexplored today.

"Interlude I: Literature and Empathy, from Theory to Configuration" has served as a transition from the conceptualization of emotions, empathy, and extreme empathy to the analysis of their fictional semantics. Despite its liminal nature, this Interlude has revealed several key ideas crucial to my proposal for a semantics of fictional emotions and my understanding of narrative empathy, which are the foundations of my project. First, I have established that the "truth value" of emotions depends on their being felt by the subject, and that, therefore, fictional emotions stand at the same ontological level as "real" ones. In turn, this hypothesis implies that "actual" empathy and narrative empathy are not significantly different and can be approached in the same terms. Secondly, I have proposed that narrative arts excel at evoking empathy, and that among them, descriptive literature may be more appropriate for arising complex forms of intersubjective empathy due to the level of character introspection it allows. Based on this premise, I have argued

that reading narrative literature and feeling empathy are similar epistemological experiences. The similarities that led me to this conclusion lie in the fact that both narrative reading and empathy are imaginative and epistemic processes, carried out through a hermeneutic method, directed toward understanding an Other, temporally bounded, and variable from one instance to another. The identification of this overall correspondence has made me conclude that narrative literature stands as an optimal space for arousing empathy in the reader, as fiction *systematically reproduces* empathy's conditions of emergence and, upon entering a fictional world, readers are already predisposed to empathize with those who inhabit it. Several inner structures of narrative have led me to argue for the existence of this "environmental support" that fosters empathy. Among these, I have emphasized: first, the critical distance granted by literature—the "safety zone" of fictionality that allows readers to feel free from real danger; second, the multiplicity of complex subjectivities that narrative usually presents; and finally, its intrinsic narrativity and rhetorical dimension, which enables detailed description and deep character introspection. Drawing on the emotional and representational openness inherent in narrative, I have also characterized narrative as a counter-discourse that facilitates both reading about and *feeling with* morally flawed characters, thus allowing for an exploration of the boundaries of empathy. Finally, I have explained how literary studies have neglected the perspective on narrative empathy that constitutes my main thesis: that, as a literary emotion, narrative empathy, including its extreme version, is an element of the fictional world as well as an *effect of* narrative technique.

Block II, "Mimesis. Emotions as Narrative Building Blocks", constitutes the theoretical backbone of my research. In this section, I have formulated the role of narrative emotions as "building blocks" of fictional worlds, I have developed a taxonomy

for analyzing these emotions, and I have explored the dynamics of the reader-character relationship. Thus, this chapter of my thesis has theorized how narrative emotions work at semiotic and intersubjective levels. For this purpose, I have adopted the perspective of fictional mimesis of possible-world semantics, particularly drawing from Doležel's fictional semantics outlined in *Heterocosmica.* A synthesis of the principles of traditional mimesis has allowed me to present the limitations of the "one-world frame" that possible-world semantics aimed to overcome: on the one hand, the incapacity to understand fictional texts as independent systems and consequently, to account for fictional characters, and on the other hand, its inattention to the role of the reader. To these two shortcomings, indeed solved by possible-world semantics, I have added a third one: the absence of narrative emotions, unaddressed by this understanding of the fictional world. In view of this critical void, I have described how narrative emotions may exist at the semiotic level and which role they play in the construction of the fictional world. To do this, I have adopted Doležel's theory on fictional worlds, in which emotions stand merely as motivational factors, to *expand* his project and reformulate it to include narrative emotions as "elementary building blocks" of the fictional world. To demonstrate my hypothesis, I have examined the dynamics of the two semantic levels through which fictional worlds are constructed—extensional and intensional semantics—based on the idea that these levels also shape narrative emotions, and that emotions, in turn, perform distinct functions within each semantic framework. This exercise has proved that the semantic status of fictional emotions can indeed be subjected to description, and that, besides being motivational factors that guide the character's actions, emotions also define the plot, the characters themselves and the relations among them, can pervert the authentication function, and play a key role in the reader's reception and interpretation of the fictional world. Considering that they determine and are determined by the processes

of formation of fictional worlds, and that they are inherent to them, I have concluded that in effect, emotions can be regarded as "elementary building blocks" of fictional worlds. In this regard, I have given a tentative answer to the status and the functions of emotions in fictional semantics. With the purpose of distinguishing the types of emotions that exist in the fictional world and in their subsequent "transduction", and to be able to describe them on the textual plane, I have also put forward a taxonomy of fictional emotions. This classification has categorized fictional emotions based on their origin, scope, and purpose, dividing them into two broad categories: *intra-world* emotions, that appear *inside* of the narrative world—*individual* (*particular* or *abstract*), *social intra-world* emotions, and *aesthetic tone*—; and *inter-world emotions*, which arise in the encounter *between* the narrative world and the reader—parasocial *inter-world* emotions and *emotional impression*.

Finally, Block II has also dealt with the circumstances of the social and emotional encounter between the fictional world and its inhabitants and the reader. In what this aspect of the literary process is concerned, I have strived to formulate a theory capable of preserving both the uniqueness of the text and the independence of the reader. Building upon these premises, I have proposed a variation of what I have called "theories of simulation" (Pavel 2010; Ryan 1980; Walton 1990), influenced by Deciu Ritivoi (2016) and Caracciolo's (2013) hermeneutical understanding of "cross-world encounters" and by Hakemulder's idea of literature as a "moral laboratory" (2000). My interpretation of these antecedents has prompted me to conclude that fictional worlds serve as *parasocial* worlds: *enlarged* and alternative versions of the "actual" social world where, due to the simulative nature of fictionality, readers momentarily increase their moral, epistemological, and emotional acceptance. Because of these circumstances, fictional worlds turn into privileged spaces for emotional and empathic encounters. Finally, I have

closed Block II by arguing that extreme empathy stands out among *parasocial inter-world emotions* as a paradigmatic case for the study of narrative emotions and the examination of their circumstances of emergence. That is because extreme empathy is an emotional response made possible—maybe exclusively—by the very foundations of literature as a semantic construct and as a phenomenological and emotional experience. Thus, it is an emotion uniquely linked to the *parasocial* status of fictional worlds.

The purpose of Interlude II, entitled "Literature and Empathy, From Configuration to Formulation", has been to bridge the gap between the examination of emotions and parasocial encounters within fictional worlds and their representation in the semiotic channel: the text of the novel. In Interlude II, I have explored previous attempts to study narrative emotions, narrative empathy, and extreme empathy as effects of formal features. Moreover, I have introduced the methodology for the upcoming narratological analyses, based on Genette's classical narratology and oriented towards the identification of what I have termed *empathy builders*. Additionally, I have outlined the objectives, scope, and potential constraints of these analyses.

In both extension and significance, "Block III. Narratology of Emotions. The Case of Extreme Empathy" stands as the cornerstone of my thesis. This final block comprises the narratological analyses of two contemporary novels that, from my perspective, are structured to evoke extreme empathy in readers: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jonathan Littell's *Les bienveillantes*. The empathy-driven exegesis of both works has concluded with a comparison of the way in which each elicits empathy for its immoral protagonist. Hence, the specific objective of this Block has been to unravel, in these narrative texts, *which* literary devices work as *instructions* for evoking the *inter-world* emotion of extreme empathy and *how* they mold the reader's emotional orientation towards the fictional world and its targets of empathy. Considering that this narratological

exercise has constituted the practical counterpart of my previous theoretical considerations, most of the conclusions reached in this project are concentrated in this section.

In what the narratological formation of extreme empathy is concerned, I have narrowed down my conclusions about which literary devices best promote this response in the final comparison. In this section, the third one of Block III, I have contrasted the techniques deployed by both novels and compared the results with existing opinions on the creation of narrative empathy. With this exercise, I have aimed to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how narrative empathy, and particularly extreme empathy, are generated in literature. In the comparison, as well as in the preceding analyses, I have employed Genette's narratology, thus indirectly proving that, despite its age, Genette's methodology is adaptable and can be applied to interdisciplinary and contemporary projects, such as this one. At a general level, identifying the *empathy builders* at work in both novels has led me to confirm, given that most of them are character-related devices, the most widely accepted assertion regarding the narratological construction of empathy: that extensive and detailed knowledge of characters and their situations is crucial for evoking empathy (Smith, "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 114). Nonetheless, I have also asserted that character representation is *indispensable* in the case of extreme empathy, in which the engagement of readers depends on the dominance of the criminal character's self over their actions. Besides highlighting the importance of characterization, I have also concluded that, in comparison with narrative empathy, extreme empathy requires a baroque emotional richness concerning the target's *intra-world* emotions, which are generally painful, and are expressed subtly through formal aspects and *intra-world social* relations. This conclusion aligns with Ercolino & Fusillo's hypothesis that empathic response seems linked to the intensity of psychological suffering

shown by the character (82). On the other hand, my suggestion that, in extreme empathy, the *target*'s emotions of suffering must be expressed in a more nuanced way to avoid the reader's skepticism has led me to two further conclusions. First, that this "indirectness" in emotional characterization turns inference into the optimal reading method for an extreme empathic response. To engage the reader and pique their interest, fictional narratives often leave out parts of the characters' emotional lives, creating "emotional gaps" for readers to fill. This omission, I have argued, is especially pronounced in *parasocial* relationships with immoral characters. Secondly, the sophistication required for portraying immoral targets makes extreme empathy narratologically more challenging than narrative empathy. This has led me to validate my previous thesis by which the more challenging the empathic understanding demanded by the fictional world, the more relevant the formal resources employed by the text become in achieving the empathic effect. Drawing from this conclusion on the relevance of form for triggering empathy and extreme empathy, I have investigated which formal resources may enhance this emotional response. To accomplish that, I have compared the use of the different narratological categories—*voice, mood,* and *tense*—in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*.

In terms of *voice,* my analyses have led me to reject, in the case of extreme empathy, the notion that *voice* is the primary factor in eliciting empathy (Goldie 2000; Keen 2007), as well as the idea that first-person narration is the ideal *voice* format for empathic engagement (Goldie 2000; Suleiman 2009). Instead, through a comparison of the heterodiegetic-extradiegetic narrator in Capote's novel with the homodiegetic-intradiegetic one in Littell's, I have concluded that, when it comes to extreme empathy, the less biased the narrative *voice*, the more effective it is at creating a sense of a "safe moral environment", which is crucial for fostering extreme empathy.

In reviewing the use of *mood* in *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes*, I have corroborated the significance of textual perspective in narrative empathy, as emphasized by affect theorists (Basseler 2017; Coplan 2011; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022; Hakemulder 2000). In fact, I have posited that *mood* might be even more crucial in the case of extreme empathy, as its arousal demands subtler access to the *target*'s interiority. The high concentration of *empathy builders* within the *mood* category in both novels appears to support this idea. In this regard, I have identified three commonalities in their empathic use of *mood:* both compare the *targets* with other characters to portray the immoral character under a more favorable light, both explore the criminal's subconscious, and both prioritize a realistic narrative perspective. Regarding the importance of realism, I have proposed that a realistic and linear narrative style—in my corpus novels, reinforced by the inclusion of "actual" documents and by the access to the target's subconscious—may enhance empathic comprehension, particularly for morally ambiguous characters. Lastly, the comparison of the different *mood* formats—monoperspectivism and variable focalization—did not reveal any inherent advantage of one over the other.

The correlation between narrative *tense* and the construction of empathy in the novel represents, in my view, the most significant practical innovation of my project. Despite the lack of antecedents in its study, I have identified multiple *tense empathy builders* in both novels, suggesting that narrative time is imbued with emotions and plays a role in their emergence. In terms of *tense order*, in the case of extreme empathy, the empathic engagement is cultivated *before* readers are informed of the full extent of the *target'*s immorality. Then, *order* is essential for the strategic placement of empathy-building elements. An *order* asynchrony that helps this strategic engagement, as it gives time for the criminal to be described while awakening readers' attention and involvement, are pseudo-ellipsis or "enigmas". On the other hand, I have concluded that analepses or

"flashbacks" containing biographical details are also vital for triggering extreme empathy, providing explanatory insights into the target's life story and past traumas. These elements create a continuum of suffering, aiding readers in understanding the character's state of mind during the narrative events. Finally, I have considered the importance of the narrative's length when it comes to engaging with its characters. While my corpus was not extensive enough to draw definitive conclusions, comparing the length of *In Cold Blood* and *Les bienveillantes* suggests that, as Bonasera theorizes, prolonged exposure to a character's motives and struggles may enhance empathic resonance, even if readers do not necessarily like them (167).

To conclude, through the analysis of the *aesthetic tone* of both novels, I expect to have contributed to the ongoing research on an aspect of narrative emotionality that has long been a challenge in philosophical aesthetics (Ngai 29). In relation to *tone*, I had previously hypothesized that it may be more related to the spatial and temporal conditions of the narrative world than to its inhabitants. I have identified several ways in which fictional space and time mold the general emotionality of novels. For instance, I have described how the increasing speed of the concatenation of scenes in *In Cold Blood* generates a pervasive sense of anxiety in the narration. However, my corpus has been insufficient to fully explore the importance of spatio-temporal elements in shaping *aesthetic tone.* Yet, I have argued that the use of analepses commented above contributes to unifying the *tone* of my corpus novels, creating an emotional unity of suffering in the *target*'s past and their present that promotes *extreme empathy.* This continuum of pain creates an *emotional tone*, immanent to the text, that is marked by a perpetual "state of emergency". Within this moral "state of emergency", the corruption of the protagonists is in *conjunction* with the rest of the novel's environment, in a way that extreme empathy

almost appears as the sole means of engagement conceivable within the atmosphere of the fictional world.

Beyond my research on the formal creation of narrative empathy and extreme empathy, I would like to think that the emotion-oriented analyses in Block III have contributed to the narratological understanding of both *In Cold Blood* and *Les Bienveillantes.* In the case of Capote's *In Cold Blood*, existing theoretical criticism had largely ignored its formal analysis, with the exception of Ortells' work (1999; 2009) and, although briefer, that of González de la Aleja (1999). Therefore, I hope to enrich the narratological discourse surrounding Capote's masterpiece by providing the first emotion-oriented analysis of the novel and potentially the most extensive examination of its formal features so far, thus addressing a critical gap in the existing literature. In the case of Littell's *Les bienveillantes,* I hope to expand its analysis by establishing new connections with literary trends such as postmemory, the maximalist novel (Ercolino 2014), and the grotesque. Although, unlike *In Cold Blood*, the use of extreme empathy in *Les Bienveillantes* has already been explored (Bonasera 2023; Ercolino 2018; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022), I have sought to offer a fresh and expanded perspective on the topic, thereby enriching the existing scholarship on the novel. With respect to the previous literature on extreme empathy, my analyses have aligned with some of its ideas. For instance, the inner structures of the novels analyzed seem to confirm that empathy for criminal characters arises from a balance between emotional connection and critical distance, as proposed by Barberich 2020, Bonasera 2023, and Ercolino & Fusillo 2022.

In conclusion, I consider that my study has revealed, following the analyses carried out throughout Block III, that despite its variability, the narratology of emotions is neither "ineffable" nor "purely subjective" (Grossberg 80), but rather governed by a series of formal causes and effects. The examination of extreme empathy in *In Cold Blood*

and *Les bienveillantes* has proved that emotions are inherently present in the text and conveyed by means of formal features, thus allowing for examination through narratology. Furthermore, both empathy-oriented exegesis and their subsequent comparison have cohered with my previous fictional semantics and taxonomy of fictional emotions. In this regard, I consider that Block III has demonstrated, on the one hand, how the theoretical framework I have proposed here is descriptive of the function and materialization of narrative emotions, and on the other hand, how the terminology I have introduced can account for them effectively.

After the practical part of my thesis, Interlude III has served as a coda aimed at addressing one of the major challenges of my project, and of the study of narrative emotions in general: the impossibility of describing them without summoning an "implied reader" that is, without relying on subjectivity, even if constructed. To negotiate this challenge, I have concluded by suggesting that Iser's theory of *aesthetic response* (1978), shaped by hermeneutic phenomenology, offers, in my view, the most suitable approach for investigating the reception of narrative emotions.

However, I acknowledge that the controversial position of subjectivity in a semantics of narrative emotions is just one of the multiple shortcomings of my project. In fact, in my opinion, the conclusions drawn above represent findings for what I consider to be a preliminary dissertation. In this regard, the use of the adverb "towards" in my title is not merely a gesture of modesty, but rather descriptive of an inquiry that is only just beginning, and of which I would be very proud to have laid some foundations. First and foremost, I am keenly aware that my study does not encompass all manifestations of extreme empathy. As explained earlier in this dissertation, I have chosen to conduct an in-depth analysis of a limited corpus rather than expanding the scope to include more works and risk not fully capturing their emotional complexity. Consequently, the

discussion on the formal construction of extreme empathy remains incomplete and necessitates the study of more novels to draw definitive conclusions. Similarly, I have sought to illustrate, through two case studies, that both a semantics and a narratology of narrative emotions are feasible. However, I am fully aware that this project requires the investigation of more fictional emotions, from various fictional worlds and their corresponding *parasocial* systems, to truly demonstrate its potential functionality. Due to the limitations of my project and its interdisciplinary nature, multiple potential future applications have emerged during its development, which, in my opinion, could contribute to giving narrative emotions the place they deserve in literary theory.

Firstly, I am positive that the semantic model and taxonomy proposed in Block II could be extended to encompass different manifestations of empathy. In this regard, I consider that it would be interesting to explore the formal creation of other "challenging" kinds of narrative empathy, as those that posit a target whose cultural identity is, for reasons of gender, religion, or cultural background, far removed from the reader's "comfort zone". In the same vein, I would like to apply the research model proposed in this dissertation to other narrative emotions such as anxiety—briefly studied in relation to cinema in Ngai 2005—or depression—stunningly captured, for instance, in Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018) or in Jackie Polzin's *Brood* (2022). In this regard, further investigation into the interplay between narratology and narrative emotions, such as the association between anxiety and sadness, and *tense* speed, could yield valuable insights.

In relation to this, and in second place, I consider that the role of emotions in the construction of the fictional world is a potentially fruitful area of research. For instance, it would be stimulating to examine the intervention of emotion in specific *extensional* and *intensional* functions such as authentication or saturation with the intention of

understanding how emotions alter these semantic processes and shedding light on the central role of characters' mental and emotional worlds in the narrative.

Thirdly, while my thesis does not specifically address gender, advancing the theory and analysis of narrative emotions could be valuable for literary feminism, especially in relation to the latest trends of auto-fiction, which show a clear tendency to the narrativization of emotions. Investigating the relationship between emotions and the narrator/protagonist's auto-fictional *voice*, and their direct influence on the *aesthetic tone* of the work, could enrich, in my opinion, feminist literary discourse.

In relation to the latter, and in fourth place, *aesthetic tone* constitutes another element addressed in my thesis that, from my perspective, requires further attention. Apart from the unresolved question of whether a pattern can be determined in the way *tone* is created and its level of dependence on spatial and temporal elements, I am particularly interested in its direct relationship with what I have called the *emotional impression* of the reader. How does said *emotional impression* affect the overall reception of a novel? How does it relate to *inter-world* and *intra-world* emotions? These questions have haunted me during my research, but for the sake of brevity, and as they were not directly related to my objectives, they have not been addressed here.

Finally, influenced by the research group "(Un)Housing: Dwellings, Materiality, and the Self in American Literature", led by Drs. Rodrigo Andrés and Cristina Alsina Rísquez, another research topic that has emerged during my research is the relationship between the absence of home, or the "nomadic" lifestyle as an element affecting the *inter-world* emotionality of characters. In both the case of Perry Smith in *In Cold Blood* and that of Max Aue in *Les Bienveillantes*, the narrative suggests a link between the turbulent inner lives of the protagonists and their lack of an established "home" in childhood. Both carry the trauma not only of a "broken" family but also of the loss of home as a personal

space, a place to return to. Considering the historical significance of nomadism in the American way of life from its origins to the present day, and how this lifestyle may have influenced the *ethos* of the community and individuals, this undoubtedly constitutes a literary and cultural topic whose investigation, I think, would not lack examples.

The present journey towards a semantics of fictional emotions has started with a painting. A personal tendency toward symmetrical narratives invites me to close this work in the same way. I am thinking, specifically, of a painting I saw in person at the Musée d'Orsay during my doctoral stay: "Le remords" by Louis Baader.[250] Of course, its appearance here is no coincidence: its subject matter directly refers to what, as we have seen, is the main hypertext of *Les Bienveillantes*—the *Oresteia*. In "Le remords", Baader represents the exact moment in which the Furies/the Kindly Ones force Orestes to face his crimes. The immoral protagonist is a prisoner who has been accused of matricide, as symbolized by the shackles that unite him into his mother's corpse, which lies with the dead body of this step-father, Aegisthus. Its connection with Littell's novel was evident. However, each time I recalled my mental image of the painting, it appeared more and more not just as a representation of Orestes, or even of Max Aue, but as an allegory of the literary experience of extreme empathy. As may happen to any researcher, this highly subjective association became increasingly vivid in my mind, eventually turning into a kind of personal truth that I felt the need to prove, to justify. The other two times I visited the Musée d' Orsay during my stay, I stood in front of the Baader's *huile sur toile* and I searched for secret signs that the painting was indeed speaking to me—about my research, about the ineffable experience of extreme empathy. At first glance, the *impression* the painting made on me was not unlike the *emotional impression* I felt when reading Littell or Capote. Similarly, the dynamism of the painting reminded me in some way of the chaos

[250] Figure 12 in Appendix II.

and anguish, the state of emergency, present in the *emotional tone* of the narratives analyzed here. But with each viewing, there was more and more.

In the painting, Orestes tries to avert his gaze from his past sins, as if looking at the two corpses would bind him to the Underworld forever. Yet, like Orpheus, Baader's Orestes cannot resist turning back and staring at the bodies. Like Perry, Aue, and the other criminal characters discussed in these pages, the Greek anti-hero attempts to distance himself from his past, but it anchors him with emotions as heavy as steel. Just like in Littell's novel, we, the readership, are once again represented in the figures of the four Erinyes. Unlike in other representations, like in William-Adolphe Bouguereau's "Orestes Pursued by the Furies",[251] in "Le remords", the four deities, despite having the same role and being in the same situation, adopt very different attitudes in their encounter with Orestes. The Fury on the left, with a reflective gesture, holds up a mirror, pointing it towards the criminal's face, while indicating the bodies with her finger, attempting to prompt Orestes to reflect on his actions and their impact on his self-image. The central deity, shocked, cries out to heaven. At her right, a third figure cannot take her eyes from the corpses, as if, confronted with such a dreadful panorama, she adopted the same premise, as a witness, as that of Aue in *Les bienveillantes*: "à la malheur, il faut s'y confronter […] fermer les yeux, ce n'est jamais une réponse" (81) [1]. This Fury raises a fist in indignation, while the other arm, very close to Orestes, firmly points to the corpse of Clytemnestra, as if urging her murderer. She does not look away from the violence, nor does she want the one responsible for that violence to do so. Finally, the last of the Furies seems to stretch her arm to touch that of her companion, as if trying to calm her accusatory gesture. What I saw then in the Orsay, and what I still cannot stop seeing even now, is that each of these positions can be seen as a possible reaction of the readership in

[251] Figure 13 in Appendix II.

front of the representation of Evil in literature. All of them seem shocked by the crimes they are about to judge, all appear equally ready to confront the criminal, but none of them reacts like the one beside her: shock is tinged with anger, horror, fascination, or reflection, depending on each figure. Perhaps the last of the Furies, with her doubtful gesture, seeks to avoid a judgment that, like Orestes' crime, would be driven only by vengeance and irrationality? Perhaps Athena is already influencing this female deity, who is now more an empathic Kindly One than a Fury? If so, her response would not be more correct than that of her three companions, because none of the emotional responses of the other Furies, like none of the responses of the readers, is more correct than another. Nor is my interpretation of this painting—likely driven not so much by the image itself but by my personal filter, my interests, what I *needed* to see in it—correct or incorrect. In my imagination, "Le remords" came to mean what I *needed* it to mean, transmitted what I *needed* it to make me feel and said to me what I *needed* to hear: "You are right. In your research, in your looking at me, you are right. Because in front of a painting, in front of a book, you cannot be wrong, at least not in what you feel". Regarding narrative emotions, readers can never be wrong. We simply must look, read, and feel with them. That is the great emotional freedom in art and literature: if we feel something, it becomes automatically true. My objective in these pages has been to do justice to that liberty.

CONCLUSIONS

Après des siècles de négligence, la théorie littéraire a commencé, il y a environ trois décennies, à considérer les affects, les sentiments et les émotions comme des objets centraux dans la recherche académique. Avec l'essor des idées issues de la «affect theory», les chercheurs en littérature ont reconnu que les émotions ne sont pas de simples ornements—au mieux une distraction agréable, au pire un sortilège à dissiper avant de pouvoir entamer une analyse rigoureuse—mais plutôt que « l'engagement affectif est le moyen même par lequel les œuvres littéraires parviennent à toucher, réorienter, voire reconfigurer leurs lecteurs » (Felski, 177). Comme le suggère cette citation de Felski, l'étude des émotions narratives s'est concentrée tout particulièrement sur leur impact potentiel sur la cible, c'est-à-dire le lecteur/lectrice. Par conséquent, une grande partie de l'intérêt pour ce sujet s'est portée sur les études de la réception (Andreychik & Migliaccio 2015 ; Batson 1998 ; Eisenberg 2002 ; Hakemulder 2000). Toutefois, au-delà de cette approche pratique, la majorité des travaux en théorie de l'affect se sont limités à des cadres théoriques et à des spéculations, négligeant leurs implications concrètes. Dans bien des cas, l'idée selon laquelle « l'affect est peut-être le plan le plus difficile à définir et à décrire […] car il n'existe aucun vocabulaire critique pour en décrire les formes et les

structures » (Grossberg, 80) a perduré. L'affect littéraire a été abordé de manière indirecte, et un lexique propre à en décrire les manifestations n'a pas été élaboré. Cette lacune critique, comme nous l'avons constaté, est commune à l'ensemble des disciplines littéraires.

En raison de son caractère nécessairement interdisciplinaire, ma thèse a abordé les émotions narratives sous divers angles au sein des études littéraires. Pourtant, l'étude de la nature narrative des émotions demeure un défi majeur, quel que soit le point de vue adopté. D'un point de vue théorique, comme le souligne Susanne Knaller, « les émotions au niveau de la production comptent parmi les moins explorées » (20). Des chercheurs influencés par la théorie de l'affect, tels que Martha Nussbaum, Sianne Ngai ou Sarah Ahmed, issus d'horizons très différents, ont reconnu ce vide critique et souligné la nécessité de considérer les émotions comme un « problème formel » (Ngai, 52). Ce manque devient particulièrement frappant dans le cas de l'empathie, souvent considérée comme un objet central de la théorie de l'affect—notamment dans son application à la littérature (Pedwell). Pourtant, comme nous l'avons vu, les rares tentatives d'analyse de l'empathie narrative d'un point de vue narratologique demeurent insuffisantes et relèvent davantage des études de la réception que de la narratologie proprement dite (Colm Hogan 2011 ; Jandl et al. 2017 ; Keen 2007).

Si la théorie de l'affect considère la narratologie des émotions—et celle de l'empathie en particulier—comme un chantier encore ouvert, une situation similaire prévaut en narratologie, l'autre champ engagé dans cet effort interdisciplinaire. Malgré un discours critique récent soulignant que les éléments émotionnels font partie intégrante de la structure narrative, la construction narratologique des émotions, c'est-à-dire leur manifestation textuelle, reste ambiguë. Ce manque a été identifié par des narratologues comme Colm Hogan (2016) ou Suzanne Keen (2007), qui ont noté que « les approches

narratologiques de l'émotion sont globalement peu développées, du moins en comparaison avec d'autres aspects de la théorie narrative » (Colm, 1).

Cependant, la question de la micro-sémantique des émotions fictionnelles n'est que la partie émergée de l'iceberg. Le manque de compréhension des émotions narratives a des répercussions à chaque étape du processus littéraire. La difficulté à décrire « la nature expérientielle subjective (phénoménologique) des émotions » (Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 65) et le constat selon lequel « rien dans les émotions n'est véritablement bien compris » (de Sousa, xix) ont également freiné l'analyse de leur *macro-sémantique*—c'est-à-dire leur rôle dans la construction des mondes fictionnels. Même dans les domaines de la réception littéraire et de l'herméneutique, où se concentrent la plupart des études sur les émotions narratives et l'empathie, les questions sans réponses demeurent plus nombreuses que les réponses elles-mêmes. Cela tient en partie au manque de théorisation sémantique évoqué plus haut. Du fait de leur rôle mal défini dans le roman, les émotions narratives ont souvent été considérées comme résultant de l'acte de lecture plutôt que comme produites par les éléments textuels eux-mêmes, et ont donc été étudiées en lien avec les lecteurs/lectrices—en privilégiant leurs ressentis et leur réception au détriment de leur fonction en tant que structures textuelles, à la fois préétablies par le texte et ouvertes à l'interprétation. L'empathie narrative—qui, au moment du « tournant empathique » au début du XXIe siècle, est devenue presque une « obsession » pour les chercheurs en littérature (Pedwell, ix)—illustre bien cette focalisation restreinte : la recherche s'est tellement préoccupée de l'empathie narrative *comme déclencheur* des réactions du lecteur/lectrice qu'elle en a négligé le rôle *en tant qu'effet* d'une technique narrative. En définitive, aucune discipline de la théorie littéraire ne semble avoir pleinement saisi l'essence des émotions narratives, qui apparaissent comme un élément

que l'on reconnaît central dans le processus littéraire, mais qui « échappe à toute prise théorique » (Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 65).

Face à ces constats, ma thèse a cherché à proposer une réponse provisoire aux rôles sémantiques et formels que jouent les émotions dans les récits fictionnels. Dans cette optique, j'ai proposé de conceptualiser les émotions narratives comme des « blocs élémentaires » des mondes fictionnels (Heterocosmica, 113), d'abord conçus au niveau sémiotique, puis représentés formellement dans le texte fictionnel afin que le lecteur/lectrice puisse les décoder et *les ressentir*. Cette approche part du principe que, puisque les émotions fictionnelles sont véhiculées par des structures formelles, elles peuvent faire l'objet d'une analyse narratologique. Elle suggère en outre que, en raison de leur statut fictionnel qui les « protège », les mondes narratifs fonctionnent comme des simulations *parasociales* permettant aux lecteurs/lectrices d'éprouver des émotions perçues comme « authentiques », mais dans un contexte plus souple que celui des interactions sociales réelles. Ainsi, je soutiens que chaque monde fictionnel articule un système émotionnel propre, encapsulé et organisé dans le texte fictionnel.

Afin d'examiner la manière dont cette compréhension des émotions fictionnelles et de leur transmission peut se déployer au fil du processus littéraire—c'est-à-dire la construction sémantique du monde fictionnel, sa représentation textuelle et l'interprétation du lecteur/lectrice—, cette thèse a retracé le parcours littéraire d'une émotion narrative spécifique : l'empathie extrême. Aussi désignée sous le nom d'« empathie négative » (Ercolino 2018 ; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022 ; Bonasera 2023), cette émotion implique une réponse empathique envers un personnage qui commet des actes immoraux. Pour rendre compte des différentes dimensions d'un phénomène aussi complexe que le parcours littéraire d'une émotion narrative, et après avoir fourni un bref contexte théorique dans le Bloc I, ce travail s'est efforcé d'explorer les émotions

narratives en général, et l'empathie extrême en particulier, à travers trois domaines d'enquête étroitement liés et centraux dans la fiction : la sémantique, la narratologie et l'herméneutique (Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 72). Dans le Bloc II, l'étude des aspects sémantiques des émotions, conduite à partir de la théorie des mondes possibles de Doležel, a permis de proposer une sémantique des émotions narratives. Le Bloc III s'est centré sur la création textuelle des émotions fictionnelles à travers une analyse narratologique de l'émergence de l'empathie extrême dans *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote et *Les Bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell, accompagnée d'une comparaison de leurs constructions formelles respectives. Enfin, l'Interlude III a interrogé l'(im)possibilité d'une herméneutique des émotions narratives, ainsi que les effets de l'empathie extrême en tant qu'expérience littéraire.

L'adoption de la méthode en *zigzag* de Barthes a facilité l'analyse à la fois du fonctionnement des émotions dans le monde fictionnel (Bloc II) et de leur expression narratologique dans le roman (Bloc III). En combinant sémantique et narratologie, j'ai tenté d'instaurer le dialogue entre théorie et pratique préconisé par Doležel (*Heterocosmica* xi). Toutefois, les exigences de mon sujet de recherche—à savoir la participation des émotions à tous les niveaux de la littérature—m'ont conduit à adopter une approche analytique interdisciplinaire. Ainsi, ces pages explorent non seulement la sémantique et la narratologie, mais aussi des aspects de la réception, de la pragmatique fictionnelle et de la théorie esthétique, entre autres. Le degré d'implication variable dans chacun de ces domaines, combiné au fait que, en raison du manque de précédents, j'ai dû, dans cette étude, formuler de nombreuses hypothèses sur les émotions fictionnelles et l'empathie extrême, ainsi que forger un vocabulaire inédit, rend difficile la synthèse des résultats de ce projet en quelques lignes cohérentes. C'est pourquoi il m'apparaît plus

pertinent de présenter les apports et conclusions spécifiques à chaque section de cette thèse.

Dans le Bloc I, intitulé « Empathy and Extreme Empathy », j'ai retracé une brève trajectoire historique des émotions et des facteurs qui ont conduit à leur marginalisation dans les études savantes jusqu'à la fin du XXe siècle. J'y ai ensuite analysé l'impact transformateur de la théorie de l'affect, en particulier sa distinction entre « affect », « émotion » et « sentiment », ainsi que son approche constructionniste des émotions, qui a déplacé leur étude vers les cultural studies. À partir de cette perspective générale, j'ai introduit le concept d'« émotions transitives ». Couramment appelées « réponses émotionnelles » (Carroll 2011 ; Eisenberg 2005 ; Keen 2007) ou émotions « orientées vers autrui » (Coplan & Goldie 2011), ces émotions nécessitent une *cible* (*target*) pour se manifester et leur développement dépend davantage de cette *cible* (*target*) que du sujet qui les ressent. Parmi ces « émotions transitives », je me suis concentré sur l'empathie, en exposant la définition la plus largement acceptée et en identifiant les problématiques qui persistent dans sa théorisation. Cet état de la question introductif m'a permis de contextualiser ma propre vision de l'empathie, fondée sur la défense d'une compréhension élargie de cette émotion proposée par Pedwell (2014). J'ai ensuite proposé de représenter l'empathie sous la forme d'une gradation horizontale, dans le but de dépasser l'idée d'une empathie unique et dominante, et de promouvoir une compréhension nuancée et inclusive, apte à englober ses diverses manifestations. Cette conceptualisation m'a permis d'inscrire, dans ma propre définition de l'empathie, le type spécifique sur lequel porte ma recherche : l'empathie envers les individus auteurs d'actes immoraux, également appelée « empathie négative » (Ercolino 2018 ; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022 ; Bonasera 2023). En m'appuyant sur la littérature existante—et notamment sur la seule définition détaillée du concept proposée par Ercolino & Fusillo (2022)—, j'ai

proposé de renommer cette notion « empathie extrême » afin de souligner sa complexité morale sans diviser l'empathie en formes positives et négatives. De cette manière, je conçois mes réflexions sur l'empathie extrême comme une contribution à la théorisation en cours d'une expérience émotionnelle longtemps ignorée par le monde académique, et qui demeure encore aujourd'hui relativement peu explorée.

"Interlude I: Literature and Empathy, from Theory to Configuration" a servi de transition entre la conceptualisation des émotions, de l'empathie et de l'empathie extrême, et l'analyse de leur sémantique fictionnelle. Bien que liminaire, cet interlude a permis de faire émerger plusieurs idées clés essentielles à ma proposition d'une sémantique des émotions fictionnelles et à ma compréhension de l'empathie narrative, qui constituent les fondements de ce projet. En premier lieu, j'ai établi que la « valeur de vérité » d'une émotion dépend du fait qu'elle soit effectivement ressentie par un sujet, et que, par conséquent, les émotions fictionnelles se situent au même niveau ontologique que les émotions « réelles ». Cette hypothèse implique, en retour, que l'empathie vécue dans la réalité et l'empathie narrative ne diffèrent pas fondamentalement et peuvent être analysées selon les mêmes critères. Deuxièmement, j'ai proposé que les arts narratifs sont particulièrement efficaces pour susciter l'empathie, et que, parmi eux, la littérature descriptive est sans doute la plus apte à faire émerger des formes complexes d'empathie intersubjective, du fait du degré d'introspection qu'elle permet. Sur cette base, j'ai soutenu que lire un récit littéraire et ressentir de l'empathie sont des expériences épistémologiques comparables. Les similitudes qui m'ont conduit à cette conclusion résident dans le fait que la lecture narrative et l'empathie sont toutes deux des processus imaginatifs et cognitifs, relevant d'une méthode herméneutique, orientés vers la compréhension d'un Autre, circonscrits dans le temps et variables d'un cas à l'autre. L'identification de cette convergence m'a amené à conclure que la littérature narrative

constitue un espace privilégié pour l'émergence de l'empathie chez le lecteur/lectrice, car la fiction *reproduit systématiquement* les conditions propices à son apparition ; de plus, dès qu'ils entrent dans un monde fictionnel, les lecteurs/lectrices sont déjà prédisposés à éprouver de l'empathie pour ceux qui l'habitent. Plusieurs structures internes du récit m'ont permis d'argumenter en faveur de l'existence de ce « soutien environnemental » favorable à l'empathie. Parmi celles-ci, j'ai mis en avant : premièrement, la distance critique que permet la littérature—cette « zone de sécurité » de la fictionnalité qui libère le lecteur/lectrice de tout danger réel ; deuxièmement, la multiplicité des subjectivités complexes que la narration propose en général ; et enfin, sa narrativité intrinsèque et sa dimension rhétorique, qui autorisent des descriptions détaillées et une introspection approfondie des personnages. En m'appuyant sur l'ouverture émotionnelle et représentative propre au récit, j'ai également défini la littérature narrative comme un contre-discours permettant à la fois de lire et de *ressentir avec* des personnages moralement ambigus, et d'explorer ainsi les limites de l'empathie. Enfin, j'ai expliqué comment les études littéraires ont négligé la perspective qui constitue l'axe central de ma thèse : le fait que, en tant qu'émotion littéraire, l'empathie narrative—y compris sous sa forme extrême—est à la fois un élément du monde fictionnel et un effet de la technique narrative.

Le Bloc II, **«** Mimesis. Emotions as Narrative Building Blocks **»**, constitue l'ossature théorique de ma recherche. Dans cette section, j'ai formulé le rôle des émotions narratives en tant que « blocs fondamentaux » des mondes fictionnels, élaboré une taxonomie permettant de les analyser, et exploré les dynamiques de la relation entre le lecteur/lectrice et les personnages. Ce chapitre théorise ainsi le fonctionnement des émotions narratives à la fois au niveau sémiotique et intersubjectif. Pour ce faire, j'ai adopté la perspective de la mimésis fictionnelle issue de la sémantique des mondes

possibles, en m'appuyant notamment sur la sémantique fictionnelle développée par Doležel dans *Heterocosmica*. Une synthèse des principes de la mimésis traditionnelle m'a permis d'exposer les limites du « cadre du monde unique », que la sémantique des mondes possibles visait à dépasser : d'une part, son incapacité à considérer les textes fictionnels comme des systèmes indépendants et, par conséquent, à rendre compte de l'existence des personnages fictifs ; d'autre part, sa négligence du rôle du lecteur/lectrice. À ces deux lacunes, effectivement résolues par la sémantique des mondes possibles, j'en ai ajouté une troisième : l'absence des émotions narratives, que cette approche n'aborde pas. Face à ce vide critique, j'ai montré comment les émotions narratives peuvent exister à un niveau sémiotique, et quel rôle elles jouent dans la construction du monde fictionnel.

Pour le faire, j'ai repris la théorie des mondes fictionnels de Doležel, dans laquelle les émotions ne sont envisagées que comme des facteurs motivationnels, afin d'en *étendre* la portée et d'y intégrer les émotions narratives comme des « blocs élémentaires » du monde fictionnel. Pour démontrer mon hypothèse, j'ai examiné les dynamiques des deux niveaux sémantiques à partir desquels les mondes fictionnels se construisent—la sémantique extensionnelle et la sémantique intentionnelle—en partant de l'idée que ces niveaux modèlent aussi les émotions narratives, et que ces dernières remplissent des fonctions distinctes dans chacun de ces cadres. Cet exercice a permis de montrer que le statut sémantique des émotions fictionnelles peut bel et bien être décrit, et que, au-delà de leur fonction motivationnelle dans l'action des personnages, les émotions définissent aussi l'intrigue, les personnages eux-mêmes et les relations entre eux, peuvent altérer la fonction d'authentification du récit, et jouent un rôle clé dans la réception et l'interprétation du monde fictionnel par le lecteur/lectrice. Dans la mesure où elles déterminent et sont déterminées par les processus de formation des mondes fictionnels, et qu'elles leur sont inhérentes, j'ai conclu que les émotions peuvent être considérées

comme des « blocs élémentaires » de ces mondes. Ce faisant, j'ai tenté d'apporter une réponse à la fois au statut et aux fonctions des émotions dans la sémantique fictionnelle.

Dans le but de distinguer les types d'émotions présents dans le monde fictionnel et leur « transduction » ultérieure, ainsi que de pouvoir les décrire sur le plan textuel, j'ai proposé une **taxonomie des émotions fictionnelles**. Cette classification distingue les émotions selon leur origine, leur portée et leur finalité, en les répartissant en deux grandes catégories : les *émotions intra-mondiales,* qui apparaissent à l'intérieur du monde narratif—*individuelles* (*particulières* ou *abstraites*), *sociales*, et le *ton esthétique*—; les *émotions inter-mondiales*, qui surgissent dans la rencontre entre le monde narratif et le lecteur/lectrice—émotions *parasociales inter-mondiales* et *impression émotionnelle*.

Enfin, ce Bloc II s'est également penché sur les conditions sociales et émotionnelles de la rencontre entre le monde fictionnel, ses habitants, et le lecteur/lectrice. Dans cette optique, j'ai cherché à formuler une théorie capable de préserver à la fois la singularité du texte et l'autonomie du lecteur/lectrice. En m'appuyant sur ces prémisses, j'ai proposé une variante de ce que j'ai appelé les « théories de la simulation » (Pavel 2010 ; Ryan 1980 ; Walton 1990), influencée par l'approche herméneutique des « rencontres trans-mondiales » selon Deciu Ritivoi (2016) et Caracciolo (2013), ainsi que par l'idée de Hakemulder (2000) selon laquelle la littérature fonctionne comme un « laboratoire moral ». Mon interprétation de ces travaux m'a conduite à conclure que les mondes fictionnels fonctionnent comme des mondes *parasociaux* : des versions *élargies* et alternatives du monde social réel, où, en raison de la nature simulée de la fictionnalité, le lecteur/lectrice accepte momentanément d'élargir son horizon moral, épistémologique et émotionnel. Dans ces conditions, les mondes fictionnels deviennent des espaces privilégiés de rencontres émotionnelles et empathiques. J'ai donc terminé ce bloc en affirmant que l'empathie extrême se distingue,

parmi les émotions *parasociales inter-mondiales*, comme un cas paradigmatique pour l'étude des émotions narratives et des circonstances de leur émergence. Cela tient au fait que l'empathie extrême est une réponse émotionnelle rendue possible—peut-être uniquement—par les fondements mêmes de la littérature en tant que construction sémantique et expérience phénoménologique et émotionnelle. Elle est ainsi une émotion profondément liée au statut *parasocial* des mondes fictionnels.

Le but de l'Interlude II, intitulé "Literature and Empathy, From Configuration to Formulation", a été d'assurer la transition entre l'étude des émotions et des rencontres *parasociales* au sein des mondes fictionnels, et leur représentation dans le canal sémiotique : le texte romanesque. J'y ai exploré les tentatives précédentes d'étude des émotions narratives, de l'empathie narrative et de l'empathie extrême comme effets de caractéristiques formelles. De plus, j'ai introduit la méthodologie des analyses narratologiques à venir, fondée sur la narratologie classique de Genette et orientée vers l'identification de ce que j'ai appelé les « constructeurs d'empathie ». J'y ai également précisé les objectifs, le champ d'application et les limites potentielles de ces analyses.

Par son ampleur et sa portée, le Bloc III, « Block III. Narratology of Emotions. The Case of Extreme Empathy », constitue le pilier central de ma thèse. Ce bloc contient les analyses narratologiques de deux romans contemporains qui, selon moi, sont structurés pour susciter l'empathie extrême chez le lecteur/lectrice : *In Cold Blood* de Truman Capote et *Les Bienveillantes* de Jonathan Littell. L'exégèse centrée sur l'empathie de ces deux œuvres a abouti à une comparaison de la manière dont chacune suscite l'empathie envers son protagoniste immoral. L'objectif spécifique de ce bloc a donc été d'identifier, dans ces textes narratifs, *quels* procédés littéraires servant d'*instructions* pour évoquer l'émotion *inter-mondiale* d'empathie extrême, et de comprendre *comment* ces dispositifs orientent émotionnellement le lecteur/lectrice vers

le monde fictionnel et ses cibles empathiques. Étant donné que cet exercice narratologique représente la contrepartie pratique de mes considérations théoriques précédentes, la majorité des conclusions du projet se trouvent concentrées dans cette section.

En ce qui concerne la formation narratologique de l'empathie extrême, j'ai formulé, dans la dernière partie du Bloc III, mes conclusions sur les dispositifs littéraires les plus propices à susciter cette réponse. J'y ai comparé les techniques utilisées dans les deux romans et confronté les résultats aux recherches existantes sur la création de l'empathie narrative. Par cet exercice, j'ai souhaité contribuer à la discussion en cours sur les modalités de production de l'empathie narrative—et notamment de l'empathie extrême—en littérature. Dans l'analyse comme dans la comparaison, j'ai employé la narratologie de Genette, démontrant ainsi, indirectement, que malgré son ancienneté, cette méthode reste pertinente et adaptable à des projets contemporains et interdisciplinaires comme le mien.

De manière générale, l'identification des *constructeurs d'empathie* présents dans les deux romans m'a permis de confirmer, puisque la majorité d'entre eux concernent les personnages, l'affirmation la plus largement admise concernant la construction narratologique de l'empathie : une connaissance fine et approfondie des personnages et de leurs situations est essentielle pour susciter l'empathie (Smith, *Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind* 114). J'ai néanmoins souligné que cette représentation du personnage est encore *plus cruciale* dans le cas de l'empathie extrême, où l'engagement du lecteur/lectrice dépend de la prédominance de l'intériorité du personnage criminel sur ses actions. Outre l'importance de la caractérisation, j'ai également conclu que, par rapport à l'empathie narrative « classique », l'empathie extrême requiert une richesse émotionnelle baroque concernant les émotions *intra-mondiales* du personnage *cible* (*target*), souvent douloureuses, et exprimées de manière subtile à travers les aspects

formels et les relations sociales *inter-mondiales*. Cette conclusion corrobore l'hypothèse d'Ercolino & Fusillo, selon laquelle la réponse empathique semble liée à l'intensité de la souffrance psychologique du personnage (82). D'autre part, ma proposition selon laquelle, dans le cas de l'empathie extrême, les émotions de souffrance du personnage *cible* (*target*) doivent être exprimées de façon nuancée afin d'éviter le scepticisme du lecteur/lectrice, m'a conduite à deux conclusions supplémentaires. Premièrement, que cette indirection dans la caractérisation émotionnelle fait de l'inférence la méthode de lecture la plus adaptée pour susciter une réponse empathique extrême. Pour capter l'attention du lecteur/lectrice, les récits fictionnels omettent souvent certaines parties de la vie émotionnelle des personnages, créant ainsi des « vides émotionnels » à combler par le lecteur/lectrice. J'ai soutenu que cette omission est particulièrement marquée dans les relations parasociales avec des personnages immoraux. Deuxièmement, la sophistication requise pour représenter ces cibles immorales rend l'empathie extrême narratologiquement plus exigeante que l'empathie narrative ordinaire. Cela m'a permis de valider une de mes thèses précédentes : plus la compréhension empathique attendue du monde fictionnel est complexe, plus les ressources formelles mobilisées par le texte sont cruciales pour produire l'effet empathique. Partant de cette conclusion sur la centralité de la forme dans l'évocation de l'empathie, j'ai exploré les ressources formelles susceptibles de renforcer cette réponse émotionnelle. Pour ce faire, j'ai comparé l'utilisation des différentes catégories narratologiques—*voix, mode* et *temps*—dans *In Cold Blood* et *Les bienveillantes*.

En ce qui concerne la *voix* narrative, mes analyses m'ont amenée à rejeter, dans le cas de l'empathie extrême, l'idée selon laquelle la *voix* serait le facteur principal de l'émergence de l'empathie (Goldie 2000 ; Keen 2007), tout comme l'idée selon laquelle la narration à la première personne serait le format idéal pour susciter l'implication

empathique (Goldie 2000 ; Suleiman 2009). À l'inverse, à travers une comparaison entre le narrateur hétérodiégétique-extradiégétique dans le roman de Capote et le narrateur homodiégétique-intradiégétique dans celui de Littell, j'ai conclu que, s'agissant de l'empathie extrême, plus la *voix* narrative est impartiale, plus elle est efficace pour créer un « environnement moral sûr », essentiel à la production de cette forme d'empathie.

L'analyse du *mode* narrative dans *In Cold Blood* et *Les Bienveillantes* m'a permis de confirmer l'importance de la perspective textuelle dans l'empathie narrative, telle que soulignée par les théoriciens de l'affect (Basseler 2017 ; Coplan 2011 ; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022 ; Hakemulder 2000). J'ai même proposé que le *mode* joue un rôle encore plus crucial dans le cas de l'empathie extrême, dans la mesure où sa mise en œuvre requiert un accès plus subtil à l'intériorité du personnage cible. La forte concentration de *constructeurs d'empathie* relevant de cette catégorie dans les deux romans semble appuyer cette hypothèse. À cet égard, j'ai identifié trois points communs dans leur usage empathique du *mode* : les deux romans comparent les personnages *cibles* (*target*) à d'autres figures pour présenter le criminel sous un jour plus favorable, tous deux explorent le subconscient du criminel ; et privilégient une perspective narrative réaliste. Concernant le réalisme, j'ai proposé qu'un style narratif réaliste et linéaire—renforcé dans mon corpus par l'inclusion de documents « réels » et par l'accès au subconscient du personnage—peut faciliter la compréhension empathique, notamment pour les figures moralement ambivalentes. Enfin, la comparaison entre le monoperspectivisme et la focalisation variable n'a pas révélé de supériorité intrinsèque de l'un sur l'autre.

La corrélation entre le *temps* narratif et la construction de l'empathie constitue, selon moi, l'innovation pratique la plus significative de mon projet. Malgré l'absence d'antécédents sur cette question, j'ai identifié de nombreux *constructeurs d'empathie temporels* dans les deux romans, ce qui suggère que le *temps* narratif est chargé

d'émotions et participe à leur émergence. Du point de vue de l'*ordre* temporel, dans le cas de l'empathie extrême, l'engagement empathique est cultivé *avant* que le lecteur/lectrice ne prenne pleinement conscience de l'immoralité du personnage *cible* (*target*). L'*ordre* devient alors un levier essentiel dans le positionnement stratégique des éléments déclencheurs de l'empathie. L'asynchronie de l'*ordre* narratif, qui soutient cet engagement stratégique—en permettant que le criminel soit d'abord décrit avant que les révélations ne surviennent—se manifeste notamment par des pseudo-ellipses ou « énigmes ». Par ailleurs, j'ai conclu que les analèpses ou « flashbacks » contenant des détails biographiques sont également essentielles pour déclencher l'empathie extrême. Elles fournissent un éclairage sur le passé du personnage, ses souffrances et ses traumatismes, créant un continuum de douleur qui aide le lecteur/lectrice à comprendre son état mental au moment des événements narrés. Enfin, j'ai envisagé l'importance de la longueur du récit dans la relation empathique aux personnages. Bien que mon corpus soit trop restreint pour tirer des conclusions définitives, la comparaison de *In Cold Blood* et *Les bienveillantes* semble corroborer l'idée, formulée par Bonasera, selon laquelle une exposition prolongée aux motivations et aux luttes d'un personnage favorise la résonance empathique, même si le lecteur/lectrice ne l'apprécie pas nécessairement (167).

Pour conclure cette partie, l'analyse du *ton esthétique* des deux romans m'a permis, je l'espère, de contribuer à la recherche actuelle sur un aspect de l'émotion narrative qui reste un défi pour l'esthétique philosophique (Ngai, 29). Concernant le *ton*, j'avais émis l'hypothèse qu'il pourrait être davantage lié aux conditions spatio-temporelles du monde narratif qu'à ses habitants. J'ai identifié plusieurs manières dont l'espace et le temps fictionnels façonnent l'émotivité globale des romans. Par exemple, j'ai montré comment l'accélération progressive du *rythme* narratif dans *In Cold Blood* engendre une anxiété diffuse dans la narration. Mon corpus s'est toutefois révélé

insuffisant pour étudier en profondeur l'impact de ces éléments. Néanmoins, j'ai soutenu que l'usage des analèpses contribue à unifier le *ton* de mes romans analysés, en créant une unité émotionnelle de la souffrance entre le passé et le présent du personnage *cible* (*target*), ce qui favorise l'empathie extrême. Ce continuum douloureux donne naissance à un *ton* émotionnel, immanent au texte, marqué par un état d'urgence moral perpétuel. Dans ce climat, la corruption des protagonistes *s'inscrit* dans l'environnement global du récit, au point que l'empathie extrême apparaît presque comme le seul mode d'engagement possible avec le monde fictionnel.

Au-delà de ma recherche sur la construction formelle de l'empathie narrative et de l'empathie extrême, je souhaite croire que les analyses orientées par l'émotion menées dans le Bloc III ont enrichi la compréhension narratologique des romans *In Cold Blood* et *Les Bienveillantes*. Dans le cas du roman de Capote, la critique théorique a en grande partie négligé son analyse formelle, à l'exception du travail d'Ortells (1999 ; 2009) et, dans une moindre mesure, de González de la Aleja (1999). J'espère donc avoir contribué au discours narratologique sur ce chef-d'œuvre en proposant la première étude centrée sur l'émotion et, potentiellement, l'analyse formelle la plus approfondie de ce texte à ce jour, comblant ainsi une lacune critique. Concernant *Les Bienveillantes* de Littell, j'ai tenté d'élargir son analyse en établissant de nouvelles connexions avec des tendances littéraires comme la postmémoire, le roman maximaliste (Ercolino 2014), et le grotesque. Bien que, contrairement à *In Cold Blood*, l'usage de l'empathie extrême ait déjà été exploré dans *Les Bienveillantes* (Bonasera 2023 ; Ercolino 2018 ; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022), j'ai souhaité proposer une lecture renouvelée et approfondie, enrichissant ainsi les travaux existants. Par rapport à la littérature critique sur l'empathie extrême, mes analyses confirment certaines de ses thèses, notamment que l'empathie envers les criminels naît

d'un équilibre entre connexion émotionnelle et distance critique, comme l'ont suggéré Barberich (2020), Bonasera (2023) et Ercolino & Fusillo (2022).

En conclusion, je considère que mon étude a montré, à travers les analyses menées dans le Bloc III, que malgré sa variabilité, la narratologie des émotions n'est ni « ineffable » ni « purement subjective » (Grossberg, 80), mais bien soumise à une série de causes et d'effets formels. L'examen de l'empathie extrême dans *In Cold Blood* et *Les Bienveillantes* a démontré que les émotions sont inhérentes au texte et transmises par des moyens formels, rendant ainsi possible leur étude narratologique. De plus, l'exégèse centrée sur l'empathie et la comparaison des deux romans ont confirmé la validité de la sémantique fictionnelle et de la taxonomie des émotions fictionnelles que j'ai proposées. En ce sens, je considère que le Bloc III a démontré, d'une part, que le cadre théorique formulé dans ce travail permet de décrire le fonctionnement et la matérialisation des émotions narratives ; d'autre part, que le vocabulaire que j'ai introduit est opérationnel pour les analyser.

À l'issue de la partie pratique de cette thèse, l'Interlude III, « Literature and Empathy, from Formulation to Reception » a fait office de coda, visant à aborder l'un des défis majeurs de mon projet—et plus largement de l'étude des émotions narratives : l'impossibilité de les décrire sans faire appel à un « lecteur implicite », c'est-à-dire sans recourir à une forme de subjectivité, même construite. Pour relever ce défi, j'ai conclu en suggérant que la *théorie de la réponse esthétique* d'Iser (1978), issue de la phénoménologie herméneutique, constitue, selon moi, l'approche la plus pertinente pour étudier la réception des émotions narratives.

Je reconnais cependant que la position problématique de la subjectivité dans une sémantique des émotions narratives n'est qu'une des nombreuses limites de mon projet. En réalité, je considère que les conclusions précédemment exposées représentent les

résultats d'un travail préliminaire. En ce sens, l'usage de l'adverbe « vers » dans mon titre ne relève pas d'un simple geste de modestie, mais décrit effectivement une recherche en devenir, dont j'espère avoir posé quelques fondations solides. Avant tout, j'ai pleinement conscience que mon étude ne couvre pas toutes les formes d'empathie extrême. Comme je l'ai expliqué dans cette thèse, j'ai choisi une analyse approfondie d'un corpus restreint plutôt qu'un élargissement de l'échantillon au détriment de la complexité émotionnelle des œuvres. Par conséquent, la discussion sur la construction formelle de l'empathie extrême demeure incomplète et nécessite l'étude d'autres romans pour parvenir à des conclusions définitives. De même, j'ai voulu montrer, à travers deux études de cas, qu'une sémantique et une narratologie des émotions narratives sont possibles. Je suis néanmoins consciente que ce projet devra s'élargir à l'analyse d'autres émotions fictionnelles, issues de divers mondes fictionnels et de leurs systèmes *parasociaux* correspondants, pour démontrer pleinement sa fonctionnalité potentielle. En raison des limites de ce travail et de sa nature interdisciplinaire, plusieurs pistes d'applications futures ont émergé au cours de son élaboration, et pourraient, selon moi, contribuer à redonner aux émotions narratives la place qu'elles méritent dans la théorie littéraire.

Premièrement, je suis convaincue que le modèle sémantique et la taxonomie proposés dans le Bloc II pourraient être étendus à d'autres manifestations de l'empathie. À ce titre, il me semblerait particulièrement intéressant d'explorer la construction formelle d'autres formes « complexes » d'empathie narrative, notamment celles dirigées vers des personnages dont l'identité culturelle—en raison du genre, de la religion ou de l'origine—se situe hors de la « zone de confort » du lecteur/lectrice. Dans le même esprit, j'aimerais appliquer le modèle de recherche proposé dans cette thèse à d'autres émotions narratives, telles que l'anxiété—brièvement abordée dans le domaine cinématographique par Ngai (2005)—ou la dépression, brillamment représentée, par exemple, dans *My Year*

of Rest and Relaxation d'Ottessa Moshfegh (2018) ou dans *Brood* de Jackie Polzin (2022). En ce sens, un approfondissement des interactions entre narratologie et émotions narratives—comme l'étude du lien entre anxiété, tristesse et *rythme* narratif—pourrait s'avérer particulièrement fécond.

Deuxièmement, dans la continuité de cette réflexion, je considère que le rôle des émotions dans la construction du monde fictionnel constitue un champ de recherche prometteur. Par exemple, il serait stimulant d'examiner l'intervention des émotions dans des fonctions sémantiques spécifiques, aussi bien extensionnelles qu'intensionnelles, telles que l'authentification ou la saturation, afin de comprendre comment les émotions modifient ces processus et de mettre en lumière le rôle central des univers mentaux et émotionnels des personnages dans le récit.

Troisièmement, bien que ma thèse ne porte pas directement sur les études de genre, le développement d'une théorie et d'une analyse des émotions narratives pourrait être bénéfique au féminisme littéraire, en particulier à la lumière des tendances actuelles de l'autofiction, qui témoignent d'une forte tendance à la narrativisation de l'émotion. Explorer la relation entre émotions et *voix* narrative/protagoniste dans des récits autofictionnels, ainsi que leur influence directe sur le *ton esthétique* de l'œuvre, pourrait, à mon sens, enrichir considérablement le discours féministe en littérature.

Quatrièmement, dans le prolongement de ce point, le *ton esthétique*—que j'ai abordé dans cette thèse—me semble être un autre élément qui mérite une attention approfondie. Au-delà de la question encore non résolue de savoir s'il est possible d'identifier une régularité dans sa création et dans son lien avec les éléments spatio-temporels, je m'intéresse particulièrement à sa relation directe avec ce que j'ai appelé l'*impression émotionnelle* du lecteur/lectrice. Quelle est l'incidence de cette *impression* sur la réception globale d'un roman ? Comment se relie-t-elle aux émotions *inter-* et *intra-*

mondiales ? Ces questions m'ont accompagnée tout au long de ma recherche, mais, pour des raisons de concision et parce qu'elles ne s'inscrivaient pas directement dans mes objectifs, elles n'ont pas été traitées ici.

Enfin, influencée par le groupe de recherche "(Un)Housing: Dwellings, Materiality, and the Self in American Literature", dirigé par les Drs Rodrigo Andrés et Cristina Alsina Rísquez, un autre axe d'exploration est apparu au cours de mon travail : celui du rapport entre l'absence de foyer—ou le mode de vie « nomade »—et l'émotivité *inter-mondiale* des personnages. Dans le cas de Perry Smith (*In Cold Blood*) comme de Max Aue (*Les Bienveillantes*), le récit semble suggérer un lien entre les tourments intérieurs des protagonistes et l'absence, durant l'enfance, d'un « foyer » stable. Tous deux portent en eux le traumatisme non seulement d'une famille brisée, mais aussi de la perte du foyer en tant qu'espace personnel, lieu de refuge et de retour. Étant donné l'importance historique du nomadisme dans la culture américaine, de ses origines à aujourd'hui, et l'impact que ce mode de vie a pu avoir sur l'éthos communautaire et individuel, ce sujet représente, à mon sens, une problématique littéraire et culturelle particulièrement riche.

Le présent parcours vers une sémantique des émotions fictionnelles a commencé par un tableau. Une inclination personnelle vers les narrations symétriques m'invite à clore ce travail de la même manière. Je pense, en particulier, à une toile que j'ai vue au Musée d'Orsay durant mon séjour doctoral : « Le remords » de Louis Baader.[252] Sa présence ici n'a rien d'un hasard : son sujet renvoie directement à ce qui, comme nous l'avons vu, constitue l'hypertexte principal des *Bienveillantes : l'Orestie*. Dans « Le remords », Baader représente le moment précis où les Furies—les Érinyes—forcent

[252] Figure 12 du Appendix II.

Oreste à affronter ses crimes. Le protagoniste immoral est un prisonnier accusé de matricide, symbolisé par les chaînes qui le lient au cadavre de sa mère, gisant aux côtés de celui de son beau-père, Égisthe. Le lien avec le roman de Littell m'a paru évident. Pourtant, à chaque fois que je revoyais mentalement l'image du tableau, celle-ci apparaissait de plus en plus non seulement comme une représentation d'Oreste, voire de Max Aue, mais comme une allégorie de l'expérience littéraire de l'empathie extrême.

Comme cela arrive souvent chez les chercheurs, cette association subjective s'est peu à peu imposée à moi avec une clarté croissante, jusqu'à devenir une vérité personnelle qu'il me fallait justifier. Lors de mes deux autres visites au Musée d'Orsay, je suis retournée devant l'huile sur toile de Baader, à la recherche de signes secrets, d'indices muets que le tableau me parlait—de ma recherche, de cette expérience indicible qu'est l'empathie extrême. L'impression ressentie devant la toile n'était pas sans rappeler celle provoquée par la lecture de Littell ou Capote. Le dynamisme de la scène évoquait à mes yeux le chaos, l'angoisse, l'état d'urgence émotionnel présent dans les récits analysés. Et pourtant, à chaque nouvelle contemplation, je voyais davantage.

Dans le tableau, Oreste détourne le regard de ses péchés passés, comme si fixer les deux cadavres le condamnait à l'Enfer pour l'éternité. Mais, tel Orphée, l'Oreste de Baader ne peut s'empêcher de se retourner. Comme Perry, Aue et les autres personnages criminels étudiés ici, le héros grec tente de fuir son passé, mais celui-ci l'enchaîne avec une force émotionnelle plus lourde que le métal. Comme dans le roman de Littell, nous, les lecteurs et lectrices, sommes figurés par les quatre Érinyes. Contrairement à d'autres représentations, comme celle de Bouguereau dans *Oreste poursuivi par les Furies,*[253]

[253] Figure 13 du Appendix II.

dans *Le remords*, les quatre divinités, bien que partageant un même rôle et une même situation, adoptent des postures très différentes.

La Furie de gauche, dans un geste réfléchi, tient un miroir qu'elle dirige vers le visage du criminel, tout en désignant les cadavres d'un doigt accusateur, l'incitant à réfléchir à ses actes et à l'image qu'il a de lui-même. La divinité centrale, bouleversée, lève les bras au ciel. À sa droite, une autre Furie fixe les cadavres sans ciller, comme si, face à cette horreur, elle faisait sienne la position d'Aue dans *Les bienveillantes* : « à la malheur, il faut s'y confronter […] fermer les yeux, ce n'est jamais une réponse » (81). Cette Furie brandit un poing d'indignation, tandis que l'autre bras, tendu vers le cadavre de Clytemnestre, le désigne avec fermeté, exhortant son meurtrier. Elle ne détourne pas le regard, et ne veut pas que le coupable le fasse non plus. Enfin, la dernière des Furies semble tendre le bras vers sa compagne, comme pour adoucir le geste accusateur. Ce que j'ai vu alors—et que je ne peux plus oublier— c'est que chacune de ces postures reflète une réaction possible du lectorat face à la représentation du Mal en littérature. Toutes semblent choquées, prêtes à juger, mais aucune ne réagit de la même manière : la stupeur se teinte de colère, d'horreur, de fascination ou de réflexion selon les figures.

Peut-être que la dernière des Furies, par son geste hésitant, tente d'éviter un jugement qui, à l'image du crime d'Oreste, serait dicté par la seule vengeance ou l'irrationnel ? Peut-être qu'Athéna agit déjà sur elle, la métamorphosant en bienveillante, plus empathique que vengeresse ? Si tel est le cas, sa réaction n'est pas plus juste que celle de ses consœurs, car aucune des réponses émotionnelles—pas plus que celles des lecteurs/lectrices—n'est plus correcte qu'une autre. Mon interprétation de cette peinture—influencée davantage, sans doute, par mes filtres personnels que par l'image elle-même—n'est ni « juste » ni « fausse ». Dans mon imaginaire, *Le remords* a fini par signifier ce que j'avais besoin qu'il signifie, transmettre ce que j'avais besoin de ressentir,

et me dire ce que j'avais besoin d'entendre : « Tu as raison. Dans ta recherche, dans ton regard sur moi, tu as raison. Car face à un tableau, face à un livre, tu ne peux pas te tromper, du moins pas dans ce que tu ressens ».

En matière d'émotions narratives, les lecteurs et les lectrices ne se trompent jamais. Il leur suffit de regarder, lire et ressentir avec les personnages. C'est cela, la grande liberté émotionnelle que permettent l'art et la littérature : si nous ressentons quelque chose, cela devient vrai. Mon objectif, à travers ces pages, a été de rendre justice à cette liberté.

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GLOSSARY

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

- ***Transitive* emotions**: Also called "emotional responses" (Carroll 2011; Eisenberg 2005; Keen 2007) or "other-oriented" emotions (Coplan & Goldie xxxiv), *transitive* emotions are those that always require an "object" to occur. Unlike intransitive emotions, which can be self-contained, transitive emotions depend on an external stimulus to arise. This category includes emotions such as envy, jealousy, and pity, which require an external trigger. The most prominent examples of t*ransitive* emotions are sympathy, empathy, and compassion, whose intensity and nature are shaped by the state of another individual. In these cases, the emotional response is more closely tied to the circumstances of the "other" than to the personal experience of the one feeling the emotion.

- ***intra-world interactions*:** intersubjective encounters ocurring between two or more fictional characters that inhabit the fictional world of the text.

- ***inter-world interactions:*** intersubjective encounters ocurring reader(s) and fictional character(s).

- ***intra-world emotions:*** *Intra-world emotions* refer to the narrative emotions conceived by the author of the text, which appear *inside* the fictional world and have an impact on its dynamics. They are elementary building blocks of fiction and resultingly, they are organized by the extensional operations of selection and of formation, and their meaning is dependent from intensional operations of

authentication and the saturation function. Depending on their target, *intra-world* emotions can be *individual* or *social.* Besides, *emotional tone* also belongs to this category of narrative emotions.

- ***individual intra-world emotions***: a sub-category of *intra-world* emotions that encompasses the emotional states felt by one fictional person, in a way that they do not involve more than one subjectivity in a direct way. *Individual intra-world emotions* can be particular —responses to a specific object or event—or abstract —which tinge the whole world of the sufferer.

- ***social intra-world emotions***: a sub-category of *intra-world* that includes those in-text emotions that imply some form of intersubjectivity, that is, emotional responses from one (or multiple) fictional person towards other (or multiple others). This category, then, encompasses all the emotional connections that relate characters among themselves.

- ***Emotional tone:*** a specific type of *intra-word* emotion which designates the overall emotional mood transmitted by the fictional world as a whole. Emotional *tone* does not refer to the ensemble of emotions that appear in the plot, but rather to an overall emotion that covers the texture of the fictional world. Hence, the emotional *tone* of a narrative may coincide with its *intra-world emotions* or not, but that certainly influences the reader's response to the text.

- ***Inter-world emotions*:** the term *inter-world emotions* alludes to narrative emotions that are not native to the fictional text but arise in the readership as a response to it. Whereas *intra-world emotions* are conceived as part of the building blocks of the text, and semiotically transmitted through narrative, *inter-world emotions* appear during the act of reading. These emotional reactions are elicited by the formal devices of the text and determined by the circumstances of each reader, in a way that each reading act gives place to a unique inter-world "semiotic encounter" and to a particular combination of *inter-world emotions*. We can distinguish three types of depending on their object: *concrete inter-world emotions, parasocial emotions* or *emotional impression.*

- ***Concrete inter-world emotions**:* a type of *inter-world emotions* that integrates all the emotional responses of a reader towards a specific element of the fictional world. For instance, a single event, a plot-twist, a house, or a description of a landscape.

- ***Parasocial emotions*:** a type of *inter-world emotions* that arise within the framework of the relationship established between the reader and a fictitious person, as a response to the subjectivity of the latter. Although *parasocial emotions* rely largely on the reader's *Weltanschauung,* experiences, personal character preferences and other subjective factors, these emotions can be boosted and directed via narratological resources. In fact, they are influenced by both *individual* and *social intra-world emotions.*

- ***Emotional impression*:** refers to the possible set of emotions that the reader experiences towards the narrative as a macro-structure, considering all its aspects. It concerns the fictional world in its entirety, and thus, it can be understood as *inter-world*, counterpart of emotional *tone*. As it originates in the reader, *emotional impression* relies heavily upon the readership's actual emotional state, their tastes, their prior personal or reading experiences, and so on.

- ***Empathy builders:*** identifying the narratological elements within the novels that, in my view, encourage an empathetic response towards their criminal protagonists. I have termed these devices "empathy builders". Inspired by Doležel's notion that "fictional worlds of literature are constructs of textual activity" ("Possible Worlds" 489), the concept of "empathy builders" intends to underscore the material construction of narrative emotions through formal aspects. To clearly identify each of these empathy-triggering devices within the context of their respective fictional worlds, I present one narratological analysis per novel.
- ***intradiegetic empathy:*** an *intra-world* emotion by which a character experiences empathy for another inhabitant of its fictional world.

APPENDIX I: TRANSLATIONS

INTRODUCTION

[1] “Never again, I will never again serve a lord who can die on me.” (my translation)

BLOCK I. EMPATHY AND EXTREME EMPATHY

[1] “to relocate at the center of the critical, theoretical, and aesthetic debate the issue of art’s telluric, subversive, anti-hierarchical power, while also being sublime and cathartic.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 13) (my translation)

[2] “Our work situates itself within this *new wave* of *critical* reflection on empathy, which aims at highlighting its limitations. However, rather than discrediting or rejecting the notion of empathy, we will focus on one of its specific expressions, negative empathy, in an attempt to achieve a broader and more nuanced understanding of empathic phenomena, and to demonstrate how the concept of empathy, in general, remains crucial for aesthetics and for the *Humanities*.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 11) (my translation)

[3] “negative empathy is an aesthetic experience consisting of a *cathartic empathy* with characters, figures, performances, objects, musical compositions, buildings, and spaces that are *negatively connoted and disturbingly seductive*, or that evoke a *destabilizing primal violence*. This violence, in turn, has the power to trigger a deep *empathic anguish* in the viewer of the artwork, to insistently prompt them to engage in *moral reflection*, and to urge them to *take an ethical stance* [...] negative empathy can also be characterized as

an aesthetic experience that is variably *open or neutral* in terms of agency […] or that may remain confined to the inner life of the empathizer." (Ercolino & Fusillo 70-71) (my translation)

[4] "empathic relation that we establish with aesthetic objects." (Ercolino & Fusillo 104) (my translation)

[5] "characters, figures, performances, objects, musical compositions, buildings, and spaces." (Ercolino & Fusillo 70) (my translation)

[6] "Readers of novels […] can release negative emotions or repressed aggressive impulses—whether self-destructive or socially unacceptable—by empathizing with characters who suffer." (Ercolino & Fusillo 70) (my translation)

[7] "a curious affinity between literature and madness." (Rabinow, Paul & Nikolas Rose, eds. *The essential Foucault: selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954-1954*. The New Press, 2003)

INTERLUDE I: LITERATURE AND EMPATHY, FROM THEORY TO CONFIGURATION

[1] "A fundamental component, we could say structural." (Ercolino & Fusillo 115) (my translation)

[2] "It is perhaps no coincidence that the birth of cinema and the critical debate on empathy are contemporaneous." (Ercolino & Fusillo 288) (my translation)

[3] "Images are capable of provoking, of making empathy arise, of moving one to compassion to the point of tears, of uplifting, degrading, of reactivating, preserving,

contradicting, or deceiving memory, of urging action or paralyzing, due to the terror they can induce. Images, in fact, possess an *agency*." (Ercolino & Fusillo 188) (my translation)

[4] "Storytelling can provide the viewer with much information about the objects and individuals it represents, such as the movements and actions of a character and various details about the situations they experience that require them to act. In narrative art forms, complex historical-social and motivational segments can be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy, offering a well-defined context […]" (Ercolino & Fusillo 56) (my translation)

[5] "the ability of aesthetic objects in general to manipulate our attention, leading us to focus more on the seductive aspects of an immoral character." (Ercolino & Fusillo 59) (my translation)

[6] "a more or less edifying discourse at the service of categorical and Manichean international agendas of the common good." (Ercolino & Fusillo 12) (my translation)

[7] "novels describe suffering, hardly ever satisfaction. The virtue of happiness is ultimately its rarity." (Bataille 121) (Hamilton, Alister, trans. *Literature and Evil*, by Georges Bataille. Penguin Modern Classics, 2012.)

[8] "only literature could reveal the process of breaking the law […] independently of the necessity to create order." (Bataille 17) (Hamilton, Alister, trans.)

[9] "It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time." (Rockhill, Gabriel, trans. ed. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible* by Jacques Rancière. Bloomsbury, 2004)

[10] “these derangements, these lacerations.” (Bataille 55) (Hamilton, Alister, trans.)

[11] “a profound and *cathartic* moral reflection on the limits of the human.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 113) (my translation)

[12] “I believe that the Evil—an acute form of Evil—[…] has a sovereign value for us. But this concept does not exclude morality: on the contrary, it demands a ‘hypermorality’.” (Bataille 3) (Hamilton, Alister, trans.)

[13] “one of the most fascinating elements of *Othello.*” (Ercolino & Fusillo 87) (my translation)

[14] “Morality is like a ladder: the lower we fall on it, the greater the technical demand of the novel we tell ourselves to try to excuse ourselves.” (Luque 96) (my translation)

BLOCK II. MIMESIS. EMOTIONS AS NARRATIVE BUILDING BLOCKS

[1] “the imaginary discourse of an imaginary speaker.” (*La ficción narrativa* 36) (my translation)

[2] “The sentences of a novel are full, complete, and serious acts of language, effective and genuine, but they are merely imaginary and, consequently, they are not acts of the novel’s author. The author of a novel, qua talis, neither speaks nor pretends to speak. Nor does he write, if by writing we mean communicating or carrying out his acts of language in written form […] The fundamental rule of the novelistic institution is to accept a fictional discourse […] But this discourse belongs to an ‘other,’ who is not strictly the author.” (*La ficción narrativa* 66) (my translation)

[3] “The narrator’s assertions about the particularities of the depicted fictional world are unconditionally true. The characters’ assertions, if they make sense, are either true or false, just like those of all human beings.” (*La ficción narrativa* 39) (my translation)

[4] “As the theoretical and ideological prohibition—rooted in a broadly formalist tradition—against the widespread academic practice of considering literary characters as mere fictive entities has fallen away, in recent years their importance has been rediscovered both in terms of analyzing certain formal aspects of texts and in understanding the axiological framework of works, as well as the issues surrounding reader involvement and *agency*.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 41) (my translation)

[5] “a certain emotive tone, a characteristic *Stimmung* of the artwork.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 68) (my translation)

[6] “its own peculiar ‘character [*Charakter*]’, a unique *Stimmung,* that is not determined by the observer’s psychic projection.” (qtd. Ercolino & Fusillo 204) (my translation)

[7] “whenever literature really appears” the participants “are cancelled out simultaneously: they extinguish each other mutually, until the Word alone remains.” (qtd. Bataille 162) (Hamilton, Alister, trans.)

[8] “like an essential protective mechanism against particularly overwhelming negative emotions.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 49) (my translation)

[9] “in the aesthetic domain, the very barrier of morality might, instead, set (almost) *no limit* on our empathic response.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 54) (my translation)

[10] “The amount of time we ‘spend’ with Nikolaj Stravrogin while reading Dostoevsky’s *Demons* is incomparably greater than the time we would presumably spend with a real criminal or an immoral individual. The negative empathy one might feel for the former is

hardly something we would experience for the latter." (Ercolino & Fusillo 57) (my translation)

BLOCK III. NARRATOLOGY OF EMOTIONS. THE CASE OF EXTREME EMPATHY

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

[1] "The fact that Capote consistently claimed to faithfully describe the events that took place shifted critical attention toward a comparative investigation with reality, somewhat sidelining the literary and artistic value of his works." (Ortells, *Truman Capote: Un camaleón ante el espejo* 22) (my translation)

[2] "Capote aimed to create […] the *illusion* of simply transposing into writing an external reality, unmediated by any agent." (Ortells, *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 109, my emphasis) (my translation)

[3] "does not eliminate the author's perspective and judgment on the story being told, but rather renders them tacit and subtle; instead of expressing his opinion openly, Capote does so implicitly through the act of selecting, shaping, and presenting the material of the story." (Chillón 218) (my translation)

[4] "Although presenting a multiplicity of viewpoints is one of the strategies the author employs to create the illusion of neutrality, in most cases, we are not given different versions of the same incident. Instead, various individuals recount the multiple phases that make up a particular event." (Ortells, *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 110) (my translation)

[5] “no one took the trouble to set his mind on the right road.” (Foucault 40) (Jellinek, Frank, trans. I, *Pierre Riviere, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century* by Michel Foucault. Nebraska UP, 1982.)

[6] “All his life he had witnessed his parents’ domestic quarrels.” (Foucault, *Moi, Pierre Rivière* 82) (Jellinek, Frank, trans.)

[7] “I always had ideas about learning things and bettering myself.” (Foucault 104) (Jellinek, Frank, trans.)

[8] “As the novel progresses, Dick gradually becomes an increasingly hateful character, while Perry undergoes the opposite transformation.” (González de la Aleja 85) (my translation)

[9] “two very different worlds, doomed to never understand each other.” (González de la Aleja 81) (my translation)

[10] “the victim of a legal mechanism that will ultimately kill him.” (González de la Aleja 89) (my translation)

[11] “according to the class to which individuals belong, will lead them to power or to prison.” (Foucault 289) (Sheridan, Alan, trans. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, by Michel Foucault. Vintage, 1991)

[12] “Thus, tracing the history of madness is a way of recounting the articulation of our modernity—that division which organizes reality into two complementary halves, one of which, having until now been the absolute limit of the other, is beginning to be understood as its hidden foundation.” (Morey 69) (my translation)

[13] “the benefits gained from the construction of a criminal-object are numerous, all aiming to maintain an asymmetrical class balance: the Bourgeois Order.” (Morey 373) (my translation)

[14] “In Classicism, the voice of the madman is condemned to confinement as the madness-truth binary emerges, reducing it to silence. Through confinement in Classicism, madness is constructed as ‘the other’, that which denies the subject the very possibility of thought.” (Morey 78) (my translation)

[15] “two complementary halves” (Morey 69) (my translation)

[16] “All of Capote’s characters appear to be trapped by fate in one way or another.” (González de la Aleja 86) (my translation)

[17] “it is not about opposing Nancy and Perry but rather the opposite: to unite them as victims of the same tragedy, as if fate had inevitably crossed their paths, leading to the outcome the reader already knows.” (González de la Aleja 75) (my translation)

[18] “The attack on the Clutters is an attack on the heart of America, not only geographically but also socially. […] The underlying theme of the entire work, therefore, is the violation of paradise by external forces and the questioning of the norms that govern that community.” (Ortells, *Ficción y no-ficción* 81) (my translation)

[19] “the result of a social determinism that irreversibly condemns him to an underworld of misunderstanding, violence, and madness.” (Ortells, *Ficción y no-ficción* 82) (my translation)

[20] “The man who kills you is not free not to kill you. It is society or, to be more precise, bad social organization that is responsible.” (Foucault 287) (Sheridan, Alan, trans. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, by Michel Foucault. Vintage, 1991)

[21] “a demonstration of the cycle of revenge.” (Ortells, *Ficción y no-ficción* 82) (my translation)

[22] “While the confrontation between good and evil, so characteristic of American literature as a reflection of the duality present in the world, persists in both Capote’s early narratives and *In Cold Blood*, the conclusions he seems to reach in this work challenge the traditional Manichean divide.” (Ortells, *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 32) (my translation)

[23] “The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance.” (Girard 15) (Gregory, Patrick, trans. *Violence and the Sacred* by René Girard. John Hopkins UP, 1977.)

[24] “The novel contains a harsh critique of the American judicial system, questioning a practice that proves to be inequitable.” (Ortells, *Truman Capote, un camaleón ante el espejo* 279) (my translation)

[25] “a social possession” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 236) (Sheridan, Alan, trans.)

[26] “Punishment, if I may so put it, should strike the soul rather than the body.” (Mably, 326) (qtd. in Sheridan, Alan, trans. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, by Michel Foucault. Vintage, 1991)

[27] “‘non-corporal’ penality” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 11) (Sheridan, Alan, trans.)

[28] “what gives rise to modern penal practices.” (Morey 322) (my translation)

[29] “judgement is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity.” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 17) (Sheridan, Alan, trans.)

[30] “Not what the subject *has done* but what they *could potentially do*.” (Jordana 42) (my translation)

[31] “Killing and dying are the only meaningful acts allowed to these voiceless people that have always excluded from all discourse […] In this work, it is no longer the magistrate—the delegate of power, the Same—who speaks on behalf of that terrible and distant Other; rather, it is the criminal himself, the Madman, who speaks up.” (Morey 302, my emphasis) (my translation)

[32] “the distribution of the sensible” […] delimitates what is visible and invisible.” (Rancière xiii) (Rockhill, Gabriel, trans.)

3.2 “LE VRAI DANGER POUR L’HUMANITÉ” : JONATHAN LITTELL’S *LES BIENVEILLANTES*

[1] “Those who kill are humans, just like those who are killed, that’s what’s terrible.” (Mandell, Charlotte, trans. *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell. Harper Collins Publishers, 2009, 24)

[2] “And that is how the bourgeoisie finally made me one of its own […] rather reluctantly.” (Littell 11-12) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[3] “I have nothing to justify” […] If after all these years I’ve made up my mind to write, it’s to set the record straight for myself, not for you.” (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[4] “the traditional epic distance” (Aínsa 45) (my translation)

[5] “The transgeneric, the hybrid, the fragmentary, the ambivalent, the self-reflexive, the ironic, erasing the boundaries between the real and the fictional, between truth and simulacrum, between play and rigorous investigation.” (Quílez 69) (my translation)

[6] “What makes a novel realistic is using a realistic technique, not having some layer of reality as its subject or setting.” (Luque 62) (my translation)

[7] “Realism is the sacrifice of the perfection of the plot in favor of the profusion of details.” (Rancière 148) (my translation)

[8] “One of the most common narrative techniques to foster identification with a character” […] “to establish a distressing empathetic relationship with Aue’s ‘infamous narrator’; a negative empathetic relationship that the reader will often try to resist but will just as often end up yielding to.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 104) (my translation)

[9] “And if you’re not convinced of this, don’t bother to read any further. You’ll understand nothing and you’ll get angry, with little profit for you or for me.” (Littell 21) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[10] “Oh my human brothers, let me tell you how it happened” [...] “And also, this concerns you: you’ll see that this concerns you.” (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[11] “the ordinary men that make up the State.” (Littell 21) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[12] “you might be luckier than I, but you’re not a better person.” (Littell 20) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[13] “There was a lot of talk, after the war, in trying to explain what had happened, about inhumanity. But I am sorry, there is no such thing as inhumanity. There is only humanity and more humanity.” (Littell 589) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[14] “The real danger for mankind is me, is you.” (Littell 21) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[15] “I am a man like other men, I am a man like you. I tell you I am just like you!” (Littell 24) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[16] “in the history of provocative appeals to the reader in Western literature” (Ercolino & Fusillo 101) (my translation)

[17] “Is it possible that I thought about all this at the time? Didn’t such ideas come to me later on, when the end was approaching, or even later, when it was already all over?” (Littell 341) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[18] “I did not tell all of this to Partenau: but I am telling it to you.” (Littell 192) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[19] “you have an irrevocable power, that of closing this book and throwing it in the trash.” (Littell 783) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[20] “You must be thinking: Ah, finally this story is over. But no, it still goes on.” (Littell 913) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[21] “The narrative thus operates on the withholding and preservation of the secret […] and the readers are in on the secret.” […] “Therefore, for the readers to keep going, it is essential for them to be the narrator’s ‘human brothers,’ to feel a sense of closeness and solidarity with him […]” (Roussell 156) (my translation)

[22] “For instance, if you are an American, consider your little Vietnam adventure, which so traumatized your fellow citizens. You lost 50,000 troops there in 10 years: that’s the equivalent of a little less than 3 days and 2 hours’ worth of dead on the Eastern Front, or of some 13 days, 21 hours, and 25 minutes’ worth of dead Jews. I obviously am not including the Vietnamese dead; since you never speak of them, in your books or TV programs, they must not count for much to you. Yet you killed 40 of them for every single

one of your own dead, a fine effort even compared to our own, and one that certainly speaks for the value of technical progress." (Littell 16) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[23] "A trait that consistently characterizes literary characters capable of eliciting negative empathy." (Ercolino & Fusillo 93) (my translation)

[24] "Forgive me for wearying you with such sordid details: but I do have a right to complain a little. And if you can't bear this you'd better stop right here." (Littell 5) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[25] "It is now, friendly reader, that you must prepare your heart and mind for the most impure story that has ever been told since the world began, a similar book not existing either amongst the ancients or the moderns. Imagine that every honest pleasure –or any pleasure permitted by that beast which you always talk of, though you are not acquainted with it, and which you call nature– imagine, I say, that these pleasures will be deliberately excluded from this collection and that if you find them by any chance it will only be because they are accompanied by some crime or colored by some infamy." (qtd. in Bataille 117) (Hamilton, Alister, trans.)

[26] "even though I'm addressing you, it's not for you that I am writing." (Littell 8) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[27] "Once again, let us be clear: I am not trying to say I am not guilty of this or that." (Littell 20) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[28] "I do not regret anything: I did my work, that's all." (Littell 5) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[29] "Don't think I am trying to convince you of anything." (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[30] “Throughout the entire narrative, Aue repeatedly declares that he does not wish to justify himself or seek the reader’s complicity […] and yet, his discourse often sounds, especially in the first section of the novel, *Toccata*, like a subtle self-apology.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 100) (my translation)

[31] “let me tell you how it happened.” (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[33]“[…] myself and my twin sister, Una, our gaze locked and our hands touching without anyone noticing, and our love even vaster and more endless than that blue sea or the bitterness and pain of the wounded years, a solar splendor, a voluntary abyss.” (Littell 403-404) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[34] “And then one day, as I said, we were caught. There were endless scenes, my mother called me a pig and a degenerate, Moreau cried, and it was the end of all that is beautiful.” (Littell 201) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[35] “[…] and explained to her in a few words what had happened. She had only one question, frantic, panic-stricken: ‘And the twins? Where are the twins?’” (Littell 533) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[36] “That is what I remembered, yet it seems that things didn’t happen that way.” (Littell 871) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[37] “Existential malaise”, which is “the central void” in his memoirs. (Ferdjani 273) (my translation)

[38] “I had the feeling that the hole in my forehead had opened up a third eye, a pineal eye, one not turned to the sun, not capable of contemplating the blinding light of the sun, but directed at the darkness, gifted with the power of looking at the bare face of death, and of grasping this face behind each face of flesh and blood, beneath the smiles, through

the palest, healthiest skin, the most laughing eyes. The disaster was already there and they didn't realize it, since the disaster is the very idea of the disaster to come, which ruins everything long before term." (Littell 443) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[39] "black hole of the mind" (Littell 631) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[40] "I do not regret anything" (Littell 5) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[41] "I am not talking about remorse, or about guilt. *These too exist, no doubt, I don't want to deny it* […]" (Littell 7, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[42] "Despite the discourse held by the narrator-writer at the beginning of the novel, the guilt underlying the character's confessions weaves an impossible project: writing to repair the loss." (Delorme 45) (my translation)

[43] "If you ever managed to make me cry, my tears would sear your face." (Littell 16) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[44] "for me, as for most people, war and murder are a question, a question without an answer, for when you cry out in the night, no one answers." (Littell 24) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[45] "For Aue, the war has a demonic dimension, and he is horrified when they are told they must kill all the Jews, including women and children." (Ferdjani 273) (my translation)

[46] "Like a demonic Dante in this warrior's hell" (Tame 214) (my translation)

[47] "He is not so much a character as a voice, a tone, a gaze." (Ferdjani 264) (my translation)

[48] “it was as if a film camera were fixed just above me, and I was at once this camera, the man it was filming, and the man who was then studying the film. Sometimes that astonished me, and often, at night, I couldn’t sleep; I stared at the ceiling; the lens didn’t leave me in peace. But the answer to my question kept slipping through my fingers.” (Littell 107) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[49] “I consider that watching involves my responsibility as much as doing.” (Littell 482) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[50] “I can in all honesty say that 1 had doubts about our methods: I had trouble grasping their logic.” (Littell 80) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[51] “an immense, boundless rage” […] “senseless human waste I was filled with.” (Littell 130) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[52] “we were killing a lot of people. That seemed atrocious to me, even if it was inevitable and necessary.” (Littell 81) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[53] “‘It’s necessary, you understand? Human suffering mustn’t count for anything in all this.’ — ‘Yes, but still it does count for something.’ This was what I couldn’t manage to grasp: the yawning gap, the ab¬ solute contradiction between the ease with which one can kill and the huge difficulty there must be in dying. For us, it was another dirty day’s work; for them, the end of everything.” (Littell 82-83) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[54] “The cold gaze of the objective” (De Tholozany 201) (my translation)

[55] “The abyss of horror *surpasses* the limits of understanding.” (Vargas Llosa 2006, my emphasis) (my translation)

[56] “Only the artifice of a dominated narrative will manage to partially convey the truth of the testimony.” (Semprún 25) (my translation)

[57] “Who, I wondered, will mourn all these killed Jews, all these Jewish children buried with open eyes under the rich black earth of the Ukraine, if their sisters and mothers are killed too? If they were all killed, no one would be left to mourn them […]” (Littell 115) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[58] “The first word of the Face is the ‘Thou shalt not kill’. It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I might be, but as a ‘first-person’, I am he who finds the resources to respond the call […] It is the presupposed in all human relationships.” (Cohen, Richard A., trans. *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo,* by Emmanuel Levinas. Duquesne UP, 1985, 89)

[59] “I too had grown attached to little Yakov.” (Littell 110) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[60] “‘Be gentle with her,’ 1 said to him stupidly.” (Littell 109) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[61] “a clear, luminous look” makes Max “burst into flames” (Littell 179) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[62] “my gaze met that of a beautiful young woman, almost naked but very elegant, calm, her eyes full of an immense sadness. […] I wanted with all my heart to bend over and brush the dirt and sweat off her forehead, caress her cheek and tell her that it was going to be all right, that everything would be fine, but instead 1 convulsively shot a bullet into her head.” (Littell 129-130) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[63] “That had been a mistake, *a sentimental naivete*; still it filled me with a great melancholy.” (Littell 147, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[64] “I was dizzy, I wanted to cry. […] I felt an insane rage.” (Littell 109) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[65] “now, the woods filled me with fear” (Littell 110) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[66] “For days on end I reflected on this strange scene […] she seemed fabulously beautiful to me, inhabiting death like an idol, Our-Lady-of-the-Snows. […] I always found her lying in my way, […] This lasted for weeks.” (Littell 179-180) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[67] “what right did we have to hang her, how could we hang this girl, and I sobbed endlessly, ravaged by her memory, my very own Our-Lady-of-the-Snows, it wasn’t remorse, I didn’t have remorse, I didn’t feel guilty, […] yet I understood what it meant to hang a girl.” (Littell 912) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[68] “Those who kill are humans, just like those who are killed, that’s what’s terrible.” (Littell 24) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[69] “the one who kills, kills above all his brother” (Ferdjani 266) (my translation)

[70] “I came to the conclusion that the SS guard doesn’t become violent or sadistic because he thinks the inmate is not a human being; on the contrary, his rage increases and turns into sadism when he sees that the inmate, far from being a subhuman as he was taught, is actually at bottom a man, like him, after all, and it’s this resistance, you see, that the guard finds unbearable, this silent persistence of the other, and so the guard beats him to try to make their shared humanity disappear.” (Littell 624) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[71] “I had only vomited once or twice, but often, after meals, I was seized with these unpleasant and exhausting retchings,” (Littell 143) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[72] “I was vomiting often now and felt I was getting a little sick; I had a fever, not enough to keep me in bed, but rather long shivers and a sensation of fragility, as if my skin were turning to crystal.” (Littell 176) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[73] “[…] I didn’t wipe myself, but jerked off standing in the service staircase, rubbing my shit-stained buttocks against the railing, the smell assaulting my nose and going to my head; and as I came, I almost fell down the stairs, I caught myself just in time, laughing, and looked at the traces of shit on the wood.” (Littell 910-911) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[74] “often, at night, I couldn’t sleep; […] I was dizzy, I wanted to cry.” (Littell 107-109) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[75] “Once again, an immense desire to weep overwhelmed me. That seized me often nowadays.” (Littell 386) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[76] “I imagined those neat, tidy boys or those young women with their discreet charm being gassed—thoughts that turned my stomach […] and for the first time in a long time I wanted to vomit, vomit my powerlessness, my sadness, my useless life.” (Littell 788-789) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[77] “A brief interruption while I go and vomit, then I’ll continue. That’s another one of mv numerous little afflictions […] It’s an old problem, I’ve had it since the war, since the fall of 1941, to be precise, it started in the Ukraine, in Kiev I think, or maybe Zhitomir.” (Littell 8) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[78] “As brutalized and habituated as they may have become, none of our men could kill a Jewish woman without thinking about his wife, his sister, or his mother, or kill a Jewish child without seeing his own children in front of him in the pit. Their reactions, their violence, their alcoholism, the nervous depressions, the suicides, my own sadness, *all that*

demonstrated that the other exists, exists as an other, as a human, and that no will, no ideology, no amount of stupidity or alcohol can break this bond, tenuous but indestructible. This is a fact, not an opinion." (Littell 147, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[79] "If I have described these meetings with Eichmann at such length, it's not because I remember them better than the others: but this little Obersturmbannfuhrer, in the meantime, has become a kind of celebrity […] he was certainly not *the enemy of mankind* described at Nuremberg […] nor was he an *incarnation of banal evil.*" (Littell 569, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[80] "I could now distinguish three different temperaments among my colleagues […] criminals who revealed their true nature thanks to the war. Then there were those who were disgusted by it and who killed out of duty, overcoming their repugnance, out of a love of order. Finally, there were those who regarded the Jews as animals and killed them the way a butcher slaughters a cow […] And what about me? *I couldn't identify with any of these three types*, […]" (Littell 107, my emphasis)

[81] "Our propaganda repeated over and over again that the Russians were Untermenschen, sub-humans; but I refused to believe that. I had interrogated captured officers, Commissars, and l saw that they too were men like us, men who wished only good, who loved their families and their country." (Littell 103) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[82] "How long, I wondered, before I was like him? The thought made me want to cry." (Littell 367) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[83] “He is not an orthodox fascist. That is also what interests us about him. He embodies ‘the problematic hero’, a heroic type of Georg Lukács, struggling with himself and with society.” (Tame 219) (my translation)

[84] “Authentic values in a world of conformity and convention.” (Sheridan, Alan, trans. *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, by Lucien Goldmann. Tavistock Publications, 1975, 1)

[85] “the story of a degraded search […], a search for authentic values in a world itself degraded.” (Goldmann 1) (Sheridan, Alan, trans.)

[86] “visceral, obscene anti-Semites” (Littell 241) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[87] “Killing without understanding why, without caring either […] that is what I didn’t understand.” (Littell 89) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[88] “You’re insane! Stop that at once!” I was trembling.” (Littell 243) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[89] “A man of convictions? Before, probably, I had been one, but now, where was the clarity of my convictions hidden away? I could glimpse these convictions, they were dancing gently around me: but if I tried to grasp one, it slipped between my fingers, like a nervous, powerful eel.” (Littell 476) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[90] “a vast indifference” (Littell 571) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[91] “For that is what total war means: there is not such thing as a civilian […] war, it is a collective phenomenon: genocide in its modern form is a process inflicted on the masses, by the masses, for the masses […] Just as, according to Marx, the worker is alienated from the product of his labor, in genocide or total war in its modern form the

perpetrator is alienated from the product of his actions." (Littell 18) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[92] "In the Ukraine or in the Caucasus, questions of this kind still concerned me, difficulties distressed me and 1 discussed them seriously, with the feeling that they were a vital issue. But that feeling seemed to have gotten lost. Where, when did that happen? In Stalingrad? Or afterward? […] the feeling that dominated me now was a vast indifference." (Littell 570-571) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[93] "A sudden burst of bitterness invaded me: so *this is what they've turned me into,* I said to myself, a man who can't see a forest without thinking about a mass grave." (Littell 702) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[94] "I felt like an empty shell, an automaton." (Littell 879) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[95] "Even when I was little, I liked to build things, when all my classmates just wanted to break them." (Littell 687) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[96] "a real moral play" (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[97] "The gate opened onto a little paved courtyard, surrounded by charming little whitewashed buildings; on the right, a second floor had been built over a shed, with a staircase outside; the library was there." (Littell 262) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[98] "There was a lot of talk, after the war, in trying to explain what had happened, about inhumanity […]" (Littell 589) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[99] "I hadn't blamed it right away on the disappearance of my father: that idea didn't come till later on, when she prostituted herself to that Moreau." (Littell 370) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[100] “I had turned out to be acutely allergic to her breast milk.” (Littell 370) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[101] “a nightmare that lasted many years and that, in a way, *still continues*.” (Littell 201, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[102] “Everything in that school was deformed and perverted.” (Littell 201) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[103] “Alas, Voss was dead, and I was alone again. (Littell 333)”/ “Then she hung up and I was alone again.” (Littell 498) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[104] “When I looked at girls, […] I said to myself: What’s the point? It’s not her and it never will be her. Better then for me to be her and all the others, me.” (Littell 203) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[105] “I thought about my life, about what relationship there could be between this life that I had lived […] and what was happening here. […] Ever since I was a child, I had been haunted by a passion for the absolute, for the overcoming of all limits; and now this passion had led me to the edge of the mass graves of the Ukraine. I had always wanted my thinking to be radical; and now the State, the nation had also chosen the radical and the absolute […] And if this radicalism was the radicalism of the abyss, and if the absolute turned out to be absolute evil, one still had to follow them to the end, with eyes wide open— of that at least I was utterly convinced.” (Littell 95-96) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[106] “The figures of the father and the mother are omnipresent throughout the novel, both in memories and in dreams.” (Roussel 163) (my translation)

[107] “‘You have matured. Your father would have been proud.’ These words *touched me to the quick*: ‘You think?’” (Littell 451, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[108] “through this despair images from my past rose like drowned men after a shipwreck, one by one, more and more frequently. Often they were pathetic memories.” (Littell 389) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[109] “in the end, the collective problem of the Germans was the same as my own; they too were struggling to extract themselves from a painful past, […] That was how they arrived at the most radical solution of them all: murder, the painful horror of murder. But was murder a solution?” (Littell 526) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[110] “Yes, you hate me, I know it, I can see it. You came in that uniform to tell me how much you hate me.” (Littell 521) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[111] “I’d hold a grenade right up against my heart and go out in a bright burst of joy.” (Littell 3) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[112] “any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture.” (‘Theory of the Text’ by Roland Barthes. *Untying the Text*, Young, Robert, ed. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981, 39).

[113] “I was sad but didn’t really know why. I felt all at once the entire weight of the past, of the pain of life and of inalterable memory, I remained alone with the dying hippopotamus, a few ostriches, and the corpses, alone with time and grief and the sorrow of remembering, the cruelty of my existence and of my death still to come. *The Kindly Ones were on to me*.” (Littell 975) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[114] “A means by which the former executioner would somehow manage to free himself from the memory demons that constantly pursue him.” (Delorme 37) (my translation)

[115] “Aue, the narrator created by Littell, asks his readers, like Villon, to show indulgence and compassion. He asks them not to judge but to understand.” (Ferdjani 263) (my translation)

[116] “Those who kill are humans, just like those who are killed, that’s what’s terrible.” (Littell 24) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[117] “is conceived as an ambiguous variation on the theme of the banality of evil.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 103) (my translation)

[118] “It is also, in the case in question, a process segmented according to the demands of industrial method. Just as, according to Marx, the worker is alienated from the product of his labor, in genocide or total war in its modern form the perpetrator is alienated from the product of his actions.” (Littell 18) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[119] “Another example, taken from the abundant historical literature rather than from my personal experience: the program for the destruction of severely handicapped and mentally ill Germans, called the “Euthanasia” or “T-4” program, set up two years before the “Final Solution.” Here, the patients, selected within the framework of a legal process, were welcomed in a building by professional nurses, who registered them and undressed them; doctors examined them and led them into a sealed room; a worker administered the gas; others cleaned up; a policeman wrote up the death certificate. Questioned after the war, each one of these people said: What, me, guilty? The nurse didn’t kill anyone, she only undressed and calmed the patients, ordinary tasks in her profession. The doctor didn’t kill anyone, either, he merely confirmed a diagnosis according to criteria established by higher authorities. […] The policeman was following his procedure, which is to record each death and certify that it has taken place without any violation of the laws in force. So who is guilty? Everyone, or no one?” (Littell 19) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[120] “What interests Littell is the bureaucratic aspect of the extermination process, analyzing the role of bureaucracy as an actor in the genocide.” (Ferdjani 269) (my translation)

[121] “The real danger for mankind is me, *is you*.” (Littell 21, my emphasis) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[122] “I am guilty, you’re not, fine. But you should be able to admit to yourselves that you might also have done what I did.” (Littell 20) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[123] “the war is never over.” (Littell 23) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

3.3 “FRÈRES HUMAINS QUI APRÈS NOUS VIVEZ”: NARRATIVES OF INMORALITY IN *IN COLD BLOOD* AND *LES BIENVEILLANTES*

[1] “The strength of the reader’s empathetic response seems to be partly dependent on the intensity of the psychological suffering expressed by the character with whom they empathize.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 82) (my translation)

[2] “However, empathizing with Cosette and empathizing with Humbert are two very *different* things. [...] Empathizing and suffering with Cosette poses no moral dilemma, and therefore no issue of allegiance, whereas doing so with Humbert does. Here, we are dealing with two distinct forms of empathetic suffering: that for Cosette arises from the establishment of a natural empathetic bond with her; that for Humbert stems from an *intense aesthetic experience, perpetually oscillating between trembling adherence and disdainful detachment.*’” (Ercolino & Fusillo 83) (my translation)

[3] “And here I was again, chosen (a strong term, I know, but I don’t see how I can say it any other way) by that atrocious story, drawn within the orbit of the man who had done *that*.” (Coverdale, Lisa, trans. *The Adversary* by Emmanuel Carrère. Penguin Random House, 2017, 25).

[4] “In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, negative empathy intersects with a series of related themes: dreams, the supernatural, hallucination, and the night as a symbol of the unconscious.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 148) (my translation)

[5] “In the initial phase of the play, we find monologues that elicit emotional engagement with Macbeth’s hesitation before committing the crime. However, as the drama progresses, the protagonist increasingly transforms into a bloodthirsty tyrant, and the identification gradually fades. *This is a common technique* that encapsulates the paradoxical nature of this aesthetic experience: the author initially evokes empathy for a negative character by revealing *their motivations, social and familial background, and inner conflict,* only to then push them to an extreme of wickedness that no longer allows for any form of emotional alignment.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 126, my emphasis) (my translation)

[6] “The length of the exposure to Aue contributes to the creation of an empathetic bond between him and the reader.” (Ercolino & Fusillo 105) (my translation)

[7] “The excess of things goes hand in hand with the excess of words.” (*Politique de la littérature* 148) (my translation)

[8] “The truck moved forward, the two men tried to keep their balance, then they fell over, one after the other, and swung back and forth several times. Kieper’s pants had fallen around his ankles; below his shirt, he was naked; horrified, I saw his engorged penis, still ejaculating.” (Littell 95) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

[9] “a sensation of permanent shock” (Ercolino & Fusillo 109) (my translation)

INTERLUDE III: LITERATURE AND EMPATHY, FROM FORMULATION TO RECEPTION

[1] “a disposition towards openness” (Pilcher Keuneman, Katrine, trans. *Criticism and Truth* by Roland Barthes. Continuum, 2007, 25)

[2] “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader.” (McLaughlin, Kathleen & David Pellauer, trans. *Time and Narrative. Volume I* by Paul Ricoeur. University of Chicago Press, 1984, 71)

[3] “narrative, which is never ethically neutral, proves to be the first *laboratory of moral judgment.*” (Blamey, Kathleen, trans. *Oneself as Another* by Paul Ricoeur, University of Chicago Press, 1992, 140)

[4] “the enlarging of our horizon of existence” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I* 80) (McLaughlin, Kathleen & David Pellauer, trans.)

[5] “To wound its readers” “to access the moral machinery, the emotional structure of humans […] the best way to access the gears of this machinery is by placing it beyond its limits […] it highlights what lies beyond the boundaries of morality so that we deal with the liminal.” (Luque 75) (my translation)

[6] “To distance oneself from personal life in order to place oneself in the situations experienced by the characters, [...] so that the story told serves as an example to reflect on ethical and political issues.” (Jiménez & Fonegra 35) (my translation)

CONCLUSIONS

[1] “if the absolute turned out to be absolute evil, one still had to follow them to the end, with eyes wide open— of that at least I was utterly convinced.” (Littell 95-96) (Mandell, Charlotte, trans.)

APPENDIX II- GRAPHICS

Figure 1. Moreno Carbonero, José. *La conversión del Duque de Gandía*. 1884, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Figure 2. Pradilla y Ortiz, Francisco. *Doña Juana la Loca*. 1877, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Figure 3. Doležel's schema of literary transduction (*Heterocosmica* 203).

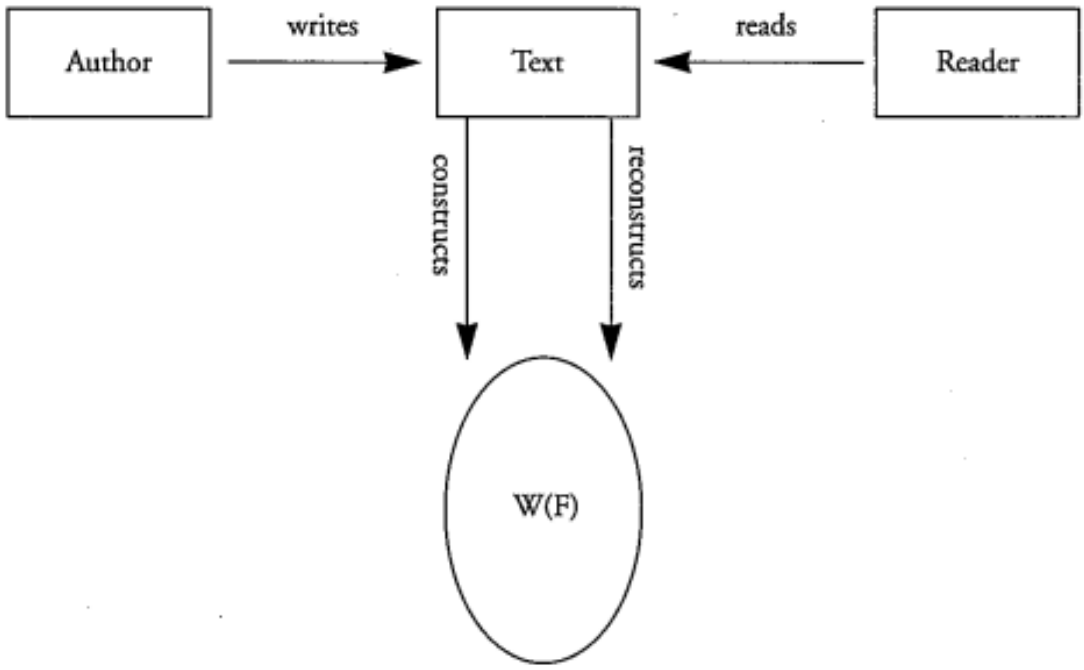

Figure 4. Saussure's schema of literary communication (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 203).

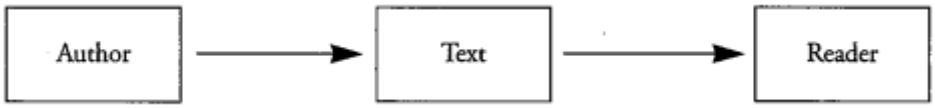

Figure 5. Classification of narrative emotions.

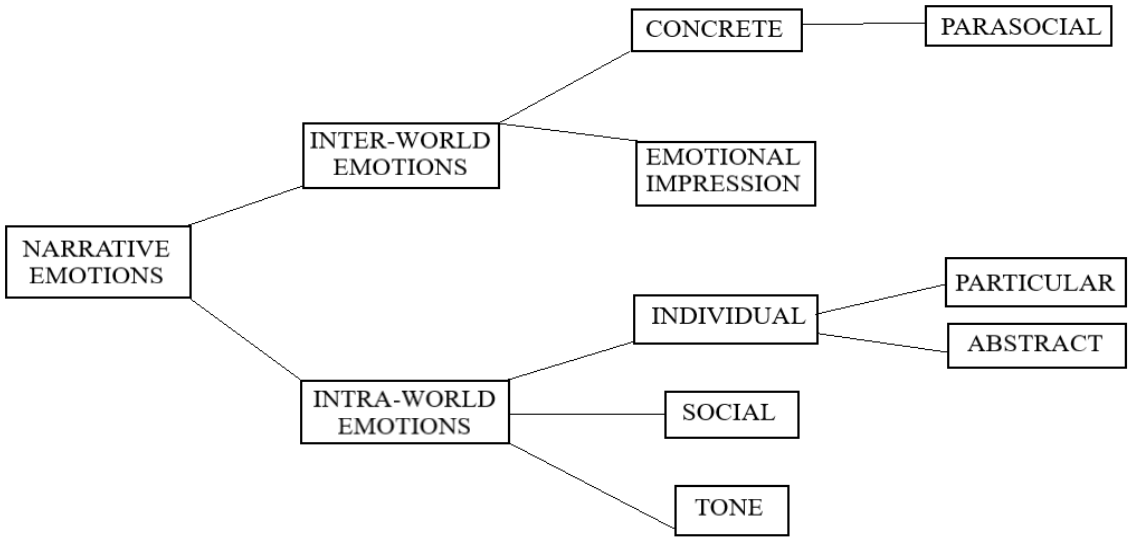

Figure 6. Graph representing the sentiment analysis of emotions in *Les bienveillantes* (Bonasera 183)

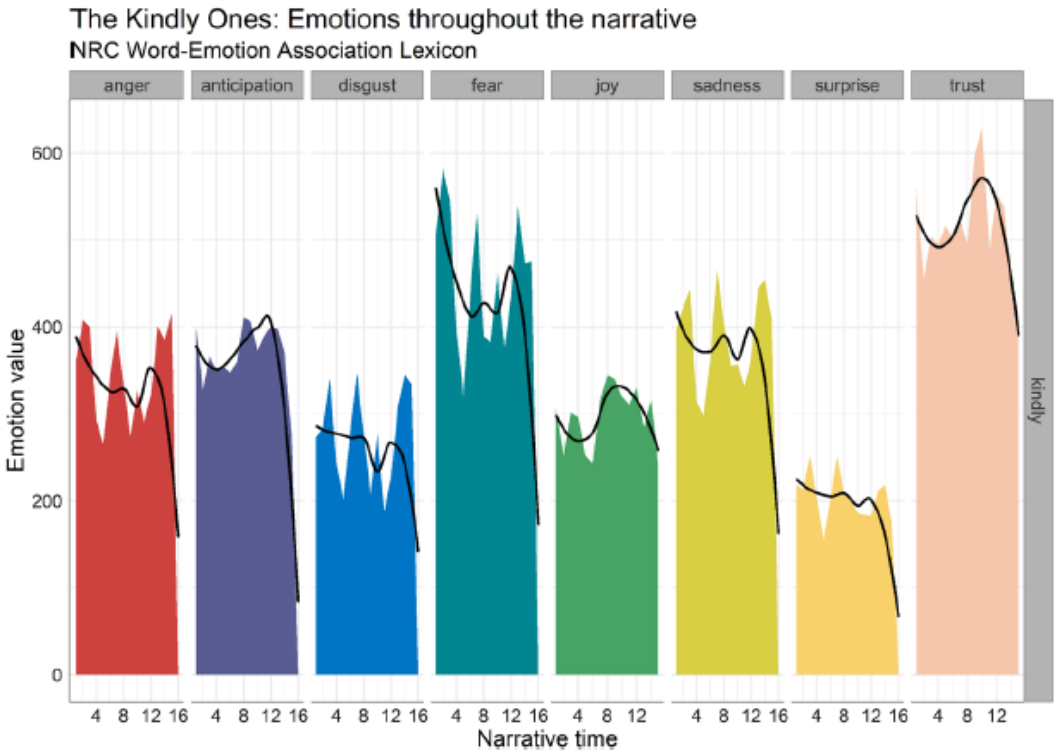

Figure 23: Emotions in *The Kindly Ones*.

Figure 7: Cover of *In Cold Blood,* Random House 1992.

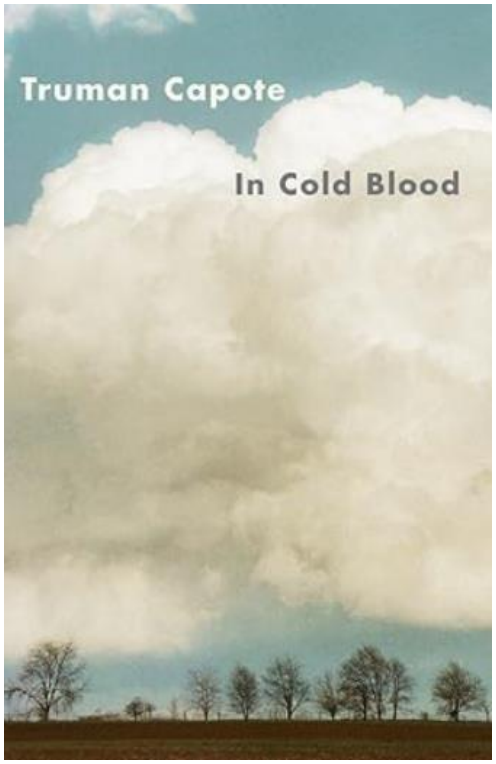

Figure 8: Cover of *In Cold Blood,* Vintage 1994:

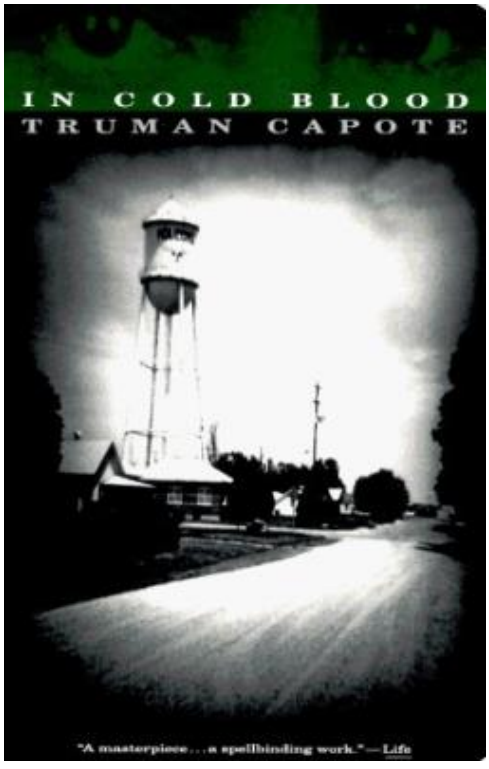

Figure 9: Cover of the Spanish translation of *In Cold Blood* (*A sangre fría*), DeBolsillo 2016.

Figure 10: Cover of the French translation of *In Cold Blood* (*De sang-froid*), Gallimard 2005.

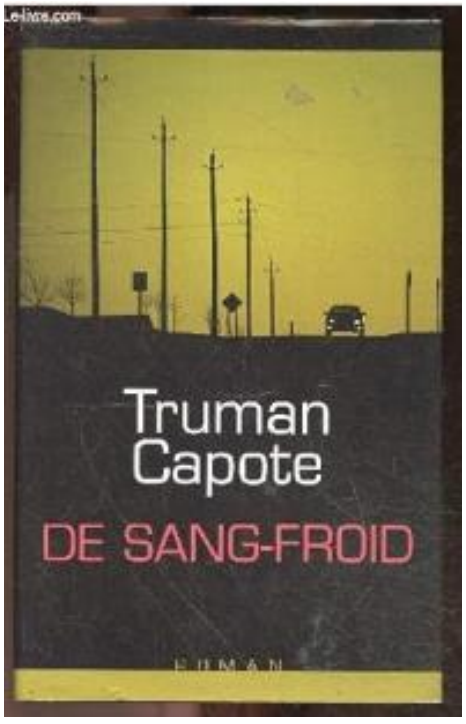

Figure 11: Cover of *In Cold Blood*, Penguin Essentials 2012:

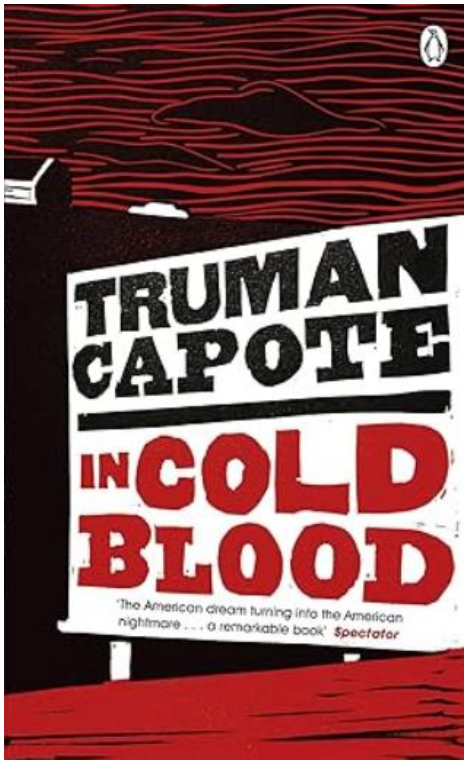

Figure 12. Baader, Louis. *Le Remords.* 1875. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 13. Bouguereau, William-Adolphe. *Orestes Pursued by the Furies*. 1862. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia.