

On Some Affective Relations between Audiences and the Characters in Popular Fictions

Noël Carroll

11.1 Introduction

The focus of this paper concerns aesthetics in the sense that Alexander Baumgarten introduced that concept. It is about sensations, especially about a certain class of feelings in relation to works of art, notably narrative fictions. The feelings in question involve the emotive responses of audiences to fictional characters. Specifically, I will explore a range of cases where, for the most part, the emotive and other affective responses of readers, viewers, and listeners tend to converge, to be congruent, or otherwise to resonate appropriately with what the fiction presents as the emotional states of characters, particularly those characters whom we label the protagonists.

Although I think that my observations are relevant to the understanding of narrative art in general, for methodological reasons, I will pay especially close attention to the ways in which the characters in *popular* fictions engage our emotional responses. For, in those cases, typically, the emotions are, by design, extremely pronounced and clear cut. This is due to the fact that standardly it is part of the job description of the popular fictioneer to make his productions immediately accessible. Thus, popular fictions may afford perspicuously insight into the affective structures that also operate in so-called high art, where the emotive address may be more complex, ambiguous, and/or recessive, and, therefore, harder to pith.

As some readers have probably already noticed, rather than labeling my topic with a single term like 'empathy,' I have chosen instead to describe it—to say that I am interested in cases where the emotional states of audience members converge, are congruent with, or otherwise resonate appropriately with what we are given to imagine are the emotions of fictional characters. I have resorted to these circumlocutions and avoided the word 'empathy' because I have been unable to find much

consensus in either ordinary language or the relevant technical literatures about how we are to understand *empathy*.¹

As occurs with people's usage of other emotion-vocabularies, speakers and writers, including experts, employ the relevant terminology in diverse, often conflicting, incommensurate, and/or mutually canceling ways. For example, even what are called emotions can vary appreciably. Some count reflexes and phobias to be emotions, while others categorize moods as emotions—for example, what some psychologists call 'mood-induction' procedures might be more accurately be called 'emotion-induction' procedures, since what they elicit are short-lived, episodic states rather than more enduring ones.

This kind of terminological disagreement is very evident with respect to talk of empathy. Although most of us think of it as taking another person as its object, the term was apparently coined by Titchener who was inspired by the concept of 'feeling our way into' as that was used in aesthetics to describe our affective response to objects with pronounced expressive properties, such as the impression of muscularity imparted by bulging architectural columns.² As well, some draw a distinction between empathy and sympathy, when they come to define their concepts; yet we find that highly respected researchers may map the terrain in very different ways. Often in his excellent book, *Empathy and Moral Development*, Martin Hoffman characterizes empathy as others define sympathy, insofar as on his account empathy appears to involve a pro-social disposition of beneficence toward its object.³ Others restrict empathy to the experience of cognate affective states with no necessary smidgen of concern on the part of the empath. To complicate matters, Lauren Wispé, in contrast, appears to define 'sympathy' in the way that the former theorists define 'empathy,' namely as a condition where the spectator merely undergoes the same emotive state as the victim—which state, for Wispé, must be exclusively some negative experience, like pain and/or distress; thus, whereas some theorists think that sympathizers can share happiness with others, Wispé thinks that only negative affect can be the medium of sympathy.⁴

For some, the object of empathy is a person; for others, a situation. Sometimes empathy only seems to pertain to simply *understanding* another person's viewpoint which, of course, is possible without feeling anything. According to other authorities, feelings are requisite, although which feelings vary. So, some regard empathy as essentially cognitive, some treat it as essentially affective, and, in addition, others think it is a mixture of cognitive and affective elements.⁵

¹ My suspicions are corroborated in Eisenberg & Strayer (1987).

² See Wispé (1987): 20–3. Throughout this essay, I have benefited from Wispé's useful historical overview.

³ Hoffman (2000). See for example, p. 30.

⁴ Wispé (1991).

⁵ Hoffman (2000): 29.

Of those who maintain the relationship involves affect, some require that the empath suffer the identical emotion-types as does the empathee; others slacken the requirement of a perfect match and ask no more than that the emotions or feelings of the emoter be suitable to the emotive state of the object of empathy; for example, Simon Baron-Cohen says empathy involves understanding the situation of another and responding with the appropriate emotion.⁶ This may involve no more than feeling some negative affect in response to another's distress, or something positive when the other feels pleasure.⁷

With all this diversity of usage, the temptation to legislate is strong. This is what I think Paul Griffiths does in his book *What Emotions Really Are*.⁸ He elects one candidate for the title of *emotion*, and tells us little about what we are to make of the rest of the phenomena that have often been slotted under that rubric. Having shown that certain variants of the cognitive theory of the emotions are not comprehensive, Griffiths offers an alternative account of the emotions: that emotions are really affect programs. But this decision unfortunately tells us virtually nothing about how to theorize the kinds of mental states—like academic envy—that the ostracized cognitive theories handled so neatly.

On my view, such terminological vagaries should not serve as invitations to regiment matters à la Griffiths. They are rather signs that it is very likely that there are more kinds of phenomena lurking in this domain than heretofore recognized. Our nomenclature gets confusing, because we don't have enough labels to go around. So, different folks keep redeploying the same linguistic repertoire to mark whatever it is that interests them. Successive generations of psychologists, for example, keep employing earlier concepts in behalf of new research programs.

The discourse gets tangled up like a reel of fishing tackle in the hands of an amateur like me because there are so many different things to be interested in this sphere of inquiry and so few markers in ordinary language, or even the available technical languages. Given this, on my view, it may be less profitable to quibble over labels, and more useful at this point to initiate an exploration of the range of the phenomena in this arena—that is, to start, at least, to develop a conceptual cartography of what we might call the realm of affect. With regard to aesthetics, this involves beginning to identify some of the dominant emotive relationships between fictional characters and their audiences. Though I may no pretense to exhaustiveness in this matter, that is the purpose of this essay.

⁶ Simon Baron-Cohen writes 'Empathizing...involves recognizing what another person may be feeling or thinking and responding to those feelings with an appropriate emotion of *one's own*' (2005: A15, emphasis added).

⁷ Interestingly, Baron-Cohen's conception of empathy covers the notion of sympathy that will be developed later in this article.

⁸ Griffiths (1997).

11.2 Identification

The natural place to start a discussion about the relation between readers, viewers, and listeners and the fictional characters to whom they attend is with the notion of identification. There are several reasons for this. First, when asked for an account of our emotive relation to fictional characters, especially to protagonists, referring to this alleged process is likely to be the answer most people, including a great many professionals, are apt to give. It is probably the oldest account in the western tradition where it was first introduced by Plato who feared that citizens would become possessed by the undesirable emotions, such as fear of death, portrayed by characters in the texts of poets like Homer.

Identification is also interesting for our purposes because there is one version of the notion of identification that some might be tempted to appropriate as one possible explication of empathy.

Moreover, we can use the notion of *identification* or, at least, one version of it, in order to probe critically the range of different emotive relations between audiences and fictional characters. That is, by working through various of the inadequacies of the leading notion of identification, we can begin to uncover the rich array of audience/character relationships occluded by the idea of identification.

Of course, identification, like empathy, and almost every other concept in this field of discourse, is fraught with multiple meanings—some more or less misleading, and others completely unobjectionable. In some cases, to identify with a character comes down to wishing one were like that character. It makes no claim to any sort of identity, affective or otherwise, between me and the pertinent fictional being. I wish I felt as fearless as Superman does, but, alas, I have vertigo. And I'd like to have the romantic flair of a James Bond, but I'm too afraid of rejection. But perhaps these cases shouldn't be called identification at all, but rather wishful fantasizing. Furthermore, it is not clear how much of this wishful fantasizing I can indulge while consuming a fiction without losing track of the story. And if the fiction is a movie, how will I keep up with the rapid editing, if I am off dreaming about being invulnerable and/or irresistible?

Frequently, when people say that they identify with a character, they mean no more than that they like the character or, as teenagers say, they think 'he's cool.' Or maybe it comes down to indicating that they've had a similar experience. The character has been dumped and so have they been. These usages come without the Platonic insinuation that the imagined emotional states of the characters have infected the audience. These variants of 'identification' really amount to feeling some affinity for the characters in question and might be better called 'affiliation' rather than 'identification.'

Alternatively, sometimes identification is parsed in terms of putting myself in the place of the character. This is not a matter of putting myself in the character's shoes, as

they say, but of putting the character in my shoes.⁹ But why suppose that this entails that the character and I are in the same emotive states? This might be better labeled *projection* rather than *identification*.¹⁰

What I suspect is the core concept of identification, and, for some, the core of empathy as well, involves the supposition that the audience member is in the same type-identical emotional state in which fictionally the character is.¹¹ This is certainly what Plato had in mind. The character in the poem fears death and then the reader likewise fears death. Likewise, this is the view of present day Platonists: the protagonist evinces aggressiveness, and then the viewers, or, at least, the adolescent male viewers, are contaminated with the selfsame species of aggressiveness too.¹²

But identity of emotion-types, even if necessary, is not enough to constitute identification in the variation that I am exploring. The fans of a certain team at a soccer match may be in the same emotive state—they all hate the opposing team. Yet we wouldn't call this identification (let alone empathy). For, with whom are they identifying? Although they may all be inflamed to the same degree with hatred for the rival team, they are not identifying with each other, since they may not even be aware of the presence of the others, so wrapped up are they in the game they are witnessing before them. Or they may be home alone, watching the game on TV, oblivious to the existence of other fans.

Nor is it plausible that they are identifying, in the relevant sense, with any of the soccer players—the players are probably too absorbed in the activity on the field to be emoting anything, and, in any event, it is unlikely that they literally *hate* their opponents. That kind of sports-hatred is for the fans, not for the professionals.

⁹ This is sometimes called perspective-taking. There are two kinds of perspective-taking, the sort described above and the case where I attempt to embrace the perspective of the other wholesale. However, there is a real question about the extent to which the latter form of perspective-taking (a.k.a. empathy and/or identification) is conceptually possible. For, we can never be sure that there isn't a mismatch between the kind of person I am and the kind of person whose perspective I intend to take on (where the kind of person I am depends upon many variables of which I am typically unawares). For more sophisticated objections to this sort of perspective-taking, see Peter Goldie's 'Against Empathy' in this volume.

¹⁰ Alessandro Giovannelli regards this as one form of empathy. I don't see why, since someone in this state could be totally misunderstanding the empathetee as well as experiencing an utterly different emotion. Moreover, contra Giovannelli, experimental data indicate that this projective state cannot be empathy while taking the perspective of the other is empathy, if empathy means having type-identical feelings with the target. For in magnetic imagining experiments, when one is one's own target, the results differ from cases when another is the target. However, if empathy involves identical feelings, all of the cases should be the same. See Giovannelli (2009). See also Jackson, Brunet, et al. (2006): 752–61.

¹¹ Here I am only requiring that the emotion-types be congruent. I am not stipulating that the audience member and the character must have the emotion in the same degree. I suspect that even those who believe in infectious identification will say that the emotions formed in reaction to the character may differ in intensity from those the character is imagined to suffer. Our emotions, it may be said, can be more or less intense than the characters'. Of course, this may be yet another reason to be suspicious of the notion of infectious identification, but I will not press the issue in this essay.

¹² Some have suggested to me that this is not the core concept of identification and have maintained that all that most people mean by 'identification' is that they feel in some way similar to the pertinent character. I question this because it seems weaker than people intend when they use 'identification' and because it doesn't seem plausible to call such a weak connection 'identification'.

But if the sharing of type-identical emotional states is not sufficient for identification, what needs to be added? That the viewers be in the emotional state in question *because* that is the state they think that the characters are in. That is, putatively I identify, in this sense, with Anne Darrow when I am horrified by King Kong *because she is*—or I imagine her to be—horrified by King Kong. In short, the version of identification on the table is: someone x identifies with a fictional character y if and only if (1) x is in the same type-identical emotive state that y is in (2) *because y is in*—or, x imagines y to be in—that state. To speak metaphorically, the audience member has been infected by the ostensible emotive state of the character. Furthermore, this is, I submit, probably the dominant sense of the notion of identification nowadays.

I have no reason to believe that this phenomenon (or something like it) never occurs, especially in *real* life. There is empirical evidence that infants feel distress, when they detect distress in their caregivers. I am not sure that this is a full-blown emotive state, rather than merely an affective reflex. But for now, let that pass; I will talk about affective reflexes like this toward the end of this paper.

Similarly, recent research shows that women respond to fMRI scans of their significant others being subjected to electrical shocks with the activation—to a certain extent—of the same neural pathways in themselves that are registering pain in their spouses.¹³ Again, the question arises about whether these are emotive states (it depends on how you categorize pain),¹⁴ but it doesn't seem altogether improbable to me that some emotional states, like anger, might be transmitted in this way, especially between people involved in intimate personal relationships. Nevertheless, the question remains whether this model of identification has much to offer aestheticians when it comes to our emotive responses to fictional characters. By way of preview, let me say that there is abundant cause for skepticism here.

First, let us consider the preceding characterization of emotive identification—which, for convenience, we might call the *infection model*—as a comprehensive account of our relation to fictional characters. I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that many subscribe to this view, especially pre-reflectively. That is, they think that this account pretty much covers most, if not all, of our emotive relations with fictional characters, or, at least, with the protagonists.

Nevertheless, even a cursory review of the data shows this is false. In the story, the candidate is pumped up by the adulation with which his acceptance speech as been greeted by the crowd; but we know that she is standing in the cross-hairs of a rocket-launcher, manned by an enemy assassin. We do not feel the thrill that the candidate

¹³ Singer, Seymour, O'Doherty, Kaube, et al. (2004): 1157–62.

¹⁴ Feeling the pain of the other is often adduced as evidence for identification and empathy-as-identification. But surely we cannot be feeling the *same* pain as the empathee. None save perhaps the most inveterate masochist could stay seated while experiencing the same pain that Jesus experiences as the Roman soldiers flail him in Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*.

does; we feel suspense, even anxiety. Our emotional states are not type-identical. Nor should they be, since the fiction mandates that we fear for the candidate's life.

This asymmetry of affect is also common throughout comic fictions. Every time the would-be suitor is discovered in a compromising situation, we are amused while he is discomfited. When Bertie Wooster is flustered, we are merry.

Situations in which the emotional states of the characters diverge from those of the audiences abound in fictions of all sorts. One reason for this, obviously, is that generally there is a significant differential between what we know and what the characters know, and this, of course, can have a discernibly different impact on what is felt on both sides of the audience/fiction divide. In some cases, we know more than the characters; we tremble for them as they plunge ahead ignoring clear and present danger. On the other hand, Sherlock Holmes always knows more than we do, so we never share his aplomb in the face of peril.

Circumstances like these are not rare. They may even predominate statistically. But, be that as it may, there are more than enough cases like these to establish that the infection model of identification cannot be comprehensive on readily observed empirical grounds. Furthermore, there are also conceptual considerations that invite us to suspect the infection model. Quite often both the cause and the object of the audience's emotional state differ from that of the protagonist's affective condition. We are told that the character's son, Moe, died last year. That event was the cause of her grief; the object is her son. But the cause of the audience's emotional state is the character's grieving; and our object is the grieving mother.

Our emotion gestals a wider situation than the mother's, while also including the object of the mother's state as a constitutive component. Moreover, our emotion is pity for the mother, not grief. Who is Moe to us? It is his mother with whom we have become acquainted through the fiction. Indeed, Moe may never even have had his moment on the stage in the fiction under consideration. Since quite frequently, our emotional states have different causes and take different objects than the putative mental states of the protagonists, the suggestion that our emotions always, or even most often, match each other perfectly is highly unlikely. So, again, the infection model must be abandoned as a comprehensive picture of our emotive relations to fictional characters.

Indeed, there are certain cases, perhaps many, where the audience member's emotional state can only be reasonably thought to be an onlooker's state rather than one that corresponds to the object's. When we feel nail-biting suspense as the protagonist claws his way to safety, he cannot be feeling that emotion; he is probably not feeling anything. He is so caught up in and focused upon his task that his anxieties are on hold.

Nevertheless, the proponent of infectious identification may point out that, even if there are many cases where the inner states of the audience members and those of the characters diverge, there are also a significant number of cases where the emotive states at issue would appear to be type-identical. In an episode of *Law and Order: Special*

Victims Unit, say, the character recoils in contempt at the child molester's ploys; so do we. Emotive symmetry obtains.

Therefore, even if the infection model fails to be applicable across the board, perhaps the argument can be made that it has compelling authority with cases like these. However, in order to test this suggestion, we need to introduce a distinction between emotions that are held in common or coincidentally versus emotions shared due to some intimate causal connection between them.

11.3 Coincident versus Connected Emotional States

Jet bombers have streaked past their fail-safe points and they are winging their way to Beijing. They are freighted with nuclear devices. Atomic warfare looms; millions will die. The protagonist, the President of the United States, is stricken with fear; so are we. Isn't this a case where infectious identification can be said to obtain?

I think that it is not. The infection model of identification requires not only that our emotions match those of the protagonists, but also that our emotions be a causal consequence of the protagonists being in precisely the selfsame mental states. Nevertheless, in a great many of the cases in which we find ourselves in the same emotive condition as the protagonist, including the preceding example, it is pretty obvious that we have gotten there by our own route, so to speak. We are not anxious because the president is anxious. We are anxious because we have been encouraged to imagine that a nuclear exchange, threatening a catastrophic number of deaths, is in the offing.

Perhaps some evidence for this is that the fiction could be told without reference to the president's anxiety and we would still feel anxiety. We would feel the same sort of anxiety because the fictional situation has been structured in a way that makes certain features that are appropriate to the state of fear salient—such as assessments of how much explosive power those jet bombers are carrying, their capacity to evade radar detection, their imperviousness to any and all anti-aircraft defenses as well as the putatively uneasy diplomatic relations between the United States and China.

Elsewhere I have called this sort of structure criterial prefocussing.¹⁵ By that I mean that the fiction, by means of either visual depiction, enactment, and/or verbal description, organizes or filters the situations and events it presents in such a way that the features the creators select for emphasis are those that are criterially apposite to the emotional states intended to be excited by the work. In the Odessa Steps sequence of *Potemkin*, Eisenstein foregrounds the callous massacre of old people, a young boy, two mothers, and an infant—in short, those who are culturally figured as defenseless and harmless. His selection of these vignettes, instead of shots of the clouds overhead, is designed to activate the viewer's emotions of moral outrage. For, the sequence has been forcefully designed so that these factors, which are criterial to moral indignation,

¹⁵ Carroll (2001a).

unavoidably command attention in a way that leads the viewer, unless he is a White Russian or a Cossack, to appraise the episode as evil and, in consequent, to feel visceral distress.

Most often, I contend, when the feelings of audiences are congruent with those of the protagonist's, it is a result of criterial prefocussing, not infectious identification. The difference is that in the case where criterial prefocussing leads to emotive uptake on the part of audience members, the correspondence between what the audience feels and what the characters are imagined to feel is coincident rather than causal. That is, the audience has been effectively led to the emotional state it is in by a pathway that can be causally independent of what, if anything, the protagonist feels. Thus, cases of congruent emotions between audience members and protagonists, though quite frequent, are typically not instances of infectious identification, but are better regarded as coincidentally congruent emotive states engineered by means of criterial prefocussing.

Indeed, it seems to me that postulating infectious identification in most cases is to take on excess theoretical baggage, since typically congruent emotional states, where they occur, can, *ceteris paribus*, be adequately and exhaustively explained by means of criterial prefocussing. That is, since infectious identification will also presumably involve something like criterial prefocussing, it is more parsimonious to explain what is going on by means of criterial prefocussing alone.

Of course, it may be pointed out that often the way in which situations are criterially prefocused in fictions tends to parallel the way the protagonist sees things. Even if the narration is omniscient and not channeled explicitly through the point of view of the protagonist, fictional narrators often depict or describe the fictional world from the perspective of leading characters. The gloominess of the portrayal of the environment echoes the apprehensiveness of the hero as he enters the realm of Lord Voldemort.

This is a fair point, but it does not, I think, revive the model of infectious identification, however. For, on the one hand, the audience need not be aware that it is the character's viewpoint that he is being invited to take on; it is the perspective of the narrative. And, furthermore, the criterial prefocussing will work in the same way whether or not it is crafted in a way that reflects the point of view of the protagonist.

Here it is interesting to consider the case where the fiction explicitly establishes that the way in which events are criterially prefocussed are congruent with the emotive states of the protagonist. A striking example of this is the use of point-of-view shots in the editing of audio-visual arrays. The character looks off-screen, her visage etched with horror; then there is a shot of a slimy creature—part reptile and part arachnid and part lawyer with a maw like a chain saw—and we are horrified too. Isn't that a case of infectious identification? Again, I think not for the simple reason that we would probably feel the same level of horror, if the sequence were shown without the shot of the character looking off-screen.¹⁶

¹⁶ It might be interesting for psychologists to design an experiment to test this.

So, once again, hypothesizing infectious identification appears unnecessary. In the largest number of cases, I suspect that its conjecture violates the principle of theoretical parsimony.

Of course, this leaves open the question of why such point-of-view shots—and other perspective disclosing devices—are used by fictioneers. The short answer, I think, is that they are a means to prime or to prepare the audience by communicating to them in a very broad way the general kind of affect the audience should bring to the objects, persons, situations, and events they are about to encounter. I will have more to say about how this communication works later in my remarks regarding mirror reflexes.

11.4 Vectorially Converging Emotive States

I have challenged the second condition of the model of infectious identification on the grounds that, even if the audience is in an emotive state congruent with the imagined mental state of the protagonist, that is generally the result of the reader, viewer, or listener having arrived at that state by a process situated in his or her own emotive-appraisal system, independently of any necessary causal input involving the character being in the selfsame emotional state. In other words, as those jet bombers race toward Beijing, I fear for humanity because human life is, in the fiction, endangered and not because the protagonist fears for human life. The protagonist's fears need not be a causal ingredient in my fear, even though our fearful states are congruent. My fear is coincident or conjoint with the protagonist's while, at the same time, being causally independent from it. Or so I maintain is the standard case.

However, it is important not to misinterpret this example. The claim is not that we are never emotively influenced by the emotional states of characters, especially the protagonists and others to whom we bear a pro-attitude. For example, at the end of *The Gold Rush*, the Tramp accidentally meets up again with Georgia, the woman of his dreams; the two embrace, they kiss, and they fade out into the land of happily-ever-after. They are in love, and their successful match gladdens us. Scenes like this happen all of the time in popular fictions. However, our previous objections to the infection model of identification should not be taken as an attempt to deny their existence. For, cases like these should not be taken as cases of infectious identification.

True, the emotive states of the characters do cause us to be in a euphoric state. But our euphoric state is not precisely the state that the lovers are in. Their emotional state is one of infatuation. That is not our state; we are happy for the couple. I am not in love with Georgia. Were I in love with Georgia, I wouldn't be so happy; I'd be jealous of the Tramp. So I am not in the state of infectious identification. But I am in a state of roughly the same emotive valence. They are, let us say, euphoric and I am euphoric as well. Our emotive states converge vectorially—they both belong on the positively charged side of the scale of the emotions. We are not in the same emotional states, but

our states are in broad categorical agreement and we are in that vectorially converging state with the state of the characters, because they are in that condition.

Contrafwise, when the monster in the concluding scenes of *Bride of Frankenstein* is reviled by his reanimated betrothed, we feel sorry for him. Our emotion does not match his. We do not feel the pain of the unrequited lover. Indeed, I doubt that any viewers, no matter how desperate, harbor any desires for the frizzy-haired, electrified corpse, played by Elsa Lanchester. But we do respond to the monster's misery with sorrow. It is in this sense that we share his misery. We are not miserable for being lovelorn but we do pity the monster.

Both misery and pity, of course, are dysphoric or negative emotions. Both sit on the distressful, discomforting, disturbing, or painful pole of emotional states. Again our emotions are broadly similar in their general valence. They converge vectorially in their negative direction. Our emotions are causally coordinated. But this does not support the notion of infectious identification, unless identification means nothing more than a somewhat similarly charged feeling. But why mobilize the notion of *identity* to describe that?

I suppose that if I were empowered to legislate linguistically in these matters, the category of vectorially converging emotional states would be my preferred candidate for 'empathy,' since it captures the idea that the audience is resonating emotionally or 'communing' with the pertinent characters, while not requiring that the audience and the protagonists be precisely in emotional synch. It is only that our emotional states are 'like' each other.

The notion of vectorially converging emotions also seems to mesh with Titchener's early conception of empathy which maintains that empathy involves feeling our way into the mental state of others. For, with vectorially converging emotions, we grasp the general valence of the internal states of others by means of the directionality of our own inner dispositions. We do not replicate the emotional state of others exactly, but instead approximate its general drift.¹⁷ When we say our feelings are *like* those of the empathee, I suspect we intend this similarity in terms of vectorially converging emotions.

Moreover, since we empathize, in my sense, with The Tramp rather than identifying with him, we are happy for his good fortune and not jealous of him, as we would be if we identified with him emotionally and, like him, loved Georgia possessively. However, I do realize that this suggestion on my part remains stipulative, since many use 'empathy' to signal precisely matching feeling-states rather than merely vectorially converging ones.¹⁸

¹⁷ Sometimes simulation theorists speak of our *resonating* in feeling with the targets of our attention. 'Resonating' seems to me a useful way of describing the relation between our emotions and fictional characters in cases of vectorially converging emotions. See Goldman (2006a): 132.

¹⁸ Perhaps needless to say, I think that many claims made to the effect that our emotions perfectly match those of the characters turn out, upon scrutiny, to be vectorially converging emotions. In fact, my money is

11.5 Sympathy

Mention of empathy invites a discussion of sympathy, insofar as the two states are, though closely related, often differentiated. Sympathy is probably a concept that is used with as many various definitions as is empathy. For present purposes, I will describe sympathy as non-fleeting care, concern, or, more broadly, a non-passing pro-attitude toward another person under which rubric I include fictional characters and anthropomorphized beings of any sort whatsoever (such as Charlotte in her web). Sympathy involves a supportive response to its objects. It provides an impulse toward benevolent action with respect to those toward whom it is directed, though, of course, that impulse need not and often is not acted upon, frequently because it conflicts with other interests that we might have. And, needless to say, with fictional characters that impulse cannot be acted upon. Perhaps, one reason we are so free with our sympathies towards fictional characters is that, since we need not ever act on their behalf, their needs never threaten to fall afoul of our interests.¹⁹

Sympathy, construed as an emotional state, involves visceral feelings of distress when the interests of the objects of our pro-attitudes are imperiled and feelings of elation, closure, or satisfaction when their welfare is secured. The emotion of sympathy under discussion possesses as a component the presiding desire that things work out well for whomever it focuses upon—that their objective interests, goals, and desires be realized. In order to be the object of this pro-attitude, the person in question must be thought to be worthy of our benevolence as a result of our interests, projects, loyalties, allegiances, and/or moral commitments. When someone is appraised to be worthy of our non-passing desire that things go well with her and this is linked to positive feeling tones when gratified and negative ones when stymied, then that person is the object of the emotional state that I am calling sympathy. Likewise our response is sympathetic if we hope a character we esteem makes the right choice, as we do when, in reading *Middlemarch*, we wish that Dorothea not give into Casaubon's demands.²⁰ If you don't like calling this state 'sympathy,' you can call it feeling benevolently.

Initially, this account may seem indistinguishable from the one I recommended for empathy. The Tramp's fortunes, romantic and otherwise, flourish and we feel happy for him; our emotions converge vectorially. Nevertheless, sympathy does not always track how the protagonist feels. Sympathy concerns what we believe to be the genuine or objective well-being of the character. Should the protagonist go head over heels for the nefarious *femme fatale*, he may be overjoyed, but we will feel anxiety, because we surmise that his interests are endangered. So although empathy, as I've characterized

behind the claim that this is what is going on in the vast number of cases where we appear to 'commune' with protagonists.

¹⁹ Amy Coplan points out that this is a reason why we often sympathize with fictional characters more readily than with actual people. Rousseau would have concurred, but he would have added that this made theater (the topic of his concern) morally suspect.

²⁰ The example comes from Feagin (1996): 114–15.

it—that is, as a vectorially converging emotion—may sometimes be a part of sympathy, it need not be. Though the two states may overlap, they are nevertheless discriminable.

Moreover, I suspect that at least with regard to the characters in popular fictions, it is probably the case that sympathy generally governs empathy (in my sense). That is, we rejoice when the character rejoices over circumstances we judge to be actually beneficial to him because he is already an object of our benevolence. We do not rejoice when the villain rejoices, because the villain is not an object of our sympathy; his well-being is not something about which we could give a fig. I would not make a similar claim about the relation of sympathy and empathy in everyday life. But in popular fictions, characters come to us marked as worthy of our concern almost upon arrival.

In life outside of our fictions, our benevolent or altruistic attitudes toward others depend on factors such as kinship, group memberships of all sorts, and group interests. Of course, for both artistic and economic reasons, creators of popular fictions are aiming at larger audiences than a single extended family and often at audiences that exceed regional, ethnic, national, and religious boundaries. And even where their targets are less than global, they must be careful not to trigger the sectarian differences that always exist in virtually every large group. This obviously presents the creator of popular fictions with a problem to be solved, namely, how to enlist the care and concern—the sympathetic feelings—of mass audiences for fictional characters.

In order for us to feel sympathy for a fictional character, we must find the character worthy of our emotions. There must be some reason grounding our wishes that they fare well. But how will the maker of popular fictions motivate diverse audiences with often vastly variegated and sometimes even conflicting real-world interests to get behind the protagonists? As an empirical generalization, my conjecture is that the most frequent solution by far to this design problem is to construct protagonists and the other characters intended to warrant our concern in such a way that we perceive them to be, broadly speaking, morally good.

Morality, especially of a fairly widely shared and often nearly universal variety, gives the popular fictioneer the interest, or project, or loyalty, or touchstone of allegiance upon which audiences from similar cultures, and even sometimes dissimilar ones, can converge. The protagonists protect the lame and the halt, the helpless and the sick, the young, the old and the defenseless, while simultaneously treating them with dignity and respect. They evince a sense of fairness, justice, loyalty, honor, and are altogether pro-social, and especially pro-family, at least, where the families in question are portrayed as wholesome ones. These characters tell the truth and they keep their promises to good people, because they, themselves, are what we call good people.

By designing protagonists who are morally appealing, the producer of popular fictions purchases the criterial wherewithal necessary to engender the sympathy requisite for keeping audiences emotionally absorbed in the story. The pertinent fictional characters satisfy the criterion of being deserving of our benevolence because, in short, they are fundamentally morally deserving. They exhibit virtue, including Grecian or

pagan virtues. Morality, in a very generous sense, is the project that we share with them—usually one wide enough to be recognized by Christian, Jew, Moslem, Hindu, Yankee, Korean, and Chilean alike.

Protagonists are usually good guys, since good guys are exactly what are apt to elicit pro-attitudes from the heterogeneous audiences for popular fictions whose interests and loyalties are varied and even otherwise at odds. Such characters are attractive, but it is important to emphasize that a significant amount of their attractiveness has to do with their virtue. Morality, of the fairly generic sort found in popular fictions, is something upon which people from different backgrounds are apt to agree. Who would dare to cast the first stone at Cinderella? Even the so-called anti-heroes of popular fictions are seen to be righteous, once you get beyond their gruff exteriors. In the end, for example, Sam Spade turns out to be almost Kantian in his sense of duty.

Sympathy, in my estimation, is the central emotional response that we bestow upon the protagonists in popular fictions.²¹ Needless to say, in the course of a popular fiction we may undergo a gamut of emotional reactions to the relevant characters. But it is the sympathy we feel with regard to these characters that generally plays the major structuring role vis à vis whatever accompanying feelings may emerge. For, we are proud of the hero's success because his well-being is an object of our concern and we are angry at the heroine for sneaking off with the city slicker because we do not think that is in her best interests. Sympathy is the primary glue that binds us emotively to the protagonists and their fates in popular fictions.

11.6 Solidarity²²

If sympathy is as central to our emotional response to fictional protagonists as I have maintained, then instances of the strongest version of infectious emotive identification cannot be common, since, sympathetic feelings, construed as emotions, are not ones that we share with their objects. Sympathy, by definition, is directed at others. The protagonist does not feel sympathy for himself; were he to do so—to any extent—that would probably turn the audience off. However, though crucial to our emotional bonding with protagonists, sympathy pure and simple is usually not the whole story of our emotional connections with protagonists. It is usually supplemented by another emotional state—which we may call solidarity.

Some fictions have only protagonists. The film *Just my Luck* is an example. There are two major characters—Ashley Albright and Jake Harden. Their names are clues to their most important attributes. She is always the beneficiary of deliriously good fortune. When she leaves her apartment without an umbrella, it immediately stops raining. And so on. He is just the opposite; if he bends down, his pants will split; if he picks up a five

²¹ I think that this view would also be shared by Smith (1995).

²² The notion of solidarity in this essay is meant to replace the more cumbersome idea of sympathy-cum-antipathy in Carroll (2007).

dollar bill, it will be smeared with canine feces. But their luck changes hands at a masquerade ball when they kiss while dancing. Now everything Ashley attempts leads to disaster, while Jake becomes a very successful record producer. The rest of the story involves Ashley tracking Jake down in order to reclaim her good fortune with another kiss. However, they fall in love and kiss their way to some kind of providential equilibrium; they will live happily and unhappily ever after in the normal proportions.

What is striking about *Just My Luck*—and I think this is true of many romantic comedies—is that there is no real villain. There are some people who present temporary obstacles to the main characters, but they are not full-fledged antagonists. They are not on the scene long enough for our antipathy toward them to take root. We are encouraged to feel care and concern for Ashley and Jake. But there are no real bad guys in the film.

Most popular fictions, however, are not like this. Most popular fictions pit the protagonists and the other nice people against some adversaries. We are not only prompted emotionally to embrace the good people as members of a generic 'Us'; their opponents belong to 'Them'.²³

If sympathy toward the 'Us' is characteristically elicited by portraying the protagonists and the other nice people in the fiction as morally good, then the antipathy generated toward the 'Them' is generally provoked by representing Them as morally blemished. Whereas the protagonist is nice to nice people—treating good people with good manners—the villain is at least rude to inferiors and very often much worse. The antagonists pillage, cheat, rob, kill, lie, and so forth. The hero pets the old dog sleeping on the doorstep; the bad guy kicks it out of his way.

Popular fictions are most frequently *political* in Carl Schmitt's sense.²⁴ The fictional population is partitioned into friends and enemies—into Us and Them. Sympathy, motivated by morality, disposes us to assimilate the protagonists as belonging to Us. But the bond is usually further strengthened by introducing enemies who, in popular fictions, are customarily marked by being constructed as bad people. As I am using the term, 'solidarity' is the name of the complex emotive relation of sympathy-for-the-protagonists plus antipathy-for-the-antagonists, which state is typically incited in audiences in response to popular fictions.²⁵ The reader, listener, and/or viewer feels emotionally allied to the protagonist and against the antagonist. The antagonist instills anger, indignation, hatred, and sometimes even moral disgust in us.

Unlike sympathy in everyday life which we tend, all things being equal, to extend quite readily to most of those around us by default, in fictions our sympathy must be won. In popular fictions, the most efficient way of doing this is to render the relevant characters morally appealing. Our bond with these characters can then be reinforced by

²³ See Berreby (2009), especially chapter 9.

²⁴ Schmitt (1996).

²⁵ 'Solidarity' as a real world phenomenon, of course, also includes a sense of responsibility to other members of the Us, but, of course, this is not practicable with respect to fictional characters.

setting an array of nemeses against them whom we find repulsive, customarily because their various moral failings—from petty vices to outright viciousness—are emphatically foregrounded by means of criterial prefocussing.

I suspect that, in most cases, our sympathy for various characters is enlisted by their evident virtues. However, in some instances, characters may obtain our sympathy on the rebound, so to speak. That is, we may be so appalled by the villain that our care and concern goes out to whomever he opposes. In other words, sometimes solidarity in popular fictions may result from the ‘enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend’ phenomenon. This, moreover, explains why it is that we sometimes find ourselves siding with characters whose morals we do not otherwise share, like Hannibal Lector. It is that we find his enemies, the people who are trying to kill him, so much more depraved than he is, bent, as they are, to feeding him to giant, slavering pigs.²⁶

Solidarity involves sympathy and antipathy viscerally felt. Though our sympathetic feelings toward the protagonists are not shared by them, our hatred for the villains often is. But we do not hate the villain simply because the protagonist does. Rather, we have detected coincidentally on our own many of the same morally noxious characteristics of the antagonists that have impressed the protagonists. Thus, when it is congruent with the protagonist’s hatred of the bad guy, the antipathy component of our feelings of solidarity with the hero is basically conjoint with his. We may vent our hatred of the bad guy at the same time the hero does, but primarily as a result of our own processes of moral appraisal.

11.7 Mirror Reflexes

So far I have explored several kinds of emotional relationships between audiences and characters in popular fictions. These have included circumstances: (1) where our emotions may be type-identical with those of the protagonists, but only due to our own independent appraisals of the relevant situations, (2) where our emotions vectorially converge upon the emotional states of the characters, (3) where we sympathize with the character (which, of course, can be an instance of a vectorially converging emotion), and (4) where we emote in solidarity with the protagonist (where the antipathy component may be an instance of a congruent response that we find ourselves in as result of our own appraisal of the situation). None of these cases correspond to the popular model of infectious identification which requires that the audience member be in an emotional state that is type-identical with the protagonist’s precisely because the relevant character is in that state. But let me conclude by briefly examining a fifth affective relation—one which comes closer to the notion of infectious identification—and whose very existence probably lends a modicum of credibility to talk about our identification with fictional characters.

²⁶ For further discussion, see Carroll (2004).

What I have in mind can be called 'mirror reflexes'.²⁷ This is the sort of motor imitation that Gordon Allport had in mind when he wrote: 'the imitative assumption of the postures and facial expressions of other people plays a greater part in ordinary life than is commonly realized'.²⁸ When conversing with another, we often observe ourselves knitting our brows as they knit their brows. They chuckle; we chuckle. They grimace; we grimace.

Moreover, these imitative responses are not confined to facial expressions. They extend to postures as well. We tend to fall into step with our companions; when they're walking tall, so are we. They rub their chin, we do likewise.²⁹ This mimicry is not restricted to real life encounters; when Hamlet's muscles bunch up—on either stage or screen—we feel a tug in our own. In short, we have an involuntary tendency to replicate automatically in our own bodies the behavior, particularly the expressive behavior, of our conspecifics. Furthermore, this tendency is inborn and already evident in infancy.³⁰

These imitative reflexes grant us some inkling of what others are feeling. When we configure our faces in the shape of another's—frowning when he frowns, for example—the feedback from our facial muscles stimulate our autonomic system in a way that is somewhat similar to his inner feelings, so long as he is sincere. This need not give us full access to his emotional state, but it supplies us with a valuable clue to the nature of that state by providing us with an experiential sense of the bodily-component—the feeling state—of the occurrent emotion of the other person.

This feature of the human organism has great adaptive value and is probably bred in the bone.³¹ These advantages are especially pertinent for communication. When I 'catch' the negative vibes or feelings of distress of another, I immediately survey the environment to locate the source of his discomfort. His negative affect alerts me in my own musculature to the likelihood that I may soon need to mobilize some vectorially converging, negative emotion, such as fear or possibly anger.

Of course, mirror reflexes, which *may* be linked to mirror neurons,³² are not only relevant for the purposes of gathering information about what surrounds other people.³³ By relaying to us something of what others are feeling, they help us cope with others. Detecting that one's brother is in a bad mood via mirror reflexes is helpful in

²⁷ See Wispé (1991), especially chapters 7 and 8. See also Hatfield, Cacioppo, & (1994), especially chapter 2.

²⁸ Allport (1924): 530.

²⁹ Meltzoff & Decety (2003): 494.

³⁰ Meltzoff & Moore (1977): 75–8; Meltzoff & Moore (1997): 179–92.

³¹ Plutchik (1987).

³² On mirror neurons, see: Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Matelli, et al. (1996): 246–52; Jellema, Baker, Perrett, & Perrett (2002); Fadiga, Fogassi, Pavesi, & Rizzolatti (1995): 2608–61. See also the articles by Iacoboni and Decety & Meltzoff in this volume.

³³ It should be noted that presently the mirror neurons that have been identified by researchers seem primarily dedicated to perceptual, motor, and pain mimicry rather than to emotive mimicry. This is one of the reasons for the caution in the sentence above.

deciding when to ask him for a loan. And, of course, mirror reflexes are immensely useful for coordinating group activities—for getting the troops reeved-up as they march off singing in lockstep comradeerie.

The communicative potential of mirror reflexes is widely exploited in audio-visual fictions, especially the theater arts and moving images of all sorts from films to CGI. The Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, having read Theodor Lipps on the topic, quite consciously attempted to exploit mirror reflexes in his film-making. He showed close-ups of clenched fists and horrified faces in the expectation that audiences would mimic these gestures in a way that would jump-start bodily feelings of consternation in them which, given the narrative context, would then segue into the emotional state with which Eisenstein wanted them to respond to the situation. Whether or not they realize their debt to Eisenstein, motion picture makers ever since have been following his example.

Arguably, mirror reflexes are not fully articulated emotional states, but only not-quite-specific, bodily-feeling states, such as vague intimations of distress. Since these mirror reflexes are not full scale emotional states, they do not supply evidence for *emotional identification*.³⁴ But mirror reflexes are undoubtedly affective states and they are contagious.³⁵ Furthermore, we can use the information that we gather in this way about the putative inner states of fictional characters in the formation of our own, integrated emotional reactions to them. That is, mirror reflexes may function as subroutines in the activation of our emotional responses to characters by alerting us to the general valence—whether positive or negative—of the characters, enabling us, thereby, to mobilize the appropriate, perhaps vectorially converging, emotional reaction to them—for example, sorrow if we detect that they are in spiritual pain. Mirror reflexes, in this respect, supply us with clues to the way in which we should size-up the situation in which characters find themselves.

Perhaps it is the existence of mirror reflexes that has led people to endorse the notion of the infectious emotional identification. This is understandable, since we do share feelings somewhat similar to those that the characters evince as a result of their ostensible manifestation of the pertinent states. Yet what is shared are not full-blown emotions, but only bodily feelings, and merely roughly similar ones at that. That is,

³⁴ Some, like Iacoboni and Decety & Meltzoff in this volume, write as though mirror reflexes and related patterns of mirror neuron firings are tantamount to empathizing. But if empathy is an emotion, then this seems unlikely, since these reflexes don't involve appraisals, whereas emotions do necessarily. Moreover, if empathy involves understanding then these states can't amount to empathy, since they are pure feeling-states. Nevertheless, as I indicate above, these states may contribute to the formation of emotional states. Regarding Iacoboni, and Decety & Meltzoff, see footnote 32.

³⁵ I wonder whether Meltzoff and Decety would agree with me about this. In their article, they indicate that behavioral imitation and its neural substrate precede mentalizing. Does that mean that these states in children are not yet emotions, properly so-called? On the other hand, the authors speak of 'empathy.' Nevertheless, it is not clear if by 'empathy,' they are speaking of empathy as infectious identification or merely about resonances (which might be only vectorially converging sensations) or simply feeling that we are *like* others. But if the latter, these would appear to fall far short of the notion of empathy as infectious identification.

unlike emotions, mirror reflexes do not necessarily involve appraisals, though they may afford data pertinent to forming an appraisal.³⁶

Nevertheless, mirror reflexes afford the creators of audio-visual fictions with a powerful repertoire of devices that are unparalleled in literary fiction and which can be deployed to keep spectators in virtually continuous affective contact with the pertinent characters. By exploiting our biological endowments, mirror reflexes enable us to feel our way into popular visual narratives with an impressive level of ease, accuracy, and assurance which we nevertheless take for granted.

11.8 Summary

There is no single affective relationship that describes the one and only connection between readers, listeners, and/or viewers, on the one hand, and fictional characters, on the other hand. There are a number relations; I do not know how many. In this essay, I have explored several: coincidentally occurring emotions which may include the antipathy element of solidarity; vectorially converging emotions, which can encompass certain episodes of sympathetic feeling and which is my preferred candidate for the title of empathy (should we wish to retain that label); as well, I have discussed mirror reflexes, affective states that, though not precisely fully articulated emotions, can nevertheless contribute to their formation. In charting these affective states, I have been skeptical about the degree to which infectious identification—and empathy construed as infectious identification—accounts for our emotional bond with fictional characters, especially protagonists. However, I grant that there are more species of affective relationships in this neighborhood of the heart than I have enumerated here, which relations I hope future research will disclose.³⁷

Appendix: A Competing View

Alessandro Giovanelli would undoubtedly agree about the importance that I assign to sympathy in our commerce with fictional characters. However, since his view of sympathy is at odds with mine, his position is a rival one. For Giovanelli, a certain kind of sympathy—which he calls *paradigmatic sympathy*—requires empathy as a

³⁶ I do not think that mirror reflexes involve appraisals, since we may detect distress in a fictional character by means of mirror reflexes, but that may lead to a sympathetic appraisal, if the character is the heroine, or a triumphant appraisal, if she is the villain.

³⁷ I have profited from comments on the body of this paper from Amy Coplans, Murray Smith, Jesse Prinz, Peter Goldie, Margaret Moore, Susan Feagin, William Seeley, Stephen Davies, Graham McFee, Martin Hoffman, E. Anne Kaplan, and the other participants in the conference on empathy at California State University, Fullerton, 2006. I have also benefited from a discussion of the main section of this paper at the Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts in July, 2008, where my commentators included David Miall, Keith Oately, Willi van Peer, Margaret Freeman, Donald Freeman, Reuven Tsur, and Ellen Dissanayake. None of these scholars are responsible for the flaws in this paper. For despite their sage advice, I did it my way.

component.³⁸ Empathy, in turn, is thought of by Giovanelli in terms of an empathizer vicariously experiencing the mental states and emotions of another, as if they were her own. Thus, Giovanelli thinks that some sort of identification is a part of sympathy and, therefore, denies my hypothesis that it is sympathy, construed as a state contrasting to identification, that is the primary glue that emotively attaches us to fictional characters.

Giovanelli's reason for this view is that since identification/empathy is a part of sympathy, it makes no sense to say that sympathy is a more comprehensive emotive fixative than identification/empathy, because they are, in a significant number of cases, a package deal.

It is not always easy to follow Giovanelli's discussion, since he frequently uses 'sympathy' interchangeably with 'paradigmatic sympathy'—i.e. sympathy plus identificatory empathy.³⁹ Thus, he will say that something is a necessary component of sympathy, where counterexamples are easy to come by. But then he will say that he is talking about paradigmatic sympathy, rather than sympathy more generally.

Giovanelli knows that sympathy in general does not require empathy. As he himself notes, a husband may sympathize with his wife who is enduring labor pains, although he lacks the equipment to experience them vicariously. Likewise a male audience member may sympathize with the sentiments expressed by the characters in *The Vagina Monologues*, but be incapable of representing those experiences to himself. Similarly, we may not be able to imagine the experiences of those stricken by exotic diseases or by unprecedented catastrophes. And, although Giovanelli does not mention this case, we may be sympathetically indignant with respect to the treatment of others—such as the prisoners at Abu Graib—because we feel their suffering to be unjust, even though we do not feel ourselves to be suffering that injustice. I don't have to vicariously experience humiliation in order to mobilize my sympathies for those who are so humiliated.

Giovanelli will concede all this, I think, but go on to say that he is not speaking of sympathy broadly, but only of paradigmatic sympathy. Yet, this raises the question of why this kind of sympathy—if there is such a thing—counts as paradigmatic and why Giovanelli thinks it should be accorded theoretical primacy. Giovanelli offers three considerations, none of which I find compelling.

The first consideration might be called 'the-best-sort-of-sympathy argument.' The idea here seems to be that paradigmatic sympathy is deeper than sympathy sans empathy. It is more sensitive. In everyday life, Giovanelli asserts, we want sympathy that comes garnished with empathy in contrast to sympathy *simpliciter*. With regard to our relation with fictional characters, we value the opportunity for this more sensitive sort of sympathy just because it engages us more deeply to the relevant characters. Moreover, this deeper sort of sympathy may act as a bulwark against the possibility of being manipulated sentimentally.

³⁸ See Giovanelli (2009) and (2008): 11–24.

³⁹ In fairness, it should be acknowledged that he warns us that he will do this, but it is still a little confusing at times.

None of this seems persuasive to me. Paradigmatic sympathy is said to be more sensitive than other types of sympathy. But surely there is an equivocation here. It may be more sensitive with respect to the feelings or sensations supposedly experienced vicariously, but that does not mean that it is a more discerning kind of sympathy. I see no reason to doubt that sympathy, without the alleged accompaniment of identificatory empathy, can also be the equal and often surpass what Giovanelli calls paradigmatic sympathy in discerning the concern we ought to bring to others. This will be the case especially where the target of our sympathies is attracted to something not in her best interests. Furthermore, I doubt Giovanelli's assertion that we want those who sympathize with us to vicariously experience what I am feeling. Although I am glad to have their sympathy, I do not want my family or my doctor to feel my pain as I lie in my hospital bed with third-degree burns.

Just because I am unconvinced that so-called paradigmatic sympathy is more sensitive in an artistically pertinent sense than sympathy, as I construe it above, I question whether we value it as the best sort of sympathy to indulge with regard to fictional characters. Nor do I see why Giovanelli thinks that paradigmatic sympathy blocks the threat of sentimentality. Indeed, I think that many, like Plato, who endorse the idea of identification, worry that taking on the experiences of characters will mislead our sympathies, often in an extremely superficial direction.

Giovanelli's next set of reasons for defending his notion of paradigmatic sympathy involve the claim that this idea can handle certain problem cases between than competing theories. These problem cases are labeled respectively as *anticipatory sympathy*, *conditional sympathy*, and *sympathy by proxy*. Anticipatory sympathy occurs when we muster sympathy for a character before ill fortune befalls her and her lamentations commence; for example, we feel anticipatory sympathy for the character who is about to learn that the rest of her family is dead. Conditional sympathy is extended to characters who will never know about some setback to their interests, such as the dead man who never learns his will has been overturned by his feckless children. And lastly, there is sympathy by proxy; this involves sympathy for someone who is keenly attracted to some prospect that is not in his best interest, such as the eighty-year-old millionaire smitten by the nubile, young gold-digger. Nevertheless, we feel sympathy for him, which, on Giovanelli's account, should imply we are vicariously experiencing what he experiences.

As the last example underscores, these might appear to be cases where empathy is inapposite, since the vicarious feelings of empathizers will be strikingly different than what the targets are experiencing at the moment that our sympathy takes hold.

But not so, claims Giovanelli. He says that with anticipatory sympathy, we empathize with a future or possible state of the character. In the case of conditional sympathy, we empathize counterfactually with what the character *would* feel, were he apprized of the way in which his will has been disrespected. And when it comes to sympathy by proxy, we are said to empathize with what the silly old millionaire *should* be feeling.

I find these suggestions very strange, if we are to conceive as empathy as a form of identification, since, following Giovanelli's instructions, it does not appear that I am actually imagining the experiences of these characters as experiences of my own, for the simple reason that the experiences I am entertaining are radically different than the experiences these characters are thought to be having. How can we be said to have the same experiences of the characters when they themselves are not having said experiences? Perhaps we can send our imaginations in the directions that Giovanelli suggests. But we are not identifying with the characters in question by way of sharing their experiences vicariously.

Giovanelli considers his approach to these three problems in contrast to Susan Fearn's account of audience sympathies as directed toward characters, which account, like the view sketched by me above, sees the relevant sort of sympathy as grounded in our endorsement of the interests and desires of the characters, rather than in empathetic identification.⁴⁰ According to Giovanelli, his approach can explain the differences in sympathetic reactions to the characters when they are undergoing the emotions we putatively, vicariously emulate versus when they are not suffering the feelings we emote on their behalf.

But I am not sure that there is always a difference in our experience of sympathy across these cases, and, even if there is, I doubt that it is systematic, and thus, I suspect, the differences would need to be adjudicated on a case by case basis, where, in fact, the model that Feagin and I embrace would not appear to be obviously disadvantaged. Moreover, on the basis of what he has said so far, I am not certain what the differences in sympathetic response are that Giovanelli has in mind nor is it clear to me how exactly his view explains them.

In relation to the preceding point, it also needs to be emphasized that Giovanelli has failed to appreciate the methodological problem the competing theories of sympathy, based on audience alignment with the interests and desires of characters, pose for his empathy/sympathy view. For, since the interest/desire view does a nice job dealing with the cases that Giovanelli introduces, it is incumbent on him to demonstrate what explanatory pressure remains that is being relieved by the postulation of identificatory empathy. Without that, Giovanelli has failed to motivate his conjecture to the effect that empathy is a *necessary* part of (even just some sort of) sympathy. Instead, he's added a wheel to the mechanism that turns nothing, or, to put it less poetically, he's violated the methodological principle of parsimony. Until Giovanelli adduces some compelling explanatory gap in my account of sympathy that can only be closed by introducing the alleged process of identificatory empathy, a theory of sympathy, like the one I proposed earlier, has no reason to take empathy/identification on board. The burden of proof here belongs to Giovanelli.

⁴⁰ Feagin (1996).

Finally, Giovanelli believes that an account of sympathy as entailing empathy gains support from the causal connection between empathy and sympathy—namely, that empathy often leads to sympathy. Giovanelli proposes this consideration despite the fact that he realizes that the notion of empathy that he presupposes is compatible with the empathizer being hostile or indifferent to the target.

For example, it is often suggested in the literature that the Complete Sadist should be an astute empathizer—all the better to grock what torments his victim. Likewise, suppose I could engender Hitler's feelings towards Jewish people in my own heart; but that could lead me to anathematize him. Nor is there any contradiction involved in suggesting that I might empathize, in Giovanelli's sense, with the rodeo star's experience but just remain indifferent to his interests and desires because I'm just not an-at-home-on-the-range kinda' guy.

Clearly, if there is a causal connection between empathy à la Giovanelli, and sympathy, it is an empirical question, not a conceptual one. But in order to convince us empirically that there is such a connection, Giovanelli will have to show that empathy must be added to the audience member's endorsement of the character's goals, interests, and desires in order to explain our sympathy for the protagonist. Until Giovanelli can adduce some reasons why identificatory empathy has to be added to accounts of sympathy like the one I've sketched, adding empathy/identification to sympathy seems like so much excess theoretical baggage.

12

Empathy: Interpersonal vs Artistic?

Graham McFee

12.1 Introduction

Although I have not typically thought about contact with artworks (and especially with literary works) in terms of empathy,¹ I had an experience which might seem to point in that direction. On one occasion, while suffering from heatstroke, I read at one 'sitting' a translation of De Lampedusa's novel, *The Leopard*. Confined to bed, my attention to the novel took on a peculiar focused quality, in which I 'imaginatively identified' (for want of a better expression) with a central character, throughout his trials and tribulations as recounted in the book. And my 'identification' was quite extreme: for instance, those circumstances made it seem easy to put oneself into the climatic conditions. It seems to me very plausible to see my relation to that central character in terms of *empathy*. But, of course, this case is very much more than just my being one of those 'readers [who] adopt the perspective of one or more characters in fictional narratives' (Coplan (2004): 141). Indeed, it is this stronger (than usual) sense of identification that clearly warrants the term *empathy* here.

Now, a case so peculiar shows us nothing directly about reading, about empathy, or about literature. My reading of *The Leopard* in a semi-hypnoid state cannot be our model of the usual experience of literature. Still, in that unusual case, my empathy was with the character as depicted, not with the author. And this would, I take it, be a characteristic of any such identification—although the situation might become clouded when the writing had a strong autobiographical flavor. But that would just generate the familiar problem of distinguishing the implied author (and his acts) from

¹ Thoughts raised by the 'Empathy' conference at California State University Fullerton, June, 2006 led to this paper. I am conscious that some readers might see this as 'inventing the wheel': my only reply is that most of the other offerings on this topic do not seem appropriately *round* to me. (My avoiding the term 'circular' is important!) And I would like to thank all those who by word or deed encouraged me to shape those thoughts into a chapter; especially, in alphabetical order, Heather Battaly, Amy Coplan, Terry Diffey, Peter Goldie, and Derek Matravers. And then, again, to the editors for help later on.