

On the Phenomenon of Literary Empathy¹

Jing Shang

Faculté des Lettres, Sorbonne Université

sjmzht@gmail.com



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Abstract

In this paper, drawing on Husserl, as well as on certain other phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Richir, I claim that the phenomenon of the apprehension of the perspectives and emotions of literary characters deserves to be called *literary empathy*. In order to support this claim, I'll firstly argue that empathy is principally an act of presentification closely related with perception, memory and imagination. Secondly, I'll argue that *literary empathy* with literary characters is an imaginative reproduction of the reader's bodily sedimentations under the instruction offered by the literary text. Thirdly, I'll argue that through *literary empathy*, a reader forms a peculiar intersubjective link with the literary character. The subjects in play are thus the real existential "I" and the imagined Other. Asymmetry of existence-positing and lack of interaction do not prevent the imagined characters from exerting an effective influence upon the reader and reconfiguring her actual life.

Keywords: imagination, empathy, presentification, fiction, bodily sedimentation

1. Introduction

The notion of empathy plays an important role in the contemporary debate on social cognition. In general, empathy denotes one subject's grasp of another subject's lived experience – their perspectives and emotions for example. Differently from the "Theory Theory" and "Simulation Theory" which explain empathy as mediated either by a folk-psychological theory of mind (cf. Fodor, 1987; Gopnik and Wellman, 1994; Carruthers and Smith, 1996) or by an imaginative simulation (cf. Gordon, 2005; Goldman, 2006; Stueber, 2006), traditional phenomenologists such as Scheler and Stein maintain that

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empathy is a perception *sui generis* in which the lived experience of others is directly given (Scheler, 1973; Stein, 2012). Recent scholars who adopt a phenomenological approach thus hold the view that empathy is a direct perception of the other's lived experience unfolding during our intercorporeal interaction with other embodied subjects in a shared environment (Gallagher and Hutto, 2008; Krueger and Overgaard, 2012; Zahavi, 2014).

Despite its simplicity and cogency in explaining empathy happening in face-to-face situations, this approach leaves a puzzle regarding our apprehension of foreign lived experience in a non-face-to-face situation, especially when it comes to the crucial question that interests us here, namely, how can we explain the phenomenon, sometimes called "readers' engagement with characters" (Caracciolo, 2013), that occurs when we read a literary work, whereby we often have the impression that we can "perceive" the fictional world from the perspectives of the literary characters, and grasp their feelings, thoughts and emotions, such that our own emotional states are in turn influenced – even though we are aware that their world is merely fictional? Would not this to some extent constitute a "paradox" (cf. Davies, 2009)²?

Taking recourse to the theoretical resources elaborated by phenomenology, and especially those proposed by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Richir, I claim that this phenomenon deserves to be called *literary empathy*. In order to support this claim, I'll firstly argue that even face-to-face empathy is not a pure perception in the sense of a *presentation*; instead, it is an act of presentification which is closely related to perception as well as to other acts of presentification, namely imagination and memory. Secondly, I'll argue that *literary empathy* with literary characters is an imaginative reproduction of the reader's bodily sedimentations under the instruction of the depiction offered in the literary text. Thirdly, I'll argue that through *literary empathy*, the reader forms a peculiar intersubjectivity with the literary characters, and implicitly also with their writer.

2. Empathy as presentification and its relation with presentation as well as other acts of presentification

In Husserl, presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) and presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) are fundamentally distinct from each other. While presentation is an intentional act in which the object is given "in person" or "in the flesh" (*leibhaftig*) (Hua III: 51) and its paradigm is perception, a presentification is an intentional act in which something which is not actually given "in the flesh" is manifested. That which is not given "in the flesh" might be, for example, the perspectives or emotions of another person, a sight I have witnessed in the past, or an imagined fantastic animal. Correspondingly, empathy, memory, and imagination are the three main intentional acts classified by Husserl as presentifications.

Generally speaking, presentation is originary (*ursprünglich*), while the presentifying acts are modifications carried out on the basis of presentation. At first sight, this might seem to confirm Derrida's critique that Husserl advances a certain kind of "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida, 1993: 3, 120), failing to realize that presence can never be "full", since it is always intricately with non-

² To be precise, Davies distinguishes empathetic emotion toward fictional figures, such as my pity for Anna Karenina, from the abnormal emotion directly aroused by a fictional object, such as my fear of a menacing object in a movie, judging the first case to be non-paradoxical and the second paradoxical (cf. Davies, 2009). In the present article, I will focus only on the first case, namely on the phenomenon of empathetic emotion and the real existential emotion that it may subsequently draw out. I will thus show how this phenomenon is phenomenologically non-paradoxical and integrally intelligible.

presence. However, the truth is rather that, far from sticking to the priority of presentation, Husserl in fact devotes large swathes of his research to investigations both of the *interlacing* between presentation and presentification and of that between different acts of presentification.

Presentification does indeed presuppose the acts of presentation as its basis of modification, and thus does have presentation as its constitutive element. My memory is the remembrance of my past perceptive experiences: if I had never visited the town of Illiers and had never seen such and such a house, I would not *remember* that I did so. The imagination is also a modification of perceived elements. The image of a centaur, for example, is based on the perceptive experience of the head of a human being and the body of horse. My empathy towards an Other - my understanding of another subject's perspective and *psyche*³ - presupposes my own experience of the original unity of my own body and of my *psyche*, as well as my perception of the Other's bodily gestures or countenances.

Talking like this, it seems as if perception were something prior to presentification, and as if it could function independently of presentification. However, this is not the case. Despite Husserl's attempt to take perception as the standard form of presentation, and to distinguish it from presentified acts, perception - as Husserl himself notices - is in fact not isolated from presentification. Taking a closer look at perceptive experience shows that the "look" at something often goes far beyond a simple presentative perception. For example, when I look at the curtain in my room, I don't see *only* its green color and gauze tissue; rather, its green color also makes me think about the morning forest and thus has a refreshing effect upon me. By looking at the curtain, I may also at the same time remember that it's a gift from a friend, and it may thus remind me of the nice moments of our friendship. Likewise, my experience of another person, does not consist of two different successive acts, namely perception of a physical body first and *then* empathy with a person. In my perceptual experience of the Other, a certain grasp of her *psyche* immediately and always *goes hand in hand with* my perception of her facial and bodily expression. In a word, different acts of presentification are interwoven within one and the same "look" which tends usually to be taken to be merely a perception.

Beside its interwovenness with perception, the functioning of empathy is also closely related with the two other acts of presentification, namely memory and imagination.

Husserl is aware of the difference between memory and empathy: he notes that "the pure ego of a memory is identical with the remembered pure ego, but the pure ego of empathy is not identical with the empathized pure ego." (Hua XIII: 434. Cf. also Hua XIII: 318–319; Hua XIV: 139) In other words, in memory, what is presentified is *my* own past original experience, which is to say, something which I once had direct access to. A memory not only posits the existence of the remembered object, it also identifies the experience in question as *mine*. In contrast, in empathy, what is presentified is not at all anything to which I have ever had direct access: it is not *my* own experience, but instead that of the Other. In fact, I could never have direct access to it, for if I were able to have direct access the Other's experience, I would be her and she would be me, and the experience would then be an experience of myself rather than an instance of empathy towards the Other.

However, in the *Cartesian Meditations* as well as in many unpublished manuscripts, we nonetheless find evidence that Husserl does think that empathy functions, at least to some extent, in a way that is similar to memory. His comparison of memory with empathy is so pervasive that one must

³ I use the notion "psyche" without its empiricist denotation. I understand it in a general sense as referring to sensuous, affective and emotional subjective experience, such as exemplified in "thoughts, feelings, decisions, being excited, expecting, paying attention" (Hua XIII: 63). In order to ensure a terminological consistency, all translations from German and French philosophical texts will be my own).

agree with Iso Kern that there is in Husserl a repeated “parallelization of empathy to memory” (Husserl XIII: XXX). Just as in memory a past experience can be reproduced and its object presentified to the present subject A, so in empathy the perspectives and *psyche* of another subject B, which this subject A cannot originally experience, can be presentified (Hua I: 145; Hua XIII: no. 15c, no. 16; Hua XIV: attachment 32; Hua XV: no.20, attachment L). And we posit the real existence of both the remembered objects and the other subjects’ perspectives and *psyches* as real. What is more, just as a memory demands previous experience as its basis, so empathy towards the Other also demands previous self-experience as preparation. According to Husserl, in order to empathize with others, I must have previously experienced myself as a psycho-physical unity, so that, when a body similar to mine appears in my perceptual field, a passive analogy can take place, endowing a sense of psycho-physical unity to the body that I see. The passive analogy is similar to remembrance: it is as if the other body and its bodily gestures “reminded” me of my own body-*psyche* experience, thereby letting me understand the Other’s body-*psyche* experience: “it (the foreign body) indicates to me a modification of memory of myself as concrete present” (Hua XV: 642). What is more, our memories related to our own past, or regarding other people, constitute an existential context with reference to which we may empathize with others to a better extent. For example, if I remember that I often played with a doll together with a friend in our joyful childhood, I can better understand how happy she is when I see that she has found this old doll in the attic.

Husserl himself and later scholars have, furthermore, paid attention to the constitutive role that imagination or phantasy plays for empathy (Hua XIII, XIV; Depraz, 1995). Empathizing with somebody is similar to entering into a state of phantasy, and to perceiving and thinking as if we were the other person (Hua XIV: 186), as if we were there in her place (Hua XV: 250). At a certain moment in his reflections, Husserl deems empathy a “fictive genesis” (Hua XIV: 477), and he even replaces empathy with fantasy: ‘Instead of “empathize,” we can also say “think into” (*sich hineindenken*), “fantasy into” (*sich hineinphantasieren*).’ (Hua XIII: XXVI). More specifically, empathy, as imagination, takes place under a special form of the “as if.” In empathy I don’t take myself to be the Other, but I do *feign* (*fingieren*), *as if* I were another (Hua I: 106). This feigning can be conceived as being a fantasy modification (Hua XV: 640) of myself. “I” cannot be at the same time both here and there, since the “I”, as the subject, is the absolute center of my own kinesthesia: the “I” is an absolute *Here*. The fantasy modification consisting in feigning to be another may be made possible by my fictional transformation (*Umfiktion*) as being *there*, while in fact I am the absolute *Here*. This fictional transformation involves taking up another perspective towards the world (Hua XIII: 365). Furthermore, even when I am neither joyful nor sad myself, I can nonetheless “feign” an affective and emotional state such as joyfulness or sadness when I empathize with a smiling or crying person.

Emphasizing the affinity between imagination and empathy, Richir goes as far as to identify imagination with empathy in his interpretation of Husserl’s theory of imagination and fantasy. According to Richir, the noema is not limited to being something pictorial, representative, or objective, and while non-figurative fantasy is a special kind of noetic act, its corresponding noema is the corporality (*Leiblichkeit*), affectivity, and even the emotion of the other subjects. In this way, he does not explain empathy with reference to fantasy, but instead goes the other way around: fantasy in its most original form is an experience which Husserl characterizes precisely as empathy. For instance, the empathy for characters portrayed by actors on the stage, or the empathy towards other people’s countenances, are equally both validated as apt models of pure fantasy. Phantasy for Richir is in a

certain sense a synonym of empathy, as an act which presentifies another subject's embodied lived experience (cf. Richir, 2010: 143–158).

Nevertheless, Husserl himself holds certain reservations concerning this kinship between empathy and imagination. He notices that the imagination is an act in which the real existence of the object is not posited, or is neutralized – that is, the existence of the imagined holds only under the mode of the “as if”. When we perceive or remember a person, we naturally believe that this person exists as we do. If the person that I just saw disappeared suddenly from my vision, I might rub my eyes and ask myself where she went or whether I did in fact really see her. If someone told me that there was never such a person, I would be amazed. But the same thing does not happen in free imagination. If I *imagine* that I'm passing by such and such a cheerful person, and then at the next moment I cease imagining this scenario, I don't wonder where this person went, and I don't doubt as to whether or not I had had the imagination of her.

Contrary to this non-positing attitude of the imagination, in empathy we do pose the existence of the Other and of her experience. When we see a grimace on another person's face, we consequently think that the person might be suffering pain. We are aware that we might be *wrong* with regard to what exactly the person is feeling, but we don't think that the person, the grimace and the possible pain *are* just “as if”. Identifying empathy with imagination also risks falling back into the traditional interpretation of empathy as imaginative projection (Ferencz-Flatz, 2014: 87–118), and this would make empathy a mere imagining *according to myself* and *of myself*, rather than an understanding of the “Other,” of what the Other really thinks.

What happens in the case of what we call *literary empathy*, in which we are not submitted to the appeal to reality, and wherein there is no embodied Other to interact with me and give me feedback, but in which we nonetheless do experience perspectives and emotional states that are not ours?

3. The imaginative reproduction of bodily sedimentations in *literary empathy*

Like empathy with a real person, the functioning of *literary empathy* is a result of the interwovenness and cooperation of perception with different presentifying acts, but in a more finely interlacing and subtle way.

Literary empathy cannot happen without the reader's actual perception: the reader must read the text. Of course, reading and comprehending a text is not identical with the perception of it; and yet the former cannot work without the latter. Appealed to (*gefordert*) (Hua XIV: 187) by the written text, the reader turns her attention from her own actual life and interests to the situation described in the text. And instead of being received as a list of simple predications or judgements directly concerning reality, the text is rather seized as a trigger of the unfolding of imagination, which is to say of the reproduction of anteriorly perceived elements. Past perceptions are thus also implicated in the reading experience. Indeed, *literary empathy* is anchored in the reader's own past experience (Hua XIII: 299; Hua XXIII: 522), and as such it requires the sedimentation of past perceptions; it “therefore runs necessarily according to my habitual self or towards him” (Hua XIV: 187). The past experience in question need not necessarily be an explicit pictorial episode, such as in the case of Husserl's memory of being with the children on the Mausberg with the field glowing in the sunset light (Hua XXIII: 287). But it does require the sedimented elements of past experience, and by “sedimented elements of past experience” I mean fragmental impressions, such as the color of the sunset I saw, the feeling of peacefulness, or simply an ineffable affection that I might have then had, at a certain past moment. The sensations we

have had are sedimented in us and can be reactivated and rearranged even without our thematic, deliberate recollection of the relevant full episodes.

To give an example: in order to empathize with the strange sensation, the confusion, the thrill and the awe that strike little Aureliano in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* when he touches some ice for the first time and exclaims “it’s boiling,” I don’t need to have ever experienced the whole depicted episode. I don’t need to have ever lived in a remote tropical Columbian village and to have touched some ice there. I don’t necessarily need either to represent the episode that it was in this or that winter in the northernmost village of China under minus 50 degrees Celsius that I once touched a steel door. But I do need to have had some experience with something that is very cold and something boiling. As a person who once touched a steel door in an extremely cold winter, when I read this passage, my own sedimented sensation is called forth: it was not “cold,” but instead exactly “boiling”; the “heat” on the palm of the hand, the fear and the immediate withdrawal of the hand, etc.. The concrete content and quality of the imaginative empathy vary according to different personal experiences. For a reader who has never had this kind of experience, the exact empathic affect drawn out in her by the same text may be different.

It is this reactivation that makes possible the imagining directed by the instructions of the literary text. “The *elements* are still *memorial elements*. The intentional whole, however, is characterized as ‘free invention’” (Hua XXIII: 250), since otherwise the subject would experience it as memory rather than imagination. Instead of a repetitive reproduction, the imagination is rather a creative reproduction of these sedimented elements of past experience which turns them into new experiences guided by the literary text. More than a simple “waking up”, the text functions as the guidance for *arranging* and *reshaping* the sedimented elements. For example, contrary to the normal cheerful feeling of spring, when reading Eliot saying “April is cruel”, or when Dickinson calls blossom “the Queen of Calvary,” the reader may have a totally different new feeling: the Spring may be felt as a mixture of the past (death) and the newly born. Through determining and filling in the horizon of indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheithorizont*), the literary writer brings form (*Gestalten*) to this horizon of the reader (Hua XXIII: 540). *Literary empathy* is not a passive reception of something already finished, but a guided re-shaping and even re-creation.

Where exactly are the past experiential elements sedimented? In the reader’s lived body. And how is it possible that they can be reactivated and reshaped by the literary text? The key to this question also lies in the reader’s lived body. Husserl leaves us some traces concerning the relation between body and memory, but this “bodily memory” has mainly been understood as pertaining to our implicit familiarity with our kinesthetic bodily movements (Summa, 2014: 302 ff.). However, when Husserl says that when he recalls his childhood and sees himself as a child, “some image of my corporeal existence as a child plays a part, thrusts itself forward, and becomes the bearer of my experiences” (Hua XXIII: 468), are the experiences which are borne by the image of his childhood body limited only to bodily movements? And what exactly is this image? Is it a mere recollection, or does imagination already start to play its part even here? And how can this bodily image interact with a literary text? Husserl seems to offer few explicit answers in response to these questions.

It is Merleau-Ponty, inheriting the notion of lived body (*Leib*) from Husserl, who pays more attention to the embodiment of memory. Merleau-Ponty argues that memory functions not only intentionally, but also bodily. The body “is the medium of our communication with time (as well as with space)” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 221), and corporeity is the “guardian of the past” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 292). As vividly illustrated in a paragraph in which Proust describes a bodily memory –

a certain posture of lying down⁴ – the bodily sensations that this corporeal posture evokes bring back the past sensation, as well as the past environment along with its whole system of *existential meanings* (such as “Siena marble” and “in grandma’s house”), the system in which the bodily sensations were produced.

Moreover, the relation between language and body equally receives a fuller elaboration in Merleau-Ponty. For him, language functions as phonetic *gesture*. This is not simply because language, just like bodily gestures, can express the *mind* of the subject, but more specifically because language itself is *bodily*. First of all, we need a body to employ language; but more importantly, the meaning of linguistic words is not limited to abstract conceptuality, but is rather *vital* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 242ff) in such a way that the words echo or evoke our bodily sensations to different degrees. While citing and analyzing Werner, Merleau-Ponty writes:

“the word ‘warm,’ for example, induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo [...] One subject states that on presentation of the word ‘damp’ (*feucht*), he experiences, in addition to a feeling of dampness and coldness, a whole rearrangement of the bodily schema, as if the inside of the body came to the periphery, and as if the reality of the body, until then concentrated into his arms and legs, were in search of a new balance of its parts.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 272).

This description is quite similar to the case of the above-mentioned example of the reading experience concerning little Aureliano touching the ice. Such bodily sensations elicited in response to verbal solicitations obviously demand the sedimentation of the bodily sensations in question on the reader’s side. They bear witness to a dynamic interwovenness between the past bodily sensations on the one hand, and the guidance of the literary texts on the other. *Literary empathy* with fictional characters is an imaginative reproduction of bodily sedimentations proceeding under the instruction of the depiction offered in the literary texts.

4. Imaginative intersubjectivity in *literary empathy*

Even though literary characters are not posited as existing in the real perceptual world, they still have a certain kind of “as if” existence. And despite its fundamentally non-positing character, the phenomenon of our understanding of the perspective and emotional experience of literary characters still deserves to be called *empathy*, since fictional characters are taken as subjects instead of mere objects - subjects who *live* in the fictional world with all their sensations, feelings, perceptions, emotions, wishes, etc., and which thus have their *subjectivity sui generis*. What’s more, in normal cases, the reader is aware that she is empathizing with someone *else* and does not posit herself as the character. Literary subjects do possess a *non-objectal alterity*. Even when a reader is absorbed or engrossed (*versinkt*) into her reading, when the attention she pays to her actual self is abated while that

⁴ For example, especially: “[...] my body, the side upon which I was lying, faithful guardians of a past which my mind should never have forgotten, brought back before my eyes the glimmering flame of the night-light in its urn-shaped bowl of Bohemian glass that hung by chains from the ceiling, and the chimney-piece of Siena marble in my bedroom at Combray, in my grandparents’ house, in those far distant days which at this moment I imagined to be in the present without being able to picture them exactly, and which would become plainer in a little while when I was properly awake.” (Proust, 1992: 6)

which she directs towards the fictional world and towards what the fictional figures are experiencing is privileged, her actual life nonetheless still does not dissolve completely, and her attention to herself is not reduced to the point of zero. The reader is usually still unthematically aware of *herself* and of the fact that she is empathizing with *someone else*. Her integrated past and present experiences of herself remain as a *horizon of literary empathy*.

Even in deep reading in which the reader is engrossed in the imaginative episodes, her body anchored in the actual perceptual world does not completely disappear. The attention-to-oneself of the engrossed reader might become blunt, losing its sharpness, but still she has an awareness of herself being in the world, and still passively and unthematically senses the environment wherein she is situated. Her body still remains operative as an open sensorial field: it lurks in the background and is ready to be awakened at any moment. When the reader feels tired or when something irritating happens in the environment, her attention may be turned back to the world wherein her body is situated. In *literary empathy*, the reader transfers her attention from one world to another, or she has, to some degree, attention for both simultaneously (cf. Hua XXIII: 454).

The reader thus maintains a double life when reading literature. For example, when imaginatively empathizing with the feelings of little Hans in *Zauberberg* in his grandfather's somber "cabinet," the reader may still feel bothered by the uncomfortableness of her chair, or by sunlight that is too bright, and when the uncomfortableness and the brightness reach a certain degree, this reader will be "awakened" from her imagining, will pay attention to her real state, and will maybe even take action to change chairs or move into the shadow. The "transfer into" (*Hineinversetzung*), by which I either locate myself in the imaginary world or place myself into the fictional figures (Hua XIII: 299), is a kind of co-living (*mitleben*) of the episodes and the fictional figure's experience: I as a reader live closely parallel to the fiction, but I neither think that I myself am in the scene as a third person, nor that I am Hans himself. There is thus, contrary to Husserl's claim (cf. Hua XIII: 298-301; Bernet, 2012: 7-8), no fantasy-I – at least not in the sense according to which I would appoint myself a role in the imaginary scene – otherwise it would be a daydream or hallucination and not an instance of literature-reading in the normal sense. While its identity remains based on the body anchored in the world, a manifold splitting of the "ego" of the reader nonetheless takes place.

The reader in her real life and the character in the imaginary world thus form a peculiar *intersubjectivity*. The subjects in play are not "real I – real Other", since the existence of the other is not posed: the fictional figures are not confounded with the people living around me in the system of reality. The subjects are not "imagined I – imagined Other" either, since I don't assign myself a specific role in the fictional story. The subjects in play are instead "existential embodied I – imagined Other": it is the real I who is reading, imagining and taking the fictional characters as fictive subjects such as to empathize with them, and so there is indeed an Other.

Besides the positing of existence, the difference between the alterity of a person and that of a fictional character lies in the degree of their transparency. Since the exact manner in which we empathize with literary characters has largely to do with the personal embodied experience of the reader, they seem more "transparent" to the reader who has the impression that they can know them "in ways [they] could never know people in real life." (Cohn, 1978: 5) However, this does not mean that literary empathy is a simple and free projection on the part of the reader, for – as discussed above – this reader must follow the fixed depictions offered in the literary text. The text can contradict the reader's projection or surprise them. That is to say, the literary subject is not, after all, completely transparent to us – it maintains, like the real embodied subject, a certain opacity which is beyond the

reach of my projection and expectation. In fact, behind the parallel of the embodied reading subject and the imagined subject, hides another subject – the writer who has composed the text. Even though there is no direct face-to-face encounter nor communication, every embodied reader, through empathizing with the characters, also forms a more subtle intersubjectivity with the embodied writer. Neither the reader, nor the character, nor the writer, but only all three of them together co-participate in shaping a literary work through the functioning of this peculiar intersubjectivity.

The non-positing of the real existence of the literary characters in this peculiar intersubjectivity is not a hindrance when it comes to these characters drawing out affections in the embodied reader, just as a real subject can do. Even though we do not presuppose that a young man named Werther lives or once lived in the world in which we live, many of us might still shed tears when empathizing with Werther's sorrows. This is what has been called by recent scholars (cf. for example Konrad et al., 2018) the "paradox of emotional responses to fiction", namely that a "real" reader can be effectively affected by an imagined "irreal" fiction. From my point of view, this is not truly a paradox however, but rather an entailment of the doubleness of the life the reader conducts during *literary empathy*. The episodes and the emotions traversed by the characters are imagined and presentified, and yet the joy or sadness I feel while reading is real and actual. At the same time as I keep my own identity in the real actual world, I am also engaged in the peculiar imaginary intersubjectivity. The imagining subject "actually feels" (*aktuell fühlen*) (Hua XXIII: 375), astonishment, fear, or desire, and this astonishment, fear and desire are "not reproductive, but real acts, grounded in the really performed fantasy" (Hua XXIII: 375). The presentified empathy towards the fictional characters and the present affections felt by the reader are fused together in one and the same reader.

Husserl distinguishes two groupings amongst the actual feelings that readers have for the artwork: aesthetic feelings (*ästhetisches Gefühl*) and existential feelings (*Existentialgefühl*). An aesthetic feeling, especially aesthetic pleasure, is the actual pleasure the real subject takes in the manners of appearing (*Erscheinungsweise*) (Hua XXIII: 388) harboured and deployed in the works – the beautiful forms and appearances of the imagined objects (Hua XXIII: 386 ff., 439 ff.), rather than the content of the object itself. An existential feeling is an emotion, such as fear or pity, which the imagining subject may have during imagination. Taking the experience of reading fairytales as an example, we "sympathize emotionally with the persons in the fairytale; we rejoice and are sad; we experience fear and pity, and so on." (Hua XXIII: 383). Since these are the emotions the imagining subject has for the imagined, and not her emotions *for* real life, Husserl calls them quasi-feelings (*quasi-Gefühle*) (Hua XXIII: 389). In keeping with this, he thinks that they are *modified* emotions. Inasmuch as they are indeed acts that the real subject actually carries out, they are "modified and yet actual" (Hua XXIII: 393). Husserl thinks that they are real acts of the affections (*wirkliche Gemütsakte*), in which we live and through which we react to the aesthetic works (Hua XXIII: 383). Both types of feeling – aesthetic and existential – are the affective effects that an artwork draws out in the real appreciator; they are thus both instances of the "return from the fantasy into real life" (Bernet, 2012: 20).

It should even be said that it is not the quasi-being quality of the imaginary world that causes the imagination's affective influence upon reality – it is not because I suppose that the imaginary characters exist that I am affected by them. On the contrary, it is the presently felt affective influence that motivates the imagining subject to confer a quasi-being quality upon the fictional characters. In other words, it is not because I believe that the figures quasi-exist that I am affected by them; it is

rather because they have such a strong influence on me that I cannot but think that they somehow exist, that it is “as if” they exist.

Empathy and the emphatical interaction with others in real face-to-face intersubjectivity can enrich and reshape our experience of the world and of ourselves. Likewise, *literary empathy*, although lacking reciprocal interaction with the literary characters, can also to some extent exert an influence on the reader’s actual and future perception of the world. Once the imagination, guided by the literary work, has recreated and reintegrated the sedimented sensory and impressional elements into the current imagining, which thereby becomes that which is being lived by the reader, such new imagining can in its turn enrich the reader’s actual perception. In other words, not only can the present or ever-present sensations and impressions serve fantasy; fantasy can in turn be interwoven into them, since, as Husserl affirms, “even the re-presentation is sensed, is present, becomes constituted as a unity in the presenting time-consciousness” (Hua XXIII: 290) – which suggests that every new fantasy is also blended into the stream of consciousness, thus enriching it. What’s more, the enriched experiential elements will also get sedimented into the lived body of the reader. That is why literary imaginary empathy can serve as a training and an enrichment of personal experience. For example, before reading “Not all Pianos in the Woods/Had power to mangle me,” few people would experience the twitters of the birds in the forest as pianos, and few would experience this as a power destructive of the personality, but after reading this poem, *after having empathized with the “me”* in it, our perception may be reshaped. Birds’ twitters will no longer be merely some random animal sounds, but will be associated with different notes played on a piano, and the vitality of spring will not remain a neutral fact, but will be felt as a depersonalizing power, removing our self-sufficiency and dissolving us into pure elements belonging to nature. In this sense, *literary empathy* reconfigures our real perception of things, and, in this way, reshapes the “reality” the embodied reader lives in. As a result, the reader herself is also ceaselessly reformed and reconfigured by *literary empathy*.

5. Conclusion

Though lacking the presence of a real body and its concomitant positing of existence, the perspectives and emotional experiences of fictional figures can be presentified to readers. Literary empathy with fictional characters is a special kind of presentification in which empathy takes place inside of the existence-neutralizing imagination; it is, in addition, an imaginative reproduction of bodily sedimentations under the instruction of the depictions offered in the literary text. The analysis of the features of *literary empathy* shows the degree of intricacy of the interaction between presentation and presentification, and equally within presentification itself amongst empathy, imagination and memory. Through the taking-place of *literary empathy*, the embodied reader forms a peculiar asymmetrical imaginative intersubjectivity with the fictional characters, and thus also with the writer. This asymmetry does not hinder the real affects the fictional characters draw out in us. It is rather because they have such a strong influence on me that I cannot but grant them the quasi-quality of their existence. Motivated by this imaginative empathetic presentification, not only aesthetic feelings, but also quasi-impressional existential feelings (*Existentialgefühl*) come to the fore. Following on from this, the experience-whole reshaped in *literary empathy* in its turn gets sedimented and contributes to further future configurations. The lived experience of the reader in *literary empathy* possesses a multidimensional structure in which presence and non-presence are *synchronic*.

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