The Dark Side of Narrative Empathy: A Narrative Persuasion Perspective on Whether Fiction Reading Can Lead to Antisocial Beliefs and Attitudes.

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This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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Signed:

Date: 30/08/2023

Dedicated to my grandmother, Caltouma.

Abstract.

Studies about the narrative impact of fiction reading often focus on the benefits of this entertainment experience. These accounts of benefits often involve a mostly positive association of fiction reading with the ethical development of readers through the cultivation of their empathic skills (Nussbaum, 1990). However, the history of novel reading offers a contrary view that emphasises the 'corrupting powers' of narrative engagement. While the proposal of benefits has attracted empirical attention, the second is not as equally and systematically assessed. Thereby, the question of whether fiction reading can influence antisocial outcomes on readers remains weakly investigated (Igartua & Barrios, 2012). It is therefore the objective of this dissertation to identify the working mechanisms that may influence beliefs and attitudes such as prejudicial radicalisation and cynicism in readers. By drawing on recent evidence and theories from media psychology and narrative persuasion research, a qualitative analysis based on close reading of three novels was applied. This application offers a new method that is based on literary analysis, new because most studies assess narrative persuasion following quantitative measures. The approach involves applying theories of narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000), empathic identification (Keen, 2007; Cohen, 2001), and moral disengagement (Raney, 2004) to demonstrate how the selected novels can reduce readers' critical and moral scrutiny to minimise resistance to their persuasiveness (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). The main finding that may facilitate the occurrence of antisocial attitudes via these mechanism involves directing readers' empathy towards immoral protagonists who internally focalize their narratives, obscuring their moral transgressions, and depersonalizing their victims. This also involves the manipulation of textual techniques such as point of view, imagery, and foregrounding style. With these findings, the thesis contributes to the scholarly literature on narrative impact by foregrounding the negative aspects of empathic identification and narrative transportation that are sometimes acknowledged, but not as extensively examined.

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Acknowledgement.

1. General Introduction.

1.1. Overview:

This chapter provides background information of the current study which explores the potential of fiction reading to influence anti-social and immoral beliefs and attitudes. The first section places the subject in the context of broader discussions about book censorship, the denunciation of novel reading during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the later classification of this as a moral panic in the 21st century. It also focuses on the association of novel reading with empathy and its impact on readers' moral development as emphasised by literary ethics in late 20th century. These broad debates create a gap in research which will be highlighted in the second section. The third section will provide a theoretical framework about the relevant theories which will be later applied to close-reading analysis to demonstrate an approach to the main research question.

In this introduction I am going to define the principal concepts of morality, immorality, antisociality, empathy, and readers' variables as they are necessary to demonstrate my main thesis. These are necessary as the thesis engages with the ethics of fiction reading and the tendency to characterise its outcomes as moral and prosocial in contemporary research. Because I am going to challenge this tendency by highlighting how fictional narratives can influence immoral and antisocial outcomes, it becomes crucial to define and locate these terms within relevant discourses. Also, a rationale on my choice of these terms is necessary as they are used in a wide range of everyday discourses and disciplines which may create confusion. For instance, individuals as well as some scholars may agree that empathy is a moral and prosocial skill for relationships to thrive. However, this is not entirely true as recent studies have discovered the negative side of a morality based on empathy (see 1.2.3.). By extension, narrative studies such as literary ethics which base the benefits of literature on the process of narrative empathy may fall short, as I will show later (see 1.2.2.).

In the same regard, what characterises an effect of a narrative as antisocial maybe open to interpretation. This can be seen in the process of radicalisation, for example, which can lead to both pro- and antisocial outcomes. However, I will explain later why I decided to consider only its antisocial aspect which is tied to the notorious attitudes of polarisation and racism (see 2.3.). Thereby, I will offer a relevant context from some particular theories and

discourses to contextualise each of these concepts in relation to the research question. Moreover, since I attempt to predict a shared response from readers to a selection of novels and readers vary in their personalities, attitudes, knowledges, interpretations, and responses, I am going to specify a group of readers to formulate my predictions (see 1.3., for example). This choice will be explained further in each of each chapter.

1.2. History of the Research Question.

The question of whether fiction reading can influence the adoption of immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes is often pointed at, but not fully examined as I will argue throughout this brief survey of previous literature. I am going to present some of the most frequently used arguments to demonstrate how they lack evidence, or how they are undervalued, and why my research study is needed. For an illustrative preview, this question is often projected by oppositional reactions against fiction which can be related to distinct strands in classical philosophy, the rise of the novel in the mid-18th century, literary ethical criticism in the late 20th century, and the overall discourse of book censorship throughout history. Although I make no claim to provide a detailed history of all oppositional reactions against fiction reading, a general pattern that emerges from their main arguments and claims is the lack of 'objective' assessment and thereby evidence. This is useful to the demonstration of a gap in research which this study approaches. As I will explain below, earlier reactions were not rooted in empirical investigations and were therefore later dismissed as a moral panic which implies irrationality in response. The phenomenon of book censorship, too, asserts that novels are dangerous, without systematic assessment which can be exemplified from some famous censorship cases. It is, therefore, the main objective of this study to explore if fiction reading can indeed be harmful as these debates stress.

Moreover, the association of fiction reading with harmful effects is no longer a concern in today's studies as they mostly examine its beneficial outcomes on readers. This relates back to the emphasis made by literary ethicists on the role of what is later known as narrative empathy (Keen, 2007) in readers' moral development. Promoters of this view advance the assumption that reading literature is ethically beneficial for it allows readers to understand the Other (Nussbaum, 1990; Pinker, 2011). This moving away in scholarly discourse from oppositional reactions against fiction reading to the presumed benefits of the cultivation of empathic skills seems to take away attention from the first possibility.

Nonetheless, as I will show in the second section of this introduction, there are ample evidence and theories to provide a working mechanism which may help explain how immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes can occur from fiction reading. This evidence comes from media psychology and narrative persuasion which demonstrate that narrative engagement via narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000) and character identification (Cohen, 2001; de Graaf, et al., 2012) correlates positively and significantly with readers' adoption of beliefs and attitudes consistent with narrative perspective (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; van Laear, et al., 2014). These effects occur by decreasing readers' counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000; Chen & Chang, 2017) and increasing their moral disengagement (Bandura, 1986; Raney, 2004) which in turn reduce resistance to persuasion (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Before elaborating on these points, it is crucial to offer a rationale on my choice of the principal terms of morality, immorality, and antisociality as they are going to occur more frequently throughout the thesis. In fact, I am going to use a comparatively narrow criterion to determine if certain outcomes of reading are moral or not, which is to identify how far they are or are not prosocial. This choice is similar to the narrative persuasion studies I cite, which specify the prosocial outcome when conducting their investigations without engaging with a philosophy of morality. The reason I chose these terms aligns with the studies cited next. For example, moral outcomes from fiction reading are perceived as prosocial beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours such as understanding others for the purpose of helping them or voting. An example of the notion of a moral outcome in this context can be demonstrated through the example of a study where participants who empathised with the struggles of an Arab Muslim protagonist in New York reduced their stigma, prejudice, and intergroup anxiety towards members of this outgroup (Johnson et al., 2013). This is both a prosocial and moral outcome that helps individuals and society to create social cohesion, instead of friction which may influence notorious antisocial behaviours such as exclusion or racism.

In contrast, immoral outcomes are antisocial beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that risk readers' health, for instance. To exemplify further, an immoral or a harmful outcome can be seen in the normalisation of health risks such as sexual violence when engaging with a piece of fiction such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (see Bonomi et al, 2014). This also includes antisocial attitudes such as racism and cynicism which are offered as illustrations in the next chapters. To put it differently, the content of particular narratives such as the ones selected for this thesis orients readers' responses towards particular positions, of which some can be

immoral and antisocial such as empathising with racists, which may influence the persuasion for radicalization.

In the same regard, the term 'antisocial' refers to a kind of aggressive sentiment or attitude that disrupts social norms in deleterious ways. Because the term is contested (Millie, 2008, 2) and is often subject to interpretation (Mackenzie et al, 2010), I use it in relation to specific attitudes, for example, racism and cynicism. The antisocial aspect of these particular attitudes will be located within particular accounts when they are introduced later. This means that the conception of immorality and morality as they occur in this thesis are related to the commonly known immoral and antisocial attitudes of racism, radicalism, and cynicism. These attitudes as will be examined later can influence both good and bad outcomes. However, only their immoral and antisocial aspects are emphasised in relation to the selected novels.

After this introduction to the main objective of this section, I am going to elaborate on the reasons made in the debates mentioned above and their lack of evidence to justify the importance of this research study. The most salient discourse about the harmful effects of fiction reading comes from the oppositional reaction against novel reading in the 18th century. This time in the history of fiction reading is a good starting point to show what type of arguments were made to justify the association of novel reading with immoral effects on readers. Broadly speaking, opposition against novel reading accompanied its rise in the mid-18th century (Lovell, 1987; Littau, 2006). However, in spite of the assertive claims made in that early reaction discourse, it lacked systematic examination. Resistance at that time came from the literary establishment with support from educational, medical, media, and religious professionals (Syvertsen, 2017, 13). It involved harsh criticism to aspects of the novel such as its new form, characters, focus on the individual, effects on readers, and its social function as a whole (Vogrincic, 2008). One famous example of such negative responses was against Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), a bestseller from the early decades of the English novel. This novel was criticized for its depiction of gender and class relations (Doody, 1993), religious virtues (Eagleton, 2005), epistolary style (Price, 2003) and so on (for more details, see Keymer & Sabor, 2005). These claims gave the novel a notorious reputation for deviating readers' morality. The 'Pamela craze' writes Turner (1994) was divided between what 'supporters viewed as sentimental identification and skeptics diagnosed as a contagious madness, allied to methodism and sexual mania' (70). These claims, however, have not been empirically assessed to show the negative impacts of novel reading on actual readers. This could have

been mapped onto empirical investigations by observing and measuring readers' sanity, for example, before and after reading *Pamela*, while controlling for different variables such as readers' environmental stressors.

Other arguments that were used to associate novels with harm were their popular use for escapism and as a pastime. By this time, public readership and literacy were already on the rise (for a review about the rise of readership during the 18th century, see Collins, 1926). This helped novels to become the first 'popular leisure praxis' in England (Vogrincic, 2008, 106) and the first literary genre to become 'a commodity' (Lovell, 1987). This offered readers variety in their choices for reading materials. Thereby, reading for leisure was not encouraged compared to reading for educational purposes. John Knox's essay, *On-Novel Reading* (1778), compared the activity to 'sweetened poison' that was generally perceived as inferior to reading sermons, philosophical treaties, history, or poetry for self-improvement and enlightenment (cited in Vogrincic, 2008, 113). This claim of comparison too is not refined as both genres serve different purposes and "educate" in their separate ways.

Moreover, the association of novel reading with women readers and later women writers added to the sense of the novel at that time as not respectable. Conduct writers like James Fordyce in *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) condemned women who read novels altogether, except Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). He asserted that women should not read books, but 'to read Men, to make yourself agreeable and useful ' (quoted in Pearson, 1999, 43). The issue for women readers was more alarming. as it was predicated on the notion that women were more susceptible to negative influences. This is because they were thought to be weaker, more fanciful, and sensitive (Vogrincic, 2008; Pearson, 1999, for more details).According to Proulx (2019), the reading of novels has always been denounced and studied in relation to female readers. Nonetheless, it was not just women who were deemed impressionable by early critics of the novel. By the end of the 19th century, French male readers of romance fiction became a source of worry. This was expressed in polemical essays, pedagogical articles, and medical treatises that engaged in exposing its alleged emasculating effects. Novels, thus, were associated with perversion, a threat to masculinity and virility encouraged by their illicit, sexual, and homosexual depictions. A consequence of that worry about male adolescent readers motivated many authors to produce novels that stress manhood. They offered their fictional narratives as possible cures to that perceived disease of emasculation (Proulx, 2019; for a review, see Pasco, 2022). This sets out the transformative impact believed to be 'caused' by novel reading without actually testing for it. These bold

claims, especially those about women readers or virility as presented above were built on old notions that no longer conform to scientific facts.

Another source of worry that characterised fiction reading as harmful was the fear of exploiting readers' dissatisfaction with their lives from reading too many novels. This aspect brings to mind scenes from Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) whose main character was 'corrupted' from reading too many romances. When Emma did not find in her husband the romantic love, she read about all her life, she sought extramarital affairs (Proulx, 2019, 3-4). Here, the consequences implied by readers' supposed dissatisfaction with reality refers to a negative aspect of fiction reading. However, it indicates an underlying bias against the medium because dissatisfaction can positively drive personal and social change. This supposed exploitation of readers' dissatisfaction with their lives also implies their lack of distinction between fact and fiction. Indeed, the question whether readers have the capacity to distinguish fact from fiction influenced much of the resistance to novel reading. Brantlinger (1998) writes that fear implying that 'you become what you read' was constantly voiced by the cultural and political elites of the 18th and 19th century (12).

In the same vein, Syvertsen (2017) too states that fears of copycat behaviour influence media resistance to this day. Copycat behaviour, here, refers to individuals' inability to distinguish fiction from reality; thereby copying the behaviour of fictive characters (Syvertsen, 2017, 18). A controversial case that comes to mind is concerned with the imitation of Werther's suicide in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). The novel is reputed to have inspired an epidemic of copycat suicide among readers who dressed like Werther and shot themselves as he did when he could not marry Charlotte. Nonetheless, it has never been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that there was a significant replication of Werther's suicide. According to Thorson and Öberg (2003), 'the evidence for an epidemic cannot be said to be convincing. So, contrary to popular belief, it seems that a suicide epidemic did not arise after all' (69). But it is known that various authorities were sufficiently alarmed to ban the book in many places in Europe. It is also known that Christel von Lassberg drowned herself in the River Ilm at Weimar on January 16, 1778, with a copy of the novel in her pocket (Jack, 2014). In contemporary media effects studies, however, the 'Werther Effect' (Phillips, 1985) does suggest a spike in suicide rates after a publicised suicide, especially of celebrities (Williams, 2011; Zosmer, 2021). Therefore, it seems that the potential imitation of harmful behaviours was directly blamed on engagement with fictional characters such as Emma or Werther. Again, the claims of imitation and copycat behaviour of fictional

characters were made without objective validity which is hard to measure even in today's advanced research (for a review see Surette, 2016).

Furthermore, most of the harsh criticism against novel reading during the 18th and later 19th century can be related to general anxieties about representation in art. For instance, Socrates feared writing for weakening people's memory (Furedi, 2015), while Plato banished poets from his republic for 'corrupting' his ideal forms of reality and interfering with people's emotions (Griswold, 2003; Juan-Navaro, 2007, 100-104; Pappas, 2016; Furedi, 2016). In fact, 18th century moral criticism was prescriptive as it followed two neoclassical principles for how representation should be. The first one is an Aristotelian-Horatian principle that art should teach moral virtue with delightful representation (Furedi, 2015). A didactic element had to be embedded in a kind of realistic mimesis that takes seriously its moral impact on readership and society (Alsuhaibani, 2016, 07). The second principle is a Socratic diagnosis of the public as gullible, morally deficient, and susceptible to manipulation (Furedi, 2016, 02; Vogrincic, 2008). As Samuel Johnson (1750) puts in his essay *The Rambler*, all it took was 'the Young, the Ignorant, and the Idle […] easily susceptible of Impressions' (21) for a novel to damage society. Thereby, any novel that diverted from or did not consider these two principles was deemed dangerous and corrupting (see Alsuhaibani, 2016). This means that the perceived danger of fiction reading was predicted, at least in part from the absent consideration of these principles, not from a thorough observation of narrative impact on readership.

Vogrincic (2008) explains that 18th century anxiety about novel reading was not often an outcome of analysis of content, but it stemmed from the perception of threat brought by from the general public's accessibility to the new medium. She reasoned that it was 'the popularisation, the commercialisation, and the commodification of novels that caused so much disquiet. The fact that the moral party picked on the contents was only part of the response to the situation, albeit the most conspicuous one' (117). Furedi (2016) too argues that 18th and 19th century moral condemnation against novels did not focus on their content. It was focused on novels' capacity to communicate beliefs that might disrupt the value system of that time. Furedi (2015) explains that the educated elite expressed a general mistrust in the increasing literacy of the general public, and their capacity not to be misled or corrupted. The attitude conveyed disdain for public tastes and the belief that the general public will be drawn to the vilest and most corrupting literary influences. This also shows an

underlying bias to characterise the new genre as 'corrupting' without objective assessment of the validity of what was observed in readership.

Up till now, I have engaged with some broader arguments about the danger of novel reading. However, in spite of their lack of evidence, the perception of danger was strongly believed. This can be observed from the efforts spent by authors to tame readership habits and taste, from the used rhetoric of warning, and censorship. Authorial efforts included editing works to guide readers to the most morally and socially acceptable conclusions. Samuel Richardson, for example, edited *Pamela* fourteen times in the course of more than half a century to help readers avoid unwanted interpretations (Bender, 2004; Eaves & Kimpel, 1967). In the same vein, the lack of supervision while reading and the fact that anyone can write meant that all sort of values could be represented (Pearson, 1999, 22; Vogrincic, 2008, 109) which was beyond the control of the cultural, religious and political elites (Furedi, 2016). Thereby, the elocution movement during the 18th century, for example, was invested in training students how to read critically the emotional content of novels (Binder, 2020; Jajdelska, 2010).

Along the same line, the perception of danger toward novel reading from the late 18th century to the late 19th century was often expressed in the warning language of pathologies (Brantlinger, 1998; Furedi, 2015; 2016; Syvertsen, 2017, 21). Medical metaphors were used to warn readers not to read specific novels or not to read too much, as described below by Furedi (2015).

> A dangerous disease appeared to afflict the young, which some diagnosed as reading addiction and others as reading rage, reading fever, reading mania or reading lust. Throughout Europe reports circulated about the outbreak of what was described as an epidemic of reading. The behaviours associated with this supposedly insidious contagion were sensation-seeking and morally dissolute and promiscuous behaviour. Even acts of self-destruction were associated with this new craze for the reading of novels (Furedi, 2015).

Such discourse included claims about damaging readers' minds, morals, posture, and eyesight from engagement with novels (Vogrincic, 2008, 109). Nonetheless, the rhetoric of pathologization in opposition discourse to novel reading did not result from empirical investigations. No serious examination was done to justify how reading words about fictional characters is akin to poison or fever-causing pathogens. Syvertsen (2017) confirms this

observation that resistance to novels as we all other media genres did not depend on 'specific, detailed or even empirical evidence' (129).

Overall, it seems that the discourse of opposition to novel reading and the many efforts taken to control or protect readers took for granted that novels have the capacity to change readers' attitudes and behaviours. Although this assumption is supported empirically in contemporary research, its earlier lack of investigation can be interpreted in terms of the 'hypodermic needle' or 'magic bullet' theory. These metaphors suggest how messengers, in this case authors, shoot their messages directly into receivers such as readers (Borah, 2015). This theory, however, emerged later between 1920s and 1930s where media were perceived as holding power over audiences who were characterized with uniformity in consumption, reception, and impact (for reviews, Thibault, 2016; Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). As such, the early discourse of opposition can be seen as holding the same assumption regarding the powers and dangers of novel reading. When novels were perceived as powerful in 'shooting' their unwanted values into readers, society censored and still sensors them.

The alleged determination to protect the status quo from the claimed corrupting effects of specific novels often involves the extreme measures of book censorship, persecution, and sometimes the death penalty (see Green & Karolides, 2014). To this day and across the globe, novels are banned for reasons to protect what is deemed morally, religiously, politically, and socially acceptable from 'bad' influences. Indeed, almost all the novels that have been challenged and censored at some point in their history were for reasons of obscenity, blasphemy, and ideology (for more details, Bald, 2014). However, these powerful claims do not provide evidence to demonstrate how readers do change 'for the worst' when they engage with them. This can be deduced from famous censorship cases that are motivated by rhetoric not evidence.

For example, Gustav Flaubert was tried for publishing *Madame Bovary* (1856) a year after its publication in France. Haynes (2005) wrote that censors in this trial were against the publication of sexual descriptions of an unfaithful wife which challenged the authors and printers' societal role as 'advance sentinel against scandal' (04). James Joyce's *Ulysses* was also banned in the UK in 1922 (and the US) for an obscene passage by censors who read only forty pages of its seven-hundred and thirty-two pages. Casado (2000) cited that this was based on censors' fear that 'other world writers with a love of notoriety will attempt to write in the same vein' (483). A similar case is made against Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) which is frequently banned in US schools because its lonely teenage hero uses profane

language and hired a prostitute to talk to (see Whitfield, 1997). Additionally, reasons of blasphemy and treason were behind the censorship of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in some Muslim countries. Some individuals protested in the UK (Mazrui, 1990; Pipes, 2017), while another violently assaulted its author in New York last year (Cabral, 2022). These cases of censorship show the lack of evidence in the claims made to control public tastes.

In light of anxiety and strong belief that novel reading does cause harm to the extent of banning some of them, this dissertation, however, is not an endorsement of book censorship. Instead, it is concerned with highlighting mechanisms that balance out current discussions which nowadays mostly point out the beneficial outcomes of fiction reading as will be discussed later. Censors, meanwhile, seem to entirely ignore the plethora of psychology and media effects studies that flourished in the 20th century, and which may or may not have supported their censorship discourse. Nevertheless, I assume that the danger of censorship is far more costly than that of the freedom of speech. I also advocate for experimentation and discussions about the potential dangers of fiction, instead of bullying or cancelling what does not appeal to a group. According to Gilbert, Tafarodi, and Malone (1993),

> When the marketplace is underregulated, the bad ideas that are present (but that one wishes were absent) may be embraced by an individual whose wrong-headed beliefs may eventually be corrected by his or her fellows. However, when the marketplace is overregulated, the good ideas that are absent (but that one wishes were present) will never be encountered. Even if the censors are entirely benevolent (itself an unlikely assumption), the intellectual anemia that their prior restraint creates is not amenable to social correction (232).

As such, while free speech allows ideas to compete and emerge, so that eventually trivial, detrimental, and outdated ideas may undo themselves, censorship can empower the forbidden by increasing temptation to seek it as well as obscuring possibilities all together. Therefore, decisions to ban books in whatever form are wrong, but the motives are not necessarily unworthy of discussion. This is true for the early opposition discourse against novel reading which some of its arguments have acquired empirical validity in contemporary research. For example, when Samuel Johnson (1750) wrote in *The Rambler* that:

> MANY Writers, for the sake of following Nature, so mingle good and bad Qualities in their principal Personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their Adventures with Delight, and are led by Degrees to interest ourselves in their Favour, we

> lose the Abhorrence of their Faults, because they do not hinder our Pleasure, or, perhaps, regard them with some Kindness for being united with so much Merit (24).

The danger of novel reading, according to Johnson (1750), may stem from representing an equally moral and immoral character, sympathetic villains, and realism effects that may lead to the reduced abhorrence of evil. These variables refer to a contemporary process with modern terminology such as antiheroes, perceived realism, and moral disengagement (in this order). As I will elaborate later, recent empirical studies confirm the role of perceived realism in generating intense narrative transportation which is the underlying mechanism of narrative persuasion (Green, 2004; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; 2011). Similarly, an equally moral and immoral character is the archetypical antihero which can produce moral disengagement in readers and affect their worldview (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022). Therefore, as my thesis will show, Johnson (1750) successfully pointed out a combination of variables which can work for producing deleterious effects.

Similarly, Anthony Trollope in the 19th century presented a diagnosis of the intoxicating effects of novels on (female) readers. He wrote (1879).

> [T]he novelist creeps in closer than the schoolmaster […] She retires with him, suspecting no lesson, safe against rebuke, throwing herself head and heart into the narration as she can hardly do into her task-work, and there she is taught' (quoted in Furedi, 2015).

Again, by considering terminology from contemporary research which will later be fully addressed, Trollope uses metaphors ('creeps in closer' and 'throwing herself head and heart into the narration') that point at the process of narrative transportation or absorption. This state consists of merging imagery, attention and emotion to create an intense and intimate psychological state between readers and characters/narrators (Green & Brock, 2000; Kuijpers, et al., 2014). The expression: 'She retires with him, suspecting no lesson, safe against rebuke, and there she is taught' hints at the common assumptions that fiction is a safe space where serious education or instruction are supposedly not expected. Thus, it can 'teach' or persuade in disguise. This goes in line with contemporary studies that fiction is effectively persuasive because its messages are not associated with the salient persuasive intent which readers are otherwise found to counterargue (Slater & Rouner, 2002, 176; Slater, 2002, 173).

These earlier scholars who have discussed the potential dangers of novels have some degree of truth when delineating possible processes that are recently found to work in producing narrative persuasion. However, as I will discuss below, the oppositional discourse has not been considered seriously by either dismissing it as a moral panic or emphasising the moral benefits of fiction reading.

1.2.1. A Question Dismissed as a Moral Panic.

On the one hand, the view of oppositional reactions that some novels can cause harm was later characterised reductively as a moral panic (Vogrincic, 2008; Lovell, 1984; Brantlinger, 1998). This characterization, as I am going to explain below, not only implies irrationality in response, but it also dismisses the examination of fiction for its potential harmful effects. First, the term moral panic refers to a period of intense, exaggerated worry over a specific topic or perceived threat that did not prove to be particularly harmful when empirically assessed (Cohen, 1972; for a detailed review see Critcher, 2017). However, although the definition of moral panics involves the notion of empirically examining the damages caused by a specific phenomenon, scholars who associated opposition to novel reading with the term do not provide empirical evidence to counterargue the reasons made by the 'panicking' elites, as seen below.

For instance, Lovell (1987) mentions that '[t]he moral panic [the novel] occasioned in the last quarter of the 18th century was merely the first of a series which occurred whenever a new cultural commodity made its debut' (Lovell, 1987, 08). Brantlinger (1998) too writes that 'the more specific history of reaction to novels or novel-reading can be understood as a diffuse moral panic extending over two centuries' (142). These scholars briefly mention the term to characterise all negative reactions against novel reading in a homogenous way which may stop serious debate. More precisely, Vogrincic (2008) follows Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) five attributes model of moral panics to the 18th century resistance against novels. She concludes that the perception of novel reading as harmful to readers caused great concern in 18th century English society and this encouraged consensus about the seriousness of the matter. Consensual concern fuelled hostility in discourse against readers, writers, and sellers of novels. The fear then grew out of proportion and became volatile. Therefore, 18th century moral panic against novel reading is described as a disproportionate reaction against the perceived threat of media's effect on society (Vogrincic, 2008, 105, 118). Again, Vogrincic's (2008) study is motivated from the start with

the assumption of moral panic which may not do justice to whatever arguments made to point out harm from novels.

Other scholars, too, use the term with some reservation such as Furedi (2016) who narrows its focus by referring not to the entire English society across more than two centuries, but only to 'intra-elite reactions to popular culture' (12). He explains that opposition to novel reading did not likely influence public reading habits as demand for cheap fiction increased. He asserts that a moral panic characterization cannot be applicable to two centuries because the sociological concept refers to limited temporal reactions. As such, he restricts the use of the term moral panic to describe reactions against particular cases such as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (17) as it encompassed a limited period. He then refers to the alarmist reactions against mass literacy as moral disquiet (Furedi, 2016, 08).

Nevertheless, both scholars who associate resistance to novel reading with moral panic and those who empirically examine society in relation to moral panic imply lack of serious damages from fiction without empirically testing for those potential damages. Indeed, I align my argument with the opponents of the moral panic analysis who often point out the negative judgement implied in the concept and its lack of explanatory comprehensiveness (Rowe, 2009, Thompson, 1898; Critcher, 2003; 2006). According to Thompson (1998), the concept is generally criticized as loaded with ideological values or lacking clear constituents to facilitate its application (Thompson, 1898, 10-11). Often, labelling a phenomenon as a moral panic implies that there is all that needs to be said (Critcher, 2003, 143). Both Rowe (2009) and Garland (2008) agree that the term moral panic is frequently used to imply that a given social issue should not be taken seriously. This is because the combination of the noun 'panic' and the adjective 'moral' creates 'a pejorative connotative dimension' that is 'designed to play down levels of threat and negative consequence, and to present anxieties, whether justified or not, as exaggerated and overblown' (Rowe, 2009, 23).

In the same regard, Critcher (2006) states that the classification of social problems as moral panics implies irrational appraisal since panics involve emotions that overrule reason (03). He (2003) argues that the moral panic association is 'necessary but not sufficient' (178) in explaining the mode, role, and place of the representation of certain social issues in the public domain. Additionally, criticism against moral panic includes its attributional models like that of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) which focuses on the effects of the moral panic rather than the processes that produce it in the first place (Rowe, 2009, 33). Thereby,

although earlier critics such as Johnson (1750) and Trollope (1879) explained the processing of the deleterious impact of fiction reading without assessing their assumptions, the moral panic advocates do not test those assumptions as well. They do not engage with fiction reading but focus on the critics of fiction reading. Therefore, although Vogrincic (2008), for example, historically contextualized her study within the sociohistorical accounts of 18th century England, her application of the term describes the outrage toward novel reading, but it fails to explain and integrate the processes involved in the emergence of the phenomenon that lasted over two centuries.

Considering the above critical accounts against the large conception of moral panics for its implied 'intellectual arrogance' and 'scholarly laziness' (Rowe, 2009, 37), I reject the idea that there was nothing to the concerns of 18th and 19th century cultural commentators but panic about the rise of the novel and public reading taste. The main reason for the rejection of this claim is that the association discredits what those early critics had to say and devalue their observations of reading habits as uniformly uncredible and irrational. In other words, it seems that when the cultural elites of the 18th and 19th century expressed outrage against novel reading because they considered the reading public gullible and unknowledgeable, 20th and 21st century scholars who characterized their responses as a moral panic ironically attributed their targets with irrationality. Therefore, the question whether fiction reading can have deleterious effects escapes empirical scrutiny. The nature of novels' potential harmful effects is not addressed appropriately by either. It is the role of this dissertation, henceforth, to examine the extent of validity of criticism against novels by exploring their potential to produce immoral and anti-social influences on readers.

1.2.2. A Question Dismissed when Emphasizing Reading Benefits.

On the other hand, by the end of 20th century, criticism moved toward a discourse of celebration that attributes novels with the development of readers' morality which again ignores the possibility of harm from reading fiction. This time witnessed a revival of the ethical value of literature in society. In fact, Furedi (2015) observes that the fear of reading too many novels became a fear of reading fewer novels, whereas the language of disease used to describe novels became a language of cure ('Reading Troubles'). This shift in scholarly emphasis is worth discussing because it offers a foundation that may have later influenced cognitive studies of literature. It also obscures the potential of fiction to be associated with unethical outcomes as I am going to discuss shortly. Generally, literary ethical criticism

emerged to assert the ethical value of engagement with literary fiction in making readers better citizens (Antor, 2012; Phelan, 2014). However, by doing so, the perception of novels as inherently ethical became too 'romantic' (Cosgrove, 2007; 2008) and self-assertive in its praise of literary fiction in improving readers' ethical life.

Initially, narrative ethical criticism has roots in antiquity as I mentioned earlier (Murray, 2014). It can also be seen in works such as R. F. Leavis' (1948) *The Great Tradition* where particular novelists are thought to connect the aesthetics of form with interest in morality (see Bilan, 1976). However, it is by the late 20th century, in what is known as the 'ethical turn', that the field became an identified domain of research where scholars emphasised the ethical benefits of fiction (Antor, 2012; Phelan, 2014; Hale, 2007). Prominent works that stress the ethical dimension of novels on readers start with Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 1983) where he argues that author's choice of rhetoric affects readers' ethical properties. Later, in *The Company We Keep* (1988), he explicitly analyses the role of rhetoric in literary ethics using the metaphor of friends to argue that novels are like friends. Some of them are good and others are bad, depending on the situation of individuals when they encounter them. Like friends, books guide the trajectory of desires and expand readers' experiences when they follow those trajectories. However, Booth's (1983) emphasis is on the benefits of encountering those friends, not the unethical positions they may put readers into (cited in Lindhé, 2016, 25).

Influenced by Booth, Martha Nussbaum (1997) took the discussion of the novel and ethics to the domain of philosophy to assert that the novel offers a concrete study of morality than the abstractions of analytic philosophy (for a review see Phelan, 2014). She is an ardent defender of the role of novels in expanding readers' sympathies and thus teaching them to become better individuals (Lindhé, 2016, 26). Influenced by both Booth and Nussbaum, Newton (1995) argues that narrative is ethics because of the intersubjective force prose fiction imposes on readers. However important these works are in asserting the value of engagement with narrative fiction, they stress only the benefits of such engagement, mostly through the emotion of empathy. This again limits the effects of what narrative fiction and narrative empathy can do.

Indeed, the binding force that emotionally ties readers to characters is later described as narrative empathy (Keen, 2007; 2013). This is a significant factor to this dissertation because it approaches the potential harmful effects of fiction reading from the onset of empathising with immoral characters. Empathy, here, refers to 'a vicarious,

spontaneous sharing of affect, [that] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, [or] by hearing about another's condition' (Keen, 2007, 04). It is mostly understood as a driving force for morality and prosocial behaviour (Hoffman, 1984). For example, the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, et al., 1981) suggests that when individuals empathize with someone, they tend to help by engaging in altruistic behaviour to alleviate that other's discomfort (for more details, see Batson, et al., 2015). Accordingly, narrative empathy which is 'the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition' became a hallmark for studies of prosocial behaviour (for a critical review, see Keen, 2006; 2018, 127).

Thereby, when literature was tied to the 'moral' emotion of empathy, it became understood as a moralizing force itself which ignores its potential unethical effects. This is seen in literary ethicists' emphasis that fiction reading enhances readers' morality and altruism by allowing them to experience alterity. This view is influenced in part by poststructuralist ethics where ethics is tied to the state of facing alterity and otherness which later influenced political criticism like feminism and postcolonialism (for more details, see Phelan, 2014, 3.5; Hale, 2007; Cosgrove, 2007). To note, it is during this time that some scholars in culture studies such as Edward Said (1993) argued against the ethical role of Western literature when considering its contribution to imperial discourse, essentialist attitudes, and universalizing experiences (discussed in Keen, 2007, xx). However, although postcolonial analysis points at how some novels can create unethical positions for readers, it is often not based on empirical investigations as this dissertation intends to demonstrate.

Similarly, Hale (2020) states in the opening of *The Novel and New Ethics* that the art of the novel in the 20th century is the ethics of otherness through which readers experience and understand the other. Hale (2007) explains the ethical position of this new ethical criticism in its focus on prosocial change as follows:

> These theorists [new ethicists] all agree that to open a novel is to open oneself up to a type of decision-making that is itself *inherently ethical*. For the new ethicists, the novel demands of each reader a decision about her own relation to the imaginative experience offered by novels: Will I submit to the alterity that the novel allows? An affirmative answer launches the novel reader into a transactional relation with another agent, an agent defined by its Otherness from the reader [...]. The novel reader's experience of free submission, her response to the 'hailing' performed by the novel, becomes, for these theorists, a necessary condition for the social achievement of diversity, a training in the honoring of Otherness, which is the defining ethical property of the novel-

and is also what makes literary study, and novel reading in particular, a crucial pre-condition for positive social change (189, added emphasis).

Hale (2007; [2020]), without taking a position herself, points at the position of other new ethicists which strive to restore literature's and specifically novels' value in bringing positive social change. The position of alterity the novel is said to impose on the reader is thought to increase empathy and influence more thoughtful decision-making in society. This can be interpreted from the hopeful speculation made by Gaytri Spivak (2002) about training politicians in literary fiction to prevent violence such as the war on Iraq (cited in Cosgrove, 2007). Therefore, literary ethicists emphasize the moralizing role of empathy with fictional characters in civilizing humans and motivating pro-social behaviour in real life. Influenced by this view, studies took interest in investigating the role of narrative empathy in producing outcomes such as reducing group stigmatization and increasing altruistic behaviour (Oliver, et al., 2012; for reviews, see Hakemulder, 2000; Harrison, 2008; Keen, 2015, 139-140). However, although these studies are valuable in demonstrating empirically how empathising with a particular fictional character influences a particular prosocial behaviour, they should not be generalised to all fictional narratives. This is because some may do the opposite of influencing prosocial outcomes, as this thesis aims to demonstrate.

Nussbaum's position that reading literature trains readers to empathize with fictional characters which then motivates them to empathize with real people is widely shared by historians, psychologists, philosophers, and literary scholars (see Keen, 2007; Cosgrove, 2008). For instance, the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker ([2004]; 2011) promotes the idea that storytelling and literacy, in general, made people 'nicer' and less violent by expanding their 'moral circle' to include other groups of people who are different from them. He argues that narrative empathy results in a payoff in understanding and better behaviour. In this regard too, the psychologist Martin Hoffman's (2000) proposes that novel reading may contribute to the socialization and moral internalization required for transforming empathic guilt into prosocial action (for a review of these views, see Keen, 2007). Hakemulder (2002) maintains that reading literary fiction elicits moral reflection and the adoption of 'habitual empathic attitude towards fellow humans' (154). Many scholars, indeed, highlight that highly literate civilizations have historically functioned more empathically and less violently than less literate societies, especially societies that created psychologically rich literature (in Tamir, et al., 2016, 221). Again, engagement with fictional

narratives is indeed valuable and beneficial, but that does not mean that this is all what fiction is capable of influencing.

An important note here is that many literary ethicists, although not using the term narrative empathy *per se*, use different words that are related in one way or another to the position of empathizing with fictional characters. This includes Newton (1995) who borrows words from other scholars such as 'live-entering', 'acknowledging', and 'facing' to argue that narrative is ethics (Phelan, 2014). Similarly, in *Love's Knowledge* (1990), Nussbaum uses the term 'literary imagination' when referring to the ability to enter someone's inner life and shift perspective. She then perceives this ability in *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) as having a civilizing effect in the education of better citizens. She also argues in *Poetic Justice* (1995) that by experiencing the other through literary imagination, readers learn to concern themselves with the wellbeing of others who are distinct and distant from them (cited in Lindhé, 2016). This is important as the field continues to use various concepts of narrative empathy such as those of sympathy, perspective-taking, and identification interchangeably. This kind of use is due to the overlapping nature of these processes with each other, which will be explained later in the Theoretical Framework, to offer a more nuanced understanding of them all (see, 1.4.2.2.). For instance, I am going to use these terms together because empathy is often used synonymously with identification. It involves perspective-taking, and is found to precede sympathy (see Cohen, 2001).

Overall, because empathy has been considered a moral and prosocial emotion, the capacity of novels to induce readers' empathy is thought of as an ethical process and outcome in itself (Keen, 2007; Lindhé, 2016, 19). This can be reflected in the many cognitive studies that often conclude with the ethical benefits of fiction reading. It is argued that because of the concrete psychological, social, and cultural content of novels (Mar & Oatley, 2008), they allow readers to simulate and mentally practice the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of fictional characters (Oatley, 2016). In turn, this enhances readers' cognitive capacities such as social cognition (Mar, et al., 2006; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Black & Barnes, 2015; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Oatley, 2016; Mar, 2011; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017; Tamir, et al., 2016; Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018). Here, social cognition 'includes a broad suite of abilities related to processing, interpreting, and responding to social information' such as theory of mind and empathy (Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018, 1714) which are understood as positive outcomes.

Many cognitive studies have shown the capacity of fictional stories in increasing readers' empathy, theory of mind (Oatley, 1999a; Zunshine, 2006; Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013; 2016; Koopman, 2015), prosocial attitudes, skills, and behaviours (see Assmann, Rupp, & Schwanecke, 2023). Benefits include reducing prejudice against outgroup members (Johnson, et al., 2013a; Johnson, 2013; Chung & Slater, 2013; Zeng & Winner, 2022), improving social understanding (Kozak & Recchia, 2018; Fialho, 2019), cultivating moral virtues (Young, 2019), increasing brain connectivity (Timothy, et al., 2009; Horowitz-Kraus & Hutton, 2018), increasing helping behaviour (Johnson, 2012; Johnson, et al., 2013b), donating (Zak, 2015), and improving persuasive communication in health (Shen, Sheer, Li, 2015), advertisement (Escalas, 2004) and entertainment-education (see Moyer-Gusé, 2008). These findings may obscure the negative impact of fiction reading when they are often linked to prosocial behaviour. For instance, Mar and Oatley (2008) use their theory of simulation to conclude that fiction 'provides an opportunity for empathic growth. It trains us to extend our understanding toward other people, to embody (to some extent) and understand their beliefs and emotions' (181). Again, this conclusion from the researchers indicates a tendency to link fiction reading with 'empathic growth' and understanding which does necessarily result in prosocial influences.

The evidence for the transformative role of narratives is mostly significant, especially in showing how they do allow the experience of alterity with different characters which may give readers the opportunity to enhance their social cognition and mentalizing skills. Nevertheless, I disagree with interpreting these induced processes as always morally beneficial. I suggest that if fiction can manipulate readers' empathy for the good, it can also manipulate it for the worse. The reason for this disapproval comes from recent criticism against empathy itself. In simple terms, empathy is found to be selective, manipulative, and biased to conditions such as cuteness, proximity, and in-group membership (Prinz, 2011). It can also suffer from preferential treatments, implicit attitudes, favouritism and ethnocentrism (see Decety & Cowell, 2015). It may lead to deception (Bubandt & Willerslev, 2015), cruelty and aggression (Bloom, 2016), polarisation, terrorism, or even sadism (Breithaupt, 2018; 2019).

1.2.3. The Dark Side of Narrative Empathy.

The challenging accounts above about the limitations of empathy with real people have influenced some narrative studies that show how readers' empathy can be oriented

towards unethical situations. For instance, literary narratives can foster empathy with a remorseful paedophile (*Lolita* in De la Durantaye, 2006), with a remorseless former Nazi officer (*The Kindly Ones* in de Jonge, et al., 2022), with a human-butchering alien (*Under Her Skin* in Kark & Vanderbeke, 2020), or with a racist warlord (*The Turner Diaries* in Vanhanen, 2015). These studies, similar to this thesis's main approach, indicate an undergoing shift in scholarly perspective that points out the limitations of an ethics built on narrative empathy. However, they are different in their theoretical frameworks and do not apply the narrative persuasion theories I present later. Overall, the positive view that connect novels with empathy in real life and prosocial change is heavily criticized as I will explain below.

In *The Ethics of Storytelling*, Meretoja (2018) states that '[w]hile it has long been taken for granted that literature is beneficial for us, this is no longer necessarily the case' (03). Disdain toward generating audience empathy is seen in earlier periods such as those of the German dramatist, Bertolt Brecht who considers empathy as a problem in art. According to Cummings (2011), Brecht disapproved of inducing audience's empathy to invite their 'accordance, agreement' and 'complacency' through 'character identification', 'passivity', and 'emotional contagion'. Brecht (1927) states that:

> The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates a fog, has got to be given up (38, quoted in Cummings, 2011, 44-46).

Empathy as described in Brechtian Epic Theatre is akin to emotional contagion (see Decety & Cowell, 2015) which he wanted his audience to avoid. Brecht wanted his audience to study the spectacle in front of them, not to agree passively and emotionally with what is performed. His criticism comes from his rejection of a theatre that is designed to generate a 'static' worldview that trains its audience to accept the world 'as it is' (discussed in Cummings, 2011, 46). Similar to Brechtian theory that criticises empathy as a unidimensional emotional contagion, up-to-date critical studies that understand narrative empathy as the complex and multidimensional state that it is also criticize its association with empathy in real life and prosocial behaviour.

An influential figure in this regard is Suzanne Keen (2007; 2018) who criticizes studies that associate novel reading with altruism. Her sceptical study points at many gaps in research that need to address the limitations of narrative empathy in prosocial behaviour. As

such, she rebukes researchers who acknowledge those limitations, yet still maintain the arguably exaggerated view of literary ethicists. For instance, Hakemulder (2000) keeps readers' empathy at the centre of his Moral Laboratory by exaggerating the conclusiveness of the link between human empathy and altruistic behaviour (2007, 93, 167). Broadly speaking, Keen (2007) argues that the causal connection between empathizing with fictional characters and moral behaviour is not yet known. She states that 'the case for altruism stemming from novel reading [is] inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading' (vii).

In her review, Keen (2007; 2018) criticizes studies that join empathy with moral action by pointing out where empathy fails. For example, she refers to cases where 'people experiencing empathic overarousal may react with aversion to the source of the negative feelings' (19). In this case, empathic overarousal prevents the empathiser from engagement in prosocial behaviour such as helping. She also suggests that if empathy is a measure of morality, authors who represent the population that scores higher in empathy scales should have the most moral agents among all people. However, she explains that this is not the case because '*authors' empathy can be devoted to socially undesirable ends*' (128, original emphasis). In this other case, she provides examples of novels that involve racial supremacy as capable of generating empathy towards their racist characters. Thereby, Keen's (2007; 2018) study questions and challenges the ethical outcomes exaggerated by some literary ethicists.

A similar thought-provoking criticism comes from Currie (2016) who finds the evidence for connecting narrative empathy, empathizing with real people, and prosocial behaviour 'poor'. In his sceptical discussion, he lists eight points where empathy from literary fiction can have negative effects on empathy with real people and helping behaviour. To name but a few in order not to exhaust this critical section, Currie counterargues that a)- fiction enables direct accessibility to characters' minds, unlike real situations where that accessibility is weaker, and b)- empathy and helping behaviour are weakly connected (58) which aligns with Keen's (2007) review of evidence above. However, Currie elaborates only on one way by using moral self-licensing hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that previous behaviour increases individuals' sense of self-worth, which in turn gives them permission to act less sensibly or poorly. Using this theory, Currie argues that empathizing with a fictional character may 'eat into our empathy capacity' to respond empathetically afterwards. This

may reinforce readers' self-licensing attitude to either stop empathizing all together or to be less sensible thereafter in real situations.

Cosgrove (2007) too uses the adjective 'romantic' (01) when describing the exaggerated tone of the body of research on ethics and the novel in the mid-20th century. In both of her articles: 'Can the Novel Save the World?' (2007) and 'Literature as Activism' (2008), She argues that experiencing alterity cannot lead to a firm conclusion about the role of novels in motivating social and pacifist activism. She (2007) explains that readers' experience of alterity from 'othered perspectives' cannot be measured and verified for its political effects. While she acknowledges the experience of alterity for empathetic reflection and interpretation, she asserts that the pursuit of actions is the answer beyond reading novels. She states that '[p]erhaps we read and through that process become more empathetic, but that empathy must then translate into action/reactions in the world beyond the text: reading alone isn't the answer' (Cosgrove, 2008, 237).

In regard to the critical review above, I share the scepticism about the association of narrative empathy with prosocial change; if novels allow readers to experience alterity with good role models, they can obviously allow them to do so with bad role models. However, on the other hand, I disagree with their argument that empathy with fictional characters cannot be transferred into empathy with real people. This is because some evidence, as I will show later, suggests that narratives are effective in changing readers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. That evidence relies on processes that are connected to narrative empathy as I will explain in The Theoretical Framework.

All in all, this dissertation acknowledges some of the arguments made by literary ethics and the findings of cognitive studies that highlight the process of entering other's perspectives. Yet, it adheres more to the sceptical view by asserting that narrative empathy is not inherently moral or prosocial. It is rather a neutral process that can motivate even antisocial beliefs and attitudes when narrative content allows it. As Prinz (2011) puts it 'empathy is less well suited to serve as the central motivational component of morality' (227). The same goes for other processes that are often studied in relation to or with narrative empathy such as identification, transportation, theory of mind and perspective-taking. As I will explain later, these processes can produce different outcomes, but are not naturally moral or prosocial. Indeed, unlike Currie's, Cosgrove's, and Keen's views which are reserved when it comes to attitude and behaviour changes after reading, I am going to show how

narratives may exert such effects by relying on media effects and narrative persuasion studies.

This dissertation is, therefore, in line with the view that fictional narratives enhance readers' empathy and theory of mind by means of perspective-taking and identification (Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Crum, 2019). However, it challenges the connection of narrative empathy with prosocial attitudes advocated for by literary ethicists and their followers. Therefore, I am going to argue that narrative empathy can also invite antisocial beliefs and attitudes such as political radicalization, racism, and cynicism. This is possible because narratives can orient readers' empathy toward the protagonist, alongside feelings of resentment for the antagonist. According to Lindhé (2016), this paradox challenges the ethical position of narrative empathy when considering alterity. Indeed, fiction allows readers to engage with alterity and otherness, as well as creating otherness and alterity because of the tension arising from the distribution of discourse and story in relation to characters (Lindhé, 2016; 2021). Lindhé's (2016; 2021) theory will be explained further when applied to analysis.

In the next section, I am going to state the problem and importance of this research by point out the gap in research more explicitly. Then, I will refer to some relevant studies and theories that can support its exploration in The Theoretical Framework.

1.3. Problem, Purpose, and Importance.

The gap in research this dissertation approaches is related to an earlier opposition to novel reading in the 18th and 19th century for its attribution of morally 'corrupting' effects, and a contrary late 20th century praise of novel reading for developing readers' morality. The position I take is that the discourse of opposition lacks empirical evidence, while the discourse of praise is limited. Although, both discourses around the effects of novel reading have their share of criticism, they acknowledge the transformative impact of novels on readers, something well documented in recent empirical works. As such, this dissertation is concerned with exploring how novels can produce harmful effects because this possibility, albeit referred to in many accounts (see Lindhé, 2016, 24-25; or Keen, 2007, 91), it is not exclusively examined to the same degree as that of the benefits of reading. By doing so, this dissertation aims to reduce the stigma of 'moral panic' associated with the earlier oppositional discourse. This is motivated in part by observing that some authors like Trollope (1879) were right in identifying some of what is now known in contemporary research as

mechanisms of narrative impact such as narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000).

As I discussed previously, the discourse of praise is limited in its discussion of the potential for narrative empathy to produce harmful effects. In fact, explicit contemporary investigations explore the negative influences of videogames or social media, not the novel. Keen (2007) writes in this vein that 'the gory narratives of video games, which require advanced gaming skill even fully to preview, are assumed to have a corrupting influence on the young people who play them, but few literary fictions, no matter how transgressive, achieve the spotlight of public reprobation' (132). She explains that '[t]he lower the cultural estimation of the form under consideration, the more likely it is to receive condemnation for inciting consumers to imitative violence or expression of anger and hatred' (131). Seemingly, when a new media technology or narrative genre emerges such as the cinema or TV, it takes condemnation attention from the previous one, in this case the novel.

Although, contemporary studies have mixed findings about the harmful effects of videogames (for a review see Ferguson & Wang, 2019), only a few studies have recently investigated the role of novel reading in producing unethical positions for readers. For example, Igartua and Barrios (2012) observed that 'research into the impact of public narratives that sow controversy or agitate public opinion by addressing topics that are directly related to personal values is scarce' (515). In heath communication, Banomi and collaborators (2014) state that '[n]o prior study has empirically characterized the association between health risks and reading popular fiction depicting violence against women' (02). Gabriel (2008) also perceives narratives as holding 'seductive powers'.

> [S]tories can be vehicles of contestation and opposition but also of oppression, easily slipping into hegemonic discourses; […] they can be vehicles to enlightenment and understanding but also to dissimulation and lying; and finally, that they do not obliterate or deny the existence of facts but allow facts to be re-interpreted and embellished – this makes stories particularly dangerous devices in the hands of image-makers, hoaxers and spin doctors (Gabriel, 2008, 154).

Based on these claims, the investigation of novel reading for its potential negative or antisocial effects deserves more attention to balance out the extensive studies on its benefits.

Overall, the juxtaposition of these two ways of considering the effects of novels (that is the novel is morally corrupting without systematic assessment vs. the novel is morally

beneficial with extensive assessment) overlooks the examination of its potential harmful effects such as influencing readers to be ethnocentric, sexist or cynical. It also overlooks the role of narrative empathy for influencing the adoption of socially unacceptable attitudes. Therefore, by asserting the ethical value of fiction reading (Nussbaum, 1990; Duncan, Bess-Montgomery, & Osinubi, 2017; Nünning, 2015), the former potential becomes further dismissed. To note here, some scholars in culture and gender studies such as postcolonialism (Edward Said; Franz Fanon) and feminism (Judith Butler; Gayatri Spivak) have associated some canonical literature with negative attitudes such as ethnocentrism and misogyny. However, they use different methodologies and distinct epistemological and theoretical paradigms (post-structuralism) than the cognitive and psychological framework identified in the next section.

Henceforth, the purpose of this study is to explore how some novels can produce antisocial effects on readers such as political radicalization, racism, and cynicism in light of recent evidence from narrative persuasion studies as will be discussed in The Theoretical Framework. By applying Cohen's (2001) theory of identification and Lindhé's (2016) paradox of narrative empathy, I am going to argue that there is a linguistic context that can cause ethical concern. This is when narratives manipulate readers' empathy to immerse into and take on the perspective of immoral and antisocial protagonists such as racists or perpetrators, while denying it for their victims (Lindhé, 2016; Bentham, 2014; Kark & Vanderbeke, 2020). Many scholars, even some literary ethicists have pointed out this potential, but only few have examined it from novels as Keen (2007) puts it.

> Novels can provide safe spaces within which to see through the eyes of the psychopath, to occupy the subject position of the oppressive racist, to share the brutalizing past of the condemned outcast […] Such serious literary experimentation with inhabiting the perspective of stigmatized or repulsive others may play on readers' appetites for vicious imagery or play with taboos, but it has not been generally understood as a corrupting aspect of narrative (131).

The ethical concern that emerges from these positions can be self-explanatory because what is morally acceptable is to side with the victim not their perpetrator (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Decety & Cowell, 2015; Leake, 2014; Gray & Wegner, 2009). However, because empathy can be selective and manipulated for a number of conditions such as the attractiveness of individuals or their proximity to us (Prinz, 2011; 225-227), some narratives can distribute readers' empathy by using linguistic cues and narrative techniques to identify and take on

the perspectives of those antisocial characters. This can take the form of manipulating themes of narrative victimization and dehumanization where the real perpetrator is constructed as a victim and its victims are represented as dehumanized antagonists within a plausible order of events. As such, this type of narratives may invite readers' empathy for evil characters alongside feelings of resentment for their victims (Lindhé, 2016; Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt, 2022, under review).

Furthermore, the link between narrative empathy and consistent behaviour changes in real situations is perhaps tenuous as Keen (2007) and Currie (2016) argued previously. Nonetheless, narrative impact, as will be delineated in the next section, can occur from vicarious experience (Bandura, 1986; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Wojciehowski & Gallese, 2022) following narrative transportation and character identification. These two processes have been shown to influence changes in beliefs and attitude (Green & Brock, 2000; van Laear, et al., 2014; Braddock & Dillard, 2016), personality traits (Sestir & Green, 2010), behavioural intentions and actual behaviours (HIV prevention in Banerjee, et al., 2019; Slater, 2002, for a review), and that this can have long-term effects (Appel & Richter, 2007). This means that the role of empathy in changing attitudes and behaviours is indirect because empathy has an integrative role in identification (Cohen, 2001; de Graaf, et al., 2012) and transportation (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012).

To explore how novels can create the unethical position described above, I am going to consider three novels where this specific linguistic context can be salient, applying relevant theories from media psychology (Potter, 2012). In Chapter Two, I am going to analyse Jean Raspail's *Le Camp Des Saints* (1973), translated into English as *The Camp of The Saints*, to demonstrate how it can invite readers to empathize and identify with its racist narrator and violent heroes. I am going to apply relevant theories to predict how this novel can contribute to political radicalization. The persuasion of readers towards racism is especially explored in relation to readers who already hold racist beliefs as well as those who do not hold any firm beliefs about the matter. I am going to argue that the novel, therefore, creates an experience of alterity that is unethical for readers and its consequences can be antisocial. Similarly, in Chapter Three, I am going to analyse how two thrillers - *You* (Caroline Kepnes, 2014) and *Gone Girl* (Gillian Flynn, 2012) - ensure readers' empathy with their psychopathic and criminal protagonists. I predict that frequent exposure to this type of novel can accumulate into moral desensitisation and cynicism due to the integration of moral disengagement in frequently activated story-schema (Bandura, 1986; Raney, 2004).

The importance of this study lies in expanding the research literature by exploring the negative effects of novels which are not yet fully covered. In fact, this study explains an age-old problem which is not approached properly by using recent theories and empirical evidence from media psychology and narrative persuasion studies. It also challenges the praise discourse of novel reading by highlighting how some novels can elicit readers' empathy for unethical considerations that can persuade them of antisocial attitudes. Therefore, this study attempts to critically balance out the discourse about the effects of novel reading by focusing on its darker manifestations. Another contribution of this research study comes from using close-reading analysis on a lengthy narrative like the novel to apply theories that are usually based on readers' self-report of small narrative passages. Contrary to the widely used methods that investigate narrative persuasion and impact quantitatively using readers' self-reports, the thesis is going to utilise a qualitative approach. This is important because close-reading and textual analysis allows researchers to identify the linguistic and literary features that may be missed by quantitative methods. It allows them to find more subtleties, draw out more questions, find more discoveries, about entire texts not just the extracts investigated.

The selection of the qualitative approach of close-reading and not the quantitative approaches based on readers' self-reports (especially using the Likert-type questionnaire) or imaging is suitable for the construction of a new theory. Empirical evidence is expensive and it is generally considered best to clarify a new theory as much as possible before beginning empirical work. This helps researchers to identify patterns and themes in the data collected to inform the design of experiment and selection of variables and measures (Morse & Peggy Anne Field, 1996). My choice of the close-reading method also fits with the intuitive view that text or narrative is the primary "stimulus" that orients readers' different responses during narrative experience. While self-reports offer a great deal of discoveries and evidence about the responses of large samples of actual readers as indicated by the various scales used, they are mostly made to focus on the outcomes of narrative engagement such as identification or similarity, often when the reading is done. But, they do not show how the text and its linguistic context operate for those outcomes to occur. For instance, self-reports demonstrate statistically how readers respond to the different facets of narrative experience such as empathy with fictive characters. But readers may be biased to give desired answers (Keen, 2007, 89). Self-reports may thus prime readers to give favourable answers (for a critical review on the method see Paulhus & Vazire, 2007).

In the same regard, I perceive text to have an orienting capacity which occurs from its framing of different issues. Like news media, fictional media such as novels also frame issues in particular ways to influence opinions by selecting some of their aspects and making them more salient compared to others. For example, Mulligan and Habel (2011) found that participants who watched a movie that frames abortion in the case of incest as justified and morality as following one's conscience, were more likely than those in the control group to support abortion rights in this particular situation and to concur with the movie's moral message. Framing theory will be illustrated later in chapter two (see 2.6.1.). In narrative studies too, there is some consensus that support my view that text or narrative 'instructs' readers to take a particular position through which they interpret and respond (see Macken-Horarik, 2003; Strange, 2002). Narrative, for instance, acts like a contextual frame to influence readers' interpretive freedom (see Strange, 2002). Textual devices such as point of view too has an orienting capacity which positions readers to experience narrative from its scope (see van Peer & Maat, 2001). As such, it becomes necessary to primarily analyse the textual patterns and narrative techniques as they occur in lengthier stories to predict readers' responses.

This is not to overlook or devalue variability in readers' different properties which are likely to influence their narrative experience. Readers' variables such as their prior knowledge (see Green, 2004) or need for affect (Appel & Ritcher, 2010) have been examined in relation to narrative-based persuasion. In fact, readers have an active role in narrative engagement. They choose what to engage with. They use their background knowledge to interpret, to respond empathically to characters, and to discern the message of stories (see Macken-Horarik, 2003). However, readers operate from a subjectivity which cannot be generalised when expecting their responses to a single narrative. At the same time, a generalised response is necessary to form a judgement in this thesis. For this reason, I am going to use a generalizable category similar to the ones found in reader-response criticism such as De Maria's (1978) 'ideal reader' or Eco's (1994) 'model reader' to be able to narrow the scope of the main argument. As I will explain in each following chapter, I narrow the prediction of narrative impact in the second chapter to a 'middling reader' who does not hold rigid beliefs about an issue such as anti-immigration. I also narrow the analysis in the third chapter to a 'frequently engaged reader' with aberrant heroes for an antisocial outcome to occur. I also assume that both types of readers may likely lack the sophisticated knowledge of how narratives persuade. In line with these rationales, I am going to apply the theories

identified below to conduct a close-reading analysis on the selected novels to approach the research question.

1.4. A Theoretical Framework.

My approach to investigate the potential antisocial and immoral influences of novel reading depends on relevant theories from media psychology, especially narrative persuasion studies. This field is concerned with examining the effects of engagement with different media narratives on the emotions, beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and behaviours of individuals (see Potter, 2012, for a review). Therefore, in this section, I am going to explain how narrative comprehension is facilitated using discourse-processing mental models, especially simulation theory (Oatley, 2016). This is to demonstrate how narrative is processed emotionally and cognitively in ways similar to real-life processing. I will also discuss the potential of narrative fiction to alter readers' worldview. This is useful to highlight how immoral and antisocial influences can occur following the same logic of the identified mechanisms. Overall, this section is going to explain the theoretical foundation my analysis is going to rely on.

1.4.1. Narrative comprehension processing.

The examination of novel reading for its potential harmful effects involves understanding how narratives are generally processed based on widely accepted theoretical frames. As I am going to explain below, narratives are processed in the same way real experience is which may facilitate the fluidity of narrative comprehension and thereby influence. They engage readers' inferencing, mental models, and emotions in ways similar to real experience. This, however, does not necessitate having a positive outcome on readers. First of all, a novel is a specific type of extended fictional narrative presented in prose (Watt, 1957). A narrative is the organization and interpretation of events within a causal and temporal structure that conveys a particular meaning (Bal, 2009). It has a storyline with a beginning, middle, and end considering the inner life, goals, views, and emotions of a character. Conflict or crisis inside or between character(s) rises and generally resolves to mark the climax and ending of a narrative (Bruner, 1986). This organization of narrative structure (causality and temporality), narrative content (stories about friendship or social nature), and narrative language (everyday vocabulary vs. jargon in exposition) is similar to

the organization of real life experience (Mar, et al., 2021, 733). In fact, individuals organise their life information in a story-like mode; also known as a narrative mode of thought (Bruner, 1986; Escalas, 2004). This similarity may then facilitate the fluency of narrative processing in readers' minds when they read fiction, increasing their impact.

Secondly, the fluidity of processing which may result from the mapping between real and fictional experience is reported by different researchers and with different models (for a review see Green, et al., 2019). This is useful to discuss because it shows the extent of effect narratives have on readers, not necessarily moral ones. In fact, studies show that narratives are more effective in comprehension and memory recall (Bruner, 1986; Clinton, et al., 2020). This is probably because narratives typically involve background knowledge from everyday life experience, whereas expository texts, for instance, require more specified knowledge (Graesser, et al., 2004). Narratives are also more effective in enhancing readers' mentalizing (Zunshine, 2006), and persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000). Overall, narratives are found to enhance readers' social cognition (Kidd & Castano, 2013; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017; Tamir, et al., 2016; Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018). This is observed in their ability to enhance readers' theory of mind, also known as mind reading which is the ability to infer other people's mental and psychological states of mind (Zunshine, 2006; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Fong, Mullin, & Mar, 2013; Mar, et al, 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009; Black & Barnes, 2015). For example, fiction readers (referred to as Bookworms) scored higher than readers of expository texts (referred to as Nerds) in terms of social abilities such as empathy and mentalizing (Mar, et al., 2006). This is also recorded at the level of brain regions where story comprehension processing brain region is found to overlap with many regions of the core mentalizing network found in non-story-based neuro-imagining studies of theory of mind (Mar, 2011).

Nevertheless, although fiction reading can map on to theory of mind abilities, that does not necessarily mean positive moral outcomes. Fiction simulates or models real life experiences by abstracting, compressing, and simplifying information about them to facilitate communication and social inference (Oatley, 1999a; 2016; Mar & Oatley, 2008). This is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) which suggests, in part, that learning occurs from individuals' 'vicarious capabilities' when observing the behaviours and behaviour consequences of others (Krcmar, 2019, 101). This includes the behaviours of fictional characters when a level of involvement with narrative and characters is maintained (Green, et al., 2019, 132). However, like many scholars who approach literary fiction with an

expectation of its benefits, Mar and Oatley (2008) use their theory of simulation to argue that fiction 'provides an opportunity for empathic growth. It trains us to extend our understanding toward other people, to embody (to some extent) and understand their beliefs and emotions' (181). While this can be true to some extent depending on many variables, especially what character or social experience is modelled, I argue that simulation as a process can also facilitate vicarious experience and mentalizing with negative role models such as sympathetic perpetrators.

A third way in which mapping between fictional and real life experience is at the more abstract level of mental models which is also a neutral process, not at all morally positive. As simulation theory, other theories of narrative processing are discourse-processing theories such as mental model and situation model (Mar, et al., 2006; Jajdelska, 2019). These have robust empirical support. For instance, reading comprehension, especially of narrative, involves the mental representation and encoding of many aspects of text (gramma, lexis, syntax, semantic, characters, genre), involving readers' memory (for a review, Sparks, 2012). These aspects of a story contribute to different-levels of encoding and mental representation ranging from surface coding to pragmatic context (Graesser, Olde, & Klettke, 2002). This involves, for example, monitoring multiple dimensions of the situation (situation model) those textual aspects conveyed including characterisation, the temporal and causal order of events (Zwaan, Magliano, & Graesser, 1995). Indeed, readers comprehend texts/stories by actively constructing situation models and updating them with new consistent information (Zwaan & Madden, 2004) to 'realize' a story (Oatley, 2002). The mental construction of a story involves readers' prior knowledge and sensory-motor processes. Theoretically, visual, perceptual, and action-related representations activate the neural regions that resemble the ones activated when actual experience takes place (Zwaan, 2004). This also shows that there is no moral component to narrative comprehension and simulation which may prevent the simulation of antisocial narrative experience such as fictionalised aggression.

Like narrative processing, Read and Miller (1993) support the idea that real-life social perception follows the mental construction of story from sequences of action based on prior knowledge schema, and the generation of causal inferences about all individuals partaking in a coherent way. The similarities between real and fictional world processing are empirically supported. Evidence about the simulation and construction of situation models during narrative experience is found in brain connectivity studies (Berns, et al., 2013). Another study

found that reading a fictional story 'dramatically activate specific visual, motor, and conceptual features of activities in specific brain regions which are associated with an observer or an actor perceiving or performing analogous activities in the real world (Speer, et al., 2009). Behavioural evidence is consistent with this account. Participants were faster to recognize a picture that is consistent with the action read than a picture that is inconsistent with the action read (Zwaan, Stanfield, & Yaxley, 2002). As such, this similarity of information processing between real-life and fiction explains the transformative impact of narratives on readers. Just as the effect of interaction with real individuals can sometimes influence antisocial outcomes, narrative interaction with fictional characters may as well influence unethical positions.

This extensive body of research on narrative processing engaging resources of real world engagement suggests that deep engagement with a narrative-world may blur the lines of its fictionality at the level of readers' perception. It may create a sense of presence from imaginary world. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) explain that when readers create mental models and situation models of a story, they perform 'a deictic shift' to hypothetically position themselves within the temporal, spatial, and personal perspective implied by the narrative. This shift creates a sense of flow and facilitates character identification. Hamby, Brinberg, and Jaccard (2016) too argue that deictic shift into a narrative through absorption and identification in a narrative needs to be followed by reflection or what they call 'deictic return' so that persuasion occurs. Thereby, it seems that narrative impact may occur between a deictic shift into the fictional world and a deictic return into the real world.

These simulation and mental model theories and experiments emphasize the role of cognition in experiencing and comprehending narratives. But, their impact include emotions also which play a comparable role too. This is based on the overlapping relationship between cognition and emotion (Okon-Singer, et al., 2015; Damasio, 1994). In fact, emotions interfere with narrative engagement before (selecting a narrative for mood regulation), during (emotional connectedness with characters), and after (self-modifying effects) (see Mar, et al., 2011). Kneepkens and Zwaan (1994) too emphasize the role of readers' emotions with both fiction emotions (induced by fictional events) and artefact emotions (induced by style) as necessary in guiding readers' attention and evaluation of relevant information. Tan (1994) too suggests that readers simulate the emotions of characters as well as their own emotions in the same way witnesses do in real life which enables inference. This aligns with narrative

empathy studies which emphasise the vital role of sharing characters' feelings and perspective for narrative experience (Breithaupt, 2012, 02).

Therefore, the embodied responses to verbal narratives allow the emotions of characters to be integrated into readers' mental representations. This influences readers' emotions such as liking, approval, and closeness with characters which then contribute to the larger discourse structures of curiosity, surprise, and suspense. Ultimately, this interplay of emotions and discourse structure generates emotional arousal and heightened engagement with the story (Sanford and Emmott, 2013). The role of emotions during narrative engagement is important for it makes narrative experience seems realistic like that of real experience. Oatley (2002) writes in this regard that '[e]motion is to fiction as truth is to science. We would no sooner read a novel that did not move us, than an empirical article that did not offer a validly drawn conclusion. Fictional narrative has its impact primarily through the emotions' (01). However, emotions from fiction have a 'laboratory quality' which allows readers to feel them fully, voluntarily, and safely, unlike the situation in real life (Oatley, 2002). These qualities of narrative emotion may thus be effective in impacting readers as they occur from a voluntary intention for entertainment and escapism, not persuasion.

An important point to consider about narrative processing is that it can be affected by the modality or type of narratives used. According to Jajdelska and colleagues (2019), hearing, reading, and viewing narratives are mentally modelled in the same way and are capable of producing narrative absorption and narrative impact, especially carefully crafted narratives like literary fiction. However, the researchers found that these narrative types demand different cognitive loads, and activate different brain regions. For instance, visual processing with some working memory are engaged while watching moving image narrative, while verbal processing, visual imagery, and personal memory are engaged when reading narrative (Jajdelska, et al., 2019). This is useful to consider because the evidence on narrative impact I am going to consider in the next section and throughout the analysis comes from different studies, using different modalities. Nonetheless, I argue that this is not going to cause a problem because most studies tend to explore the macro-level factors shared across modalities such as point of view or perceived realism. They also tend to generalise their findings relative to narrative, not the specific aspects of each modality.

To summarise, narratives of all sorts are processed in readers' minds by constructing mental and situation models that correspond with the narrative information encountered

(Zwaan, et al, 1995; 2004). When readers create consistent mental models, they simulate the experiences represented by hypothetically positioning themselves within the narrative world (Mar & Oatley, 2008). The construction of mental models is affected by readers' emotions prior to reading and their emotional responses to fictional events, characters, and writing style (Kneepkens & Zwaan, 1994; Mar, et al., 2011). The effect of deictically shifting from the mental representation of narrative world helps in producing a sense of presence, and facilitates character identification (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). The striking similarity in mental representation between narrative and real life experience makes it less surprising when engagement with fictional stories can lead to changes in beliefs and attitudes (Green, et al., 2019). But, this is consistent with how beliefs and changes occur in real life through observing vicarious experience (Mar, et al., 2006; Bandura, 1986). This is not to claim that there is no difference between real and fictional experience.

To approach how the construction of mental models, the simulation of vicarious experience, and the learning from observable behaviour can also occur with immoral protagonists, I argue that narratives need to enable particular processes. These involve the enjoyable process of immersion which correlated positively and significantly with reducing critical elaboration (Prentice & Gerrig, 1999; Green & Brock, 2000) and moral sanctioning (Raney, 2004). These processes are explained below in relation to how they mediate readers' changes in beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and actual behaviours.

1.4.2. Narrative Persuasion: beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

It has long been established and demonstrated that narratives can influence readers worldview (Strange & Leung, 1999; Prentice & Gerrig, 1999). Indeed, narrative persuasion studies have robust evidence about the effectiveness of narratives in changing readers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; Fitzgerald & Green, 2017; Green, et al., 2019). This is investigated across disciplines from health communication (Shen, Sheer, Li, 2015), marketing advertisement (Escalas, 2004; 2007), to entertainment-education (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Narrative persuasion also occurs regardless of the fictionality or factually of narratives as found across different modalities such as novels, films, videogames, and television (Green, et al., 2019). For this reason, and an important source in my demonstration of how reading particular novels can persuade readers' to adopt immoral and antisocial beliefs, attitudes and behaviours is narrative persuasion studies. I selected this field of study as it approaches various modalities of narrative to understand and measure how

they exert their various effects on narrative consumers. The field also offers plenty of evidence which can be mapped onto a qualitative textual analysis for a new method that puts more attention into the poetics of form than readers' self-reports. Therefore, I am going to explain how narrative persuasion occurs relative to the duration of effect. I will then refer to some models that can explain narrative impact to justify my choice of concepts, , namely transportation, identification, and moral disengagement. I predict that these processes that have been found to mediate persuasion from narratives can explain the persuasion of antisocial attitudes.

First, narrative-based persuasion can occur durably as well as temporarily after narrative engagement (Appel & Ritcher, 2007; for a review, see Green, Garst, & Brock, 2004). For instance, researchers found that engagement with a fictional narrative that encourages the self-generation of alternative scenarios or counterfactual thinking of what could have happened after a car accident, reported consistent attitude and behavioural intentions with traffic safety for the long-term. In contrast, when counterfactual thoughts were explicitly provided, short-term effect were reported (Tal-Or, et al., 2004). Appel and Ritcher (2007) too empirically confirm that narratives can be a source of a 'sleeper effect'. This refers to the persistence of persuasion; in this study belief certainty about false assertions, after some time from exposure (two week after reading). The researchers explain that an absolute sleeper effect may occur in situations where a persuasive message is presented with a discounting cue such as the fictionality of a narrative. The presence of two conditions helps persuasion to persist for long-term: when source amnesia or memory of the source decays fast, and memory for the belief-relevant information encountered in the narrative is maintained (Appel & Richter, 2007, 118). This indicates the extent of impact narratives can have on readers, without specifying the moral or prosocial nature of potential outcomes.

Second, these long-term effects of narrative-based persuasion fit with the general assumption of the cultivation theory in communication studies. Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) suggests that frequent and extensive exposure to repeated media content influences consumers to believe that the world is similar to that mediated representation of reality. Because media representation is not 'objective' and can often be distorted and at best limited, consumers may cultivate a biased perception of reality (Koch & Arendt, 2017, 03). For example, news media reporting of violent stories in real life makes the idea of social violence more salient in consumers' perception which then influences them to view the world as a dangerous place or to be more alerted and pessimistic (mean world syndrome,

Gerbner, 1980). This is probably because a 'slight but pervasive (e.g., generational) shift in the cultivation of common perspectives may alter the cultural climate and upset the balance of social and political decision-making without necessarily changing observable behavior' (Gerbner, 2000, 07). This means that if readers keep engaging with narratives that skilfully promote antisocial attitudes, they may develop consistent antisocial worldviews.

Cultivation theory is less often applied to fictional narratives. However, Bilandzic and Busselle (2008) explain how the process of transportation (explained below) which leads to narrative persuasion can indirectly mediate the cultivation of genre-specific beliefs and attitudes. The researchers suggest that the more a genre becomes associated with the enjoyable state of narrative transportation (that is transportability), the more its consumers become motivated to seek similar stories within the genre. Frequent exposure and the motivation to experience the same gratification repeatedly makes readers more knowledgeable and familiar with the genre conventions. This, in turn, reduces cognitive load for criticizing narrative information and increases potential for intense narrative transportation. The researchers found some correlation between the internalization of consonant genre-specific beliefs and attitudes, and readers' agreement with those beliefs. They reduced their critical elaboration about the belief-relevant information which increased their potential for cultivation for the long run. Thereby, because cultivation theory addresses the metamessage of repeated stories (both fictional and factual), it can be suitable to explain the accumulation of racist and cynical attitudes from frequent engagement with the selected narratives as will be considered in the next chapters.

These temporal and durable effects occur when narratives allow particular conditions to emerge. In this regard, many theoretical models explain the mechanisms through which narratives influence and persuade readers (for a review, see Green, et al., 2019; Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013). However, persuasion research originally focused on argument-based, analytical, or advocacy messages in dual processing models such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM, Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989), not narratives and stories. These models posit that durable persuasion occurs from careful elaboration on and critical motivation to assess the message. This follows the 'central' or 'systematic route' where individuals critically assess the strength of argument. In contrast, temporary persuasion occurs from superficial processing (referred to as 'peripheral' or 'heuristic') of message elements like the source cues or the number of arguments. Both models assume that individuals are cognitive misers who

prefer to follow heuristic processing (Kim, Wing, & Kim, 2018). This means that readers are likely to follow superficial processing not to critically elaborate on information in fiction; a supposed discounting cue for persuasion (Appel & Ritcher, 2007, 116).

On the other hand, although these models are influential, they are not fully adapted to explain narrative-based persuasion because of the inherent differences between narrative and analytical messages. These include the explicit persuasive nature and educational purposes of analytical messages. In contrast, narrative are conventionally associated with entertainment or aesthetic purposes, not with persuasion (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Igartua & Barrios, 2012, 293). More suitable models of narrative persuasion include but not limited to the Transportation-Imagery Model (Green & Brock, 2003) and the Extended-Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM, Slater & Rouner, 2002). These explain that persuasion arises from involvement with story, that is narrative transportation and involvement with characters such as identification (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). I select these models as they can be adapted to explain how narratives can persuade readers' of antisocial and immoral beliefs and attitudes as will be seen below.

1.4.2.1. Narrative Transportation.

Narrative transportation is a major mechanism for narrative-based persuasion. This is because it is an enjoyable state readers may want to maintain during their narrative engagement. It is also found to reduce negative thought responding (Green & Brock, 2000). This is useful to my analysis in the sense that I am going to demonstrate that if the selected novels can generate readers' feelings of narrative transportation into their story worlds, they may reduce their counterarguing to persuade them of their antisocial attitudes. In other words, readers who are going to be transported into the selected thrillers may therefore be persuaded of their antisocial narrative perspectives of racism and cynicism. In this section, I am going to define narrative transportation, explain how it occurs, and its correlation with persuasion. I will finish by referring to its intended application in later analysis.

Green and Brock (2000; 2003) use the term narrative transportation to point to the mental journey readers undergo while reading fiction as theorised by Gerrig (1993). They define it as the merging of emotion, attention, and imagery through which readers psychologically 'travel' from the real-world to the fictional-world and come out of it transformed. However, before moving on in discussing how narrative transportation leads to narrative persuasion, I need to clarify a terminological issue. A number of models describe similar or the same state as Green and Brock's (2000) such as The Story World Absorption

Scale (SWAS; Kuijpers et al., 2014). However, although those models add more dimensions and variables to the understanding of the state, they have contributed to conceptual confusion. Indeed, narrative transportation is often used interchangeably with the concepts of absorption, identification, immersion, engagement, involvement, presence, flow, and so on. However, each of these terms have a different history, domain, and particularity (for more details, Busselle & Bilandzic, 2017). After explaining some of these concepts, I am going to continue using them interchangeably. But, I will specify how.

Transportation, for example, is sometimes used synonymously with the word 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). This term comes from the psychology of happiness and refers to optimal experience, including but not limited to fiction reading. The words 'immersion' and 'presence' meanwhile are often used in computer game studies (Rayan, 2001). Similarly, the term 'engagement' occurs in a multidimensional scale that measures different degrees of transportation including 'narrative presence, narrative understanding, attentional focus, and emotional engagement' (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Moreover, transportation itself shares similarities with identification; they are often, but not always correlated (Green, 2021, 89). As mentioned earlier, identification refers to involvement with characters, whereas transportation is involvement with the story world in general (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Green, 2021). According to this brief explanation, I am going to use narrative transportation with the identified concepts synonymously to refer to deep psychological engagement with narrative. However, I am going to use identification separately from transportation as the former is character-driven as I will show in the next section.

Moreover, it is useful to understand the extent of effect narrative transportation have on readers' emotions and cognition to facilitate their persuasion. This is also to show how this process can be connected to other processes such as narrative empathy. Indeed, narrative transportation affects readers' cognitively and emotionally. When readers are absorbed into a narrative, they tend to emotionally connect with the characters which may implicate the other processes of narrative empathy and identification (Oatley, 2002; Cohen, 2001). Although narrative transportation refers to involvement with the story, it also facilitates narrative empathy (Walkington, Wigman, & Bowles, 2020) and vice versa (Weiss, 2015). This correlation is important to my argument that if readers of the selected novels can experience immersion into their story worlds, their potential to empathise with their evil protagonist may be affected.

Cognitively, absorbed readers reduce their monitoring of real-world distractions such as time and surroundings to fully be 'lost in a book'' (Nell, 1988). Readers' need for enjoyment and escapism while reading fiction motivates them to invest and focus their cognitive energy to mentally construct or imagine the fictional world, not the real world (Green & Brock, 2000; Raney, 2004). This is significantly important for persuasion to occur because it lowers resistance and dissonance to the information encountered (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). For example, readers and viewers of different advertisements who experienced high transportation, reported more favourable attitudes toward the advertised product. The researcher explains that transportation distracts participants from assessing argument strength as induced by analytical self-referencing (Escalas, 2007). Therefore, when the narrative world acts like the frame of reference to evaluate the assertions encountered in it (Strange, 2002), absorbed readers may lose access to real world assertions which may then facilitate persuasion (Appel & Richter, 2007, 117). Therefore, I argue that when particular novels transport readers into their narrative worlds, they can potentially persuade them of antisocial and immoral beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

Narrative transportation is a key mechanism of narrative persuasion (van Lear, et al, 2014). This means that when readers experience intense narrative transportation, they tend to align their beliefs and attitudes with narrative perspective (Green, 2021; Green, et al., 2019; Green & Fitzgerald, 2017; Braddock & Dillard, 2016). It exerts its persuasive effects through the reduction of readers' counterarguing against the narrative to minimize resistance (Dal-Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Transportation increases their emotional connection to the story, makes the story seem more realistic, and heightens vivid imagery (Fitzgerald & Green, 2017). For instance, readers' prior knowledge increased their absorption in *Just as I am*, which made the story seem more realistic (that is perceived realism), and increased support for story-relevant beliefs about the experience of homosexuality in US fraternities (Green, 2004).

Studies confirm that readers high in transportation do not engage in critical elaboration because narrative transportation is not compatible with disbelief or counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Escalas, 2007; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Green & Clack, 2013; Chen & Chang, 2017; Green, et al., 2019). Counterarguing, negative cognitive responding, or disbelief refer to the generation of thoughts that dispute or are inconsistent with a given proposition (Green & Brock, 2000). Reasons for such incompatibility come from the assumption that fiction is meant for entertainment, not

educational persuasion. Therefore, readers are not going to spend much time searching for and assessing embedded persuasive messages when they are motivated to maintain the enjoyable process of immersion (Green, 2021). Another reason come from belief formation where individuals believe propositions by implicitly and automatically accepting them, during comprehension (known as the Spinozan model). However, disbelief is a more active process as it requires more time, motivation, cognitive energy, and counterevidence to occur. Empirical studies on cognitive resource depletion found that when participants are distracted, exhausted, lack sleep, or multitasking, they tend to accept the communicated assertions uncritically (Gilbert, 1999; Gilbert, Tafarodi, & Malone, 1993).

This means that when transported readers' cognitive energy is invested in imagining the story world and their motivation is reserved to enjoying it, they cannot counterargue against its logic or central perspective. For example, Green and Brock (2000) found that readers who experienced intense transportation circled only few false notes compared to less transported readers. As a consequence, they reported narrative consistent beliefs and attitudes such as malls are dangerous places and that mentally-ill people should not be left unsupervised in public. In other words, absorption distracts readers from critically elaborating on the embedded message (Escalas, 2007). This is due in great part to their reluctance to spend cognitive energy, time, motivation, and search for counterevidence to deplete their enjoyable experience of immersion. Therefore, to demonstrate how particular novels can persuade their readers of immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes, I am going to predict that transported readers may not want to counterargue against the narratives when they generate an immersive experience.

The influence of narrative transportation on readers is also reported at the level of behaviour change. Research in this domain is scarce compared to the examination of belief and attitude changes (van Laear, et al., 2014). However, some health communication studied show that transported readers may behave or at least develop intentions to behave in a narratively-consistent way. For example, studies on smoking behaviour demonstrate that transportation into movies with smoking cues may increase smoking intention among non-smokers and immediate smoking behaviour among smokers (Dal-Cin, et al., 2007; Lochbuehler, et al., 2020), especially among teenagers (see report by WHO, 2015). This is probably because transportation may activate behaviour schemas consistent with the behaviour of character (Dal-Cin, et al., 2007). Similarly, individuals who were more transported into a video story about cervical cancer screening were more positive about

getting a screening test (Murphy et al., 2013). Green and Fitzgerald (2017) confirm that these conclusions fit the assumption that some unhealthy behaviours can be made more salient in the minds of viewers. Thereby, influencing the likelihood of the behaviour to occur (Stacy, Newcomb, & Ames, 2000).

Fan behaviour can also illustrate some level of narrative impact. For instance, *Twilight* fans tended to dress like the heroes of the narrative, strengthen within-gender social ties, organize Twilight parties, and produce thematic consumer goods like cakes and tattoos (Head, Schau, & Thompson (2011). This aligns with the collective-assimilation hypothesis which explains individuals' need for human connection and belonginess influence their affiliation with fictional groups such as vampires or wizards (see Gabriel & Young, 2011). In the same vein, transportation into fictional narratives can also normalize and reinforce unhealthy behaviours like sexual violence and eating disorders. Banomi and Colleagues (2014) found a strong correlation between reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) and risk behaviours, which were both reinforced for readers who already experienced similar traumas and were developed for readers who did not initially have them.

All in all, the influential implication of narrative transportation can be manifested in the socialization of the self (Kuiken, et al., 2004; Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004). Storytelling, whether fictional or personal, has often been studied as a site or tool of socialization where individuals learn about different ways of being and acting through their lifetime (for more details see Miller, Koven, & Lin, 2011). According to Green (2005), narratives prompt self-examination or remindings of past experiences. They create risk-free opportunity for openness to experience, simulate the blueprint of possible selves to be, and loosen the boundaries of oneself through the experience of perspective-taking with various characters. In combination, these effects suggest that narratives can affect self-efficacy or the extent to which individuals believe they have control over their behaviour by frequent exposure to the same narrative for a period of time (Green, et al., 2008; van Laear, et al., 2014;). Taken together, this indicates thar narrative experiences can have subtle but profound effects on the self.

To analyse the selected novels for their potential to elicit readers' narrative transportation, I am going to look for the devices and aspects studies have identified regarding the mechanism. In fact, many studies highlight the different factors that facilitate transportation into a narrative world. For example, it is affected by foregrounded style (Balint, et al., 2016) and by readers' prior knowledge (Green, 2004). Readers' transportability,

or the predisposition to be transported, also increases narrative absorption (Mazzocco, et al., 2010). The same correlation is observed for readers' need for affect or inclination to seek out the experience of emotions (Appel & Ritcher, 2010). Overall, the Extended Transportation-Imagery Model (van Laear, et al., 2014) summarises how both narrative and readerly factors affect the process. Narrative antecedents include having identifiable characters, imaginable plots or vivid imagery, and verisimilitude or perceived realism, while readers' antecedents include familiarity or prior knowledge, attention, transportability, and some demographic factors (van Laear, et al., 2014).

However, not all stories generate immersion, and not all readers experience immersion. Therefore, I am going to predict readers' potential for immersion based on the identified textual devices from the selected novels. This is an original contribution to narrative persuasion research because most studies use quantitative methods and readers' self-reports. This dissertation, however, applies narrative transportation theory using literary analysis. By drawing on the above empirical evidence which suggest that narrative transportation does affect readers' different properties, I propose that they can also adopt immoral and antisocial beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours through experiencing immersion in particular novels.

1.4.2.2. Empathic Identification.

In addition to the role of narrative transportation in transforming readers' selves, beliefs, and attitudes, character identification is another key mechanism of narrative persuasion (de Graaf, et al., 2012). I share Breithaupt's (2012) view that 'there would probably be no fiction if we did not have the ability to imagine how it feels to be another or to be in another's situation' (2). The relationship readers develop with the fictional character as a role model or simply as someone to care and root for is hypothesized as crucial to readers' socialization and transformation (Cohen, 2001, 259). This character dimension is useful to consider in my analysis because the antisocial and immoral attitudes of racism and cynicism this study is concerned with are promoted by racist and cynical protagonists. For instance, in the analysis of the psychological thrillers in the third chapter, I am going to argue that their antiheroes may invite readers to share their perspectives which may result in the cultivation of cynicism overtime. This is because when readers identify with a character, they tend to adopt their goals, motivations, personality traits, beliefs, and attitudes (Oatley, 1999b; Sestir & Green, 2010), sometimes regardless of their immorality as affirmed by the moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1986; Raney, 2004). I therefore consider the

protagonists' perspective and attitude to estimate their capacity to influence or determine the ethical nature of the outcome that occurs from empathic identification.

While there are many concepts that refer to varying degrees of involvement with characters as I will explain below, I am going to focus only on the process of empathic identification as it is the closest and deepest of those relationships. Thereby, throughout this section, I am going to explain why I select empathic identification over other concepts, and its causal connection to persuasion to support my argument.

One-way readers can be influenced by characters can be encouraged by the position the narrative implies on them. In fact, readers are likely to experience varying degrees of involvement with characters, especially the narrator or protagonist (Cohen, 2001). According to Oatley (1999b), these degrees or positions can be understood on a scale of involvement that runs from a position that is 'overdistanced (the reader with a spectator stance keeps emotional issues of the story events from encroaching on the self) to underdistanced (the identifying reader experiences emotions as happening directly to the self, so that if these emotions are intense, they can feel overwhelming)' (446). Accordingly, readers and audiences can experience a narrative with no close relationship with any character. This basic mode of engagement is known as spectatorship where curious readers are situated outside the diegesis of the story. They become observers who may feel different emotional responses to characters, but from a distant and uninfluenced position (Oatley, 1999b, 445). Bentham (2014) explains that spectatorship has a distancing effect which typically prevents readers from developing an empathic involvement with the protagonist. This effect is generally facilitated by the application of heterodiegetic narration, and it is presumed to be a 'safe' mode of engagement with aberrant characters (41).

Distanced spectators of fiction may likely not get as much influenced by fictional characters as underdistanced readers, suggesting that my thesis might be restricted somewhat to deeply engaged readers. However, I suggest that authors may still use the distancing effect of spectatorship in crafting particular characters such as the antagonist or, as I will demonstrate later, an impersonalized victim to guide empathy for the sympathetic perpetrator. This means that narratives can induce different psychological distances of involvement with their different characters, especially the protagonist and antagonist to influence different responses at the level of readers (Oatley, 1999b). To put it differently, I build on Oatley's (1999b) account to speculate that readers' empathic distribution is influenced by the degree of psychological distance invited by style and linguistic context

relative to characterization. As such, to understand how narratives can influence harmful attitudes, my investigation is going to look for the psychological proximity created by the narrative toward the protagonist (such as an immoral perpetrator or a racist) and psychological distance with the antagonist (such as an impersonalised victim). This is necessary to predict how the selected novels may orient readers' perspective-taking and side-taking with the evil protagonist.

Narratives can invite readers to experience them from different psychological distances; this notion refers to the degree of immersion readers feel in relation to events and characters (for more details see Gardner, 1983; Baltatescu, 2014). These can include positions of engagement with a character such as parasocial interactions (PSI), sympathy, and/or empathy. Again, the discussion of conceptual distinction is useful to see how different degrees of involvement with characters can affect readers to varying degrees. This in turn helps to determine to which degree to analyse the selected novels. For this reason, I adopt Cohen's (2001) detailed survey which compares how the concepts above are different from each other in terms of: nature of process, basis, positioning of the viewer/reader, associated phenomena, and theoretical roots. For example, he classifies identification as an 'emotional and cognitive' process that 'alters state of awareness', whereas parasocial interactions are 'interactional' and 'parasocial'. Here, parasocial interactions refer to perceiving media characters as known friends and 'interacting' with them by reacting and acting in relation to their attributes as if they were present face-to-face, in a 'pseudo-social' interaction. For instance, feeling embarrassed for a media character or answering what they were asked are examples of PSI (for more details, see Arda, 2006, 05-13).

Also, both identification and parasocial interactions have different bases. Identification is based on understanding and empathy, while PSI are based on attraction (Cohen, 2001). Most importantly, both processes are different in their positioning of the reader. Unlike identification that positions the reader as a character (protagonist), PSI position readers as themselves (Cohen, 2001, 253). This means that identification is an under-distancing process that 'merges' the reader with the protagonist (Oatley, 1999b, 446). In contrast, readers who experience PSI remain aware of themselves as different from the character, while treating them to some extent as real people. This means that PSI may precede feelings of identification. Readers first interact with a character as a friend or a known somebody which may facilitate merging with them as one, if a narrative enables such

deep connection. Thereby, I am going to consider only identification for its psychologically underdistancing effect on readers.

Moreover, identification has also a close relationship with the concepts of empathy, perspective-taking, and sympathy. In fact, empathy may precede sympathy, while identification involves emotional empathy and cognitive perspective-taking (Keen, 2007, 22; Cohen, 2001). Empathy alone is divided into many components such as cognitive perspective-taking, motivational empathic concern or sympathy, and emotional contagion (see Decety & Cowell, 2015). Perspective-taking too which is understood as the cognitive component of empathy (Coplan, 2011) is also divided into two more types; emotional and cognitive perspective-taking (Healey & Grossman, 2018). This mean that the relationship between identification, empathy, sympathy, and perspective-taking is an interplay between the different components of empathy. For this reason, I am going to use the concept empathic identification (see below) to refer to the most underdistancing process where readers 'merge' with the protagonist.

Sympathy means to 'feel for' someone without wishing to be them, whereas empathy is to 'feel with' someone their situation whether it is happy or sad (Keen, 2007). Thereby, unlike sympathy, where the reader remains aware of their differences and distance from the character, empathy enables readers to psychologically occupy the position of the character. Therefore, I chose narrative empathy to approach the analysis of the novels. The rationale for this selection is because narrative empathy is a psychologically underdistanced effect of engagement with characters that is often emphasised in the benefits of reading studies. As for identification, it implies 'unity of perspectives' (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010) which means the same thing as feeling with or empathizing with someone. However, this should not be the case as many accounts concede that empathy is a component of identification (Keen, 2006) or that identification is an extreme case of empathy (Oatley, 1999b). This confusion in terminology between empathy and identification prevails in narrative studies that deal with them (Keen, 2006). Although both processes are conceptually and psychologically different states when considering closeness with characters, they are often used interchangeably (Coplan, 2004; Cohen, 2001, Keen, 2007, McGlothlin, 2016). Keen (2006) writes in this regard that,

> Character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from one another in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but empathy for fictional characters appears to require

only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization. Whether a reader's empathy or her identification with a character comes first is an open question: spontaneous empathy for a fictional character's feelings sometimes opens the way for character identification (2006, 214).

In light of this elusiveness in definition and direction of causality, I am going to use the terms empathy, identification, and empathic identification synonymously as used by both Keen (2007) and McGlothlin (2016). In this thesis, e Identification refers to readers' empathy and perspective-taking with the protagonist (Cohen, 2001) to experience emotional merging (Oatley, 1999b), unity in perspective (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), and unity in experience with that character (experience-taking in Kauffman & Libby, 2012). In other words, I will investigate the possibility that narratives influence readers' beliefs and attitudes for different outcomes when they empathically identify with a protagonist by taking on their perspectives. I again emphasise this choice because of the psychological merging empathic identification is likely to cause between reader and character to the extent of becoming one (Oatley, 1999b; Cohen, 2001).

The effect of psychologically merging the reader with the protagonist has persuasive implications on their beliefs, attitudes, self-concept, and behaviours (for a review, Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017; Chung & Slater, 2013; McGlothlin, 2016). A number of studies have shown that readers who identify with the main character, report character-consistent transformation (Slater, Rouner & Long, 2006; Kauffman & Libby, 2012). This is relevant to this research study because it considers the mechanisms through which particular novels can influence socially undesirable outcomes, this time, through involvement with their protagonists. For instance, Hoeken and Fikkers (2014) found that individuals identify more strongly with the protagonist than the antagonist. When they identified with the protagonist in favour of an issue (either in favour or against tuition raise), they yielded a more positive attitude toward the issue and generated issue-relevant thoughts. Kauffman and Libby (2012) too found that the more readers' experience reduced accessibility to their self-concept, the more they adopt the protagonist's self-concept and internalize their attributes. The effect of experience-taking which is conceptually similar to empathic identification was observed in readers' report of voting intentions and actual voting action after a week of reading the voting journey of the protagonist. Sestir and Green (2010) also found a causal relationship between high levels of identification and participants' shift in their self-concept through the activation of consistent

character traits. These studies thus confirm the persuasive effect of empathic identification on readers' perspective-taking with the protagonist.

Moreover, de Graaf and colleagues (2012) too concede that identification causes persuasion depending on which narrative perspective (job applicant or employer/for or against euthanasia) the story is told from (that is point of view or focalization). The researchers define narrative perspective as a textual device that refers to the character whose physical and psychological point of perception is presented in a story. When they manipulated narrative perspective in two stories, each with two different point of views, across two experiments (job applicant vs. employer; sister considering euthanasia vs sister favouring a nursing home, and vice-versa), participants identified and took on the perspective of the perspectivizing character. Indeed, participants identified with the character whose perspective is presented in the first-person point of view, which led them to reinforce their prior similar attitudes such as negative attitude toward employer' autonomy, or to adopt character-consistent attitudes such as considering euthanasia, regardless of their prior attitude similarity with the non-perspectivizing character (de Graaf, et al., 2012). Thereby, empathic identification according to this study is 'caused' by which character perspective focalises the narrative. This means that if a reader successfully identifies with a focalising character that holds antisocial and immoral attitudes regarding an issue, they may well adopt their antisocial and immoral perspective. As such, narrative perspective is a textual variable that can be analysed in the selected novels in the next chapters to evaluate the potential outcome of empathic identification with their protagonists.

Like narrative transportation, the significant and positive effect of identification on narrative-based persuasion is mediated by reducing readers' counterargument, increasing enjoyment (Igartua, 2010; Cohen, 2001; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Moyer-Gusé, 2008) and inaccessibility to their self-concept (Kauffman & Libby, 2012). Igartua (2010) confirms the positive correlation between identification, increase in enjoyment and cognitive elaboration which he defines as reflection or the intensity of information processed while engaging with a narrative. His study also replicates the negative correlation between identification and counterarguing and its positive correlation with persuasion (Igartua, 2010). Igartua and Barrios (2012) too have empirical evidence on the negative correlation between identification and counterarguing and their effect in increasing narrative-based persuasion for controversial messages (negative attitudes toward a church). Building on the robust

evidence of empathic identification and narrative persuasion, I am going to investigate how the selected novels can influence immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes by investigating their potential to invite readers to empathize and identify with their main characters.

A relevant point to consider here is that empathic identification occurs at the level of readers (Keen, 2007, 93). This is because active readers determine which character to connect with at an intimate level. This may suggest that my analysis cannot predict when readers are going to identify with the selected evil protagonists because this study does not experiment with actual readers. However, as I am going to explain below, narratives can encourage empathic identification by manipulating elements such as point of view and narrative perspective. Overall, little is confirmed about which factors encourage readers to identify (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Some researchers investigate readers' factors such perceived similarity between reader and protagonist to predict identification (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2015; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2009). However, sometimes narrative perspective (Hoeken, Kolthoff, & Sanders, 2016) and perceived vulnerability (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010) erode the influence of perceived similarity on identification when characters' are dissimilar. The direction of causality is also unknown in the sense that similarity increases identification, or identification makes the protagonist seem more similar (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2017, 141). In light of the mixed results, some scholars emphasise the role of psychological similarity such as having similar attitudes or personality traits (Cohen, 2006), not similarity at the level of demographic variables for identification to occur (Cohen, Weimann-Saks, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2018). Support for this view can be observed in a study by Oschatz, Niederdeppe and Liu (2021) who found contrary to their hypothesis that having prior attitudes (toward marijuana legalization) that are consistent with narrative perspective increases identification which reinforces post-exposure attitudes.

On the other hand, some scholars believe that textual devices and narrative techniques can help induce empathic identification in readers (Keen, 2007; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020). My analysis is going to use evidence from these studies to predict how the selected novels may encourage readers to empathically identify with their protagonists. For example, many scholars investigate the different roles of techniques such as having a perspectivising character; type of point of view; and vividness, especially in terms of mental action (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Christy, 2018; Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017). It is mostly hypothesised

that making character's thought, feelings, and motivations more transparent by using first-person narration or free indirect speech can increase potential for empathic identification (Kotovych, et al., 2011; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). Additionally, readers' empathic identification can be oriented towards particular characters such as victims, while perpetrators are traditionally denied that affective disposition (Woodward, Hiskes, & Breithaupt, 2022). I will draw on these studies in my analysis of the selected novels to infer readers' identification. This is because textual devices such as point of view and mode of narration can be directly analysed using the close-reading method to form a judgement about their capacity to merge readers' with evil protagonists.

In conclusion, the whole scope of this review of existing and related work to explain the potentially negative effect of engagement with particular novels suggests that readers need to empathically identify and be absorbed into stories of their cruel and immoral characters. This, however, may be expected to trigger their cognitive dissonance or resistance. This negative thought responding, as explained before, can be overcome by absorption into the narrative, connection with their protagonist, and need for enjoyment (Dal-Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). It is also confirmed that when readers empathically identify with a main character who is morally-ambiguous like an antihero, they tend to reduce their moral scrutiny which may otherwise reduce their enjoyment (Raney, et al., 2009; Janicke & Raney, 2018). Therefore, when deep narrative engagement reduces counterarguing and increases moral disengagement, as I will elaborate on below, narrative-consistent persuasion for both positive and negative outcomes becomes unsurprising.

1.4.2.3. Narrative Moral disengagement.

The idea that readers may empathically identify with and take on the perspective of cruel and evil protagonists seems counterintuitive. The conventional assumption suggests that readers enjoy and like moral characters and dislike immoral characters as it is advocated by the affective disposition theory (ADT, Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) in its simple formulation. However, recent studies confirm that readers can indeed develop strong affiliations with evil characters under some conditions, and get influenced by their immoral attitudes (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022). This specific issue is relevant to both chapters since the three selected novels have immoral protagonists. However, because most studies investigate moral disengagement in relation to antihero narratives, the discussion seems more related to the analysis of thrillers in chapter three. For this reason, I am going to discuss the literature

in relation to antiheroes, while putting in mind both the racist and cynical heroes analysed later.

Engagement with immoral characters can be demonstrated through anecdotal evidence such as the popularity of shows such as *Breaking Bad, Deadpool, House of Cards, Dexter*, and books like *Lolita*, *American Psycho*, or *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Janicke, 2013; Raney & Janicke, 2013). It is also examined empirically. 'Some like it bad', for example, explains that enjoyment, appreciation, and involvement with ethically bad characters is increased when they are ugly, realistic, and relevant (Konijn & Hoorn, 2005). 'The dark side of antiheroes' explores the relationship of individual differences and the appeal of and affinity to antiheroes who show dark triad traits. They reveal that participants' self-reported antisocial tendencies namely aggression, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy strongly predicted enjoyment and affinity of antiheroes (Greenwood, Ribieras, & Clifton, 2021). 'Who can resist a villain?' found that individual differences in perceived morality and Machiavellian traits were associated with preferring evil fictional characters and increased identification with them via their increased ability to morally disengage. However, readers who refused to morally disengage to protect their 'moral purity' did not like immoral characters and did not identify with them (Black, et al., 2019). This review demonstrates that evil heroes do appeal to some readers for different reasons.

The increasing popularity of protagonists regardless of their immorality motivated the emergence of new theories that extend the explanatory premise ADT based on Bandura's (1986) selective moral disengagement theory (Raney, 2004). As will be explicated below, readers can morally disengage to maintain the enjoyable state of absorption, instead of depleting it by morally monitoring the protagonist all the time. This narrative moral disengagement, as I explain below, is facilitated by developing empathic identification with the evil hero, as well as developing antihero story-schema overtime (Raney, 2004; Raney, et al., 2009). This theory is significantly important to explain how readers can enjoy immoral and antisocial protagonists which in turn may increase potential for the persuasion of racism and cynicism.

Selective moral disengagement comes from Bandura's (1999) social cognitive research. It is a cognitive process that allows individuals to hold their moral judgement to avoid dissonance, guilt, and distress when their actions or those of their loved ones violate their moral standards (de Caroli & Sagone, 2014). Bandura (1999) identified eight strategies that underline the process, which occur in the following order: moral justification,

euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame (Newman, et al., 2020, 539; Bandura, 2011). These strategies can often translate into observable behaviours. For example, religious genocides are justified in the name of divine orders (moral justification), the army 'servicing targets' instead of killing other peoples (euphemistic/sanitising language or dehumanization), guards carrying orders (displacement of responsibility), or students plagiarizing assignments because everybody does it or it does not harm anyone (minimizing harm/advantageous comparison or disregard of consequences) (Raney, 2004, 359). The diffusion of responsibility can be seen when people do not help others because there are other people around, whereas the attribution of blame occurs when people blame other people for their own wrongdoing or when they attribute the problem to others' core character and not to their situation.

Moral disengagement allows individuals to self-relieve themselves of negative affect and dissonance. But it is mostly found to lead to anti-social outcomes. These include the increased potential to dehumanize others, endorsement of violence, bullying and aggression in adolescents, crimes, misconduct in workplace, and seeking media violence (for reviews, see Bustamante & Chaux, 2014; Moore, 2015). For instance, a study by Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger and Alsaker (2009) found that when kindergarten to 9th grade students morally disengaged, they displayed less prosocial behaviour. This theory has been applied to morally-ambiguous narratives, as I am going to explain below. This is useful to my demonstration that particular novels can influence antisocial attitudes like cynicism, when they encourage readers to morally disengage from the moral violations of their evil protagonists.

In fact, moral disengagement explains the enjoyment process of antihero narratives, which contradicts the theoretical principle of the affective disposition theory (Janicke & Raney, 2015; 2018; Greenwood, Ribieras, & Clifton, 2021). The affective disposition theory suggests that reader's affective disposition to liking or disliking a traditional hero is affected by the moral judgement of its motives and behaviour outcomes. In its basic formulation, the theory suggests that moral or good characters generate positive emotions and agreement, while immoral or bad characters stir negative emotions and disapproval. Anticipatory emotions are triggered by the moral expectation that virtuous heroes should be rewarded and immoral villains punished (Janicke, 2013). Therefore, the enjoyment readers experience can depend on how they evaluate the outcomes portrayed, especially how justice is expected to be restored (Shafer & Raney, 2012, 1028). Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2013) support this

view in the sense that character's altruistic motivation and positive outcomes impacted their perceived attributes, liking, and moral disengagement. As a result, enjoyment is thought to be maximised when liked characters experience positive outcomes and/or when disliked characters suffer from negative outcomes. In contrast, enjoyment is expected to decrease when liked characters experience negative consequences and/or when disliked characters attain positive rewards. In accordance with these dispositions, narrative producers often reward the heroes/good guys by letting them win, while punishing the villains/bad guys (Konijn & Hoorn, 2005, 115).

However, the growing complexity of characters like the antihero challenges the simple classification of ADT. Because ADT does not seem sufficient in explaining why readers enjoy antiheroes who are cruel and immoral, researchers expand it by considering other factors aside from characters' morality which the evil hero clearly lacks (Raney, 2004). Accordingly, recent scholarly consensus suggests that the enjoyment process of antihero narratives does not simply rely on moral evaluation. But it involves the development of antihero story-schema, their ability to invite readers' identification, and moral disengagement to excuse their immoral behaviours in order to enjoy and experience absorption into their stories (Janicke & Raney, 2018; Seipel, 2021).

In this vein, Raney (2004), building on Bandura's (1986) moral disengagement work, theorized that readers respond to liked fictional characters in the same way they respond to loved ones in reality. When they identify with the protagonist, they form affective affiliations that can be withstanding even in the face of the immoral transgressions they commit. The stronger the affiliation, the stronger the desire becomes to continue liking them. Therefore, readers engage in attitude-maintenance or defence strategies to keep liking their loved characters, and to excuse or ignore their bad behaviour, following those strategies suggested by Bandura's (1986) moral disengagement theory such as moral justification. Indeed, empirical evidence suggest that when readers identify with an antihero, their moral disengagement increases (Raney, et al., 2009; Janicke & Raney, 2015). Hohle (2016) too confirms this potential from his qualitative analysis of viewers' self-reports. He found that they use all strategies of moral disengagement to 'remoralise' the moral violations of their preferred transgressive character.

The appeal and enjoyment of evil heroes is hypothesized on the cognitive level when Raney (2004) draws on Mandler's (1984) story-schema theory to explain the role of antihero story-schemas in the enjoyment of their narratives. Story-schemas are mental shortcuts that

rely on readers' knowledge of story grammar '(or the common rule system that specifies regularities within related texts)', which individuals begin to develop in early childhood from repeated exposure to a particular kind of narratives (traditional hero narrative or non-traditional antihero narrative) (Shafer & Raney, 2012, 1030). They include assumptions for how a narrative will develop and how it will be internally organised by focusing attention, directing anticipations, and improving comprehension and recall (Janicke, 2013). According to Raney (2004), this processing shortcut eliminates cognitive taxation that is likely to occur from scrutinizing characters' actions and morality to rather invest readers' cognitive energy in absorption into the story. Thus, story-schemas help readers to quickly determine character roles and plot expectations, regardless of the morality of characters (Raney, 2004).

Furthermore, Janicke and Raney (2011) investigate the role of specific story-schemas in the enjoyment of hero and antihero narratives. The researchers explored how fan and nonfan viewers responded to the antihero, Jack Bauer in the television series *24*. They found that fan viewers' sympathy toward the antihero increased their enjoyment of the narrative more than nonfans. Interestingly, the investigation found that fans' enjoyment increased the more unattractive and immoral Bauer was rated by participants. Thus, contrary to nonfans, fan's enjoyment increased as the sympathetic protagonist's attractiveness and moral character decreased. The researchers explain that fans significantly enjoyed the narrative while thinking that Bauer was unattractive and immoral than nonfans because they used different story-schemas to enjoy his narrative. In other words, fans knew what it is expected of antihero narratives because they relied on antihero story-schema, whereas nonfans relied on conventional hero narrative schema where ADT explains their lesser enjoyment (Janicke & Raney, 2011; Shafer & Raney, 2012, 1031). This means that character evaluation occurs from the activation of specific story-schemas before any moral judgement occurs which confirms Raney's (2004) theory.

Shafer and Raney (2012) too have empirical support for character liking beyond moral judgement that is central to ADT. Some extratextual factors can determine dispositions toward character-liking such as the race of viewers (team liking was determined by the race of the team playing, see Sapolsky, 1980) or the presence of moral disengagement cues. Like Janicke and Raney (2011), the researchers found that the forming of any disposition happens before character moral evaluation occurs based on story-schemas to infer quickly which character is the protagonist, for instance. This help readers to avoid cognitive taxation from morally monitoring characters to be fully absorbed into their stories, and to engage in

effortless emotional side-taking with the protagonist. They also explained that overtime, the developed antihero story-schema contains moral disengagement structure within it (Shafer & Raney, 2012).

> That is, over time viewers learn that certain protagonists in certain narratives violate typical moral standards. To enjoy such stories, a viewer must take off the default lens of moral scrutiny and put on one of moral permissiveness and justification. Only with this alternate interpretive lens, which is forged by the process of moral disengagement, can the antihero protagonist be loved and the narrative enjoyed (Shafer & Raney, 2012, 1038).

This discovery is important because it explains that moral disengagement is somehow inherent to antihero narrative processing in readers who frequently engage with this character archetype, and not for readers who seek conventional hero narratives. Indeed, Shafer and Raney (2012) confirm that viewers develop positive dispositions toward both hero and antihero as protagonists of their own stories. Character liking and moral evaluation was significant for the hero than the antihero. Yet, at the end of both narratives, they were equally well-liked by viewers, and judged as morally acceptable. The researchers concluded that regardless of morality, viewers formed positive dispositions toward the protagonist, perhaps due to the 'presumed morality' (Raney, 2004) of this role readers develop in their narrative schemata through repeated exposure to stories. The researcher then manipulated three narratives by adding or removing moral disengagement cues which are justifications for the immoral behaviour of the protagonists. They found that enjoyment did not differ from when moral disengagement cues were or were not present. Yet, the enjoyment process was different: in the no-cue condition, moral judgement significantly affected viewers' enjoyment and evaluation of characters, while in the cue condition, it was less important (Shafer & Raney, 2012). This confirms the different processing of conventional hero that is based on moral judgement and antihero narratives that relies on moral disengagement.

The integration of moral disengagement structures within antihero story-schema is relevant in explaining their accumulative effect on readers' ethical judgement in real life. Overtime, readers or fans of certain types of fiction where racism or cynicism are promoted may seek out gratification from engagement with those narratives because their story-schema may be frequently activated. This process in turn motivates readers to seek specific narratives over and over to satiate their need for gratification (Raney, 2004). Janicke (2013) building on story-schema studies synthesises that the frequent activation of story-schemas

makes them stronger or more accessible in one's memory which in turn, guides one's attention to select the same stimuli such as antihero narratives. Seeking the same gratification from similar stimuli keeps the story-schema activated again and again. Janicke (2013) then argues based on moral philosophy that traditional heroes prime hero story-schemas and their actions are quickly and automatically judged because they cause no moral dilemmas (automatic deontological or rule-based moral judgement). In opposition, antiheroes prime antihero story-schemas, and their complex actions are deliberately judged based on the consequences of their actions (consequentialist moral judgement).

> [A]ssuming that antihero narratives appeal to a specific group of people, exposure over a long period of time could reinforce their way of moral judgment making (i.e., focusing on the consequences of a certain situation (consequentialism), rather than strictly following rules (deontology)), which could affect a persons' ethical decision making in various fields (Janicke, 2013, xii).

However, she proposes that frequent exposure to antihero narratives makes antihero story-schema frequently activated and accessible which may facilitate their consequentialist moral judgement to be quicker and more automatic as in deontological judgement (Janicke, 2013). This means that readers can be primed to judge real life situations in a quick consequentialist manner if the context primes an antihero story-schema. However, more research is needed to verify such a claim. Nevertheless, the possibility remains, especially when we consider the evidence of cultivation effect from genre-specific narratives as proposed by many scholars (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Cultivation effects have been observed for frequent engagement with specific TV genres by holding schematically related beliefs or metanarratives. When readers engage with specific genres to seek the same gratification over and over, they adopt metanarratives of those genres. With this habitual engagement, the cultivation of those metanarratives fortifies (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004). The effect of cultivation from antihero story-schema on readers' development of character's immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes are further analysed in Chapter Two.

Overall, antiheroes like heroes are equally enjoyed regardless of their immorality perhaps because they occupy the same role of the protagonist (fight their enemies, have attractive personalities, and seek self-actualization, Raney, 2004). In fact, moral violations are more acceptable when the character is perceived to be heroic or is presented with typical heroic traits (Matthews, 2019; Kleemans et al., 2017; Grizzard et al., 2018). This commonness of traits can manipulate readers to form likability disposition toward evil protagonists,

following what ADT posits in some part. Indeed, readers develop mental shortcuts that allow them to recognize the characterization patterns of the antihero before forming any moral evaluation. This is due to developing integrated moral disengagement structures within those antihero story-schema to prevent readers from experiencing cognitive dissonance and distress from morally sanctioning antihero's bad behaviour.

> As soon as the viewer [reader too] encounters a narrative that follows the structure of the existing schema, the viewer presumes that the protagonist is virtuous and, therefore, can be liked and hoped for, because this is what they have learned through repeated exposure to these narratives. For antihero narratives, where the protagonist is in fact not virtuous, however, the viewer learns that such character's actions are typically justified in one way or another. As a result, moral amnesty can be given early on. It can be assumed that with repeated exposure to antihero narratives, the justification processes becomes part of the schema (Janicke, 2013, 03).

This means that antihero story-schemas prevent readers to be distracted by moral sanction or moral counterarguing in order to fully immerse themselves into their story-worlds.

Furthermore, moral disengagement in antihero narratives can be considered a personality trait (Black, et al., 2019; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, et al., 2021) as well as a text-induced capacity such as manipulating the presence or absence of moral justification (Shafer & Raney, 2012; Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022). However, I am going to focus on how it can be textually-induced for its suits the close-reading method chosen for analysis in this dissertation. Briefly speaking, readers' potential to morally disengage is an important factor which can influence the degree of their moral disengagement while engaging with antihero narratives. For example, frequent exposure to antihero narratives which leads to the development of antihero story-schema is an individual variable that may influence the degree to which they morally excuse the bad behaviour of characters as proposed by Raney (2004). Indeed, empirical evidence suggest that the more exposed a reader is to antihero narratives, the more they can morally disengage (Janicke & Raney, 2011; Shafer & Raney, 2012). In the same regard, a study that was mentioned earlier found that individual differences in perceived morality and Machiavellian traits were associated with preferring evil fictional characters and increased identification with them via their increased ability to morally disengage. On the contrary, individuals' imaginative resistance or reluctance to morally disengage was negatively correlated with liking of dark characters and failure to identify with them in order to maintain moral purity (Black, et al., 2019).

On the other hand, narrative techniques play an impactful role in the elicitation of moral disengagement (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Raney & Janicke, 2013) to guide readers' attention to the positive traits of the antihero, regardless of their moral violations (Janicke, 2013, 14). For example, unexpected events, character role as hero, backstories, and other plot devices are proposed to cause viewers to question the morality of a favourite character, leading them to use their cognitive strategies to maintain enjoyment and dispositional affiliations through moral disengagement (Raney, 2004). The attribution of morally complex characters with heroic traits such as warmth in physical appearance opposed to an angrier-looking character could activate hero story schema before observing their immoral behaviour (Grizzard et al., 2018). Character's moral intentions and positive behaviour outcomes can also motivate readers to reduce or stop their moral sanctioning to support that character in spite of their bad behaviour (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013).

Moreover, narratives can directly employ Bandura's eight moral defence mechanisms to keep readers' sympathy for evil characters. Embedded dehumanization, for instance, was a prevalent component in 50% of the games analysed where the opponents are often non-human, with barely visible faces often hidden under masks, lack personality traits, or are culturally-remote to support violence against them. Also the analysed games used euphemistic labelling to instruct the users such as 'let's give these ugly bastards a taste of their own', instead of 'let's kill them' (Hartmann, Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2014). In the same vein, the manipulation of the absence or presence of a personalised victim in a narrative is found to determine moral disengagement effects on real-life judgement. If the portrayal of a victim is vague or absent from a narrative, viewers are more likely to take on the perspective of the immoral protagonists and morally disengage to support him/her (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, Grizzard, 2022). I also suggest that having a morally disengaged protagonist itself is a characterization technique that can increase readers' moral disengagement when they identify with him/her. This means that moral disengagement can be directly analysed in terms of Bandura's (1999) eight strategies.

It fact, it is through the process of identification that these aspects (sympathetic and heroic portrayal, absent or impersonalized victims, positive motivations and behaviour outcomes) are likely to mediate the occurrence of reduced moral sanctioning (Raney, et al., 2009; Sanders and Tsay-Vogel, 2016; Janicke & Raney; 2012; 2013). When readers identify with an evil hero of such representation, they are more likely to morally disengage (Janicke & Raney, 2015). Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2011) found that perceived similarity between

the viewer and character mediates the relationship between identification and moral disengagement, which in turn leads to greater affective enjoyment of a narrative. In the same vein, when readers identify, they take on the beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviours of the protagonist (Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017; de Graaf, et al., 2012; Braddock & Dillard, 2016) as discussed earlier. This means that readers' identification with an evil protagonist mediates their moral disengagement, which like reduced counterarguing increases the persuasion of their antisocial beliefs and attitude (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022).

1.5. Conclusion.

The empirical investigation of whether fiction reading can influence anti-social and immoral beliefs and attitudes is scant in comparison to the investigation of how it can be beneficial. However, many accounts from antiquity to the present day have pointed at how fictional representations can have deleterious effects. In light of new research findings in media psychology, there seems to be ample evidence and theories that can explain how all sort of influences can emerge from engagement with narratives, even harmful ones. Therefore, to examine the potential of particular novels in influencing harmful effects on readers, I am going to analyse some in relation to narrative transportation, character identification, and moral disengagement because these processes have been associated with narrative-based persuasion. Thereby, I limit the scope of investigation to consider racism in *The Camp of The Saints* (Raspail, 1973), and cynicism in *You* (Kepnes, 2014) and *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012) as illustrations of antisocial behaviours which can be adopted and reinforced overtime from engagement with such novels.

Following close-reading analysis, I am going to demonstrate how these novels can persuade readers of their antisocial attitudes through their potential to induce their feelings of absorption and empathic identification. This is because these processes minimize counterarguing and moral scrutiny to prevent resistance to persuasion. In other words, I am going to use the same analysis method and the same theoretical background as pointed out in The Theoretical Framework to explore how these different narratives use their distinct textual and narrative techniques to influence distinct persuasive outcomes in readers beliefs and attitudes. I also specify different readers for an outcome to occur. This is important to narrative experience as both readers' variables and narrative features work together for an effect to occur. In the second chapter, readers may be manipulated through their various psychological biases to accept the provocative thesis of *The Camp of the Saints*. As for the

third chapter, readers may come to antihero narratives excited for new and challenging experiences. However, in the long run, they may develop a liking preference for dark personalities which may in turn influence a liking for and idealising of cynicism. For both chapters, I am going to demonstrate, contrary to the ethical association of narrative empathy, how it can be oriented for evil characters which may invite readers to unethical situations.

2. Empathy for Racists: A Potentially Radical Reader.

2.1. Introduction.

As discussed previously, narratives have the power to transform readers' worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and even behaviours when particular conditions are met (see Fialho, 2019; Maretoja, 2018). These include primarily their abilities to transport readers into their story worlds, and to invite them to empathically identify with the protagonist. This in turn allows them to align their beliefs and attitudes with the narrative perspective (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; Fitzgerald & Green, 2017). While many investigations are concerned with examining the benefits narratives can exert on readers when these conditions are met following quantitative analysis (for example, Johnson, et al., 2013; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.), this chapter is going to qualitatively examine a novel when its content clearly advances the antisocial attitudes of political radicalization and racism. In other words, I am going to follow close-reading analysis of a racist and xenophobic novel to explore its potential for transporting its readers and inviting them to identify and empathize with its violent and racist heroes. I argue that in spite of its racist narrative world, *The Camp of the Saints* (Raspail, 1973), *CoS* from now on, may persuade some readers of its anti-immigration thesis based on hate and racism.

To approach this objective, I am going to introduce the novel, explain political radicalization, and its main mechanisms, especially polarisation. In the first half of the chapter, I am going to illustrate how *CoS* represents some of its radical perspectives by embedding them within an often subtly polarised frame of reference. This is to orient readers to take a particular radical position that does not recognise a moderate, middle ground. In the second half of the chapter, I will explain *CoS's* frame of reference as a conflict frame based on media framing analysis. This is useful because conflict frames are associated with attitude polarisation. Conflict too is linked to empathy and narrative empathy. This is to argue that the definitive lines of polarisation in the conflict between characters is likely to facilitate readers' side-taking as suggested by Leake's (2014) notion of easy empathy, Breithaupt's (2012) three-person model of empathy, and as used in Lindhé's discussion of the ethical paradox of narrative empathy (2016; 2021). In other words, I will demonstrate that *CoS* orients readers' feelings of empathic identification with its racists protagonists, alongside their feelings of resentment for its immigrant antagonists. I will suggest that this may occur

regardless of readers' identity affiliation. Finally, I will demonstrate how *CoS's* polarised frame of reference can also maintain readers' enjoyable state of narrative transportation which is key for narrative persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000). In the conclusion, the connection between the findings of analysis in the first half of the chapter, and narrative persuasion mechanisms in the second half of the chapter will be explicated using Strange's (2002) hypothesis of how readers adopt fabrications from fiction.

2.2. The Camps of the Saints (*CoS*).

The Camp of the Saints (Raspail, 1973; translation for *Le Camp des Saints* (Shapiro, 1975) is a French dystopian novel told by an unknown and omniscient narrator from a place in Switzerland. The narration is told in retrospection, when the West has already been defeated by the rest of the world. On an Easter Sunday in the southern coast of France, Professor Calguès was observing the arrival of a massive fleet of old ships carrying thousands of Indian immigrants. The fleet was the first, but not the last, to arrive. Many fleets came afterwards from various parts of the rest of the world to 'invade' the West. In most of its parts, the novel documents the 'paradise' state of France prior to the arrival of immigrants as well as the journey of the fleet from 'Calcutta,' India, throughout the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, to eventually land in France. The novel narrates how the majority of white people were brainwashed by the media to welcome immigrants whose intention was to replace them, echoing the more recent conspiracy theory of Renaud Camus's *Le Grand Remplacement* (2012). When France and the West fell into anarchy and revolution divided the few people that wanted to preserve their land and the many that sided with the immigrants, a group of twenty French nationalists, including Professor Calguès, gathered to fight the immigrants. However, the group of heroes was outnumbered by immigrants and their European and international supporters, who raised the banner of multiculturalism and cultural assimilation. The immigrants apathetically refuse these notions in order to establish their own cultural hegemony over the white race. The narrator ends the story in Switzerland, the last Western place to fall due to international pressure to open 'her' door for the immigrants.

The Camp of the Saint is selected to demonstrate that controversial novels which promote violence and racial discrimination can have the power to persuade even readers who do not necessarily hold prior racist attitudes.. However, not all readers are going to respond to *CoS* similarly because of their different knowledges, experiences, and

expectations which are likely to determine their responses (Miall, 1990; Busselle & Rössler, 2004; Bal, Butterman, & Bakker, 2011). In part, the case made in this chapter is not for readers who come to the novel already holding radical prior-attitudes for they may have them reinforced. This particular case can be explained using confirmation bias theory where individuals seek what strongly affirms their beliefs (Mercier & Sperber, 2011; Hart, et al., 2009). For instance, holding narratively consistent prior-attitudes can be a strong predictor of narrative-based persuasion (Oschatz, Niederdeppe & Liu, 2022).

Nevertheless, I am going to consider a middling reader who may not have enough or sophisticated knowledge about the politics of immigration, how narratives persuade, or how their psychological biases can be stimulated to mediate narrative impact. In fact, readers may engage with *CoS* out of curiosity, in spite of knowing about its racist reputation. Yet, they may believe that it is not going to negatively affect them like it did to other readers. This fits with the third-person effect hypothesis (Davison, 1983) which suggests that individuals tend to believe that media messages do not influence them, but they influence others (Borah, 2015, 04). This illusion of immunity or optimistic bias lowers individuals' risk perception which can lead to maladaptive behaviours (Perloff, 2002). Thereby, I am going to argue that curious readers who might not have previously held radical views on immigration and race may risk being radicalised. This is because *CoS* uses radicalization mechanism such as polarisation discourse which can be observed from its frame of reference. *CoS's* polarized discourse, as I am going to propose, may compel transported readers who might have been reluctant to adopt a political position regarding immigration to side with the radical position salient in the novel.

Therefore, contrary to recent studies where narratives are often studied in relation to reducing group stigmatization (Oliver, et al., 2012) and ethnic prejudice (Chung & Slater, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Johnson, et al., 2013) by increasing readers' feelings of absorption and empathic identification with outgroup protagonists (Igartua & Frutos, 2017), I perceive narrative empathy, transportation, and identification as neutral processes that may lead to antisocial outcomes as well. Because *CoS* is clearly a racist work of fiction, it is adequate to analyse potential for political radicalization and the internalization of racism. In the next section, I am going to explain why political radicalization is antisocial and explain its mechanisms. Later, I will suggest that *CoS* uses rhetorical persuasion techniques such as those associated with political radicalization, and narrative persuasion techniques that can occur from its fictional narrative structure to manipulate readers. This is compatible with

Wampole's (2020) characterization of *CoS* as a roman-à-thèse, fiction with a didactic thesis. This means that *CoS's* potential persuasiveness stems from mixing fact and fiction to produce the effects from both on readers. Thereby, I will argue that narrative persuasion mechanisms can also facilitate the emergence of radicalization because they are likely to reduce readers' critical counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000) and increase moral disengagement (Raney, 2004).

2.3. Political radicalisation.

The political nature of *CoS*, as will be demonstrated later, applies a polarised discourse to promote radical beliefs. Therefore, the first step to analyse *CoS* for its potential persuasion of antisocial beliefs and attitudes is to explain what radicalisation means. Radicalisation is understood as a 'process that involves the adoption of beliefs and attitudes that are in opposition to the mainstream status quo and dominant socio-political discourses' (Macnair & Frank, 2017, p. 148). This definition hints at the polarisation aspect that is inherent to radicalisation. In fact, polarisation is a significant mechanism for radicalisation (van Stekelenburg, 2014; Borum, 2017; Alimi, Bosi, & Demetriou, 2012, 11). Polarisation involves developing and concentrating beliefs, opinions, and attitudes into extreme endpoints or 'at the opposite ends of the attitude scale' (Albada, Hansena, & Otten, 2021). This is useful to my analysis because radicalisation as a process may be difficult to analyse through close-reading, but polarisation can be observed linguistically in discourse. Therefore, the analysis of *CoS* for its radicalisation potential involves its polarisation discourse as will be seen later.

Contrary to the common view that political radicalisation and polarisation are detrimental processes, some scholars argue that they may lead to some positive social changes. For example, van Eerten and colleagues (2017) argue that famous individuals who were considered radicals fighting against the prevailing norms of their time are recognized nowadays as national heroes such as Nelson Mandela. However, they emphasize that radicalization 'becomes a concern when it leads to beliefs and attitudes that sanction, legitimize and compel violence as a means to achieve social change' (van Eerten, et al., 2017, 13). The same case can be made for polarisation which can have positive and negative outcomes. Albada, Hansena, and Otten (2021) summarize that polarisation can stimulate discussions and political engagement. But it may also undermine social cohesion by increasing avoidance of engagement with opposing opinions and information, stigmatizing

out-group members, and segregating society (Albada, Hansena, & Otten, 2021, 627). Nevertheless, I am going to perceive polarisation as 'one of society's greatest ills' (Jung, et al., 2019) because,

> Polarization leads to the impediment of communications between disagreeing groups, the increase of disagreement about facts and interpretations of those facts, the blurring of the line between facts and opinions, the proliferation of false information within each group, the distrust between opposing groups, the emergence of radical groups, and the failure to reach a nationwide consensus on important issues (Jung, et al., 2019, 301).

The antisocial aspect of these processes is confirmed in models of terrorism where polarisation is found to precede radicalisation. This facilitates the justification and motivation for violent behaviour (Moghaddam, 2005; Van Stekelenburg, 2014, 545) and violent cognition (Malthaner, 2017, Borum, 2011).

By building on this negative view of radicalisation, I regard *CoS's* potential radicalization as an antisocial outcome. This is because the novel encourages violence and hatred as means to protect the West, as will be illustrated later. I also suggest that this negative outcome can occur via its key process of polarization which can be observed in its discourse. As I will show later, *CoS* does not simply oppose illegal mass migration which can be made based on reason and evidence, it does so by means of racial polarization in all levels imaginable between a superior, yet victimised West and an inferior, yet powerful East. *CoS's* polarised discourse thus creates a massive gap between the West and the rest of the world as binary opposites that do not share the same humanity. Throughout the novel, the narrator insists that violence and racism are the only right course of action to maintain the survival and superiority of the West in the face of migrant 'invaders'. However, as I will demonstrate below, this provocative scenario is embedded within a subtle and internally-plausible narrative world. Thereby, if *CoS* can generate readers' feelings of transportation, they may not counterargue against its radical beliefs.

In addition to the role of polarisation that precedes radicalisation, the latter has other known mechanisms that facilitate its occurrence such as the evocation of grievances, nostalgia, and conspiracies (Al-Saggaf, 2018; van Stekelenburg, 2014; Trip, et al., 2019). Although these mechanisms will be discussed later, when necessary, I suggest that they all have a polarisation aspect to them. For example, grievances imply the existence of a victim in contrast to a threatening perpetrator, while nostalgia implies a glorious past in opposition

to a pitiful present. Most importantly, these mechanisms of radicalization are embedded in a narrative structure in the case of *CoS*. Narrative form again has potential to persuade as evidence suggests (Braddock & Dillard, 2016). Therefore, as I mentioned before, *CoS* can radicalise its readers because it mixes techniques associated with both rhetorical and narrative persuasion.

In other words, the narrative structure of the novel may reinforce the effects of radicalization mechanisms such as polarization, elicitation of grievances, and nostalgia to influence readers' feelings of empathic identification and absorption. Therefore, in order to demonstrate how *CoS* can have a radicalisation effect, it is useful to analyse how its radicalisation mechanisms are narratively constructed. To do so, I am going to consider the bigger picture of how *CoS* operates narratively and linguistically, that is its frame of reference. This is because *CoS* is a complex narrative that intertwines many notions, debates, ideologies and conspiracies to deliver a coherent, explanatory and 'authentic' (01) anti-immigration story-world. It thus becomes difficult to give equal attention to all details of the narrative. Thereby, in the next section, I am going to demonstrate how *CoS's* frame of reference is polarised.

2.4. A Polarised Frame of Reference.

To reiterate, because radicalization involves the polarisation of beliefs and attitudes (van Stekelenburg, 2014; Borum, 2017), it is easier to look for polarisation elements in *CoS's* context. In fact, as I am going to illustrate below, many elements of *CoS's* frame of reference such as genre, characterisation and setting are constructed with binary opposition. According to Strange (2002), narrative context acts like a frame of reference through which readers make sense of narrative assertions. Therefore, to highlight how *CoS* can influence favourable interpretations and responses on its readers, I am going to show how its frame of reference is polarised in the first half of this chapter. In turn, by highlighting that *CoS* has a polarised context that can be analysed from the semantic levels of metaphor to the syntactic levels of juxtaposition, I propose that transported readers who may empathically identify with the plight of its heroes can also develop a polarised worldview that matches *CoS's* context. This will be explained based on four theoretical views in the last half of the chapter.

The first element that stands out in *CoS* as potentially polarising comes from its dystopian genre. By polarising, here, I mean an aspect that is based on binary opposition. Indeed, a dystopia is known to operate like a hyperbole that maximises the perception of

threat and prediction of doom which might stand in opposition to the reality they reflect on. According to Malak (1987), dystopias are 'quintessentially ideological novels' or roman-à-thèse that polarises thematic possibilities against each other, especially through the role of power needed to combat against an impending threat (11). They use elements of fantasy and horror to forewarn against possible threats in the (near) future, while holding true an element of realism that does not aim to distort reality beyond recognition. They are steeped in binary opposition to dramatize conflict between polarities as in having two-dimensional character types that discriminate between good and evil (Malak, 1987).

Because genre conventions influence characterisation and plot, many of the elements that characterise *CoS's* frame of reference are influenced by its dystopian genre. In light of Mallak's account (1987), I am going to illustrate below how the ideological nature of dystopias such as *CoS* is constructed based on binary opposition between good and evil, realism and fantasy, fact and fiction, present and future. To put it differently, I am going to focus on the two-dimensionality of characters, the perception of threat to elicit grievances, nostalgia about the past in light of impending doom, while maintaining a sense of realism. These aspects will be analysed in terms of polarization and binary opposition to argue that *CoS's* frame of reference is polarised in an internally coherent way. Readers are thereby expected to engage with and evaluate a simple two-dimensional frame of reference in which good fights evil.

2.4.1. Two-Dimensional characters.

The first elements of *CoS* that is likely to polarise readers' interpretations and responses comes from its characterisation. *CoS's* polarised frame of reference is constructed using a conventional hero-villain narrative structure. This structure emphasises the opposite attributes of these characters in terms of their physical, cultural, moral, and behavioural traits. This two-dimensionality is also sharpened by the binary opposition at the level of diction and metaphors used to characterize each, as will be illustrated below. I suggest that this manipulation is likely to influence readers' evaluation of both types of characters and may influence the distribution of empathy towards them. This is because positively attributed characters such as the hero are likely to generate likability, agreement, and sympathy, whereas negatively attributed characters such as the villain may produce dislike, disagreement, and resentment. This fits with the vital role of characters' morality in the affective disposition theory (ADT, Zillmann & Cantor, 1976, see The Theoretical Framework,

1.5.2.3.). Nevertheless, because the dismissive nature of polarization does not recognise the in-between space reality occupies, *CoS's* characters are constructed as binary opposites. *CoS* represents its racist and violent characters as vulnerable, moral heroes, and immigrants as powerful, immoral villains, which may thus manipulate readers' affective dispositions, accordingly.

Polarization can be observed in characterization where the middle ground is non-existent. The general West is pushed to a positive polarity, while the general rest of the world is pushed to a negative polarity. This is known as racial polarization; a technique that polarizes the differences between Us and Them, emphasizes that the protagonist is Us, and denies any similarities between Us and Them. It relies on the valorisation of Us by positive self-presentation, while ignoring Our pejorative traits, and attributing negative other-presentation to Them, while ignoring Their good traits (Van Dijk, 2005; 2016). This technique can be observed in *CoS's* construction of two-dimensional characters from the lexical, syntactic and semantic levels of diction, setting, and metaphors used. It can also be interpreted from the contrast in themes of victimization and dehumanization. The racist heroes are represented as victims, whereas the immigrants are dehumanised and antagonised as perpetrators. This is likely to orient readers' empathy toward the victims, not their perpetrators as evidence suggests (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Leake, 2014; Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt, 2022). The tension between heroes and villains in discourse and story is also an aspect of polarisation *CoS* uses to distribute readers' empathy. The narrator focalises the story from the Western heroes' third-person point of view, whereas the immigrant villains are represented in story, not in discourse. This fits with Lindhé's (2016) proposition that tension with story and discourse orients readers' empathy for the hero, and resentment for the villain. In the analysis below, I am going to illustrate the binary opposition in characterisation, while its connection to empathic identification will be resumed in a different section later.

CoS's segregation between its heroes and villains starts out on the surface level of the names and occupations given to each, all the way to their psychological and moral depths, as it is explained below. In fact, character naming is an important aspect of character-based discourse. According to Sanford, Moar, and Garrod (1988), using proper names is an aspect of discourse to control readers' attention and memory representation by making main characters more accessible and salient than secondary characters. In this case, naming characters such as Calguès or Norman makes them more prominent than the use of role

descriptors to refer to the immigrants as 'the fleet', for example (01). The conventional aspect of naming characters influences character processing, evaluation, and it can also be considered a minimal factor in the elicitation of empathic identification as speculated by Keen (2007, 94), CoS's naming. However, although this may not be noticed by readers as a polarizing aspect, but it will direct their attention to follow the named characters, which in turn may influenced their empathy.

By taking into consideration Van Dijk's (2005) account of racial polarisation, *CoS* ensure a positive representation for the West and its heroes, and a negative representation for the rest of the world and its villains. On the one polarity, *CoS* properly names its Western protagonists and describes their highly-reputed occupations such as professor Calguès, Colonel Dragasès, Consul Himmans, the sociologist Dr. Norman Hailer, Captain Luke Notaras, or journalist Jules Machefer. The naming makes these characters identifiable, indicates their knowledges and expertise, and also emphasises their European lineage which can be traced by their last names. The names of characters are not random for the narrator states explicitly that they symbolise real people that existed in the Christian-European history. For instance, Colonel Dragasès symbolises the last Roman emperor to fall with the defeat of Constantinople in the 15th century by the Ottoman Empire. Luke [Loukas] Notaras too was the commander-in-chief for the byzantine navy under emperor Dragasès. Readers who may know these historical figures may find it interesting to see them fictionalised in the novel. The attributes implied by the names of these characters may influence readers to evaluate them as likable and reliable main characters. The named characters may thus inspire agreement and likability in readers as suggested by ADT (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976),

The likability of the Western characters is also implied by the positive representation of their culture. This can be exemplified from Calguès' admiration of the 'fork', when he thought '[a] curious object, really, when you think that the Western World invented it for propriety's sake, though a third of the human race still grubs up its food with its fingers' (07). This positive attribution is constructed using juxtaposition to ensure conflict between 'the Western World' that uses the fork, and 'a third of the human race' that uses fingers. Juxtaposition, here, implies that the former is a clean and advanced place with clean and advanced people who value hygiene and practicality, without explicitly making these attributes salient. The binary opposition is further reinforced by the verb 'to grub' which is slang for the verb to eat. The verb has an unappetising history referring to birds eating grubs which are a type of insects. This implicitly connotes the degradation of 'a third of the human

race' as animal birds, and their food as grubs. Therefore, juxtaposition at the level of syntax and binary opposition at the level of metaphors and diction creates a semantic of polarization which may influence readers' interpretation.

Moreover, the positive valorisation of the West can be understood from the metaphors used in its attribution such as 'the gates of abundance' (02), 'paradise' (33), or simply 'perfect' (09). However, although the metaphors are self-explanatory, they are used in a subtle way that may not necessarily raise suspicion. For example, when professor Calguès was observing the fleet of ships that landed on shore, the narrator comments in free indirect speech that.

> [T]he decks and holds must be piled high with layer on layer of human bodies […] with the dead underneath supporting the living […] with millions of trampled cadavers […] Like all the ships in this phantom fleet […] now that the exodus had finally led to the gates of the newfound paradise […] a prodigious interest in this vanguard of an antiworld bent on coming in the flesh to knock, at long last, at the gates of abundance (02).

The imagery of death evoked by words such as 'the dead underneath,' 'cadavers,' and 'phantom' makes the association with 'the newfound paradise' intuitive because death and paradise can schematically prime each other. Yet, it creates a polarised association network where the West, in this case France, is akin to paradise, and the immigrants are the dead/phantoms waiting to enter that paradise. This analogy also offers an imagery of misery and disgust as can be interpreted from the expression 'piled high with layer on layer of human bodies […] with the dead underneath supporting the living' or 'millions of trampled cadavers'. Thereby, the association of France with 'gates of abundance' is subtly constructed not to raise suspicion about its polarisation as an exaggerated aspect of the West.

Most importantly, the Western heroes are portrayed as peaceful people who were forced into war when an invasion reached Europe. This manipulation associates the violence promoted by these heroes to protect themselves as a moral behaviour that needs to be taken. The peacefulness of the West is implied from the opening of the narrative when the narrator through the eyes of professor Calguès said,

> [T]he rich man's sea, *now suddenly* stripped of all the opulent veneer that *usually* overspread its surface […] The old man took his eye from the spyglass, moved back from the tripod. The amazing invasion had *loomed up* so close that it already seemed to be *swarming over* the hill and *into his house* (01, added emphasis).

The passage implies the peacefulness of the West as suggested by the direction of assault the arrival of immigrants forced on the west. The immigrants are thus antagonised by association with transgression and 'invasion.' The phrasal verbs 'loomed up' and 'swarming over' act like metaphors that emphasise the perception of threat from the chaotic state and countless numbers of the immigrants. The adverb of time, 'now suddenly,' gives an urgency effect to stress how things promptly shifted negatively; that is 'stripped of all the opulent veneer.' The adjectives 'so close,' 'loomed up,' and the preposition phrase 'into his house' emphasise the proximity and end of invasion. Thereby, the passage implies a notion of polarization between a peaceful and victimised West through professor Calguès who stands in opposition to the perpetrating immigrants. This imagery of one victim standing against several perpetrators has a major implication of readers' identifiable victim bias (Kogut & Ritov, 2005) and empathy (Leake, 214), as I will explain later.

This theme of victimisation can be used to morally justify the heroes' need for racism and violence to survive. Within the internal logic of *CoS* which brings to mind conventional scenes of war and invasion, the immigrants are literally on shore of France. This is to ensure that no measure is preventative, except war and violence. Indeed, *CoS* praises violence and racism as the only justifiable means of triumph in 'this curious war taking shape' (04). For example, when crime rates increased among non-white people in New York, Dr. Hailer, another American hero, states that there was '[n]o hope [...] Unless you kill them all, that is, because you'll never change them' (08). In the same vein, *CoS* praises other countries when they used violence against the immigrants. For instance, in spite of mocking the Egyptians for not being Europeans, saying they 'were no strangers to woe and despair; and grotesque, misshapen bodies were a common enough sight the length and breadth of Egypt' (46). However, their successful retaliation to stop the fleet from crossing the Suez Canal was praised and encouraged by the narrator. 'Who knows how things might have worked out if the peoples of the West, in similar straits, had put their faith in God, by name, and stormed their churches the way they did in those blessed ages past, when plagues and invasions buttressed their faith?' (46).

These examples illustrate *CoS's* assertion of the necessity of racism and violence as the only measures to protect the West. This means that *CoS's* heroes are not mere victims of immigration, but they are also racist and violent heroes who promote radical beliefs. Indeed, *CoS* reinforces radical 'beliefs and attitudes that sanction, legitimize and compel violence as

a means to achieve social change' (van Eerten, et al., 2017, 13). However, they are coherent and justifiable within its polarised frame of reference.

On the opposite polarity from the Western heroes, *CoS* leaves more creative space for the degradation of the rest of the world in its frame of reference. This can be indicated from their naming, occupations, customs, and behaviours which may be evaluated by transported readers as 'normal' attributes since those characters are villainous invaders, after all. The novel, as I explain here, emphasises that the immigrants are homogenous and dehumanised. In fact, *CoS* does not often name its immigrant antagonists, but refers to them by derogatory nicknames such as 'the cuckold' (07), 'the wretches' (20), 'the surging beast' (20), or 'the poor devils' (11). Some of the main immigrants like the fleet captain is referred to as 'the turd-eater' (14), his son is the 'monster child' (41), 'his hideous totem' (12), 'dung man and his hideous son' (15). An immigrant 'thug' called 'Mohammed' is nicknamed 'Cadi One-Eye' (13), and the pro-immigration journalist 'Ben Suad, alias Clément Dio' is described as 'one of the monster's most faithful minions' (26). Most importantly, the immigrants are often represented as a homogenous 'crowd' (09), 'the numberless masses' (33), 'the fleet' (01), or the 'flood' (12). Names that suggest unpredictable behaviour and chaos as well as dehumanization. The dehumanization of immigrants and their supporters is also seen in the animal-related diction such as 'the hordes' (15), 'the herd', (103),'the rats' (90), 'the mold' (10), 'Columns of ants' (02), 'all wormy inside' (10), or 'The dismal fauna of the Third World' (115).

Homogeneity can also be observed in the negatively stereotypical jobs associated with the immigrants.

> [T]he swill men, sewer men, sweepers from all the dumps the length and breadth of Paris; the peons and bedpan pushers from all the hospitals; the dishwashers from the shabby cafés […] the swivel-hipped menials digging their pits around gas pipes and cables; the fodder for industry's lethal chores; the machinery feeders, the Metro troglodytes, black crabs with ticket-punching claws; the stinking drudges who mucked around in filth (12).

The description of these jobs does not only stereotype immigrants as 'menials', but it also obscures the reality where they work in prestigious jobs. Indeed, the passage degrades immigrants as passive as the word 'swivel-hipped' may imply. They are also claimed to be unskilled as in the word 'troglodytes' as well as being ugly like 'crabs' with 'claws', and dirty as the words 'stinking' and 'mucked around in filth' indicate. Nevertheless, the narrator

mourns the loss of these jobs to the immigrants as 'essential jobs that the French had let slip through their delicate fingers' (12). As such, although the passage is explicit in its degradation of immigrants, it does so by means of binary opposition to create polarisation. The narrator considers these jobs as 'menial' when performed by immigrants. But they become 'essential' when done by the French. The immigrants has 'claws' for hands, while the French has 'delicate' ones. These binaries create a polarised imagery where the 'moderate' middle ground of reality is non-existent. Absorbed readers may thus have a limiting narrative frame to based their interpretation on.

The homogeneity emphasised by the association network in binarism between the symbolic immigrants and the French denies immigrants any positive attribute. In fact, these derogatory associations and imagery of homogeneity dehumanise the migrant characters and make it hard for readers to identify with them. By considering the theoretical explanation of ADT again (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976), the immigrant characters become unlikable and somehow unidentifiable because their homogeneity and dehumanization may encourage readers to perceive as such. However, *CoS* does not simply throw pejorative words at the immigrants to influence readers' responses, it portrays them in narrative situations that do emphasise their dehumanization, cruelty, or criminality. As illustrated above, the narrative from its beginning frames 'the incredible fleet from the other side of the globe' as the 'amazing invasion' (01). This means that from the beginning readers are invited to associate the immigrant characters with enmity and conflict. An example of narrative situation where racial polarization and degradation are subtle comes from the following passage.

> The old professor—Calguès by name—aimed his glass at one of the ships still lit by the sun, then patiently focused the lens until the image [of the fleet] was as sharp as he could make it, like a scientist over his microscope, peering in to find his culture swarming with the microbes that he knew all the time must be there (02).

The passage describes vividly how the single hero, professor Calguès, came face-to-face with the fleet of ships landing on the beach down the hill from his house. Nonetheless, the situation implicitly makes the professor's position superior and precise than that of the fleet. This is because he observed them from his spyglass on top of the hill, not the other way around. In fact, setting is another polarised element of *CoS* which will later be analysed. Moreover, the simile, 'like a scientist over his microscope, peering in to find his culture swarming with the microbes' reinforces polarization in a tricky way. The simile indicates that

the distance between the observed microbes (referring to the fleet) and the scientist (referring to Professor Calguès) is physically approximate, but psychologically distanced. This imagery reinforces the superiority of the professor and the subjugation of the immigrants to his point of view. At the same time, the simile suggests that like harmful microbes, the immigrants are still threatening in proximity, number, and effect. The professor is indeed alone facing the overwhelming numbers of immigrants/invaders. He is the victim; readers may feel sorry and worry for him. As such, the narrative situation of Calguès as subject to potential harm and pain can induce stronger empathy, especially that the causer of harm is salient (Cook, 2011) as I will elaborate later.

Furthermore and most importantly, the immigrants in the role of villains are strongly associated with disgust to dehumanise them, using sensory metaphors and vivid imagery. Vivid imagery as I will discuss later correlates significantly with narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). Yet as of now, I am going to explain how *CoS* orients readers to distance themselves from the character of immigrant on a deep psychological level. This is supported by the language of disgust used in their representation. Readers can vividly feel metaphors of disgust as in expressions such as 'the stench became so thick you could practically see it' (100), Gonorrhoea as an 'Arab disease' (27), 'too horrible to look at' (101), 'North African clap' (27), and so on. Disgust-related metaphors also include behaviours. For instance, the immigrants sailing the oceans cooked rice using their 'turds' (42) when they run out of fuel, and how they had orgies onboard, including even children (42). The disgust-related imagery is potent in terms of sensory vividness as I shall discuss in full details later.

The implication of disgust on readers' responses towards the immigrants may likely to distance readers from feeling pity or warmth towards the fictional immigrants. This fits with evidence which suggests that 'words stink'. Reading words of disgust is found to activate the same neural network in charge of processing disgust from external stimuli (Ziegler, et al, 2018). This means that within the narrative-world of *CoS* which uses sensory and vivid imagery, not just words, the attribution of immigrants with disgust-related traits is likely to decrease readers' sympathy for them. In fact, the association of immigrants with infections or infectious animals is found to increase their avoidance, ethnocentric attitudes, and reported disgust (Karinen, et al., 2019; Krings, et al., 2012). For example, Harris and Fiske (2006) found that the dehumanisation of an outgroup such as immigrants as neither competent nor warm can activate readers' disgust processing brain region of the Amygdala and Insula to perceive them as less human, equivalent to objects, or without internal lives.

Also, the researchers found that the fMRI scans of participants who viewed disgust-inducing groups lacked activation of the medial prefrontal cortex, a brain region that is otherwise involved in social cognition and cognitive empathy (Harris and Fiske 2006).

In other words, the groups associated with disgust were perceived as more object-like. In turn, this dehumanization may facilitate atrocities like racism and violence against them (Harris & Fiske, 2011). In the same vein, Ngai (2005) writes that disgust is the 'ugliest' of 'ugly feelings', that 'is never ambivalent about its object' (335). She argues that disgust creates a sense of community and agreement against the object of disgust. Lindhé (2021) argues based on Ngai's (2005) view that disgust in the characterisation of a character draws readers away from them and reinforces connection with the perspectivising character (242). In light of these studies, it seems impossible for absorbed readers' into *CoS* to feel warmth with the fictional immigrants when their association network with disgust is salient.

In conclusion, *CoS's* frame of reference is polarised in part at the level of characterization. This is facilitated through a conventional hero-villain structure where the few Western characters are positioned in the role of heroes who are likable, sympathetic, and victimised. In opposition, the immigrant characters who play the role of villains are dehumanised and antagonised as countless and immoral invaders with a strong association with disgust. Thereby, *CoS* may induce readers' affective dispositions consistently with what is predicted by the affective disposition theory (Raney, 2017). These dispositions are likely to involve feelings of repulsion toward the immigrants from the disgust-related imagery, and feelings of grievances toward the Western heroes from their victimization as it is explained below.

2.4.2. Elicitation of Grievances.

In contrast to the dehumanisation of immigrants as explained above, *CoS* also relies on a theme of victimization in its representation of its Western heroes. The racist heroes and the immigrant villains are not just racially segregated. The heroes are constructed as vulnerable victims to elicit readers' feelings of grievances, whereas the immigrants are portrayed as powerful perpetrators. Victimization and the perception of threat refer to another subtle layer of polarization in *CoS's* frame of reference. The racial polarization used in the representation of immigrants as disgusting, dehumanized, and countless invaders on the one side implies the victimization of the West, on the other side. *CoS* thus polarizes its heroes as victims and its villains as perpetrators to create a sense of threat and vulnerability

with a clear direction of causality. This can be perceived on the level of storyline where millions of migrants invade Europe out of the blue. They were 'numberless' and dedicated in their persistence to reach their destination which eventually threw France into an anarchist revolution and the West into instability. The perception of threat and victimization can also be analysed from two more narrative aspects of context which are the atmosphere of nostalgia to the powerful past of West which implies that the present is vulnerable, and the setting where a single hero faces many perpetrators as will be pointed out below.

The elicitation of grievances through perceived threats is a mechanism of political radicalization (Al-Saggaf, 2018; McCauley & Moskalenko 2008). The greater percentage of political and ethnic radical violence is due to the evocation of grievances because individuals are more willing to fight when they perceive harm inflicted on a group they identify with or have sympathy for (Van Stekelenburg, 2013). To maintain an atmosphere of impending threat, *CoS* insists that 'Third World' immigrants are racially different and do not share the same humanity as Europeans. For example, Dr. Hailer asserted that '[b]lack would be black, and white would be white' (08). This is to ensure that coexistence is a threat to the Western culture and customs. This is woven in a theme of victimisation where the West is 'really' under attack by an 'anti-western' (11) allegiance started by mass migration and supported by mass media and world politics. Under this allegiance, the few people who could understand the extent of harm facing the West were outnumbered, vulnerable and doomed to fail. Following this theme, the novel promotes violence and racism as justifiable anti-immigration measures to protect the vulnerable victims.

The perception of threat *CoS* creates facilitates the perception of victimization. This can be deduced from the presence of each of the few Western heroes face-to-face with massive numbers of migrant villains as their setting conveys. *CoS's* positioning of characters in terms of high and low spaces is another tricky way of polarization. Readers may not pay attention to this detail. Yet, it may influence their evaluation of characters' point of view, (un)reliability, and even morality. Therefore, when the narrator describes professor Calguès following situation, setting is polarised and with-it characters' point of view and perceived morality.

> The old professor—Calguès by name—aimed his glass at one of the ships
> still lit by the sun [from his house on top of the hill], then patiently focused
> the lens until the image [of the fleet] was as sharp as he could make it,
> like a scientist over his microscope, peering in to find his culture swarming
> with the microbes that he knew all the time must be there (02).

This passage was previously analysed to exemplify subtle racial polarisation in *CoS* not to raise readers' suspicion. Nonetheless, it is analysed this time to suggest how setting is polarised in *CoS* to establish a subtle imagery of victimization. First of all, the professor occupies a higher position in space relative to the migrants who are below, at sea level. Physically, the professor was eying the fleet of immigrants from his house. His house is 'one of the last houses up toward the crest of the hill, perched on the rocky slope like an outpost guarding the old brown-hued village that stood out above the landscape, towering over it all' (02). The binarism in space of the characters is implied by the high space of the professor's house as the adverbial clauses of place suggest a high position; 'up toward the crest', 'perched on', 'an outpost', 'out above', and 'towering over' the fleet's lower position, at sea level. This binarism in space gives the professor's point of view dominance and 'superiority' like that of a guarding soldier, while it denies the point of view of immigrants because they are subject to the professor's 'spyglasses' not the other way around.

This binarism of setting is reinforced by the imagery induced by the simile used where the professor is 'like a scientist over his microscope, peering in' his petri dish. This figurative setting creates distance between the characters involved, and makes the point of view of Calguès reliable, precise, and conscious like that of a scientist. Ergo, Calguès' point of view is supposedly unbiased as the expression 'patiently focused the lens until the image was as sharp as he could make it' suggests. At the same time, the simile suggests that the migrants are akin to microbes who are subject to Calguès's 'spyglass' or figurative microscope. Like microbes, the immigrants are dehumanized, denied agency and consciousness. But the simile still stresses their threatening nature both in proximity, number and effect just like harmful microbes. The imagery of anticipated confrontation induced by binarism in setting illustrates how the professor is thus alone facing the overwhelming numbers of immigrants/invaders. He is the vulnerable victim; readers may feel sorry and worry for.

This theme of victimization that is facilitated by polarizing setting is also used in the introduction of the rest of the Western heroes. The narrator focalises the narrative from their third-person point of view where every single one of them is often alone, observing the overwhelming numbers of migrants, from a higher space. For instance, the American sociologist Dr. Norman Hailer is described looking outside his window from his house 'on the twenty-sixth floor of Central Park's most elegant apartment building' (08) on the unusually empty street of New York. The imagery from this scene sends off a feeling of suspense that resembles the beforemath of a zombie attack.

Although Dr. Hailer's view dominates the park, it is still a detached position from the horrible events and people that dominates the scene down below. This implied distance or detachment can signify his moral superiority relative the 'black and Puerto Rican' criminals of the night (08). This distance can also add value to his occupation in sociology. It gives him a power-position to observe and predict systematically and impartially what the people of the city are preparing. Like professor Calguès previously, Dr. Hailer's fearsome and suspenseful position in face of massive numbers of migrants emphasise their victimhood, which may induce readers' empathy and concern from them. Indeed, readers can feel the threat and victimhood of the Western heroes facing the menace of immigrants and their sympathizers. The imagery induced by such confrontation which conveys the heroes' feelings of vulnerability and grievances may also induce readers' feelings of perceived vulnerability and grievances because it can generate situational empathy. This kind of narrative empathy is generally produced by 'creating suspense and evoking a situation of potential harm [as] a mode of engaging the reader' (Nünning, 2015, 44). In the same vein, Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) found that readers who identify with a character that is represented as vulnerable to a harmful behaviour may increase their perceived vulnerability to that same risky behaviour. This means that if readers of *CoS* are going to identify with its Western heroes, which is likely, they may perceive immigration as a threat too.

The binary opposition between a white educated man who lives high in a setting versus the non-white criminals who inhabit 'ghettos' (08) has a polarizing effect that pushes the two groups away from each. The former is positively represented, while the latter is negatively represented when attributing stereotypical valorisation to both. The binarism between the heroes' high space and the villains' lower space may be interpreted as a metaphor for the heroes' moral superiority compared to the immorality of the immigrants. Therefore, the heroes' presence in high spaces has a significant effect on the value of their perspective and the power-position of their focalization which are likely to influence identification and perspective-taking with them, not from the non-existent perspective of immigrants. This fits with evidence that suggests that narrative perspective or point of view from which a story is told causes identification with the perspectivising character (Hoeken, 2017; de Graaf, et al., 2012).

In this case, readers' potential identification may likely be oriented toward the perspectivising characters who are the few racists heroes, as will be discussed in another section. Indeed, *CoS's* use of victimisation to reinforce perception of threat within its subtle

polarised frame may stimulate its readers' sense of grievances. As will be explained later, the evocation of grievances can influence readers' empathy with the victimised heroes as supported by the identifiable victim effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). They can also experience feelings of repulsion and resentment for its immigrant villains as the paradox of empathy suggests (Lindhé, 2016). This challenges the ethical role of narrative empathy in understanding the Other as it creates the Other's Other and blocks understanding for it (Lindhé, 2021). Therefore, within the logic of *CoS*, readers who can be engrossed in its polarised frame of reference, may take the side of heroes who 'rightfully' need to be racist and violent to protect themselves and their land. Simultaneously, readers are likely to despise the immigrants because the narration does not allow any positive portrayal or fellow-feelings with them. This can be supported by evidence from narrative victimization (Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt, 2022) as will be explained later.

2.4.3. Nostalgia: Polarisation and Grievances

In addition, *CoS's* victimization of the West to elicit readers' grievances can also be sensed from an atmosphere of nostalgia to the past. Nostalgia is also an identified mechanism of radicalization (Al-Saggaf, 2018; Upal, 2015). According to Upal (2015), nostalgia to the past is often used in narratives of radicalization. These 'acknowledge that a group is currently not doing well, remind the group of its glorious past, and promise that making a change to group's shared beliefs will restore that glory in the future' (63). A similar case is implied in *CoS* which gives away an atmosphere of nostalgia to emphasise the victimhood of the West. This also has rapport with polarisation in the sense that the current present of the West is claimed to be inferior to its glorious past. Thereby, *CoS* exaggerates the past as ideal and better, and laments the present as pitiful and worse.

Themes of nostalgia can be interpreted from *CoS's* attitude towards the arrival of immigrants and its consequences on the West. In fact, the novel insists on how the West must go back to its old heritage of state violence to ensure order in the face of chaos brought by mass migration. For example, when the fleet of immigrants landed, French soldiers were deployed to burn the corpses that were thrown overboard the ships. The frustrated narrator reports this event as an assault on the West.

> The West doesn't like to burn its dead. It tucks away its cremation urns, hides them out in the hinterlands of its cemeteries. The Seine, the Rhine, the Loire, the Rhône, the Thames are no Ganges or Indus. Not even the

Guadalquivir and the Tiber. Their shores never stank with the stench of roasting corpses […] But in Western times, on their bridges and banks, people danced and drank their wine and beer, men tickled the fresh, young laughing lasses, and everyone laughed at the wretch on the rack, laughed in his face, and the wretch on the gallows, tongue dangling, and the wretch on the block, neck severed—because, indeed, the Western World, staid as it was, knew how to laugh as well as cry—and then, as their belfreys called them to prayer, they would all go partake of their fleshly god, secure in the knowledge that their dead were there, protecting them, safe as could be, laid out in rows beneath their timeless slabs and crosses, in graveyards nestled against the hills, since burning, after all, was only for devilish fiends, or wizards, or poor souls with the plague (04).

This passage comes as a narratorial commentary on the fact that French soldiers had to burn the dead among the immigrants which is not their custom. The fictionalised West after all does not burn its dead in the open air, on shore, it 'cremates' them in the privacy of funeral homes. As I am going to explain below, the passage promotes subtle polarization between Western and immigrant funeral customs. It does so by eliciting feelings of nostalgia to the past where the West knew how to deal with transgressors to maintain joy and order. Nostalgia to the past is used here to justify violence as a means of predictability and order.

The sentence, '[t]he West does not like to burn its dead' in the simple present asserts a general truth about the practices of the West to highlight how the arrival of the immigrants is changing those practices. Nostalgia is thus implied and reinforced from the expression '[t]heir shores never stank with the stench of roasting corpses […] burning, after all, was only for devilish fiends, or wizards, or poor souls with the plague'. This is because the French who are not used to this funeral practice, had to burn the corpses of the dead migrants on French shores. As such, the passage asserts a positive view on the past to mark the assault on Western waters and practices. In other words, the passage may give away a sense of nostalgia to the past that is implicated from an imagery of assault on its funeral rites.

The difference in diction between the words 'burn' and 'cremate' provides a different imagery in the perception of readers which also implies subtle polarization. Cremation is a mechanical, impersonal process not witnessed by mourners; 'burn' is an active verb, and the outcome is visible to the person doing the burning. Also 'cremation' is a Latinate word, in English these tend to be formal; 'burn' is an Anglo-Saxon word, usually associated with less formal language. Although both funeral practices involve burning the corpse, the choice of words construct different imagery. Burning the dead implies gruesome and graphic imagery, while cremation is sanitary and abstract. The contrast, in terms of binarism creates two

associative images that distances between the culture of the symbolic Indian migrants and the West. This associative imagery is likely used to imply that the West is clean and pure, while the Indian immigrants are impure as they threw their dead in water. Thus, the passage above uses a sense of nostalgia to create grievances from the current transgression and disgust attributed to the immigrants.

Moreover, nostalgia to the past can be exemplified directly from the narrator's praise of state violence. 'But in Western times' implies a sharp contradiction between the familiar 'West' in readers' present (the one fictionalised), and the familiar 'West' of the past. Western, here too refers to both the geographical location as well as the model of society such as the political West. By implying that the second is now firmly in the past, the reader who admires or identifies with the first, geographical definition, finds themselves living in an emptied space, like ruins. Thereby, the reader is situated in a landscape deprived of meaning and value, created by a sense of nostalgia and cultural defeat which started the moment the immigrants were 'burnt' on French shores by the French.

Also, what comes after 'but' nullifies what preceded to promote nostalgia to 'the real or true Western times' that no longer exist. The sense of frustration before '[b]ut in Western times' is then replaced by a sense of nostalgia as can be felt from the familiarity of order and violence through which the West had fun and stood firm. The stability of the system implied in the predictability of violence against the mentioned criminals insinuates that a stable system that uses the 'right' violence against the 'right' people serves justice and makes death or rather murder meaningful. In fact, nostalgia for violence is often embedded in discourse of far-right ideology to stress how a group's current affairs are not as their 'old despotic regimes' (Minkenberg, 2017, 28). Thereby, the passage above implies that readers' current Western society that operates on shame, guilt, and 'brotherly love' (21) is paralysed in the face of mass immigration. It also asserts subtly that state violence is a necessity to ensure security among people as previous Western society took against unlawful individuals.

During those old times, the narrator claims that people enjoyed a stable system of society where criminals hang on the gallows; information was taken on the rack; and traitors lost their heads. However, the imagery of state violence is embedded in a discourse of celebration and joy to stress that people liked that violence that ensured predictability and order. The expression, the West 'knew how to laugh as well as cry' probably suggests that in the past, the West was mighty or 'staid'. It knew how to have a good time as 'people danced and drank their wine and beer, men tickled the fresh, young laughing lasses'. They also knew

how to treat transgressions as 'everyone laughed at the wretch on the rack, laughed in his face, and the wretch on the gallows, tongue dangling, and the wretch on the block, neck severed'. Indeed, these state punishments are represented as an ordinary part of the fabric of that nostalgically described society. The graphic imagery of sufferance inherent in the tortures described is desensitised and muted by its position within an imagery of celebration and joy. The sentence is also aesthetically pleasing due to its syntactic construction in parallelism. The foregrounding effect of parallelism draws readers' attention to the aesthetics of construction (Miall & Kuiken, 1994). In this case, it may further blur the semantics of torture which are completely absent.

The ambiguous reference to state violence may suggest that unlike the 'Western world' that kills its 'wretch', the rest of the world like the symbolic India sent them to Europe. This also implies that the immigrant is a 'wretch' too as they are often called in *CoS*, which legitimizes using violence against them. Therefore, *CoS* does not only convey feelings of nostalgia to the past where violence was rightful against specific individuals, it 'mourns' it as a lost quality of stable systems that is needed against immigration. Holak and Havlena (1998) write that nostalgia occurs when,

> The pleasant memory of the past is combined with a sense of loss associated with the realization that the past cannot be recreated. The connection between sadness and desire may reflect the recognition of this fact and the feeling of sadness associated with the unattainable desire to return to some time or place in the past (222).

The perceived familiarity of the 'not necessarily lived past' with the sense of loss gives nostalgia its 'bittersweet' nature that combines delight and sorrow, gratitude and desire, warmth and surgency (Holak & Havlena, 1998, 223). The capacity of nostalgia to elicit this range of different emotions may influence emotional shifts during narrative engagement which is an effective quality to increase absorption (Nabi & Green, 2015). This emotional capacity in a narrative form with foregrounded style has major implication on narrative transportation as will be elaborated on in the final section of this chapter.

To conclude this section, nostalgia to the past is used subtly in *CoS* to emphasis cultural defeat of the West. This generate a polarisation effect as the present is lamented as pitiful, while the past was not. The potential function of nostalgia in *CoS* is likely to induce readers' feelings of grievances and vulnerability because the immigrants are represented as forcing their cultural practices on Western people. Nostalgia also mourns the loss of violence

as a rightful measure for protection. Yet, the violence is still blurred from its implied gruesomeness. The potential effect of such technique, besides creating a sense of nostalgia, is to prevent the reader from experiencing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) that is likely to accompany discourse that encourages torture by despotic regimes.

2.4.4. Perceived realism in a polarised narrative.

As dystopias exaggerate the perception of threat without distorting reality beyond recognition (Malak, 1987), *CoS* seems to do so by drawing on the familiarity of the topic of immigration. However, I am going to demonstrate that *CoS* promotes itself as authentic and realistic, while in essence, it is not. I argue that the illusion of familiarity and realism may trick readers to believe its portrayal as authentic and reliable, while it is polarised and biased. This is observed by Wampole (2020), too who argues that that novel 'markets itself as a reality check. Like most dystopian fiction, it aims to stir the reader from his or her apathy or ignorance and to prompt, in the best case, some kind of action to stave off looming ruin' (Wampole, 2020, A Precursor). However, this marketing is done using conflict and binary opposition that distance the polarities involved away from each other, as seen above. Indeed, how *CoS* can be realistic and authentic when political polarization does not acknowledge the common ground of reality, the novel vehemently ignores.

In the same vein, the fictionality of *CoS* which may intuitively influence readers not to take it as an authoritative or reliable source can be mitigated by its engagement with real events. Jarvis (2021) confirms that many of *CoS's* themes are in fact influenced by three major historical events. Those events include the sense of gradual decay in France from being a global superpower to losing its colonies after WWII. Also, the arrival of non-European migrants to Europe in the 1950s to fill in the labour shortage. Among those migrants that 'took France by surprise' is the arrival of one million French pied-noirs (that is French citizens born of French settlers in Algeria) from the Algerian war of independence. This also signalled the beginning of immigration movements coming from Africa to Europe. The third major event that contributed to the making of the novel is the social changes of the 1960s, especially the American Civil Rights Movement and its effects on the US and the rest of the world. In France too, society witnessed vast labour strikes that paralyzed French economy, and in May 1968 students riots demanded sexual openness and gender equality (Jarvis, 2021, 03). Accordingly, the influence of these real events on the novel may convey a sense of realism and familiarity to its readers. In turn, these may increase their feelings of absorption

because both perceived realism and familiarity correlate positively with narrative absorption (Green, 2004) as I will explain later.

In addition, many of the themes fictionalised in *CoS* can be familiar to readers. for instance, topics of multiculturalism and mass migration from the rest of the world to the West are likely to create a sense of familiarity for both readers during the time of its publication in the 1970s, and readers in the contemporary era. This is likely to be true due to the salience of immigration related topics in media coverage (for example, in Europe, see Caviedes, 2015; in the UK, see Smith & Deacon, 2018) which may then influence readers to perceive the dramatization of *CoS* as plausible and somehow realistic. Nonetheless, a critical reading of the novel shows that the real events are fictionalised at extreme endpoints. For example, illegal migration from the rest of the world to Europe is a real phenomenon, but not from India to France on the scale exaggerated by *CoS*. The adoption of Indian babies by European countries like Belgium is also a real phenomenon that took off in the 1960s (see Candaele, 2020). Yet, it did not end in 'adoption *en masse*' (*CoS*, 11). Thereby, although fictional discourse 'is also filled with direct assertions of accepted historical and scientific fact' (Strange, 2002, 266), *CoS* integrates the information that is real to either blur or validate the information that is fictional through the polarization of both.

Therefore, the novel is 'licensed' by its fictionality to mix the familiarity of facts with the manipulations afforded by fiction to shock readers by its representation of immigration as cultural and biological degradation. The reality effect (Barthes, 1968) generated by *CoS* stems from the reality of migration from the rest of the world to the West. However, the dystopian nature of the novel which focuses on and foregrounds the anxieties of discontent with a situation generates an exaggerated sense of realism that stops being realistic. Wampole (2020) uses the term 'degenerative realism' to refer to this type of realism. She writes that it is a 'type of literary realism marked in both content and form by a poetics of cultural and biological degradation […] relying on a logic of decline'. *CoS* is considered as a precursor to this authoritarian type that embraces the combative forms of roman à thèse (novel with thesis) and pamphleteer novel to convert readers to its cause. As such, *CoS* conveys a sense of realism and familiarity which in essence is hyperbolic and paranoid. This is facilitated by the following aspects.

> [T]he characters or narrators of the new degenerative fictions make polemical assertions throughout the narratives […] From a formal perspective, these new novels seek to create an effet d'immédiat, an

immediacy effect, in lieu of the Barthesian reality effect (effet de réel) [with] nervous urgency and hyperbolism […] a new vitalism and, at times, survivalism manifests itself in the insistence on the struggle of France to survive against forces that threaten it. The protagonists of these fictions are often symbolic proxies for France, under cultural, economic, and demographic assault (Wampole, 2020, Introduction).

This authoritative and survivalist aspect which is also found in *CoS* that foregrounds the perception of threat, assault, and decline, uses immediacy and urgency effects to emphasise them. This can be observed from the start of the novel where the author warns of demographic decline of the white race by year 2000. He said that 'twenty-eight years from now: seven billion people, only nine hundred million of whom will be white' (01). Also, the mode of narration in retrospection gives a sense that the doom is no longer impending as the West has already been invaded by immigrants. This can be felt from the expression, 'and now, stretching over that empty sea, aground some fifty yards out, the incredible fleet from the other side of the globe' (02) has arrived. This retrospective expression conveys a sense of immediacy that signals the beginning of assault as the paralysed West could not prevent this as the narrator would reveal later. The expression also accelerates time to bring the predicted future to the present as the adverbial 'and now' implies. Wampole (2020) explains that the acceleration of time 'to such a degree that real-life events that hadn't happened yet [that is the arrival of million migrants] when the book was written [1970s] seem to have been anticipated by the text, creating an effect of prophecy' (Part I). This technique not only prophesises about 'tomorrow', but it also uses the label of 'tomorrow' on the events of 'today' which 'produces an immediacy effect, making the future feel hauntingly familiar only because it is the now in disguise' (Wampole, 2020, Journalism). This technique thus allows *CoS* to assert itself as realistic and familiar in a twisted way.

Thereby, the kind of realism *CoS* markets ignores and obscures the bigger picture of reality where Europe did invite other peoples to help build it in the aftermath of WWII, for instance. By subtly limiting the reality of events and pushing them into the extreme polarity of decline and degradation, *CoS's* realism stops being realistic. It becomes limited, exaggerated, and polarised. This can be interpreted from the polarised presentation of some values such as 'Christian charity' (11), 'brotherly love' (21), and 'the rights of man' (74) when promoted for people who are not white. These values are constructed in *CoS* from a polarised, black and white angle which may manipulate readers not to see the grey zone that occupies the distance *CoS* empathises. As such, readers they 'might mistakenly incorporate

fabrications of historical fiction into their beliefs about history' (Strange, 2002, 268), since narrative is the frame of reference which readers rely on to make sense and respond.

As it is illustrated below, if *CoS* subtly polarises a value and represents it as moderate, a transported reader may perceive it accordingly. In the same light, I propose that readers may not be aware that everything in *CoS* is polarised and thus unrealistic. This is because *CoS* polarises the ideals above through having dialogues that juxtaposes the pro-and anti-immigration beliefs held by its hero and villain characters at extreme endpoints. This may manipulate readers to consider only the two sides of the arguments made in their extreme extent, without recognizing the moderate and complex ground reality occupies. 'By strategically borrowing from public debates of the time', Wampole (2020) argues that, '[Raspail] is able selectively to feature the grounded, common-sense 'truth' of one side and simultaneously to lampoon and misrepresent the other' (A Precursor).

The polarization of the human values can be observed in the dialogue of consul Himmans with some Western intellectuals who encouraged migration from India. The novel claims that Europe used to adopt Indian babies to provide them with a better life. However, when Belgium stopped the process because it could no longer accommodate them, the outraged parents in 'Calcutta' could not accept the decree. Thereby, Western sympathisers encouraged them to migrate. One of them stated that '[i]nstead of the piecemeal adoptions […] they're hoping and living for something bigger […] like a kind of adoption *en masse*' (11). On the opposite end, the consul disapproved of abusing charity when moving a nation to reside in another nation by '[p]laying on their [white people's] sentiments, their sympathy. Perverting their minds with vague feelings of self-reproach, to twist their Christian charity to your own bizarre ends' (11). The two sides of the dialogue symbolise two opposing polarities that exaggerate the value of charity at extreme ends. Consul Himmans saw in charity and sympathy with the immigrant a propaganda of abuse against the West, whereas the group of sympathisers with the immigrants take charity for granted as a human right, regardless of the alleged danger it represented for the West.

On the surface level, it seems that *CoS* allows the reader to 'listen' to the two sides of the exchange that represent respectively a pro-immigration argument based on charity and sympathy, and an anti-immigration argument based on long-term calculations. Nevertheless, this is not a realistic representation of the value of charity. It is a polarisation effect stemming from juxtaposing the value of charity as either an abuse or a right. *CoS's* polarized discourse that emphasises only two opposing views of charity at extreme endpoints

limits readers' interpretation as it denies them access to the representation of a moderate use of charity that benefits the needy and the helper. It may also motivate them to side with the anti-immigration view of the consul because it is represented as more rational compared to the fanciful and impractical explanation of the pro-immigration sympathisers. The conflict of views in the dialogue may induce readers' side-taking, empathy, and identification with the victimised West in general (Breithaupt, 2012; Hoeken, Kolthoff, & Sanders, 2016) as will be discussed later.

In the same regard, the value of 'brotherly love' (21) is also mocked as a propagandist rhetoric of 'anti-western' conspirers. The polarization of values using a narrative structure enables the construction of a coherent, yet subtle thesis embedded in an aesthetic of imagery that may obscure its polarization. This can be demonstrated from the passage below.

> Bishops proclaimed their messages of charity, and the ruling leftist cliques droned on in the name of universal harmony and brotherly love. But even as the Spanish government spoke of peace and calm, [...] Two streams, in fact, were cutting across Spain, in opposite directions. One, a river of words, rolling down to the sea and the Ganges fleet beyond. The other, a river of life, flowing inland, away from the coast. On Good Friday evening, the second stream dwindled and died [...] It was then that the stream of words swelled into a gushing torrent, one that wouldn't subside until Easter Monday, when, clearly, it was France that was going to be invaded (63).

Like the rest of the novel, contrast, conflict, and juxtaposition are the main techniques used to polarise this passage. This time, juxtaposition from the expression, '[t]wo streams, in fact, were cutting across Spain, in opposite directions' gives the value of 'brotherly love' two opposing manifestations with two opposing outcomes. This is facilitated by the vivid imagery from the passage that visualises the contrast of promoting 'brotherly love' for the rest of humanity, while denying it to someone's own people. The metaphor of 'a river of words, rolling down to the sea', while the other, 'a river of life, flowing inland, away from' the sea makes the idea come to life. This implied association of brotherly love or rights of men to promote immigration makes the values weak and ironic for they are denied for the native people who are afraid for their lives.

Moreover, the words 'streams' and 'rivers' do not imply polarization *per se* as rivers flow following the path of least resistance. Rivers are fluid, but powerful in their 'cutting' streams. Thus, the passage not only 'materialises' the polarisation of the abstract values of harmony and brotherly love, but it is also able to promote the feelings of those involved. The

polar opposition between the detached reality of media and authorities to preach of more harmony and sympathy with the fleet, without being sympathetic toward the fear and panic of their own people. Thus, the passage invites readers to see and feel the gap in the pro-immigration view which is realistic only within *CoS's* narrative frame. This is reinforced through the discourse of polarization that does not allow a moderate expression of brotherly love and sympathy. This conflicting representation may limit readers' interpretation and guide their empathy toward 'the river of life' that eventually 'dwindled and died' not the promoters of 'the river of words' that 'swelled into a gushing torrent'.

To conclude, *CoS* constructs its narrative frame with familiarity and realism that are only realistic within its dramatization. This is affirmed by its representation of values in a supposedly unbiased light, while in fact they are polarised to ensure distance between their opposite manifestations. That is to say that when *CoS* constructs charity or universal harmony as rights for all humans without considering all humans as promoters of immigration believe, it responds by representing their opposite manifestation as an abuse against the West. This distancing in representation characterises these values in their extreme endpoints as either a rightful property or abuse against the West. In both representations, conflict is ensured, and the West is victimised. The reader, thus, may be limited to consider only these extreme representations which does correspond with reality. To cite Wampole (2020) again, she argues that a work like *CoS* cannot be labelled realistic for it is steeped into hyperbole and exaggeration. However, 'it is realist in the sense that it attempts to jolt the reader into a forced recognition of what the author sees as all-too-evident reality, veiled by mediatic lies' (Wampole, 2020, A Precursor). This realisation, I speculate, may confound the reality of immigration in readers' mind, even when they recognise that *CoS* is hyperbolic.

2.5. Summary of analysis:

Up till now, I have illustrated how *CoS* uses a hero-villain narrative structure that polarises the heroes into moral, pure, and vulnerable victims, while the immigrants are represented in opposite polarity as immoral, disgusting, and powerful invaders. This racial polarisation completely negates the middle ground of their shared humanity. It also orients all positive feelings towards the heroes who are in fact racists and violent as perceived from their insistence on these attitudes for self-preservation. This means that *CoS* frames immigration in terms of threat to elicit readers' feelings of grievances and perception of vulnerability which in turn justify the use of violence and racism as self-defence mechanisms.

Moreover, *CoS* is not an irrational work of fiction. It is based on familiar and real events and ideas which are, however, distorted through polarisation and represented as moderate and realistic. This may manipulate readers' perception of familiarity and realism to fit with *CoS's* realism which is arguably not realistic. The narrative is also full of metaphoric and foregrounded aesthetics that offer vivid imagery and psychological depth to its frame as will be elaborated on later. Thereby, readers are going to construct their mental models and simulate *CoS's* vicarious experience from an extremely polarised source. These observations are explained below in terms of their potential impact on readers following some relevant theories.

2.6. The potential impact of a Polarised Frame of Reference.

Four theoretical views can be used to demonstrate how readers' beliefs and attitudes may be affected by engagement with the polarization of *CoS's* frame of reference. I begin with framing effect theory to argue that *CoS's* construction of immigration can be linked to the broader field of media effects studies. In this context, I propose that *CoS's* polarized frame of reference is a 'conflict frame' that may reinforce readers' attitude polarization. Second, I'll demonstrate how the way conflict is constructed encourages readers to feel empathy for the racist heroes who are being victimized, alongside feelings of disgust for the criminal immigrants. Thirdly, I'll show how *CoS* can make readers feel transported and enjoy themselves, which increases their susceptibility to narrative persuasion. Finally, I will conclude using Strange's (2002) hypothesis of how readers' perceptions of factual issues can be influenced by narrative fabrications.

2.6.1. Not just polarization, a Conflict frame.

The potential impact of *CoS's* polarised frame of reference on readers' beliefs and attitudes can be explained using frame effect theory from media effects studies. This enables the association of this particular case of fiction with the wider domain of framing analysis in media psychology. This is because framing analysis suggests that 'the way people understand an issue is likely to vary depending on how it is presented in the news media' (Kim & Zhou, 2020, 937). I propose that framing analysis can be extended beyond news media because narratives in general, and *CoS* in this case also present different issues using different frames which may likely influence readers' interpretations and responses, as I am going to explain.

As I have demonstrated above, the novel does not simply push the main characters, realism, and values into extreme opposites, it also does so by means of emphasising conflict and tension on all levels of discourse. In fact, *CoS* insists on conflict which can be interpreted for example, from the causal chain of its events to the diction it uses. Overall, the causal relationship between the East and West characterises immigration as an 'invasion' (02). This positions the East as a perpetrator against the West. The novel then portrays the transgressions committed by the immigrants against white people such as 'looting' (05) or turning them into 'pâté' (86). Conflict can also be interpreted from a war-related diction to associate immigration with violence such as 'vanguard' (02), 'the hideous army' (04), 'legions of Antichrist' (72), 'battalions' (115), or 'militias' (117). Other expressions such as 'peaceful assault' or 'defenceless bastards' also imply that immigration is a peaceful form of invasion or assault because immigrants come disarmed.

In fact, *CoS's* frame of reference adds increasing tension, clash, and division between the Western heroes and the immigrant villains to the extent where violence and racism are pushed as justifiable means for self-protection. This means that the polarised frame of reference constructed in *CoS* promotes radical 'beliefs and attitudes that sanction, legitimize and compel violence as a means to achieve social change' (van Eerten, et al., 2017, 13). *CoS* does so by the organization of information (that is *CoS's* frame of reference) to make the differences and negative aspects of immigration more salient in the relationship between the parties involved through racial polarization. This conceptualises *CoS's* frame of reference as a conflict frame as identified in media effects studies. The impact of this type of frame is linked to attitude polarization as it is discussed below.

The effect of framing anti-immigration in terms of conflict can be explained in light of framing effect theory that was proposed by Goffman (1974) and applied to media analysis by Entman (1993). Goffman suggests that individuals follow 'schemata of interpretation' to make sense of themselves and the world around them. A frame is a 'central organizing idea' or a plotline that gives context to a series of events as they develop (Gamson & Modigliani 1989). However, because frames are matters of information selection and salience, they tend to guide and limit considerations and interpretations of particular issues (Kim & Zhou, 2020). Likewise, Entman suggests that the media select and make certain information more salient in frames 'to define problems, to diagnose a course, to make value judgments, and to suggest remedies' (Linström & Marais, 2012, 25). Among the generic frames media use to organise an issue is conflict frames (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). These are used to emphasise

contest, disagreement, incompatibility, and tension between groups, individuals, and so on, to grab individuals' interest (Bartholomé, et al., 2018).

However, what is relevant to this explanation is that the effects of conflict frames are linked to attitude polarization (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016; Han & Federico, 2018; Han & Yzer, 2019) for the long term (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011). For example, Kim and Zhou (2020) used a conflict-oriented news story either among political partisans or scientists about GMO food to test different levels of polarisation on readers. They found that when framing a scientific issue in terms of political conflict to make political identity and self-categorization salient, it compels individuals to think in terms of identity which then results in participants' perceptual and attitudinal polarization. Therefore, I suggest that the same outcome of attitude polarization might be predicted from engagement with *CoS*. This is because the narrative frames mass migration in terms of conflict between the East and West, liberals and conservatives, left and right…etc. This framing makes identity affiliation and group belonginess more salient which can subsequently guide the identification of readers who hold the same identity with *CoS's* heroes. The outcome of identification with *CoS's* heroes may lead to attitude polarization and therefore radicalization. The implication of readers' group affiliation on identification will be explained separately later.

To conclude this section, I suggest that framing immigration in terms of conflict between Europeans and non-Europeans creates a frame of reference that may limit readers' perception of the topic to be more aligned with its radical anti-immigration perspective. By framing immigration as conflict, *CoS* manipulates readers by making information in favour of anti-immigration more salient and dominant, while dismissing information that goes against it. To be more precise, *CoS* polarises its narrative-world by constructing a causal structure where the immoral, powerful, and perpetrating villains cause the moral, vulnerable, and victimised heroes overwhelming pain and eventual destruction. This structure emphasises conflict which is associated with attitude polarisation. As such, the selection, salience, and organization of anti-immigration in terms of conflict may limit readers' interpretations and orient their attention and empathy to side with the victims, who are in fact violent racists. Absorption into *CoS's* conflict frame may then influence readers to empathise with its racist heroes. In turn, this may increase readers' susceptibility to adopt consistent radical and racist attitudes as some evidence suggests (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, et al, 2013b). The potential for such disposition and its implication on readers' beliefs and attitudes are discussed below.

2.6.2. Empathic identification with racists.

The conflict frame constructed by *CoS's* polarised context may have implications on readers' responses towards its heroes and villains. These responses which are going to be explained in light of empathic identification can also increase their potential to adopt radical beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, using narrative persuasion research, I am going to demonstrate all the ways *CoS* follows to orient readers' empathic identification with its racist heroes. I am also going to propose that *CoS's* potential elicitation of readers' empathic identification can reach a wider audience, depending on readers' self-categorisation.

2.6.2.1. Distribution of empathy.

The use of a conflict frame in a conventional hero-villain narrative structure is likely to orient readers' empathy toward *CoS's* racist heroes and resentment toward its immigrant villains. This is likely to occur because of the likability, vulnerability, and victimhood associated with its heroes, alongside the unlikability and abjection used in the portrayal of its villains. This fits with Lindhé's (2016) account that narratives are able to distribute readers' empathic responses towards particular characters, especially the protagonist. However, while doing so, narratives can also generate resentment towards marginal characters and the antagonist. In other words, to empathise with the protagonist means to block empathy for the antagonist who hinders the progress of the former. These dispositions, for Lindhè (2016), as discussed below, are facilitated by techniques of conflict between characters, and tension between story and discourse.

Lindhé (2016) draws this theory from Breithaupt's (2012) three-person model of empathy which challenges the dominant view that empathy involves only two persons. According to Breithaupt's theory, people use mental exercises to prevent losing their sense of self and perspective by restraining their too empathic reactions. . This is because humans are considered 'hyper empathic', which means that they cannot not empathise with others by adopting their different feelings and perspectives. However, situations that involve side-taking such as witnessing conflict seem to trigger empathy by bypassing the inhibitory mechanisms that block it. This side-taking involves three positions, not two, such as the case of engagement with narratives where readers observe conflict between the protagonist and antagonist within a clear causal interaction. Empathy for Breithaupt (2012) as Lindhé (2016) states is 'an effect of side-taking in a three-person interaction in which one person observes a situation involving some kind of conflict or tension between two other individuals' (30).

This means that readers' empathy can be activated as a consequence of side-taking with characters in conflict.

Lindhé's (2016) proposition is applicable to the narrative situation created by *CoS's* two-dimensional characterisation. Conflict at this level of narrative that is generated by racial polarization is likely to influence the distribution of readers' empathy. Readers are invited to a polarised narrative world where heroes and villains are conflicted with each other in all ways imaginable. If conflict activates side-taking and then empathy (as Breithaupt (2012) theorises), it is likely that the conflict frame of *CoS* may intuitively induce readers' side-taking with its heroes. Thereby, readers are likely to empathise and identify with the heroes, as well as resenting the immigrant villains. According to Lindhé (2016), this is likely to occur when narratives create tension between story and discourse to guide readers' empathic distributions. This technique is explained in the next sub-section by considering aspects of point of view in *CoS*.

2.6.2.2. Empathy and perspectivizing.

The inevitable imbalance in the tension created between story and discourse refers to the orientation of readers' attention within discourse (the way a story is told) and the patterning of the story (the sequence of what happened) (Chatman, 1978; Woloch, 2003). This can be observed, for instance, in the uneven distribution of attention between major and minor characters through focalisation and narrative voice as discourse elements. To cite Lindhé (2016) again, she theorises that the conflict created at this level is likely to influence readers' attention and empathy. In this context, more attention and empathy are expected to occur for the hero, and less attention and withdrawal of empathy for the villain. This dynamic can be interpreted from *CoS's* use of a heterodiegetic narrator that focalises the narrative from the third-person point of view of the racist heroes. It can also be observed in the conflict in association networks between the likability of *CoS's* heroes, and unlikability of its villains. However, for this sub-section, I am going to focus on how *CoS's* perspectivising from the racist heroes' point of view distributes readers' empathic responses towards its racist heroes as Lindhé's (2016) proposes.

The representation of characters' thoughts and feelings is a recognised technique for the elicitation of readers' empathic identification (van Krieken, Hoeken & Sanders, 2017; Aare, 2016; Wimmer, et al., 2021). This occurs even more readily for 'negative feeling states', regardless of similarity in prior experience (Keen, 2007, 72). In line with this evidence, *CoS's* omniscient narrator focalises the story using heterodiegetic narration from the third-person

point of view of the Western characters. This way of focalisation invites readers to consider the narrative world and its immigration-related assertions from the point of view of the racists heroes, not the immigrants. In other words, *CoS* uses an omniscient narrator that focalises the narrative from the heroes' third-person point of views to convey their thoughts and feelings for the reader to experience. In contrast, the immigrant villains do not have such capacity. They are available for story development, but their internal lives and point of view are mostly absent in discourse. Thereby, readers' empathic identification towards *CoS's* racist heroes may occur as a result of making their consciousness accessible for readers in discourse, while silencing the immigrants.

For example, the narrator states that 'the Sikh guard tightened his rump, and felt a cold sweat trickling down his thighs, as his gun barrel trembled madly against a sky turned black with shaking fists' (18). The omniscient narrator conveys the feelings of the Sikh, who is a favourable character, guarding Consul Himmans. More importantly, the narrator conveys two emotional states of characters in conflict: the Sikh and the fictional Indians in port. The reader can understand how the Sikh felt in that situation. Emotive verbs such as 'felt a cold' or 'trembled madly' convey the negatively valanced feelings of the Sikh which may influence readers to feel sorry for him. Simultaneously, the expression 'a sky turned black with shaking fists' that refers to the immigrants' reaction towards the Sikh is emotionally obscure. It implies perhaps the size of reactors and their anger. However, although this metaphor refers to a negative feeling state, it is not warm or subjective. The immigrants, here, are referred to ambiguously by substituting them with the metaphor, 'shaking fists'. This depersonalises them which is also reinforced by syntax where the immigrants are placed as an object in the sentence. Thereby, if emotion presentation orients readers' attention and feelings such as empathy toward particular characters, the passage may orient them towards the Sikh because the focalisation centres his thoughts and feelings for readers to share and simulate. In other words, the racist heroes, in general, become the perspectivising characters from which the narrative is rendered. This in turn is likely to have a causal effect on character identification as readers are found to identity and take on the perspective of the focalising character, not the other characters (see de Graaf, et al., 2012).

Moreover, the expression above uses third-person point of view which may not create the most psychological closeness or spontaneity of experience between reader and character as some studies suggest (Segal, et al., 1997). Nonetheless, the potential effect of point of view on readers' empathy is characterised by mixed results (see Hartung et al., 2017,

for a challenging account). As such, I share the recent consensus (Christy, 2018; Wimmer, et al., 2021) that the idiosyncrasy of narrative context, in this case, *CoS's* polarised frame of reference, may be more useful to analysis than making a generalisable prediction based on a type of point of view. This also means that point of view is manipulated by the general narrative context it occurs into, as explained below.

In fact, types of point of view play different roles depending on discourse manipulations. In this context, third-person point of view is hypothesised to give readers an impression of authority, trust, and reliability than first-person point of view (Meretoja, 2018, 229; van Lissa, et al., 2016). For instance, van Lissa and colleagues (2016) found that point of view did not influence readers' empathy for characters, but it affected their trust towards them. The researchers manipulated a narrative using first-person point of view and third-person point of view with internal focalisation. They found that reading the narrative perspective in third-person point of view significantly increased trust for the character than reading it in first-person point of view. They concluded that 'the increase in trust in third-person narrative depends on the external narrator's authority, which validates the perspective of the protagonist' (43). As such, it seems that *CoS's* omniscient narrator that validates the racist heroes' thoughts and feelings can increase readers' trust towards them.

In the same regard, other studies show that using third-person point of view can especially be effective in eliciting readers' empathic identification when the protagonist is an outgroup member (Kauffman & Libby, 2012; Christy, 2018). Christy (2018) explains that first-person point of view compels readers to merge with the outgroup protagonist which may create reactance in them to reassert their group affiliation. However, third-person point of view allows readers to experience the narrative without triggering that reactance. To exemplify a study, students participated in an experiment in which they read either a first- or third-person point of view tale about voting that was told by either a student from their own institution (the ingroup) or a student from a competing university (the outgroup). The first-person point of view was noticeably more successful at encouraging actual voting behaviour, and perspective-taking among the participants who read a narrative told by an ingroup member. But the third-person point of view was more successful in boosting identification (also known as experience-taking) and voting behaviour for those who heard the tale told by an outgroup member (Kauffman & Libby, 2012). By drawing on these results, it seems possible to expect that readers may respond to the racist heroes with trust and

empathy, even if they do not belong to the same identity. This implication will be developed in another section.

Although third-person point of view is assumed not to create stronger psychological closeness between reader and character (Segal, et al., 1997; Christy, 2018) as mentioned earlier, I suggest that it can be mitigated by using of heterodiegetic narration (Keen, 2006, 219) and free indirect discourse (Keen, 2007, 96). These known devices may create closeness from enabling the representation of characters' internal perspectives (see Keen, 2007; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). As seen above, heterodiegetic narration that is authoritative by convention, gives access and validation to characters' thoughts and feelings which in turn increase readers' trust in them (van Lissa, et al., 2016). Therefore, when the narrator says, for example, that '[t]he Consul, poor man, didn't know what a pose he had struck. He had looked for no models to follow. He had felt no epic grandeur in his soul, no taste for theatrics' (18), the narrator centres and authenticates the perception of this main character for the reader to witness with an implied authority. This is because the grammatic structure of the sentence in free indirect discourse combines the authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator with the muted voice of the Consul. This mode of narration allows the omniscient narrator to report the thoughts and feelings which otherwise cannot be accessible to anyone, except the Consul himself as facilitated by the lack of indexical elements and reporting verbs. This accessibility to character's consciousness may induce readers' to empathise with the dire situation of the Consul.

To note here, *CoS* uses a mixture of direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse in its mode of discourse presentation. However, the narrative voice of the omniscient narrator uses free indirect discourse more frequently. Indeed, I propose that although these modes of discourse can allow readers to witness the thoughts and feelings of characters, it is mostly through free indirect discourse that the heterodiegetic narrator implies itself. This is to direct readers' attention and empathy towards the heroes by reporting and validating their perception. Thereby, the voice of the racist heroes becomes combined with that of the authoritative narrator to guide readers' experience and interpretation of the narrative world. Although, I predict an empathic response in readers from this narrative discourse, the evidence is not yet robust. The effect of free indirect discourse on readers' empathy (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003) is limited to the idiosyncrasies of narrative situations investigated (for a critical study, Fletcher, 2016; Hakemulder & Koopman, 2010; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). However, the association of free indirect discourse with

accessibility, transparency and psychological closeness created from reporting on characters' thoughts and feelings for the reader to experience (Hakemulder & Koopman 2010; Kotovych et al., 2011, 262) may potentially induce readers' empathic identification with them (Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017, 14; Keen, 2007, 93).

To conclude this section, *CoS* may distribute readers' empathy towards its racist heroes, alongside their feelings of resentment towards its immigrant villains through the manipulation of their representation in story and discourse as Lindhé (2016) proposes. While the villains are necessary for the development of story, the discourse elements of heterodiegetic narration, focalisation from the heroes' third-person point of view, and free indirect discourse works in favour of the racist heroes. This gives readers access to the consciousness and perception of the heroes which may then allow them to share their thoughts and feelings as many studies point (Keen, 2007; Cohen, 2001). This emotion and discourse presentation is mostly denied for the immigrant villains which, adding on to their dehumanization and association with disgust, stops warm feelings towards them (Harris & Fiske, 2006; 2011).

To cite Lindhé (2016) again, this narrative context allows readers to empathise and understand the plight of the racist heroes as 'Others'. At the same time, it denies empathy and understanding for the immigrant villains as 'the Other's Other'. For this reason, Lindhè (2021) argues that 'reading literature does not merely teach us to empathize but also to withhold empathy. As much as literature invites us to feel ourselves into the other, we are also involved in creating new others, thus implicating readers in processes of empathy and othering' (226). Thereby, the polarised nature *CoS's* frame of reference which is maintained through racial polarisation in characterisation and conflict illustrates how empathy can be directed toward evil characters who promote racism and violence as justifiable means for social change. This means that to empathically identify with a character is not always ethically beneficial as some literary ethicists and psychologists seem to believe (Nussbaum, 1997; Pinker, 2011; Oatley, 2016) because it sometimes invites readers to be 'complicit' in the process of 'Othering' (Lindhé, 2021). This prediction is explained further in the next sub-section by considering how *CoS* manipulates readers' side-taking and empathy by manipulating the likability and unlikability of the two-dimensional characters, their attractiveness and disgust, and their roles as victims and perpetrators.

2.6.2.3. Empathy and Likability.

In this sub-section, I am going to connect racial polarisation in the representation of *CoS's* two-dimensional characters to empathy. As seen in the first half of the chapter, *CoS's* heroes are represented as pure, knowledgeable, and peaceful people who are invaded by disgusting and fearsome immigrants (see 4.1.). The affective implication of such narrative representation can be explained in light of ADT (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) which suggests that characters' morality plays a central role in their evaluation. In particular, characters who have good intentions and behave morally generate likability and sympathy in readers, contrary to characters who have bad intentions and behave immorally. Following the rationale of ADT, *CoS's* racist heroes are characterised with traits to manipulate readers' likability for them. This depends on 'our notions of right and wrong; it must be morally justified […] viewers monitor and evaluate the behaviors and motivations of characters in order to judge which are worthy of our favor and which are due our disdain' (Raney, 2017, 02). Thereby, because *CoS* constructs its heroes and villains as moral opposites, readers may see them in the same light. This can be illustrated from the passage below when French soldiers were burning the corpses of migrants on shore, while Professor Calguès observed them.

> He opened his binoculars and trained them on the highest of the piles, flaming neatly along like a wooden tower, loaded with corpses from bottom to top. The soldiers had stacked it with care, first a layer of wood, then a layer of flesh, and so on all the way up […] pushing the bodies together into soft, slimy mounds, scooping a load in the air and pouring it onto the fire, as arms and legs and heads, and even whole cadavers overflowed around them and fell to the ground. It was then that the professor saw the first soldier turn and run […] The young man had dropped the corpse he was dragging. He had wildly thrown down his helmet and mask, ripped off his safety gloves. Then, hands clutched to temples, he dashed off, zigzag, like a terrified jackrabbit, into the ring of darkness beyond the burning pile. Five minutes more, and ten other soldiers had done the same (04).

First of all, the imagery generated from the quote above shows a soldier in panic and distress from the burning of corpses. The reader can vividly imagine the apocalyptic scene of burnt bodies. The expressions 'a wooden tower, loaded with corpses from bottom to top', 'whole cadavers overflowed', and 'scooping a load in the air and pouring it onto the fire' give the event visual and sensory details as the word 'Slimy' or 'scooping' connotate. More importantly, the narrator's description of the soldiers' distress and pain, through Calguès's

focalisation, may create feelings of situational empathy. To explain, the emotional presentation from expressions such as 'the first soldier turn and run […] dropped the corpse […] wildly thrown his helmet […] ripped off his safety gloves […] hands clutched to temples, he dashed off, zigzag, like a terrified jackrabbit' is clear and negative. The vivid description conveys the panic of the 'young' soldier who was forced to contribute to this horror because the West, remember, does not burn the dead in public. Thereby, if empathy is felt more strongly for negative affect (Keen, 2007, 73), this terrible situation is likely to trigger readers' situational empathy for the soldier from the suspense created from his situation of harm (Nünning, 2015, 44).

Moreover, the passage above can elicit readers' disposition to side with the soldier because he has the altruistic intention and behaviour to take care of the dead and not leave them to decay in the open air. However, in doing such 'untraditional' and 'non-Western' behaviour, the soldier lost his mind. On the other hand, although the reader may infer the obscured sufferance of the immigrants who died in their journey to France, their pain is obscured by their inactive, anonymous, dehumanised, and inanimate representation as mere 'corpses' with no 'internal lives' as Harris and Fiske (2006) puts it in their study about dehumanization. Thereby, the dead that belong to the immigrants are denied warmth and sympathy by their lack of emotion presentation. They are indeed the inanimate 'culprit' who caused the French soldier to flee in terror. The representation of corpses is dehumanised and alienating. They are not just represented without sympathy and warmth, they are also objectified into 'cadavers', or 'arms and legs and heads'. Descriptions that create both horror and psychological distance. As such, the passage orients readers' disdain toward the dead (the immigrants too) because they are unlikable and unsympathetic for hurting the soldier. In turn, the soldier thus deserves readers' empathy as he is likable and more sympathetic. This fits with what the Affective Disposition Theory (Raney, 2017) posits.

> The greater the liking (i.e., the more positive the affective disposition), the stronger the empathic response. Feelings of empathy are accompanied by anticipatory emotions, as well. Not only do we feel for characters in their moments of emotional struggle, but we actively hope for them to avoid more suffering and experience success in the future. In contrast, once we dislike characters, we cannot empathize with them (or, some suggest, we experience counterempathy toward them). Because disliked characters typically cause the pain, suffering, and struggles experienced by liked characters, we are free to wish for their downfall and demise (i.e., we form negative anticipatory emotions) (Raney, 2017, 03).

As such, when *CoS* orients its readers to view the racist heroes as likable and sympathetic victims of the dehumanised and antagonised immigrants, the narrative encourages them to empathically identify with the virtuous victim, not the perpetrator. This is the main point of the next sub-section.

2.6.2.4. Empathy and victimization.

In addition to the likability of the racist heroes and the unlikability of the immigrant villains which were linked above to empathy, *CoS* may increase this potential through its main themes of dehumanisation (that is perceived threat) and victimization (perceived vulnerability). These themes relate to the radicalisation mechanisms of elicitation of grievances and perception of threat. That is to say; the heroes are not just likable characters (peaceful and knowledgeable), but they are, most importantly, vulnerable victims who face invasion and destruction by the threat of millions of migrants. The fact that the heroes are vulnerable victims can generate readers' empathy towards them because humans feel empathy for victims not perpetrators (Leake, 2014; Gray & Wegner, 2009). In turn, the villain immigrants are not just disgusting and dehumanised, they are also powerful perpetrators causing the misery of heroes. Under this juxtaposition, the heroes become sympathetic victims who deserve readers' empathy, while the disgusting representation of the immigrant villains makes it difficult to feel warmth towards them. Again, if conflict activates empathy (Breithaupt, 2012; Lindhé, 2016), it is likely to be with the humanised, sympathetic, and identifiable victims who experience pain and suffering, not the dehumanised, unidentifiable millions of perpetrators.

The distribution of readers' empathy following this particular dynamic can be explained in part using the identifiable victim effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). According to this preferential tendency, individuals experience more emotional reaction (such as empathy) and greater willingness to help in situations where a single and identifiable victim is present than when an anonymous or statistical group of victims is present (Decety & Cowell, 2015). This may be due to role of attention that begins to lose focus and intensity when the number of statistic victims increases which in turn reduces individuals' positive affect and helping behaviour (for more details, see Long, 2020, 15-17). Studies show that the identifiable victim effect increases willingness to help for one victim with a personal information such as a picture, not a group of eight victims with no identifying pictures (Kogut & Ritov, 2005).

Nonetheless, the identifiable victim effect is used below to explain the distribution of empathy from *CoS's* representation of a single victim facing a large number of perpetrators. It is not to explain a distinction in emotional reaction for a single victim versus a group of victims, as the phenomenon does in its origin. This also fits with what Leake (2014) calls 'easy empathy'. In this type of empathy, readers 'are commonly asked to empathize with those who are seen as most deserving of our empathy. These are victims of abuse and oppression. This is a relatively easy form of empathy because who would not want to empathize with those who are the victims of abuse by others' (176).

To explain, *CoS* represents its heroes as single and personalised individuals (Professor Calguès or Consul Himmans) facing the overwhelming numbers of immigrant villains. In contrast, the immigrants are depersonalised by their homogeneous antagonization and dehumanisation using disgust. This can be illustrated from the death of Consul Himmans. Now, imagine that the single, known, and psychologically accessible hero is the perspectivizing character, while the many perpetrators are without psychological depth or point of view. It thus becomes less surprising that readers are encouraged to take the side and perspective of the heroes. For example, when Belgium stopped adopting Indian babies, the fictional Indians decided to migrate to Europe from ports of 'Calcutta'. To stop the ships from sailing, Consul Himmans took his army of one guard with his one rifle and went to the port. The narrator describes.

> People talked about "Consul Himmans and his foolish heroics," but without the slightest concern for the little man trampled by the mob until he was nothing but a puddle of blood on the Ganges shore […] The Consul, poor man […] He had looked for no models to follow. He had felt no epic grandeur in his soul, no taste for theatrics […] His army, for example, reduced to a single soldier—the faithful Sikh [..] High noon, and there by the docks the little Western Consul appeared, at the head of his army. To say that the army's morale was low would be rather an understatement; it was catastrophic. The army was in utter disarray. Its antique rifle trembled in time with its panic. The mob was sizzling in the noonday sun […] In no time a murderous cry had gone up […] The Consul struggled to push his way through the mass of flesh, growing denser and denser […] At which point the army deserted. It did so in the disarray of utter defeat […]The Sikh thrust his rifle into the Consul's hands, and dove into the Ganges […] The Consul was thrown to the ground in a frenzy of blows […] the bishop thought he saw, there on the deserted dock by the Ganges, a score of stray dogs lapping up a shining pool of blood (18-20).

By considering the discussion of the identifiable victim effect provided above, the imagery of this extract shows a single hero, Consul Himmans taking his army of one guard to fight 'the mob' or 'the mass of flesh' who eventually killed him nonchalantly. The hero, here, is known by name, occupation, personality, and even appearance. He is also described in terms of vulnerability as 'the little man', or 'the poor man', a noble warrior who 'looked for no models to follow. He had felt no epic grandeur in his soul, no taste for theatrics'. This description suggests that consul Himmans acted on instinct, selflessly to do the right thing. In opposition, the perpetrators who took his life are unidentifiable and unpredictable as the words 'mob' or 'mass' indicate. The power of the immigrant perpetrators is in their numbers under which Consul Himmans was 'trampled' into a 'puddle of blood' or 'a shining pool of blood', the dogs were seen licking. This representation of a single and personalised victim is likely to trigger readers' feelings of empathy toward the consul, and resentment toward the migrants who nonchalantly killed him.

Through this manipulation *CoS* creates identifiable and single victims facing unidentifiable and depersonalised group of perpetrators. This may likely to orient readers' empathic identification towards the single heroes, not the immigrant perpetrators. Long (2020) explains that this is likely to occur because

> A single victim is perceived as a more psychologically coherent unit than a group of victims. As such, the perceiver feels less psychologically distant with the single victim than groups. It is easier to adopt a single victim's perspective and process the information of the individuals at a more concrete level than groups, leading to stronger emotional responses (15).

This also fits with previous observations that the single victims are also likable and emotionally accessible characters. It thus seems intuitive to assume that readers of *CoS* may feel more psychological closeness from its representation of a victimised single hero in confrontation with large numbers of threatening immigrant perpetrators.

The assumption that readers are likely to side with the victims, not their perpetrators is supported by the Dyad Model (Gray & Wegner, 2009), and a study presented in IGEL by Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt (2022) on spontaneous side-taking and narrative victimization. The Dyad Model has empirical support for individuals' preference and side-taking in a conflict situation with the victims, described as 'moral patients', not the perpetrators, described as 'immoral agents' (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt (2022) also confirm the findings of the Dyad Model using a narrative situation of

victimhood. They found that narratives in general orient readers' attention toward victims to align their empathy and perspective-taking with them. The study demonstrated that in narratives of conflict between two characters, readers take the side and empathise with the perceived victim who was identified with sympathetic background information. They tend to judge the victim as understandable, moral, and relatable. They also perceive the victim as narrator of the narrative, and remember them better than the perpetrator. The researchers conclude that perceived disadvantages (perceived vulnerability and grievances of *CoS's* racist heroes) and victimization trigger spontaneous side-taking in narratives and can potentially lead to on-going polarization (Woodward, Hiskes, & Breithaupt, 2022, under review). This evidence support my proposition that *CoS* relies on radicalisation mechanisms of perceived threat and grievances to characterise her racist heroes with victimhood to direct readers' empathy towards them.

To conclude the above discussion, it seems that *CoS* has potential to induce readers' empathic identification with its racist heroes. This is likely to stem from their characterisation as likable, vulnerable, single, victims facing millions of unlikable, powerful, numerous perpetrators as explained using Affective Disposition Theory (Raney, 2017) and the identifiable victim effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). Empathic identification may also be influenced from framing the relationship between the racist heroes and immigrant perpetrators using a conflict frame which is associated with attitude polarisation (Kim & Zhou, 2020). Also, when individuals observe conflict (including fictional ones), they tend to empathise by taking the side most worthy of their empathy such as the side of a victim (Breithaupt, 2012; Lindhé, 2016; Leake, 2014).

Therefore, if readers are going to respond to *CoS* as delineated above, their potential for persuasion of radicalisation may increase. This is because readers who identify are expected to reduce their counterarguing (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé, Chung & Jain, 2011) and increase their moral disengagement (Raney, 2004; Raney, et al., 2009). These may encourage them to align their beliefs and attitudes with *CoS's* radical and racist perspective (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Hoeken, 2017) without dissonance or guilt. These processes are in turn found to increase potential for narrative-based persuasion (see Slater & Rouner, 2002; Chen & Chang, 2017). Character identification as discussed in the previous chapter invites readers to internalise the feelings, goals, perspectives (Oatley, 2008; Cohen, 2001) and personality traits (Sestir & Green, 2010) of the character they identify with, in this case, *CoS's* racist heroes.

In light of this evidence, I conclude that *CoS* is a persuasive work of fiction that may have detrimental effects on readers' morality and prosocial attitudes in relation to group relationships. I also suggest that this potential may exceed readers' group affiliation to reach even readers who are not necessarily white Europeans. I mean that it is perhaps simpler to expect that *CoS* may easily persuade readers who belong to the same ethnic group of its racist heroes. However, I suggest a far reaching persuasive effect, even for outgroup readers as it is explained separately below.

2.6.2.5. The Issue of Readers' Identity.

It is useful to discuss readers' identity as a potential variable that may influence their responses and potential persuasion from *CoS*. This is because the topic of *CoS* makes group identity salient to motivate self-categorisation. This was illustrated above from many levels of *CoS's* polarised frame of reference. As such, the political and racialist nature of *CoS* requires a discussion of readers' identity in relation to its anti-immigration thesis. To note here, identification with a similar group is another mechanism of radicalisation (see van Stekelenburg, 2014; Choudhury, 2007; Smith, Blackwood, & Thomas; 2019). McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) state that radicalisation 'occurs in a context of group identification and reaction to perceived threat to the ingroup' (514). They explain that some individuals think that they 'are a special or chosen group (superiority) who have been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), no one else cares about us or will help us (distrust), and the situation is dire—our group and our cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability)' (514). However, although I referred to a middling readers who does not necessarily hold a rigid position in relation to the politics of immigration, group identity may manifest in a complex way as I will explain in this section.

This is also important to consider because almost all discussions of empathic identification refer to perceived similarity between reader and character as an antecedent (Cohen, 2001; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Chen, Bell, & Taylor, 2016). In this context, many studies investigate the role of perceived similarity in relation to identification and group identity (Kauffman & Libby, 2012; Christy, 2018). Nevertheless, as I will delineate below, I propose a challenging account in which *CoS* may elicit outgroup readers' feelings of empathy with its racist heroes based on its themes of victimization and dehumanization. In other words, I suggest that *CoS* may appeal to outgroup readers' primal pathos of empathy with the victim, and repulsion from disgust objects. To do so, I am going

to draw on relevant studies about the similarity-identification hypothesis, the elusive nature of identity, and Keen's (2008) three types of strategic empathy.

To begin, the similarity-identification hypothesis suggests that readers are likely to strongly identify with characters of the same age, sex, ethnicity, and other meaningful psychological ways (Cohen, 2006; Cohen, Weimann-Saks, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2018). Thereby, it seems intuitive to assume that readers who have the same identity as *CoS's* heroes may identify more strongly with them, not the immigrant villains. At the same time, outgroup readers who share the same identity of the immigrants may identity with them, not the Western heroes. However, while this prediction can be withstanding, I disagree with its simplified generalisability. I argue that readers who share the ethnic identity of the Western heroes may empathically identify with them, while readers who do not share the same ethnic identity of the Western heroes (readers who share the identity of the immigrants) may also empathically identity with the Western heroes. I reason that this is likely because of the 'universal' disposition to avert disgust and side with the victim. To put is differently, I am going to explain that readers' perceived similarity at the level of their shared responses toward disgust and victimhood may be stronger than their perceived similarity of group affiliation.

There are four reasons for this prediction that come from research of the similarity-identification hypothesis. First, this hypothesis has generated mixed empirical results. Some studies have demonstrated that perceived similarity increases identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Chen, Bell, & Taylor, 2016). Other studies did not find such correlation (Cohen, Weimann-Saks, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2018; Cohen, 2006). This means that readers can identity whether they share similar attributes with the character or not. Second, sometimes textual devices and narrative techniques can help induce empathic identification in readers when no match in experience exists (Keen, 2007; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020). These include narrative perspective (Hoeken, Kolthoff, & Sanders, 2016) and perceived vulnerability (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010) when character and reader are dissimilar. This means that perceived similarity can be overcome by other aspects of narrative.

Third, the direction of causality is also unknown in the sense that similarity increases identification, or identification makes the protagonist seem more similar (Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017, 141). Although this domain needs further investigation, the observation above may suggest that perceived similarity is an effect of empathic identification, not an antecedent. Fourth, some scholars emphasise the role of psychological similarity such as having similar

attitudes or personality traits (Cohen, 2006), not similarity at the level of demographic variables for identification to occur (Cohen, Weimann-Saks, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2018). This is useful because it broadens the scope of similarity to include more loose categories such as commonness in response to avert from disgust or to feel with victims.

In light of these perspectives, I perceive having the same identity as a psychological category through which readers can empathically identity with fictional characters who are similar to them. In fact, it is widely accepted that individuals empathise more with ingroup members, than members of outgroups (see Prinz, 2011; Fuchs, 2017; Han, 2018). Additionally, when *CoS* frames the issue of immigration in terms of conflict where group identity becomes salient, readers are likely to reassert their identity affiliation and polarise (Kim & Zhou, 2020). Kim and Zhou (2020) state '[i]f a news story portrays a conflict between two political parties on an issue, audiences may activate their party identity rather than any other identity' (943). Identification with a group in conflict situation, as was discussed previously, reinforces intergroup stereotyping and polarisation eventually (Kim & Zhou, 2020). In this vein, *CoS* invites readers to view immigration as conflict between East and West, and between left and right ideologies to encourage them to identity a side to empathise with. However, identity is an elusive concept that may include many layers of shared experience and attributes (Tobiassen, 2018), not necessarily limited to ethnic group.

For example, readers who belong to a different ethnic group from the Western heroes can still hold universal dispositions to empathise with victims and avert from disgust-inducing sources and experiences. Even readers who share the same identity as the immigrants may side with the Western heroes because they may hold beliefs against colonialism or multiculturalism. That is to say, they become an in-group who share the same values as *CoS's* heroes. These different constituents of identity may compel readers to side and empathise with the victim heroes, not their disgusting perpetrators. By making these aspects of the Self salient, *CoS* may reach a wider readership which can be primed to overlook the shared aspects of ethnic group identity. This narrative situation and predictive response can be explained using Keen's (2007; 2008) notion of authorial empathy in relation to group belonginess as I elaborate below.

Keen (2008) theorises that authors' attitude and intention can manifest in three types of authorial empathy to 'reach readers in immediate, more distant, and totally remote audiences, where the metaphor of nearness/distance also correlates with familiarity/strangeness and sameness/otherness' (479). Keen (2008) suggests that Bounded,

Ambassadorial, and Broadcast strategic empathy determine the transaction between author's intention, empathy, language, and readers' identity, empathy, response. Keen (2007; 2008) is useful to the discussion of *CoS's* potential elicitation of readers' empathy because it offers a new lens to consider the author's empathic attitude in regard to readers' fluid group identity. As I am going to argue, Keen's (2008) taxonomy that does not specify the boundaries of group belonginess is both useful in allowing many aspects of identity to be implicated, and inconsistent during application, especially in relation to Bounded Strategic Empathy.

Keen (2008) explains that Broadcast Strategic Empath is used to reach a wider readership. It happens by calling 'upon every readers to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing our common human experiences, feelings, hopes, and vulnerabilities' through universalizing emotional representation (Keen, 2008, 488). Bestselling authors, pop fiction such as thrillers and romances reflect the effectiveness of this type of empathy to generate more feelings of immersion and emotional connectedness with a wide range of readership. By taking into consideration *CoS's* emotional rhetoric that is manifested in its themes of threat, grievances, nostalgia, and dehumanisation which can be universally recognised, it may seem plausible that even readers who do not belong to the same group as its Western heroes can feel with them. However, I doubt that this is Raspail's intention as it is apparent from his attitude and narratorial voice which assert indifference to what other groups think or feel. Thereby, if outgroup readers empathise with its Western heroes, that would be unintentional empathy. Keen (2008) calls this, 'empathic inaccuracy' where authors' intention to elicit empathy does not match with the feelings of readers towards particular characters.

Unlike the universalizing reach of broadcast strategic empathy, Ambassadorial Strategic Empathy occurs when an author writes for a specific out-group audience. Keen (2007) writes that this empathy 'addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end. Appeals for justice, recognition, and assistance often take this form' (142). *CoS's* call for violence and racism against the immigrants and their sympathizers in order to protect Western values is promoted as a twisted appeal for justice and assistance. For instance, *CoS* may be interpreted in this regard as using this form of authorial empathy to elicit specific out-group readers' empathy to feel with the West. However, because group identity is elusive and subjective, outgroup readers here can refer to both ethnic others, and to Western readers who are 'unenlightened' about

CoS's anti-immigration thesis. Thereby, if both types of readers empathise with its Western heroes, ambassadorial strategic empathy can only be fulfilled in the second case. Again, this is because I doubt that *CoS's* intention was about seeking justice or assistance from non-Western readers. This is clear in the narrated monologue of professor Calguès that '[m]an never has really loved humanity all of a piece—all its races, its peoples, its religions—but only those creatures he feels are his kin, a part of his clan' (04). This attitude is also explicit in the preface of its author that sounds unapologetically careless about 'cultivating' empathy outside of the West.

The final type of authorial empathy in Keen's (2008) taxonomy is Bounded Strategic Empathy which is used to elicit in-group members empathy based on the mutuality of experience and familiarity with similar others. This type of authorial empathy 'may indeed prevent outsiders from joining the empathic circle' (Keen, 2008, 481) based on the assumed role of perceived similarity to narrative effect. Bounded authorial empathy seems to describe *CoS's* narrative expression because it is clearly disinterested in what out-group members outside the West may think. Thereby, it might be predicted that only readers who share the same ethnic group as *CoS's* heroes can respond empathetically. It may thus be counterintuitive to predict that outgroup readers who do not share the same identity as the Western heroes can empathise with their plight.

Nonetheless, I suggest that the victimization of the heroes may create an identifiable victim bias (Kogut & Ritov, 2005) for readers to empathise with the few victim heroes. At the same time, the dehumanization of the immigrants through threat- and disgust-related imagery may create aversion and resentment towards them (Harris & Fiske, 2006; 2011). As mentioned before, disgust is a powerful emotion. Ngai (2007) describes as the 'ugliest' of 'ugly feelings', that 'is never ambivalent about its object' (335). She argues that disgust creates a sense of community and agreement against the object of disgust. In fact, media's association of immigrants with disgust elements was found to increase avoidance and racism against them (Karinen, et al., 2019; Krings, et al., 2012). Also, the third-person point of view used may also prevent outgroup readers from reasserting their distinct identity to take on the perspective of the Western heroes as mentioned earlier by Christy (2018). Henceforth, the empathic identification of outgroup readers who share a different ethnic identity with *CoS's* heroes can be plausible because of its appeal to their affective tendencies or biases.

In sum, the potential appeal of *CoS* to a wide range of ethnically distinct readership based on its emotional rhetoric of grievances, victimization, and dehumanization can make

its narrative perspective persuasive. Readers' empathic identification correlates with narrative-based persuasion (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014; Hoeken, Kolthoff, & Sanders, 2016; Kauffman & Libby, 2012; Chung & Slater, 2013). It also correlates with another mechanism of narrative persuasion which is narrative absorption (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Both enjoyable states that reduce negative thought responding and cognitive resistance (Green & Brock, 2000; Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Moyer-Gusé, 2008) can increase potential for *CoS's* radicalization. Readers who empathically identify with *CoS's* heroes experience the narrative perspective of its racist heroes' point of view. They become transported into their thoughts and feelings which may likely align their beliefs and attitudes with the heroes' radical and racist perspectives. This potential for persuasiveness, as discussed below, can also be supported using narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000; van Laear, et al., 2014).

2.6.3. Narrative Transportation in a Polarised Narrative.

After demonstrating that involvement with *CoS's* characters has some potential to align readers' beliefs and attitudes with their radical and racist perspectives, I am going to show that involvement with its story-world can also reinforce its potential persuasiveness as suggested by Slater and Rouner (2002, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.). As explained earlier, when readers experience feelings of absorption into a narrative, they tend to reduce counterarguing and critical elaboration which facilitates the alignment of their beliefs and attitudes with narrative perspective (see 1.5.2.1.). In other words, to justify the main thesis of this chapter that particular novels, such as *CoS* have potential for the persuasion of immoral and antisocial attitudes, I am going to argue that readers need to feel absorbed or narratively transported into its story-world. For an approach, I am going to connect some of its previously discussed techniques such as perceived realism, perceived familiarity, vivid imagery, and metaphors with its capacity to generate readers' narrative transportation.

Similar to studies of empathic identification, narrative transportation is often measured using short narrative passages and asking participants to report on their thoughts and feelings after they finish reading (Green & Brock, 2002; Escalas, 2004; Kuijpers, et al., 2014). However, I am going to apply the findings of these studies using qualitative analysis which may help to bridge the findings of media psychological research with literary analysis (see 1.4.). In this regard, studies have explored some textual techniques that can increase the elicitation of absorption feelings in readers. These include vivid imagery (Green & Brock,

2000), foregrounded style (Kuiken & mail, 1994), perceived realism and familiarity (Green, 2004) as discussed below..

2.6.3.1. Perceived Familiarity.

The first aspect of *CoS* that may facilitate readers' absorption into its narrative world is its ability to create a sense of familiarity in readers' perception. Green (2004) found that readers' prior knowledge about the main topic or themes of a narrative world increases their imagery which then positively increases their immersion into the story. In fact, perceived familiarity is positively correlated with narrative transportation and indirectly with narrative persuasion (van Laear, et al., 2014). As mentioned before, the salience of the topic of mass migration from the rest of the world to the West in media narratives can prime readers to perceive *CoS* as familiar. Some aspects of its plot can also seem familiar to readers such as the imagery of millions of migrants on ships can easily recall the actual images of refugees on boats crossing the Mediterranean. The atmosphere of nostalgia to the old days of the West, as discussed earlier (see 2.4.3.), may also trigger readers' sense of familiarity from the historical information it offers or from the imposed sense of familiarity the atmosphere brings on readers. Kim, Kim, and King (2019) explain that nostalgia can trigger individuals' emotional involvement (thoughts and feelings) such as intimacy towards a past experience which in turn renders it more familiar.

Therefore, I predict that both readers' prior knowledge about the topic of migration and themes like nostalgia can increase *CoS's* familiarity. In turn, this may facilitate their immersion into its world. Prior knowledge, here, does not refer to specialised field knowledge, but to the more general realisation that *CoS* deals with something familiar. This aspect can be deduced from the fact that the novel reemerged in public discussions during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 (Wampole, 2020). Indeed, some evidence suggests that perceived familiarity can occur from more general aspects of narrative such as the time of exposure. Vaughn and colleagues (2007) found that reading a story about winter in wintertime increased absorption more than reading it during summer. They explained that this occurs presumably because schemas such 'snow' and 'cold' are already primed in readers' minds. Therefore, by building on Green (2004), I predict that when *CoS* draws its storyline on familiar topics and themes that readers can recognise, they may easily construct mental imagery to enhance their imagination. In turn, the generation of mental imagery, as will be explained later, increases potential for narrative transportation and persuasion thereafter (Green & Brock, 2000; 2002).

2.6.3.2. Perceived Realism.

The second factor that may help readers be transported into *CoS's* narrative world is its ability to create a sense of realism in readers' perception. As discussed earlier, *CoS's* polarisation of the topic of mass migration has a twisted sense of realism which may manipulate readers to perceive it as plausible and realistic, while in essence it is a hyperbole trying to disguise as realism (Wampole, 2020). Perceived realism is often cited alongside perceived familiarity as antecedents of narrative absorption (van Laear, et al., 2014; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Perceived realism, according to Green (2004), is 'individuals' subjective evaluations of the plausibility and realism of story events, settings, and characters' (252). It does not refer to the truth or factuality of a story, but to its plausibility. Thereby, factors that draw attention away from the narrative world can hijack narrative transportation, identification (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011) and reduce enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). According to Busselle and Bilandzic (2008), narrative aspects such as violations of external realism (refers to inconsistency with the actual world) or internal realism (refers to inconsistencies within the logic of the fictional word) may reduce readers' engagement, increase negative evaluation, and reduce postexposure impact. As such, although the weight of perceived realism seems to fall on readers' susceptibility to judge as Green (2004) mentions above, the more a story is plausible internally and externally, the more it facilitates the narrative experience of transportation (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011).

Moreover, some studies have found that textual features such as the inclusion of typical information within a realist genre (Shapiro & Chock, 2003), and the consistency of character's emotions or emotional relevance (cited in Green, 2004, 253-4) can increase perception of realism. Accordingly, *CoS* seems to hold a level of realism that stems from the familiarity of its topic. To note, perceived realism and familiarity overlap with each other in the sense that what seems familiar, also seems realistic and vice versa. For instance, *CoS's* insertions of pamphlet-like dialogue between characters in conflict allows the inclusion of typical information that connects them to actual debates as Wampole (2020) suggests.

2.6.3.3. Vivid Imagery.

The third aspect of *CoS* that may increase readers' narrative transportation comes from its ability to generate vivid mental imagery. Indeed, when narratives are realistic and familiar, they are expected to facilitate mental imagery (Green, 2004). Many narrative engagement models include a subscale of mental imagery for its positive correlation with

imagination, transportation, and persuasion (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Kuijpers, et al., 2014; see The Theoretical Framework). Fitzgerald and Green (2017) explain that images take on their meaning from the contextual reference of narratives. The ability of narratives to associate images with beliefs enable the belief to be recalled when the associated image is recalled. This has an implication on persuasion in the sense that the ability of readers to generate vivid imagery from the narrative increases their absorption and in turn potential for persuasion (Fitzgerald & Green, 2017). Thereby, it is important to show what imagery *CoS* associates with each of its two-dimensional characters. However, before elaborating on this, it is crucial to understand what I mean by vivid imagery.

Vivid imagery is found to facilitate and enhance the construction of mental models which increase potential for narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2002; Jajdelska, et al., 2010, for a review of 'vividness'). In fact, mental imagery is a process of embedded simulation from sensory information without direct external stimuli (Nanay, 2018). Kosslyn, Behrmann and Jeannerod (1995) explain that '[v]isual mental imagery is 'seeing' in the absence of the appropriate immediate sensory input, auditory mental imagery is 'hearing' in the absence of the immediate sensory input, and so on. Imagery is distinct from perception, which is the registration of physically present stimuli' (1335). The production of vivid imagery which is more likely to improve mental modelling in imagination and simulation (Quinlan & Mar, 2020), increase reading comprehension (Long, Winograd & Bridge, 1989), and memory recall (see Marre, Huet, & Labeye, 2021; Bagri & Jones, 2018). All these processes have positive and significant impact on narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2002; Zheng, 2010; 2014; Quinlan & Mar, 2020).

Also, vivid imagery can be considered both a readers' and narrative ability. Although individuals vary in their 'susceptibility to mental imagery, all readers experience mental images some of the time, and some readers experience them all the time' (Kuzmičová, 2014, 275). Mental imagery can affect a range of modalities that correspond with the senses (visual/mind's eye, auditory/mind's ear, interoceptive, tactile, and so on). But visual mental imagery or visualization is the most studied in narrative studies (Brosch, 2017). This is probably because visualisation is believed to be the default mode of reading by generating visual images about the characters or events represented (Mackey, 2019, for a debate). In this regard, mental imagery is studied relative to being both a texts' quality to induce images in the mind of readers, and as a readers' ability to imagine narrative information (Zheng, 2014, 41; Long, Winograd & Bridge, 1989). However, because of the close-reading method

of this analysis, I am going to treat mental imagery as a quality of the narrative that occurs, especially from its metaphoric language. Thereby, I am going to illustrate how *CoS* can facilitate readers' generation of vivid imagery.

A quick look at how *CoS* describes many of its scenes and characters reveal a great deal of its ability to visualise them. *CoS* is likely to allow readers to construct mental models to associate its villains, for instance, with different images and beliefs through the help of metaphors and sensory details. To exemplify, the narrator describes a scene of suicide of a girl who 'fell without a murmur, feet first, her bare arms, ringed with gold, straight by her sides, and the Ganges' gelatinous waters opened without a sound to let her through' (14). The sensory details of the lack of 'murmur' from the silencing effect created by the 'gelatinous' texture of the waters is vividly constructed and holds many connotations. Two of them is the pollution of the river from its use as cemetery and the implied normalcy of the suicide described. Moreover, the sensory vividness of the attributes of immigrants the novel portrays are capable of making the reader not just imagine the scenes with vividness, but also feel nauseous. For example,

> What struck the Western observers the most—those few who would speak to historians later—was clearly the smell. They all described it in much the same terms: "It stunk to high heaven … It bowled you over, wouldn't let you breathe…" As the decks sprang to life with their myriad bodies—men, women, children, steeping in dung and debris since Calcutta—as the hatchways puked out into the sunlight the sweating, starving mass, stewing in urine and noxious gases deep in the bowels of the ships, the stench became so thick you could practically see it" (100).

This passage in its totality emphasizes the disgusting nature of the fleet of immigrants as remembered by its smell. The retrospective voice embedded in the expression 'those few [Western observers] who would speak to historians later' gives an authoritative tone of factuality as if the remembered smell of the fleets was indeed such and such. The smell of the fleet is overemphasized in *CoS* as a negative other-representation (van Dijk, 2005). *CoS's* repeated reference to the smell of immigrants from its opening chapter to its end as in 'the terrible stench of latrines, that had heralded the fleet's arrival' (02), to '[h]ow could a good cause smell so bad?' (100) assert the association of immigrants with disgust and biological degradation. The disgust-related diction and metaphors from the passage above is sensory and vivid as these expressions indicate: 'stench', 'puked out', 'sweating', or a smell that 'stunk to high heaven'; 'bowled you over'; or 'wouldn't let you breathe'. They render a rather

abstract stimulus such as smell, especially one that is represented in a written narrative, into a felt material and concrete element that can be sensed. Such perceived materiality is invoked by attaching sensory adjectives to familiar elements of dirt such as 'steeping in debris', 'stewing in urine and noxious gases', or 'the stench became so thick you could practically see it'.

These examples illustrate the capacity of *CoS's* language to construct vivid scenes which are likely to activate multiple sensory modalities (for more details, Kuzmičová, 2014; Nanay, 2018). For instance, visual mental imagery can be generated from the expression ' 'gelatinous waters', or 'the stench became so thick you could practically see it'. Olfactory imagery can be generated from words such as 'puked out' or 'sweating'. Even auditory mental imagery may occur from the expression 'fell without murmur' or 'a radio, volume turned down, was playing the Mozart Requiem', a symphony of death and grief. In light of these examples, the capacity of *CoS* to stimulate readers' senses can be explained using neuroimaging research. Studies have shown that second-hand experience of an activity is registered in the activation of the brain regions responsible for that activity just by imagining or reading about it (see Mar and Oatley, 2008). For instance, reading words that signify odours like 'cinnamon' or 'garlic' are found to activate the primary olfactory cortex than when reading about neutral words (González, et al., 2006). Similarly, reading taste-related words like 'salt' strongly activated primary and secondary gustatory cortices (Barrós-Loscertale, et al., 2012). This may signify that reading *CoS's* full narrative depiction of the smell of immigrants, for instance, is likely to influence readers to experience the horrible smell in their mind's nose.

Readers' vivid imagination that is likely to be facilitated by the interplay between sensory language and metaphors may likely to increase their feelings of transportation in *CoS's* story world (Green & Brock, 2002). When readers enjoy the narrative from the flow of imagination as if being there, they may not wish to disrupt that state (Green, 2008, 47). Thereby, they may not feel the need to counterargue against the narrator or the heroes they identify with (Slater & Rouner, 2002). As a consequence, I propose that readers who are primed by their transportability not to resist the narrative may likely to align their beliefs and attitudes with *CoS's* racist and radical perspective (Green & Brock, 2000; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

2.6.3.4. Foregrounded Style.

The last aspect of *CoS* which may influence readers' feelings of transportation is likely to occur from its foregrounding style. According to Gregoriou (2014), foregrounding is a

technique through which texts draw attention to some of their textual elements which can be observed from the lexical to the pragmatic level. Although this device is associated with absorption as I am going to demonstrate, it has been mostly linked to the aesthetic feelings of defamiliarization. That is art in general makes the familiar strange or unfamiliar to draw readers' more conscious attention to its aesthetics. Bernaerts and colleagues (2014) consider defamiliarization as 'the effect that literary texts can bring about on readers by challenging their ideas about what counts as 'normal' or 'predictable' in a given genre or narrative situation' (73). In fact, the main objective of defamiliarization as theorized by Shklovsky (1917) is 'to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged' (02). In terms of processing, Miall and Kuiken (1994) explain that defamiliarization occurs in three phases.

> First, these novel linguistic features strike readers as interesting and capture their attention (defamiliarization per se). Second, defamiliarization obliges the reader to slow down, allowing time for the feelings created by the alliterations and metaphors to emerge. Third, these feelings guide formulation of an enriched perspective on [the novel's] (Miall & Kuiken, 1994, 392).

Foregrounding is thus found to slow down reading, intensify perception and emotional involvement, direct attention to the form, and prompt more reflection on the text (Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Stanford & Emmott, 2012; Hakemulder, 2004; van Peer, et al., 2021).

The slowing down of time and the direction of attention from the story world to the form may see counterproductive to the process of narrative transportation. Nevertheless, foregrounding as a stylistic feature of narrative can have implications on both narrative feelings such as absorption and aesthetic feelings such as defamiliarization (see Kuiken & Miall, 1994). While most studies seem to separate absorption feelings from defamiliarization effects, Balint, et al., (2016) and Kuijpers, et al., (2017) disagree because they consider narrative absorption as possible through engagement with the story world, foregrounded language, or both. Kuijper and colleagues (2017) explain the relationship between foregrounding and story world absorption as two sides of the same process of narrative absorption. The researchers assume that the novelty brought by foregrounded elements may lead to enjoyment, especially when readers are reported to find pleasure in 'overcoming' the challenges of comprehending foregrounded elements.

However, the researchers refer to foregrounding as 'artifact absorption' into the poetics of the form, which 'co-occurs' with story world absorption during one reading

experience. They argue that 'when a readers' attention shifts from story world to the artifice of the story, this does not automatically mean that absorption is disrupted' (Kuijpers, et al., 2017, 39). For example, Balint and colleagues (2016) report different degrees of absorption from the interviews of readers who successfully identified a deviating element from a narrative. They found that readers' respond to different features of the text with varying degrees of absorption. For instance, foregrounding that brings out uncertainty calls for disambiguation which compels readers to re-read, or re-immerse themselves into the narrative to solve the uncertainty. Readers who perceived a level of strikingness or novelty, responded with surprise, and so on (for more details, see Balint, et al., 2016). These studies confirm that attention to the form and attention to the story world work hand in hand to magnify the general experience or state of absorption.

Foregrounding works in tandem with literary devices which can be observed on many interconnected discourse levels of *CoS*. While the hyperbolic nature of the novel foregrounds every piece of its provocative prose, I am going to limit analysis to the phonetic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and thematic levels of foregrounding. This is to illustrate that *CoS* may draw readers' attention to its poetics which may in turn increase their feelings of absorption. This can be analysed from some of its formal features which are associated with foregrounding to make some aspects of its context standout such as consonance, assonance, alliteration, parallelism, metaphor, analogy, and allusion (see Burke, 2014).

The expressions '[f]our [ships] were lopped off at different levels, *by time, by rust, by lack of care, by chance*—in short, *by gradual decay*' (02, added emphasis), stands out from its linguistic background due to the combination of phonetic, lexical, and syntactic parallelism. The repetition of the same paratactic structure using the same proposition 'by', and the sound 'b' creates a melodic tone from the alliteration of the sound 'b', a sense of flow while reading as well as 'local emphasis' (Stanford & Emmott (2012, 79) to draw readers' attention to both the beauty of the expression and the decaying status of the ships. Syntactic parallelism, for instance, may help in comprehension which is a factor of narrative engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Robust evidence demonstrate that when the second part of a noun phrase had the same structure as the first part, it was read at a faster pace than when it didn't, which primed comprehension (Dubey, Sturt, & Keller, 2005).

Another example of foregrounding is in the phrases 'teeming, steaming squalor [...] the depths of despair [...] miserable mass' (60). The repetition of the same letter sound at the beginning of the adjacent words of 'depth' and 'despair'; 'miserable' and 'mass' is an example

of alliteration. Assonance and consonance too occur from the repetition of the vowel sounds at the beginning and end of the words 'teeming' and 'streaming'. The potential effect of phonetic parallelism in this case is to emphasise respectively, the despair, misery and overpopulation of what is described, by drawing attentional focus on the rhythmic sound sequence (see Cutler, 1976). These parallel phonetic structures have both an emotional and aesthetic implication on readers' responses in the sense that they intensify the emotions described and invite admiration from readers (see Menninghaus, et al., 2017, Kraxenberger & Menninghaus, 2016, in poetry). Also, the predictability from the repetition of parallel structures influences readers' pace of reading and pleasure which may facilitate the flow of narrative engagement and effortless imagination. This is supported with Van Peer, et al., (2021) who states that the repetitive pattern of parallelism 'lets the reader anticipate what is coming, thereby exerting a soothing influence. Parallelism lays down a pattern of expectations, the fulfilment of which is often harmonious and pleasing' (151).

Most importantly, *CoS* heavily relies on figurative language to foreground its style and provoke its readers. This is observed in its use of metaphors, similes, analogies, and allusions. In fact, its symbolic and hyperbolic nature makes its entire narrative stand out as an allusion of anti-immigration thesis. These devices were mentioned previously in the dehumanisation of the immigrants. For example, they were compared to animals, using similes such as 'they reproduce like ants' (60). Their intellectual supporters are compared to inanimate objects, using metaphors such as 'statues' (10), or 'the totem's monster minions' (16). Additionally, the passage below illustrates an analogy that stresses the countless numbers of dehumanised immigrants.

> Everywhere, nothing but the howling, swarming horde. Thousands of human ants, streaming down the zigzag path from Fontgembar, in an endless column, bristling with fists, and sticks, and scythes, and guns … (120).

The immigrants, here, are referred to metaphorically as 'human ants' which is a strange description. However, the meaning is still clear; the countless numbers of humans/immigrants are compared to 'an endless column' of ants. The adjectives 'howling' and 'swarming' also stress the shared attribute of size by recalling an imagery of animals that howl in a pack and swarm in a 'horde' such as canines or monkeys. Foregrounding can also be deduced from the parataxis that ends in ellipsis ('…') which stresses the endless numbers

of armed immigrants by dragging the form of sentence on to suggest that their arms and numbers are infinite.

In sum, the use of metaphors and figures of speech is likely to make the intended meaning clearer by making concrete and familiar associations (Boozer, Wyld, & Grant, 1991). The semantic parallelism created by metaphor increases vivid imagery (Stephan, et al., 2022), memory recall and comprehension (Reynolds & Schwartz, 1983). These processes are associated with narrative engagement and persuasion (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; 2017; Boozer, Wyld, & Grant, 1991). Therefore, *CoS* may generate an enjoyable state in readers by eliciting their aesthetic feeling of defamiliarization, and narrative feeling of absorption (Mar & Oatley, 2011). The enjoyment may influence readers to disengage their negative thought responding to continue experiencing the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). Miall and Kuiken (2002) argue that aesthetic emotions such as fascination can combine with narrative emotions such as empathy to influence self-modifying feelings in readers. By drawing on this body of studies, I suggest that *CoS's* potential persuasiveness may occur from its foregrounded style that draws attention to its formal and narrative construction.

2.7. Summary of Analysis.

To illustrate a case study where a novel can influence antisocial and immoral beliefs and attitudes, I have selected the racist narrative of *The Camp of The Saints* (Raspail, 1973). Although the racist and radical nature of this narrative should prevent readers from being persuaded by its claims, I have demonstrated based on media psychology and narrative persuasion studies how it can. The findings suggest that *CoS* is not an irrational work of fiction that may prime readers' counterarguing and resistance. It is indeed a powerful work that combines both rhetorical and narrative persuasion techniques. To influence its readers, *CoS* embeds its radical perspectives within a coherent and plausible frame of reference that is likely to limit and guide their interpretations (Strange, 2002). Its polarised frame of reference which is compatible with its dystopian genre and a roman á thèse combines the authority of facts with the imaginative capacity of fiction (Wampole, 2020). It mixes techniques that can activate both the mechanisms of radicalisation such as nostalgia, grievances, and polarisation, and the mechanisms of narrative persuasion such as empathic identification and transportation. In fact, the polarised nature of *CoS's* frame of reference which relies on a conflict frame of disagreement and tension is likely to increase attitude polarisation (Kim & Zhou, 2020).

The narrative maintains its realism by inflating the familiarity of its topic. Treating immigration as a threat, for instance, to maximise the perception of grievances in readers to empathise with the heroes. Referring to a glorious past may also elicit readers' negative emotions like sadness which may compel them to empathise with the heroes who lost that past. Most importantly, having two-dimensional characters who play different roles (single, likable, hero, victims vs. many, unlikable, villain, perpetrators), with different emotion and discourse presentation (the heroes exclusively focalise the story) is a stronger predictor that *CoS* may orient readers' empathic identification with its racist heroes. This fits with supporting evidence that humans easily empathise with identifiable victims, not perpetrators (Woodward, Hiskes, & Breithaupt, 2022; Leake, 2014; Lindhé, 2016; de Graaf, 2012).

The dehumanization of the immigrants by associating them with disgust is also a strong predictor of readers' aversion from them (Harris & Fiske, 2008, 2011). This affective disposition towards *CoS's* racist heroes can be reinforced by the absorbing potential of their narrative. I have demonstrated that the novel's association with familiar events, realism, vivid imagery, and foregrounding may facilitate readers' feelings of enjoyment and transportation. The states which may then motivate readers not to disrupt them by counterarguing the plausibility of *CoS's* radical ideas. Indeed, it seems impossible not to recall the imagery of *CoS* when the topic of immigration is mentioned. Therefore, *CoS* is a counterexample for the ethicists who believe in the moralising capacity of readers' empathy with characters for it offers understanding of and merging with the Other which is racists, while denying it for the Other's Other (that is the immigrant) as theorised by Lindhé (2021).

2.8. Conclusion.

CoS's potential persuasiveness as explained using theories of empathic identification and narrative transportation may influence readers' adoption of its fabrications about immigration. This can be explained using Strange's (2002) proposal that novels' contextual frame influences readers' adoption of fabrications about history in their beliefs. The author proposes that when 'context discrimination failure', 'context activation failure', and 'context engulfment' occur, readers may integrate fictional information into their knowledge structures. He explains that belief fabrications are adopted from fiction when readers misremember the fictional context about a particular issue, and later use it as a factual source (that is context discrimination failure). This can mean that readers of *CoS* may believe that

immigration is a threat to Western culture when they forget its fictional nature which should intuitively discredit all its assertions.

On the other hand, influences on readers' beliefs can also occur when the fictional context is remembered, but content is hard to ignore. In this context activation failure, readers ignore the fictional context of *CoS* when 'when an opportunity arises to utilize this knowledge' (Strange, 2002, 270). This means that readers may remember information, such as violence against illegal migration is rightful, was found in a fictional (unreliable) source, but the opportunity to use this information is too hard to ignore. Furthermore, frame of reference may also influence beliefs and attitudes even when context is 'specified, encoded, comprehended, believed, remembered, and activated during judgment' (Strange, 2002, 270). This least intuitive mode refers to readers' confidence in the truthfulness of fictional information, even when they know the context is non-evidentiary. The author explains this context engulfment process as 'even when fictive information is independently retrievable in memory, it is not partitioned in a manner that fully isolates it from knowledge that is deemed to be reliable' (273-274).

This somehow supports Gilbert's (1991) belief formation model based on Spinoza's view which explains that information is comprehended by initially believing and accepting it (see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.1.). Readers 'believe' fictional information in light of scepticism toward its context because 'unbelieving' requires cognitive scrutiny, effort, motivation, counterevidence, and time. As such, fictional information may be integrated in readers' memory and knowledge structure 'by resonating with items already in stock, bring some to the fore and allow others to recede' (Strange, 2002, 282). In light of Strange's (2002) theory, it seems plausible to imagine that a middling reader may internalise some of *CoS's* exaggerated assertions and have them activated when presented with a topic related to immigration. This may occur by misremembering their fictional context, or disactivating the context to use them, or by failing to properly isolate them as fictive information in their reliable knowledge structures.

Evidence about this claim is found in a study by Marsh, Meade, and Roediger (2003). The researchers found that although information learnt from fiction should be differentiated from factual information, people's information retrieval is found to rely on erroneous information read in fiction to answer related general knowledge questions (Marsh, Meade, & Roediger, 2003) even when they were instructed to pay more attention to errors in the fictional source (Marsh & Fazio, 2006; Eslick, Fazio & Marsh, 2011). As such, false assertions

encountered in *CoS* may still be used to respond to related real contexts. Similar evidence is found in Green and Donahue's (2011) study about the persistence of false beliefs from fiction. Participants who read a fabricated story (representing a false story as true) continued to believe its false information even when they were told that the author intentionally deceived them. 'Although readers derogated a deceptive author, they did not correct their attitudes even in the intentional and accidental error conditions' (312). Readers' 'evaluations of the characters in a story can remain unaltered even in the face of an author's deception' and even when attempted to correct false information, 'they do not do so effectively' (324).

In light of Strange's, Gilbert's, Marsh and colleagues', and Green and Donahue's works, there is some support to expect that *CoS's* polarised context may influence radical and violent attitudes in readers. They may accept *CoS's* provocative notions of racism and violence as rightful actions to protect the victimised West. Therefore, *CoS* illustrates a case where fiction reading can influence antisocial and immoral beliefs and attitudes.

3. Empathy for Devils: A Potentially Cynical Reader.

3.1. Introduction.

As seen in the previous chapter, a novel can manipulate readers' affective responses by combining the poetics of language with the emotional disposition to take side with racist, hero victims, not their villain perpetrators (Leake, 2014; Woodward, Hiskes, & Breithaupt, 2022). This limited distribution of empathy is often inevitable in narratives since it is determined by their limitation not to make the thoughts and feelings of all characters at play equally accessible to readers (Woloch, 2003; Lindhé, 2016; 2021). This narrative technique can also be observed in the selected psychological thrillers of *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012) and *You* (Kepnes, 2014). However, although this limited empathic distribution may be overcome, for instance, by alternating between characters' point of views in different chapters as in the case of *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012), I am going to show that this distribution of empathy can still occur by other textual manipulations. Additionally, like the previous identification of *CoS's* manipulation of readers' affective dispositions by switching characters' aspects of vulnerability and dehumanisation, the thrillers follow a similar dynamic. They too apply themes of victimization and depersonalization to influence readers' character evaluation and empathy thereafter. As such, I will demonstrate, as I did previously in *CoS,* that both narrative empathy which leads to perspective-taking and affect-sharing with conventional good heroes, may also occur for evil characters perspectivizing the narrative. This is useful to my main argument that empathy can occur for evil characters to influence their beliefs and attitudes for the worse.

Nonetheless, unlike the persuasion towards radicalization and racism which was illustrated in the previous chapter, this chapter is going to illustrate how involvement and empathy with evil characters such as the fictional psychopath can influence cynicism and moral desensitization overtime. Fictional psychopaths, as I will explicate later, make the representation of the dark triad of personality disorders charismatic and likable (Johanson, et al., 2012; Leistedt & Linkowski, 2014; Lopera-Mármol, Jiménez-Morales & Jiménez-Morales, 2022). This contrasts with their clinical reality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Yet, like real psychopaths, fictional psychopaths are cynical (Međedović & Bulut, 2017) and view life as motivated solely by self-interest (Vice, 2011). Thereby, I assume that their sympathetic and charismatic portrayal may make cynicism seem like an intelligent and adaptive way for

success. I also predict that the reality of the disorders may be twisted in readers' minds. Readers' may view these personalities as an icon of intelligence, and their worldview may thus shift to appreciate and adopt cynical attitudes. This corresponds with the fact that popular media have been portraying more inaccurate than accurate psychopathologies such as the stereotypical representation of someone with mental disorder as violent or unhygienic. These misconceptions are likely to influence erroneous public opinions (Walker, et al., 2010; Cross, 2004).

This proposition is, therefore, another illustration of the notion of empathy with evil characters to contradict, in part, the general assumption that readers empathize only with virtuous and likable characters as the affective disposition theory suggests (ADT, Raney, 2017; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.3.). By evil characters, here, I refer to psychologically compelling protagonists who do not function in the same moral way traditional heroes do. These are often selfish characters, instead of being altruistic. They are antiheroes who hold ambivalent attitudes and behaviours (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015; Prusa, 2016). In fact, some argue that they can move up and down the morality scale, where they occupy the middle ground between traditional heroes and villains (Eden, Daalmans & Johnson, 2017). However, as more recent observations suggest 'even the anti-hero has degraded to the point that we cannot easily tell them apart from the antagonist' (Duffy, 2008, 208). This degradation involves their representation with recognizable dark personalities in psychology such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Jonason, et al., 2012; Snyder, et al., 2019; Bogousslavsky & Dieguez,, 2013). Therefore, I view evil heroes as closer to villainous characters than traditional heroes.

Before setting the main approach of this chapter, I am going to highlight some notions to theoretically contextualize the analysis yet to come. I am going to explain the nature of antisocial outcomes, discuss the reason for the prediction made, and engage with some observations that may counterargue against my proposition above.

3.2. The Scope of Effect.

First of all, the prediction of cynicism and moral desensitization in this chapter are expected to occur overtime from frequent exposure. Unlike the immediate effect of polarization that might be expected from absorption into *CoS's* conflict frame or polarized frame of reference, it seems hard to imagine the same immediacy of outcome from readers of the selected thrillers. Nevertheless, the adoption of cynicism and moral desensitization

may be 'cultivated' through repeated exposure to the psychopathic antihero. This prediction can be explained in light of the cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; for a review, Bilandzic and Busselle, 2012) and the 'sleeper effect' theory (Appel & Richter, 2007). In fact, robust evidence suggest that narratives can lead to the cultivation of beliefs and attitudes that are consistent with genre-specific metamessages (Bilandzic and Busselle, 2008; Appel, 2008), even for longer periods of times after narrative engagement occurs ('sleeper effect', Appel & Richter, 2007, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.).

Second, the prediction of cynicism from frequent engagement with antihero narratives can be expected from the rising popularity of psychopathic antiheroes in entertainment narratives (Janicke & Raney, 2011; Black, et al., 2019; Jonason, et al., 2012). Anecdotal evidence can be derived from the success of antihero novels such as *Lolita, American Psycho, The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and shows such as *Breaking Bad, House of Cards, or Dexter*, to name few. Generally speaking, the cultural fascination with dark characters (Broll, 2020) adds to the success of antihero narratives in entertainment media (Janicke, 2013; Vaage, 2016). According to Prusa & Brummer (2022), '[t]oday, we live in the Age of Antiheroes. Antiheroic characters have become the norm in both popular culture and in politics, while the zeitgeist's taste for the rebellious, anti-establishment message is omnipresent' (03). The researchers explain the 2016 election of Donald Trump whom they diagnosed as a psychopathic antihero as a cultivation effect from the overspread of psychopathic antiheroes in the contemporary era. Prusa and Brummer (2022) argue that 'the American public was primed for Trumpism through a zeitgeist hospitable to antihero worship. That is, Trump's dogged popularity with nearly half of the American public was foretold by decades of pop-cultural obsession with, and adulation for, the antihero' (01). This goes to show the prediction made by Gerbner (2000) of 'a slight but pervasive shift in the cultivation of common perspectives overtime' (07).

Third, the ethical concern that emerges from empathizing with an evil hero is thus predicted to be more attitudinal than behavioural at first glance. One may disagree that crime fiction, for an example, has been around since the 19th century and there seems to be no real life emulations of the criminals dramatized. I disagree with this because unlike crime fictions, the narrative cases taken in this study do not involve detective heroes and criminal villains. They involve criminal heroes and no focalizing detectives. In fact, readers are left alone to experience aberrant events from 'inside' the minds of criminals. In crime fiction 'readers' identities merge with the detective's hence allowing for a transformative

experience more often than not resulting in the cathartic restoration of the status quo' (Álvarez, 2019, 142). In the selected thrillers, however, readers' identities are likely to merge with their charismatic criminals which may influence their attitudes overtime.

There may be also a behavioural dimension to empathising with evil heroes if I consider the phenomenon of fandom. In fact, more recent anecdotal observations have demonstrated that fans behave in certain ways toward their favourite criminal antiheroes or fictionalized real life criminals(for more details, see Smith, 2022). Examples include the fan following of Morgan Dexter, a fictional criminal who hunts down other criminals (Donnelly, 2012), or the fandom of Ted Bundy after fictionalizing his crimes in a movie. This 'dark fandom' (Broll, 2020) may be perceived as an outcome of the sympathetic and charismatic portrayal of evil characters in the role of heroes.

Four, the phenomenon concerning readers' enjoyment and empathy with evil characters has been observed using quantitative and qualitative analysis as I will elaborate later. In fact, the enjoyment of an equally good and evil character was associated with moral desensitization or the fade 'Abhorrence of their Faults' as Samuel Johnson believes (1750) (*The Rambler, Number 04*, 24; see section 1.2.). Qualitative analysis, for instance, has shown that the representation of evil characters and readers' responses to them has evolved (Bentham, 2014, Raney, 2004; Vaage, 2023). The evil character like the psychopath has evolved from the role of villain that inspires aversion in 19th century readers to the role of charismatic hero that inspires admiration and empathy in 21st century readers (Bentham, 2014). On the other hand, quantitative analysis has empirical support for readers' enjoyment and empathy with antiheroes (Janicke & Raney, 2011; Raney, et al., 2009). These studies, as I will review later, offer a plethora of evidence and theories to help extend the discussion of empathy with evil heroes to the persuasion of cynicism.

Nevertheless, one may disagree again that the history of morally ambiguous characters goes back to the trickster without necessarily observing any negative influences on readers' beliefs and attitudes. While this needs its own empirical attention to confirm, I suggest that the trickster can be seen as the precursor of the modern antihero, but they may serve different purposes. These purposes may, as I explain below, make the modern antihero more ethically concerning than the previous trickster. To note, both character archetypes share some common aspects. Although tricksters exist in all cultural folklores (Lukac, 2019), they are hard to define, just like antiheroes (Friedrich, 2021). Both characters share the moral ambiguity of being both good and bad (Halwani, 2020; Lukac, 2019). Just like the

criminal/protector antihero (such as Dexter), tricksters too are morally ambiguous in both the roles they play (culture heroes vs. deceivers) and how they behave (greedy vs. saviour). Both can be seen as 'carnivalesque' who challenge order by breaking it, or celebrate the grotesque and the forbidden (Bakhtinian Carnival, Buchanan, 2018). They can also be seen as a shadow reflection of human consciousness (Yorke, 2013; Raharto & Permatasari, 2019). Humans present themselves in society through their conscious 'persona' which is generally positive, moral, and prosocial, whereas their unconscious negative 'shadow' is repressed in social interactions (see Halwani, 2020, 725). It is through both tricksters and antiheroes; society can release tension from moral obligation. Like tricksters that take on the guilt of committing the breaking of order so that people do not learn the hard way (Lukac, 2019), antihero narratives too can relieve society from the burden of moral obligation to follow order. Antihero narratives may therefore offer a 'safe space' for human ego to release its repressed sadistic and dark desires by identifying with aberrant heroes without the suffering entailed from their experiences as Freud (1908) proposes (cited in Bentham, 2014, 50). This last point has implications on readers' empathy with evil heroes which will be developed later.

Nevertheless, as Lock (2002) puts it '[n]ot just any rogue or anti-hero can properly be termed trickster'. Unlike the modern antihero who is a realistic fictional representation of a human being with human limitations, the trickster, besides not having ethical and social boundaries, is generally a crosser and shapeshifter that does not have physical ones too (Hynes, 1993; Hynes & Doty, 1997). Examples include Loki who turned himself into a mare or Puss in Boots who is personified as a human. Most importantly, unlike the modern antihero who is often celebrated for evading punishment, the trickster is eventually punished for its transgressions. Almost all tricksters are defeated by their own mischief or others to serve poetic justice and maintain the moral and social order. Sugiyama (2017) writes in this regard.

> Punishment often takes the form of ridicule, which is the source of the humor in these often hilarious tales. We laugh at trickster, not with him: he is an object of scorn and derision. Among the Koyukon, for example, he "is treated with scant respect" and White Mountain Apache elders often concluded a trickster tale by warning, "'Don't do like Coyote did in the story. He did a lot of bad things for us long ago such as marrying his daughter and stealing!'" (12).

As such, it seems that the trickster serves a stricter educational purpose than the modern antihero who enables merging with the dark shadow of humanity without warning

commentary not to be complacent. The trickster thus confirms order by getting punished when breaking it. According to Lukac (2019), the transgressions of tricksters against norms and rules to achieve their goals or for the mere pleasure of breaking rules has a reaffirming impact on the rules broken. This is to demonstrate what happens in the case order is not maintained for non-tricksters. The trickster, thus, breaks rules to confirm them and allows individuals to experience what is not permitted. Tricksters make a fool of themselves by breaking order as a sacrifice on behalf of people (Lukac, 2019, 18-29). This cannot be said of the modern antihero because poetic justice does not eventually counter their crimes and deception. Indeed, their narratives often end by their success, while their victims end up being punished, as will be analysed from the selected thrillers.

3.3. Objective and Approach.

After explaining the notions above to help understanding of the theoretical ground this chapter stands on, I am going to delineate its objectives and approach. The first objective of this chapter is to analyse how the selected thrillers can textually manipulate readers' empathy to take on the perspectives of and side with their antiheroes. The second objective is to discuss how these novels have the potential to persuade readers to perceive humanity from a cynical and amoral attitude. Although, these two objectives may seem separate in their scope, the former is likely to contribute to the latter because narrative empathy is symptomatic of narrative involvement with characters. This in turn plays a major role in the occurrence of narrative persuasion (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Igartua & Barrios, 2012, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.2.).

To explain, when readers empathetically identify with an antihero, they 'affectively and cognitively put themselves' into the psychological state of that character. This means that they are fully absorbed into its psychological state (Keen, 2006; 2008). When readers identify with an antihero, they disengage their moral defence mechanisms to fully enjoy their stories (moral disengagement, Bandura, 1977; Raney, et al., 2009, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.3). As such, an empathizing reader who is likely to be absorbed into antihero narratives, and who is likely to identify with the antihero is going to have their counterarguing (Chen & Chang, 2017) and moral defence mechanisms depleted in order to fully enjoy the story (Shaffer & Raney, 2012). Readers are thus expected to adopt consistent beliefs and attitudes (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022) and personality traits (Sestir & Green, 2010; Gabriel & Young, 2011) with the focalizing antihero.

When evil characters who can be seen as role models of immoral and antisocial behaviour occupy the role of hero, a role of 'presumed morality' (Raney, 2004), empathizing readers may desensitize overtime from their cruelty and view their cynicism as morally justifiable.

In light of this evidence, I speculate that indulgence in the desensitization from moral transgressions and the enjoyment of immorality as entertainment from sympathetic evil heroes may have consequences. This may involve, for instance, subjecting readers' moral reasoning to disengagement when their empathic response is oriented toward romanticized perpetrators, not their abstracted victims. Nonetheless, it is likely not the one reading of a novel about an evil hero that is going to shift readers' attitudes and perceptions about success or crime in the contemporary era, but the accumulative effect from frequent exposure to similar media content overtime. In fact, the growing sympathetic and attractive portrayal of fictional criminals and psychopaths (Bentham, 2014), may characterize them as good role models that may inspire wishful identification in readers (Von Feilitzen & Linné, 1975; see Konijn, Bijvank, & Bushman, 2007). Readers may develop a liking preference for the cynical and deceptive personality of antiheroes to the extent of wishing to be like them; detached from empathy and focused on their next move.

This may likely occur because repeated exposure to the character archetype as a positive role model may enhance positive attitude towards it as 'the mere exposure effect' suggests (Zajonc, 1968). The effect refers to robust observation that repeated and unreinforced exposure to a stimulus with no pre-existing negative attitude toward it is sufficient to enhance positive attitude toward that stimulus, even in lack of conscious awareness about it (Bornstein & D'Agostino, 1992). The mere exposure to a repeated stimulus develops into a cognitive bias that increases likability and preference formation for that stimulus, especially when that stimulus is associated with positive affect (Zajonc, 2001; Bornstein & Craver-Lemley, 2022). Because antihero narratives are psychologically intriguing entertainment, frequent exposure may associate them with positive affect and likability which may then increase preference for engagement with their behaviour.

For an approach to highlight how the selected thrillers operate to potentially persuade readers of cynicism and moral desensitization, I am going to firstly explain the antisocial aspect of these attitudes. Then, I will explain the appeal of antihero characters in terms of their enjoyment and processing. I will introduce and discuss the selection of the two novels. By drawing on the positive correlation between moral disengagement and narrative persuasion mechanisms (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022), I will finally propose how

these processes can prime moral cynicism in readers by illustrating how they occur in the selected texts.

3.4. Moral Cynicism and Moral Desensitization.

Before analysing the selected thrillers for their potential to desensitize readers' to influence the adoption of their cynical attitudes, it is useful to explicate the motivation behind this expectation, and define what and how moral cynicism and moral desensitization are interrelated antisocial attitudes. This fits with the previous observation made by Prusa and Brummer (2022) that the 21st century is the 'Age of Antiheroes', and Ivanova and Kudriavtseva's (2015) observation that in the last two centuries, mass media has turned to a new myth-making that is inspired by the revival of 'infernal' characters into the role of cynical heroes.

> The mythological meaning-making is mobile; it meets requirements of the present, but comprises deep meanings. Therefore, the dialectic concept of a binary ethical contradiction appears before us: the good turns into the evil, the evil is represented kind and attractive. The kind cultural hero becomes boring, doubting expediency and his ability to make good deeds. The image of cynic becomes attractive, declaring "what many think on the quiet, not daring to declare it publicly". "Revaluation of values" in mass culture leads to romanticizing of negative infernal cultural heroes (Ivanova, & Kudriavtseva, 2015, 275).

Thereby, the archetypical antihero who understands the morality of things, but still violates it becomes a role model of cynicism. I suggest that the continuous success of cynical evil heroes can imply that readers are morally desensitized from their antisocial behaviours, especially that they are glorified and romanticized in their fictional representations. To demonstrate this potential from the selected thrillers, I am going to demonstrate that moral cynicism as an accumulative effect of exposure to antihero narratives may be facilitated by two distinct but related processes: moral disengagement and moral desensitization. Because antihero narratives rely on moral disengagement techniques to ensure readers' involvement with and enjoyment of them, as I will explain later (Raney, 2004; Shaffer & Raney, 2012), readers may maintain their moral disengagement from repeated exposure, and become desensitised overtime.

This prediction can be supported by two studies that confirm the influence of narratives on readers' levels of cynicism. Stavrova and Ehlebracht (2019) observe that 'in film

and fiction, the most cynical characters, although lonely and unhappy, are frequently painted as the most experienced, insightful, competent, and knowledgeable ones' (265). The researchers found that the romanticized representation of cynical antiheroes may reinforce the 'cynical genius illusion.' Participants across cultures reported false assumptions about the cognitive superiority and competence of cynics which were empirically disproven. Another study too found an association between the fictional representation of political leadership and viewers' development of cynicism. Manoliu (2019) found that viewers became less cynical after watching *The West Wing* series, a realistic utopian representation of American politics where people's wellbeing is a high priority (meaning a traditional hero narrative). In contrast, viewers became more cynical after watching *House of Cards,* a realistic dark representation of corrupt political affairs, while those who watched *Big Bang Theory*, a non-political narrative did not (Manoliu, 2019). Therefore, the first study offers empirical evidence about the cross-cultural spread of misconception about cynicism from the favourable representation of cynical antiheroes as positive role models. The second study shows the role of antihero narratives in increasing political cynicism and reducing individuals' trust in politics. Thereby, engagement with cynical antiheroes can sustain cynicism in the long run.

According to Vice (2011), cynicism in its narrow sense is 'a belief that all motivation is self-interested'. In its broader sense is 'a general attitude of contempt or scepticism about human beings and their values, or a denial of their nobility and value' (171). She continues that cynicism influences individuals to perceive, interpret, evaluate, expect, and by that behave according to general disengagement and disregard from the standard human world. For example, a person who is cynical by nature is more inclined to doubt the motivations of others, including even victims to harm as worthy of their fate. Because cynics believe that everyone is acting selfishly, they may also be more prone to deflect responsibility to others, especially leaders, because they perceive them to be deficient in moral character (Detert, Trevin, & Sweitzer, 2008, 377).

Nevertheless, cynicism can be seen as a beneficial mechanism for survival in times of crisis. Vice (2011) acknowledges that cynicism can be beneficial in certain cases such as the psychological weightlessness of cynics about the way they navigate life, or how they seem to see through hypocrisy. However, because cynicism lacks commitment to a morality for it is built on a relativism that washes off the boundaries between good and evil (Ivanova, & Kudriavtseva, 2015, 276), it becomes immoral. Most importantly, Vice (2011) explains that

the process of moral disengagement that is inherent in the attitude is harmful to individuals and societies. She argues that because cynicism encourages disengagement from standard matters such as politics or morality, it becomes undesirable and destructive to maintain a level of moral standards through which relationships and communities stand and thrive. Overall, these processes that can be primed by antihero narratives may potentially contribute to shifting the moral compass of the public to glorify cynical attitudes or deceptive intelligence (Manoliu, 2019; Stavrova and Ehlebracht, 2019). In fact, several studies have shown the dangerous effects of cynicism. For instance, the rise of organizational cynicism among social workers makes them leave their jobs, threatens productivity (Carey, 2014), and increases their engagement with unethical behaviour (James, 2005). It is also associated with 'bad health outcomes, and increased mortality risks, lower psychological well-being, diminished self-esteem, and reduced economic well-being' (see Stavrova and Ehlebracht, 2019, 254). Cynicism too is found to increase mistrust in governments which lowers political participation (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Rijkhoff, 2018).

Moreover, I speculate that moral cynicism requires moral disengagement and moral desensitization to occur as an accumulative outcome. Thereby, it is useful to discuss how these processes relate to each other. However, as far as I know, this relationship is not investigated which allows room for speculation. Overall, similar to cynicism, desensitization also requires a level of detachment and disengagement from a stimulus. Brockmyer (2021) defines desensitized individuals as having an automatic, gradual, and reduced or absent physio-emotional response to a given desensitizing event after several exposures. She explains that the desensitization process has a natural function to protect from having the same equal reaction over and over to events such as the horror of a mass shooting (Brockmeyer, 2021). It can also be used to treat phobias, for example, by repeatedly exposing the patient to the frightening stimulus (Tyner, et al., 2016).

However, because desensitization affects how individuals feel, think, and react to situations, its consequences can be detrimental (Brockmeyer, 2021). Desensitization is often studied in relation to media violence, especially from video games (Anderson et al. 2010). Examples include developing a pro-violence attitude, not supporting victims of violence, or failure to prevent violence (Funk, 2005). According to Brockmeyer (2022), exposure to violent video games, for instance, increases the risk of desensitization to violence, which in turn may increase aggression, block empathic responding, and decrease prosocial behaviour.

Desensitization also occurs from real life exposure to violence in youth which lowers their empathy, and decreases distress to repeated scenes of violence (Mrug, et al., 2015).

In light of the understanding above, it might be expected that repeated exposure to moral transgressions is likely to increase moral desensitization which overtime may lead to cynicism. This can mean that if someone is exposed to glorified immoral behaviour repeatedly (such as deception as intelligence), they may become desensitized to it and eventually become amoral and cynical. For instance, deception may lose its association with immorality when it becomes entertainment, and a glorified way to gain self-interest. This brings the incestual relationship between Jamie and Cersei Lannister in *Game of Thrones* to mind as an example of readers' potential desensitization. During the duration of the show, these siblings were sleeping with each other which is a violation of moral boundaries. However, the drama was successful in not causing readers' dissonance to drop the show altogether. It seems that readers did not mind or get triggered by the incest since it was natural to the imaginative fabric of the story during the eight seasons/sequels of the narrative.

Accordingly, an antihero often deceives, manipulates, and sometimes kills to achieve some 'identifiable' objectives such as love or safety. This trope which may invite readers' identification and empathy with the antihero often denies it for their victims who are often depersonalized and antagonized. Indeed, this trope usually provides moral justifications to the cynical attitude of the antihero to seem moral and justifiable (Raney, 2004). As I will explain later, readers need to disengage their moral sensitivity in order to enjoy the story (moral disengagement, Bandura, 1999). In turn, this makes the immoral behaviour relative to the emotional context which may then influence the perception of a real life criminal as a victim of childhood trauma, for instance. While this aspect can warrant some warm feelings toward criminals as failed human beings, it should not motivate support for them, while denying it for their victims. This manipulation may explain why some individuals develop liking and support for criminals (see Smith, 2022) who were presented as sympathetic, while justice becomes bitter for their victims who were denied empathy.

To approach the argument above that moral disengagement from the moral and social transgressions of the antihero may accumulate into moral desensitization and cynicism thereafter, I am going to explain how antihero narratives are processed.

3.5. The appeal of antihero narratives.

So far, I have explained a potential relationship between repeated engagement with evil hero narratives, moral desensitization, and cynicism. However, for this relationship to occur, I have to demonstrate how individuals process morally ambiguous characters who are recognizable in psychology as cynical and psychopathic (Greenwood, Ribieras, & Clifton, 2021) for any effect to happen in the first place. For this purpose, I turn now to the question of why readers, most of whom presumably do not support antisocial behaviour, still enjoy reading antihero stories. Overall, stories about immoral characters like the antihero are successful and enjoyable regardless of the immoral and antisocial behaviours committed by them (Seipel, 2021; Black, et al., 2019). This seems to counter the central role of character' morality in readers' enjoyment and empathy only with virtuous characters as the affective disposition theory posits (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.3.).

In fact, morally flawed and immoral protagonists could generate enjoyment, likeability, and even induce readers' empathy and identification (Oliver, et al., 2019; Jonason, et al., 2012). 'Once we like characters, we are able to empathize and identify with them. We can understand their motivations and rationales, feeling with them like we do with good friends in reality' (Zillmann, 1994; Raney, et al., 2009, 05). This means that the initial evaluation of a character influences the interpretation of their motivation and actions which in turn reinforces readers' disposition to liking or disliking them (Raney, 2004; Tamborini, et al., 2010, 634). As discussed in The Theoretical Framework, the processing and enjoyment of antihero narratives require a degree of moral disengagement from their bad behaviours (Raney, 2004; Janicke & Raney, 2011). Similar to when individuals selectively disengage their moral judgement for their bad actions to avoid guilt (Bandura, 1999; 2011), readers too often need to excuse, accept, tolerate, or ignore the immoral behaviours and attitudes of evil heroes to maintain enjoyment of their narratives (Raney, 2004).

> That is, over time viewers learn that certain protagonists in certain narratives violate typical moral standards. To enjoy such stories, a viewer must take off the default lens of moral scrutiny and put on one of moral permissiveness and justification. Only with this alternate interpretive lens, which is forged by the process of moral disengagement, can the antihero protagonist be loved and the narrative enjoyed (Shafer & Raney, 2012, 1038).

The process of moral disengagement is likely to develop in readers' antihero story-schema through repeated exposure to their narratives overtime (Mandler, 1984; Raney, 2004; Janicke, 2013). Otherwise, readers may experience dissonance from their moral violations which can stop the enjoyment and absorption into their stories (Janicke & Raney, 2018).

In addition to readers' personalities and propensity to morally disengage (Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011; Black, et al., 2019; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, et al., 2021; Greenwood, Ribieras, & Clifton, 2021; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.3.), some narrative aspects can also help induce moral disengagement. For instance, it has been shown that moral disengagement is not affected by the realness or fictionality of characters. Character liking mediated between moral disengagement and enjoyment. Individuals' propensity to morally disengage predicted actual moral disengagement (Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011). However, as this research is concerned with linguistic context, not readers' factor, it is useful to consider how textual and narrative cues help induce readers' moral disengagement. Textual factors include, for instance, the positioning of evil characters as perspectivizing heroes, a role of 'presumed morality' where they fight their enemies and seek self-actualization (Raney, 2004; Oliver, et a., 2019). Also, their more realistic flawed personalities (Konijn & Hoorn, 2005) with sympathetic features (Grizzard et al., 2018), or good intentions (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013) can also help. These aspects are likely to increase readers' potential to enjoy and identify with evil heroes (Raney, et al., 2009; Shafer & Raney, 2012). This means that although ADT does not seem to explain the enjoyment process of antihero narratives, it eventually does when the narrative invites readers to seen evil characters as sympathetic heroes.

Furthermore, the pathway from moral disengagement that is inherent to the enjoyment of antihero narratives (Janicke & Raney, 2011) to the persuasion of cynicism can be explained through character identification which is found to mediate moral disengagement (Raney, et al., 2009, Shafer & Raney, 2012; Sanders & Tsay-Vogel, 2016). In this regard, I argue that because identification is a key mechanism of narrative persuasion (Cohen, 2001; Slater & Rouner, 2002) that reduces counterarguing (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Igartua, 2010) and increases moral disengagement (Raney, et al., 2009), readers' potential to get persuaded from an antihero narrative may likely to increase. In fact, the manipulation of the absence or presence of moral disengagement cues in a narrative is found to determine moral disengagement effects on real-life judgement. If the portrayal of a victim is vague or absent from a narrative, viewers are more likely to take on the perspective of the immoral protagonist and to morally disengage to support him/her (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, Grizzard,

2022). Thereby, if these conditions can be found in the selected thrillers, I predict that readers who empathically identify with their evil heroes may be more likely to adopt a cynical worldview with misconceptions about the adaptability of their dark personalities.

To sum up, I have explained that the popularity and appeal of morally-ambiguous protagonists is based on their ability to morally disengage readers. The enjoyment process of traditional heroes as theorized by the affective disposition theory was extended to include immoral protagonists. Instead of the central association between morality and likability of heroes, other aspects such as the development of antihero story-schema overtime influences readers' dispositions and expectations. Integrated within antihero story-schemas, moral disengagement schemas exist. Identification with characters too contribute to increasing moral disengagement. The positive and significant correlation between identification and moral disengagement can have significant impact on narrative-based persuasion. The next step after introducing the novels is to demonstrate their ability to invite readers' empathy and identification with its antiheroes to morally disengage them.

3.6. *You* and *Gone Girl*: Selection Criterion.

Some of the narratives that test readers' willingness not just to tolerate, but also empathize with cruel protagonists are *You* (Kepnes, 2014) and *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012). The aberrant nature of the protagonists these thrillers has been demonstrated by some psychoanalytical studies. Joe Goldberg in *You* is analysed as a psychologically complex character who reflects the dark triad of psychopathy by his impulsiveness, Machiavellianism by his self-righteousness, and narcissism by his positive self-image (see Dahar, 2021). He has 'an exaggerated sense of self, he is cunning and manipulative, he lacks guilt or empathy, demonstrates criminal versatility, and when his relationships end, they really end' (Rosebaum & Friedman, 2019, 268). Similarly, Amy in *Gone Girl* is often studied as a psychologically compelling heroine who is often found to be sociopathic, psychopathic, or antisocial (Greenwood, Ribieras, & Clifton, 2021). These novels can, therefore, illustrate the main thesis of this dissertation that narrative empathy can also occur for immoral characters and may even influence antisocial attitudes such as cynicism in the long run.

As I will elaborate later, although the narratives are similar in terms of using their application of antihero protagonists and thriller genre, they use different ways to induce readers' absorption and empathic identification. Both of which mediate narrative-based persuasion (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Braddock & Dillard, 2016). For instance, they both have

psychologically compelling protagonists who can be recognizable cynics. They too narrate their own stories following first-person point of view. However, these novels are different when considering that *You* uses both first- and second-person point of views, while *Gone Girl* alternates between its main characters in conflict using first-person point of view chapter after chapter. These aspects are likely to influence readers' empathic responses differently which helps demonstrating that narratives can be different in their influences. But their metamessage can accumulate in the adoption of a cynical worldview.

The story of *You* follows Joe Goldberg, a bookstore manager who fell blindly in love with Guinevere Beck the moment she entered his shop. He immediately started fancying her and trying to win her over. In his pursuit of her affection, he stalked her online and in-person. He broke into her apartment. He stole her phone. He even killed her friends, Benji and Peach to separate her from their 'selfish' friendship. However, as the reader accompanies Joe in his deceptive tactics to win Beck, everything he does is 'justifiable' in the name of love and protection. Eventually, Joe discovers that Beck was sleeping with her therapist which motivated him to kill her too. He then framed her therapist for her murder. Apart from being an entertaining thriller, *You* encourages readers to feel with Joe and not Beck or the other victims because they are portrayed as hindrances to his ultimate romance. They are denied representation of their consciousnesses as Joe reports on them. As such, it might be expected that readers who are invited to merge and experience *You* from Joe's internal monologues are likely to root for him and ignore his crimes. This is likely to be reinforced, especially when his victims are impersonalized, vilified, and their death is abstracted as I will illustrate later.

On the other hand, *Gone Girl* is about Amy's disappearance which puts her husband Nick as the primary suspect. After both spouses lost their job as writers in New York, they had to relocate to Missouri, Nick's birthplace, to take care of his ailing parents. During their two years stay there, Nick grew apart from Amy, used her money to open a bar, did not empathize with her misery there, and eventually cheated on her. The chapters of the story are organized in most of its parts by Nick's narrated side in the past tense followed by a diary entry of Amy in the present tense, that only readers have access to. It is not until the second part of the novel that the rest of characters know about the diary, and her revenge plan to incriminate her cheating husband of her fake murder. This plan eventually changed when Nick knew what his wife was doing, and begged the kidnapers (her) to return her home. On her return home, Amy killed her friend Desi who was helping her, which in turn incriminated him as her kidnapper. While Desi's death requires readers' empathy, he is not likely to get it

because Amy describes his protection of her as an imprisonment; a manipulation on her part to 'morally justify' her crime. Desi's death is desensitized, and his grieving mother is dismissed as a rich unsympathetic woman (*Gone Girl*, 399). These attributes, as will be explained later, are likely to reduce readers' moral sanctioning to increase perspective-taking with the immoral protagonists (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022).

Both Amy and Nick narrate their side of the story to invite readers to 'judge' them in a supposedly unbiased narrative approach. However, as I will explain, this technique is itself a form of control to manipulate readers' judgement to side with the evil heroine. Contrary to *Gone Girl's* claim on its book cover that: 'There are two sides to every story…,' Amy and Nick are not equally likable. For instance, both main characters' consciousnesses are equally available in discourse. Yet, throughout the first part of the novel, Amy's diary entries portray her as a lovely wife who is becoming afraid for her life, while Nick similar to her description is portrayed as apathic, cold-hearted, and unconcerned in his own narration. This in turn proves or justifies Amy's diary description of him and forces readers to support Amy's cruel plan to destroy him as he is not represented as likable. After Amy reveals fer revenge plan, readers who already formed an affective disposition to like and empathize with her as a victim of Nick's cheating may not change their disposition toward her. They may even like that she is getting justice for herself.

In light of the above introduction of the novels and the general theoretical discussion that preceded, I am going to analyse how both narratives can induce readers' feelings of absorption and empathic identification. This is to demonstrate how empathy can be oriented towards evil heroes to increase readers' moral disengagement and absorption which in turn mediate narrative persuasion (Kuijper, et al., 2017). More precisely, I am going to argue that both narratives are likely to elicit readers' feelings of transportation due to their genre and affective discourse structures. However, they are going to elicit empathic identification differently due to differences in their techniques such as point of view and tense manipulations. Moreover, because these devices and techniques occur within an interconnected narrative, their effects on transportation, identification, and empathy are also likely to overlap. In fact, narrative impact can occur via involvement with plot (that is transportation) and involvement with characters (that is empathic identification) (Slater & Rouner, 2002; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.). Therefore, to avoid repetition in the organization of the analysis, I am going to begin by investigating how the novels may orient readers' empathic identification towards their evil protagonists, as I did with *CoS*. This is to

highlight how they can morally disengage their readers. Then, I will look at how they can increase readers' absorption into their story worlds. This is to connect the potential persuasiveness of the novels to the ethical concern that may emerge from frequently empathizing with evil heroes overtime.

3.7. From Empathic Identification.

Based on the account provided in The Theoretical Framework about the relationship between empathic identification and persuasion, I am going to illustrate how the thrillers invite readers to bond with their evil heroes by considering the devices that have been empirically tested in relation to empathic identification such as point of view, discourse presentation, and mode of narration. In fact, scholars seem to agree that point of view and transparency of or accessibility to the consciousness of characters may be effective in allowing readers to identify and position themselves into the shoes of those characters (Sandefur, 2003; Niederhoff, 2011). This can be observed in the use of first-person point of view in both novels to present the consciousness of their evil protagonists to the reader. It is the evil protagonists that narrate their own stories using psycho-narration and stream of consciousness techniques as I am going to show below. This is likely to create more psychological closeness between readers and protagonists as robust evidence confirm (Segal., et al., 1997; Kotovych, et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, there are some differences that need to be accounted for such as the use of second-person pronoun in *You* to 'address' one major character, while *Gone Girl* alternates between its two main characters' first-person point of views. These aspects are likely to influence the mode of narration and discourse/emotion presentation of the characters involved as well as the responses induced in readers. For instance, having equally-accessible point of views of the characters in conflict in a single narrative allows readers to evaluate the characters involved with more interpretive freedom than having only one perspectivizing character to 'impose' their thoughts and feelings on them. As such, I propose that it is not just the mere use of a first-person point of view on its own that can elicit greater psychological closeness in readers (this was also predicted previously in *CoS*). These differences, as will be considered secondly, are important to demonstrating how the linguistic context of particular narratives can determine the kind of empathic response in readers (Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020; McGlothlin, 2016).

3.7.1. The Effect of Point of View (POV).

The first aspect that stands out from both novels as capable of inducing readers' empathic identification is internal focalisation from the first-person point of view of their antiheroes. This is because first-person point of view is associated with increasing readers' psychological closeness (Segal, et al., 1997), perspective-taking (Nünning, 2015, 44), and empathic identification (Keen, 2006; 2007). Segal and colleagues (1997) confirm that 'one of the rhetorical or pragmatic functions of having a first-person narrator tell a story is to invite the reader to identify with that narrator (Segal, et al., 1997, 299). In fact, a study on young adult readers found that first-person present tense narratives influenced them to automatically identify and empathize with the protagonist/narrator because this type of narration keeps the reader in the immediate present of the diegesis, and does not allow much critical distance (Nikolajeva, 2014). This was also found in health promotion narratives where first-person point of view created more identification feelings (Chen & Bell, 2022).

Each one of Joe, Amy, and Nick is the homodiegetic narrator playing the role of protagonist. Their thoughts and feelings are in the form of psycho-narration, interior monologue, and stream of consciousness. These aspects allow readers' accessibility to character's thoughts and feelings to understand the narrative from their viewpoints. In turn, this helps create more psychological closeness between reader and character (Keen, 2006; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). Wayne Booth (1983) writes in this regard that '*[i]f* an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, *then* the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him' (cited in Keen, 2006, 219, original emphasis). This fits with empirical evidence that the perspectivizing character, the one who focalises the narrative, is the character readers adopt its perspective and identify with (see de Graaf, et al., 2012; Oliver, et al., 2019). This is exemplified in the following passage which shows the complex context Joe's first-person point of view occupies and how it can influence readers' experience of other characters.

3.7.2. Manipulation of POV in *You*.

"Well," I say and I should shut up and I want to shut up but you make me want to talk. "That guy is the reason that Blockbuster shouldn't have gone under."

You look at me. You're curious and I want to know about you but I can't ask so I just keep talking (*You*, 03).

You operates in the same way as in this passage. Joe's perception in the form of interior monologue narrates the event taking place in the present moment. His stream of consciousness as conveyed in a paratactic sentence allows his emotions to occur with fluency and immediacy for readers to witness. This is because parataxis is associated with narrative representation of stream of consciousness (see Hale, 2013). The parataxis in 'I say and I should shut up and I want to shut up but you make me want to talk' not only delivers Joe's thoughts as they pile up in his mind. But it also characterises his emotions with urgency and vividness. This emotion presentation is significant in making a character's thoughts and feelings transparent for readers to experience affective empathy (Keen, 2007; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020; Nabi & Green, 2015).

However, as Segal and colleagues (1997) put it, 'seeing a mind is not quite the same thing as identifying with one' (280). This means that making characters' feelings accessible to readers does not guarantee that they are going to put themselves into their situation. Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that readers identify and take on the perspective of the 'perspectivizing character' to understand and navigate the narrative world from that perspective (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). This means that readers' knowledge and perception of the diegesis come from what Joe allows them to witness. If they are going to be transported into the narrative world, they become hypothetically transported into Joe's mind. As Oatley (1999b) puts it, readers who identify 'merge' with the protagonist. To put it differently, 'seeing a mind' of someone like Joe can initially motivate readers to experience his narration. This allows him then to involve the readers with his compelling personality.

Moreover, Joe is the 'I' designating Beck as his object of observation by addressing her using the second-person pronoun, you. Thus, Beck becomes 'the focalised' to be observed (Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020, 130). This position is likely to distance readers from 'merging' with her because her side of the story and consciousness are completely absent or obscured by Joe's perception of her. Readers, for instance, may take for granted that Beck was 'curious' in the exchange that took place in front of her, but it is Joe who says that she is looking curious. This imposes Joe's thoughts on readers' perception of Beck. At the same time, Beck remains oblivious to being the central character of Joe's observation. As such, she 'is referred to and designated, but not addressed by the second person pronoun. [she] is just as oblivious to being the centre of a narrative as are the protagonists in third person narratives' (Nielsen, 2011, 12). In other words, readers are going to experience and evaluate

Beck from the perception and knowledge of Joe about her, and not from her own point of view. This is one aspect that is going to orient readers' evaluation of characters and empathic identification thereafter toward Joe, the perpetrator, not Beck, his victim.

Furthermore, the passage above seems to establish three psychological distances from the pronouns used, to orient readers' experience of and empathy with the characters involved. Initially, pronouns have a deictic function which influences the directness of justifying their utterances. First-person utterances such as 'I say' or 'I want' are directly justified by the experience of the speaker, whereas second- and third-person utterances often require the drawing of inferences and justification which make experience indirect (Segal, et al., 1997, 276). It thus might be expected that readers may likely to experience Joe, the 'I' with more closeness and reliability; Beck, the 'you' with some distance; and 'that guy'; the 'he' with the utmost distance. This proposal can be supported with Hartung, Burke, Hagourt, and Willems (2016)'s study about the role of person pronouns and narrative engagement with the protagonist. They found that the manipulation of narrative point of view through person pronouns can guide readers to take the role of either spectator or character.

The researchers found that first-person pronoun, I, facilitates a more immediate experience and therefore identification, increases mental imagery, and leads to more immersion and appreciation. This perhaps relies on the assumption that the default mode of processing language is the first-person perspective to reduce cognitive taxation as found in studies of embodied cognition. They also found that third-person pronouns demand more processing which can account for less immersion, whereas the role of second-person pronoun was not investigated (see Hartung, et al., 2016). This means that Joe, the narrating I, a homodiegetic narrator in the position of hero is going to invite readers to experience his narration with more immediacy, vivid imagery, immersion, and increased potential for identification with him.

Although these pronouns were studied in relation to the role of protagonist in the study above, it seems plausible to extend them to refer to other characters in a single narrative. I mean that when Joe the narrator refers to other characters as 'she, he, they,' readers may be compelled to occupy the role of a spectator and perceive them from Joe's perspective with psychological distance. According to Bentham (2014), [s]pectatorship's distancing effect, created by heterodiegetic narration, typically precludes the reader from empathetic engagement with characters' (42). To note briefly here, this distancing effect was

not expected to be the case with *CoS's* heterodiegetic narrator because of the role of other devices such as imagery and realism to shock readers with its style. To continue, this means that in relation to these characters, Joe operates like a heterodiegetic narrator; a situation that will be discussed later in relation the issue of his potential unreliability. On the other hand, referring to a character as 'you' can draw readers in as if being addressed themselves which may stimulate identification with that of you. However, I disprove of this potential function of the second-person pronoun in *You* because you is fully marked as Beck as I am going to explain from the following passage.

> You take the books out of the basket and put the basket on the floor and look at me like it wouldn't be remotely possible for me to criticize anything you ever did (*You*, 03).

The first impression readers may feel when reading 'you take' or 'you put' may trigger their feelings of personal involvement as if they are being called out or addressed in the present moment. However, I argue that this impression is not going to be maintained for longer because the reader can shortly identify the person being mentally called by the narrator as another fictive character, Beck. To put it differently, the second-person pronoun becomes fully marked as Beck, the more the narrative develops, which breaks any potential ambiguity that may place the reader as a narratee/protagonist. Indeed, the 'I' which refers to Joe is likely to draw readers' to side with him, while 'you' which refers to Beck pushes her outside of that hypothetical bond. Yet, that does not negate all together readers' potential to sense some level of personal involvement from the frequent repetition of 'you'. In this regard, Mildorf (2016) explains that second-person narration creates both an aesthetic-reflective involvement (equated with the pleasure of intellectual response) and an affective-emotional involvement (equated with narrative empathy) in readers by considering its linguistic context. Yet, she specifies that the effects of involvement which is likely to draw readers into the narrative as if being called out, even when they know the 'addressee' as a designated character, is elicited by 'the interpersonal semiotic quality' of the second-person pronoun that has a 'summoning' function for readers' attention (Mildorf, 2016, 152).

However, the potential positions readers may occupy via their engagement with the second-person pronoun are worth some discussion. First of all, the second-person point of view is rare in use compared to the first- and third-person perspectives in both fictional writing and empirical studies (Fludernik, 1994; Hartung, et al., 2016; Christy, 2018; Al-Alami, 2019). It can also influence readers' experience of narrative and characters. Many scholars

agree that you-narration has the capacity to address many entities toward the story world including the reader, the protagonist, or both depending on the linguistic context (Mildorf, 2016; Richardson, 2006). The second-person pronoun can implicate readers through questioning who the narratee is; a narratee as protagonist, narratee as the commonly implied reader of all narratives, or narratee as both protagonist and reader if the second-person pronoun is not fully marked (for a distinction, see Herman, 1994; Kacandes, 2001; Fludernik, 1993; Cowan, 2018; Richardson, 2006; Bell & Ensslin, 2011). Although I argue that readers of *You* are not going to experience the narrative as Beck because they are likely to take on the perspective of Joe, the 'I', it is useful to discuss how I came to this opinion.

For example, Herman (1994) offers a taxonomy of textual-you that involves five functions from referential you, address you, and double deixis. 'Referential you' is employed to refer to either a 'generalized' audience as generically found in instructions, proverbs, or recipes. It can also be used in narratives to refer to an 'impersonal' entity such as when an intradiegetic narrator refers to themselves as an intradiegetic narratee (fictional reference). This is not the case of *You* because the narrator, Joe refers to himself in the first-person point of view which separates him from his narratee, Beck. On the other hand, 'address you' has two functions too. It can be used for 'fictionalized address' to address a character within the diegesis. Or it can be used for 'actualized address or apostrophe' to reach readers outside of the frame of diegesis. This case occurs in *Gone Girl* when Nick said '[n]ow is the part where I have to tell *you* I have a mistress and *you* stop liking me. If *you* liked me to begin with' (*Gone Girl,* 161, added emphasis). Here, Nick clearly 'breaks the fourth wall' using apostrophic address to reach readers outside of the diegesis, without implying himself or another character. The breaking of the imaginary fourth wall between the fictional diegesis of characters and the non-diegetic world of readers is an aesthetic technique (Conway, 2010) which will be later linked to narrative absorption.

This double address function is characterised as 'double deixis' in Herman's (1994) taxonomy where 'you' is used to refer simultaneously to both a real and fictional addressee. This function can create 'ontological hesitation' at the level of the reader due to the ambiguity of who is being addressed (Herman, 1994; Bell & Ensslin, 2011). For example, Joe says, '[t]here comes a point when the universe needs to get on *your* side or go fuck itself and the universe gets in line' (61, added emphasis). Judging from the linguistic context of this sentence, Joe is not referring to another character. He is thinking to himself. The ambiguity from who is being addressed (the reader, the narratee/narrator) can imply Joe, the narrator

as addressing himself as narratee (fictional address). At the same time, the reader can be pulled into that monologue (referential address or apostrophe) because of the ''double deixis' capacity of 'you'. In this regard, sometimes the ambiguity created from not specifying who is being designated in you-narration can draw readers into the story as if being directly addressed.

The apostrophe, here, also refers to 'a form of address in which the absent are addressed as though present, the inanimate as though animate, the dead as though living' (Boas & Smith, 1961, 72-73, quoted in Enns, 1993, 45). Kacandes (2001) too argues that the apostrophe can be a way for the narrator to address an absent or imaginary person or entity, but also to connect with the real world and the reader in a tangible and emotional way. This can mean that textual-you in *You* is apostrophic towards Beck because she is oblivious to being addressed by Joe's narration. It can also include readers outside the diegesis because of the summoning nature of the second person.

Nevertheless, in this narrative, I propose that 'you' is not going to bond readers with Beck. Joe's first-person point of view may override that potential. I suggest that readers can identify Joe's addressee/narratee as Beck, not themselves, even though Beck is not aware of being 'summoned' or 'addressed' herself. Phelan (1994) writes that the second-person point of view can create both distance and involvement by considering the specificity of 'you'.

> [W]hen the second-person address to a narratee-protagonist both overlaps with and differentiates itself from an address to actual readers, those readers will simultaneously occupy the positions of addressee and observer. Furthermore, the fuller the characterization of the 'you,' the more aware actual readers will be of their differences from that 'you,' and thus, the more fully they will move into the observer role, and the less likely this role will overlap with the addressee position (Phelan, 1994: 351; cited in Mildorf, 2016, 151).

Phelan's idea applies partially to *You*. That is, readers are placed as ''observers' of Beck, while they are invited to 'merge' with Joe. Indeed, Beck's evolving specificity as the central character of Joe's story prevents readers from identifying the second-pronoun as addressing them. This is also likely to occur because of Beck's superficial and depersonalized specificity. She is reported on by Joe, does not have a point of view, and her consciousness is absent in discourse. At the same time, Joe's first-person point of view is likely to break any potential for readers to side with Beck. Instead, they are encouraged to side with Joe, the active protagonist who moves the actions forward. This recalls Lindhé's (2016) idea of how

narratives distribute readers' empathy due to the tension they create between story and discourse. Some characters are represented in story such as Beck, but they are not significant to discourse as Joe, for instance, is.

Under this logic, Beck is 'designated', but not 'addressed' and she remains oblivious to Joe's narration as Nielsen (2011) argued previously. At the same time, the reader is not oblivious to the fact that Joe's narratee/addressee is Beck. This dynamic depersonalises, silences, and subjects the thoughts and emotions of the victim, Beck, to the manipulations of the perpetrator, Joe. The potential effect from this specific use of second-person is likely to alienate Beck from readers' affection as she remains outside the proximity created by Joe's homodiegetic narration. In turn, this mode of narration is likely to orient readers' empathy toward Joe. In other words, readers may be pushed to occupy the 'observer role' anticipated by Phelan (1994) when experiencing Beck as she becomes an object to be observed by both the reader and Joe, and not an active character with agency to be involved and connected with. Meanwhile, Joe's homodiegetic narration in the role of protagonist may prevent them from being mere observers, but to 'occupy' his mind as participators.

In fact, Joe's first-person point of view humanizes Joe and makes his emotions and perspectives salient and accessible to the reader to experience. In turn, because in psycholinguistics, 'attention is paid to what is in focus, not what is out of focus' (Stanford & Emmott, 2012, 88), readers' attention is directed by Joe's narration to focus on what Beck does. This creates a dynamic where Beck's actions are represented as causing Joe's joy and misery. This is to facilitate his twisted sense of vulnerability and victimhood as I shall illustrate later. As such, the reader is positioned to remain in the background watching with Joe, from his mind, not with Beck in the foreground. This may create de/personalization effects from the manipulation of the first- and second-person pronouns. Joe is personalised, while Beck is not so that to influence the distribution of empathy, in the sense that Joe receives readers' emotional involvement, while Beck is denied that.

Moreover, there are other aspects to make Joe seems more engaging and likable than Beck to influence readers' evaluation and empathy, thereafter. First of all, Joe's role of protagonist who focalises the narrative may give readers an illusion of his 'presumed morality' as Raney puts it (2004). He is a round character that satiates readers' need for information to experience the narrative. He is a morally flawed antihero, which makes his personality realistic. He is also represented as a traditional hero who has struggles and overcomes them (for more details, see 1.5.2.3.). Unlike Beck who is not portrayed as a victim,

Joe is often constructed as a victim of his upbringing. He sometimes uses flashbacks to take the reader to his unhappy childhood to orient their sympathy toward him. For example, he says 'I was lonely in high school' or 'My whole life, I've never felt at home […] I've survived winters without presents […] I've known Thanksgivings without turkey' (278). These sad events may help readers relate to Joe's persistence for Beck's love. It may sometimes justify his twisted ways to get there. His intention to find love with Beck is a good intention which may justify his moral violations as I will illustrate later. These traits of Joe correspond with evidence on their potential to generate empathic response in readers (see de Graaf, et al., 2012; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013).

Up till now I have focused on the special effect of second-person pronoun that stands out in *You* as likely to alienate Beck the victim of Joe from readers' identification. This is likely because she remains an object to be observed outside the intimate circle forced onto the readers from Joe's first-person point of view. This is one aspect of how *You* may generate readers' empathic identification with its evil hero. Overall, the use of person pronouns to position readers at particular psychological distances from the characters involved is likely to 'merge' them with Joe, the narrating 'I', while they remain distant from the other involved characters such as Beck. However, this does not mean that all first-person point of views are likely to create this affective relationship with readers. This can be illustrated from *Gone Girl* where two first-person point of views are equally accessible in both discourse and emotion presentation. Both characters in conflict, Amy and Nick narrate their side of the story so that readers can decide which character is worthy of their empathy. Nevertheless, before illustrating this particular discourse feature of *Gone Girl*, I am going to primarily consider how first-person narration, especially in *You*, can dissociate Joe from unreliable narration. *Gone Girl* is not analysed in this regard because both characters in conflict narrate their side of the story which overcomes their unreliability when their views eventually match up.

Generally speaking, first-person point of view can often be associated with unreliable narration (Riggan, 1981; Hansen, 2007; for critical reviews, see Nielsen, 2004; Murphy, 2012). Unreliable narration may influence distrust in readers and force them to distance themselves from Joe or Amy. According to Manfred (2021), a narrator is considered unreliable if the reader has cause to doubt their interpretation of the narrative and/or commentary on it. A first-person narrator's limited knowledge, their own involvement, and their problematic value-scheme can be primary sources of unreliability (71). Supposedly first-person point of view in the present tense limits narrator's access to other characters' states of minds.

Thereby, as I will exemplify below, when Joe or Amy narrates with confidence and unmatched insightfulness the thoughts and feelings of other characters, they may seem unreliable as they cannot possibly know with certainty. Riggan (1981) confirms that 'first-person narration is, then, always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives' (19–20).

Therefore, Joe's role as a protagonist and homodiegetic narrator should prevent him from accessing the thoughts and feelings of other characters. However, his judgemental thoughts, for instance, when he attributes them with different psychological states and personality traits characterises him not with unreliability, but with omniscience. Joe's psycho-narration is somehow omniscient when considering the ontology of his internal focalization that takes place most of the time inside of his mind. However, this should also be impossible for his limited first-person point of view. Indeed, while the diegesis with characters are constructed most of the time inside Joe's observing mind, Joe should not have knowledge of other characters' states of minds, unless he made them up or inferred them (the issue of unreliability). Nevertheless, this is overcome by his unethical ways to collect information. Indeed, the insight of Joe on other characters is an outcome of his stalking. He can access their online data, their meetings, and houses without them knowing, which gives him the superior knowledge like that of an omniscient narrator.

In fact, Joe's online and in-person stalking makes his judgements eventually correct like that of an *all-knowing* heterodiegetic narrator in a third-person narration. This aspect combined with his use of second-person pronoun makes his narratorial status similar to an omnipresent heterodiegetic narrator in a third-person narrative. This can be realized if we merely replace every 'you' with 'she' as in, 'you make me want to talk' (*You*, 03) with 'she makes me want to talk'. The meaning is not going to change as Richardson (2006) indicates how some, but not all standard you-narrations, can be rendered into the first-person or third-person by simply switching the pronoun 'you' to 'I' or 's/he' (22). DelConte (2003) too points out the consensus that 'we encounter an inevitable overlap of second-person with either first- or third-person because second-person is always also either first- or third-person' (204).

Additionally, Joe's potentially unreliable narration which may motivate readers not to trust him is prevented by the influence of other characters' judgements. Joe's judgements become reliable because they are devoid of 'epistemological uncertainty or inconsistency' (Heinze, 2008, 280) from the affirmations made by other characters. He judges them as bad

and they turn out to be as bad by other characters' commentary which may likely to associate Joe with an intelligent and reliable narrator. This point can be illustrated from Joe's initial judgement of Beck and how the other characters validate his reliability by confirming that initial judgement. For example, one of the aspects Joe attributes to Beck the moment he laid eyes on her was how sensual she was. This can be demonstrated from the diction and metaphors he uses to infantilise and sexualise her as a 'nymph' (01); 'Children are not supposed to talk to strangers' (10); 'You are uniquely sexual' (17); 'You're so clean that you're dirty (01); 'You sneeze, loudly, and I imagine how loud you are when you climax' (01); 'you horny girl' (02). He even psychoanalyzes her as if he knows her past when he said that Benji, her troubled lover, 'is the daddy you try desperately to please, the daddy who leaves, no matter what you do' (48).

Joe's specific judgements about Beck may thus characterize him as an unreliable narrator and alert readers not to trust his narration because how he could know that match about her from first encounter. However, that knowledge eventually becomes true. He either studied her extensively before meeting her through his stalking, or other characters confirm his judgment. To exemplify, after Joe got together with Beck, he felt something odd going on between Beck and Dr. Nicky. He, then, sneaked into his office and listened to the recordings of Beck's diagnosis. The diagnosis below is going to confirms Joe's insightful judgment of Beck.

> *Okay, day one, Beck. Female. Early to midtwenties. Hypersexualized. Boundary issues. Father issues. Claims to be here to resolve her issues with men but doesn't seem to realize that I have a ring on my finger. Only mode of communication is seduction. Repeatedly crosses her legs and wears a flimsy shirt without a bra. Attention seeking. Directly asks about transference, severe narcissistic disorder. Insists on calling me Dr. Nicky in spite of my repeated statements that I am not an MD. Repeatedly asks if I'm married and if I have a good sex life with my wife to avoid discussing her own life. Tells me she slept with her therapist in college. Repeatedly. I ask why she doesn't see a female clinician and she says she has one mother, doesn't need another. Possible borderline, predatory, masochistic tendencies* (*You*, 243, original emphasis).

Although, Joe's value-laden descriptions of Beck above reveal his impulsive and overconfident nature when he projects his over-sexual nature onto Beck, his judgements can initially be overlooked in good faith that someone is just excitedly describing someone they desire. Nevertheless, as the narrative develops, the plot orients the reader to see Joe's judgements as Beck's truth. This glorifies Joe as an intelligent and insightful person who can

read people properly and vilifies Beck as a promiscuous and disloyal woman. This point can be validated from the part where Joe reads Beck's letters to herself and her therapist's recording of her diagnosis as quoted above. As instructed by her therapist, Dr. Nicky, Beck wrote letters to herself every day in the form of emails. Because Joe stole her old phone, he has access to all her social media and emails which allowed him to read her letters and in turn confirm his judgement of her as an attention seeker. She wrote: '*Dear Beck, you reel in men and you lose interest when you have them. You don't wear a bra so that guys will look at your nipples. Wear a bra. Nicky sees what you're doing. This is good. Be seen. Love, Beck*' (222, original emphasis).

Similar to Beck's letter that affirms Joe's judgement of her, her therapist's diagnosis also does that. As such, Joe who seems to possess 'unusual knowledge' that 'violates the prototypical model of first-person narrative, according to which a […] character's range of knowledge is constrained by his or her physical and mental limits' (Kang, 2022, 01) is prevented. His knowledge which should be 'unusual' is not impossible when considering that he acts like an omniscient narrator by stalking his targets online and in-person which adds to his competence and insight. Joe's omniscient consciousness takes over the diegesis by simply collecting information on his victims such as reading their emails, personal blogs, tweets, observing them from windows, keeping tabs on their friends, or following them in streets. Both of the letter and recoded diagnoses demonstrate how *You* manipulates readers' evaluation of characters in conflict. It compels them to side and admire Joe and feel alienated from Beck.

Joe is characterised as this intelligent person who is always ahead of Beck, while Beck is vilified as a promiscuous woman without space to defend herself. Even though Joe narrates his side of the story with a bold judgemental attitude, he is prevented from association with unreliability as other characters are used to validate his point of view. Thereby, the perspectivizing of the whole narrative from Joe's point of view, constructing Beck from his perception as an object to be watched or a prey to be chased, and validating that perception by her own confessions and other characters create a dynamic of victim-blaming where the real victim, Beck, is silenced and vilified and her perpetrator is treated like a victim of her seduction. This narrative manipulation where the victim is depersonalised and their pain is absent will have consequences on readers' moral disengagement as will be explained later.

Overall, the novel gradually manipulates the reader to justify Joe's hurt as consequential of Beck's promiscuous and disloyal nature while denying her voice in discourse

to defend herself. This point fits with Pedro (2020)'s disapproval of some critiques of the narrative as an ironic critique of gender and patriarchal oppression to denounce the pervasive rape culture. She writes that *You* fails these aspirations as it 'prioritises [Joe's] POV over his victims, who are portrayed as promiscuous and deceitful women [who] actually deserve Joe's abuse because they were being unfaithful and dishonest to him' (Pedro, 2020, 175). As such, it becomes unethical to use empathy-inducing techniques such as interior monologue and first-person point of view to encourage perspective-taking with a misogynist criminal such as Joe. To merge readers psychologically with Joe, while his victim is antagonised and silenced is an example of how far fiction can trespass moral boundaries by switching the role of victim and perpetrator to manipulate readers' sympathies (Lindhé, 2016; 2021).

3.7.3. Manipulation of POV in *Gone Girl*.

Similar to *You's* way to merge readers with Joe, *Gone Girl* also uses the first-person point of view. However, both its characters in conflict, Amy and Nick, have their thoughts and feelings accessible to readers to evaluate. This can be observed from the organization of chapters in the novel where Nick's narration is followed by Amy's narration. Since consciousness representation is associated with empathic identification (Keen, 2013; Mallan, 2013), this can mean that readers can empathize with both Amy and Nick. For instance, readers can identify with Nick or Amy if one of them is more similar, relevant or judged more virtuous. This fits with Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-Tregerman's (2015) study of readers' responses toward a story with two protagonists who hold opposing perspectives regarding controversial issues (pro- or anti-demonstration on university campus). They found that readers' identification with the character who hold similar beliefs (what they called a concordant character) polarized their attitudes, while their identification with the character who hold dissimilar attitudes (discordant character). In contrast, transportation into the two-sided narrative tempered their attitudes. This can mean that readers who are going to see Nick's cheating and apathy as tolerable in contrast to Amy's revenge and incrimination of him, may identify with him, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, I disagree with this potential because *Gone Girl* uses other aspects besides first-person point of view to manipulate readers to side with Amy. These include creating a situation of conflict to activate readers' side-taking (Breithaupt, 2012; Lindhé, 2016). Indeed, besides the plot-driven conflict that arises between a cheating husband and

vengeful wife, the atmosphere of both point of views is different in the sense that Amy's side is more dynamic and exciting, whereas Nick is careful and guilty. This implicates other aspects to influence readers' evaluation of characters and their empathy, thereafter. These aspects can include the attitude of characters toward each other, the order of narration, (point of view after point of view), shift in emotional tone (such as gloomy vs., playful), and shift in temporal deixis (retrospective narration in the past tense vs., retrospective narration in the present tense (in diary entries), and simultaneous narration in the present tense (interior monologue, stream of consciousness). I propose that the interplay between these elements, as they are illustrated below, is likely to pull readers into Amy's side of the story.

Readers of *Gone Girl* are first introduced to Nick narrating his gloomy side of the story using first-person point of view in the past tense where he eventually informs them of his wife's disappearance. Nick's narration creates a negatively-valanced atmosphere. He starts by usually thinking of 'opening her [Amy's] skull' (01) and finishes with melancholy. 'Bile and dread inched up my throat' (03). He is passive as can be sensed from the expression, 'as I tried to decide whether I was ready to join my wife. Amy was in the kitchen, oblivious to my hesitation' (04)). His tone is suspicious like when he said '[*y]ou have been seen. You will be seen*,' (01, original emphasis) or 'It was my fifth lie to the police. I was just starting' (35). He is also anxious as can be felt from him saying '[t]o pretend to be calm is to be calm, in a way' (39). This atmosphere is contrasted with Amy's happy and playful diary entries which are narrated from her first-person point of view in the present tense. She is happy. 'I am embarrassed at how happy I am, like some Technicolor comic of a teenage girl talking on the phone with my hair in a ponytail.' (05). Her narration is playful and more engaging as can be demonstrated from her shifts in deixis inside the diegesis when she extensively 'breaks the fourth wall' with readers, as illustrated below.

> I met a boy! But I did. This is a technical, empirical truth. I met a boy, a great, gorgeous dude, a funny, cool-ass guy. Let me set the scene, because it deserves setting for posterity (no, please, I'm not that far gone, posterity! feh). But still (08).

Readers can feel that they are with Amy as she writes her diary. They become not just readers, but friends who are questioning her experience. The expression '[b]ut I did' implies that Amy is defending herself against the doubt of someone, in this case, the reader. Then, when she says, '[l]et me set the scene', implies that Amy is with someone, supposedly the reader, and she is eager to convince them that she did meet a boy. Also, Amy's comment

between bracket "(no, please, I'm not that far gone, posterity! Feh") gives a 'quasi-communicational set up' (Mildorf, 2016, 146) to the whole expression as if she is conversing with someone 'real'. The expression also gives a sense of immediacy as if readers are listening to Amy correct herself in real time. In other words, the passage breaks the fourth wall and implies that there is a reader with Amy. That reader is sometimes treated like an accomplice when she uses quizzes as in the following passage.

> You are Amazing Amy, and you've survived a brutal kidnapping involving repeated assaults. You've killed your captor, and you've made it back to a husband you've discovered was cheating. You:
>
> Put yourself first and demand some time alone to collect yourself.
> Hold it together just a little longer so you can help the police.
> Decide which interview to give first – you might as well get something out of the ordeal, like a book deal.
>
> Answer: B. Amazing Amy always puts others first.

This quiz shows the calculating nature of Amy which can absorb readers' into her situation. This type of quizzes force readers to put themselves into the shoes of Amy to consider their/her next move. This breaking of the fourth wall as will be seen later, adds playfulness to her narration and pull readers into her particular situations.

This constant ping-ponging between Amy's engaging diary entries and Nick's gloomy voice creates tension which may invite readers to evaluate Amy as a kind and interesting person, while making Nick seem uncomfortable and suspicious. The tension created from their contrasting tones and emotion presentations can make Amy's side of the story more suspenseful than the distressful side of Nick that is likely to reinforce his culpability in Amy's disappearance as her diary entries suggest. In fact, while Nick remains gloomy, suspicious, and careful, Amy's side changes from cheerfulness and excitement to resentment and revenge. Amy shifts her tone from cheerfulness to anxiety and fear with the development of her diary. For example, she says '[b]ut I may be wrong […] I catch him looking at me with those watchful eyes, the eyes of an insect, pure calculation, and I think: This man might kill me. So if you find this and I'm dead, well … Sorry, that's not funny.' (199). This commentary of Amy matches Nick's narrative voice. He is indeed careful and watchful, which may influence readers to trust Amy and stay distant from Nick.

I assume that this fluctuation in emotional tone functions against Nick. His emotions characterise him as guilty from the beginning as he indeed cheated on Amy, but he did not murder her. However, because that information was revealed later in the narrative, it

coincided with many clues of Amy's alleged death (such as her fear of him) and police suspecting of him. This manipulates readers to falsely suspect him of her murder. Therefore, I suggest that Amy's change of tone from thrill to fear is going to antagonise Nick because he is the reason of her change of spirit. It also reinforces his culpability which is manifested in his suspicious tone in his side of narration.

In addition, the disposition above is likely to be reinforced by considering how both characters talk about each other in the first part of the novel. The order of narration from Nick's anxious narration to Amy's cheerful diary entries emphasises Nick's bad attitude toward his wife. For instance, when Nick begins his narration in a desperate tone wishing to understand how his wife thinks, he says '[l]ike a child, I picture opening her skull, unspooling her brain and sifting through it, trying to catch and pin down her thoughts. What are you thinking, Amy?' (01). The graphic metaphor of opening her skull invites readers to assume that Amy is hard to understand. However, in the following chapter, when Amy writes that 'I am smiling […] I met a boy, a great, gorgeous dude, a funny, cool-ass guy' (08), readers can easily sense how thrilled Amy is with meeting Nick. These different events with different attitudes point out how both characters' energies shift when considering each other. The juxtaposition of characters' attitude toward each other can reinforce readers' liking of Amy as it matches her diary entries. All she does is '*keeping my head down and making the best of a bad situation*' (134, original emphasis). It also encourages readers to dislike Nick as he is Amy's cause of pain.

Therefore, when Amy's tone changes from happy to dreading her husband's intentions toward her as when she says 'he seems to have lost all interest in both me and his ailing parents' (136), Nick becomes the causer of her pain; a dislikable association to have. This is further reinforced by his own nonchalant attitude toward her disappearance as can be demonstrated from his own self-description and other characters', and the discovery of his hidden mistress. For instance, he says 'the jackass grin. Another of me waving and smiling like a pageant queen as I got out of my car (I was waving back to Marybeth; I was smiling because I smile when I wave)' (156). Other characters too report on him as weirdly suspicious. Desi told him:'[b]ecause I have to tell you, Nick, on TV, hell, here, now, you don't seem to be a grieving, worried husband. You seem … smug' (161). Later, when readers discover that he has a mistress (see page 139), they may likely dislike him even more.

These unlikable qualities which match Amy's fear of him in her diary are likely to influence readers' evaluation of Nick and deprive him of their empathic identification as he

develops into a dislikeable perpetrator. When readers reach such conclusive evaluation of both characters, the rest of the narrative is likely to activate readers' affective dispositions according to the affective disposition theory (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976; Raney, 2017, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.3.). I mean that Amy's change of tone and emotion presentation construct a theme of victim and perpetrator. Readers may very well evaluate Nick as an antagonist who is acting suspiciously while his wife is allegedly dead. They may evaluate Amy as a kind wife who is probably a victim of her husband's cheating and potential murder (diary manipulation). Henceforth, readers' disposition to liking Amy increases and Nick's decreases. Consequences of empathic identification may follow the universal disposition to side-taking with the victim (Woodward, Hiske, & Breithaupt, 2022; Leake, 2014). This is because when humans are able to detect 'a clear causal connection' between who caused the pain of another, 'empathy is stronger' for the person in pain alongside resentment for the perpetrator (Lindhé, 2016, 31).

Nevertheless, when Amy reveals in part two of the novel that she was in fact manipulating the police (therefore, readers) to incriminate Nick, surprised readers are likely to reevaluate their previous judgement of all characters. This goes in line with evidence which will be discussed later about the evaluative function of surprise to all preceding information (Rapp & Gerrig, 2006). Readers may thus view Amy as an unreliable narrator and stop trusting her. However, I assume that readers may be more motivated and curious to see what Amy's next move will be to avenge herself from Nick who continues to be cold-hearted and detached. This can be supported from the fact that Amy's side of the story is more engaging than Nick's. Amy's narration is thus capable of generating more surprise, suspense, and curiosity as she pushes the narrative forward by her different manipulations. This creates more tension in the overall narrative and makes Amy's narration more enjoyable as the Multidimensional Narrative Tension Theory of Enjoyment suggests (Bermejo-Berros,, Lopez-Diez, Martínez, 2022). Discourse structures will be defined later in relation to narrative absorption.

When Amy's tone changes drastically while revealing to readers that her diaries were fake, a device to avenge herself from her cheating husband, her narration changes from retrospection to simultaneous mode, and her tone and attitude shifts from a damsel in distress, afraid for her life, to a femme fatale. Amy's shift in attitude as denoted from her commentary:'([d[]on't fret, we'll sort this out: the true and the not true and the might as well be true.)' (211) is going to make her more intriguing and interesting like a new personality

emerges to review the old story. At the same time, Nick continues his reflective narration in the same rhythm of melancholy and anxiety when he discovered what Amy was doing to him. This shift may not affect readers' evaluation of her in a negative light. This may be due to the sympathetic effect of her diary entries on characterizing her as a positive character and victim, and Nick's unlikability when he did cheat on her and took her money.

Therefore, when Amy wrote her diary entries to represent herself in a positive and sympathetic light, she implied a degrading representation of her husband who was already consistently representing himself as such. Thereby, the absorbed reader in the first half of the novel is guided to perceive them in the same light; Amy in a positive light and Nick in a negative light. When Amy reveals her strategy to avenge herself from her cheating husband, she becomes even more powerful and intriguing; a victim who is taking her power back from her abuser. This may fall in line with Tal-Or and Cohen's (2010) study where they found contrary to their expectations that 'whether we informed participants about what the character did in the past [cheater or loyal] or what he will do in the future [cheat or not] did not affect their reported identification with the character' (413). They explain that identification implies a unity of perspective with the main character. As such, the positive connection that Amy manipulated throughout the first half of the narrative and Nick's unsympathetic self-portrayal may orient readers to keep empathizing with Amy, not Nick.

The second aspect of textual manipulation that is likely to override the impact of Nick's first-person point of view on readers' empathy comes from the shift in temporal deixis. Readers' experience may be influenced by Nick's retrospective narration in the past tense followed by Amy's retrospective/simultaneous narration in present tense. I suggest that this difference makes Amy's narration more immediate, authentic, and by that more enjoyable than Nick's. In other word, because tense has a deictic function (Segal, et la., 1997; Comrie, 1985), Amy's prese tense narration becomes more absorbing as it pulls readers back to the present moment, after Nick's reflection in the past tense. This is likely to occur because a little durational gap exists between what the narrating 'I' narrates and what the experiencing 'I' performs (Sandefur, 2003). This is also probable because the grammatical form of first-person present tense in narration (FPPT) is associated with simultaneous narration (Stjernfelt & Zeuthen, 2010). As such, Amy's narrated events become more simultaneous. Readers, therefore, may feel more present in her side of the story. This narrative immediacy will be linked to narrative absorption later.

However, as I will discuss later, the first-person present tense narration can have two modes of immediacy effect (Tatishvili, 2011, 11). The historical present used for retrospection or reflection as Amy does in her diary entries, and simultaneous mode as she does in the rest of the novel. Thereby, I expect that the textual manipulation of temporal deixis may likely to pull readers more into Amy's narration as if it is happening 'right now'. This may facilitate merging with her than Nick's past time narration because his first-person point of view in the past tense is 'somewhat psychologically distanced from the ongoing subjectivity of the main characters' (Segal, et al., 1997, 297).

3.8. Summary of analysis.

To bring to conclusion, the sections above explained how *You* and *Gone Girl* may facilitate empathic identification with their evil protagonists Joe and Amy. This might be expected from their use of known empathy-inducing devices that facilitate psychological merging with the protagonist. These devices mainly include different manipulations of point of view to allow readers' accessibility to their consciousnesses (Keen, 2007; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020). In both works, the diegesis takes place entirely in the protagonists' minds (homodiegetic narration) using stream of consciousness, psycho-narration, and interior monologue. These techniques centralise the perspectives of the evil protagonists which is likely to influence readers to empathise with them, and to take on their perspectives (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Salem, Weskott & Holler, 2017). However, although both novels use first-person point of view, they construct different experiences for character involvement. This offers a good illustration to how linguistic and narrative context can be more effective in influencing readers' affective dispositions than just having a particular point of view.

To summarise, *You* uses most prominently the second-person pronoun to address Joe's focalised, Beck. As such, Beck becomes an object to be followed and observed outside Joe's and readers' intimate proximity. She is depersonalised and silenced from having her side of the story told. She is necessary to story, not in discourse (Lindhé, 2016). She is also antagonised by the end of story and treated like someone who hurt Joe. This alienates Beck from the empathic circle that is likely to form between readers and Joe. Eventually, readers may empathise with Joe, the true perpetrator, and may despise Beck, the true victim.

As for *Gone Girl*, although the point of view of both characters in conflict is available in their respective chapters for readers to evaluate with presumed interpretive freedom, I proposed that readers are likely to empathise with Amy. This is facilitated by constructing

Nick with unlikable traits such as being suspicious, nonchalant, and uncomfortable. His side of the story is pessimistic and passive as it moves only when Amy did/does something. In contrast, Amy uses diary entries to influence readers' evaluation of her. she is lovely, happy, and playful which are reflected in her use of quizzes and breaking the fourth wall. In addition, the most important aspect that stands from *Gone Girl* is the manipulation of temporal deixis. The narrative alternates between Nick's retrospective narration in the past tense, followed by Amy's present tense narration, either in retrospection when she uses her diaries or simultaneous narration after she reveals her plan. This is likely to make Amy's narration seem more immediate and absorbing than Nick's. Eventually, readers may empathise with Amy, not Nick. All in all, this conflict in narration and characterization (although not about a controversial topic) between Amy and Nick may increase readers' involvement in the narrative world as Cohen, Tal-Or and Mazor-Tregerman's (2015) speculate, 'compared with one-sided narratives about controversial topics, two-sided narratives will engender more transportation (255).

Finally, empathic identification with Joe and Amy because they are more sympathetic and interesting, not their depersonalised victims, may encourage readers to morally disengage. This occurs through identification which is found to increase moral disengagement (Raney, et al., 2009; Janicke & Raney, 2018). However, although most studies examine identification as a mechanism of moral disengagement, I propose that moral disengagement occurs in the characterisation of characters themselves. In other words, moral disengagement can be examined as a characterization cue, as I am going to demonstrate in the next section. When a character is already morally-disengaged, empathizing readers adopt the perspective and feelings of an already morally-disengaged character. Thereby, I suggest that moral disengagement as both a character trait and effect of identification may increase potential for narrative persuasion.

3.9. To Moral Disengagement.

For a reminder, this chapter posits that readers may develop moral desensitization and moral cynicism over repeated exposure to immoral protagonists. To demonstrate this proposition, I drew on previous evidence that identification with antiheroes reduces readers' monitoring of their moral violations which reduces counterarguing and increases persuasion (see Theoretical Framework, 1.4.2.2. and 1.4.2.3.). I build on this evidence to argue that if readers are frequently morally disengaged, they may learn to do so with any manipulation of

their sympathies in real situations. Bandura (2002) points out that once minor transgressions can be excused, it is simpler to accept larger ones in the future. Readers may grow fond of immoral protagonists, keep seeking gratification from their narratives, and eventually become desensitised to their moral violations as will be concluded later.

Based on the analysis before, I demonstrated how *You* and *Gone Girl* can induce readers' empathic identification by constructing the evil protagonists as sympathetic and likable characters, whereas, their victims are depersonalised and their pain is almost absent. As such, Joe's pursuit of Beck's love can be seen as a noble intention. He does not kill or stalk unless he is provoked to protect Beck, which may easily manipulate readers to seen him as the romantic and noble man he claims to be. This fits with Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel's (2013) study which confirmed that the positive intentions and behaviour outcomes of morally-ambiguous characters (such as Amy killed Desi to escape him) correlates positively with their perceived attributes, likings, and moral disengagements. It can thus be predicted that readers who identify with Joe and Amy may reduce their moral scrutiny to excuse their wrongdoings and enjoy their intriguing personalities. However, to explain this prediction further, I am going to focus only on how characterisation alone can influence moral disengagement. Instead of identification leading to moral disengagement, I suggest that having an already morally-disengaged protagonist influences readers to take on this morally disengaged point of view. This can be illustrated from narrative context where Joe and Amy violate law and morality then justify their actions following Bandura's eight moral disengagement strategies.

First of all, many of the thoughts of the antiheroes, especially Joe can be interpreted by drawing on Bandura's (1999; 2011,) eight strategies that underline the process of moral disengagement (see The Theoretical Framework, 1.4.2.3.). . These moral disengagement strategies are embedded within a context that does not make them seem obvious or unreasonable excuses. This can be exemplified from Amy's use of diary entries to influence readers' perception of her and Nick. Joe too antagonises his victims by judging them as bad and having other characters validate that judgement.

In other words, the order of events and characters' perception of each other help the protagonists to morally justify what they do without causing dissonance or disrupting the internal logic of events. For example, Joe stalks Beck and eventually kills her and two of her friends. However, the context where Joe's cruelty takes place does not come as a shocking to readers. From the beginning, Beck's stalking can easily be brushed off as research for the sake of love, while her friends were portrayed as bad influences on their potential romance.

Benji is seen by Beck's girlfriends as 'a sociopathic party boy' (23) who 'cheats on you, Beck. A lot. Compulsively' (48), while Peach is 'a seriously pathological sicko' (210). Similarly, when Amy framed her husband, her hurt from his betrayal and apathy, which both sides of the story confirm, motivate and justify her revenge. It seems hard not to empathise with her when she says '[h]e took away chunks of me with blasé swipes: my independence, my pride, my esteem. I gave, and he took and took' (232).

Most relevantly, Joe's perspective about his actions and others' offer a good template of Bandura's (1999) eight strategies of moral disengagement. Joe uses 'moral justification' while stalking Beck online because 'the Internet was designed with love in mind. It gave me so much of you, Beck' (08). When he stalks her in-person because '[w]ith your open-door policy, I am allowed into your world' (12), he implies that Beck does not mind being observed since she has a 'deluded sense of privacy' (11). When Joe kills Peach by drowning her, he used 'euphemistic labelling' to abstract the pain of her death by saying '[s]he is gone, at peace' (218) or 'Peach left the picture' (221). Similarly, when Joe kidnapped Benji, he used humour to dilute his struggle by saying 'try having the same conversation over and over while Benji's in the cage trying to *dig his way to China*' (61, added emphasis). The metaphor 'dig his way to China' connotate plenty of struggle, but the cartoonish imagery may lesson that struggle with humour.

The abstracting of suffering can also be observed in Desi's death. When Amy killed Desi to 'escape', she did not give the gruesome details of his death. Readers know that she drugged him with her 'sleeping pills' (356) which suggests that he did not suffer. She also describes that event saying that the police will 'find him naked and drained, a stunned look on his face, a few strands of my hair in his clutches, the bed soaked in blood. The knife I used on him, and on my bonds' (363). Although the words, 'drained', 'blood', and 'knife' clarify Desi's death, the sufferance is not there to feel sorry for him. The abstracting of the victim's suffering also takes the form of 'advantageous comparison' such as when Joe killed Benji thinking that he did him a favour.

> He died educated. He died with new confidence and new pride and who says a life has to take eighty years to be lived? […] Most people die old, full of pain and regret. Or young and full of drugs and self-indulgence—or sheer bad luck. But Benji had the ultimate privilege; he died with an opening heart, an improving mind (117).

Joe continues by 'displacing responsibility' onto Benji not to take accountability for killing him, when he thought '[l]ook at the way he treated you and look at the way he treated his body. The trap I set for him was a relief from the trap he was born into' (117). Joe 'diffuses responsibility' onto social norms when he attempts to distract readers from his stalking to social norms by asserting that 'the bullshit thing is, if someone saw the three of us, well, most people would think I'm the weird one just because I followed you here. And that's the problem with this world, with women' (28). Joe's 'distortion of reality' and consequences of his actions invites readers' to side with him because in the example above, he was indeed following Beck and saved her from the train rails.

Similarly, when Joe broke up with Karen, he 'blames' that on Dr Nicky' advice to distract himself. 'How could Nicky do this to Karen?' (246). The same happens when Amy blames her parents for profiting from her existence and leaving New York for Missouri. Although she also profited from their writing about her and was an adult when she decided to move with Nick to Missouri, she still thinks 'how can I feel sorry for them since they made me this way […] they were earning money from my existence […]. Then, after they siphoned off my money, my 'feminist' parents let Nick bundle me off to Missouri like I was some piece of chattel, some mail-order bride' (230). Finally, Joe's distortion of consequences results in 'dehumanizing' the victims and blaming them for his immoral choices. This can be deducted from his language when Beck does something he does not like. He either slut-shame her such as '[y]ou are a whore and Nicky is a prick' (246). He also compares her to an animal such as 'I pretend you are a lion at the zoo. I am the zookeeper' (286), or 'as a zookeeper, I know I need to keep a safe distance from the animal for the animal's sake and my own' (283).

The examples above of how the antiheroes reason their actions vis-a-vis their victims illustrate how they themselves use moral disengagement strategies to influence narrative perspective and readers' interpretation of them. Henceforth, readers who empathically identify with these protagonists are likely to morally disengage if they want to enjoy absorption into their story worlds (Raney, 2004). They may also take on their morally-disengaged perspectives as well because identification implicates 'unity in perspective' (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). This means that readers who psychologically merge with Joe and Amy are likely to morally disengage to enjoy their stories. This in turn may increase potential of their persuasion as de Graaf and colleagues' study found (2012). In fact, moral disengagement may lead to persuasion which can extend to real life moral judgement. According to Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, and Grizzard (2022), moral disengagement cues which

facilitate perspective-taking with the immoral protagonist affected participants' approval of the protagonist's unethical actions. This predicted more positive outcomes for the protagonist in the story, and also predicted less punishment for doctors who committed ethical violations in the real world. This potential persuasiveness of these thrillers from involvement with their characters is explored further in relation to involvement with their story worlds. Thereby, I am going to analyse their potential to generate narrative transportation.

3.10. Narrative absorption.

For *Gone Girl* and *You* to exert any effects on readers to motivate, alter, or reinforce their beliefs and attitudes consistently with their protagonists', they need to be able to absorb or narratively transport readers into their narrative worlds as robust evidence suggest (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; van Laear, et al., 2014). In other words, if these narratives successfully invite readers to be fully absorbed into their narrative worlds, readers are going to suspend their counterarguing in order to fully imagine and enjoy them, instead of criticizing their perspectives (Green & Brock, 2000; Igartua & Barrios, 2012). Yet, the narrative perspectives of those protagonists are cynical and amoral as they come from cruel personalities that are motivated by self-interest even when the lives of other characters are at risk. Nonetheless, the protagonists in these novels are glorified, their crimes are rewarded, and poetic justice is not served. Therefore, I speculate that overtime, readers may desensitize from the cruelty or cynical tendencies of these fictional characters and adopt a cynical worldview that is motivated by Machiavellian beliefs such as the means justifies the end.

The first aspect of novels that standout as potentially capable of absorbing readers comes from their thriller genre. Both narratives belong to the subgenre of the psychological thriller, which is known for its absorbing nature, association with escapism (Saricks, 2009; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004), and capacity to trigger intense emotional engagement (Patterson, 2006). A combination of devices is likely to invite readers to fully immerse themselves into thrillers (Saricks, 2009, for a review of those devices). Generally speaking, Saricks (2009) lists the absorbing elements of the genre such as using fast-paced storylines that involve plot-twists, mysterious atmospheres, and a page-turner quality. 'Though physical action is usually present, the narrative focus is on the criminal mind; thus the psycho thriller is more character study than it is a plot-driven narrative' (Simpson, 2010, 187). The psychological thriller often represents distorted mental perceptions of psychologically-

stressed protagonists, focusing on their complex and often obsessive and pathological relationships with other characters (Mecholsky, 2014).

The effect of mental action of the thrillers on readers might be expected from their use of homodiegetic narrators in role of protagonist. This is because first-person point of view create more intimacy and psychological closeness in readers (Christy, 2018; Segal., et al., 1997). This potential effect will be examined in relation to perceived immediacy later (Sandefur, 2003). Although psychological thrillers focus on mental action, it occurs within a narrative structure. Thereby, I am going to focus on the general structure that may generate readers' feelings of absorption. However, I am going to consider only the few techniques that have been empirically examined such as discourse structures (Kuijpers, 2014) and effect of presence (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2017).

3.10.1. Discourse structures.

The first aspect of both novels that may help generate readers' feelings of absorption is their discourse structures which are explained, illustrated, and then linked to readers' affective dispositions below. As popular fictions, both thrillers are associated with suspenseful events. 'A feeling of suspense in reading a crime fiction or a thriller may be more intense, with a sense of thrill, than in the reading of literary stories' (Iwata, 2009, 04). This is not to say that literary fiction cannot induce suspense, for instance, but suspense is more salient in popular fiction. Overall, research demonstrates that discourse structures which refer to the 'sequential organization of the events in terms of their occurrence in a narrative' (Brewer & Lichtenstein 1982, 474) influences readers' feelings of suspense, curiosity, and surprise (for more details, Iwata, 2009). These structures co-occur in a narrative depending on how it organises its events and information. According to The Structural Affect Theory (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982) as explained by Hoeken and van Vliet (2000), the order of the events narrated in a story determines the kind of cognitive processing and affective responses readers are going to have.

Responses such as suspense 'is evoked by postponing the story's outcome, curiosity is evoked by presenting the outcome before the preceding events, and surprise is evoked by an unexpected event' (Hoeken & van Vliet, 2000, 277). However, although most scholarly work focuses on suspense than the other structures, they are likely to co-occur within a narrative and they are likely to prime each other. For example, Bermejo-Berros,, Lopez-Diez, Martínez (2022) empirically confirm that '[c]uriosity is present in all types of stories and fulfils

a revitalising role' (12). When readers perceive a 'gap' in narrative information, they may become curious to know more (Yuan, 2018). This can create suspense from the uncertainty of what is going to happen to a liked character.

By taking into consideration the sequence of events in the selected thrillers, I argue that *You* is organised in a suspense structure and *Gone Girl* in a curiosity structure. This is because the outcome of the potential relationship between Beck and Joe is delayed until the ending chapters. On the other hand, Gone Girl begins *in media res* with Amy's disappearance at the beginning of narrative. The first order of event is likely to force readers to stay focused while anticipating the final outcomes. It thus prolongs suspense to create a clash of feelings in readers involving hope and anxiety from postponing the final resolution (Iwata, 2009, 21). This fits with the quality of suspense as a process-oriented, ongoing, or progressive emotion (Iwata, 2009; Yuan, 2018). There are five narrative conditions that can stimulate suspense in readers as Iwata (2009) concedes.

> The protagonist [Joe/Amy] faces a conflict with other character(s) [Peach; Benji; Beck/Nick], narrative situations, or within the self. In the opposition, the protagonist faces a situation where he or she fears losing something [Amy's self-respect] or someone important to them [Beck]. In the case of someone important, the person is a trigger-character more directly troubled. The situation has two opposing outcomes—a hoped for one [love] and an unhoped for one [separation]—which are readily foreseeable. Until a resolution or conclusion is presented, a state of aroused uncertainty continues (for a short while at least) (253).

These five conditions of suspense can be observed in some narrative episodes of *Gone Girl*. However, I suggest that the novel's general sequence of events, especially how it starts, is organized in a curiosity structure. Readers are initially invited to witness a major event that 'Amy was gone' (27) without preceding information (*in media res*). This lack of knowledge about her disappearance can create a 'gap' in readers' perception and motivate their curiosity to know what and how that happened. However, both narratives are suspenseful in many of their events. For instance, in the opening of part two, Amy reveals herself to readers as still alive. This is likely to shock and surprise readers as well as triggering their curiosity to understand what is going on. At the same time, the episode is likely to generate further suspense as the outcome of revealing her plan to readers may force them to have mixed feelings and anticipations about the success of her plan or the consequences of getting caught.

In addition to suspense and curiosity, the selected thrillers are full of plot-twists which can produce surprise in readers. Surprise is unique in its occurrence because it refers to 'a peculiar state of mind, usually of brief duration' (Jacobs & Lüdtke, 2017, 77). It is 'obtained when expectations about what is going to happen are violated by what in fact does happen' (Prince, 2003). It is an effect-oriented emotion that may accompany major climactic events and plot-twists. For instance, when Beck found some of her lost items in Joe's flat. This expectation violates the preceding order of events. Joe coming home, thinking '[t]here's nothing to worry about anymore. I've never felt so at peace with where I am, right now, on a train, tunnelling toward my home, toward you' (278), only to find a furious Beck with a fate-changing discovery. In *Gone Girl* too, narrative episodes such as discovering that Amy is 'so much happier now that I'm dead' (247) or that Nick has 'a mistress' (161), while his wife was presumedly dead are likely to cause surprise and shock in readers when the narrative clearly was not preparing them for these realisations. These surprising events are likely to compel readers to pay more attention to the information presented and the information that preceded. In fact, surprise structures have been shown to result in slower reading times, signalling an increased attentional focus and deeper information processing of the relevant events (Rapp & Gerrig, 2006).

Most importantly, discourse structures are effective in inducing readers' enjoyment, likability of the story, and affective disposition toward characters as the final outcome or resolution unfolds (see Iwata, 2009). This can be explained in light of how emotions operate to grab and guide attention toward emotionally charged information than neutral information (Okon-Singer, et al., 2015; Clore & Gasper, 2000). Thereby, when discourse structures induce readers' emotions of surprise or suspense, they guide readers' attention toward particular, significant episodes in narrative. This is likely to help in comprehension when surprise, as an example, compels readers to reevaluate prior information. To explain, engagement with narratives requires the construction and monitoring of situation models to mentally represent the event and characters involved (Zwaan, 2004). Because surprise provides information that is new, incongruent, or mismatched with the information built in the situation model, it forces a re-assessment of all preceding information (Rapp & Gerrig, 2006). As such, when surprise occurs, it enhances attention to information, causes emotional arousal and orienting response, and increases message encoding and recall (for more details, see Sukalla, Shoenberger, & Bolls, 2015). Hoeken and van Vliet (2000) too confirmed that surprise led to more comprehension by reassessment of all information that preceded the

surprising event. This can mean that surprise events may enhance narrative comprehension which is likely to increase narrative transportation because 'narrative understanding' is a key dimension in narrative engagement scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009).

Moreover, suspense, for instance, can be related to character evaluation (Brewer & Ohtsuka, 1988). This anticipatory emotion can manifest in wanting positive outcomes for liked characters and punishment for disliked characters. It was confirmed that when readers identify with a liked character, they report more suspense when they faced an event with major consequences (Jose & Brewer, 1984). This means that suspense in relation to liked characters increases involvement with them so that any violation of these affective expectations can result, for instance, in surprise or frustration. Therefore, an interaction between affective discourse structures of suspense, surprise, and curiosity; attentional focus; comprehension; and character involvement is likely to increase readers' feelings of absorption when they co-occur in a one narrative. This is likely because all these processes correlate positively with narrative absorption (see Balint, et al., 2017).

In fact, discourse structures, especially suspense, are empirically examined in their relationship with narrative absorption and persuasion (Balint, et al., 2017; Hoeken & van Vliet, 2000; Doicaru, 2016). For instance, de Graaf and Hustinx (2011) confirm that suspense structures evoke more emotional response, led to more transportation as a whole, and made people hold beliefs more consistent with the story, than non-suspense structures. Nabi and Green (2015) too affirm the significant effect of shifts in emotional flow that can be generated by suspense and surprise in maintaining attentional focus, and eliciting emotional arousal. These correlate with narrative transportation, and message encoding, retrieval, and persuasiveness (Nabi & Green, 2015).

In the same vein, although curiosity is not as much studied in relation to affective responses (Iwata, 2009, 06) or narrative absorption (Jacobs & Lüdtke, 2017), it might intuitively be expected predict that the more a narrative evokes readers' desire for knowledge by withholding information, the more likely their feelings of involvement increase when they pursue that incomplete knowledge. For instance, Hoeken and van Vliet (2000) did not assess curiosity-induced transportation. But, they found that curiosity had an equal effect on readers' appreciation of the story as suspense did. The researchers explain that the 'amount of curiosity evoked by knowing the outcome is appreciated as high as the amount of suspense evoked by not knowing the outcome' (284). Nonetheless, Kuijpers (2014) too found that a curiosity structure can work better than suspense in eliciting narrative

absorption while engaging with a new narrative. Evidence on the absorbing nature of curiosity may be found in flow studies too. Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.1.) which is a similar state to absorption is found to increase when curiosity about an activity such as reading increases (Schutte & Malouff, 2020).

By drawing on the studies provided above, it might be predicted that narrative absorption from *You* and *Gone Girl* is likely to increase from the comprehension that occurs from the evaluative function of surprise. Absorption can also increase from the effect of suspense on character evaluation, and the effect of curiosity on flow. In fact, the shift in emotional flow created from the co-occurrence of suspense, curiosity, and surprise discourse structures may increase potential for absorption. Last but not least, the absorbing nature of the selected thrillers that was demonstrated from the influence of their event order on readers' affective responses can also be demonstrated through their capacity to create feelings of immediacy and presence from their particular linguistic contexts. Therefore, in the next section, I am going to investigate their textual devices which can contribute to the occurrence of presence and immediacy in readers. In general, both narratives create a sense of presence and immediacy with their antiheroes that is stimulated by their manipulation of person and tense deixis.

3.10.2. Immediacy and Presence.

The second aspect of both *You* and *Gone Girl* that may induce readers' feelings of transportation comes from their techniques to create perceived presence and immediacy in their narratives. In this vein, narrative presence 'reflects the impression that a reader or viewer is present in the narrative rather than the actual world' (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2017, 15). Narrative presence that involves 'an intense focus resulting in a loss of awareness of self and surroundings' and 'the sensation of entering another space and time' is an integrated dimension in narrative engagement scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). On the other hand, emotional immediacy is often treated as mental immersion which is similar to feelings of absorption (Calarco, et al., 2017, 19). Immediacy too reflects being 'here and now' as it is similar to 'being there' in a narrative world which is often how narrative absorption is described in lay terms (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2017). However, I consider them as perceptually different states of vicarious experience. This can be understood through the following analogy: a reader is transported into a narrative destination perhaps via discourse structures. When they arrive, they become present in the destination. Meanwhile, when the protagonist

takes them with him or her (mental action via point of view), they start experiencing the event with instant immediacy. As such, I am going to show that both *You* and *Gone Girl* share some devices which can create those effects in readers. These devices have been associated previously with empathy identification such as their first-person present tense narration and breaking the fourth wall. They also have unique aspects which can also induce the effect, such as *You's* second-person narration and *Gone Girl's* shifts in temporal deixis between the present tense in Amy's simultaneous narration and retrospective diary entries, and Nick's past tense retrospective narration.

3.10.2.1. Temporal Deixis.

In this sub-section, I am going to demonstrate that both narratives can create feelings of immediacy and presence when using verbs in the present tense and first-person point of view to communicate the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of their protagonists. In fact, both person and temporal deixis have an impact on conceptual perspective-taking (Macrae, 2016) and identification (Segal, et al., 1997). However, the role of first point of view was examined before as capable of generating psychological closeness (Segal, et al., 1997) and identification (de Graaf, et al., 2012; Christy, 2018) with Joe and Amy, not their victims. Therefore, I am going to focus only on the role of tense in combination with other devices to induce readers' feelings of presence and immediacy in this section. This is because tense functions as a deictic tool which positions actions on a chronological timeline in relation to the moment of speaking or writing (Comrie, 1985).

First of all, both Joe and Amy use the present tense to communicate their stories to the reader which makes their narration simultaneous. This is because 'little durational gap exists between experience and narration and in which little ideological and emotional distance is communicated between the narrating persona and the subject self' (Sandefur, 2003, iv). For instance, when Amy narrates, 'I smile again as I shift my crappy getaway car into fifth gear' (*Gone Girl*, 231), the acts of smiling, driving, and narrating are happening in the present tense. This means that since the narrating 'I' and the experiencing 'I' are one, little durational gap exists between what is narrated and what is performed. This may put readers at proximity with Amy as if being her or her accomplice.

This mode of simultaneous narration can also be observed in *You*. For example, when Joe says 'I don't want to come down. I want to be here, fully, watching you bite your unpainted nails' (*You*, 01), the action of observing and narration are all happening at the same time within the diegesis. This is further imposed by the deictic reference 'here' which

compels the reader to feel present in that 'here and now' of Joe when Beck entered the bookstore, and not their actual living-room, for instance. This present tense narration is associated with immediacy, vividness, and dramatic effects.

> [The] present tense enhances the feel of immediacy of the narrative text: it advances the subsequent scenes as in a movie. Particularly when representing a horrible event as the present, the intended effect of choices in perspective and tense could be something like 'dramatization': what happened will be imaginable and literally perceivable (Snader, 2010, 239).

The perceivability of events from the use of present tense and its dramatic effect can enhance the elicitation of presence and immediacy. As can be observed from the passage below, an interplay between the frequent repetition of the second-person pronoun in the simple present within a paratactic and hypotactic sentence structure can create a feeling of immediacy with Joe.

> YOU walk into the bookstore and you keep your hand on the door to make sure it doesn't slam. You smile, embarrassed to be a nice girl, and your nails are bare and your V-neck sweater is beige and it's impossible to know if you're wearing a bra but I don't think that you are and you murmur your first word to me—hello—when most people would just pass by, but not you, in your loose pink jeans, a pink spun from Charlotte's Web and where did you come from? (*You*, 01).

Immediacy which implies an instant and direct involvement with some urgency and excitement is sensed in the simultaneous description of the event as Beck moves in space followed by Joe's observing eye. The passage above can be read in one breath and is effortless in mimicking Joe's perception as it is stimulated by Beck's movement. The combination of the simple present in a parallel or paratactic sentence allows readers' accessibility to Joe's perception of Beck with the effortlessness that resembles how the thoughts came to him. This is because parataxis is a known device in the representation of stream of consciousness (Hale, 2013). The repetition of the same short sentence structure as seen below is an example of syntactic parallelism or parataxis.

> YOU walk into the bookstore
> and you keep your hand on the door
> and your nails are bare
> and your V-neck sweater is beige (*You*, 01)

Parataxis in the juxtaposition of sentences alongside each other as in the examples above mimics Joe's thoughts as stimulated by Beck's movement in his bookstore to give a sense of spontaneity and vividness to the event narrated. The paratactic examples give a sense of fluidity in narration that captures Beck's actions and Joe's perception and judgement. Readers are invited to occupy Joe's focalising position and observe Beck through his eyes/consciousness in the present moment. In the same regard, the repetition of the conjunction 'and' and the pronoun 'you' exemplify lexical parallelism. It is worth noting here, that the repetition of the second-person pronoun that was explained previously as likely to alienate Beck from readers' affections may also implicate them as potential addressees or narratees when it breaks the fourth wall or when Beck is not fully marked (see 3.7.2.).

This 'double deictic' (Herman, 1994) or 'interpersonal semiotic quality' of the second-person pronoun (Mildorf, 2016, 152) may thus create a sense of immediacy and presence in readers when they feel themselves called out. Wechsler (2010) argues that similar to the first-person pronouns' self-ascription or self-reference association, a second person pronoun does not actually refer to the addressee, but rather invites the addressee to self-ascribe the property of being 'you'. In fact, reading simple event sentences using the pronoun 'you' may promote mental simulation from an internal (first-person) perspective (Brunyé, et al., 2009; Ruby & Decety, 2001, for neuroimaging evidence that pronouns may modulate perspective). This capacity will be addressed later in relation to breaking the fourth wall. To briefly note here, the rarity of second-person narratives (Christy, 2018; Al-Alami, 2019) may create an aesthetic defamiliarization effect in readers (Richardson, 2006; Anderson & Iversen, 2018). This is to direct their attention to intensify narrative involvement (Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Kuijpers, 2014). It can thus implicate their feelings of transportation as evidence suggests (Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

Moreover, parallelism in the grammatical structure, from the passage above, and the spontaneity implied by the simple present give Joe's consciousness transparency to allow readers' to be inside his mind as Beck moves. van Peer, et al., (2021) writes that the repetitive pattern of parallelism 'lets the reader anticipate what is coming, thereby exerting a soothing influence' (151). Accordingly, it seems possible that the predictability from the frequent use of parallelism as done in *You* can facilitate readers' imagination and the flow of narrative engagement. In fact, robust evidence demonstrates that when the second part of a noun phrase had the same structure as the first part, it was read at a faster pace than when it didn't, which primed comprehension (Sturt, Keller, & Dubey, 2010). As such, the combination

of the simple present in parataxis creates predictability and leaves no durational gap between what is narrated and what is happening.

In the same vein, *You* creates a sense of fast pacing while reading that reflects Joe's on-going perception of Beck's movement to pull readers immediately into his mind, to be present in the scene. The fluidity and spontaneity of the passage above are facilitated by the use of hypotaxis. Like parataxis, hypotaxis is also associated with the representation of stream of consciousness (Hale, 2013). In fact, when Joe's perception moves from Beck's actions and appearance, hypotaxis facilitates his move from one group of ideas to another. In the below examples, Joe's thoughts move to different thoughts (whether she was wearing a bra) with many subordinate clauses ('but I don't think that you are; when most people would…; but not you; in your…). This creates a hierarchy that matches Joe's piling up of thoughts.

> and it's impossible to know if you're wearing a bra
> but I don't think that you are
> and you murmur your first word to me—hello—
> when most people would just pass by,
> but not you,
> in your loose pink jeans, a pink spun from Charlotte's Web
> and where did you come from? (*You*, 01).

The hypotactic sentences above demonstrate how Joe moves from one thought to the next to mimic the amount of thoughts he was having in the present moment to build up tension. The sentence is compact with Joe's thoughts that move from Beck's appearance, to assuming her sensuality, to comparing her to others. The hypotactic sentence in the simple present allows Joe's stream of consciousness to move with fluidity between groups of ideas (subordinate clauses) to build up tension, leading to the dramatic question 'and where did you come from?'. This rhetorical question can act as a literary hook to grab readers' attention and signal the beginning of Joe's pursuit of Beck, the story. Thereby, the hypotactic sentences mimic Joe's on-going observation of Beck which adds to the immediacy of what was going on. The narrating 'I' and the observing 'I' become one with the absorbed reader.

Moreover, the examples above lack temporal information such as time adverbs which may add to the assumption that all events are occurring simultaneously in the present moment. Zwaan (1996) writes about this default iconicity assumption that 'in the absence of explicit information to the contrary, readers assume that events that are consecutive and contiguous in the text are consecutive and contiguous in the story world' (1197). This

influences readers to experience Beck's presence in the bookstore as simultaneous with Joe's perception of her. Therefore, parataxis and hypotaxis in the simple present with the lack of temporal information are likely to enhance reader's accessibility to Joe's perception as it occurs to him in the present moment.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that sometimes the present tense does not create simultaneous narration for it can also create retrospection. Tatishvili (2011) writes that the former present tense narrative 'is qualified as 'simultaneous narration' or as the 'instantaneous present' where 'the narration is synchronous with the events described', while the latter 'is associated with the historical present' (11). *Gone girl* illustrates well these functions of the present tense when considering Amy's switch between retrospection in her diary and spontaneity in the rest of the novel. However, I assume that the novel as a whole can create a sense of immediacy and presence from the general shift in temporal deixis. This can be observed from the beginning of the novel when Nick using the historical present reflects on his relationship with Amy, moving on to his past time retelling for the day of her disappearance. This is followed by Amy's diary using the historical present, until, she starts narrating instantaneously.

For example, when Amy narrates in her diary entry '[t]ra and la! I am smiling a big adopted-orphan smile as I write this' (11), the act of smiling and narrating seem to happen in the present moment. The dramatic expression '[t]ra and la' with neither quotation marks nor reporting verb, and the deictic reference in the clause 'as I write this' all give an illusion of immediacy and presence as the actions of smiling, writing, and narrating seem to occur immediately right now. However, this is part of her diary entry which manipulates temporal deixis so that the actions 'reflected on' seem to be experienced right now, rather than written right now. The lack of temporal information indicates a lack of durational gap between experience and narration to create spontaneity from reflection. The first-person present tense thus positions readers within the mind of Amy to experience her thoughts and feelings as they occur to her. This textual technique can be effective in pulling readers into Amy's present. Readers are not just experiencing the diegesis with immediacy, they experience it with a sense of presence in the mind of the focaliser/narrator/protagonist. This can be expected to increase when Amy moves from retrospection in her diary entries to 'the instantaneous present' (Tatishvili, 2011, 11). In fact, I assume that the general shift in temporal deixis from Nick's retrospection to Amy's instantaneous narration is what makes *Gone Girl* immersive as a whole.

Because of this dynamic where Amy's narration comes after Nick's past tense viewpoint, her narration seems more located in the present moment. Readers may feel themselves pulled into the present moment of Amy's simultaneous narration. Unlike Nick's narration about what already happened, Amy's narration refers to actions that have just happened right now. This special effect of the first-person present narrative generate more psychological closeness between readers and the character (Segal, et al., 1997) as discussed previously. Additionally, I assume that immediacy can occur in this narrative by pulling readers into Amy's diegesis and making Nick's retrospective narration seems somewhat extradiegetic to hers. In other words, although the story is about Amy's disappearance and Nick's alleged culpability, there are two diegeses relating to two narrators: Nick's occurring in the past as retrospection and Amy's occurring 'now' with immediacy. Both narrations can create a degree of immediacy, however, Amy's is likely to be experienced with more presence and immediacy as it occurs in the 'right now' with more suspense to what is going to happen. This last point falls in line with one of Tal-Or and Cohen's (2010) findings that transportation increases for 'the scene when receiving information regarding the future [...] than when receiving information regarding the past' (412).

Although narratologists associate the grammatical first-person present tense with simultaneous narration (Alber, et al., 2010, 129; Stjernfelt & Zeuthen, 2010), empirical evidence to support the claim that the present tense can create immediacy and presence can be indirect. This is due to the lack of empirical investigations of the potential effects of tense on narrative absorption (Keen, 2007, 95; Eekhof, Eerland, & Willems, 2018). Yet, stories told in the present tense seem to be indirectly associated with creating vividness and immediacy in readers. This can be supported with Macrae's (2016) study on conceptual perspective-taking after reading a short story about a protagonist moving in a landscape. When Macrae (2016) asked participants to select a picture that describes their distance from a character, height of viewing the character, character's viewpoint, or no image after reading, they selected significantly more instances of the character's point of view in the present tense group, and significantly fewer in the past tense groups' (70).

Carreiras, and associates (1997) too discovered that readers are able to recognize information related to the main character in sentences more quickly when it is presented in the present tense compared to the same information presented in the past tense. This indicates that information conveyed in the present tense is more easily accessible or prominent in readers' mental representations of the situation described. In situation model

research too, Zwaan (1996) as mentioned earlier found empirical support for the iconicity assumption. Readers tend to process narrative events that are reported successively in text as occurring successively and simultaneously in the narrative world, especially when time adverbials and tense do not suggest a time shift. 'The construction of a situation model is facilitated when the iconicity assumption is met because readers can temporally locate each incoming event after the most recent event in the model' (1197).

Nonetheless, a recent study found a small to a no effect of past vs. present tense on sensorimotor simulation of narrative events and transportation (Eekhof, Eerland, & Willems, 2018). Although this finding may suggest that tense has no substantial effect on narrative absorption, the finding may not be as much reliable because of the interruptions readers were subjected to. After reading a story, they self-reported their experience in the absorption scale used, for four times in a row. Such procedure may confuse readers as well as their reports when they jumped from two short stories in the present tense/first-person to two more short stories in the past tense/third-person and their other four versions of tense manipulation. Also, this study as the few studied that manipulate original tense in stories usually do not test a novel with shifts in temporal deixis such as *Gone Girl*. In the same vein, a study by Chen and Bell (2022) found that stories told in the fist-person past tense increased potential for persuasion when the protagonist and reader were similar. In light of these mixed results, I propose that each narrative is unique in its stylistic constructions and the same textual device may produce different narrative effects. That is both tenses can generate immediacy and presence in different degrees depending on the idiosyncrasies of their linguistic context. Segal and colleagues (1997) make this last point.

> The values of [person and tense] variables signal the "distance" from the locus of the event represented along temporal, and a combination of spatial and subjective parameters. The first-person present is the closest to the action. The language marks the event as epistemologically certain, since it is currently an action or an experience of the source of the expression. For first-person past tense, the epistemological distance is simply one of memory. For third-person present tense expressions, subjective claims are at best inferred, and actions are witnessed rather than performed. Third-person past expressions are more distant in that they require additional justification by the source of the expression to be epistemologically secure (Segal, et al., 1997, 278).

The researchers confirm that first-person present tense narratives guide readers to experience events through identification with the main character, while past tense first-

person narratives allow readers to structure events without a need for inference. This is because of the association of the 'I' with less justification effort to be epistemologically valid. However, a past tense first-person narrative is also 'somewhat psychologically distanced from the ongoing subjectivity of the main characters' (297). The researchers explained that in oral discourse, utterances coming from the first-person are directly justified by the experience of the speaker. The utterances about a third-person, in contrast, require inference and justification of their validity. This logic implies that the utterances of the first-person in the present tense are easily justified than those of the first-person in the past tense. This is because of the directness or immediacy of experience in the first case.

This means that first-person present tense narratives invite more psychological closeness with the main character and their experiences are more immediate. Supposedly reading Nick's narration in the simple past such as 'my neck bubbled with sweat [...] My gut twisted, and I moved quicker' (09) is more psychologically distant than reading Amy's narration in the simple present. 'It is a bright blue sky day, the birds are lunatic with the warmth [...] and I am utterly alive. Scared, thrilled, but alive' (196). Although both modes of narrations deliver the emotional state of their narrators with vividness, Nick being melancholic and Amy feeling alive, the temporal deictic shift between the two tenses is likely to pull readers into Amy's narration as being more simultaneous and immediate.

The role of tense in feelings of proximity or distance is reported by Dancygier (2012) who argued that the past tense creates temporal distance between the here and now viewpoints of narrator and readers on the one hand, and the viewpoint of the character on the other (not the case of our novels). On the contrary, the present tense reduces this distance. In other words, the viewpoints of narrator, character, and reader are in present tense narratives aligned along the temporal dimension. This means that present tense elicits more feeling of immediacy and presence in narratives which positions the reader and narrator/protagonist on the same level of temporal deixis. This is likely to occur in both cases of Joe's and Amy's present tense narrations, not Nick's past time narration.

3.10.2.2. Breaking the Fourth Wall.

Breaking the fourth wall is the final point of analysis of how both thrillers may give readers a sense of presence and immediacy to immerse them in their fictional worlds. Breaking the fourth wall is a metafictional technique that refers to the temporarily blurring of the imaginary wall that separates the fictional diegesis of characters and the non-diegetic world of readers (Conway, 2010, Sorlin, 2015). This technique is generally studied in relation

to theatrical narratives when the actor looks and talks directly to the audience; and in filmic narratives when the actor looks and talks directly to the camera, to the audience (Lam, 2014; Brown, 13). However, it can be found in written narratives as in the case of the selected thrillers. The breaking of the fourth wall is effective in foregrounding narration as it allows the fictional character to temporarily 'address' the reader. 'However, as soon as the moment passes, the crack becomes patched, restoring the firm and clear distinction between the diegetic and extradiegetic' (Waszkiewicz, 2020, 03).

Auter and Davis (1991) found that breaking the fourth wall gives audiences their desire to be acknowledged by what they watch. When shows allow such interaction, readers increase their feeling of involvement. This influences their appreciation and liking of the comedy as more sophisticated and entertaining than when it lacks breaking the fourth wall. In the same regard, combined with first-person point of view, breaking the fourth wall is thought to increase interaction between reader and antihero, which may increase feelings of identification and liking in the face of their perceived im/morality (Oliver, et al., 2019).

As have been mentioned previously, examples of breaking the fourth wall occur briefly and more clearly in *Gone Girl* than in *You*. This is because *You* relies heavily on the second-person pronoun to address Beck, a specific character, which sometimes give the impression of addressing the reader. As for *Gone Girl,* the narrative uses both the direct address implied from the second-person, you, as well as quizzes as Amy does. Indeed, Amy breaks the fourth wall with readers more extensively due to her engaging and spontaneous narration. This was illustrated previously from one of her quizzes (see 3.7.3.)

I propose that the directness of address when the main characters transgress the imaginary boundaries of the diegesis to 'confine' in readers may invite a special connection that 'pulls' them into a proximity with those characters, to be present with them. According to Brown (2013), direct address is a function of breaking the fourth wall creates intimacy and honesty. It gives the protagonist superior epistemic agency in the diegesis and sometimes stillness to reflect. Most relevantly, it also manipulates the temporality of event in a reflexive way to give an illusion of present-ness and immediacy (16).

There are some techniques of breaking the fourth wall that directly address the reader, some of which can depend on the context. For instance, when Nick informs readers 'I have a mistress. Now is the part where I have to tell *you* I have a mistress and *you* stop liking me. If *you* liked me to begin with […] I know. It's bad' (161, added emphasis). Judging from the context of the sentence, Nick is not addressing himself or another character within

the diegesis. The repetition of the second-person pronoun has a summoning quality and a deictic function which may catch readers off guard to be more aware of the act of address. Moreover, the two sentences 'I know. It's bad' implies that Nick acknowledges the presence of readers and is confidently responding to their shock. In turn, readers are likely to experience shock and surprise from Nick's mistress information at that stage, especially when he is the main suspect in his wife's alleged murder. As such, it might be expected that Nick's direct address of 'you' may give readers a sense of immediacy and presence 'with' him in that moment of honesty.

In *You*, breaking the fourth wall is more subtle in the sense that it can cause some level of what Herman (1994) called 'ontological hesitation' in identifying who is really intended by that 'you': readers outside the four walls of diegesis, the narrator himself, or a narratee/character. This is facilitated by the impersonal/personal function of the pronoun 'you' that can refer to people/characters in general, speaker/narrator together with addressee/narratee, or a group of third persons (de Hoop & Hogeweg, 2014, 03). However, as I have already discussed previously, readers can easily understand when Beck is addressed (most of the time) and when they are implied by breaking the fourth wall. This can be illustrated from Joe's commentary that '[y]ou win over consumers by showing *you* understand them. And *you* can't market a product if *you* don't understand the potential buyer for said product' (78, added emphasis). The context of this direct address clearly does not designate Beck as *You* generally does, or Benji whom this expression is related to, but maybe to the narrator himself as a 'fictional reference' (Herman, 1994, see 3.7.2.). This is where the narrator addresses themselves as narratee because Joe was alone outside after all. The 'you' can also operate like direct address to break the imaginary fourth wall with readers. In other words, Joe, here, narrates with superior epistemic agency, 'a position of greater knowledge within the fiction – than other characters' (Brown, 2013, 14), to ironically comment on Benji's marketing model and inform readers.

Therefore, the incorporation of this technique is effective in breaking down the traditional boundaries between the real world and the fictional world to create a more interactive and thought-provoking reading experience. Breaking the fourth wall from the instances illustrated above acknowledges the presence of readers as confidantes of antiheroes (Joe and Nick). This may create an effect of immediacy between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic. As a result, It may increase readers' sense of involvement and present-ness with the protagonists. This can translate into an immersive experience.

3.11. Summary of Analysis.

To demonstrate how particular novels can influence moral desensitization and cynicism as antisocial attitudes overtime (Vice, 2011), I discussed how *You* and *Gone Girl* can invite readers to empathically identify with their antiheroes. This is because identification leads to perspective-taking and persuasion (de Graaf, et al., 2012). I also explained how they can absorb readers into their narrative world because narrative absorption is also a key mechanism in belief and attitude change from narratives (Green & Brock, 2000; van Laear, et al., 2014). These outcomes occur because these two mechanisms are found to operate by reducing readers counterarguing (Chen & Chang, 2017), and moral disengagement (Shafer & Raney, 2012) to prevent resistance (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

The analysis revealed that both narratives use a combination of techniques some of which have been investigated for their stimulation of readers' feelings of empathy and absorption. These mostly include internal monologues, psycho-narration, and stream of consciousness because they allow accessibility to the thought and feelings of the protagonist. For instance, *You* has a homodiegetic narrator using first-person point of view in the present tense. This technique allows readers to psychologically 'merge' with Joe because they have to occupy his mind for them to imagine and experience the narrative. He thus controls the diegesis and readers' perception and evaluation of other characters. On another level, *You* uses the second-person pronoun to address Joe's focalised, Beck. Readers with Joe follow Beck in the narrative for romantic intentions. This forces Beck to be outside Joe's and readers' connection to be observed and followed. She also does not speak nor defend herself. She is available in story, but absent in discourse; a position that orients empathy for Joe, not her as Lindhé (2016) argues. This is probably because Beck becomes depersonalised and antagonised as the narrative unfolds; that is she is depicted as promiscuous and indecisive.

As for *Gone Girl*, the novel also uses homodiegetic narrators; Nick and Amy, in the role of protagonist to narrate their side of the story using past tense followed by present tense narration. This alternating between two perspectives makes the narration intriguing for readers to point out the inconsistencies which may either incriminate Nick for Amy's disappearance or save him. However, I proposed that although this duality of point of views can supposedly allow readers some interpretive freedom to evaluate the characters in conflict, the narrative generally pulls readers into Amy's perspective. I mean that readers may empathise with Amy, not Nick because of the dynamic created by alternating between

their point of views. Empathy for Amy is facilitated by her present tense narration which gives a sense of immediacy, the cheerful narration of her diaries, being a more interesting character that drives the actions forwards, and her breaking of the fourth wall through quizzes. On the other hand, Nick's narration is gloomy and suspicious. He narrates in the past tense which creates psychological distance (Segal, et al., 1997; Dancygier, 2012), and most importantly, his unlikable character remains consistent in both Amy's diary and his own view. In other words, although first-person point of view is often associated with empathy, Amy's particular narration may override the influence of Nick's first-person point of view on readers' empathy. This fits with Breithaupt's (2012) three-person model of empathy where conflict is found to motivate side-taking. To explain, unlike *You's* perspectivizing only from Joe's point of view, *Gone Girl* creates conflict between two characters in a salient and prominent way to encourage readers to take a side, Amy's side.

Therefore, if identification leads to moral disengagement (Raney, 2004), readers who empathically identify with Joe and Amy are likely to morally disengage in order to continue enjoying their narrations. They may excuse Joe's stalking for the noble aim of protecting Beck (a positive intention, Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013) and Amy's framing of Nick as a wishful identificatory point many readers may like. Empathising readers may also root for the success of Joe and Amy to the extent of anticipating they never get caught after they kill other characters. In other words, readers become absorbed into the dark minds of these immoral protagonists to the extent that everything they do becomes internally justified. In fact, it was found that the more a hero is unattractive, immoral, and unlikeable, the more enjoyment was reported (Raney, et al., 2009). Additionally, these criminals are heroes of their own stories, a position of presumed morality and their victims are antagonised in order to deny affiliation with them. The heroes are also morally-disengaged in the sense that they use moral justifications and diffuse responsibility to be perceived as victims themselves. As such, *Gone Girl* and *You* use techniques associated with inducing empathy with protagonists who themselves use moral disengagement techniques. It may thus be predicted that readers may take on the morally disengaged perspectives of Joe and Amy not to disrupt the enjoyment of these novels.

Moreover, like any other narrative, these novels cannot influence readers to change their beliefs and attitudes without immersing them in their story worlds (Green & Brock, 2002). Thereby, I demonstrated that both thrillers use a combination of discourse structures to generate emotional shifts in readers. These emotional shifts are found to be more

effective for the generation of narrative transportation (Nabi & Green, 2015). Both novels use suspense, curiosity, and surprise structures which can influence message encoding, attentional focus, comprehension, affective dispositions, and appreciation (Hoeken & van Vliet, 2000). They can also produce an illusion of presence and immediacy in the narrative worlds with the protagonists. This was shown to occur in both narratives via time manipulation and breaking the fourth wall. In *You*, Joe's simultaneous narration in the present tense and second-person pronoun give readers a sense of being present immediately in the events taking place. In *Gone Girl*, the shifts in temporal deixis between Nick's retrospective past tense narration and Amy's present tense retrospective and then simultaneous narration makes Amy's present tense narration more central and proximate than Nick's. Both Amy and Nick break the fourth wall, but Amy does it more frequently by her quizzes which can provoke readers to be in her situation more often.

3. 12. Conclusion.

In light of the previous analysis, I argue that because evil hero narratives are becoming more and more salient in entertainment narratives (Jonason et al., 2012; Prusa & Brummer, 2022), the salience of dark personalities with their cynical attitudes may be perceived as positive attributes. This can be explained in part from the 'the mere exposure effect' which suggests that repeated exposure to any stimuli is sufficient for people to develop positive attitude (Zajonc, 1986). The repeated exposure to cynical antiheroes who are portrayed as heroic and sympathetic may desensitise readers from their crimes and cynicism. Readers may even wish to be like them: insightful, intelligent, and self-effective. These predicted outcomes can increase when considering that repeated exposure has direct implication on the cultivation of attitudes, sleeper effects (Appel, 2008), and schema development from media use (Janicke, 2013; see The Theoretical Framework, 1.5.2.).

In this regard, Janicke (2013) argues based on moral philosophy that traditional heroes prime hero story-schemas and their actions are quickly and automatically judged because they cause no moral dilemmas. This is referred to as an automatic deontological or rule-based moral judgement. In opposition, antiheroes prime antihero story-schemas, and their complex actions are deliberately judged based on the consequences of their actions, which is a consequentialist moral judgement. She then speculates that,

>[A]ssuming that antihero narratives appeal to a specific group of people, exposure over a long period of time could reinforce their way of moral judgment making (i.e., focusing on the consequences of a certain situation (consequentialism), rather than strictly following rules (deontology)), which could affect a persons' ethical decision making in various fields (Janicke, 2013, xii).

However, the researchers proposes that frequent exposure to antihero narratives makes antihero story-schema frequently activated and accessible which may facilitate their consequentialist moral judgement to be quicker and more automatic as in deontological judgement (Janicke, 2013). This means that readers can be primed to judge real life situations in a quick consequentialist manner if the context primes an antihero story-schema. However, more research is needed to verify this claim.

Nevertheless, the possibility remains, especially when we consider the evidence of cultivation effect from genre-specific narratives as proposed by many scholars (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004; Appel, 2008; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). This is observed in engagement with specific TV genres or content and holding semantically-related beliefs or metanarratives than watching TV in general. Readers' motifs to obtain gratification influences their exposure to specific metanarratives. With habitual engagement, the cultivation of those metanarratives fortifies (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004). Thereby, engagement with similar antihero narratives such as *You* and *Gone Girl* may accumulate into the cultivation of moral cynicism in readers from their frequently morally-disengaged schema. This is likely due to the persuasiveness effects that occur from their potential to induce readers' empathic identification and immersion (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). Also from moral disengagement which influences real life moral judgement in line with an evil hero's perspective (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022).

4. General Conclusion.

This thesis argued that fiction reading can sometimes influence immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes. This involved tracing the research question from some views of classical aesthetics to the study of narrative persuasion in the contemporary era. I found that by the end of the 20th century, some literary ethicists and psychologists emphasised the moral benefits of engagement with literary fiction. One of the main benefits identified is narrative empathy which is the capacity to understand others by means of perspective-taking and affect-sharing when readers learn to vicariously occupy the many situations fictional characters occupy. However, this was not the only relationship fiction reading is thought to have with empathy and morality. As early as the rise of the novel in the 18th century, oppositional reactions often pointed out the potentially corrupting influence of reading for leisure. However, this opposition was not based on systematic assessment and has not been given full systematic attention. In the 21st century, some researchers have tended to regard 18th century reaction against novel reading as a moral panic. This meant that all of the moralists, authors, journalists, doctors, priests, and other critics were thought to be merely panicking about the rise of the new medium.

This observation points to a split created by current research between a group of early critics who perceived some novels as threats against moral order and authority, and a more recent group of scholars who praise fiction reading for improving readers' morality (see Nussbaum, 1990, or Duncan, Bess-Montgomery, & Osinubi, 2017). However, only the claims of the second group, in contrast to the first group, have been given full empirical attention , through experimental studies which generally conclude that engagement with narratives provides beneficial outcomes — like improving social cognition (Mar & Oatley, 2008). For this reason, the main goal of this dissertation was to examine particular novels to highlight how, by drawing on recent theories and evidence from media psychology, the first group's claims may have some legitimacy. In this thesis, theories of narrative persuasion were selected based on their appropriateness for analysing how narratives persuade readers. Contrary to the widely used methods that investigate narrative persuasion and impact quantitatively using readers' self-reports, the thesis utilised a qualitative approach that undertook close-reading. This is important for close-reading and textual analysis allows researchers to identify the linguistic and literary features that may be missed by quantitative methods. It allows them to find more subtleties, draw out more questions, find more discoveries, about entire

texts not just the extracts investigated. By doing so, the thesis adds to the potential methods that researchers could use in the future to examine this topic further. This was also considered necessary for bridging the gaps in the study of persuasion in written narratives between the findings of media psychology, narratology, linguistics, and literary studies. This is because close-reading analysis allows the synthesis of the correlations found in the empirical study of narrative persuasion. It allows the exploration of how narrative devices, for instance, may produce different effects contrary to what is empirically known about them when other contextual elements interact with them, as it is pointed out later.

This thesis put forward three main arguments that hopefully expand the range of narrative impact. The overall argument I proposed was that if fiction reading can influence positive outcomes, it can also equally influence negative beliefs and attitudes. This is because narrative content and context vary between novels and genres and can have different ethical influences on readers. Many studies are too, beginning to recognise this factor when investigating narrative persuasion in written narratives. To approach this argument, I considered an already known narrative of racism and two other narratives where immoral protagonists focalise their stories. This was done so to illustrate how they might encourage readers' adoption of radical attitudes towards immigrants and cynical attitudes towards morality. For clarity, I divided the examination of narrative effects into two main inquiries for each narrative. The first inquiry aimed to explore how these narratives enable readers' empathic identification with their immoral and antisocial protagonists in order to morally disengage them from moral violations. The second inquiry considered how these narratives absorb readers to reduce their inclination to counterargue against the moral values of their protagonists. This is because narrative absorption correlates positively with less negative thought responding which in turn lowers resistance to persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000).

For the first inquiry, I demonstrated that if narrative empathy can occur for virtuous characters, it can also occur for non-virtuous characters such as *CoS's* radical racists or the thrillers' criminal cynics. This is because the general nature of empathy is selective, biased, limited, and susceptible to manipulation as pointed out by many scholars (see Prinz, 2011; Decety & Cowell, 2015). However, only a small portion of studies have used literary analysis to demonstrate how narrative techniques manipulate readers' empathic responses towards immoral characters. These studies found that narratives deploy different techniques to make readers empathise with a racist hero, a paedophile, a Nazi, a human butcher, and

psychopaths. However, this thesis takes the study of the negative influences of narrative empathy further to the domain of persuasion.

For my demonstration, I drew on Lindhé's (2016; 2021) hypothesis that tension between story and discourse 'distributes' readers' empathy toward the protagonist, and produce more feelings of resentment toward the antagonist. Lindhé's claim challenges the association of narrative empathy with the improvement of readers' morality since it produces empathy for an Other, while denying it for the Other's Other (Lindhé, 2021). This thesis also drew on Breithaupt's (2012) model of empathy in which it is determined by an observer's side-taking in conflict between two persons. The thesis too corresponds with Leake's (2014) theory of 'easy empathy' and Woodward, Hiskes, and Breithaupt (2022)'s findings that narrative victimization directs readers' empathy toward the victim, and not their perpetrator.

In light of these theories, this thesis found that the selected novels use themes of victimization and dehumanization to redirect readers' empathy toward their immoral heroes, alongside feelings of resentment toward their unsympathetically portrayed victims. In *The Camp of the Saints*, readers empathy is manipulated by their engagement with a polarised frame of reference where the racist protagonists and immigrant antagonists are polarised into extreme binary opposites. The protagonists are often portrayed as figures facing millions of immigrants alone. This particular representation makes the racist protagonists appear as vulnerable victims who are engaged in a noble war of self-preservation, whilst the immigrants are represented as perpetrators strongly associated with disgust. The vulnerability of the racist heroes was expected to trigger readers' identifiable victim effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005) to side with the single victim, not the many, whereas the immigrants' association with disgust was predicted to avert readers' feelings of empathy away from them. Moreover, the use of internal focalisation from a third-person point of view increases the saliency of the racist heroes in the discourse than compared to the immigrants who are dehumanised and denied point of view representation. This is likely because narrative persuasive is found to cause empathic identification with the perspectivizing character (see de Graaf, et al., 2012). Also, *CoS's* use of an omniscient narrator with a third-person point of view which makes the mode of narration authoritative is found to validate the heroes' perspectives (van Lissa, et al., 2016). Readers of *CoS* may thus trust the narrator and the heroes' perspective as reliable and authentic, which in turn may validate their racist and radical perspectives against immigrants.

As for the thrillers, the same dynamics of victims and perpetrators was observed between psychopathic heroes and their victims. In *You*, Joe is the only character whose perception of Beck and his other victims is readers' only available perspective. This perspectivising technique is facilitated by his homodiegetic/ protagonist role which is likely to make readers identify with him, and not the victims whose thoughts and feelings are absent from the discourse. Beck, for instance, is alienated and depersonalised by not representing her point of view. She is also positioned outside 'the empathic circle' (Keen, 2007, 108) implied on readers by Joe's first-person point of view when 'addressing' her using the second-person pronoun. As for *Gone Girl*, I proposed that although both characters in conflict narrate their side of the story using first-person point of view, the manipulation of temporal deixis between Nick's reflective narration in the past tense followed by Amy's simultaneous narration in the present tense is likely to influence readers' evaluation of Amy as more dynamic and psychologically closer to them than Nick's. The themes of victimization and depersonalisation operate differently in this novel in the sense that both characters are personalised due to the equal availability of their point of views. However, by alternating between the characters' point of views, the reader is forced to choose a side in this conflict. Because Nick is represented as unsympathetic in both his narration and Amy's fake diary entries, readers may be more drawn to Amy's narration as she becomes a victim of Nick's betrayal.

Since the absence of a personalised portrayal of victims and the abstraction of their pain was found to increase readers' moral disengagement and perspective-taking with the perpetrator (Frazer, Moyer-Gusé, & Grizzard, 2022), I argued that the depersonalisation of Beck (*You*) and the blurring of Desi's death (*Gone Girl*) could increase moral disengagement in the empathising readers. It was also found that both Joe (*You*) and Amy (*Gone Girl*) obscure the suffering of their victims by becoming morally disengaged from their crimes. This was observed in the euphemistic language they used to describe how they murdered their victims. This could affect how readers empathise with Joe and Amy as they may wish for their success by reducing their moral scrutiny in order to enjoy their narrations. In addition, I illustrated that readers' moral disengagement cannot be entirely predicted when character identification occurs, as most studies tend to assume. It can also occur by observing how the heroes use moral disengagement strategies. When Joe and Amy use moral disengagement cues to deliver their perspectives, readers who identify with them are likely to take on that

morally disengaged perspective. This is because identification involves perspective-taking and empathy.

Furthermore, this study adds to the literature of the unethical influences of narrative empathy by considering belief and attitude changes in relation to narrative transportation theory. Although some critiques of narrative empathy (for example, Currie, 2016) argue that empathy for fictional characters may not have any impact on readers' empathy and morality outside narrative engagement, narrative persuasion research empirically demonstrates how narratives can change individuals' perspectives and worldviews. This brings us to the third argument this thesis makes. For the second inquiry carried out on each novel, I argued that if positive belief and attitude changes can occur through being transported into their narrative worlds or when they identify with characters, the persuasion of negative beliefs and attitudes can also occur following the same mechanisms. This is because I argue that empathic identification and narrative absorption are neutral processes that are not inherently prosocial or moral.

By looking for textual techniques used in the selected novels which might produce feelings of absorption, I also demonstrated how they can influence antisocial attitudes. This is because when narratives transport readers from the actual world to the fictional world, they report beliefs and attitudes changes consistent with the perspective promoted by the narrative (Braddock & Dillard, 2016). This study illustrated using *The Camp of the Saints* (Raspail, 1973) that the novel is not an irrational work of racism. It indeed relies on many literary techniques that may evoke readers' aesthetic and narrative emotions. Readers of this narrative are invited to a heavily polarised frame of reference or a conflict frame that may likely to limit readers' interpretation, and increase the potential for attitude polarisation. This novel relies heavily on the use of polarisation which can be observed from the diction it uses to describe the characters, to the settings they occupy, and to the level of realism it portrays. This novel deploys many devices which are associated with transportation namely perceived realism, vivid imagery, and foregrounding. In sum, I argued that *The Camp of the Saints* can be persuasive due to its techniques that combine radicalization mechanisms like polarisation, nostalgia, and grievances with narrative persuasion mechanisms of absorption and empathy.

The thrillers were found to use different techniques to elicit readers' feelings of absorption by relying on suspense, surprise, and curiosity discourse structures. These discourse affective structures are empirically linked to narrative absorption. They can also absorb readers by creating an illusion of presence and immediacy with their protagonists. I

showed that using a homodiegetic narrator in role of protagonist invites readers to experience the narrative 'inside' the mind of that protagonist. Feelings of immediacy and presence might also be produced by how characters break the fourth wall which has a 'direct address' function as in cases of Amy's use of quizzes. For *You*, feelings of immediacy can be facilitated by using the second-person pronoun which can sometimes have a 'quasi-communicational set up' when Beck is not around. In *Gone Girl*, shifts in temporal deixis from Nick's retrospective narration to Amy's simultaneous narration may pull readers into Amy's present moment as more epistemologically justified.

To answer the research question based on the findings above, I affirm that it is likely that fiction reading can produce immoral and antisocial beliefs and attitudes in readers. It was shown, however, that some conditions need to be met in order for particular narratives to have a negative influence. These include the realignment of readers' empathic identification with immoral protagonists and ensuring a generalised feeling of absorption in the story world. On the thematic level, aspects of narrative context like the manipulation of the sympathetic portrayal of victims and perpetrators can influence readers' evaluation of them. When a novel switches the roles of unsympathetic heroes with sympathetic victims, internally focalising the immoral hero' perspective, and using moral disengagement cues such as dehumanization, depersonalization, and the concealment of victims' pain, novels can guide readers' interpretation and empathy towards immoral heroes. Also, this thesis emphasises the importance of narrative context over the role of particular devices such as first-person point of view in influencing readers' narrative experience. This claim is confirmed by new studies where, for instance, point of view has been found to work differently when narrative topic and the hero's identity are considered factors (such as Christy, 2018). This means that having a particular point of view cannot be used solely to predict an outcome of a particular narrative without considering it within an overall narrative and linguistic context.

Importantly, this last observation could be investigated further in empirical studies by incorporating complex manipulations of point of view (using, for example, multiple voices within a single narrative like *Gone Girl* to test its different effects on empathy). Indeed, narrative impact studies has still not reached a conclusion about which devices evoke which effect in readers. This is observed in the mixed results about the relationship of devices such as person pronouns, type of point of view, or tense with narrative experiences. Future research can also use controversial topics within different narrative contexts to test readers' dispositions, instead of using narrative extracts about prosocial attitudes. Although the

empirical study of literature has generated many discoveries, there are many other narrative effects that should be considered. Framing effects, for example, are not well studied in literary works compared to news media. The application of framing analysis can benefit both media and literary analysis by showing how framing takes place at the level of narrative production of various issues and how readers come to fiction with different frames to influence different perspectives. This could also show how fiction has potentially framed readers' attitudes toward many topics throughout history, especially when fiction reading was the major leisure practice during the 18th century (Lovell, 1987).

This dissertation, however, has some limitations. One important limitation comes from the method used for analysis. The deliberate focus on the exploration of textual aspects can guide readers' empathy and transportation into the selected novels deliberately ignores readers' variables (such as demographic variables, or prior attitudes) which are also likely to influence their persuasion. Furthermore, by not using actual readers to explore the fundamental claims of this thesis means that only theoretical predictions, rather than empirical claims, have been made. Therefore, for future research, I recommend testing the findings of this thesis, — particularly the potential for readers to empathise with racist characters— and check for pre- and post-exposure beliefs and attitude to see the extent to which readers are persuaded about particular issues. Moreover, the limitation of this study is similar to and partly derived from the limitations of the studies used. The contested findings of previous studies about which point of view or tense are more effective in inducing empathy, or which linguistic devices are necessary for transportation limits the applicability and generalisability of this study to the narratives used.

One future implication of this research study is to make readers aware of the different effects narratives can have on them. A relevant issue this study brings awareness of is how narratives can activate readers' psychological biases to expose them to different frames and effects. Biases or psychological tendencies such as the identifiable victim effect, third-person effect, confirmation bias, or mere exposure effect can guide readers' attention and emotion towards particular issues, of which some cannot be moral or socially beneficial. This risk was demonstrated in the analysis of *The Camp of the Saints*, a narrative known for its polemical perspective, but still an intelligent piece of rhetoric that may elicit favourable responses towards its racist heroes. This impact might be expected to extend beyond readers' group affiliation when the biases mentioned above are activated. All in all, reading for leisure may be framing readers' affective dispositions, influencing their preferences and

need for gratification which overtime may cultivate different beliefs and attitudes, of which some can be antisocial.

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