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Fictionality and the Empirical Study of Literature

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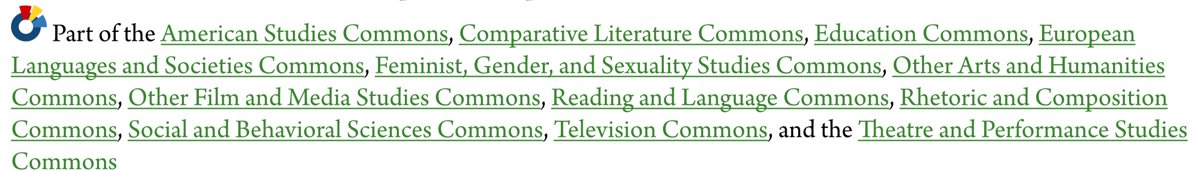
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Torsten Pettersson,
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Abstract: In his article "Fictionality and the Empirical Study of Literature" Torsten Pettersson surveys three types of studies and argues for research which disentangles fictionality from other aspects of literariness. Pettersson conceptualizes the basic paradoxical phenomenon that made-up stories can influence readers' perceptions of the real world and presents an empirical study of the impact of fictionality based on a five-page narrative presented to two groups of young Swedish readers as an extract from an autobiography and a novel, respectively. A questionnaire elicited reactions to the narrative, as well as attitudes to fictionality and to literary reading in general. Results include the respondents' professed preference for real-life stories, which was not, however, matched by their actual appreciation of the text. The participants' attitude to learning something from fictional narratives was positive, but in their stated reasons for reading fiction entertainment and relaxation loomed large.

Torsten PETTERSSON

Fictionality and the Empirical Study of Literature

Fictionality is a central element of literature which deserves more clearly focused attention in empirical studies than it has received hitherto. This study first surveys available research, then provides a relevant conceptual framework, and finally presents an empirical study of two aspects of the problem: readers' general conception of the role of fictionality and the influence of fictional status on their appreciation of a text. An ambitious general statement in this field is captured in Raymond Mar's and Keith Oatley's article title "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience." The authors emphasize the beneficial effects of reading "narrative fiction" (173) by observing, among other things, that "literary fiction describes narratives that are carefully crafted" (174). Here there is a link to fictionality since the careful crafting is predicated on the ability of authors to suit the made-up events to the effects which they wish to achieve. However, this link is not made explicit by Mar and Oatley, nor is fictionality considered separately elsewhere in their article. A central statement of their position reads: "Whereas expository representations tell us information, literary narratives show us things by having us experience them first-hand. This simulated experience results from a number of factors, including a richness of information not typically found in non-narrative expositions" (177-78). As this suggests, what Mar and Oatley actually study are the beneficial effects of narrative compared to exposition: they present them as benefits peculiar to literary fiction, but in fact do not show that they are not equally achievable in nonfictional narratives such as detailed autobiographical accounts of escaping from a prison camp. The same is true if the emphasis is placed on the importance in "literary narrative" of readers identifying with characters by "basing emotions on goals, plans and action" (Oatley 64 and 65).

In "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind" David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano are more explicit than Mar and Oatley in their contention that in contrast to popular fiction, specifically "literary fiction, which we consider to be both writerly and polyphonic, uniquely engages the psychological processes needed to gain access to characters' subjective experiences" (1). Accordingly, their combination of five experiments contrasts literary fiction with popular fiction, as well as presenting "six short texts (three literary fiction and three nonfiction)" (1). Unfortunately, they do not specify if the nonfictional texts were narrative or expository in nature, but the latter seems more likely since the authors provide no discussion of nonfictional narrative (see also the analogous approaches of Chung and Slater; Fox; Oatley; Mar, Oatley, Peterson). There are individual nuances, but the general picture is clear. One group of empirical studies of "fiction" concentrates on various aspects of literary fiction, paying little specific attention to fictionality. And when studies do attempt to contrast fictionality with factuality, they tend to conflate two variables -- fictional versus factual and narration versus exposition -- in such a way that it is impossible to say to what extent the results reported reflect one or the other.

In a second group of studies attempts are made to single out the variable of fictionality by contrasting literary fiction with nonfictional narratives: László Halász, Uffe Seilman and Sten F. Larsen study reactions to fictionality based on two different fictional and factual texts related only by a theme such as a bird of prey, and P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp contrast a chapter from José Saramago's novel *Blindness* with five newspaper articles. These are steps in the right direction, but in my opinion since in these studies the test group and the control group read different texts, fictionality cannot be disentangled from other variables. A third group of studies obviates this problem by contrasting reactions to the same narrative presented paratextually as fictional or factual: Rolf A. Zwaan elicited results based on a newspaper narrative that the presumption of fictional status engendered longer reading times and more attention to surface phenomena in the text, but less attention to situational information. Similarly, in a neurocognitive study by Ulrike Altmann, Isabel C. Bohrn, Oliver Lubrich, Winfried Menninghaus, and Arthur M. Jacobs the authors show longer reaction times in the fictional mode than in the factual mode, adding observations on respondents' past-orientation and action-based reconstruction of events in the factual mode and their "constructive simulation of what might have happened" in the fictional mode. Anne Mangen and Don Kuiken combined the variable of affordance (paper vs. iPad) with the variable of fictionality/factuality. The results are complex, but suggest that sympathy and empathy, as well as perception of narrative coherence are influenced less by variations in affordance conditions in the fictional mode than in the factual mode. Markus Appel and Barbara Malečkar add the paratextual mode of the fake narrative (falsely purporting to be factual) and confirm among other things the findings of Deborah A. Prentice and Richard J. Gerrig and Appel and Tobias Richter that fictional narratives can be persuasive. Appel and Malečkar also show that fictional narratives are more persuasive than fake ones.

As a conceptual frame for studies of this kind, let us first consider the dual meaning of "fiction": Fiction (F1) instantiates "fictionality" as the quality of a) being invented rather than making a direct reference to reality and b) of signaling this to the receiver through a cultural contract (see Currie; Eco). In this sense artefacts such as feature films, plays, computer games, novels, and short stories are or may be fictional presentations -- frequently narratives -- which are known to have no referential truth value, but which may offer other kinds of rewards. Fiction (F2) refers to literary prose narratives such as novels and short stories. They are frequently fictional in the sense of F1 but in documentary or nonfiction novels they may lay claim to direct referentiality. Thus "nonfiction fiction" is not a contradiction in terms, but a combination of denying F1 and asserting F2 in a phrase signifying "nonfictional literary narrative in prose." Further, as a form of literature F2 displays all or some of the following characteristics: aesthetic rather than practical purpose, invitation of a readerly attitude that is more

contemplative than pragmatic and fact-seeking, a position in a literary genre such as "historical novel," "detective story" or "science fiction", the use of perspective-taking and verbatim dialogue, imaginative and sometimes nonstandard use of language, and foregrounding by means of figurative language. For empirical research, this creates the danger -- realized in the first group of studies described above -- of focusing on some of these other elements of the literariness of F2 rather than the fictionality F1 which purports to be the object of the study.

A second central conceptual question is the seemingly paradoxical engagement of fiction with the real world. It is generally agreed that literary fiction can illuminate reality, and some theorists have even maintained that it has a "primary cognitive function" consisting in "the communication of general information about the existing world" (Farner 52; see also Erll 159). This referentiality may be of an individually informative nature concerning, for example, topography or historical events. As Dorrit Cohn puts it, "the nonreferentiality of fiction" does not mean that fiction "*can* not refer to the real world outside the text, but that it *need* not refer to it" and that it "does not refer *exclusively* to the real world outside the text" (15; emphases in the original). More importantly, as the above Geir Farner quote suggests, fictional reference can be of a generally illuminating kind. This is adumbrated in Aristotle's statement that while "history treats of particular facts," "poetry is concerned with universal truths" understood as "the kinds of thing a certain type of person will probably or necessarily say or do in a given situation; and this is the aim of poetry, although it gives individual names to its characters" (44). I have operationalized this as the concept of "representativity." It embodies the *pars pro toto* way in which a given non-existent individual fictional case is considered to exemplify a class of human mentality or behavior and hence to illuminate the characteristics of that class in real life. This combines a link to reality with a greater degree of imaginative reader participation than the one offered by factual narratives. This in turn is due to the fact that the reader can choose among different types of representativity: Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* never existed, but may be read as representing the Russian intelligentsia whose secular Western European rationalism is condemned (a historical reading), people who in a time of personal crisis are torn between conflicting emotions (a psychological reading), people who have committed an iniquity at odds with their deep-seated ethical convictions (an ethically oriented reading), or fallen man who nevertheless has a chance of redemption (a religious reading) (see Pettersson 92-96). In addition to individually informative statements which may or may not be presented in F2, this is above all the mechanism which allows F2 to break out of what might otherwise be a self-contained bubble of sheer make-believe irrelevant to our perception of reality. Representativity is the enabling assumption behind the persuasiveness of fiction (see Appel and Malečkar; Appel and Richter; Prentice and Gerrig), as well as the basis by direct analogy of simulated experience (see Mar and Oatley), attention to situational information (Zwaan), constructive simulation of what might have happened (see Altmann, Bohrn, Lubrich, Menninghaus, Jacobs), and perception of narrative coherence (see Mangen and Kuiken).

The link between fiction and reality is also the presupposition behind the present study. By isolating the variable of fictionality, it places itself in the third group of studies surveyed above but, firstly, extends them by focusing on readers' appreciation and interpretation of texts. Secondly, it replicates an earlier study by investigating readers' attitudes to cognitive enrichment through fiction. The basic questions asked are: What, in the respondents' view, are the consequences of fictionality for their appreciation and interpretation of a text? To what extent does this view tally with their actual assessment of a given text? Do they believe that it is possible to learn something from fiction? Do they wish to learn something from fiction? The 72 respondents were 17-18-year old vocational upper-secondary school students in two Swedish cities, 34 young men and 38 young women studying to be truck drivers, car mechanics, construction workers, hairdressers, stylists, or interior designers. Having thus chosen a form of education where reading and reading proficiency play a smaller part than in more theoretical study programs, they can, as a group, be assumed to represent a very basic level of literary proficiency. This in turn makes them suitable participants in a study of the basic function of fictionality in the reading of literary fiction.

The text presented was a five-page first-person retrospective narrative about four teenage boys practicing on their guitars and playing in a band without much success. It was taken from the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård's 2009 book *Min kamp* (*My Struggle*, the first volume in a cycle of six books sharing that title). Since it is basically an autobiography, but was also described by the publisher as a "novel," it was particularly suitable for presentation to two comparable groups as factual autobiography and as fiction, respectively. This meant that fictionality was the only variable tested while other variables remained equal. A questionnaire then elicited reactions to the narrative as well as attitudes to fictionality and to literary reading in general. A precaution taken was to read the text aloud in addition to presenting it as a handout available to respondents throughout the session. This procedure was intended to overcome technical reading problems such as dyslexia and low-level literacy reported by the teachers of the respondents. The procedure was the same for both groups and, generally speaking, should not result in reactions different from silent reading. This can be deduced from Jessica E. Moyer's study of groups of readers listening to a text, reading it from the printed page, and reading it from a screen in which her conclusion is that these differences did not result in differences in interpretation or evaluation. In the present case, the questionnaire was the same for the two groups except for two points. It included an initial statement (repeated orally in the presentation of the task) indicating the fictionality or nonfictionality of the text as well as a question which read, respectively: "What difference does it make to you that this text is made-up (compared to it depicting real-life events)?" or "What difference does it make to you that this text depicts real-life events (compared to it being made-up?)." These clear paratextual indications circumvented the problem that internal textual signals of fictionality show considerable cultural variation (see Wildekamp, van Montfoort, van

Ruiswijk) and may be difficult to pick up. The risk that the basically "factual" Knausgård text would work less well as fiction was minimized by choosing a passage where in the last sentence the narrator refers to the young men's futile efforts to lift the band to the level of expertise and performance which they imagined. Thus the text invited reflections such as "in the harsh real world people are not always able to realize their dreams" -- an orientation which is typical of the reading of fiction in that it elicits a general point based on the individual fictional case (see Pettersson 86-87, 92-96).

Upon listening and reading, respondents completed the questionnaire. Some questions were purely qualitative and in conjunction with the quantitative questions respondents were encouraged to comment on their answers. The quantitative questions were answered by ticking unnumbered boxes numbered 1-5. The quantitative results are given below as a fraction where the denominator indicates the extent of the scale and the numerator denotes the average response. Thus 2,9/5 indicates an average just below the midpoint on the scale 1-5. Such calculation of the arithmetic mean as a "measure of central tendency" is statistically simple but "informs us of the overall response that we can find in the data" (van Peer, Hakemulder, Zyngier 169). To introduce a measure of dispersion is in this case less than necessary for two reasons. First, I am interested precisely in such a "central tendency" in the two groups according to the variable fictional/factual, and will confine other comparisons to some observations on gender differences. Second, since the respondents' answers are distributed over a 1-5 Likert scale, they comprise no outliers which would require a further measure such as median value. As a further consideration, since the arithmetic mean was also used by Prentice and Gerrig in their study of attitudes replicated here, this measurement allows direct comparison.

The respondents' answers are presented in an order which starts with the most general question: "Does it generally speaking make a difference to you whether the stories you read, listen to or watch in films and on TV are based on real-life events or are made-up?" Two respondents having failed to answer, the result, on a scale from 1 (it makes no difference) to 5 (it makes a great difference), was as follows: 3.3 (N=70), 2.9 (♂=34), 3.6 (♀=36). As we can see, the young men's average answer is just below midpoint 3, while the young women at 3.6 feel more influenced by the fictional status of the presentation. Collectively, the respondents consider fictional status important at the rate of 3.3/5. About half of the respondents availed themselves of the opportunity to comment on their answers. Among those who had ticked boxes 4 or 5 indicating the importance of fictionality, a few insisted that fact and fiction need to be distinguished, but a clear majority praised factuality: "when something is based on reality you react more and reflect more," "things that have happened in real life are more engaging," "reality is always the most exciting thing to watch or read about" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). In a Swedish context, this preference for factuality is a well-known phenomenon (see, e.g., Årheim; Olin-Scheller) which among these respondents has not been affected by the vogue of fantasy identified as a favorite genre by only one respondent.

To what extent does the reading of a specific narrative correspond to this general preference for factuality? The test of this was the question "Does the text [i.e., the extract from Knausgård's book] arouse your interest?" On a scale from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("yes, definitely"), the answers elicited were: 1) the text read as autobiography: 2.3 (N=32), 2.7 (♂=15), 1.9 (♀=17)**;** 2) the text read as fiction: 2.3 (N=40), 2.4 (♂=19), 2.1 (♀=21)**;** 3) all respondents: 2.3 (N=72), 2.6 (♂=34), 2.0 (♀=38). This indicates that there was a certain gender difference in the answers. The young men in both text groups appreciated Knausgård's depiction of young men more than the young women did. As a whole, that difference came out at 2.6/5 for the men and 2.0/5 for the women. Also, the men in the factual text group showed a slightly higher preference for the text than in the fictional group (2.7 as against 2.4) while the women, conversely, preferred the text read as fiction (2.1 as against 1.9). However, these are small differences which evened each other out in a comparison of the two text groups irrespective of gender. The main result here is that the two groups showed the same relatively low appreciation of the text at 2.3/5.

In relation to the above general question about their preferences, respondents appear inconsistent**:** although collectively speaking they claim to prefer factual over fictional narratives, they do not show that preference when asked to judge the text's degree of interest according to that variable. As an example of a discrepancy between attitude and performance, this may be compared to another study which found that respondents' "expectations regarding the higher transportiveness of fiction as compared with nonfiction … did not translate to self-reported experience" (Appel and Malečkar 474). However, in the present case the comments offered on the general question about fictionality reveal an interesting complication in the reasons given for preferring factual narratives: "in that case it is easier to relate. If for instance the story is about something that is sad it is easier to relate to it if it has really happened," "you feel more touched if it is real, otherwise you dismiss it from your mind," "a story which is real is usually in my opinion more moving and often much more interesting." Apparently, sad, touching, moving stories are the ones which receive a particular bonus from being factual, a point which also emerges from a set of interviews in an earlier study of Swedish upper-secondary school students (see Olin-Scheller 203-07). In a few cases this is made explicit: "yes, I like factual movies, where people recount the horrible experiences they have had, and it would ruin everything if they were made-up and they were only acting! But in ordinary films and the like it makes no difference," "it depends on the kind of genre. If it is about nasty events like rape it would mean a lot but if it was about love, for instance, it would make no difference." Given this slant to their stance, respondents were perhaps less inconsistent than it may seem in not appreciating the Knausgård extract more when it was presented as factual: if their preference for factuality is primarily linked to stories that are shocking and tear-wrenching, it is understandable that the full force of the factual bonus was not activated by the moderately dramatic everyday events of the Knausgård extract. This situation illustrates a phenomenon which may be termed the "source sensitivity" of the data. In the empirical study of

literature scholars are attuned to the "respondent sensitivity" of the data, that is, the variation in response linked to variables such as education, reading experience, age, and gender. Less obvious and easily neglected, "source sensitivity" means that a variable which may seem extractable from the material, and therefore generalizable, is in fact valid only for the kind of material prompting the responses. In this case, as we have seen, the lack of correlation between fictionality/factuality and appreciation of the story seems to be linked to the fact that the story is realistic and not particularly dramatic. We therefore should not yield to the tempting (over)generalization that fictionality/factuality consistently does not influence appreciation of the text.

Results of my study also reveals another form of source sensitivity. Depending on the text group, a question to the respondents was phrased "What difference does it make to you that this text is made-up (compared to it depicting real-life events)?" or "What difference does it make to you that this text depicts real-life events (compared to it being made-up)?" This was a purely qualitative question which elicited answers such as these: "I do not think it makes any difference because nothing special happened [suggesting that it would make a difference if something "special" happened in the text]," "it makes no straightforward difference, this text seems real," "makes no difference since this could just as well take place in reality, and no doubt it has," "no difference at all. It might as well be real," "I think there is a small reality behind this text. Someone out there is perhaps experiencing precisely this and I do not think it makes a difference, this text still conveys good things." What emerges here is the idea that a fictional, but realistic text is read in the same way as a factual text. This may on the one hand be seen as a naïve reading of fiction as if it were real. On the other hand, it means that at least realistic literary fiction is considered to be clearly related to reality rather than cut off from it by its fictionality. More explicitly, the respondents' conception of the relation of fiction to reality was probed by the question "do you believe that it is possible to learn something from made-up stories?" On a scale from "not at all" (1) to "yes, definitely" (5), answers were 3.7 (N=72), 3.4 (♂=34), 3.9 (♀=38). Thus the answers are clearly on the positive side. This can be compared to the positive answers (5.34/7) to a similar question elicited from 29 university undergraduates by Prentice and Gerrig (531-32), a result which is now confirmed in an educationally different group of respondents. The present case, however, includes the interesting aspect that one might expect the respondents' general preference for factuality over fictionality to have entailed, conversely, a depreciation of fiction as a source of knowledge.

Commenting on their answers, respondents gave three types of justification for their conviction that one can learn something from fictional stories. The first is reading fiction as a mirror of reality: "yes, even if the story has not taken place in real life it can still be perfectly possible"; "It usually reflects reality (sometimes)," "it depends on what it [the story] is all about. If it is something made-up which is nevertheless realistic, sure you can [learn something from made-up stories]," "you can get a realistic idea of what it would be like in real life," "yes, absolutely. Just because things are made-up does not mean that there cannot be facts that are correct." It is worth noting that the orientation in the last quotation towards specific facts is rare in the respondents' data: this type of mimetic justification is dominated by the more general correspondence to reality exemplified by the first four quotations. Second, the respondents adduce as potentially illuminating the main point of the story, usually dubbed its "message": "made-up stories often tend to have very good messages & can remind you a lot of reality," "although the story is made-up it can have a good message," "children's films often have great messages," "if it contains a good message, you can [i.e., learn something from made-up stories] for instance in children's books there are many good messages, for instance that you should not be mean to others," "one should soldier on [a reference to a point in the Knausgård text]." And a third type of justification goes beyond the notion of reflection of reality or a specific message: "a made-up story is someone else's (the author's) thoughts, is it not, and you can learn from that," "one can embrace thoughts and set in motion one's own thoughts on various subjects," "one learns imagination," "of course you can [i.e., learn something from made-up stories]. Imagination & feelings may be the same." In these comments respondents celebrate the readers' encounter with the mind of another person and the development of their own minds which may ensue.

All in all, fictional stories are described as a source of knowledge, insight, or increased mental ability. This demonstrates some understanding in practice of the special relation of fictionality to reality which I designate "representativity." As I point out previously, the simplest, factual reading oriented towards specific information is rare. Instead, respondents look for links to reality characteristic of fictional cases representing a class of real-life phenomena. Within the first type of justification, the idea that literature "reflects reality", as one respondent put it, is of course the traditional professional term for the close, but indirect relation that imaginative literature bears to reality. And the phrasing in another answer -- that a story can be "perfectly possible" even when it "has not taken place in real life" -- corresponds to Aristotle's observation that while the historian depicts "particular facts," the poet writes "in accordance with the laws of possibility and probability" (44). The second type of justification emphasizes the thematic point which professionals often elicit from literary works. Even more sophisticated is the third type of justification where fiction is regarded as an improvement of the reader's ability to reflect on reality. A positive attitude to learning something from fiction is thus in many cases combined with a basic capacity for doing so on fiction's own terms. And interestingly enough, this combination is found among students who describe their own reading of fiction as sporadic. On the other hand, they are hardly aware of their special skills in reading fiction since they voice the conviction that the status of Knausgård's text as fictional or factual has little influence on their reading. Once again we encounter the discrepancy between attitude and performance as we did when respondents praise factuality, but do not appreciate the Knausgård text more when it was read on the premise of being factual.

As we see, the 72 respondents are by and large both willing and able to learn something from fictional narratives. On the other hand, the opposite tendency emerges in their answers to the question "Why do you read fiction? Tick all boxes which in your opinion describe your attitude." This was followed by ten unnumbered alternatives. The response, which on other box-ticking questions was 100% or nearly so, now dropped to 58%. This was because 20 young men and eight young women ticked the last alternative "I do not read at all" and indicated no reason for reading. In addition, two respondents provided no response whatsoever. The remaining 42 respondents chose an average of three reasons for reading. In the questionnaire the alternatives were given in random order, but as shown in Table 1. below, they have been ordered from the most favored to the least favored alternative:

choices	♂=12 27 choices	♀=30 98 choices	(N=42) 125 choices	
to be amused and entertained	5	19	24	
to experience rest and relaxation	7	16	23	
to experience suspense and horror	4	18	22	
to experience an escape from reality	5	16	21	
to feel touched	1	14	15	
to feel stimulated	0	5	5	
to get to know the world better	2	3	5	
to enjoy an experience of beauty	1	3	4	
to share interests with others	1	0	1	
something else	0	1	1	

Table 1. Choices of reasons for reading

Here the result is relevant to the two traditional educational reasons for recommending the reading of fiction. At a total of 12% (five respondents out of 42), the goal of getting to know the world better holds little attraction for the respondents**,** nor does the goal of understanding oneself better with a total of 10% (four out of 42). By far the dominant reasons given for reading are entertainment, relaxation, and escape from reality along with the desire to experience suspense and horror. As a whole, this study indicates that respondents believe that they appreciate a text more if it is factual, but this is belied by their assessment of the Knausgård text. Similarly, they appear unaware of their own reactions in the field of interpretation. Here they feel they would not view a text differently if its fictional/factual status was reversed, but nevertheless display an understanding of fiction-specific ways of eliciting knowledge and insight or increased psychological proficiency from "made-up stories." In the latter respect the result is more positive than indicated by earlier studies by Stig Bäckman and Ingrid Mossberg Schüllerqvist, respectively. Finally, while prepared to learn something from fiction, respondents read for pleasure rather than instruction.

From a gender perspective it may tentatively be noted that in terms of the variable fictional/factual, the relatively low appreciation of the Knausgård extract was influenced hardly at all by the gender of respondents. On the other hand, the fictional status of texts was in general considered more important by women than by men (3.6/5 versus 2.9/5). This means that the discrepancy vis-à-vis the consistently low appreciation of the extract was more marked among women than among men, but also that the potential for a fiction-appropriate reading may be expected to be stronger among women. In terms of other variables, it is clear across the board in both groups that women appreciated the text less than men (a total of 2.0/5 versus 2.6/5). This goes against the grain of the common view that, while men like to read only about men, women are also able to appreciate narratives about the opposite gender. The young women in this study, at least, had difficulties taking an interest in a story about young men. The clearest gender difference was, however, elicited by the question about reasons for reading literary fiction. A cultural stereotype about emotional reactions is vindicated by the fact that, as we can see in Table 1., 47% of the women (14 out of 30) appreciated the experience of feeling "touched" versus 9% of the men (one out of twelve). However, the stereotype that men are more inclined than women to seek out stories of suspense and violence is contradicted by the fact that 60% of the women (18 out of 30) indicate the experience of "suspense and horror" as one reason for reading versus 33% of the men (four out of twelve).

In further research concerning fictionality, two avenues seem promising. First, source sensitivity of the variable of fictionality should be tested across a broad range of texts. If, as we see, it does not register strongly in a realistic everyday story, will it make a more marked difference if the story is moving or exciting or provocative or supernatural? The respondents' statements about the lifelikeness of the Knausgård story suggest that it would, but this needs to be verified in actual reactions to a wide variety of stories. And if there is such a difference, is it one of interpretation or appreciation or both? Apart from the question of fictionality, the phenomenon of source sensitivity occurs in many areas such as the particularly high degree of reader identification engendered by first-person narratives. One may ask whether this is a general rule or a phenomenon predicated on relatively likable narrators: to what extent is identification reduced or removed if the narrator is repulsive? Another example is the question of whether readers take a spontaneous interest in interpreting the point of a story. Doug Vipond and Russell A. Hunt, and David S. Miall and Don Kuiken suggest that they do not, but would this result be different for more provocative or ambiguous stories which pose a real problem for the reader's understanding? Further, a question arises from the result achieved here, as well as in the

Prentice and Gerrig study of undergraduates: the respondents' positive attitude to learning something from fiction. To what extent is it matched by the skills required to do so? In future research, text-specific questions concerning interpretative and emotional reactions should probe how proficient readers are in processing fictional stories on their own terms: do they look for meaningful patterns created by an author who freely fashions the made-up narrative to achieve certain communicative results; or do they treat the story and its characters as if they were somehow given in advance, as they are in a factual narrative?

In conclusion, my study sheds light on the conditions of the traditional idea that literary fiction contributes positively to the social orientation and personal development of young readers. It shows that such an effect is perfectly possible since the respondents' attitude to fiction and its real-life relevance is positive. On the other hand, there seems to be a chasm between the institutional hope for such an effect and the merely pleasure-seeking attitude to fiction displayed by these young readers. This has three consequences. First, in contrast to Martha Nussbaum's position, positive personal growth cannot be assumed to be an automatic result of the leisure-time reading of fiction. If it occurs at all, it is incidental to the goal of entertainment. Second, educational efforts to encourage learning by reading fiction remain necessary and have a good foundation in the respondents' positive attitude to the possibility of such learning. However, such efforts should start from the realization that this objective is alien to the students' spontaneous literary orientation: educators should not assume that young readers will readily draw on fiction for personal development and social orientation merely because, at their time of life, they are likely to have corresponding needs. Literary fiction can certainly help meet those needs, but only after a teacher has deliberately and delicately re-orientated the students towards a corresponding mode of reading. And third, students need to be made aware of how much they are able to do as readers of literary fiction without realizing it. The basic understanding by participants in this study is worth highlighting and developing, namely the three types of justification for the idea that readers can learn something from fiction. Thereby teachers can help overcome what is perhaps the most serious obstacle to fruitful reading: students' sense of alienation and lack of the requisite proficiency in reading literary fiction. This, however, presupposes an awareness on the part of the teacher of the peculiarities of fictionality and how they are understood by their students.

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