

Call for participation and papers for PhD candidates and Postdocs

Workshop on Narrative Empathy

University of Basel, 20 June 2017

Part of the 2017 SLSAeu conference program (<http://www.empathies2017.com>)

With Fritz Breithaupt (Indiana University Bloomington), Marco Caracciolo (Ghent University), and Hugues Marchal (University of Basel)

This interdisciplinary workshop seeks to chart the two-way traffic between narrative and empathy: on the one hand, scholars of narrative—and particularly of narrative fiction—have argued that empathy for characters is a central psychological mechanism behind narrative engagements (see, for instance, Hakemulder 2000); on the other hand, there are widespread claims—in fields ranging from moral philosophy to social psychology—about narrative’s power to develop people’s empathetic skills in real-life interactions. This empirical research program has been pursued by Mar and colleagues (2006), and more recently by Kidd and Castano (2013) in a much-debated article in *Science*.

Empathy for characters stands out as one of the main pathways through which stories can enter readers’ lives and have an impact on their worldview. But there are several open questions, including those raised by Suzanne Keen in her seminal *Empathy and the Novel* (2007):

- How do particular definitions of empathy impact theoretical claims and empirical research on empathy in response to narrative fiction?
- How do non-narrative texts articulate their own temporal unfolding and empathy (for instance in argumentative or lyrical works), and to what extent can their strategies differ from or be combined with the ones that prevail in narrative works?
- Are literary narratives conducive to empathy, or are they more likely to disrupt readers’ perspective taking?
- If so, what are the effects of this disruption as we engage with morally deviant, psychologically troubled, or nonhuman characters?
- What are the limitations of empirical research on narrative and its psychological benefits?
- How can empirical research on narrative empathy help us use fictional stories more effectively in educational contexts, or to meet societal challenges?

We invite submissions from PhD candidates and early-career researchers willing to engage with these (and related) questions in the spirit of constructive interdisciplinary confrontation. The workshop will feature short presentations of ongoing research (10 minutes each), followed by extensive discussion.

Important dates

Please send abstracts of maximum 300 words, accompanied by short biographical notes (maximum 200 words), to marco.caracciolo@ugent.be and hugues.marchal@unibas.ch by **30 April 2017**. We will notify you of acceptance by **15 May 2017**.

Presentations or PowerPoint slides have to be made available in advance, by **10 June 2017**. The organizers will distribute these papers among the participants and identify respondents, who will be asked to provide a short response (maximum 5 minutes) to pave the way for the discussion.

Attendance of the workshop as well as the whole conference is free for accepted PhD and Postdocs. For funding reasons, priority is given to Basel and Swiss participants, though we might be able to fee-waive other participants as well.

References

- Hakemulder, Frank. 2000. *The Moral Laboratory: Experiments Examining the Effects of Reading Literature on Social Perception and Moral Self-Concept*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Keen, Suzanne. 2007. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kidd, David Comer, and Emanuele Castano. 2013. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science* 342 (6156): 377–80.
- Mar, Raymond A., Keith Oatley, Jacob Hirsh, and Jordan B. Peterson. 2006. "Bookworms Versus Nerds: Exposure to Fiction Versus Non-Fiction, Divergent Associations with Social Ability, and the Simulation of Fictional Social Worlds." *Journal of Research in Personality* 40 (5): 694–712.

Books and edited collections by Fritz Breithaupt

Breithaupt, Fritz. 2009. *Kulturen der Empathie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Breithaupt, Fritz. 2017. *Die dunklen Seiten der Empathie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Empathie und Narration. 2010. Eds. Claudia Breger and Fritz Breithaupt. Freiburg: Rombach.

Narrative Empathy. Eds. Claudia Breger and Fritz Breithaupt. Special issue of *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* 82.3 (September 2008).