ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Empathy and literary style

A theoretical and methodological exploration

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Abstract

This article presents the design, methodology, and materials of an inter-Nordic, empirical study of literary reading among students in teacher education, in which relations between literary style and experiential aspects of literary reading (e.g. empathy and transportation) were assessed empirically. The primary aim of the article is to introduce paradigms and measures from interdisciplinary empirical research on literary reading which is less known in a Nordic context but which is rapidly gaining momentum internationally. The participants in the study read Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Fly" (1922) in the original version versus in a manipulated version in which typical features of literariness (e.g. metaphors and similes) were removed. Combining quantitative measures of empathy, appreciation of literature, and aspects of reading engagement with qualitative methods, the aim is to probe deeper into readers' subjective reading experience.

KEYWORDS
literariness, literary reading experience, qualitative methods, quantitative methods

1 | INTRODUCTION: EMPATHY AND LITERARY READING

Many would intuitively agree that reading literature is a worthwhile endeavor and something to be encouraged and supported in educational contexts beyond those of literary studies proper. There is, furthermore, ample evidence in empirical research of correlations between reading for pleasure and academic skills (see e.g. Boerma, Mol, & Jolles, 2017; Mol & Jolles, 2014; Mol & Bus, 2011; Sullivan & Brown, 2015). Nevertheless, the position of specifically literary reading in school is under pressure, and recent debates about the time spent teaching young students to read strategies rather than to read literature "simply" for the personal experience[1] indicate a lack of consensus about literature and literary reading's most substantial and valuable contribution in educational contexts.

In light of such tensions, an interview with former president Barack Obama helped fuel arguments about the allegedly vital role of literary reading in our lives. During the last days of his presidency, Obama described the importance that novels have played in his life:

> When I think about how I understand my role as citizen, setting aside being president, and the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position of citizen, the most important stuff I've learned I think I've learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there's still truth there to be found, and that you have to strive for that and work for that. And the notion that it's possible to connect with some[one] else even though they're very different from you.
> (Robinson, 2015)

Appearing in a time when there is a palpable sense of crisis sweeping the humanities in general,[2] and when literary studies are challenged by increasing methodological discord, Obama's words serve to testify what scholars of literature may claim to have known for a long time: that novels, and literature, have a potentially unique role to play in promoting and nurturing pro-social abilities, such as mentalizing and empathy—that is, the ability to "put oneself in someone else's shoes" and to understand other people's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

Over the past couple of decades, philosophers and literary scholars have put forth strong claims about the importance of literary reading in this respect. Perhaps most prominently, in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (the chapter "Cultivating imagination: Literature and the arts"), Martha Nussbaum contends that literature, and in particular the novel, through its potential for expanding our empathy, provides us with the means for developing and fine-tuning a sense of social justice and morality (Nussbaum, 2010, 95–120). Literature professor Per Thomas Andersen (2011, 20) describes literary reading—the act of reading stories about other people's lives and destinies—as an excellent experiment setting with respect to immersion and developing a balance between the sense of self and the appeal from others. According to Andersen (2011), literary reading is, in its most profound sense, a basic exercise in understanding and developing empathy for other people's pain, anxiety, hope, and happiness, without losing one's sense of self. Analogously, psychologist, novelist, and literary scholar Keith Oatley (e.g. Oatley, 2011a, 2011b, 2016), has described literature as social micro-cosmoses, replete with complex characters interacting with other complex characters and forming highly intricate scenarios that the reader can use to fine-tune socioemotional skills without any of the risks entailed in real life encounters.

The past few years have seen a surge of empirical research in literary studies, psychology, and neuroscience, investigating connections between literary reading and aspects of prosocial behavior, most prominently, those of empathy and mentalizing (see e.g. Black & Barnes, 2015; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Johnson, Cushman, Borden, & McCune, 2013; Koopman, 2015, 2016, 2017; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009; Pino & Mazza, 2016; see Keen, 2007, for a book-length overview; and Burke, Fialho, & Zyngier, 2016, for a review of studies of empathy in light of contemporary literary theory and neuroscience). Several studies (e.g. Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009) have found positive correlations between proxy measures of literary reading,

such as lifetime exposure to literature (e.g. the Author Recognition Test[3]) and self-report measures of empathy. Consistent with such findings, a recent meta-analysis (Mumper & Gerrig, 2017) showed that fiction reading indeed had a higher correlation with measures of social cognition, compared to nonfiction reading.[4] However, correlational studies preclude any inferences of causality, hence we cannot say whether lifetime exposure to literature (i.e. high scores on the Author Recognition Test) makes one better at understanding other people's thoughts and emotions, or whether those who are good mind-readers (i.e. with high scores on empathy measures) are more drawn to literary reading in the first place, possibly or precisely because they have refined socioemotional skills.

Establishing causal relationships requires an experimental design, and in an article published in *Science*, Kidd and Castano (2013) reported a study comprising five experiments on empathy and "high-literary" (i.e. critically acclaimed) versus "low-literary" novels (i.e. best-sellers), and non-literary texts (i.e. informational or expository texts). They found that readers who had read critically acclaimed literary texts scored higher on measures of empathy and social cognition immediately after reading than readers who had read the best-sellers or non-literary texts. The study received substantial media coverage and served to boost an interest in the relationship between literary reading and prosocial behavior. However, two recent studies (Panero et al., 2016; Samur, Tops, & Koole, 2017) have failed to replicate the findings of Kidd and Castano (2013), indicating that questions concerning literary reading's contribution to empathy are not straightforward (but see Kidd & Castano, 2017, for a critique of the replications). Aiming to shed further light on this complex issue, the study presented here was designed to address empirically, in an experiment, questions concerning the nexus between story reading, literary language, and emotional engagement among students enrolled in a teacher education program. The primary objective of this article, however, is to introduce paradigms, methodologies, and measures for an empirical study of literary reading, with the hope that such interdisciplinary research will gain momentum also in a Nordic context.

2 | THEORETICAL RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The rationale for the present study is rooted in the ongoing scientific pursuit of the assumed associations between literary reading and empathy. A closely related objective is to supplement the analysis-oriented approaches to literature, prevalent in the humanities to date, with a principled inquiry into the experiential aspects of literary reading. For a long time, the focus in the study of literature (in literary theory as well as in the teaching of literature) has been primarily on analytical skills related to, for example, identifying particular stylistic, poetic, or narratological devices or concepts, and/or main theme or message of texts, often to the exclusion of emotional and other affective engagement (see e.g. Davis, 2013; Miall, 1996; Persson, 2007; Torell, 2002). For the most part, literary theory has downplayed or even explicitly dismissed first-person experiential accounts of reading as unworthy of scholarly attention (Culler 1980; Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1949). Even in the diverse strands of reader response theory, claims about the reading experience rest on theory-driven models of implied (Iser, 1978) or model readers (Eco, 1979), developed on the basis of textual cues. Additionally, even with the focus directed at the theoretical reader, the scholarly interest remained at an allegedly intersubjective interpretive level rather than being directed towards aspects of affective engagement.

Considering that for most people, the prospect of a pleasurable experience is a main motivation for literary reading, privileging the *analysis* and *interpretation* of texts rather than the *experiences* had through reading them, fails to acknowledge literature's *raison d'être*. According to empirical literary scholar David Miall, it may even destroy the pleasures of literary reading:

> *The problem of focusing on interpretation is evident from its effect on literature students. Asking students what a literary text means distracts them from the experience that the text offers, and may lead to dispiriting games in the classroom where the student is supposed to guess what the teacher or examiner has in mind [...].*
> *(Miall, 2006, 39; italics added)*

As a timely response to this neglect of personal enjoyment in reading, *engagement* is now beginning to emerge as a factor worthy of scholarly attention, alongside related aspects such as motivation (see e.g. Guthrie, 2004; Langer, 2001; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001).[5] In an educational climate increasingly concerned with skills, strategies, and standardized testing (see e.g. Alsup, 2015), these trends seem particularly important to counterbalance the global concern with accountability in education.

Echoing such trends and aiming to inspire further empirical research on the literary reading experience, our experiment combines quantitative and qualitative measures to explore experiential aspects of literary reading. In what follows, we present the method, materials, and measures from an inter-Nordic collaborative project, involving scholars from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. This kind of multi-method, empirical research on literary reading is still relatively rare, but it is rapidly gaining momentum internationally (see e.g. Mangen, 2013). The first of its kind in a Nordic literacy context, this study employs a number of (mainly Anglo-American) measures in an innovative design to explore relations between empathy and literary style.

The cross-national nature and the complex design presented a number of challenges. In terms of empirical findings, the outcomes of the study can be said to be only partly successful. Instead, the main contributions of the study to a (Nordic) literacy field can be found in the introduction and adaptation of a number of novel measures to study literary reading, as well as the ways in which inter-country differences were managed. Adapting rating scales from the Anglo-American context in which they were originally developed and validated to four Nordic countries required sensitivity to cultural variation and to subtleties of the languages involved. Using a modernist short story in the original and a manipulated version and combining existing scales with newly developed ones, our aim was to elucidate associations between readers' empathy and engagement, and how these may vary as a function of the literary text's degree of literariness (see e.g. Miall 2006). By introducing all materials in some detail below, we hope to inspire more empirical research on literary reading in a Nordic literacy context also.

3 | METHODS AND DESIGN

3.1 | Participants

In total, 81 students (in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland) participated in the experiment. Students in all countries were primarily from teachers' education classes, but some were recruited from library and information studies. The study design required participants to attend two sessions, which made it difficult to obtain appropriate sample sizes in all participating countries. Below, we report data from the Norwegian sample only.[6] All participants in the Norwegian study were students in the first year of teacher's education. Most were between 21 and 25 years of age, and there was a majority of female students (37 females and 9 males attended Session 1 in which the demographic data were obtained).

3.2 | Overall design, measures, and procedure

The overall study was a between-subjects design where participants attended two sessions (both taking place during ordinary lecture time at the university). Each session lasted about 60 minutes. In Session 1 we administered a number of instruments, as follows:

1. In order to measure participants' general reading comprehension, we employed a published fictional text with comprehension items from the PISA 2000 test of reading literacy.
2. The Reading Background Questionnaire developed for this study provided data on demographics and reading habits/frequency.
3. Participants' attitudes to and appreciation of literature was measured by means of an adaptation of Miall and Kuiken's (1995) Literary Reading Questionnaire (henceforth LRQ).

4. Empathy was measured by means of translations of Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET; Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001).

In the Session 2, three weeks later (to avoid a potential learning effect), we administered a new set of measures in addition to the RMET, as follows:

1. Stimuli: the participants were randomly assigned to read one out of two versions of "The Fly" by Katherine Mansfield (1922). One group read the original version high in literariness markers in a published translation, while the other group read a manipulated version low in those markers (see below).
2. The readers' sense of engagement was assessed with the use of a Post-Process Scale consisting of an adaptation of Busselle and Bilandzic's (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale, and Kuijpers, Hakemulder, Tan, & Doicaru's (2014) Story-World Absorption Scale (SWAS), as well as some items developed specifically for this study (see below for further details on the scales).
3. We assessed participants' reading experience qualitatively by asking them to mark passages in the text that they found "striking and evocative" (e.g. Sikora, Kuiken, & Miall, 2011) and then comment on three of these after having finished reading.
4. Session 2 ended with participants completing the empathy (RMET) measure again.

For the purpose of the larger cross-national study, all scales were translated into the four Nordic languages (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and Finnish), and were thoroughly checked for consistency and clarity. Even though three of the languages (Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish) are closely related, there are cultural and linguistic differences that were taken into consideration when preparing the scales.[7] The Nordic translations of the RMET used in the study had previously been piloted in clinical contexts (Bentz & Jepsen, 2012; Hallerbäck, Lugnegård, Hjärthag, & Gillberg, 2009; Sommerfeldt & Skårderud, 2008). All participants completed the same tasks, in the same order. Basic demographic information and informed consent was also collected during Session 1.

3.2.1 | Session 1: Materials and measures

PISA "The Gift"

In order to control for reading competence, we had all participants read a short story, "The Gift" (Dollarhide, 1985), which was published after its use in the international PISA 2000 study (OECD, 2002). The short story with its corresponding items (three multiple choice, four constructed response questions) tests reading literacy among 15-year-olds. This meant that we could use well-tested, reliable items which none of the participants was likely to have seen before.[8] However, we had difficulty obtaining scoring criteria for all four languages, and it was even more difficult to follow the scoring criteria we had in a systematic manner in such a small sample. The measurement was thus discarded at a later stage.

Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ)

Designed to examine readers' attitudes to and appreciation of literary reading, Miall and Kuiken's LRQ (1995) is a 68-item questionnaire comprising seven factors—for example, Empathy; Leisure Escape; Concern with Author (see Appendix I below for a full list of factors with sample items). Items from all original LRQ subscales except Concern with Author were retained and adapted for the present study. In addition, we developed new items aiming to assess components not captured by the LRQ:

- Literariness: "When I read literature, I often take notice of the wording of a line or passage"
- Interpretation/Reflection: "When I read literature, I often begin to grasp ideas that are difficult to express"
- Character-Driven Reading: "When reading fiction, I want to experience the world through the character"

- Subject-Driven Reading: "If the subject is not interesting, I cannot enjoy other aspects of the piece of fiction either"

The adapted version comprised 47 items presented on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "agree totally" to 6 = "disagree totally".

The Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET)

The Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET; Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001) consists of 36 photographs. Each photograph shows the eyes of an actor expressing a discrete emotion (e.g. "terrified"; "annoyed"; "amused"), and is accompanied by four alternative emotion labels. The task is to identify the correct label corresponding to the emotion shown. Although originally developed as a measure of the autism spectrum disorder (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001; Olderbak, Wilhelm, Olaru, Geiger, Brenneman, & Roberts, 2015), the RMET is a broadly recognized measure of empathy and of Theory of Mind more generally. It has been used in several studies on literary reading and empathy, and there is some evidence of correlational (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009) and even causal (Kidd & Castano, 2013) relationships.

3.2.2 | Session 2: Materials and measures

Mansfield, "The Fly" in original versus manipulated version

Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Fly" was first published in 1922, and has been translated and published in anthologies in all the Nordic countries represented (see Appendix II below for a summary of the story). The participants read it in one of two versions; about half of the students read the original in translation, while the other half read a manipulated version low in literary stylistic devices (more details below). The manipulated low-literary version was prepared in collaboration with Terje Torkildsen (2014), an award-winning Norwegian author of suspense fiction for young adult non-readers. Throughout the story, four main types of manipulation, referred to as *backgrounding*, *specification*, *leveling*, and *parceling* (cf. Kuzmičová, Mangen, Støle, & Begnum, 2017) were performed in order to produce a low-literary version:

- *Backgrounding*: a number of figurative expressions (e.g. metaphors and similes) were removed or replaced by more direct expressions, as follows: "'Y'are very snug in here,' piped[9] old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great, green-leather armchair by his friend the boss's desk *as a baby peers out of its pram*" (original text, Mansfield, 1929). In the manipulated version, the equivalent runs "'You have a nice place here,' *said* old Mr. Woodifield and *looked up from* the big, green-leather armchair next to the boss' desk" (low-style, Torkildsen, 2014.). Another example is the description of the boss as being "planted" in his office (Mansfield, 1929) versus "he sat there" in the low-literary version (Torkildsen, 2014). This is by far the most common type of text manipulation.
- *Specification*: a few instances of metonymy and indeterminate descriptive expressions were replaced by expressions at or closer to a basic level (see Rosch, 1978) of determinacy. An example of metonymy serves to illustrate: "Wistfully, admiringly, *the old voice* added, 'It's snug in here, upon my word!'" (Mansfield, 1929). The manipulated version spells out who the metonym "the old voice" represents: "'It's nice in here,' *Woodifield* repeated" (Torkildsen, 2014).
- *Leveling*: a few archaic features were replaced by contemporary equivalents, due to their being unfamiliar to the participants. In the original version, the description of an old-fashioned photographer's studio may evoke connotations of death ("spectral") and danger ("storm-clouds"), but it may be difficult to understand what the description denotes. The original text reads: "But he did not draw old Woodifield's attention to the photograph over the table of a grave-looking boy in uniform standing *in one of those spectral photographers' parks with*

photographers' storm-clouds behind him" (Mansfield, 1929). In the manipulated version, the description of the photograph on the boss's desk is rendered in neutral wording that is easier to understand: "But he did not point at the photo over the table. The one that showed a grave-looking boy in uniform. *Its background clearly revealed that it had been taken at a photographer's*" (Torkildsen, 2014).

- *Parceling*: a number of complex paratactic structures were broken down into simpler structures. The example above is also an example of parceling; one long sentence is broken down into three shorter sentences. The direct meaning becomes more explicit with a clear focus for each sentence: the boss's intentional ignoring of the photograph, the boy in uniform, the photographer's studio.

The manipulations were uniformly distributed throughout the text. As a consequence of the manipulations, the word count of the low-literary version (c. 2,000 words) was lower than that of the original (c. 2,200 words). However, differences in line spacing made the two texts appear to be equal in length, so that students would not be able to tell at a glance which version they were reading.

Striking and Evocative Passages paradigm

The Striking and Evocative Passages paradigm was originally developed by Seilman and Larsen (1988, 1989). In their seminal study on personal remindings while reading literature (1988), they asked readers to make a note in the margin when something in the text made them think of something they had experienced. After reading, readers were asked to describe what they were reminded of at each marked passage. (For a more recent use of this paradigm in poetry reading, see Sikora, Kuiken, & Miall, 2011). In the present study, readers were instructed to mark (in the text, on paper) any passage that they found particularly striking or evocative. After they had finished reading they were asked to turn to the computer, select three of these passages, and elaborate in writing (on the computer) what had made them mark that particular passage.

The Post-Process Scale

Developed to measure aspects of readers' transportation or engagement in the text, the Post-Process Scale is a 41-item instrument consisting of items selected and adapted from extant measures of related constructs, and items developed specifically for this experiment. Transportation, a concept introduced by Gerrig (1993), is roughly defined as immersion or engagement in fictional or nonfictional narratives. During moments of transportation, the reader feels temporarily isolated from the physical and temporal givens of the real world and may feel as if they are closer to the characters and events in the story-world than the here-and-now surroundings (see also Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Green & Brock, 2000; Nell, 1988). Consisting primarily of items adapted from Kuijpers, Hakemulder, Tan, & Doicaru's (2014) Story-World Absorption Scale (SWAS) and Busselle and Bilandzic's (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale, the Post-Process Scale comprised the following subscales (with sample items):

1. Attention: "When I finished the story I was surprised to see that time had gone by so fast"
2. Distraction: "While reading, I found myself thinking about other things"
3. Loss of sense of time: "During reading, I lost track of time"
4. Transportation: "The world of the story sometimes felt closer to me than the world around me"
5. Emotional engagement: "When I read the story I could imagine what it must be like to be in the shoes of the main character"
6. Suspense: "While reading, I wanted to know how the events would unfold"
7. Mental imagery: "I could imagine what the world in which the story took place looked like"
8. Empathy: "At key moments in the narrative, I felt I knew exactly what the characters were going through emotionally"

In addition, we developed two sets of new items not covered in the above scales, intended to measure Critical Awareness ("While reading, some expressions caught my attention") and Metacognition ("The story evoked a lot of questions").

RMET (see above)

In order to assess whether the reading of a literary text (low or high in literariness) had any effect on participants' short-term empathy as measured by the RMET, we asked participants to complete the RMET for a second time.

Procedure, Session 2

The two versions of "The Fly" were randomly distributed to the participants in class. The texts were print-outs of PDFs, and participants read them at their own pace while marking striking and evocative passages. Upon finishing the reading, they turned to the computer to complete the elaboration of three of their marked passages, followed by the completion of the Post-Process Scale and, finally, the RMET.

3.3 | Hypotheses

In light of the findings in some of the aforementioned studies (e.g. Kidd & Castano, 2013), we expected to find between-group differences in the RMET and the Post-Process Scale. For the Striking and Evocative Passages measure, we expected differences quantitatively in that readers in the high-literary condition would mark a higher number of passages, and qualitatively in that readers in the high-literary condition would mark passages high in literary style, whereas those in the low-literary condition would mark passages high in suspense or other features more typically occurring in popular fiction. We also anticipated that we would find indications in the elaborations, in the high-literary group, of an experiential self-implicating mode of reading (Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004), characterized by development of affective themes relating to personal experiences, across marked passages.

3.4 | Scale validation

3.4.1 | Post-Process Scale

Initial analyses revealed that the Post-Process Scale could not be successfully validated as an internally consistent psychometric instrument. Although adapted from measures that had been previously validated in other languages, errors in the adaptation process prevented a reliable outcome.[10]

3.4.2 | Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ): Adaptation of original scale

Miall and Kuiken's (1995) original LRQ consists of seven subscales making up a total of 68 items (Miall & Kuiken, 1995, 38). The present study retained all subscales from the original scale, except Concern with Author. Some items from the original (in all subscales) were excluded due to relatively low Cronbach's Alpha coefficient scores in previous studies, or difficulties pertaining to translation and/or cultural adaptation. However, we made sure to keep at least three items from Miall and Kuiken's (1995) original array in each subscale. In addition, the Likert scaling was changed from five to six alternatives.[11]

Since the factor loadings of the original questionnaire were so strong, one would expect to get the same factor structure when performing a principal component with the remaining items and scales. A Principal Component Analysis performed with 22 items from the six retained subscales could not confirm the factor structure of the original scale. Looking at each subscale separately, each proved to have fairly high internal consistency.[12]

3.4.3 | LRQ: Supplemental items

We developed additional items to address aspects of particular interest to the present study that were not considered in the original LRQ. These four new subscales (Literariness, Interpretation/Reflection, Character-driven reading, and Subject-driven reading) all showed medium/high internal consistency.[13]

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We expected a between-subjects effect of the RMET and the Post-Process measure due to the different degrees of literariness of the texts presented, and we expected a within-subjects effect on the RMET between Session 1 and Session 2. In the end, however, neither of these predictions could be tested due to sample size.

The Striking and Evocative Passages paradigm was expected to yield several findings: We expected, first, that there would be more markings in the literary version than in the low-literary version. This hypothesis was *not supported* by our data. Second, we expected that the students' markings of striking passages in the literary version would focus on various high-literary stylistic devices, while markings in the low-literary condition would be related to suspense or other features more typically occurring in popular literature. This hypothesis was *supported*, in that readers of the original version marked passages related to literariness (e.g. metaphors and poetic descriptions). This finding may reflect their education in literary analysis: The students knew what to look for in distinctly literary texts. However, the readers of the low-literary, manipulated version were forced to note other features in the narrative (as literary features had been removed or replaced), and they marked very diverse passages.

Moreover, we expected to find indications in the elaborations, in the high-literary group, of an experiential self-implicating mode of reading (Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004), characterized by development of affective themes relating to personal experiences, across marked passages. We did find indications of a self-implicating mode of reading, but not in the high-literary condition. Contrary to our expectations, it was those reading the *low-literary version* who reported analogous feelings in relation to the short story, and its themes of aging, death, loss, and grief (see Kuzmičová, Mangen, Støle, & Begnum, 2017). In contrast, the elaborations of the participants in the original text condition were to a much larger extent reflections on literary style, and were characterized by a more distanced reading stance.

This may seem contradictory to our hypothesis that participants reading the original Mansfield text would score higher on the RMET due to a more self-implicating mode of reading engagement (Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004) afforded by the literary reading condition. However, as discussed at length in Kuzmičová, Mangen, Støle, and Begnum (2017), our qualitative findings can be accommodated in the framework of *aesthetic distance* (Cupchik, Oatley, & Vorderer, 1998; Cupchik, 2002), entailing that "aesthetically marked stimuli are experienced as if from a greater 'distance'—in partial awareness of one's own (pre-existing) concerns as well as of the fictional world's artificial nature" (Kuzmičová, Mangen, Støle, & Begnum, 2017, 147). In contrast, when reading popular (low-literary) fiction, this awareness is typically bracketed—hence, allowing the emergence of more "unfiltered" responses directly enlisting story-analogous feelings. Our findings indicate that, aligning with classroom practice, the students in our sample apply an analytical and interpreting mode of literary reading in which literature is read primarily for the sake of identifying stylistic patterns, tropes and figures, perspective, and theme. The group reading the high-literary version, then, complied with this "schooled" analytical reading approach assumedly expected from them. In contrast, the relative lack of literary devices in the low-literary version led the students in the other group to refrain from employing an analytical approach. The latter group likely felt less constrained overall and more free to pursue their subjectively felt and emotionally colored responses, aspects of (literary) reading that are not necessarily supported in class.

In the context of literary education and in light of the aforementioned concern with the role of engagement, it becomes particularly pertinent to disentangle the relations between *literary reading*, *narrativity*, *fictionality*, and

mode of reading engagement. Narrativity may more straightforwardly afford empathic responses, whereas literary reading, in particular in an educational setting as in the present study, may afford more analytical responses to literature. This context-dependent variable in literary reading has previously been found in a number of studies conducted by Hunt and Vipond (summarized in Hunt & Vipond, 1991). In order to document Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) hypothesized distinction between a self-implicating, or "lived-through" aesthetic reading engagement and efferent reading (reading for information) Hunt and Vipond (1991) conducted a series of studies which indicated that although primed by literary reading stimuli, students would not engage in a deeply personal manner but respond analytically when in an educational setting. A valid interpretation of the students' responses is that contextual factors, here a combination of the physical—and inherently also social (Kuzmičová et al., 2017)—environment of the classroom and the habit of responding analytically to literary texts in that particular environment, may have led students to disregard personal responses and pay attention to stylistic features when presented with the high-literary text. In contrast, the low-literary narrative in everyday language allowed for a more immediate personally engaged response.

Sikora, Kuiken, and Miall (2011), who have used the Striking and Evocative Passages paradigm to minutely categorize responses in terms of readers' self-implication, likewise conclude that attending predominantly to stylistic features precludes personal engagement. In the same study, readers at the other end of the spectrum, who largely attended to their own personal memories at the cost of textual features, were also found to be exempt from deeper forms of self-implication. This indicates, as previously pointed out by Rosenblatt (1966), that responding to high-literary texts in a deep, self-implicating manner is a "demanding activity"; something that "happens when we focus our attention on what we are sensing, thinking, feeling, structuring, in the act of response to the particular words in their particular order" (Rosenblatt, 1966, 1000), and that requires a literary education accounting for both the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading. Education should allow for group discussions of literary texts, and not only focus on written analytical essays. Fodstad Gourvennec (2017) describes how discussions fostering literary interest and engagement can be organized and developed. Varied approaches to literature in school are especially important in our time, as there is a decrease in literary reading among children, adolescents, and even parents, testified by international reading surveys such as PIRLS 2016 (children and their parents; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017) and PISA, for example, 2015 (OECD, 2015).

In summary, this study reflects only a few of the numerous methodological challenges that pertain to an empirical study of literature. As a field of study, literary reading is a multifaceted phenomenon whose complexity invites—indeed, requires—a broad range of theoretical and methodologies approaches. Inspired by a recent debate in the journal *Scientific Study of Literature* (Dixon & Bortolussi, 2016; Jacobs, 2016a, 2016b; Kuiken, 2016), we suggest that this complexity is best tackled by collaborative, interdisciplinary endeavors aiming to transcend common boundaries between first- and third-person methodologies, and between measures administered *during* reading (i.e. on-line) and measures administered *after* reading (i.e. off-line). All methods are prone to limitations that compromise their validity. For instance, first-person measures administered *after* reading (e.g. ratings; verbal reports) are affected by limitations in working memory (see e.g. Jacobs, 2016a). On the other hand, administering any measures *during* reading (e.g. probed responses), will—perhaps especially in the case of literary reading—likely affect the nature of the experience. The present study attempted to reduce this trade-off by combining the post hoc ratings with the Striking and Evocative Passages paradigm. Other ways to address this challenge could be to introduce on-line, indirect measures such as heart rate or eye tracking in combination with off-line, direct measures, as suggested by Dixon and Bortolussi (2016).

5 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

The primary aim of this article has been to present the design, methodology, and materials of an inter-Nordic empirical study of literary reading, and to introduce paradigms and measures from empirical/experimental literary

studies that are less known in a Nordic context but which are becoming increasingly influential internationally. The results of our study indicate that reading distinctly literary texts in an educational setting may prime a "schooled" mode of reading more focused on identifying and interpreting literary or stylistic devices and tropes, rather than on emotional aspects related to personal engagement. In comparison, when reading texts written in a more popular, low-literary style, readers may feel it more acceptable to engage in a more personal and emotional way, focusing on experiential rather than on analytical and interpretational aspects.

If our findings are replicated in further studies, it means that the ways in which literary reading is presented and taught in schools at least partly echo the concerns of Miall— "asking students what a literary text means distracts them from the experience that the text offers [...]" (Miall, 2006, 39). In the long run, to privilege interpretation (and technical analytical skills) over engagement may serve to hamper rather than encourage a continued interest in and enjoyment with literary reading. As Thomas Zabka remarks, "a literary education should build on a primary level of responsivity towards literature, involving empathy and immersion in the world of the text" (Zabka, 2016, 227). We may want to ask the question whether there is, in school, enough focus on students' reading for the pleasure of being absorbed and expanding one's horizons towards knowledge about other people, cultures, and the past.

To develop a literary education that takes experiential approaches into consideration, we need to understand how to teach deep personal engagement with high-literary texts, and we need to develop instruments that allow us to investigate the potential empathic and other gains of the "demanding activity" that is literary reading. Literary education should be balanced and allow for in-classroom reading and discussion of personal reading experiences as well as analytical or distanced approaches to literary texts displaying varying degrees of complexity.

ENDNOTES

[1]This particular debate (in *Morgenbladet*,3 March 2017, retrieved from https://morgenbladet.no/kultur/2017/03/krise-kanskje) was triggered by an article by Knut Hoem (retrieved from https://www.nrk.no/ytring/norskpensum-pa-villspor-1.13241743). Hoem is criticizing one of the most commonly used textbooks in the teaching of (Norwegian) literature in upper elementary schools, for its use of what he considers technical and incomprehensible terminology, which in his view destroys any possibility of gaining pleasure from engaging with literary texts.

[2]As underscored by titles such as *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Nussbaum, 2010), *Why the Humanities Matter* (Aldama, 2008), and *The Humanities "Crisis" and the Future of Literature Studies* (Jay, 2014).

[3]The Author Recognition Test (ART) is a self-report measure testing the ability to recognize the names of literary authors on a list also containing authors of nonfiction and foils.

[4]However, average correlations were small: $r = .07$ for the correlations of fiction with empathy measures, and $r = .22$ for the correlations of fiction with theory of mind measures.

[5]Indicative of this trend is also a Special Issue of *Literacy*, "Reading for Pleasure: Supporting Reader Engagement" (T. Cremin & G. Moss, Eds.), *52* (2018).

[6]In Norway, the total number of participants in Session 1 was 46, and in Session 2 it was 39. Due to no-shows in both sessions, only 29 took part in both and provided data on all measurements. In this article we report the data from these 29 subjects (while Kuzmičová, Mangen, Støle, & Begnum, 2017, report on the 37 subjects who responded to the short story in Session 2).

[7]For example, for the word "story" in LRQ we used the terms *fortelling* (NO), *historie* (DK), and *berättelse* (SE), in line with the translations used in international assessments like PISA.

[8]PISA being a sample study, our participants were too young to be in the sample of 15-year-olds in 2000.

[9]Italics in these quotations are the authors'.

[10]The mistakes included (1) referring to a non-finalized version of one of the scales from which items were adapted (Kuijpers, Hakemulder, Tan, & Doikaru, 2014), and (2) keeping less than three items from each of the subscales referred to.

[11]This was done to avoid the non-descriptive middle group by forcing respondents to select among either positive or negative (graded) responses of agreement or disagreement with statements.

[12]Insight (α = .88), Empathy (α = .74), Imagery Vividness (α = .86), Leisure Escape (α= .94), Story-Driven Reading (α = .65), and Rejection of Literary Values (α = .74), where α (Cronbach's alpha) indicates the degree to which items on a given scale co-vary with each other, ranging in value from 0 to 1.

[13]Literariness (three items, α =.65), Interpretation/Reflection (three items, α =.76), Character-Driven Reading (three items, α =.78), and Subject-Driven Reading (three items, α =.63).

[14]See Appendix in Miall & Kuiken (1995), for full list of items and their factor loadings.

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APPENDIX I

Full list of subscales with sample items, LRQ (Miall & Kuiken, 1995):

1. Insight: "Reading literature makes me sensitive to aspects of my life that I usually ignore"
2. Empathy: "Sometimes I feel like I've almost "become" a character I've read about in fiction"
3. Imagery Vividness: "I can readily visualize the persons and places described in a novel or short story"
4. Leisure Escape: "Reading literature is a pleasurable way to spend time when I have nothing else to do"
5. Concern with Author: "One of my primary interests in reading literature is to learn about the themes and concerns of a given author"
6. Story-Driven Reading: "I like to see tension building up in the plot of a story"
7. Rejecting Literary Values: "I think people should spend less time talking or writing about literature"[14]

APPENDIX II

Summary, "The Fly":

"The Fly" opens *in medias res* towards the closing of a seemingly eventless meeting between two elderly men. The omniscient narrator lets the point of view shift from one man to the other, but also supplies a comment on humanity in general in the opening paragraph. The story unfolds in the recently refurbished office of the "the boss." The visitor, "old Woodifield" (in spite of his being five years younger than the boss), is retired after a stroke and looked after by his wife and daughters. The encounter represents a chance for the boss to show his success and generosity, and for Woodifield an escape from home and an occasion to reminisce former times with someone he considers a friend. A caretaker, "old Macey," appears dog-like now and then in the story time as well as in the boss's thoughts. Both the boss and Woodifield have lost a son in the First World War, and Woodifield suddenly tells of his daughters' visit to his son's grave in Belgium, where they incidentally also spotted the grave of the boss's son. The boss had plans for his only son to take over the business, but he has not yet been to see his grave abroad. After Woodifield has left, the boss contemplates the time when his young son worked for the company and he feels a need to cry. He feels that while others may get over their loss as time passes, his grief can never be relieved. However, his attention is caught by a fly struggling in his inkpot. He rescues the fly before trying its perseverance and survival instinct by repeatedly dripping ink on its wings until the fly dies. Eventually, he has forgotten why he feels so miserable and calls for Macey to get more blotting-paper.