

Juno Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and the Narration of Empathy

Rania Samir Youssef

English Language and Literature, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo, Egypt

Email: raniahassan12@gmail.com

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Abstract

Readers according to Virginia Woolf are co-creators of the text with writers. Reading requires letting imagination loose in order to become transported into a text, thus, eliciting cognitive empathy. Empathy has become recently a field of interest in several disciplines, among which is fiction. Empathic emotions can be elicited in readers, according to Keith Oatley, while reading fiction. This elicitation can be achieved through certain narrative techniques that mostly focus on identification with fictional characters. Using Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy and the theory of mind, adopted from Cognitive Psychology, this study will attempt to examine how Juno Diaz, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, utilizes narration of empathy that relies on alteration in narrative voice and authorial point of view, shifts in narrational focalization and other narrative and linguistic devices to immerse the reader in the story world of his novel. The study aspires to be an addition to the new branch of Cognitive Literary Studies that investigates literature through the focus of brain science and by extension the usefulness of Cognitive Studies to Literary Studies and vice versa.

Keywords

Empathy, Narration, Focalization, Implicature

1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf (1926: p. 40) states that the study of emotions requires some effort on the part of the reader; thus, he/she is a co-creator of the text with the writer. In her view, the reader should "be capable not only of great fineness of perception, but of great boldness of imagination". She adds that writers are not as "professional" as the reader might think for they might not know more of their characters than the reader. She concludes that books should be "the healthy

offspring of a close and equal alliance between [them]”. Woolf’s concept of literature “is thus based on an understanding of the reading process closely resembling the bi-active reading model, which presupposes interplay between textual cues and the reader’s attribution of meaning” (Nünning, 2017: p. 30). Thus, the study of emotions does not solely depend on how the writer presents emotions during the act of writing, but how the text evokes emotions in readers as well.

2. Discussion

When people read fiction, they improve their understanding of others due to the process of engagement in stories, which includes making inferences and becoming emotionally involved (Oatley, 2016). This study builds on Keith Oatley’s assumption that reading fiction which is a simulation of social worlds augments everyday empathic cognition generated by the brain when witnessing other people acting. It will attempt to tackle the narrative techniques used by Junot Diaz in his debut novel that elicit empathy in readers through identification with characters as well as several other techniques.

Fiction focuses on believability; it is assessed not on its consistency but on whether it establishes verisimilitude and truthlikeness. A reader will be affected by a fictional narrative only when it creates a narrative world that is real within its context, thus drawing the reader into the story (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). Fiction elicits strong emotions in the reader without the need for self-protection. The reader can sympathize strongly with fictional characters because he/she does not have obligations toward them. However, sympathizing with real life characters might entail obligation to help them. This process results in what has become recently known as empathy.

The word “empathy” is a relatively young term, entering English in the early twentieth century as a coined translation of the German word *Einfühlung* (Keen, 2006: p. 4). Several critics defined empathy: Stansfield and Bunce (2014) view empathy as the cognitive and intellectual ability to recognize the emotions of other persons. Suzanne Keen (2006: p. 4) throws light on how it works: “Empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading it”. Keen also differentiates empathy from sympathy in that in the former “I feel your pain”, but in the latter “I feel pity for your pain” (Keen 5). The more popular view about the types of empathy is that of Stansfield and Bunce who enumerate only two, cognitive and affective empathy: “Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand the world from another person’s point of view and to infer beliefs and intentions, whereas affective empathy refers to the capacity to share another’s feelings and emotions.”

3. Method

Empathy has become recently a field of interest in several disciplines including philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and literary criticism. However, more work

is still needed in order to reach a firm agreement on what it really means and how it works. Besides, how similar it is (or different from) motor mimicry, emotional contagion, imaginative projection, perspective-taking and sympathy (Zahavi & Rochat, 2015). Luckily, recently there is a new branch of academic research called Cognitive Literary studies, investigating literature through the focus of brain science. The present study will use Suzanne Keen's (2006, 2007) theory of narrative empathy as well as Marco Caracciolo's (2011, 2018) narration of implicature and relate them to the Theory of Mind adopted from Cognitive Psychology (Zunshine, 2008).

Empathy can include not only negative emotions like pity, pain, fear, anger, but can also include positive kinds of empathy like "Happiness, satisfaction, elation, triumph and sexual arousal ... a phenomenon French literary theorists have described with the felicitous term 'jouissance'" (Keen, 2007: p. 5).

How empathy precisely works has been a topic for recent studies; but before attempting to examine it in the field of literary studies, a brief representation of how our brains generate empathy would be more appropriate. Based on observations from neuroscience, there are certain cells in the brain called "mirror neurons" that react in a similar way when we see, hear, or even read about others performing certain actions. The brain not only needs to understand the actions, but the thoughts and emotions behind those actions as well. The agent, then, links those actions with the thoughts and emotions behind them to his/her own experience (Zunshine, 2008).

Empathy in literary studies has been an issue of interest for an array of scholars. Gerrig (1993) conceptualized transportation into a narrative world in the image of the "traveler [who] goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey". Green and Brock (2000) take this explanation further by stating that transportation is a "convergent process where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative". Caracciolo, in "Reader's Virtual Body", declares that "the narrative style cues the cognitive process of constructing the story world of the novel, thus, encouraging the simulation of emotions which is crucial to reader's phenomenological experience of being transported to the novel's story world" (Caracciolo, 2011: p. 118).

The novel chosen for this study is by the Dominican—American writer Junot Diaz (1968-), born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and raised in New Jersey. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), winner of the Pulitzer Prize, depicts the life of a romantic Dominican overweight nerd, who dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien. Although his name occupies the title, the storyline follows the lives of his grandfather, Abelard Cabral, his mother, Belicia Cabral and his sister Lola more intently than his own.

Before embarking on elaborating the narrative techniques used by Diaz to elicit readers' empathy, it will be of some value to go quickly through the literature

that was given about the novel's narrative and narrators. Sandra Cox dealt with the novel through a political angle stating that it is a counter-narrative that refutes the official history by giving voice to those who suffered and survived the Trujillo (Dominican dictator who governed the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961) reign. She adds that Diaz applies narrative pressure on the reader to formulate a sense of justice "that is genetically grounded in the universal moral grammar that all human beings share." Jennifer Vargas, in "Dictating Zafa: The Power of Narrative Form in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," argues that there are two types of competing dictators at the center of the novel: the political dictator, Rafael Trujillo, who rules over the subjects of his regime and the narrative dictator, Yunior, Lola's ex-boyfriend, who retrospectively recounts the novel's events (8). Vargas elicits this argument from a footnote in the novel where the author says: "Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists ... Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. Like, after all, recognizes like" (97, n 11). The study will later on elaborate more on the assumption that narration about the minor character, Trujillo does not elicit empathy while narrating the lives of the protagonists does.

Monica Hanna, in "Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse and Nerd Genres in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," argues that Yunior's narrative is one of resistance to official Dominican history. First, there is a purposeful lack of documentation that leaves much of this history inaccessible. However, this turns out for the good of Yunior's efforts because it allows him the freedom to fill in the gaps in a more creative way. Second, Yunior includes the reader in the process of reconstruction for much is left for the decision of the reader, thus proving the constructed nature of all histories and narratives in general (Hanna, 2010: p. 501). Moreover, Monica Hanna attributes the use of the two epigraphs of the novel, the first from *Fantastic Four* and the second from Derek Walcott's poetry, to connecting two distinct sources in the novel—one from the United States pop culture and one from contemporary Caribbean literature. The two epigraphs also address the connection between the individual and the collective or the experience of a nation's citizen and official history (Hanna, 2010: p. 500).

Sean P. O'Brien (2012: p. 76) in "Some Assembly Required: Intertextuality, Marginalization and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," argues that reading the novel challenges readers with intertextuality and with the cultural knowledge needed to wade through it successfully: "*Oscar Wao* gives readers just enough context to foreground the challenge of incorporating such information into the reading process, raising the question of how much context is enough to understand the book while confronting the reader with choices about how much to research and making it clear that the book's meaning will be determined in part by these choices". Readers who have poor background about such genres like sci-fi, fantasy and comic books will have to look up names of characters and

places in these genres if they want a fair comprehension of the narrator's hints and inferences.

T. S. Miller in "Preternatural Narration and the Lens of Genre Fiction in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*" consistently refers to Yuniior, or to multiple Yuniiors, as the author of the novel as if Junot Díaz is irrelevant to the discussion; almost reluctantly Miller (2011: pp. 100-103) concedes that Díaz plays a peripheral role, yet it is one that reinforces the text's essential ambiguity: "Díaz has designed the novel to permit a reading that ascribes ... something defiantly postmodern and antirealist." She also claims that there are two Yuniiors—the closet nerd and the card-carrying nerd—warring it out on the same page, so that the events in the story remain undecidable and thus sliding the burden to the audience.

Yuniior is the basic narrator of the novel, except for a small part whose account is given to Lola, Oscar's sister. Yuniior collects his material through oral stories he listens to, researching, secretly reading Oscar's journal and leaning on his own background information about sci-fi, fantasy and comic books. Although the study would not adopt the extreme view of Miller that Díaz is playing a peripheral role in narration, but narrative voice and authorial point of view intermingle in an overwhelmingly inclusive level. This in turn takes us to the first narrative technique that the novel uses in order to elicit empathy in readers.

Modulations of narrative voice and authorial point of view are designed to stimulate empathic identification, which, accordingly, permits the reader to experience the frustration, disappointment, pain and anger of the characters in the story. Many a time in the story the reader is baffled whether the one narrating (and commenting on) the events is Yuniior or Díaz. For instance, when Beli, Oscar's mother, was in love with The Gangster who turned out to be married to Trujillo's sister, she was beaten almost to death by some thugs sent by the wife. La Inca, the aunt who raised the orphaned girl up when a child, decided Beli should be sent away to the States. At that point, like many others in the novel, the reader can never tell who precisely the narrator is:

Beli laughed.

Oh Beli; not so rashly, not so rashly: what did you know about states or diaspora? What did you know about Nueva Yol or unheated 'old law' tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about *immigration*? Don't laugh, mi negrita, for your world is about to be changed. Utterly Yes: a terrible beauty is etc., etc: Take it from me. You laugh because ransacked to the limit of your soul, because your lover betrayed you almost unto death, because your first son was neverborn. You laugh because you have no front teeth and you've sworn never to smile again.

I wish I could say different but I've got it right here on tape. La Inca told you you had to leave the country and you laughed.

End of story. (Díaz, 2007: p. 160)

Only when Yuniór mentions that he “got it here on tape” do we know it is Yuniór, but when did Yuniór exactly take over from Díaz, we can never tell. Or even has it been Yuniór all along, or maybe Díaz?

Second, shifts in narrative focalization influence the reader’s affective involvement with the story. Over the course of the novel, Díaz employs a full scale of narrative perspectives ranging from first person narration, internally focalized third person narration, distanced third person narration and direct address to the reader. Through these fluctuations, Díaz guides our affective experience of the novel. First person narration moves between the singular “I” and “my” to “we” and “our”. Addressing Oscar in the very beginning, Yuniór uses “our hero.” When introducing *The Gangster*, Yuniór writes: “info on *The Gangster* is fragmented; I’ll give you what I’ve managed to unearth and the rest will have to wait for the day the páginas en blanco finally speak” (Díaz, 2007: p. 119). The narrative generally uses internally focalized third person narration like when Yuniór was describing how Beli felt when she joined *El Redentor*, a prestigious school for white students: “She never would admit it (even to herself), but she felt utterly exposed at *El Redentor*, all these pale eyes gnawing at her duskiness like locusts and she didn’t know how to handle such vulnerability” (Díaz, 2007: p. 83). However, when emotions are too much to render, distanced third person narration is used in order to spare the reader the agony that he/she should share with the character: “Was there time for a rape or two? I suspect there was, but we shall never know because it’s not something [Beli] talked about. All that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope. It was the sort of beating that breaks people, breaks them utterly” (Díaz, 2007: p. 147). We are cued by the narrator to stop wondering about the details of Beli’s being beaten by the thugs. It is something that hurts Beli beyond words and would strongly affect the reader had not the narrator spared us these details.

The rhetorical strategy of repeated direct address to the reader incites readers to participate in the narrative as if they are involved in the story unfolding in front of them. At times this direct address is designed to guide readers how to judge characters: “The thoughts [*The Gangster*] put in [Beli’s] head. Someone should have arrested him for it ... But if you look at it from, say, a more generous angle you could argue that *The Gangster* adored our girl and that adoration was one of the greatest gifts anybody had ever given her” (Díaz, 2007: pp. 126-127). At other times, the pervasive irony and biting sarcasm used in this direct address leaves the reader confused whether the narrator/author is serious or not. When Lola, Oscar’s sister, ran away from her family, she was searching for flyers that her family might have put in order to find her; however, all she finds were flyers about a lost cat: “That’s white people for you. They lose a cat and it’s all-points bulletin, but we Dominicans, we lose a daughter and we might not even cancel our appointment at the salon” (Díaz, 2007: p. 66). This close third person narration that mixes with direct first person narration elicits powerful empathy on the reader’s side; in other words, the reader experiences what it feels like to be in the

character's place.

Character-focused narrational style is yet a third device Diaz uses in the novel that enables the reader to identify with the characters. This identification is instigated by a textual strategy that Marco Caracciolo calls "character-centered implicature." By providing less textual information about a fictional character, more accessibility is allowed to his/her mind. This supports Suzanne Keen's (2006: p. 219) point that: "Novelists do not need to be reminded of the rhetorical power of understatement, or indeed of the peril of revealing too much. Indeed, sometimes the potential for character identification and readers' empathy *decreases* with sustained exposure to a particular figure's thoughts or voice". Hemingway (1954: p. 183), who believed that the strongest effect comes with the minimalist of means, says, "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them". Fictional characters do not have minds of their own; only what Katja Mellman terms "psycho-poetic effects," that is, the result of "mimetic illusion" that the reader envisions and that makes him/her believe they are dealing with minded beings not with words on a page. Under this illusion, the reader can get to know a character, understand the character's personality and past life and even predict his/her future action and response. This can be achieved by a dynamic process that goes on between writer and reader: the writer uses specific textual strategies and the reader has the willingness and preparedness to use his/her psychological skills in order to fill in the gaps left intentionally or unintentionally blank by the writer. Implicature permeates the novel and ranges from the easiest to the most difficult, requiring various degrees of effort on the reader's side.

The very first, and the easiest, sign of implicature occurs on the first page when Columbus is referred to as "the Admiral" for "to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours" (Diaz, 2007: p. 1). A gradual upgrade in difficulty takes place in using terms and names from sci fi and genre fiction: when Oscar's two nerd friends succeed in getting girlfriends while he fails, he considers how fat he is in the mirror and says: "Jesus Christ, he whispered. I'm a Morlock" (Diaz, 2007: p. 30). Non-readers of genre fiction will have to look up this name in order to know that they are a fictional species introduced by H. G. wells in his classic *The Time Machine* and have become characters in several comic books and films. Research is not only needed within genre fiction but with reference to regular fiction as well. During Lola's narration when she escapes from her family, she alludes to another novel: "I just couldn't do school anymore. Something inside me wouldn't let me. It didn't help that I was reading *The Fountainhead* and had decided that I was Dominique and Aldo was Roark. I'm sure I could've stayed that way forever, too scared to jump, but finally what we'd all been waiting for happened" (Diaz, 2007: pp. 62-63). The allusion to *Fountainhead* (1943) by Russian American writer Ayn Rand is sym-

bolic in that the protagonist, Roark is a revolutionary architect resisting conformity and his lover, Dominique, is still wavering whether to assist him or to go against his efforts. It is ironical that in the narrative of *The Fountainhead*, she identifies with Dominique while in reality she becomes the revolutionary and decides to escape and her boyfriend Aldo decides to stay and work with his father.

Further on when Lola takes over the narration in the second chapter of Part I, Lola does exactly what her mother, Beli, orders her to do: keep her mouth shut about what a neighbor did to her when Lola was eight, “When that thing happened to me when I was eight and I finally told [my mother] what he had done, she told me to shut my mouth and stop crying, and I did exactly that, I shut my mouth and clenched my legs, and my mind, and within a year I couldn’t have told you what the neighbor looked like, or even his name. All you do is complain, she said to me” (Diaz, 2007: pp. 56-57).

Lola did not just shut her mouth as a character in the novel, but also as a narrator. We, as readers, have to imagine and visualize what had happened to her by that neighbor and, thus, feel more empathic with her for she is double victimized, by her neighbor and, regrettably, by her mother.

Narration plays a significant role in building readers’ empathy. David S. Miall (1989: p. 54) mentions that “the privileged information about a character’s mind” through free indirect discourse invites empathic identification in readers. Going back to a point made earlier in the study about the two competing dictators, Trujillo and Yuniór made by Jennifer Vargas, we can notice that Trujillo is a minor character given full narration so that nothing is left for the decision or choice of the reader. This is made on purpose in order not to build empathic relatedness to this character. However, this full narration is given a marginalized place: in the footnotes. But the narration delineating the other characters, including the narrator Yuniór, is leaving gaps and blank spaces to be filled by the reader, thus, adopting the perspective of the character and deciding accordingly: “*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* exchanges a dictator-centric character system for a character-system based on marginalized subjects” (Vargas, 2014: p. 12). For example, when Oscar’s grandfather, Abelard, was imprisoned and tortured by the Trujillo regime, the accusation was that of slandering the president while drunk: “So which was it? You ask. An accident, a conspiracy, or a fuku (curse)? The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you’ll have to decide for yourself. What’s certain is that nothing’s certain” (Diaz, 2007: p. 243). The reader is given more than one scenario and he/she should decide what really works using his/her psychological involvement and identification with the character. Ambivalence allows the readers to project some of their own attitudes onto the characters, thus, they can comprehend the characters on a more than just a superficial level.

A fourth narrative strategy that reflects Diaz’s guided narrative is the use of larger narrative frameworks. *La Inca* encourages Beli to always keep in mind that

her father was a renowned doctor and her mother a nurse, thus bringing the girl to bear on those memories to motivate and console her in her pursuit of escape from her miserable, unpromising life: “La Inca talked to Beli about her father, the famous doctor, about her mother, the beautiful nurse, about her sisters Jackie and Astrid, and about that marvelous castle in the Cibao: Casa Hatüey” (Diaz, 2007: p. 260). This serves to bring emotional harmony between La Inca and Beli in order to arrive at a shared personal and emotional experience. There is a corresponding relationship between La Inca’s use of guided narrative constructions and Diaz’s guided narrative framework that somehow influences the reader’s own cognitive and affective responses to the novel. Diaz is using a diasporic framework struggling within the larger national framework to escape the ideology of dictatorship, but to no avail: “Oscar Wao is a transnational text that blurs the opposition between diaspora and nation by making clear that for U. S. born Oscar to be a diasporic subject, he must be domesticated according to the code of nationalist belonging, as enforced by the Dominican Republic-born Yunior” (Sáez, 2011: p. 526).

Another narrative feature of the novel is the abundant use of anachrony, that is, frequent departure from the chronology of the primary narrative. The French structuralist Gerard Genette (1980: p. 40) classifies anachrony into two categories: analepsis and prolepsis. The former takes the reader back in time as a sort of flashback, while the latter takes the reader forward in time to events that will happen at a later time in the story. This technique motivates the reader to count on his/her imagination to connect past and future events with the present narration. Diaz utilizes analeptic and proleptic narration in a manner to keep the reader continuously engaged in the story. A good example of analepsis takes place in Lola’s narration when she escapes from her family and goes to live with her boyfriend, Aldo, dreaming of going to Dublin, becoming a backup singer for U2 and her brother Oscar becoming the Dominican James Joyce: “I really believed it would happen too. That’s how deluded I was by then” (Diaz, 2007: p. 68). If Lola uses analeptic narration to confess her present disillusionment, Diaz uses proleptic narration to explain how unaware Beli was of her own disillusionment: “Her dreams are spare, lack the propulsion of a mission, her ambition is without traction. Her fiercest hope? That she will find a man. What she doesn’t yet know: the cold, the backbreaking drudgery of the factories, the loneliness of Diaspora, that she will never again live in Santo Domingo, her own heart. What else she doesn’t know: that the man next to her would end up her husband and the father of her two children, that after two years together he would leave her, her third and final heartbreak, and she would never love again” (Diaz, 2007: p. 164).

Junot Diaz makes use of several linguistic devices that enable the reader to simulate the perceptions of the characters and to construct the fictional world projected by the novel. Rhythmically arranged clauses and phrases trigger in readers perceptual simulations of characters’ point of view: “By the end of Sanctu-

ary's first year, Beli's rough lines had been kneaded out, she might have cursed more, had more of a temper, her movements more aggressive and unrestrained, had the merciless eyes of a falcon, but she had the posture and speech (and arrogance) of una muchacha respetable" (Diaz, 2007: p. 259). Repeated patterns help the reader visualize the scene as if watching a film unfold: "In the picture Lola brought home there are shots of Oscar in the back of the house reading Octavia Butler, shots of Oscar on the Malecón with a bottle of Presidente in his hand, shots of Oscar at the Columbus lighthouse, where half of the Villa Duarte used to stand, shots of Oscar with Pedro Pablo in villa Juana buying spark plugs, shots of Oscar trying on a hat on the Conde, shots of Oscar standing next to a burro in Bani, shots of Oscar next to his sister ..." (Diaz, 2007: p. 275).

The abundant use of similes elicits a powerful sense of immersive and empathic experience in the reader because the similes used by Diaz usually carry exaggeration to the limit. When Beli was a young student at El Redentor and she was after a white, handsome boy, Diaz describes her as "set[ting] out to track Jack Pujols with the great deliberation of Ahab after you-know-who. (And of all these things the Albino boy was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?)" (Diaz, 2007: p. 95). Another time when Diaz is describing Oscar's despair: "The Darkness. Some mornings he would wake up and not be able to get out of bed. Like he had a ten-ton weight on his chest. Like he was under acceleration forces" (Diaz, 2007: p. 268). The novel teems with such hyperbolic similes that bring readers closer to characters' feelings and deeper emotions.

Tactile and kinesthetic sensations play a major role in the embodied narrative of *Oscar Wao* in a way that exposes the physical and psychological vulnerability of the characters. During the first night of Abelard's being taken to prison and while filling the forms, he complains to the guard about the awful treatment only to be punched hard in the face by this guard. When he asks why, he gets punched again harder: "This is how we answer questions around here, the guard said matter-of-factly, bending down to be sure his form was properly aligned in the typewriter. Abelard began to sob, the blood spilling out between his fingers. Which the typing guard just loved; he called in his friends from the other offices. Look at this one! Look at how much he likes to cry!" (Diaz, 2007: p. 239) Our emotional involvement in the narrative emanates from our simulation of the characters' emotions and perceptions.

In the section entitled "Oscar Goes Native" in Chapter six, Oscar visits Santo Domingo in the summer with his mother and sister and decides to stay there and not to go back to the States with his sister. The representation of the thinking process that leads Oscar to this decision is presented in a very long run-on, comma-spliced sentence that takes almost three pages: "After his initial homecoming week, after he'd been taken to a bunch of sights by his cousins, after he'd gotten somewhat used to the scorching weather and the surprise of waking up to the roosters and being called Huáscar by everybody ..." (Diaz, 2007: p. 276). This stream of narration gets the reader immersed in the thinking process to fully

understand and share in Oscar's decision.

4. Conclusion

This study is an examination of the still emergent field of Literature and Cognitive Science and a contribution that might generate further discussion in that field for future development. By merging a theory adopted from neuroscience with a theory adopted from narrative studies, this study has shown that literature can affect and be affected by Cognitive Science. I have suggested throughout this study that *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is a good example of how fiction can use narration in eliciting readers' empathy. To this end, Diaz has employed several techniques varying from modulations of narrative voice and point of view to shifts in narrational focalization to character-focused narrational style to using larger narrative frameworks and anachrony among others. By refusing to give his readers definite answers, Diaz is forcing his audience to find their way in the mirror reflecting their condition. This identification with fictional characters helps readers understand and feel for people in the real world. This is a compelling reason why more attention should be given to the study of empathy and fiction or literature in general on the one hand in relation to Cognitive Sciences on the other.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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