Refining Affective Disposition Theory: Towards a Theory of Narrative Equilibrium

Enrique Cámara-Arenas
University of Valladolid, Spain

Abstract

This essay presents a preliminary theoretical development that attempts the importation of Heider's Theory of Balance into the domain of narratology. Heider's elemental POX structure offers ways to complement Affective Disposition Theory, opening the possibility for generating technical descriptions of easily recognizable but also subtle experiential aspects of the processing of narrative products. Traditional concepts like open-endings, focalization or identification will be productively revisited after considering the notions of narrative balance and narrative (affective/dynamic) imbalance. A network approach to affect distribution throughout the elements of a fictional world will allow us to isolate some specific effect-oriented authorial strategies. And finally, the study suggests that Heider's notion of balance recovery through cognitive-affective reorganization might contribute to the understanding of typically elusive ethical and world-view transformation issues.

Keywords: Heider's Theory of Balance, Affective Disposition Theory, affect, psychonarratology, sympathy

Introduction

Equilibrium within the domain of narrative might be understood in a variety of interesting and productive ways. From a purely formal point of view, for example, a narrative text might be distributed along several parts, each one containing equal number of chapters. Or, from a structural point of view, actant forces may be assigned symmetrically: There might be one hero and one villain, and both might be assisted by an equal number of corresponding co-adjuvants. And so forth.

However, for the purpose of the present theoretical exercise I will be concerned with equilibrium as a phenomenological category, and, therefore, with equilibrium as something felt or experienced by the human agent who processes the narrative product. In this particular sense, the notion is relatable to well-known narratological concepts such as poetic justice, (un)happy endings, or even suspense. In a preliminarily intuitive sense, equilibrium might be defined as a sense that all is fine and harmonious within the represented narrative world.

I will assume that as the author gradually populates the fictional world with interrelating characters, actions, objects, events, etc., every new emergence constitutes an issue of balance, since there is an overall, overarching concern with stability on the part of the processing agent, usually dependable on the well-being of the protagonists. Most if not all of what is introduced in the fictional world is likely to play a role in the (non)attainment of final pleasant repose by the processing agent. This balance-sensitive rendering of the narrative experience is compatible with classic Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) (James 1860; Zillman & Cantor 1974; 1977), according to which we like it when the protagonist prospers, and also when her enemies suffer. But there are recognizable aspects of the narrative experience, captured by the notion of equilibrium, that seem to escape the discriminatory powers of ADT. Those scholars who have worked with this theory have articulated their approaches usually around the notions of protagonist-predicament-solution cycles (Shafer & Raney 2012; Weijers 2014) and character development (Kleemans et al. 2017). In terms of the reader/listener/spectator's experience, concern mainly focuses on enjoying the story and (dis)liking the characters. In its present form, ADT would welcome some kind of theoretical and methodological complement that could allow it to account for finer aspects such as interrelatedness, counter-balancing, ambiguity, relative distances, network structure, and other aspects related, as I will show, to felt equilibrium.

The notion of balance implies the integration of diverse elements into a final state of stable repose. The total integrative

effect of a story on the human processing agent seems underdefined by the general features of enjoyment and liking. ADT is not yet at a point where it can fully grasp the experience of narrative as a dynamic, step-by-step actualizing and integrating whole. Despite interesting attempts of total effect calculation based on folk-psychology (Smith, 2015), we still miss a theory that explains how a diversity of different and differing experiences is integrated by readers and spectators in order to contribute to a total effect of (dis)satisfaction. The present attempt will not offer such theory, but it will clear some portion of the path that takes us in that direction. I will try to do so through a theoretical consideration of equilibrium in narrative that is modelled after Heider's classic Theory of Balance (1958).

1. Four premises concerning the processing of narrative texts

The present theoretical development stands upon a set of four interrelated premises.

(1.) Processing leads to experiencing. My first premise asserts that narrative texts, whatever their format—written narratives, campfire stories, film narrations, etc.—work upon the processing agents so as to make them undergo a variety experiences. As the agent processes the material, she becomes the ground for transformations, sensations and mental and affective motions in general. The gamut of effects potentially caused by the processing of narrative material encompasses skill development (Black & Barnes, 2015), feelings and emotions, appreciations of beauty, valuable realizations about life, attitudes and affect directed towards elements of the fictional world, etc. (Miall 2006). Some effects are subtle and tend to operate outside of immediate consciousness. We are not usually aware, for example, that reading fiction improves our theory of mind (Kidd & Castano 2013). Just as subtle is the experiencing the fictional world as if it were a portion of real life (Caracciolo 2013; Wolf 2004). Narrative texts are said to mediate psychological projections (Whiteley 2011), processes of perspective-taking (Caracciolo 2013), and even changes in the processing agent's world-view (Hakemulder 2000; Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora 2004; Oatley 2002). The operation of other

effects such as suspense, a need to know more, or negative emotions that emerge out of sympathy towards suffering protagonists are somewhat more *impacting* and easily verifiable by most introspecting processing agents.

This first premise is largely uncontroversial. The question has never been whether we do experience as much as whether our experiences are relevant in one way or another. Participants in myriads of experiments carried out over the last four decades do report undergoing particular states while processing narrative (Miall 2006). Emotions have been privileged by researchers who have proposed them as the main reason for processing narrative texts (Oatley, 2002), or as constitutive elements in the process of making sense of stories (Miall 2011). Other equally noticeable effects such as suspense have also been studied from a variety of perspectives (Brewer & Litchtenstein 1982; de Wied 1994; Dijkstra, Zwaan, Graesser, & Magliano 1994).

Two particular cognitive-affective mechanisms are especially relevant to the present theoretical development: sympathy and antipathy. For the purpose of this particular essay, sympathy will be defined as the mechanism by which processing agents become interested in particular characters, experience an urge to know about their evolution, and desire to witness their well-being and success. Antipathy constitutes a similar mechanism whereby processing agents find themselves in need to witness the downfall of certain characters. A similar conception of the sympathy/antipathy mechanism has been expounded and developed by Giovannelly (2009), and it is also present in Oatley (2004), who grants it a pivotal role in emotional engagement with narrative.

(2.) Some experiences are predictable. My second premise proposes that at least some of the processing agents' experiences are to a certain extent predictable. This is pretty uncontroversial when it comes to daily life. We anticipate the emotions someone is likely to experience when we give her an unexpected present, or when we give her bad news. Some aspects of human affective behavior which are relevant to our interests here have, in fact, been confirmed by psychologists. They have determined, for example, that in the face of conflict

between two disputants, we predictably side with the one who is morally right, and/or with the one who is most familiar (and/or liked by us), and/or with the one who will better ensure our well-being (Yang, van de Vliert, & Shi 2011). It is very unlikely that these mechanisms be suspended when dealing with narrative entities; on the contrary, moral constraints, for example, have been proposed as a relevant factor in granting our sympathy to a particular character (Giovannelli 2009, 90); exposure to a fictional character, simply by virtue of our becoming acquainted with her, has been said to lead to varying degrees of empathic identification on the part of the processing agent (Gavins, 2007, 64); and even self-interest might play a role in our sympathizing or antipathizing with particular characters, insofar as narrative products may exert a transforming influence upon us (Oatley 2002), which we might choose to accept or resist. In a study carried out by Oatley and Biason (Oatley 1996; 1999), the researchers found that male readers resisted identification with protagonists of the opposite sex—and therefore world-view transformation—much more than female readers did.

The predictability of a processing agent's experiences usually incorporates aspects which are much more accessible to common introspection. We will, for example, identify the hero and sympathize with him; we will feel frustrated when his goal is not achieved; or worried when he is in danger. Similarly, we will identify villains and hate them, want them neutralized, punished or even dead, and so forth. In fact, characters, costumes, appearances, objects, spaces, actions, behaviors, movements, music and most elements within a narrative world are likely to have affective correlates which might differ peripherally across different processing agents, but which must also share a number of core phenomenological properties either by cultural or biological imposition, or by both. This must be the case if we assume, as we do in premise number 3, that these correlates are consciously or intuitively exploited by the author of a narrative.

(3.) Some experiences are technique-triggered. Premise number three might in fact be understood as already implicit in premise number two. It contends that many of the

experiences facilitated by narrative products, and especially those related to affect, are in fact calculated and predesigned by the creator of the story, at least to a certain extent (Plantinga 2011). Brewer and Litchtenstein (1982) implied so much when they proposed that the force of stories is to entertain. The notion of force, derived from classic pragmatics, is inseparable from authorial intention and authorial know-how. It is, for instance, by eliding information about events in the story that the author procures enjoyable effects of surprise and suspense. According to Smith "filmmakers design their stories with the expectation that certain moments in them will make audiences laugh, cry, or clutch their armrests until their knuckles become white" (2015, 486). Although the experience of a particular processing agent can be personal and unique, especially when considered in full detail, we must not disregard the significance of the consensual acknowledgement that, for example, horror movies are scary, and designed to be thus experienced by a majority of spectators.

(4.) Experiences are directional and integrative. The fourth premise is the most daring. It contends that undergoing a particular experience is bound to have an effect on the quality and intensity of the next experience facilitated by the narrative text. In common life terms, we perceive lukewarm water as hot if we have been previously immersed in ice-cold water. Experiences do not simply add up, but integrate in structured interrelated wholes. I find that most of what John Dewey wrote about the continuity of experience in the field of pedagogy might be applied here.

> [E]very experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end. Moreover, every experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had. (1938, 37)

Since, according to Dewey, experience conveys inertia, "It is the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading" (1938, p. 38). It is also, I claim, the business of the author of narratives to consciously or intuitively anticipate the directionality of each particular experience

facilitated by the text, and to calculate its repercussions in the overall affective structure. This is very clearly perceived in narrative when we consider the experience of positive or negative affect towards fictitious entities. The more intense the sympathy we experience towards the hero, the harsher the hatred we experience towards the villain who threatens her well-being. The same principle justifies the fact that those who help the hero immediately win our sympathy, and they do so just as fast as we extend our antipathy towards those who assist villains in their evil doings. We might quite accurately understand such extensions of affect as spread-activation processes where the affect invested in a particular element radiates out, engulfing all other elements positively associated to the former.

2. Heider's Balance Theory

If, as our premises contend, we experience affects in a principled and structured way when processing narrative products, then a theory of affective balance based upon Heider's classical proposal might constitute a useful analytical tool to be especially considered by those narratologists who are interested in phenomenological issues.

Heider's theory is exquisitely simple and intuitive. Nearly folk-psychological, I would say, it is concerned with the affective relationships that occur in a microcosm minimally inhabited by a person P, who relates to another person O, and where both P and O relate to an object X. Their relating is minimally described as experiencing either a positive or a negative attitude. Such minimalistic microcosm, allows Heider to discern two fundamental distributions of affect: balanced and imbalanced structures.

A situation is balanced according to the theory when O is positively regarded by P, and she coincides with P in her liking or disliking X; and also when she is negatively regarded by P and disagrees with P in her appreciation of X. In simpler terms: my friends like what I like ($\rightarrow$) and dislike what I dislike ($\parallel$); my foes like what I dislike and dislike what I like; and that is all fine and balanced:

(1) P→O ∧ P→X ∧ O→X [P likes O *and* P likes X *and* O
     likes X]
(2) P→O ∧ P∥X ∧ O∥X
(3) P∥O ∧ P∥X ∧ O→X
(4) P∥O ∧ P→X ∧ O∥X

But when my friends like what I dislike and dislike what I like, or when my enemies coincide with me in their positive and negative appreciations, I find myself in a situation of imbalance:

(5) P→O ∧ P→X ∧ O∥X
(6) P→O ∧ P∥X ∧ O→X
(7) P∥O ∧ P→X ∧ O→X
(8) P∥O ∧ P∥X ∧ O∥X

In our everyday lives, it is not uncommon for most of us to partake in imbalanced situations. For example, P may have a friend O whom he likes very much except for the fact that O loves rugby, a sport which P happens to detest (situation 6 above, X = 'rugby'). P can, of course, live with that. Imbalanced situations are not necessarily unbearable. However, the theory has it that all imbalanced situations generate some degree of strain and stress or, in any case, some form of aversive phenomenology. The theory also includes a valuable predictability component. According to Heider, when we find ourselves in a situation of imbalance we will always feel a more or less pressing inclination to recover balance.

So, if P finds himself in the previously mentioned situation of imbalance, where he likes his friend O, O likes rugby, and P hates it, P may try to reach balance in just two ways: either (1.) by changing the world outside (rugby or my friend), or (2.) by changing himself through cognitive-affective reorganization. In the first case, for example, P may try to convince O that rugby is a very silly sport. If he succeeds at that, and O learns to hate rugby, then both will unite in their disdain of it and live happily ever after. When changing the world is not possible, or not too easy, P may try to see the bright side of things and learn to tolerate, appreciate or even love rugby, and reunite with O in this new passion. Of course, a more radical way of cognitive-affective reorganization might

imply for P to teach himself to dislike O, and drastically recover balance by turning O into a disliked other.

As far as I know, Heider's Balance Theory has never been applied to the study of the phenomenology associated with narrative processing. De Nooy (1999) tackled the possibility that literary evaluations of Dutch literature during the 1970s conformed to Heider's POX structures. He is, in fact, a pioneer of the exploration social networks in relation to literary matters (De Nooy 1991). Heider's balance was re-introduced by Cartwright and Harary (1979) into the wider domain of graph theory and network theory. But the original notion of an aversive phenomenology associated with imbalance and the prediction of a pull towards recovery was played down in the process, and it is totally absent from recent applications of graph and network theory to fiction, where any reference to effects in the reader is mostly anecdotal (Alberich, Miro-Julia, & Roselló 2008; Moretti 2011; Selisker 2015; Stiller, Nettle, & Dunbar 2003).

3. Importing balance into phenomenological narratology

By assimilating Heider's P to the processing agent R (reader/spectator), and O to a character P (protagonist)/V (villain) in the story, the benefits of importing Heider's balance theory into narratological analysis become clear: We may use the theory to predict some basic affective states, affective tendencies and expectations in R. The mechanical transposition of the theory into the narratological domain would render the following four balanced structures:
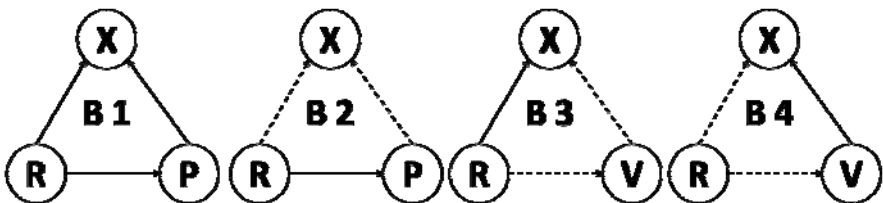

Figure 1. Balanced structures. Social-psychological perspective.
R: Reader/Spectator; P: Character (Protagonist); V: Character (Villain, antagonist)

In Figure 1, a continuous arrow represents a positive polarity (→) towards or an association with an object/behavior/event/etc., whereas the discontinuous arrow stands for negative polarity or dissociation (⫾). In the first two structures, a character P towards whom we (R) experience sympathy, relates to X with the same polarity that we would display. In B1, X might stand for [courageousness], for example, a positive value in our culture; we regard it positively, the protagonist displays it, and all is fine and balanced. In B2, X might stand for [cruelty], from which we are culturally trained to dissociate, just as the protagonist does in this particular structure, leaving readers at peace. In B3, we feel antipathy towards a villain who dissociates from, for example, compassionate behavior [X=compassion]; and in B4 we experience antipathy towards a villain who behaves, let us say, with cruelty [X=cruelty].
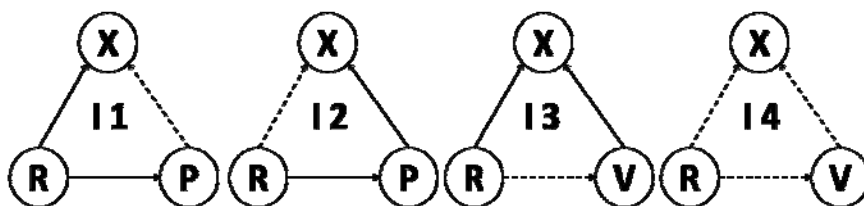

Figure 2. Imbalanced structures. Social-psychological perspective
R: Reader/Spectator; P: Character (Protagonist); V: Character (Villain, antagonist)

A mechanical transposition of the theory also renders Figure 2, which must be more thoroughly studied. To discuss this second set of structures I will introduce an element of chronology. Suppose that you (R) are exposed to a particular narrative where you are first made to sympathize with the protagonist P. Then, in a later turn of the story, P finds herself in a situation where courageousness (X) is required and, to our disappointment, she dissociates from such behavior. This will put readers in an uncomfortable situation of imbalance, I1 above, introducing a sort of affective deficit that could only be solved either by changing our attitude towards P, or by watching her overcoming her lack of courage in future situations. In structure I2 we would have our

protagonist behaving with cruelty, for example. In structure I3, we have a villain whom we hate, and whose downfall we ardently desire, behaving with heroic courage, tender compassion, amazing intelligence, etc. In I4, we see our much hated villain explicitly rejecting cruelty, or racism, or cowardice, or infidelity, etc. and therefore commanding sympathetic respect from us.

Imbalance is frequent in narrative, and it contributes very much to making it entertaining and interesting. So much so that we might even question the possibility of real balance in any ongoing narrative process. My claim is, in fact, that only B1 above constitutes a truly balanced situation in narrative. In a narrative world where B1 is the only structure, we would experience sympathy towards all characters, and the narrative world would be exclusively and idyllically populated by things that we like and guarantee well-being, constituting a utopian web of harmoniously distributed affect. A description of movements, actions and events in such a world would not constitute, from my point of view, a narration proper. Certainly, some forms of entertainment for children might *progress* along such lines: the description of a memorable picnic with mom, and dad and the grandparents; a day for flying kites, swimming in the lake, and watching lovely animals. That is all fine and balanced, but narrative proper seems to require undesirable bugs, ominously clouded skies, dangerous snakes, and so forth.

Structures B2, B3 and B4, provisionally transposed as balanced, are not so when considered from this narratological perspective. A typical B2 structure is that where a horrendous virus (X) comes out of nowhere and spreads a lethal illness throughout the world, and where our protagonist (P) shares with us (R) a negative attitude towards X. As long as P dislikes, fights and reacts against X, our expectations are satisfied; but there can be no real balance until the virus X is substituted by a cure C, mutually appreciated by R and P, and until we are brought from a B2 structure into our really balanced B1 structure: R→P ∧ R→C ∧ P→C. This B1 structure is not only balanced, it is a structure

of narrative repose, and therefore the end of the narrative inertia.

According to theory, B3 is balanced; but imagine a supposedly balanced situation S like the following:

(9) $S = R \| V \land R \rightarrow P \land V \| P$

We could flesh out S as follows: The processing agent R feels antipathy towards the villain V and sympathy towards the protagonist P. Conforming perfectly to B3 and to our expectations, the villain wants the protagonist's downfall and her suffering. The structure is balanced in terms of affect, but we cannot easily leave it at that; in line with ADT, our sympathy towards P makes us wish for the eradication of any danger that might spoil the happily ever after represented by B1. The villain must die, he must be neutralized, or he must stop being an enemy to P; only then will there be real balance. As long as there are active antipathies at work, a narrative structure may satisfy our expectations concerning characters' behavior without being narratively balanced.

Only B1 constitutes a fully balanced structure from all possible points of view. On the other hand, B2–4 are imbalanced structures, but not in the same way as I1–4 are. I propose we refer to this particular form of imbalance—where expectations are met but where antipathies remain—as Narrative Dynamic (N-Dynamic) Imbalance. This form of imbalance has to do with the perception on the part of the reader that a situation of final repose permeated by lasting harmony has not yet been reached. The other types of imbalance, I1–4, where protagonists and villains disappoint us and surprise us respectively, with unexpected attitudes and associations, clearly have a different feel. I propose we use the term Narrative-Affective (N-Affective) Imbalance to refer to these four situations. Notice that the difference between N-Dynamic and N-Affective forms of imbalance is phenomenological in nature; from a strictly functional point of view, they are all equally characterized by their deviation from a situation B1 of repose, due to the presence of negative polarities. Both N-Dynamic and N-Affective imbalances are solved when transformed into a B1 structure.

4. Open endings and imbalance

Our hero has prevailed and her nemesis has, once more, been defeated. But, as usual, the villain has not been fully neutralized: He manages to escape and he takes refuge somewhere where he will recover, where his hatred towards the hero will continue simmering, and where new plots against her will be thoughtfully planned. 'You win today… But I will be back'—that is often the final cry of nemeses. This story ends on a type of N-Dynamic imbalance already discussed—B3. This kind of ending, which I will consider open, makes it possible for the story—this particular story—to be continued through subsequent installments, with new appearances of an ever slyer and more dangerous nemesis.

Our developing theory of narrative balance may contribute to an enrichment of the notion of open ending. In relation to film narrations, Preis (1990) described four types of opening:

> The open ending… …often leaves us with an ambiguous or missing plot resolution. The story may not offer any clues to the whereabouts and future of the main characters. An open ending often fails to fulfill the viewer's emotional expectations by not offering a climax or other emotional relief. Finally… … an open ending doesn't confirm or reassure existing ideology; it questions ideology and demystifies it. (18)

Particularly, the third kind of opening described by Preis, the one that has to do with the processing agents' attainment of emotional relief, could be expanded and explored by considering N-Affective Imbalance. Our N-Dynamic imbalance seems closer to the second type of opening in Preis' view. In any case, open endings need not be strictly based on the inconclusiveness of objectively described processes—like capturing the killer, solving the case, finding the cure, determining whether they were real aliens or just hallucinations, etc.—but may also be dependent on the processing agents' experience of aversive affects due to the fact that, in their view, some stress generating antipathies remain active in the fictional world: Either a potential for entropy has managed to survive (N-Dynamic open ending); or the loved characters have not managed to grow beyond

meanness (N-Affective open ending); or characters regarded with antipathy retain, when the story is over, a perplexing light that commands respect and love (N-Affective open ending).

Concerning open endings, I must make an important disclaimer at this point. The notion that any narrative text will be perceived as imbalanced and open-ended unless it reaches a utopian B1 conclusion is by no means intended either as prescriptive or as a prerequisite for quality or good reception—although there seems to be some evidence of a general preference for happy-ending, plot-closing and suspense-solving narratives (Brewer & Litchtenstein 1982; Preis 1990; Smith 2015). Both in closed and open stories, however, dynamic and affective imbalances must be regarded as defining and constitutive elements of narrative. Our balanced B1 structure, even if it is not attained, remains essential by virtue of its cardinal nature and the tensions it exerts upon processing agents as it stands as a horizon of possibility or vanishing point.

5. Balance calculus, strategies and designed epiphanies

As mentioned earlier, a consideration of narrative balance along the lines drawn by F. Heider will allow us to circumscribe some otherwise fuzzy experiential aspects associated to narrative processing. Hopefully, our theory is not an extraneous structure forced upon narration, but the formalization of already existing and fully functional intuitions that account both for the ability of narrative authors to affect us in particular ways, and for our tendency, as human processing agents, to respond in similar ways to specific stimuli. If this is so, narratological analysis guided by this theory should be able to isolate aspects of narrative functioning whose raison d'être is none other than to trigger specific affective states in the audience. In fact, there must be four fundamental maneuvers at the author's disposal for eliciting affect, balance-wise, from an already depicted situation: (1) introducing sympathies, (2) introducing antipathies, (3) turning sympathies into antipathies and (4)

turning antipathies into sympathies. Table 1 summarizes a simple artificial example that includes instances of some possible strategies; it is a basic narrative structure consisting of seven chapters:

Chapter 1	B1:	R→[i] ∧ P→[i] ∧ R→P;	Narrative repose
Chapter 2	B1:	R→[c] ∧ O→[c] ∧ R→O;	Narrative repose
Chapter 3	I1:	R→P ∧ R→O ∧ (P∥O ∧ O∥P);	N-Affective destabilizing strategy
Chapter 4	B2:	R→(P∧O) ∧ R∥V ∧ (P∧O)∥V;	N-Dynamic destabilizing strategy
	I4:	P∥O ∧ P∥V ∧ O∥V;	De-focalized affect/N-Affective imbalance
	I4:	O∥P ∧ O∥V ∧ P∥V;	De-focalized affect/N-Affective imbalance
Chapter 5	B1:	R→P ∧ R→O ∧ (P→O ∧ O→P);	Reconciliation Epiphany
Chapter 6	B1:	R→(P∧O) ∧ R→A ∧ (P∧O)→A;	Epiphany of Victory (over V)
Chapter 7	I1:	R→P ∧ R→O ∧ (P∥O ∧ O∥P);	N-Affective open ending

Table 1. Balance structure of an artificial story

Figure 3 below represents the story described in Table 1, and it captures balance structures along chapters as social psychologists do when studying intra-group relations. The numbers 1-15 attached to the arrows indicate the chronology of the events as they are narrated. The story could be read as (arrow 1) R likes [i], then (arrow 2) P associates with [i], then (arrow 3) R develops liking towards P, etc.
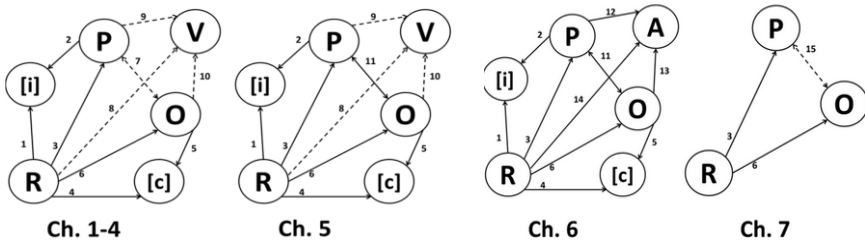

Figure 3. Schematic representation of the artificial story

We could typically flesh out this seven-chapter story as follows: In chapter one, we find ourselves (R) in a situation of

balance, where we appreciate intelligence [i], a character P associates with it and as a result we develop sympathy towards him (arrows 1, 2, 3). The next chapter also ends in perfect balance and repose, since we appreciate courage [c], character O associates with [c] and we begin to sympathize with her (arrows 4, 5, 6). In chapter three the creator of the story introduces a situation of N-Affective imbalance I1 by informing us that P and O, both of whom we appreciate, hate each other (arrows 3, 6, 7). This situation, according to the theory, generates a certain level of strain in us (R). At this point, theoretically, a desire for reconciliation between P and O is to be experienced by R; it is in the hands of the author to satisfy such desire or not to do it. As it happens, in chapter 4 an N-Dynamic imbalance is introduced in the form of a lethal virus (V), which is disliked by R, P and O as expected (arrows 8, 9, 10). We must notice at this point, that the situation is affectively imbalanced (I4) for P and O since they dislike each other, but coincide in their rejection of X (arrows 7, 9, 10). Notice that, in relation to V, we (R) find ourselves in a situation of N-Dynamic Imbalance, whereas P and O would be construed as also undergoing the effects of N-Affective imbalance. I will discuss such aspects of focalized and de-focalized affect in the next section.

Chapter 5 contains one of the maneuvers predicted above: P and O decide to unite forces and put their talents at the service of a common cause. As they begin to cooperate and to develop a fluent, efficient and successful relationship, discontinuous arrow 7 changes into continuous arrow 11, antipathy is replaced by mutual sympathy and we (R) experience, according to balance theory, a predesigned and calculated epiphany of reconciliation.

On top of that, in chapter 6, P and O find an antidote A and save the world. The resolution of the B2 structure introduced with the virus in chapter 5 gives way now to the euphoria of victory over the elimination of the V antipathy, or its substitution for the sympathy towards the cure A (arrows 11, 12, 13, 14). Up to this point, at the end of chapter 6 we have reached a moment of repose B1 where the narrative could end. But the author of this particular story has decided to re-activate through a seventh chapter the old feud between P and

O, who disappointingly go back to their antipathetic relationship once danger is over (arrow 15). Despite having reached a happy ending, we can now see that the story remains open due to an N-Affective conflict, which will stir in us (R) a certain sense of dissatisfaction, incompleteness and a desire for future reconciliation. Although the story is not a very original one, the deductive task of isolating strategic narrative transformations that theoretically bring about affect transformations in the processing agents has been, I believe, satisfactorily accomplished.

6. Focalized and De-focalized affect

Consider the three structures represented in Figure 4. According to standard Balance Theory, all of them are B1 balanced structures. However, there are important differences between them.
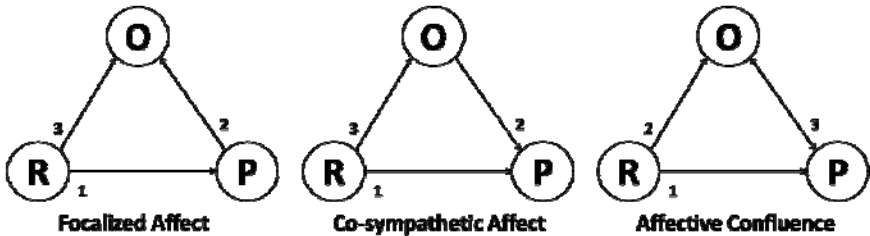

Figure 4. Focalization and affect

As before, the arrows have been numbered according to chronology, which appears to play an essential role in narrative phenomenology. In what I have called focalized affect, first we sympathize with a particular character P (arrow 1), then we learn that P has a positive attitude towards O (arrow 2), and as a consequence we are inclined to also develop sympathy towards O (arrow 3). In this way we will tend to develop special sympathy towards the hero's family and close friends, for example. This procedure has the logical structure of a conditional:

(10) $(R{\rightarrow}P \wedge P{\rightarrow}O) \rightarrow R{\rightarrow}O$

If we like P and P likes O, then we will naturally tend to sympathize with O in our search for balance. Our attitude towards O has been focalized through P and therefore coincides with P's. The logic of the second structure, co-sympathetic affect, can be captured as:

(11) $(R \rightarrow P \wedge O \rightarrow P) \rightarrow R \rightarrow O$

In co-sympathetic affect of this kind we develop liking towards a character because she helps or assists our protagonist in her predicament, or expresses a disposition to do so. Our affect here is de-focalized in relation to P, since the protagonist might not even be aware of O's existence. Co-sympathetic affect will emerge, for example, when an unknown stranger O rescues and revives our protagonist P who remains unconscious for some time after, say, having had accident in the jungle. Finally, the logic of the third structure in Figure 4, affective confluence, can be expressed as follows:

(12) $(R \rightarrow P \wedge R \rightarrow O) \rightarrow (P \rightarrow O \wedge O \rightarrow P)$

 In this case, our sympathy towards P and O is established separately, before P and O meet and begin to relate to each other, or before we learn that they are already related in any way. The artificial story represented by Figure 3 above constitutes an adequate example: First we get to know P, and we like him; then we get to know O, and we develop sympathy towards her; and from that moment the expectation that P and O must get along is established. Although the affective confluence seems logically close to focalized affect, as a form of bi-focal or multi-focal distribution of liking, it is not really the case, since our liking of P and O is not mediated through either O's or P's perspectives, but independently attained. Both co-sympathetic affect and affective confluence are forms of de-focalized affect. The three situations may be easily extended in order to incorporate antipathy, and they could all be combined in complex stories.

In a story where affect is completely focalized through a protagonist, our distribution of polarities would fully coincide with hers, since it is through her value system that we are measuring the entire narrative world and all its inhabitants. In

such structure we would also inherit P's balances and imbalances as shown in Figure 5 below.
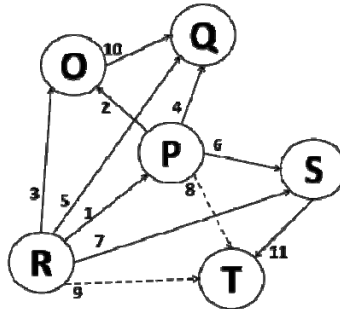

Figure 5. Affect focalized through P

As Figure 5 shows, we (R) relate to O, Q, S and T in exactly the same modality as P does. So the triangle POQ (2, 4, 10) is accurately mirrored by the triangle ROQ (3, 5, 10), and the structure is balanced B1 in both cases. Notice also how imbalanced PST (6, 8, 11) is punctually reflected in RST (7, 9, 11). Figure 6 represents a much more complex and interesting kind of story because it transcends focalized affect.
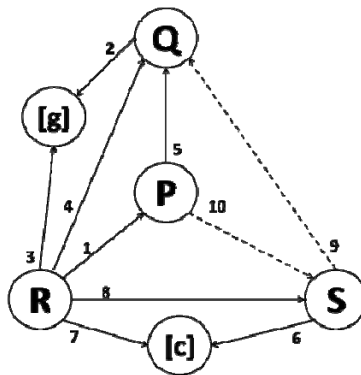

Figure 6. De-focalized affect

In the story represented by Figure 6, characters P, Q and S are presented in different chapters and then brought together, once the path towards affective confluence has been drawn. First, sympathy is procured towards the main

protagonist P (arrow 1). Then, in a second chapter, Q gains our sympathy due to her generous behavior [g] (arrows 2, 3, 4). In chapter three, an affective confluence takes place when we are informed that P satisfies our expectations by positively associating with Q (arrow 5). In a fourth chapter, we are introduced to yet another character S, towards whom we develop sympathy due to his courageous disposition [c] (arrows 6, 7, 8). In the next chapter we learn that S is full of resentment towards Q and seeking vengeance (arrow 9), and on learning about this, Q's friend P, our main protagonist, of accordance with Heider's intuitions and predictions, declares war on S (arrow 10).

If all our affect here had been focalized through P, triangle RQS would simply mirror PQS, which is not the case. Here, we (R) would not be simply inheriting P's affections. In fact, the triangle PQS is perfectly balanced from a socio-psychological point of view—structure B3 above. The triangle RQS, on the other hand, is imbalanced both narratively and socio-psychologically—structure I1.

A major difference between focalized and co-sympathetic distributions has to do with the construal of our protagonist P either as a focal origin of affect or as the receiver of external affect. A story has both aspects when the protagonist loves and hates, and is loved and hated. There is no reason, however, why stories cannot belong exclusively to one or the other extreme types. Figure 5 above represents, for example, a story where all affect is focalized through P, and where narrative movement is associated to P's emotional stability, which is threatened by his disagreement with loved S about disliked T. Figure 5 would underlie, for example, a story where a loving father P is under strain because her daughter S is in love with a vicious mafia boss T. Likewise, we might as well conceive of a story where the protagonist P is presented exclusively as the object of external constructive and destructive influences. This is, for example, the story of the shipwrecked sailor who ends up in an island where he will find both challenges to his life and unexpected assistance from, say, a friendly native towards whom we will develop de-focalized co-sympathetic affect. However, our guess is that in most existing stories protagonists are constructed and

construed both as focal origins and as targets of affective movement and therefore focalized and de-focalized distributions of affect tend to co-exist. Furthermore, it might happen that our affective link with certain characters in a narrative world is at the same time focalized and de-focalized.
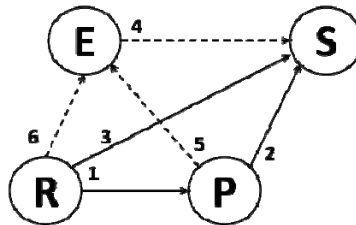

Figure 7. Simultaneous focalized and de-focalized affect

In Figure 7, our dislike of E can be understood as triggered by focalization through P, and also through co-sympathetic affect in relation with S. The question here is whether in our disliking of E we are empathizing with P—that is, feeling what we believe he must be feeling—or sympathizing with S, or both. A second question concerning this matter is whether these two affective mechanisms—focalized and co-sympathetic affect—correlate with the same qualia or are, instead, felt differently by R. The answer to both questions would welcome an empirical approach; however, and to the extent that personal introspection constitutes a valid provisional approximation, our answer would be that arrow 6 in Figure 7 represents both mechanisms, and that they feel slightly different just as empathy and sympathy are, in fact, related but distinctive phenomena.

7. The Ethics of imbalance

If our theoretical development is in fact capturing existing aspects of the phenomenology associated to narrative processing, then there can be no doubt that the effectiveness of a story depends largely on its potential for emotionally destabilizing its readers/listeners/spectators. If, on the other hand, it is true that we are biologically determined to recover balance and that we can do so through cognitive-affective

reorganization, then we can only conclude that many stories have a potential for inviting or tempting us to change our views of the world (Kuiken et al. 2004; Oatley 2002). This leads to ethical issues: The narratives we consume have a potential for shaping our worldview, and our worldview determines our social behavior.
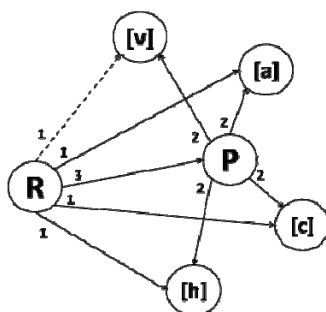

Figure 8. Balancing violence

In Figure 8, R represents the processing agent of a narrative product, and [v], [a], [c] and [h], targeted by their respective arrows, represent features of behavior. Our agent R here associates positively with humbleness [h], courageousness [c] and abnegation [a], and dissociates from violent behavior [v]. Satisfactorily enough, the protagonist of the story P provides ample evidence of humble, courageous and self-denying behavior; but he is clearly one those heroes who justifies violence in specific situations, and does not hesitate to exercise it with exacting dexterity. Character P is a case of morally ambiguous characterization (Kleemans et al. 2017) As we said earlier, imbalances are not necessarily unbearable, and some agents could probably go through the whole narrative process simply coping with or perhaps even enjoying a bit of smarting imbalance.

Now, since changing the protagonist is totally out of the question in most forms of narrative texts, the only way that R has to reestablish balance is through cognitive-affective reorganization. A reader might for example decide that she does no longer like P; but this puts her in more trouble, since it brings imbalance to the part of the structure that has to do with

[a], [c] and [h]. Changing our mind about P on account of his violent nature, would require the willing disregard of his virtuous facets, or a reinterpretation of them as fake, unreliable, pretense, hypocritical, low in intensity, relatively insignificant, etc. But there is yet another possibility; one that involves changing our mind about violence, and adopting the belief that as long as you remain humble, selfless and courageous, it is fine to resort to violence on certain occasions. Whatever R does in the end, the story presents her with a moral dilemma that crosses the apparently impenetrable barrier that divides the fictional from the real. Besides, the cognitive and affective mechanisms at work within R may not be fully or even barely conscious; in their innate search for pleasant balance, processing agents may end up shaping their worldviews without being at all aware of the process.

Conclusions and future refinement

The adoption of Heider's Balance Theory for predicting the effects on a reader/listener/spectator of possible distributions of affect throughout the elements of a fictional world appears to be not only possible but also useful and revealing. It allows us to capture integrative aspects of experience that strike us, I believe, as intuitive and ordinary, but that have evaded so far the nets of technical analysis. It allows us to trace, understand and discuss special strands of aversive phenomenology and pleasant homeostatic processes that seem to play a central role in narrative dynamics.

A tentative first approach has made it possible to discern potentially complex affective and dynamic destabilizing strategies, and the category of effects that have been referred to as epiphanies. It has allowed us to reconsider and refine our awareness of open-ended narrative structures. Under the light of Balance Theory, effects related to empathy and sympathy appear to possess an analyzable molecular structure, and we can now distinguish between focalized affect, co-sympathetic affect and affective confluences where we used to have, quite simply, identification processes. Balance Theory also offers an explanation and a way of analyzing what other researchers have already proved through empirical approaches: The

processing of narrative texts may effect transformations of the world-views, value systems and personality of the processing agents. An element of self-definition and self-image is theoretically involved in the distribution of affect throughout the entities and events that constitute the story world. Narrative products, by virtue of the processing agent's innate need for balance, end up exerting pressure over the self, especially in those cases where affective balance may be preserved through cognitive and attitudinal self-corrections. This opens the door to considerations of ethics in narrative consumption.

We cannot expect more from a theory. It must provide us with the kind of concepts and analytical tools that allow for a richer, more refined and more discriminatory rendering of what is otherwise familiar—I would be very suspicious indeed of any insights pointing to extraordinary or extremely sophisticated experiences. The effects that I have been aiming at are by no means strange; the gain here has to do with realizing that they are principled and analyzable in rather simple and self-demonstrative ways.

Some aspects of the theoretical development drafted in this essay remain as yet underspecified. Such is the case of our continuous and discontinuous arrows. An expression like P→O has been quite diversely translated as: P sympathizes with O, P likes O, P helps O, etc. The opposite, P∥O, has been taken to express: P does not like O, P wants O's downfall, P is actively committed to O's downfall, P is planning to kill O, etc. An element of intensity or degree appears to be relevant to the issue at hand; processing agents will not find a situation where their hero is simply disliked just as destabilizing as another where the hero's life is seriously under threat. The meaning of the arrows, on the other hand, is also determined by the nature of their targets. In relation to objects, concepts and behaviors, a positive arrow seems to generally mean "association with" in the sense that one's notion of self tends to incorporate the targeted elements; whereas the negative discontinuous arrow means "dissociation with" and otherness.

Our *RPO* structure invites considerations of reciprocity that have not been considered here: A situation where P→O but

O‖P is very likely to be felt as imbalanced independently of whether R sides with P or with O. Furthermore, attitudinal paradoxes are bound to occur where the recipient of the story would have grounds both for sympathizing and antipathizing with the same characters. So, the affective potential of a narrative structure is clearly not limited to the generation of sympathies and antipathies, but also and importantly, to the stirring of affective impasse and affective paradox, which should be more thoroughly explored.

All in all, the results of this theoretical exercise are, I believe, promising enough. I have used simple artificial stories to prove my points, but I hope that, with a little more refinement of the tools here drafted, we will be able to advance predictions concerning the likely effects of a variety of narrative structures, and then it will be possible to test their empirical validity.

REFERENCES

Alberich, R., J. Miro-Julia & F. Rosselló. 2008. "Marvel Universe looks almost like a real social network". *Elsevier*. https://arxiv.org/pdf/cond-mat/0202174v1.pdf

Black, J. E., & J. L. Barnes. 2015. "The effects of reading material on social and non-social cognition". *Poetics* 52*: 32–43. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2015.07.001

Brewer, F. W., & E. H. Lichtenstein. 1982. "Stories are to entertain: a structural-affect theory of stories". *Journal of Pragmatics* 6: 473–486. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(82)90021-2

Caracciolo, M. 2013. "Phenomenological metaphors in readers' engagement with characters: The case of Ian McEwan's Saturday". *Language and Literature* 22(1): 60–76. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0963947012462948

Cartwright, D. & F. Harary. 1979. "Balance and Clusterability: An Overview". In *Perspectives on Social Network Research*, edited by P. W. Holland and S. Leinhardt, 25–50. New York: Academic Press.

De Nooy, W. 1991. "Social networks and classification in literature." *Poetics* 20: 507–537.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(91)90023-I

De Nooy, W. 1999. "A literary playground. Literary criticism and balance theory". *Poetics* 26: 385–404.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00009-1

De Wied, M. 1994. "The role of temporal expectancies in the production of film suspense." *Poetics* 23: 107–123. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)00007-S

Dewey, J. 1938. *Experience and Education*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

Dijkstra, K., et al. 1994. "Character and reader emotions in literary texts". *Poetics* 23: 139–157.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)00009-U

Gavins, J. 2007. *Text World Theory: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Giovannelli, A. 2009. "In Sympathy with Narrative Characters." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67(1), 83–95. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6245.2008.01337.x

Hakemulder, J. 2000. *The Moral Laboratory: Experiments Examining the Effects of Reading Literature on Social Perception and Moral Self-Concept*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Heider, F. 1958. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

James, W. 1890. *The principles of psychology*. Volume 1. New York: Henry Holt.

Kidd, D. C., & E. Castano. 2013. "Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind". *Science* 342(6156): 377–380. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1239918

Kleemans, M. et al. 2017. "Explaining the role of character development in the evaluation of morally ambiguous characters in entertainment media." *Poetics* 60: 16–28.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.10.003

Kuiken, D., D. S. Miall & S. Sikora. 2004. "Forms of self-implication in literary reading." *Poetics Today* 25(2): 171–203. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/03335372-25-2-171

Miall, D. 2006. "Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline." *Book History* 9: 291–311. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bh.2006.0010

Moretti, Franco. 2011. "Network Theory, Plot Analysis." *New Left Review* 68: 80-102.

Oatley, K. 1996. "Inference and emotions in narrative and science." In *Modes of thought*, edited by D.R. Olson and N. Torrance, 123–140. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Oatley, K. 1999. "Meetings of minds: Dialogue, sympathy, and identification, in reading fiction." *Poetics* 26: 439–454. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00011-X

Oatley, K. 2002. "Emotions and the story worlds of fiction." In *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations*, edited by M.C. Green, J.J. Strange, & T.C. Brock, 39–69. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Plantinga, C. 2011. "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars." *Projections* 5(2): 26–50.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/proj.2011.050203

Preis, E. 1990. "Not such a happy ending: the ideology of the open ending." *Journal of Film and Video* 42(3): 18–23.

Selisker, S. 2015. "The Bechdel Test and the Social Form of Character Networks." *New Literary History* 46(3): 505–523. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2015.0024

Shafer, D. M. & A. A. Raney. 2012. "Exploring how we enjoy antihero narratives." *Journal of Communication* 62: 1028–1046. Doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01682.x

Smith, J. 2015. "Filmmakers as Folk Psychologists: How Filmmakers Exploit Cognitive Biases as an Aspect of Cinematic Narration, Characterization, and Spectatorship." In *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, edited by L. Zunshine, 483–503. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stiller, J., D. Nettle & R. I. M. Dunbar. 2003. "The Small World of Shakespeare's Plays." *Human Nature* 14(4): 397–408. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12110-003-1013-1

Weijers, A. 2014. *The craft of screenwriting.* Den Haag: Boom Lemma Uitgevers.

Whiteley, S. 2011. "Text World Theory, real readers and emotional responses to The Remains of the Day." *Language and Literature* 20(1): 23–42.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0963947010377950

Wolf, W. 2004. "Aesthetic illusion as an effect of fiction." *Style* 38(3) : 325–351.

Yang, H., E. van de Vliert & K. Shi. 2007. "Interpersonal relationship and lay third parties' side-taking preference. A Cross-Cultural Study among Chinese and Dutch." *Journal Of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 38(4): 438–457.
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022107302313

Zillmann, D. & J. Cantor. 1972. "Directionality of transitory dominance as a communication variable affecting humor appreciation." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24: 191–198. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0033384

Zillmann, D. & J. R. Cantor. 1977. "Affective responses to the emotions of a protagonist." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 13: 155–165. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(77)80008-5

Enrique Cámara-Arenas teaches at the University of Valladolid, Spain. He wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the topic of characterization in lyrical discourse. Since then, he has carried out research on the theoretical and practical applications of psychological tools to the study of literary cognition and literary experience. He has two major publications on this topic: "Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy". In Villains and Villainy. Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2011. 3-27; "Causal attribution and the analysis of literary characters: A. C. Bradley's study of Iago and Othello". Journal of Literary Semantics. Vol. 39, No. 1. 2010. 43-66.

Address:
Enrique Cámara-Arenas
Department of English Philology. University of Valladolid, Spain
Plaza del Campus Universitario s/n.
47011-Valladolid, Spain
E-Mail: ecamara@fyl.uva.es