

**Linguistic Construal and Narrative Empathy in Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour* (1894)**

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**Abstract**

While definitions of the concept vary widely within and across fields, narrative empathy is usually seen as some form of vicariously sharing thoughts and feelings with fictional characters (Burke et al., 2016). Drawing on narratological research in narrative empathy, the notion of the construed reader (Jaakola et al., 2014) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008), I explore how Kate Chopin's 1894 short story *The Story of an Hour* positions the reader to engage with the mind of its protagonist, Mrs Mallard. I suggest that the linguistic construal of the narrative invites readers to dramatically reorganise their conception of Mrs Mallard half-way through the narrative, which has the potential to change readers' empathetic engagement with her. Further drawing on real reader responses to the story, I suggest that the way Cognitive Grammar allows us to provide cognitive stylistic evidence for the idea that gapping and inferencing are crucial to the experience of narrative empathy (Iser, 1978, Louwse & Kuiken, 2004).

**Keywords:** Narrative Empathy, Constrained Reader, Cognitive Grammar, Schema Theory, Inferencing

## 1. Introduction

Hailed as 'one of feminism's sacred texts' (Cahill, 1975), *The Story of an Hour* (Chopin, 1894) documents Louise Mallard's complicated reaction to hearing of her husband's death. The reader is guided through the protagonist's changing actions, perceptions and thoughts as she processes this news during the hour after she hears the news. Readers see her undergo a transformation that takes her from weeping to experiencing 'a monstrous joy' at the prospect of the freedom life without him offers, only to have that joy ended when she dies at the sight of her husband turning up alive. The story can be expected to produce a range of emotions in readers as readers read in detail about the flood of emotions Mrs Mallard experiences.

Literary critics have commented extensively on the reasons for Mrs Mallard's 'monstrous joy' and ultimate death. The generally accepted interpretation concludes she felt repressed in her marriage and that her joy is a response to her understanding that her husband's death frees her from that repression (Papke 1990, Mitchell 1992, Cunningham 2004). Jamil (2009) comments on the power of emotion in the story, which enables Mrs Mallard to perceive the beauty of life that she was previously unable to see. The 'joy that kills' her at the end of the story is then the joy at the perception of this beauty that she refuses to surrender. Berkove, disagreeing, interprets Mrs Mallard's self-assertion as "an extreme case of self-love" (2000, p. 157) and that all she wants is just a fantasy. He concludes that Chopin "projects with delicately incisive irony what would happen if an immature and shallow egotist were to face the earthly consequence of an impossible dream of her afflicted heart" (p. 158). Interestingly, there are textual hints to support both interpretations throughout the narrative but no decisive explication of 'joy' as the cause of death at the end of the narrative. Readers may read this into the narrative based on their inferencing as they read the narrative

instead. Moreover, while these interpretations are valid if taking the whole story into account, they show clearly the difference between the scholarly activity of analysis and the everyday reading experience. Critical accounts can write about Mrs Mallard's cultural experience of marriage only because they consider the whole narrative, but these accounts do not consider the readerly experience of only gradually coming to this understanding of Mrs Mallard's transformative experiences. Readers instead only learn in more depth half-way through the story how she has felt suppressed emotionally and socially within her marriage.

In this paper, I show how *The Story of an Hour* positions its reader to engage with Louise Mallard's mind empathetically. I draw on the concept of the 'construed reader' (Jaakola et al., 2014) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008) to analyse how the reader is required to "jointly attend the conceptualisation" (Jaakola et al., 2014: 643) of Mrs Mallard's mind from a number of stances and perspectives. The language of the text exploits the schema-based processing of Mrs Mallard in such a way that it leads the reader to conceptualise her variously as the story progresses. Combining this textual analysis with real reader data on empathetic engagement with the story, I finally argue that this story requires readers' empathetic engagement to interpret the story's meaning through a range of affective inferences, thus lending cognitive stylistic evidence to the idea that gapping and inferencing are crucial to narrative empathy (Iser, 1978, Louwense and Kuiken, 2004).

Before I present my analysis of the construed reader in *The Story of an Hour*, in the following two sections I first introduce the cognitive grammatical framework used for my analysis and my understanding of narrative empathy in terms of mind attribution.

## 2. Narrative empathy, the construed reader and mind construal

Literary fiction can be understood as a communicative event between its producer and its recipient, the author and the reader (Stockwell, 2009). Author and reader come together through the language of the fictional text which is constructed with readers in mind. The notion of the *construed reader* has been used to refer to this type of reader (Jaakola et al., 2014, p. 640). In the term *construed reader* is bound up the Cognitive Grammatical concept of *construal*, which refers to the manifold ways in which we can view a particular situation (Langacker, 2008). The construed reader is a metonymical term for the way a text constructs the reader to view and understand that text. It is a cognitive stylistic reconfiguration of the *implied reader* (Iser, 1973), the textually constructed reader positioned to adopt various stances through the language choices made by the author in the text's construction. Other terms for similar concepts include 'putative reader' (Martin and White, 2005: 95) and 'reader-in-the-text' (Thompson, 2012, Thompson and Thetela, 1995). This type of reader is ontologically different from real readers (flesh-and-blood readers), the actual audience of the text (not the constructed, but actual stance taken by the reader) and the narratee (the narrator's addressee) (Phelan 2004: 631–632), and may provide a useful way of exploring how texts construe readers to comprehend and interpret its narrative. We may also combine an analysis of the construed reader with the stance taken by real readers to explore how real readers may engage with the text empathetically.

When a reader encounters a fictional mind, they may vicariously share the thoughts and feelings of the fictional character. This experience, usually called narrative empathy (Keen, 2006), has recently been studied from narratological, psychological, cognitive scientific, philosophical and linguistic perspectives (Burke et al., 2014). Definitions of the concept vary widely within and across these disciplines,

but by consensus it is usually defined as some form of vicariously sharing thoughts and feelings with fictional characters (Burke et al., 2014). Narratological accounts of narrative empathy consider the interaction between text and reader in terms of mind-attribution. Caracciolo (2014), for example, points out that narrative empathy requires readers to be able to attribute a mind (or consciousness) to characters for narrative empathy to take place. The language of the text plays a role in this in so far as it provides or inhibits access to character minds (Keen, 2006, 2007, Van Peer and Pander Maat, 2001), which in turn impacts the extent to which a reader needs to infer characters' mental states and thus draw on their schematic knowledge about events and associated emotions to conceptualise a character's mental experiences (Culpeper, 2001). The readerly experience of narrative empathy furthermore relies on the reader's qualitative sharing of affective states (emotion, moods and attitudes) and on their taking the perspective of a character in the text (Coplan, 2004). Narrative empathy is then facilitated by mapping those features of the character's situation in the world of the narrative to the reader's experiences that are similar, which is what Sanford and Emmott (2012) call 'autobiographical alignment'. They argue that autobiographical alignment is a prerequisite for narrative empathy, though there is no need to have shared the exact same experience as in the text world. Only the structure of the events needs to be the same (2012: 212).

Jaakola et al. (2014) use the four classes of construal phenomena Cognitive Grammar identifies to specify how readers piece together an understanding of the text from the 'set of instructions' (Palmer, 2004) a text's language choices provide: specificity, focus, prominence and perspective. Specificity refers to the detail with which a scene is construed. Focus refers to the way conceptual content is foregrounded or backgrounded linguistically. Prominence outlines how the way

aspects of a scene are profiled (i.e. the way these aspects are focussed on) relates to the conceptual base that acts as the background for understanding that profiled aspect. Perspective describes the point of view from which a scene is viewed. By combining discussion of these various construal phenomena and their subsets, Cognitive Grammar allows us to draw a holistic picture of the way readers are invited to construe the events of a text.

These construal phenomena may also be of use to explore how readers are construed by the text to engage with fictional characters specifically, such as how they are invited to engage empathetically with a fictional mind. One of the ways construals differ is the degree of mind attribution they afford and the extent to which a reader needs to draw on their knowledge, judgements, emotional and attentional dispositions to access character minds and attribute coherent understandings of these minds (Nuttall, 2015). Because mind-attribution is a prerequisite to empathy taking place, an analysis of the way the reader is construed to engage with *The Story of an Hour's* primary fictional mind, Mrs Mallard, may therefore start with an exploration of how the story's construal operations affect the degree of 'mind-attribution' they allow its readers to experience. We may then be able to explore the position the reader is construed to adopt towards Mrs Mallard's mind by looking at the kind of knowledge about her mind the reader is invited to respond to through the way her mental states are construed.

Especially important for our purposes are the concepts of attentional backgrounding and objective/subjective construal and their impact on mind attribution. Attentional backgrounding is a version of attentional windowing, where attention is drawn to one aspect of an event in motion with other portions backgrounded (Langacker, 2008, Talmy, 2000). For example, in the sentence 'She walked to Huddersfield' only the end point of the journey is mentioned. Where she came from or

the actual route she walked are gapped and need to be inferred. Windowing and gapping can be explored in relation to plot if we conceive of plot as a type of path. Objective and subjective construal refer to two different ways in which the conceptualiser of a scene is positioned in a particular viewing arrangement (Langacker, 2008: 77). Scenes are construed subjectively if the conceptualiser is to some degree present in the construal of the scene, or objectively if the conceptualiser is absent from the construal of the scene. We may conceive of subjective and objective construal as on a cline rather than absolute categories. That also means that when the conceptualiser becomes more prominent and viewed more objectively, the scene becomes more subjectively construed. Attentional windowing and objective and subjective construal allow us to explore the way a reader is directed to infer aspects of Mrs Mallard's mind. Objective and subjective construal instruct the reader to assess the extent to which the characters' experience is bound up with events, states, actions and thoughts in the narrative and how that impacts their thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, if the mind of a fictional character is attentionally backgrounded, the reader needs to draw more upon their schematic knowledge to empathetically engage with the character. Conversely, if a character's actions and thoughts are foregrounded, the reader needs to map their personal experiences and judgments onto explicit descriptions of the character's actions. This may result in changes of empathetic engagement as the mind of a character is foregrounded or backgrounded.

### **3. Real reader responses to *The Story of an Hour***

If we are to be sure this text does indeed invite empathetic engagement with Mrs Mallard, we need to explore the response of real readers. Canning (2018), in her

study detailing how prisoners in Belfast engaged with *The Story of an Hour*, shows that some of the prisoners identified with aspects of this text. Though this means empathetic engagement is possible, the fact they only identified with aspects of the text indicates that readers may not engage empathetically with a complex character like Mrs Mallard over the whole course of the narrative. This is echoed by Sanford and Emmott (2012), who claim that “a readers’ assessment of complex characters may also change over the course of a story, as the characters’ personalities develop, as the perspective shifts to allow us to enter into the inner worlds of different characters, or as new plot information is available to us” (2012: 212).

To test this idea with a set of real readers other than Canning’s participants, I elicited reader responses from readers based in Huddersfield in the UK. My 16 participants were native speakers of English and either students at the University of Huddersfield or members at a local church<sup>1</sup>. Before reading the narrative, I asked them to write down their associations with people suffering from heart disease who have just heard their spouse has died to understand what pre-story knowledge the participants brought to their reading of the narrative. Upon reading of the narrative, I asked them to write down whether they “imaginatively followed Mrs Mallard’s thoughts and feelings throughout the narrative” and to highlight the sections of the text that impacted their response most. Additionally, I elicited self-report of empathy using narrative experience questionnaires (Literary Response Questionnaire by Miall and Kuiken, 1995, and the Narrative Engagement questionnaire by Bruselle and Bilandzic, 2009). However, since the results of these reflect empathy over the whole narrative, only their written self-report of empathy can be used to look at empathy during the reading process. I can, however, use them as an indication whether empathy was experienced at all.

The written responses can be divided up into three groups of varying empathetic engagement with Mrs Mallard. Group one reported a lack of empathy throughout the whole narrative. Responses for this group are along the lines of participant 1: "I could not empathise as I've never been in the situation described". Group two reported a fluctuating sense of empathetic engagement with Mrs Mallard. Participant 9's response is reflective of this group of responses: "I initially felt sympathy for her physical frailty, and for this loss and its potential impact upon multiple aspects of her life. My experience of life, loss and love differs greatly from that of Mrs Mallard, so whilst I maintained some level of sympathy, I was unable to empathise with how she dealt with the situation. I could imagine myself in her shoes, but I couldn't follow her reactions." It is clear from this response that there is a change in empathy once they learn how Mrs Mallard deals with the situation. The third group indicated empathy with Mrs Mallard throughout the narrative. Because the participant responses were elicited after reading rather than during reading, I cannot be sure whether these readers were empathetic throughout the narrative or whether this is their summary response to Mrs Mallard. While I do not want to doubt this response wholesale, given these participants generally experienced high levels of empathy on the self-report measures of narrative experience, I do not have enough evidence that these readers never stopped empathising while reading.

Almost all of the readers who experienced changes in empathy over the course of the narrative highlighted paragraph 10 to be the paragraph where the change in empathy occurred. Their responses indicate reasons for why this may have been, which we can divide up in two subgroups. The first subgroup mostly didn't understand her actions, because their "experience of life, loss and love differs greatly from that of Mrs Mallard" (Participant 9) and they first "related to her reaction (tears and wanting

to be alone) remembering nana's reaction when my grandpa died, but [were] surprised and much less empathetic as the story moved on. In the end I almost feel she got her comeuppance, I felt the irony of the ending." (Participant 14). Moreover, various responses indicate they saw her as selfish, such as participant 4: "What a bitch! (Excuse my language) She barely mourns him, just cries from shock, then is glad he is gone. Even though he loved her. She is very selfish." The second group, however, indicated surprise and a need to readjust to Mrs Mallard's feelings, but then positively judge her response based on the reasons she gives for her feelings, e.g. "[I] found the development of her emotion of one of contentment confusing to begin with but was eventually persuaded to see the reason for her strange change of mood." (Participant 13). Participants in this subgroup also indicate a feeling of sadness for her eventual death, alike participant 11: "I was sad that her sense of happiness and freedom was short-lived when she had the shock of seeing her husband, alive!".

Some of the explanations readers from each subgroup give indicate that much of their response depends on how they schematically understand the death of a spouse and marriage, such as for example participant 9, who said that they couldn't empathise with her response to her husband's death, because their "experience of life, loss and love differs greatly from that of Mrs Mallard" (Participant 9). This links in with Van Dijk's (1998) work on schematic knowledge being socio-culturally determined. Further studies may look at this relationship between schematic knowledge and emotional responses to actions and minds.

Furthermore, the responses of readers who did not empathise with Mrs Mallard and saw her death as her comeuppance may be the result of the negative moral valence they attribute to Mrs Mallard's view on marriage more so than the way that readers are invited to empathise with Mrs Mallard. Moral judgment has been seen by

Sanford and Emmott (2012) to influence empathetic engagement. In this case some readers seem to consciously reject empathising once they realise the full extent of Mrs Mallard's feelings, while others consciously choose to be persuaded by her understanding of her situation. This may indicate that the way language sets up Mrs Mallard's mind underlies both responses. A linguistic analysis may explain what aspects of her mind readers are responding to.

#### **4. Attentional backgrounding and readerly stance**

From the responses of the readers of this story it is clear that the impression readers have of Mrs Mallard change in paragraph 10. This may be explained by assessing how readers access her mind before this paragraph. While Mrs Mallard features from the start of the narrative, she does not become an agent performing any actions until paragraph 3. This is significant given that a significant source for inferring fictional minds is seeing characters in action (Palmer, 2004). If the linguistic construal does not profile motives and feelings underlying these actions, readers are often left to infer based on schematic knowledge. In the first sentence, Mrs Mallard and her heart trouble are introduced in a sub-ordinate clause, with "great care" being afforded the focus of attention as the object of a sentence without an agent (a so-called) zero agent. No access is afforded to Mrs Mallard's mind yet, but not to any other mind either, and the reader is instead invited to understand her through her heart trouble and the great care taken to tell her the news of her husband's death. The construal of Josephine, Mrs Mallard's sister, and Richards, Mr Mallard's friend, care to tell Mrs Mallard of the death that follow in paragraph 2 contribute to this construal. The construal of their actions may be described as instances of 'setting-subject construal'

(Langacker, 2008, p. 389-90). Setting-subject construal draws attention to the setting first rather than agentive action. Combined with the stative verb 'to be' the reader is expected to process this information as a given rather than question how Josephine's veiled hints of half concealing and Richard's forestalling of 'any less careful, less tender friend'. The reader is thus expected to accept these observations as part of the setting against which to interpret Mrs Mallard's mind, of which we have not yet seen anything. The reader is left to infer how she may have taken her husband's death.

According to the 'principle of minimal departure' (Ryan, 1991), in cases of a lack of indication that this text's fictional world is different from the actual world, readers will fill in this textual gap with background knowledge of the actual world. In particular related to characters, Emmott argues readers assume characters to reflect our reality:

"In reading narrative texts, we imagine worlds inhabited by individuals who can be assumed to behave, physically and psychologically, in ways which reflect our real-life experiences of being situated in the real world." (Emmott, 1997: 58).

A central mechanism for this type of inference is explained by schema theory, which posits the existence of certain cognitive structures, called schemata (sg. *schema*), that aid comprehension of a text's storyworld by providing a store of information about generic entities, events and situations that a reader may use to infer details of this world that are gapped (Schank and Abelson, 1977). These generic stores of information may be supplemented with rich stores of individual personal knowledge about entities, events and situations (Culpeper, 2009), and, crucially, define expectations for these entities, events and situations. Crucially, during the processing of a narrative that may provide a range of varieties of thought presentation, readers

need schemata to construct a sense of continuity of mental processing even when the mind's contents are not explicit (Palmer, 2004).

In terms of Mrs Mallard's gapped response to the death of her spouse then, readers may infer her response based on their schematic knowledge of the death of a spouse, which reflects their real-world experiences of the death of a spouse. While different readers will have different experiences of the death of a spouse (or none at all), and different socio-cultural groups often have different types of schematic knowledge (Van Dijk, 1998), the answers to the question on my questionnaire about associations with the death of a spouse indicated that 'mourning' formed an essential element to the schematic knowledge of most participants related to the 'death of a spouse' event. From my reader response data, at least, I may conclude that these readers will infer Mrs Mallard's response consistent with their schematic knowledge of the loss of a husband, which involves a distraught wife. This may be different for another set of readers, who may not have such lofty ideas about marriage that spouses always mourn each other's deaths, and may as such not infer this initial response of mourning. This also means not all construal effects described in this paper may be wholly applicable to all readers, especially as such readers' empathetic engagement will differ from many of the readers described in this paper based on their different mapping of experiences onto her mind.

It is nevertheless likely that many readers will initially infer from the text that Mrs Mallard is mourning her husband initially. There are various textual cues that strongly hint at this understanding, such as the care the people surrounding Mrs Mallard take to tell her of her husband's death and her initial first response in paragraph three. The active verbs 'wept' and 'went away', which, following Palmer that actions are a significant source for mind inferences (2004), are two actions that are

typically associated with grief. These actions therefore either make a reader consider her mourning as a possibility or do not contest her mourning as initial inference; the factual, certain description of her weeping and leaving the room, normal responses to the death of a spouse, would in any case reinforce the schematic initial response to death to be one of mourning.

The following paragraphs construe Mrs Mallard's actions using objective construal: 'she sank', 'she could see', 'she sat', 'she was young'. There is no indication of a change in mental state in the grammatical construal of her actions, although hints are perhaps given through her perception of nature. These are instances of pathetic fallacy, which is "the projection of human emotions onto phenomena in the natural world" (Lodge, 1992: 85). Interestingly, given her sadness, these descriptions have a positive valence, which may perhaps provide a sense of foreboding of what is coming.

However, between paragraphs 5 and 9, Mrs Mallard remains a passive agent. Whenever she is an agent, the verb phrases that follow (e.g. 'could see', 'sat' and 'was young' describe either passive perception or a state. Some instances where she is not the agent have her on the receiving end of an action by an inhuman actor, such as 'a sob', which focusses the reader on the emotional aspect of the situation rather than on her mental state. The reader is construed to infer Mrs Mallard's mental state based upon how she is affected by outside factors. Moreover, whenever the reader perceives something is affecting her, subject-setting constructions with dummy subjects as agents and something else than her as patient are used: 'there was a dull stare' and 'there was something coming to her'. The reader's attention is directed at the factual description of setting and their conceptualisation of the situation Mrs Mallard finds herself in. Moreover, whatever the attention is instead direct to has to do with heightened negative emotion: 'a sob' and 'a dull stare in her eyes'. The reader is invited

to link these to their already established “death of spouse” schema, which for many readers may involve mourning. Consequently, instead of conceptualising Mrs Mallard’s mind based on her actions, readers are invited to conceptualise it from the perspective of how her setting affects her, which is informed by their schematic knowledge of the death of a spouse. Readers are invited to infer what she feels and thinks based on her passivity, not on what she actively does in response to the news of her husband’s death.

In paragraph 9 this culminates in the unspecific ‘something’ coming to her. This event is elaborated with progressive verbs (‘coming to’, ‘creeping out of’, ‘approaching to possess’), which do not indicate a beginning or end time and are thus unclear about provenance. Combined with the unspecific ‘something’ this means the reader’s perspective on the events is informed by uncertainty of what is happening, which mimics Mrs Mallard’s experience. The reader has gradually gained more direct access to Mrs Mallard’s mind; where it was first mediated through the perceptions of Josephine and Richards, then through her actions, then her factual observations, and now her uncertain perceptions. Gradually the attentional backgrounding of Mrs Mallard has lessened, which gives the reader the impression Mrs Mallard is undergoing a change. At the same time, the reader has had the mourning schema confirmed time and again in the way that Mrs Mallard has been affected by things overcoming her. While the reader may have picked up hints from the pathetic fallacy in paragraph 5 and 6, as far as they are concerned Mrs Mallard has taken the news of her husband’s death badly.

This underlies their surprise and confusion when her full feelings are accessed in paragraph 10 and they need to dramatically reorganise their understanding of her mental state as they learn she feels she is now finally free from her husband. Culpeper

and Fernandez Quintanilla define 'dramatic reorganisation' as "one particular way in which writers exploit the schema-based processing of characters is by creating a situation where a character is formed according to a particular schema, but then force the reader to abandon that schema entirely and activate another" (2018, p.100). They also conceive of this type of situation as a 'garden path' trick, where the reader is set up to believe Mrs Mallard's mental state is different from her actual mental state. Readers are set up to believe that Mrs Mallard is sad but is actually rejoicing.

Readers' empathetic engagement in the first 9 paragraphs mainly relies on their inferences of Mrs Mallard's mourning. While no reference is ever made to 'mourning' or her taking it badly, most knowledge the reader has of her mind is based on inferences from how her situation affects her, presumably negatively. From paragraph 10, however, when she welcomes the sense of freedom that overcomes her by saying the word 'free' repeatedly, the reader gains the impression she is taking responsibility for her actions. The text construes this moment using objective construal with unmodalised verbs such as 'said', 'went', 'did not stop' and 'kept whispering'. Her perceptions also get construed as subjectively hers, with the subjective construal in 'she knew that she would weep again' and the free indirect thought in paragraph 12. This free indirect thought is construed through the lens of setting-subject, objective construal again, with the dummy subject 'there' once again indicating certainty and factuality. While the verb 'would be' indicates a more subjective construal again in that these are her thoughts about the future rather than fact, these two techniques combined invite the reader to understand this as Mrs Mallard's reasoning, reasoning that is subjectively hers. The reader now no longer needs to infer her thoughts but has direct access to them.

As established in section 3, the reader needs to map their experiences and judgments onto Mrs Mallard's actions and thoughts to empathetically engage with Mrs Mallard's experience. As the reader's direct access to the thoughts and feelings of Mrs Mallard is here mediated through a marker of factuality (objective construal), the reader's attention is focussed on whether they agree with this factuality or not. As this is the reasoning behind her whispering 'free', where the reader was first surprised, this is where the reader decided to finally keep empathising or not. As the reader responses indicated, some readers were initially confused about her actions but as they understood her reasoning were able to accept it. Others, as they learned about her actions and understood her reasoning, instead saw her as selfish.

## **5. The ending**

The story has two unexpected endings: Brently Mallard was not really dead and Mrs Mallard dies. The manipulation of reader attention throughout the narrative means that cues which could have predicted these endings are backgrounded, or buried (Emmott and Alexander, 2014). Whether the news of Mr Mallard's death was really true could have been questioned from the beginning because of the attentional backgrounding of the references to the news and a gradual lessening specificity of references to the news in the first three paragraphs. The references either occur at the end of clauses or in a subordinate clause, a technique that is often associated with burying (Emmott and Alexander, 2014). The first reference to the potential death is then referred to as 'the news of her husband's death'. While 'news' is conceptually never certain, combined with a definite pronoun it is presented as factual news. Subsequently, it is referred to as 'intelligence of the railroad disaster', which focusses

in on 'intelligence' given this is zero-form (without article). Given 'intelligence' does not have to be true, this reduces the certainty of the news. The next reference reduces intelligence to 'the sad message', the reference after which is only refers to it 'the story'. The news is thus reduced to something that could be made up. After mention of 'the story' Mrs Mallard's response takes precedence over the news. She takes it as truth and the reader no longer has any indication to not take it as truth. Paragraph 19 thus comes as a surprise, especially as some suspense is created through the use of the unspecific 'someone', progressive 'was opening' and Mrs Mallard's, Josephine's and Richards' perspective of being inside. The use of the dummy subject 'it' and stative verb 'to be' in "It was Brently Mallard" emphasise with their setting-subject objective construal that reality is clear, and that the reader has thus been misled. The reader is surprised, as Mrs Mallard is herself. The grammar of the narrative thus creates 'experiential iconicity' for the reader (Harrison, 2017).

Based on earlier moral judgment, the reader would conceive of Mrs Mallard's death upon seeing her husband as either her comeuppance or a sad ending to the story. It also depends on the readers' understanding of her heart disease. As established before, the reader is invited to understand her heart disease in the light of frail health given that those surrounding her take great care to tell her the news of her husband's death. However, the last phrase 'she had died of heart disease – of the joy that kills' indicates that the heart disease may have been something else. She may instead have felt frail because of the oppression of marriage she is now free from. However, readers who gave up empathising with Mrs Mallard as they saw her full feelings may not understand this as they have stopped sharing her mental state vicariously and have imputed their judgment of selfishness on her mind instead. They will not understand her heart disease as repression as they do not understand that

she would only die upon seeing Brently as her sense of freedom was taken away from her again. Readers who do not agree with this sense of freedom anyway would just interpret her death as a physical heart disease rather than an emotional one given they can only build upon the way they first understood her mind through inferencing in the beginning of the narrative.

The twist thus makes the reader re-evaluate Mrs Mallard's character in terms of the way they have engaged with her. Readers' ethical experience of her at the end is brought about through the way inferencing allows readers to empathetically engage with Mrs Mallard's mind. Reader responses of the story can be brought to bear on the story to understand how readers may come to understand her character over the course of the narrative. The way the twist of the narrative can be linked to the empathetic experience of the reader indicates that empathy or lack thereof may be used as a characterisation technique to invite reflection upon reasons for (non)-engagement with Mrs Mallard.

## **6. Conclusion**

This analysis has shown that Cognitive Grammar analysis can link mind attribution to narrative empathy effectively as it may indicate the ways in which the reader is invited to respond to a fictional mind. It showed that when Mrs Mallard's mind was attentionally foregrounded empathetic responses were more divergent than when her mind was attentionally backgrounded. This is an interesting finding given that readers tend to bring varying schematic knowledge to narratives and inferences based on gapping may therefore lead to differing empathetic responses. Moreover, this analysis has shown using Cognitive Grammar that inferencing and gapping are crucial

to inviting narrative empathy. This account was further nuanced by the observation that where inferencing was invited due to gapping in this narrative, the gaps needed to be filled with the 'mourning' aspect of the 'death of a spouse' schema. This provides evidence for the idea that when authors construe readers to experience empathy, they rely on schematic knowledge that is universal rather than schematic knowledge that may be less universal. Further research is needed to confirm this idea. However, this paper has shown that an effective way of inviting empathy may be to attentionally background the mind of a character.

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<sup>i</sup> The church is called Hope Church Huddersfield.