

Degree Project

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The Magic of Empathy

Narrative Empathy and Ethics in Robin Hobb's *Assassin's Apprentice*

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Introduction

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

Barack Obama (qtd in Robinson)

The fantasy novel *Assassin's Apprentice* by Robin Hobb tells the story of FitzChivalry "Fitz" Farseer, the illegitimate son of the crown prince of the kingdom of the Six Duchies. From the beginning of the novel, when he as a six-year-old is left by his maternal grandfather to be brought up in the King's castle, until the end of the novel when he is in his mid-teens, the adult Fitz as the narrator retells his experiences of being the unwanted bastard in the royal household, where he, by the order of the King, is trained to be an assassin. Being a novel of the popular genre of high fantasy, *Assassin's Apprentice* is set in a world which resembles the medieval times of our world, although with its own history and myth and with its share of magic. The novel, together with the following 15 novels about the same world, is commonly praised by its readers for the complex characterization which involves the reader in the story. Hobb herself has described her love for character-driven

stories and the importance of identifying with a character. Regarding the creation of her novels she explains how “characters step out onto a blank stage, and it’s the world that falls into place around the character, rather than creating the world and setting the character down in the middle of it” (Hobb, “Christopher” 8:11-9:54).

To create a character that catches and holds the reader’s interest “means depicting a portrayal that elicits empathy and recognition” (Lopéz xxxii), and in this Hobb uses narrative techniques for narrative empathy. Narrative empathy is defined in the *Living Handbook of Narratology* as “the sharing of feeling and perspective taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition” (Keen, “Narrative Empathy”, *The Living*). The scientific area of narrative empathy has been growing for the last decades, with empirical research being undertaken with regard to how empathy can be induced by narrative strategies as well as the possible effects of narrative empathy on reader’s social and altruistic behavior (Harbus 597; Mangen et al. 472-473). Being interdisciplinary in nature, apart from literary scholars, it involves scientists from fields such as cognitive psychology, social psychology, philosophy as well as neuroscience (Keen, “Literature” 5:43). From one perspective, empathy in real life depends on the work of mirror neurons, which make the human brain capable of instinctively and emotionally interpreting another being’s emotions from their facial expressions, actions and expressed feelings. The imagination of these factors when reading about a fictional character triggers the same response from the mirror neurons, thus making the experiences of interaction with a real person and a literary one resemble one another. Consequently, the way the text describes a character and his or her inner life affects the emotional response from the reader (Harbus 597-598; White 538).

Being a novel of popular literature and not by one of the best known writers, *Assassin's Apprentice* has not been the subject of many literary studies. Those who have written about this particular text or the following novels by Robin Hobb in essays and articles have commonly chosen to focus on social criticism, gender and sexuality, or other moral questions. The novels have a strong ethical dimension, something that Hobb develops through the five series which are set in the world of the Realm of the Elderlings. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak has studied the first two of the three trilogies which feature Fitz as the main protagonist and which begin with *Assassin's Apprentice*. She explores 'Otherness' in the novels and how, as she argues, it can convey an acceptance of difference – otherness – in other humans and creatures as well as in oneself. She picks out three forms of otherness in the novels: dragons, a mentally disabled man, and the magic of the Wit, of which only the latter appears in *Assassin's Apprentice*. The Wit is an inherited magic which is the ability to share minds with animals and to form a special bond to one of a preferred species. The protagonist Fitz has this ability and soon learns that it is a forbidden and despised magic. This leads to many years of shame, fear and struggle for him as he tries to comprehend this part of his personality. The Wit is also the subject of Peter Melville's essay "Queerness and Homophobia in Robin Hobb's Farseer Trilogies", in which he argues for the Wit as an image of queerness and explores the way this can be of help for a reader who identifies with this situation.

Suzanne Keen pushes for the need of more research when it comes to the effect of reading literature on readers' real-life empathy and altruistic actions and argues that literature might have a negative effect or no effect at all (*Empathy* 74). Mary-Catherine Harrison, however, argues that although "it is essential that we examine the potential failures of narrative empathy", we must also "give an equally

rigorous account of its potential successes” (258). She points out that psychologists, such as C. Daniel Batson, have shown that there is a strong correlation between empathy and ethical responses such as altruism, prosocial behavior, and improved intergroup relations. Batson’s “empathy-altruism hypothesis” proposes that these effects are achieved by “imagination and emotion, adopting another person’s perspective and feeling ‘other-oriented’ emotions like compassion and tenderness”. Although Batson’s research does not focus on fiction, it suggests that if a person feels empathy for a member of a social group he or she will not only care for the welfare of that individual but also have a more benevolent attitude towards other members of that group (Harrison 258). Jémeljian Hakemulder’s empirical literary studies, when comparing readers’ change of attitude after having read either a fictional story about an Algerian woman or a non-fictional text about Algerian women, suggests that “empathy with fictional characters . . . is uniquely suited to influence reader’s attitudes about social groups” (Harrison 261). Vera Nünning, professor of English philology, talks of “two possible effects of reading fiction: on the one hand, the dissemination of values and effecting change of the reader’s beliefs, and, on the other, the practice of cognitive and affective processes important for understanding human beings” (51).

Narrative empathy starts with the author’s empathy and is also dependent on the individual reader’s personality, experiences, knowledge, culture and predilections (Keen, *Empathy* 106). Some people find it easier to be drawn into a fictional story while others find this hard (Green and Donahue 246). This is believed to be connected to a reader’s empathic ability (Keen, “Literature” 33:57). Readers might also more easily identify with a character who has the same traits or experiences as themselves or at least are familiar with these in some way. One

example of how predilections can influence a reader's transportation into a novel, is the genre, which both may make the reader familiar with concepts of the genre and make him or her more open to the story (Green and Donahue 246). Regarding the author of a novel, he or she is the first one to identify with and empathize with a character to be able to do a round, dynamic, characterization. Narrative empathy thus starts with the author, and empathic, people-oriented authors are more likely to write characters which the reader can identify and empathize with (López xxxiii). This is especially important when writing a story which is character-driven, as a character then needs to "have sufficient definition, depth, and complexity to power what some call 'the narrative engine' " (López xxxii).

There is a wide variety of narrative techniques which have been theorized to induce readerly empathy. Keen lists aspects such as control of timing, serial narrative, strong or weak closure, repetition, gaps, characters' involvement in a suspenseful situation, causality of the plot, 'show, don't tell', characters' motives, roundness of character, descriptive language, and 'transparency': "the judgement of characters' behavior as sensible and practical". At the same time, she points out the lack of research to verify the effect of these techniques (Keen, *Empathy* 94-95). Commonly believed to facilitate readers' empathizing with a character is the use of an internal perspective through a first-person or third-person point of view, which makes it possible for the reader to follow the character's thoughts, feelings, and sensations through psycho narration (Keen, *Empathy* 96). Another generally honored strategy for narrative empathy is the use of 'situational empathy', which is "[c]reating suspense and evoking a situation of potential harm [as] a mode of engaging the reader" (Nünning 44).

This thesis will study the use of psycho narration through the first-person point of view and situational empathy through Fitz's vulnerable position and hardships in *Assassin's Apprentice*, and how these narrative strategies can make readers empathize with the protagonist. To give examples of how narrative empathy might affect readers' attitudes and beliefs, the thesis further highlights three areas of ethics in the novel; the understanding and appreciation of otherness through the Wit, valuing women for their deeds rather than their looks as expressed by Fitz, and an openness and positive attitude towards other cultures through Fitz's encounter with the neighbouring people of the Chyurda.

Narrative empathy in *Assassin's Apprentice*

Psycho narration

Perhaps the most important tool which Hobb uses for drawing the reader close to Fitz is the vivid descriptions of his memories from his childhood. Hobb draws lifelike and intense scenes with descriptions of Fitz's perceptions and kinesthetic sensations. As Lorraine M. Lopéz explains: "In order to convey readers to another place and time, writers must forge connections through what is recognizable and familiar. That is, primarily through the body" (xxxix). The reader is invited to be part of Fitz's memories from the beginning, as when he first arrives at Buckkeep:

I knew it only as an end place for a journey, a panorama of noise and people, carts and dogs and buildings and twisting streets that led finally to an immense stone stronghold on the cliffs that overlooked the city sheltered below it. Burrich's horse was weary, and his hooves slipped on the often

slimy cobbles of the city streets. I held on grimly to Burrich's belt, too weary and aching even to complain. I craned my head up once to stare at the tall gray towers and walls of the keep above us. Even in the unfamiliar warmth of the sea breeze, it looked chill and forbidding. I leaned my forehead against his back and felt ill in the brackish iodine smell of the immense water. And that was how I came to Buckkeep. (21)

The use of words connected to Fitz's senses, has the potential to activate readers' imagination and memories of their own experiences of being in noisy places, stone houses, the smell of the sea, being weary, aching, leaning their foreheads towards someone, and feeling ill. The described or implied kinesthetic sensations of Fitz's, as when he "held on grimly to Burrich's belt", "craned [his] head up" and rides a horse, play an important part throughout the novel in helping the reader transport into the text when activating their own kinesthetic memories. In this way Fitz's "consciousness is performed or simulated by the reader through a process of narrative empathy" (White 538).

The psycho narration also consists of Fitz's feelings and thoughts. As a novel with a first-person point of view, *Assassin's Apprentice* lets the readers take Fitz's perspective in every situation he finds himself in and gives them access to his private thoughts and feelings in happy, sad and terrifying moments. One example is when he is worried that his teacher Chade, who has become something of a father-figure to him, has been so disappointed with him that he has broken all contact:

The depth of bleakness that settled over me was too solid for me to fight. All of my possible choices led to gray ends. I could not face the futility of getting

out of bed. A headachy sort of near sleep claimed me. Any sound seemed too loud, and I was either too hot or too cold no matter how I fussed over my covers. I closed my eyes, but even my dreams were bright and annoying.
(95)

And when Chade comes back to him:

I think I cried every tear I had never shed since the day my grandfather forced my mother to abandon me . . . and suddenly there were arms around me . . . Chade held me and rocked me as if I were a much younger child . . . Disbelieving, I clung to him and cried until I was hoarse, and my mouth so dry no sound would come at all. “You were right,” he said into my hair, quietly, calmingly. “You were right. I was asking you to do something wrong, and you were right to refuse it. You won’t be tested that way again. Not by me.” (99)

As with sensory perceptions and kinesthetic sensations, the description of a character’s thoughts and feelings can “[help] the reader imagine how a character feels in a specific situation” and “[prompts] the reader to take the perspective of characters, to raise empathic feelings for the characters, and reduce the reader’s distance to the characters” (Nünning 43-44). This perspective-taking also makes it easier for the reader to understand Fitz and to find his thoughts and actions plausible and “according to principles and causes that are held to prevail also in real life”, thus making it more likely that the reader will identify and empathize with him (Nünning 43). In addition, this episode, when Fitz is tested by the King and Chade, and refuses

to do what he finds disloyal to the King, helps to give the foundation of the characterization of Fitz as a moral person. As a personality trait which is likely to meet “high appreciation” from the reader, it “will enhance the reader’s willingness to adopt [his] perspective” and thus makes it harder not to take Fitz’s view on future problems (Nünning 52).

There is one other aspect of psycho narration in *Assassin’s Apprentice*. Since the story is told by Fitz when he is grown up, though not a great deal of information is presented about the time and place, there are the thoughts and feelings which are at times expressed by the adult Fitz. Nünning even lists comments by the narrator as a separate narrative strategy and one of three which she claims have been identified to evoke empathy for a character, the other two being presentation of the character’s inner life through e.g. psycho narration, and situational empathy. “These comments can fulfil a wide spectrum of functions: they can explain a character’s motives, underscore a lack of alternatives to a character’s actions (which might otherwise initially appear egoistic), emphasize a character’s plight and suffering, relate a character’s actions to common human needs, and so on” (44) Thus, Hobb uses the narrator’s voice as a way to evoke readerly empathy for Fitz, both by comments which express his own empathy with his younger self, and his adult view regarding what happens to the young Fitz. One example is when Fitz, together with other chosen teenagers on the King’s demand, is trained in the Skill, the second magic contained in the novel which is a kind of telepathy. Their teacher is the unwilling and cruel skillmaster Galan. The adult Fitz gives a few comments on this harsh time, when Fitz and the rest of the group are literally brain-washed by Galan who finally uses the Skill to try to make Fitz commit suicide, such as: “There followed another day of discomfort and random abuse. So I see it now. So I think I

knew it then, in my heart of hearts. But ever he spoke of proving us worthy, of making us tough and strong”, “I had no idea of the peril I faced” (251), and: “I know not what the others felt, but in my heart was nothing but hate for him” (251), In this way, Fitz as the narrator underlines the feelings and peril of the young Fitz, inviting the reader to take his perspective and empathize with him.

Situational Empathy

To feel with a character’s situation and care for his or her sufferings can make the reader involved in the character and be engaged in how the story turns out (López xxxii). Keen writes that “many readers report that novels in which child characters are subjected to cruel or unfair treatment evoke empathy” (Keen, *Empathy* 103). In *Assassin’s Apprentice*, Fitz is from the very beginning in a vulnerable position as a child who is separated from his mother and left with strangers in a strange environment where he has to deal with his loneliness as well as his unwanted attention as the bastard child of the royal family. His loneliness is a theme throughout the novel (as well as the following ones), and the fact that his life will not be an easy one is made clear already in the first paragraph, where the adult Fitz reflects on his writing down of his story that “the hurt of a boy bleeds out with the sea-spawned ink, until I suspect each carefully formed black letter scabs over some ancient scarlet wound” (2). Fitz’s loneliness and the hurt he suffers provides his motivation to seek fellowship and love where he can find them, while at the same time having a hard time letting other people in and trusting them. This longing, a “yearning that can never be fully satisfied”, and an important part of his motivation throughout the novel, is an “effective way to engage readers” (López xxxii-xxxiii).

Fitz's situation as an illegitimate son to the would-be King leads to him being trapped in his role as the royal assassin, and to situations where he is threatened, sometimes to be killed. The way Hobb uses psycho narration and other techniques for character identification, makes it more probable that the reader will care about what happens to Fitz. At the same time these situations in themselves are part of the narrative techniques for making the reader feel empathy for Fitz. Keen writes about hardships that "[l]ooking at college students' reports about empathetic characters verifies the sense that a character's negative affective states, such as those provoked by undergoing persecution, suffering, grieving, and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader's empathizing more likely (Keen, *Empathy* 71). Hobb says that she "simply happen[s] to have characters that get themselves into a lot of trouble" (Hobb, "Christopher" 10:12), and there are many situations where Fitz finds himself in danger. These are, for example, when he comes eye to eye with forged people, which are humans which have been turned into a kind of zombies; when being under the power and influence of the cruel teacher Galan; and in the end of the novel when he is accused of having poisoned princess Kettricken's brother, being poisoned himself, and almost drowned. Nünning asserts that "[i]n order to feel with (and for) characters, they must be in a situation that potentially allows for positive as well as negative endings" (45). In the case of Fitz, the reader knows that he will survive, since the story is told by himself as an adult. However, the way Hobb paints his situation and story, there is much uncertainty about the mental and physical health of the grown up Fitz, giving the reader reason to be at least partly uncertain about the outcome of dangerous situations and the story as a whole.

Ethics in *Assassin's Apprentice*

The analysis up to this point has focused upon how Hobb uses narrative techniques in *Assassin's Apprentice* to make the reader empathize with the protagonist FitzChivalry Farseer. The second part of the analysis looks at how this narrative empathy might affect how moral values and ethical decisions are adopted by the reader. Melanie C. Green and John K. Donahue, referring to earlier research, suggests that “attachment to characters may play a critical role in narrative-based belief change. If a viewer likes or identifies with a character . . . , statements made by the character or implications of events experienced by that character may carry special weight” (247). Several scholars connect the possible ethical effects of literature to a reader’s transportation into a text (Nünning 52, Green and Donahue 247). Transportation is when readers experience themselves immersed in a story, with a feeling of being distanced from their surroundings (Green and Donahue 241). This can strongly affect the reader emotionally and make the text persuasive (Green and Donahue 247). Transportation has a correlation with empathy and “likely relies on the same fundamental cognitive processes, such as the ability to take the perspective of another person” (Green and Donahue 243).

The three areas which have been chosen are the moral lessons which can be derived from Fitz’s experience of the Wit, the view on women’s attributes expressed by Fitz, and his encounter with the foreign culture of the people of the Chyurda. When reading about these situations, the reader reads them with the possible empathy for Fitz that thus far has been evoked through narrative strategies, among which are those discussed above, making them more likely to influence the reader’s real-life attitudes and empathic abilities. Furthermore, Nünning suggests a “two-way interaction between ethics and emotion”, arguing that “[w]hile it has been shown

that engaging the reader's emotions enhances . . . the persuasiveness of a story, there may also be a reciprocal relation with highly ethical texts that involve reader's emotions to a greater extent than do other works" (52). With this approach to ethics in *Assassin's Apprentice*, it therefore might be considered as an additional strategy for narrative empathy.

Otherness

The magic of the Wit is the ability to share minds with animals and also to form a bond with an animal. It is a magic which is forbidden in the Six Duchies as it is believed to affect the human with the animal's way of being, and thus make him or her less human or, in the worst case, not human at all. However, Fitz finds comfort and joy in his connection to animals, especially to two dogs. In the beginning of the novel, he is left to sleep with the dogs in the stable where there is a pup, Nosy, who immediately "welcomed [him] with ear lickings, nose nipping and much pawning" (13), and as if there was nothing odd about it at all Fitz, as they fall asleep, "drifted into his mind and shared his dreams of an endless chase, pursuing a quarry I never saw, but whose scent dragged me onward through nettle, bramble and scree" (13). Fitz and Nosy become inseparable and explore the city of Buckkeep together in the first carefree time, before king Shrewd decides that Fitz is to be educated and trained as an assassin. When the stablemaster Burrich, who takes care of Fitz the first years, realizes that Fitz and Nosy have bonded, he is devastated and tells the ignorant Fitz that it is "unnatural It's worse than stealing or lying" (40), that "it seizes you and draws you down, makes you a beast" (41). He also warns Fitz that he will be left without decency and humanity if he continues using the Wit. This is how the

Wit is seen in the Six Duchies: a capital offence and deeply despised and feared. Burrich himself has the Wit and expresses a deep shame of having the magic, which he passes on to Fitz, and his role as a father-figure to Fitz and the evidence of his love for him through his efforts to take care of him and defending him from his enemies, makes his condemning of Fitz's use of the Wit hard for Fitz to deal with. Burrich even tells him that he would "sooner see [him] Forged" than finding out he used the Wit, a fate worse than death most easily described as being made into a zombie with no humanity left. Nonetheless, Fitz's own experiences of the Wit makes him unable to fully accept this view, and throughout the whole trilogy he tries to find his own comprehension of it.

This is a central part of the story and is a part of Fitz which invites character identification for readers with their own experience of having a part of their personality and qualities not accepted by society, friends or family, as well as inducing empathy for such people in those who do not identify with this situation. Melville makes a strong argument for the Wit as an image for queerness and Deszcz-Tryhubczak makes it a part of the lessons of tolerance which she finds in *Assassin's Apprentice* and its sequels, arguing that it can teach acceptance of otherness both in oneself and others. In this, Hobb's use of narrative empathy is crucial in making the reader feel with Fitz in his shame and fear of being exposed as well as the joy, comfort and fellowship the Wit brings him. The empathy for, and possible identification with, Fitz can aid in making the reader transport into the story. Equally, as Green and Donahue argue, "transportation reduces counterarguing about issues raised in the story . . . [since the reader] may not be motivated to disrupt the enjoyable transportation experience by quibbling with the author's claims [and also] may affect beliefs by making narrative events seem more like personal experience"

(247). This is applicable also to the following two passages about ethics in *Assassin's Apprentice*.

Qualities of Women

Fitz's relationships to women are centered upon the one to his childhood friend and, later on, first love, Molly and the one to his father's widow Lady Patience, who is the closest to a mother-figure there is for Fitz. There are also other women who play less important roles but nonetheless convey something of Hobb's views on women and feminism. To begin with, it might be easy to simply see the *Assassin's Apprentice* as a classic fantasy novel which is set in, and bound to, a medieval, patriarchal society. However, as the story progresses the reader is introduced to elements which would not exist in a strictly medieval world, such as the female weapon master Hod and the fact that titles in the Six Duchies are inherited by the oldest child, regardless of sex.

Aside from examples like these, the men and women in *Assassin's Apprentice* to a great extent hold to old, conservative gender roles, with the men doing most of the ruling, fighting and acting while the women are either ladies who spend most of their time on dresses, or women working with traditional female occupations, such as sewing or making scented candles. Nevertheless, Hobb uses these traditional roles as a background from which she puts forward her critique and feminist values, something which she does to an increasing extent throughout the novels of the Realm of the Elderlings.

Nünning suggests that "taking the perspectives of characters and temporarily adopting their values and traits may lead to a reflection on and appraisal of these

values and thereby result in the dissemination of values” (52). The perspective-taking that is created through strategies for narrative empathy in *Assassin’s Apprentice*, might therefore affect the reader’s real-life ethics and attitudes through values expressed by Fitz. One example of this is the passage where Fitz at the age of 16 expresses his own thoughts about women’s attributes when talking to Molly about the rumor that prince Verity is to marry, and that prince Regal is to find him a wife due to Verity’s preoccupation with the Red Ship raiders who are attacking the coast of the Six Duchies. Fitz is concerned that the vain and power-seeking prince Regal will not find the kind of wife that would suit prince Verity. When Molly argues that a fine lady is expected to be beautiful and careful about her looks, Fitz answers that: “Verity deserves a companion, not an ornament to wear on his sleeve” (279), and gives an account of the examples he has seen of women around him living otherwise:

Look at Lady Patience and her woman Lacey. . . . The cuffs of [Lady Patience’s] gowns are sometimes a bit sticky from her paper making, or she will have bits of leaves in her hair from her herbery work, but she is still just as beautiful. And prettiness is not all that important in a woman. I’ve watched Lacey’s hands making one of the keep children a fishnet from a bit of jute string . . . ; now that’s a pretty thing that has nothing to do with her face. And Hod, who teaches weapons? . . . She made a dagger for her father’s birthday, with a grip like a leaping stag, and yet done so cleverly that it’s a comfort in the hand, with not a jag or edge to catch on anything. Now, that’s a bit of beauty that will live on long after her hair grays or her cheeks wrinkle.

Someday her grandchildren will look at that work and think what a clever woman she was. (279-280)

This passage is full of markers of the medieval-like fantasy world where the *Assassin's Apprentice* takes place. To the reader it might seem strange and not applicable to the real world. However, as Corinne Buckland argues, "it is the very strangeness of the fantasy setting that allows us to see morality more clearly. In the realist novel, verisimilitude to physical and emotional reality is the driving force. In fantasy it is more usually verisimilitude to emotional, and . . . spiritual reality." Thus, "[s]trangeness is merely an agent which allows the moral imagination to experience this more clearly" (Buckland 102). It therefore can be argued that the distance from readers' every day life can make them less guarded by their more or less unaware prejudices about gender roles in real life and therefore more likely to be affected by a general lesson about valuing a woman for her achievements, instead of her looks and efforts to please men, an approach that can be learned from this passage, a lesson as important in today's society as throughout history.

Meeting a Foreign Culture

The major part of *Assassin's Apprentice* takes place in the kingdom of the Six Duchies, with little or no encounters with foreigners or foreign cultures. However, the last sixth of the novel is almost exclusively set in the city of Jhaampe, a political and social center for the nomad people of the Chyurda. As previously, readers experience the encounter with this strange place and foreign customs through the consciousness and memories of Fitz. He comes there as part of the royal company

who have come for the betrothment of princess Kettricken to prince Verity, joining prince Regal and his party who have already been at Jhaampe for some time for the arrangement of the marriage.

When first meeting the people of Chyurda, Fitz “found them passing strange and almost frightening in their differences” and “was [often] forced to remind [himself] of what both Burrich and Chade had taught [him] about courtesies” (362). When they come to the city of Jhaampe, he describes his first experience of the colorful buildings set on the steep hillside, the strangeness of a city where only the “public buildings and the royal houses are permanent” and the rest consisting of the tents of the nomad tribes, who see the ruler of Jhaampe as their leader, coming to Jhaampe to stay temporarily. Before the journey, Chade taught Fitz as much as possible about the culture of Chyurda, as well as their language. This, combined with Fitz’s character, as the reader has come to know him, as empathic and observant, forms the way he meets this foreign culture. Fitz enjoys his first experience of the strange but beautiful city, trying his best to show his interest in, and appreciation of, Jhaampe to the Chyurda and making efforts to speak their language. His benevolent attitude, as well as the Chyurda’s hospitality, is contrasted to Regal’s and the nobility’s unwillingness or inability to be understanding and compliant to the ways of the Chyurda. At the outside of the city, their guides show them a pasture where they are expected to leave their animals and to walk into the city:

August, who was the nominal head of our caravan, did not handle this very diplomatically. I winced as he almost angrily explained that we had brought with us much more than we could be expected to carry into the city, and that

many there were too weary from traveling to relish the idea of the uphill walk. I bit my lip and forced myself to stand quietly, to witness the polite confusion of our hosts. Surely Regal had known of these customs; why had he not warned us of them so we would not begin our visit by appearing boorish and unaccommodating?

But the hospitable folk tending to us swiftly adapted to our strange ways. (364-365)

Fitz is concerned with how they might appear to their hosts, wishing he “had the courage to go to August and entreat him to be more adaptable to the ways of this people”, worrying that “it was already bad enough that the groom had not come in person to carry off his bride” (365). After people have arrived to help carry their burdens, they start walking into the city, but shortly they are met by older women carrying litters which the guests are offered to ride in.

August, Severens, the older lords, and most of the ladies of our party seemed only too happy to take advantage of this offer, but for me, it was a humiliation to be carried into the city. But it would have been even ruder to turn down their polite insistence, and so I surrendered my chest to a boy obviously younger than myself, and mounted into a litter borne by women old enough to be my grandmother I set my teeth and tried not to think what Verity would have felt about this display of ignorance. I tried to look out pleasantly on those we passed, and to let my delight in their gardens and graceful buildings show on my face. (366)

Fitz's honestly positive and curious attitude is what saves him, Burrich and prince Verity in the end, as it gives him the trust of princess Kettricken's brother Rurik and their aunt Jonqui which helps them to overcome the deceitful plot of prince Regal. The fact that the reader has Fitz's perspective in all this, and likely has come to understand and empathize with him after having followed him through the novel this far, may influence the reader with Fitz's humble and benevolent attitude towards a culture different from their own and "lead to a higher appreciation of perspective taking and a recognition of its importance for behaving responsibly in complex social situations" (Nünning 52).

Conclusion

Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Marek Oziewicz declare the "dire need of our spiritually famished civilization to rethink the way we deconstruct ourselves as moral agents and responsible human beings in the rapidly globalizing world, which actually demands from us even more responsibility, ethical sensitivity and moral commitment than ever", and argues that "works of literature...are, at least potentially, an education of the emotions and of the moral character" (Deszcz-Tryhubczak, Introduction). Although Keen has pointed out the need for further research on the possible effect of literature on readers' real-life attitudes and behavior, there are several studies which suggest that empathy towards a character does have a potential to influence a reader's moral and empathic abilities (Harrison 261).

Among the various narrative strategies which might affect a reader's experience of narrative empathy, are two important ones which Robin Hobb uses

throughout *Assassin's Apprentice*. The first, the psycho narration of Fitz's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and kinesthetic sensations through the first-person narration, draws the readers close to the protagonist and promotes them to take his perspective and thus increasing the possibility that they will empathize with him. The second, 'situational empathy', is carried out through Fitz's consistent vulnerable situation as an orphan and bastard child in the royal family as well as through the various difficult and dangerous situations he finds himself in. This can make the reader feel for his situation and care for his welfare.

Keen suggests "a chicken-and-egg relationship between empathy and character identification", arguing that "character identification often invites empathy" at the same time as "the opportunity to share feelings underwrites character identification that transcends difference", thus making it possible for a reader to identify and empathize with a character, such as Fitz, who is different from, and lives in other circumstances, than the reader (Keen, *Empathy* 70). The character identification and narrative empathy are in turn two factors which might affect readers' transportation into a story, which has been shown to increase the possibility that the text will affect the reader's real-life attitudes and beliefs.

Three areas of ethics in *Assassin's Apprentice* have been focused upon as examples of the ethical dimensions in the novel and to show how Hobb's use of narrative techniques for inducing empathy might have an impact on readers' real-life empathy and morality. Fitz's experience of the Wit, as a magic which is viewed with suspicion and even fear, can give the reader an insight into the feelings and difficulties of someone who is considered being in some way different, thus making it possible for the reader's attitude towards such people in real life to be affected towards a more sympathetic one. The second situation that is discussed, is the

women around Fitz and especially one statement by him about how women should be valued by their skills and accomplishments rather than their looks. The final moral lesson is from the episode when Fitz travels to the neighbouring people of the Chyurda, when the way he tries his best to bridge the cultural differences is put against the dismissive and self-centered approach of the nobles who are leading the company.

Although being of limited scope, this essay seeks to be part of the discussion about the possibilities and importance of narrative empathy. This is an old conception, as “written narrative literature, from ancient times to the present, concentrates on our emotional lives . . . [and] stories give members of society common exemplars of action of emotions and of responsibility” (Keith Oatley, qtd in Harbus 597).

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