

Theoretical background

- Literary reading may not only depend on textual features of a narrative, but also on paratextual information indicating literariness (Appel et al., 2021).
- Paratext can, for example, directly refer to the literary quality of a story or it can highlight specific aspects of a story.
- The interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic literariness markers might, however, be complex (Gavaler & Johnson, 2017, 2019), which gives rise to the question if and to what extent paratextual information alone can affect readers' perception and experience of stories.



Research Questions

In the current study, we examined ...

- 1) how paratextual information on author and award-winning status of a story influences readers' perception and experience of the story.
- 2) whether paratextual information about the quality of specific story elements (character portrayal vs. world building) influences readers' processing of the story (theory-of-mind inference efforts vs. theory-of-world inference efforts; Gavaler & Johnson, 2017, 2019).
- 3) whether readers' processing of the story in terms of their inference efforts mediates the effects of paratextual information on narrative experiences.

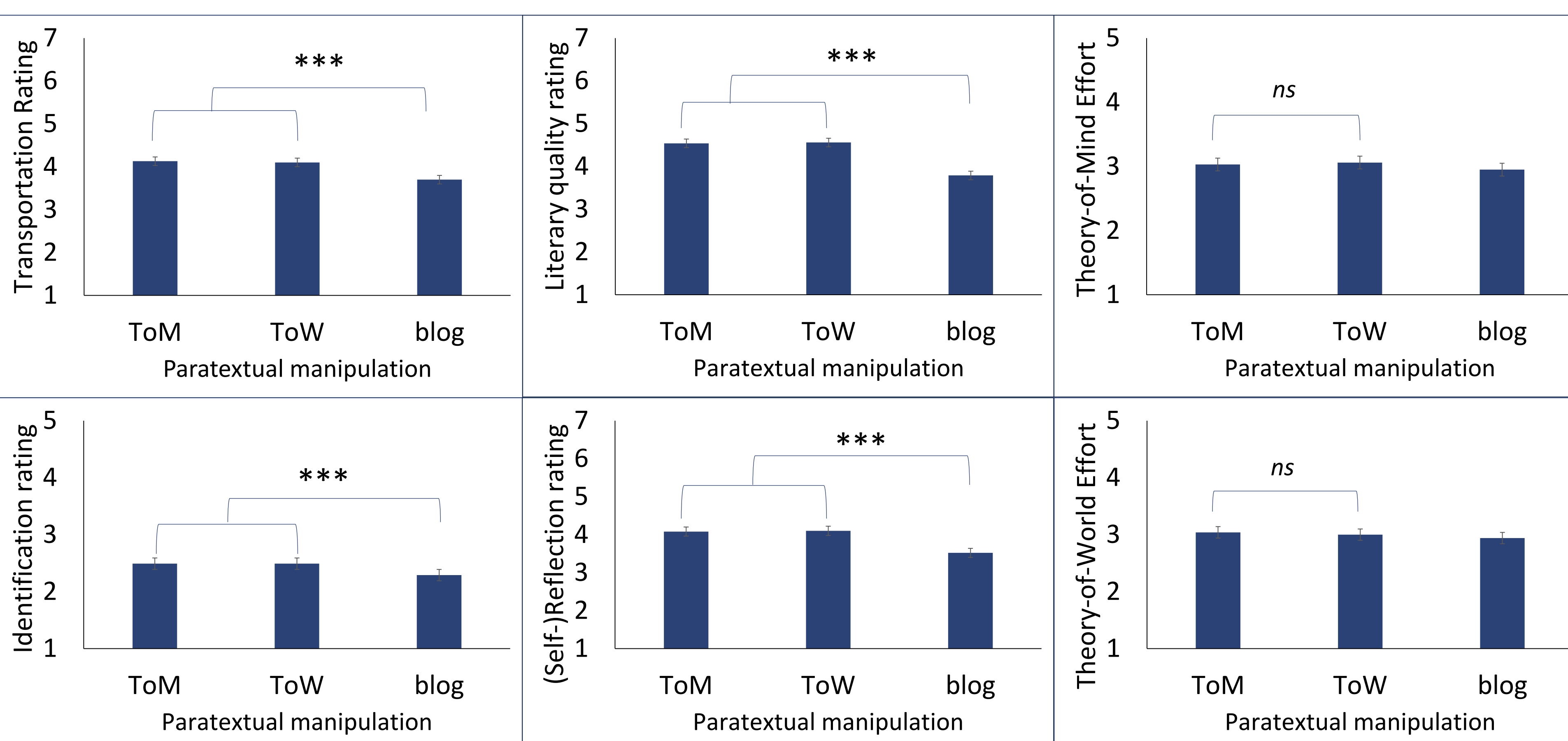
Method

- **Participants:** $N = 252$ (84% female, $M_{Age} = 21.60$ years, $SD_{Age} = 5.27$)
- **Dependent Variables:**
 - Perception of literary quality and (self-)reflection
 - Transportation Scale – Short Form (TS-SF; Appel et al., 2015)
 - Identification with Characters Scale (EDI; Igartua & Páez, 1998)
 - Reading times
 - Theory of Mind Effort, Theory of World Effort (Gavaler & Johnson, 2017, 2019)
- **Design:** Within-subjects design with 3 conditions (paratextual information)

Paratextual information conditions:

- Prize-winning story by an acclaimed author that excels in depiction of the characters' inner worlds (ToM) vs. the depiction of the story world (ToW)
- Story written by a hobby writer, published on a blog (blog)
- **Procedure:** The participants read three short stories (*The End of Something* by Ernest Hemingway, *The Chameleon* by Anton Chekov, *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov) that were randomly assigned to the paratextual conditions. After reading each story, they completed the questionnaires on their narrative experience and perception of the story.

Results



Note. ToM = prize-winning story, highlighting theory-of-mind aspects, ToW = prize-winning story, highlighting theory-of-world aspects, blog = story written by a hobby writer; error bars show standard error; *** $p < .001$.

- Paratextual information on the award-winning status of the story (vs. being posted on a blog) lead to ...
 - higher ratings on literary quality perception ($d = 0.60$),
 - higher (self-)reflection ($d = 0.20$),
 - greater experience of narrative transportation ($d = 0.28$),
 - greater experience of identification with story characters ($d = 0.26$).
- No significant effect of paratextual manipulation on reading times ($d = 0.04$).
- Paratextual information stressing the character portrayal vs. world building of the story did not influence readers' theory-of-mind vs. theory-of-world inference efforts ($d = 0.01-0.10$).
- No mediating role of theory-of-mind or theory-of-world effort between paratextual manipulation and narrative experiences (identification or transportation).

Discussion

- In the current study, we found that readers' perception of and reaction to stories (i.e., literary quality, (self-)reflection), narrative transportation and identification) were affected by paratextual information. Theory-of-mind and theory-of-world inference efforts were, however, not influenced by our paratextual manipulation.
- Additionally, there were significant differences in all variables assessing story perception and narrative experience between the short stories used in the present study. Thus, the results of our study support the assumption that intrinsic as well as extrinsic markers of literariness influence readers' story perception and narrative experiences.
- **Limitations:** homogenous sample (mostly female undergraduate students); participants may have figured out the manipulation due to the within-subjects design; only three short stories were used (1,000 to 1,400 words each); questionable ecological validity of the study (selected bits of paratext, reading task as opposed to leisure reading)

References: Appel, M., Gnambs, T., Richter, T., & Green, M. C. (2015). The Transportation Scale – Short Form (TS-SF). *Media Psychology*, 18(2), 243-266; Appel, M., Hanauer, D., Hoeken, H., van Krieken, K., Richter, T., & Sanders, J. (2021). The psychological and social effects of literariness: Formal features and paratextual information. In D. Kuiken & A. M. Jacobs (Eds.), *Handbook of empirical literary studies* (pp. 177-202). De Gruyter; Gavaler, C., & Johnson, D. (2017). The genre effect: A science fiction (vs. realism) manipulation decreases inference effort, reading comprehension, and perceptions of literary merit. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 7(1), 79-108; Gavaler, C., & Johnson, D. (2019). The literary genre effect: A one-word science fiction (vs. realism) manipulation reveals intrinsic text properties outweigh extrinsic expectations of literary quality. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 9(1), 34-52; Igartua, J. J., & Páez, D. (1998). Validity and reliability of an empathy and identification with characters scale. *Psicothema*, 10(2), 423-436.

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