The Author's Footprints in the Garden of Fiction
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Chapter 6  Conclusion and Discussion
Looking back and forward

This book started with a short description of how the Dutch writer and self-made artist Jan Cremer entered the literary field boisterously on a Harley Davidson with a successful marketing strategy that got his book *Ik, Jan Cremer* high in the bestseller lists. The book also led to characterizations of Cremer, such as pervert and criminal, and one critic depicted both book and author as “partly fantasised biography of a son of a bitch”. I posed the question whether it would be possible to read Cremer’s book without having an image of Cremer in mind, by putting all information about his marketing activities, such as cruising the streets of Amsterdam in a Mercedes convertible shouting “Ik Jan Cremer”, aside. As I explained in the first section of Chapter 1, according to some literary theorists that is exactly what interpreters of literature should do. The author is considered to be irrelevant for the interpretation of a literary text. This view persisted in literary theory for a rather long time and some of the positions that I discussed are still highly influential today. At the same time the author concept remained implicitly or explicitly present in different areas of the literary field, such as edition philology, literary reviewing, and literary historiography. Furthermore, from a feminist and post-colonial perspective on literature the author’s identity, i.e. gender and ethnicity, is of importance to interpretation, and in controversies around literary works the author’s authenticity and sincerity seem to be taken into account (Chapter 1, § 2). The aim of the present study was to bridge this remarkable gap between literary theory and other areas of the literary field by taking the reading process of readers under investigation, and shed some light on what happens during the reading of literary fiction. Do readers follow the normative prescription that the author should be irrelevant to the interpretation of the text? Or is the author as present during the process of reading as he or she is in the different areas of the literary field?

The findings of the present study suggest that the author is indeed part of the reading process of readers of literature. More specifically, results from the empirical research indicate that even if readers do not have any information about the empirical author of a text, they create a mental representation of someone who has written the text with some purpose (Chapter 2 and 3). If readers, on the other hand, do have biographical information about a text’s author, they create a mental representation of an author that is based on both this contextual information and information derived from the text (Chapter 4 and 5). In the first situation, in which readers do not have any contextual information about the author, I have chosen to define this mental representation as an *implied author* construction. In the second situation, the results of the empirical research suggest that a complex process occurs in which readers’ mental image of an author that is based on biographical information (*empirical author*) interacts with their image of an author based on the text (*implied author*). In this chapter I will elaborate on these findings and their theoretical and methodological implications as well as on some ideas about future research.
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the next section I will discuss the theoretical and methodological implications of the results of the empirical studies that I presented in the previous chapters. The second section will discuss the implications of the results for both the field of literary studies and discourse processes, and in the last section I will briefly discuss some ideas about future research, including some potential reader and textual characteristics that may affect the generation of author inferences, some methodological difficulties and challenges, as well as some ideas about author constructions in other art forms.

1. Theoretical and methodological implications of the results

In an attempt to bridge the above-mentioned gap between normative assumptions in literary theory about the relevance of the author in interpreting literary texts, and the presence of the author concept in different areas of the literary field, I have chosen to conduct an empirical investigation of the role of readers’ assumptions about an author’s identity, communicative intentions and attitude in the reading of literary texts. In other words, I wanted to investigate whether the author is indeed irrelevant when readers read a literary text, or whether the author is as present during the process of reading as he or she is in the different areas of the literary field. As research findings in cognitive psychology, and especially discourse processing, have vastly contributed to our understanding of the cognitive processes involved in reading, I have chosen to combine the insights and methods of this field on this matter with knowledge about literary texts gained from literary theory. This has resulted in a preliminary framework that functioned as the foundation of the empirical studies that have been discussed in the previous chapters. The framework, which is based on the narratological communication model that I presented in Chapter 1, includes the different communication layers and participants that may be involved in the reading of narrative fiction. In order to make sense of the text, readers have to generate different types of inferences that are necessary to establish a coherent mental representation of the text. Discourse theorists agree that this mental representation has different levels: the surface code preserves the exact wording and syntax of the text, the text base contains the explicit propositions, and the situation model can be compared to a mental micro-world that contains the characters, spatial layout, and actions and so on. A fourth level, the communicative context model, represents the readers’ subjective interpretation of the communicative context, and is expected to include information and assumptions about mutual knowledge between the participants, i.e. authors and readers, and readers’ attributions of communicative intentions to – in this case – an implied or empirical author. The central question was whether readers construct separate representations of the empirical author, the implied author, and the narrator, and if so, under what conditions.

As Figure 1 shows, readers can theoretically construct 1) a representation of an implied author 2) a representation of an empirical author, or an interaction occurs between these two representations. In the first situation, this representation would be the result of exclusively bottom-up processing, i.e. based on the text alone. The second situation would imply that this

Figure 1 Readers’ potential representations of communicative participants in the literary reading process
construction is exclusively based on top-down processing, and the text ideally will not affect readers’ constructions of an empirical author. The third option includes interactions between readers’ constructions of an empirical and implied author. For example, readers’ constructions of an implied author, based on the text, can affect their representation of an empirical author, based on contextual information, especially if these two representations largely differ. Vice versa, information about an empirical author may affect readers’ implied author construction. My position is that readers will always construct an implied author representation, regardless of whether they have contextual (biographical) information about a text’s empirical author. With regard to readers’ narrator construction (Figure 1): although the focus of this study was on readers’ author constructions, and I have not investigated the effect of the narratological perspective on readers’ constructions of a narrator and an implied author, it seems plausible that the modus of narration, meaning the type of narrator, seems to attribute to readers’ constructions of an implied author representation. I will briefly discuss how the results of the empirical studies relate to the above-mentioned framework.

Generating author inferences while thinking aloud (Chapter 2)

Chapter 2 discussed a first exploratory study in which readers were asked to think out loud while reading a narrative literary text. Readers did not know anything about the text’s empirical author, context, or genre, and therefore could only construct a mental representation of an implied author. That is, unless they would have prior knowledge about the empirical author and would recognize the text and its empirical author. The main aim of this study was to examine how readers process narrative texts, both literary and non-literary, and to what extent communicative participants of the above-presented model, especially the implied author, will be cognitively represented by readers. Methodologically, the question was whether generated author inferences can be potentially revealed by the think-aloud method. Readers’ responses were categorized in, among others, inferences that could refer to different objects, such as the story world, text level, actual world, and the author. Results of the study showed that it was difficult to identify obvious author inferences because reader responses often concerned conflations of different levels and elements of the communication model, i.e. the text’s implied author, narrator, and/or the text point or theme. For example, one of the participants read a historic textbook text about how Hitler comes into power and verbalized the following thought: “…Hitler is spoken of in very grand words”. In this phrase it is difficult to determine by whom this reader thinks that Hitler is spoken of in grand words; by the implied author, the narrator, or the text as an intentional agent. Even somewhat more obvious author inferences that include a referent (such as someone in “perspective in retrospect of someone that thinks to know better”) were on second thought ambiguous, because these expressed readers’ conflations of the text’s narrator and implied author. In addition, the protocols included text inferences that in a way refer to an author’s selection or choice in constructing the text in a particular way. A participant that read a text sample from a novel by James Joyce referred to a detailed description of one of the protagonists “…are all things that in a discrete way somewhat provide an image of Gabriel”. Again, it is difficult to determine whether this reader refers to the implied author, or perhaps to the text as an intentional agent. What is more, the protocols in general imply that readers interpret textual elements as meaningful. These elements seem to function as signals that can point to the – presumed – meaning or intention of a text and that can contribute to the construction of a coherent text representation. These signals function the same way as so-called inference invitations or evaluation points (Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). To put it differently, readers seem to read in a point-driven way (Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Vipond & Hunt, 1989).
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Although the verbal reports did not include many explicit author inferences and most of these concerned conflations such as the ones mentioned, results of post-reading tasks suggest that all participants created a mental representation of an implied author and his intentions. Without much effort, they all could formulate a presumed intention, point to text elements that contributed to this presumption. In addition, all participants felt, during the reading, the presence of someone who wants to tell a story or direct them in a certain direction, and all could provide an – often detailed – description of their image of the implied author. I concluded that readers may have generated author inferences during the process of reading that contributed to their construction of a context model, but that the think-aloud method cannot reveal these presumably short-lived and automatically generated inferences. Think-aloud protocols are, after all, supposed to reflect what is accessible to consciousness, codeable in language, and what is available in working memory (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Therefore I reasoned that if these inferences are short-lived, more sensitive measurements would be called for. In addition, I would have to look for conditions and methods that would enable me to discriminate between readers’ responses that refer to the empirical author, the implied author, narrator, and the text’s theme or point.

Reading fiction as joint pretence between an author and reader (Chapter 3)

Discussions around controversial novels provide a clue to possible conditions and methods to discriminate between readers’ constructions, because here readers seem to hold the (empirical or implied) author responsible for an unacceptable view on matters through opinions or acts of the fictional agents (narrator and/or protagonists). These debates also seem to point to certain expectations of the reader about the author that usually remain implicit. Because authors seem almost automatically subject to debate in the reception of novels that are qualified as controversial, I decided to take a closer look at what exactly is at stake here and why the author is explicitly involved in this debate. After all, these texts concern “merely” fictional events. In my opinion, this involves a unique characteristic of reading fiction that I discussed in Chapter 3, namely, an implicit mutual agreement between an author and reader of a fictional text. This so-called joint pretence basically holds that the author invites the reader to pretend that the events in the fictional world actually take place, and whenever the reader accepts this invitation, the implicit mutual agreement is in effect (Clark, 1996). This joint pretence agreement is similar to, for instance, the idea of a game of make-believe or fictional pact, which holds that an author invites a reader to play a game of make-believe, or invites him to adopt a relocation from the actual world to the textual world (Ryan, 1991; Walton, 1990). In my opinion, the implicit agreement on the reader’s part generates certain expectations about the (implied or empirical) author that are based on generic conventions and/or specific knowledge. The agreement implies that the reader grants the author a certain trust that his investment will reward him emotionally and cognitively, in reaching a sense of closure (cf. Tan, 1996; cf. Tan, 2008). Moreover, the reader has to trust the author that he is sincere in merely pretending, and has morals and values that are not questionable, i.e. morals and values that are shared by the reader. In addition, readers are expected to trust the author in that he or she will not invite them to imagine judgments or ideas that they find morally or ideologically repugnant and consequently make them accomplices. I have called this the default assumption of good behaviour. My premise was that if readers assume by default that the implied author is morally acceptable, then they should be able to discriminate between an immoral narrator and a presumably morally acceptable implied author. This immoral narrator will most likely put the joint pretence between author and reader under pressure. In effect, readers will be expected to generate inferences about the implied author’s moral position as well as his identity and intentions, such as: What are the intentions of this author? What is his
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moral position? Is the author still pretending, or is he putting his own ideas into the mouths of his fictional characters/narrator?

These hypotheses were tested in a pilot study and an experiment (Chapter 3). I manipulated two text samples taken from Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Elementary Particles*, which raised a lot of discussion about Houellebecq’s intentions and moral position. Both text versions (immoral and relatively neutral) were, again, presented without any information about the empirical author. Similar to the findings of the first study, results of this experiment suggested that, although readers do not have any information about the empirical author, they need a certain context, meaning that they read the text with the assumption that it has been written by someone with some intention. Thoughts that occurred during reading, and which were reported directly after reading the texts, showed affective reactions towards the first-person narrator and the implied author, as well as presumptions and questions about the meaning or intention of the text. Furthermore, support was found for the default assumption of good behaviour. In addition, texts with morally questionable actions or views that are represented by the text’s narrator made the readers question the implied author’s moral or ideological position. However, no convincing support could be found for the generation of inferences regarding the implied author’s intentions or identity. Readers who did wonder about the author’s identity or intention, seemed to be curious for different reasons than the immoral text content alone. Apparently they needed some contextual frame to interpret the text and decide whether there is, for instance, mutual knowledge (common ground) between reader and implied author. What is important, though, is that even if readers do not have information about an empirical author, they seem to construct an implied author representation. In the case of texts with a morally reprehensible narrator, readers generate inferences that refer to questions about the implied author’s moral position.

Effect of contextual information on the generation of author inferences (Chapter 4)

In the two experiments that I discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, I wanted to investigate the effect of contextual, i.e. biographical information, on the reading process. In other words, if it is taken for granted that readers create a representation of an implied author, I wanted to know whether readers construct a mental representation of an empirical author if they receive biographical information about this author, and whether this representation affects the reading process and their construction of an implied author. More specifically, I wanted to know whether readers construct separate representations of an empirical and an implied author and/or narrator if they are provided with biographical information about the empirical author that either is consistent or inconsistent with the narrator’s and/or implied author’s moral stance. What happens, for instance, when readers receive information about an empirical author from which it appears that this author is a very moral person, after which they read a text with a narrator that displays morally reprehensible views and/or actions? Will the joint pretence and the related trust be violated and will readers generate inferences about the author’s intentions and attitude? Methodologically, I hoped to find support for the assumption that readers generate author inferences on-line, during the comprehension process, i.e. the moment – by – moment process as opposed to post-comprehension processes (also see the next subsection).

In the field of discourse processing, researchers often use a (semantic) priming paradigm to measure the generation of these on-line inferences (cf. Chapter 4, introduction and § 2). Priming – in the context of linguistic processing – is the phenomenon that the speed with which a word is recognized increases if the word is preceded by a word or sentence that is (semantically) related. This word that has to be recognized, which is used as a so-called target, usually expresses the concept that captures the inference. For example, after reading

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The materials that were included in the first affective priming experiment (Chapter 4), and which functioned as text primes, were affect-laden text samples that were derived from Michel Houellebecq’s novels *Platform* and *Elementary Particles*. These original, “immoral” text samples were manipulated into relatively neutral text versions. Participants read both negative and relatively neutral text samples from a computer screen, but only one of two versions of each sample. Before they read these text samples, participants received information on their screen about either an immoral or moral fictitious author called Jean Nicholai, which functioned as author primes. In addition, the reading of each text sample was interrupted twice by the presentation of an evaluative adjective such as *aggressive* (on a different screen). Both the time (ms) that readers need to decide whether this adjective is positive or negative and the time that readers needed to read each sentence of the text samples were recorded (response latencies and reading times). Using the affective priming measurement, this experiment tested whether biographical information about the empirical author affects the reading process. If so, this should be reflected in an affective priming effect of the author and text information, as well as in reading times. For instance, a conflict between, on the one hand, information that readers derive from the text through the perspective of the first-person narrator (e.g. narrator abuses a young girl), and, on the other hand, biographical information about the empirical author (e.g. UNICEF ambassador), should result in readers’ puzzling about the author’s intentions and attitude. As a result, this puzzling should be reflected in longer reading times and response times. Results show that the information about the empirical author affected reading times, although the results merely attained a marginal level of significance. Furthermore, this information appears not to have affected response latencies. In addition, readers’ evaluations of the author were in line with the expectations. However, results of measurements of author evaluation before and after reading the texts showed significant differences. In methodological terms, the evaluative force of the author prime presumably declined due to text content, which would explain why I did not find the predicted affective priming effect. Possibly, because readers read both negative and relatively neutral text samples, their image of the implied author may have been moderate.

*The effect of more detailed contextual information on the generation of author inferences (Chapter 5)*

In a follow-up experiment (Chapter 5) I made some adjustments to the author primes, the design, and post-reading measurements of author and text evaluation with the aim of exploring in more detail readers’ mental representation of the empirical author, implied
author, and the text’s narrator. I also hoped to find more support for on-line generation of author inferences which should be reflected in an affective priming effect of author prime and in an effect on reading times. In contrast with the previous on-line experiment (Chapter 4), readers now read text samples with a narrator that was either consistent or inconsistent with the valence of the biographical information about the author, and this information was more detailed than in the previous experiment. Results, again, did not show an affective priming effect of the author primes, nor was an effect found on reading times. However, post-reading measurements of readers’ author evaluation showed interesting results that can shed some light on what happened during the process of reading. With concern to readers’ constructions of an empirical author, measurements of author evaluation directly after reading the biographical information (= before reading the text samples), reflect readers’ mental representation of the empirical author in terms of valence: a positive or negative image. Results were in line with the expectations: the immoral author generated a negative image and the moral author a positive image and differences were significant. Moreover, after reading the texts, readers – without being instructed before reading – recollected the most important aspects of the biographical information. This indicates that readers have constructed a representation of the empirical author. Measurements of author evaluation after reading, however, show effects of both the biographical information and text-internal information, as was reflected in significant main effects of the author and text prime conditions. This result could reflect readers’ constructions of an author concept that includes both an empirical author and an implied author representation. Another possibility is that evaluation of the author reflects readers’ representation of the empirical author (based on the biographical information) that has been affected by their image of the narrator and/or implied author (based on the text). In any case, the evaluation concerning the author seems to be the product of a complex process in which top-down and bottom-up processing – based on text-external (biographical) and text-internal information – take turns. Consequently, I cannot determine exactly what the reported author evaluation refers to.

Clearly, more research is needed to investigate under what specific conditions readers construct separate mental representations of an empirical author, an implied author, and a narrator. I will elaborate on some possibilities of future research in section 3. As for the affective priming paradigm, it seems that improvement of manipulation of text and author primes could increase the possibility of finding an affective priming effect. After all, an affective priming paradigm predicts that congruence in valence between prime and target will result in shorter response latencies. Yet, the text primes that I used in the experiment included negative vs. relatively neutral samples instead of clearly negative and positive text samples. Therefore, the congruence or incongruence is relative, in any case not as strong as when the text samples had been clearly positive or negative. However, as I discussed in Chapter 3, if I had made the relatively neutral text version diametrically opposed to the negative, immoral text version, I would have had to make the first-person narrator into an angel of some sort. Apart from the credibility problem that this option creates, it is also less interesting to read. This has to do with the intrinsic quality of literary texts that fictional characters with some deficits are desirable and make the texts appealing.

With concern to the author primes, I tried to improve the evaluative force of the primes that I used in the second on-line experiment (Chapter 5) by adding more detailed information from which an image arises of either an immoral or moral empirical author. In effect, I hoped to increase the contrast between the two versions. At the same time, I tried to enhance the credibility of the information by presenting it as a journalistic article. The effect, however, seems to be that even more interaction between author and text primes occurred, which was reflected in significant main effects of the two primes on author evaluation, and an interaction effect of the two primes on text evaluation. Possibly, this interaction between the
primes has resulted in a decline of evaluative force of both primes. Therefore, the affective priming paradigm in combination with a design that includes both an author and a text prime, seems not adequate to measure on-line author inferences, at least not if these should be reflected by an affective priming effect or in reading times. Obviously, other ways to measure (on-line) author inferences should be further explored.

In sum, the results imply that readers of literature read in a point-driven way, which means that they “implicitly realize that the text is an artefact, and therefore recognize the existence of an intentional being, who is responsible for it” (Vipond & Hunt, 1984: 7). In addition, these readers seem to construct a mental representation of the pragmatic context that includes an implied and/or empirical author representation, depending on whether or not they have any biographical or other contextual knowledge about the empirical author. This mental representation of an author concept can include features and characteristics of an author (identity), presumed communicative intentions, and in the case of literary texts with a morally reprehensible narrator, the representation can also include assumptions about an author’s moral position or attitude.

2. Implications for literary studies and discourse processes

The results of the empirical investigations have some theoretical and methodological implications for both literary studies and the study of discourse processes. Although some implications can contribute to theoretical or empirical discussions and findings of both fields, for reasons of clarity, I will discuss the implications for the two fields separately.

Literary studies

First of all, the results of the conducted empirical studies show that the poetical statement, that the author is irrelevant for the interpretation of literary texts, is untenable from a cognitive psychological view. Even if readers do not have any information about an empirical author they appear to read with the assumption that a creative figure with a set of plans and goals has written the text with some purpose or intention. Moreover, although the results of the empirical studies cannot tell us much about exactly how this is accomplished, the results do show that readers seem to construct a representation of an implied author. If readers do have biographical information about an empirical author, they do not exclude this information from their reading process. Instead, this information seems to affect readers’ reading process. Secondly, the framework that I presented can be useful in gaining a better understanding of literary reading processes through empirical research. More specifically, I think that in order to study readers’ assumptions about an author as a concept empirically, we need at least a theoretical distinction between an empirical and an implied author. Moreover, the results of this study show that these concepts are useful and workable if we define them from a cognitive psychological perspective, namely, as readers’ inferences that contribute to their construction of a mental representation of the communicative context.

I am aware though that the concept implied author has been and still is highly debated in narratology and theories of interpretation for its theoretical inconsistency (e.g. Kindt & Müller, 1999b; Nünning, 2005). According to Wayne Booth, the implied author is considered to be an image that the empirical author intentionally creates of him- or herself through the text. This image is usually a second and better self, i.e. without negative character traits (cf. § 2, first chapter). The reader’s task is to reconstruct this image from the text. Booth assumes that the (which is in fact Booth’s) construction of an implied author is indeed the
image that the empirical author intended to create through the text. In other words, he assumes that the implied author construction is a perfect copy of the intended implied author construction of the empirical author, which is theoretically problematic (cf. Chapter 1, § 2). Instead, I believe that readers construct a representation of an implied author and modify this image, based on information about an empirical author and their representation emerging from this information. In return, readers’ images of an implied author can also affect their representation of an empirical author. In both cases, however, these are modifications and by no means a perfect copy of each other.

In his article *Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother* (2005), Booth actually – probably unintentionally – shows that his construction of an implied author as opposed to his image of an empirical author is exactly what I have proposed in the preliminary framework: these are two separate representations that are constructed by a reader that can affect each other. Booth’s discussion of his reading of Sylvia Plath’s poems is a nice example of how a reader – in this case Wayne Booth – can construct a mental representation of an implied author based on the text. In addition, Booth uses his knowledge about the *empirical* author or poet Plath in order to signal a large difference between the empirical and implied author. On the one hand, there is Booth’s image of Plath that is based on biographical knowledge, i.e. she suffered from severe depressions and eventually committed suicide. On the other hand, there is the image of the implied author Plath that is based on her poems, i.e. Plath writes a beautiful poem about how contemplating suicide feels. Both images are nevertheless Booth’s subjective mental constructions. However, when Booth claims that Sylvia Plath has deliberately created a better second self through her poems, which Booth has successfully recognized, and which he greatly admires, his reasoning becomes problematic. How can he be certain that his construction of the implied author Plath is identical to Plath’s intention of creating a second self through her poems, presuming that she had that intention? Also problematic is his assumption that readers often misread literature if they fail to construct an implied author by interpreting the signals that the empirical author has included in the particular work, and thus indiscriminately assume that the empirical author is directly addressing the reader through the work. Again, how can a reader determine whether a so-called signal is deliberately and intentionally included by the empirical author? A reader can merely assume that an author has intentionally included a particular signal for some purpose. There is unmistakably a normative and moral element in Booth’s view: “great fiction educates ethically – unless we misread it” (p. 76) and his admiration for authors and poets who create better selves through their works (*literary masking*) is enormous: “…in wiping out the selves they do not like, the poets have created versions that elevate both their worlds and ours. Just think how impoverished our lives would be without such acting out of superior versions” (p.85). All in all, this example nicely shows that we need a theoretical distinction between an empirical and an implied author to describe the literary reading process.

I would like to make one remark though. My definition of the implied author in cognitive psychological terms, i.e. as a construct of an empirical reader, differs from a definition that some narratologists, such as Seymour Chatman, have proposed. The implied author is defined as the structure of the text’s norms and the concept is thus conflated with the text as a whole. At the same time it is positioned in the narratological communication model as a voiceless but inventing agent (“he is the principle that invented the narrator, along with anything else in the narrative”) that the reader has to reconstruct from the narrative (Chatman, 1978: 148). This position and definition have been criticized, because “an entity cannot be both a distinct agent in the sequence of narrative transmission and the text itself” (Nünning, 2005: 92). I have to add that there is not one position in narratology on the definition and position of the implied author concept, on the contrary, the concept is object of fierce debates (idem). At the same time, however, narratologists seem to need a concept in terms of a
constructive agent or authorial agency in order to account for, for instance, unreliable narrators. In this sense the agent is someone that designed the inconsistency in a text as a signal for unreliability (Phelan in Nünning, 2005).

**The need for separate concepts in understanding debates in literary criticism and reviewing**

What is more, I am convinced that we need both concepts not only to gain a better understanding of the literary reading process, but also to describe and understand the debates in literary criticism and reviewing. In addition, both concepts help us understand how literature functions and how we deal with literature and their authors. To give an example, a reviewer’s response to Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Elementary Particles* can be described according to the different elements of the framework: “This is a vision not only of someone who despairs of the human condition, but also, the reader of this repellent book is reminded, of someone who wants us to believe that the psychotic Bruno is a “pretty typical” human being” (Kakutani, 2000). This response nicely shows how the reviewer has apparently identified the narrator’s view as that of the implied and subsequently the empirical author. As I explained before, controversies around novels often show a lack of distinction between an implied and an empirical author; the empirical author is frequently held directly responsible for his character’s views. This seems to refer to an idea of ownership that the author has, the text becomes his property. On the appearance of his novel *Platform*, the empirical author Houellebecq was, again, questioned about the views of his fictional characters, in this case, the attack of his central character on the Islam. It did not help that when the empirical author Houellebecq was asked in an interview whether he shared his character’s views, he answered, “Yes”. Nevertheless, the distinction between, on the one hand, the image of an implied author that arises from the text and, on the other hand, the empirical author who takes part in a public debate, also protects the empirical author in juridical terms from being prosecuted and held responsible for what his fictional agents express in the fictional work. After all, both Houellebecq and the Dutch authors Gerard Reve and Willem Frederik Hermans, were acquitted by the French and Dutch court respectively. Although the empirical author and the image that arises from the text (implied author), in juridical terms, seem separate concepts, they are, of course, not completely independent of each other. An implied author construct cannot exist without an empirical author: after all, it is this empirical author who has written the text, from which a reader constructs an implied author representation.

**Five possible author constructions: an example**

What I want to point out is that the preliminary framework theoretically accounts for readers’ constructions of mental representations of an author construct in the following way; text-internal information contributes to readers’ representation of an implied author, while text-external information, such as biographical information, contributes to the construction of an image of an empirical author. However, like all frameworks and models, this is likely a simplified representation of both the literary reading process and what happens in debates in literary criticism and reviewing. I would now like to elaborate on readers’ constructed author representations, its possible aspects and concepts, as on the several information sources that can contribute to these constructions. Using my personal reading experience as an example, I will present five types of author constructions that include an implied and/or empirical author representation, depending on (a combination of) different information sources, e.g. the text, contextual information, and other reading experiences.

First of all, there is the text that provides me as a reader with all sorts of information and impressions that can contribute to my image of an implied author. For instance, in 1994 I
read *City of Glass* from *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster. It was the first story that I read by Auster and at that point I did not know anything about the empirical author Auster. Yet, based on that particular story, I created an image of this implied author Auster: a very intelligent and fascinating American male person with a fascination for the way language shapes and determines our idea of identity and reality. As I did not know anything about the empirical Auster at that time, my image of Auster, the implied author, was entirely based on the text. Interestingly, this text included a detailed description of one of the characters in the story which is referred to as Paul Auster: “a tall dark fellow in his mid-thirties, with rumpled clothes and a two-day beard. In his right hand, fixed between his thumb and first two fingers, he held an uncapped fountain pen, still poised in a writing position” (Auster, 1990: 111). Like me, the participants that took part in the first two empirical studies (Chapter 2 and 3) also did not know anything about the empirical author or the socio-historical context of the text that they read. Still, they were able to construct a – sometimes detailed – image of an implied author and his (or her) presumed intentions. Exactly what textual elements contribute to this image is a question that needs further empirical investigation. In my case, the description of “Paul Auster”, the character, largely contributed to my image, but there is obviously more to it. Besides, most texts do not include a description of a character that bears the same name as the empirical author and is a writer by profession. I will elaborate on possible textual factors that can affect reader’s constructions of author concepts in the next section, i.e. *some ideas about future research*.

Secondly, earlier reading experiences can also contribute to readers’ image of an implied author, and in a way these can form a collection of implied authors. After I read *City of Glass* and had created an image of let us say implied author Auster#1, I read the other two stories in *The New York Trilogy* and created implied author Auster#2 and Auster#3 with similar and different aspects compared to implied author Auster#1. Each time that I read another story written by Paul Auster, I create yet another implied author. Together, these different and sometimes – partly similar – implied authors form a rich image of a constructed author, and all are connected by the same name: Paul Auster. In a way, this seems similar to Foucault’s author function, namely as a means of identification; the name Auster groups together a number of texts and differentiates them from others. However, the author’s function claimed by Foucault becomes a property of the text or discourse and is culturally constructed. It is not a relation between a text and a (unknown) person attributed by a reader (Foucault, 2002 [1979]).

Thirdly, other persons’ experiences can contribute to an image of an implied and/or empirical author as well. In a way, all literary reviews are reports of the reviewer’s author construction, including presumed intentions. Usually, this constructed author consists of the reviewer’s image of the empirical author based on biographical or other contextual information, or maybe on personal encounters as well. In addition, the construction likely consists of the constructed image of the implied author based on the novel that is being reviewed. As reviewers often have read more works of a particular author, unless of course the work is an author’s début, other constructed implied authors are included in the review, or are at least part of the reviewer’s author construction, as well. A nice example is a reviewer from *The New York Times* who says: “Sometimes I think of Paul Auster as a D.J. […] I mean the late-night, freewheeling FM kind who are pretty rare now -- the ones who could talk all night between cuts, who never lacked for a story, an observation, a joke, a digression or a crackpot theory. That transmitted sound of the human voice in the middle of the night -- just talking, not haranguing or advising -- is the sound, to me, of the dirty world continuing to spin, raw proof that we’re never really that alone […]”. She explains that her image is based on a theme that she often signals in Auster’s works; “vital persistence of story -- stories that twist and turn back on themselves in never-ending ambiguity” (D’Erasmo, 2003).
Inter-medial experiences, meaning one-dimensional experiences such as reading an interview as part of a book review and/or watching an interview on television adds a forth dimension to readers’ constructions of an empirical author. For instance, in a review of Paul Auster’s *Brooklyn Follies*, reviewer James Campbell gives a detailed description of Auster’s apartment in Brooklyn and the typewriter on which Auster types all his books: “Above the piano, which hosts a mass of photo-graphs, hangs a set of paintings of the famous typewriter. The object itself has been the subject of a small book. A model typewriter, no bigger than an inkwel, sits on the coffee table beside which Auster reclines, chainsmoking small Schimmelpenninck cigars” (Campbell, 2005). This image, as well as Auster’s remarks during the interview, has added another layer to my constructed author representation of Auster: it now consists of an empirical author and several implied authors.

Finally, personal meetings with authors can, of course, also contribute to readers’ image of an author, i.e. a mental representation of an empirical author. Suddenly, the possibility presents itself to communicate with the author face to face, even if that communication is minimal. In May 2008, Paul Auster visited Amsterdam to read from his latest novel *Man in the Dark*, that – at that time – is due to be published, but appears in a Dutch translation first. For the first time I was physically present in the same room as Paul Auster. I could hear him talk in his typical rasping, dark, but warm voice, and watched his gestures, noticed how his black hair is now peppered with grey. After the reading, visitors could get in line for a book signing. Although I had brought a copy of *City of Glass* with me, I hesitated till the very last minute whether I would want to get face to face with Auster or not. Somehow, I was afraid of ruining the magic, meaning my carefully built image of both the empirical author and my collection of implied authors. After waiting for half an hour (because of my hesitating I had ended up at the end of the line that nevertheless kept growing) I could finally climb the stairs to Auster who was seated across a small table. I remember apologizing for the “shabby” look of the copy, but this was the first book that I read and I was still a student then. Auster slowly looked up and said “That’s alright” before signing the book. With a strange mixture of arousal and disappointment I walked out of the building. What exactly was I thinking, I thought afterwards; that Auster would start an extensive conversation while having the people behind me wait? A couple of days later I read in an article that Auster is very shy when it comes to meeting his reader audience. This information contributed to a sense of gratitude that Auster had actually replied to my somewhat incoherent stuttering. I am certain that I am just one of many readers who admire a particular author, and the many book signings merely support the idea that readers for some reason desire to meet the flesh-and-blood authors. What I want to show with this personal anecdote is that these personal experiences or meetings add another layer to the author construct, in this case to the representation of the empirical author. In turn, this rich representation can affect the subsequent reading process and experience as well.

I am sure that when I am going to read *Man in the Dark*, all aspects of my constructed author image of Auster will be part of a complex process in which bottom-up and top-down processing will take turns. Some elements in the text will point to and trigger certain aspects of my biographical and contextual knowledge, which, in turn, can affect the way that I read and interpret the text. However, it is fairly possible that over the course of time I, and other readers, will no longer notice that we construct another implied Paul Auster representation. Instead, we adjust our constructed author image based on the text at hand, and we will probably only be aware of the fact that we construct an implied author representation when this image conflicts with our author construction. The results of the experiments that I discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 suggest that, even in relatively simple situations in which readers have the text and biographical information from an article as information sources, a complex
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

process occurs in which readers’ image of an empirical author affects their image of an implied author and evaluation of the text, as well as the other way around.

Of course, other kinds of interactions are possible between reader’s constructions of implied and empirical authors as well. For instance, sometimes empirical authors seem to try to manipulate readers’ image of the implied (and empirical) author by taking part in discussions about their work. The Dutch author Connie Palmen, for example, felt that she had to defend her novel *Lucifer* in front of an audience, after her novel caused huge turmoil in the Dutch press. She had been accused for character assassination of a Dutch composer by suggesting that he has murdered his wife. Her main character and fallen angel is explicitly based on this person, as she explains so herself in a postscript of the novel. In the public interview and lecture, Palmen explained the genesis of her novel, and she complained that many reviewers had not noticed her references to Joost van den Vondel’s *Lucifer* and accused some of them of moralistic criticism. In a way, she tried to shape her readers’ image of both the implied and empirical author by explaining how they had to interpret her work, and what her intentions had been. What is more, walking the fine line between fiction and reality is actually a central theme in her work as well as in her interviews.

The fictional aspect of literary texts

The examples that I have provided so far all concern fictional texts, and in all but one empirical study, I have included exclusively samples taken from novels that are generally qualified as literary fiction. But how important is the fact that these texts concern fiction? Could my findings as easily have been found for non-fictional texts? My answer would be no: there is a unique characteristic of fictional texts that directly connects its readers to an (implied) author, and that is a reader’s acceptance of an (implied) author’s invitation to jointly pretend that the events in the fictional world are taking place (cf. Clark, 1996). Remember the text sample that I used in the beginning of the third chapter, which started with: “I had been sick for a long time. When the day came for me to leave hospital, I barely knew how to walk anymore, could barely remember who I was supposed to be”. What makes this text fiction and not non-fiction is this conventional agreement between an author and his readership. When the reader accepts the author’s invitation to jointly pretend or play a game of make-believe, the author no longer is the same person as the one speaking. As readers, we automatically shift to another frame in which common rules of conversation (which are also applied to non-fictional texts) do not apply, such as the Gricean postulate “be brief” or “be truthful”. In a way, all communicative acts can be regarded as joint actions in which participants have to cooperate and coordinate. And they would not be able to cooperate if their activities were not grounded in a shared background based on socio-cultural information and personal backgrounds called *common ground* (Clark, 1996). For the reading of fiction this common ground that includes conventional knowledge (e.g. joint pretence) is crucial, because otherwise authors would constantly have to explain that they merely make-believingly assert that the described events take place. This constant reminding the reader of the context would consequently ruin the reader’s reading experience, i.e. getting immersed into the fictional world (cf. Chapter 3).

However, what is special about fictional texts – besides an indirect communication compared to face-to-face communication – is that the implicit agreement between an author and a reader immediately adds a *layer* to the basic communication level. The author no longer is the direct speaker of the text, and therefore, trying to understand his intentions becomes thwarted. In addition, fictional – and especially literary – texts usually include multiple layers, and actions can occur at different levels with different domains and participants. As authors and readers are not co-present at the time of reading, and readers have to keep track of all the
layers and movement between these layers, recognition of an (implied) author’s – presumed – signals and calling upon common ground seems of importance. Presumably more than when the reading involves non-fiction.\(^2\) What is more, I have claimed that the implicit mutual agreement, the joint pretence, generates certain expectations on the reader’s part towards the author. The reader has to trust that the author is merely pretending. Although there are some clear conventional fictional markers, such as “Once upon a time”, most texts do not have such clear markers and the reader thus has to trust on the conventional agreement that the author is merely pretending.\(^3\) In general, readers can imagine all sorts of fictional worlds, and authors call upon assumed common ground to help the reader to build a lively and detailed fictional world. In my opinion, the implicit mutual agreement from the reader’s part also has an ethical or moral dimension; it implies that readers generally trust the author in not inviting them to imagine a fictional world that deviates from their moral values and norms; offering them a view on their world that they do not want to embrace. In other words, they trust that the author will not call upon a – presumed – common ground that the reader does not want to share with the author. I have called this the default of good behaviour. Controversies often show readers’ reluctance to share the (implied) author’s view on their world. The findings of the empirical studies that I conducted suggest that when this agreement and trust in the (implied) author is heavily challenged through morally reprehensible views or actions displayed by a first person narrator, that readers question the (implied) author’s moral position. If these texts had been non-fictional, the author and narrator would consequently have been the same person, and there would not have been a matter of trust that got violated or challenged, because there would not have been an implicit agreement or invitation to join a game of make-believe. I expect that readers would judge the author to be out of his mind or provocative, as some of the participants in the experiments did, e.g. a racist and a nutcase, a dirty old man that needs to be taken care of (Chapter 5).

**Discourse processes**

The present study intended to contribute to the understanding of cognitive processing of narrative fiction, and in particular literary fiction (e.g. Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003; Zwaan, 1993). More specifically, my goal was to gain a better understanding of what role readers’ assumptions about an author, e.g. his or her identity, communicative intentions, and attitude, play during the process of reading. In cognitive psychological terms the question was whether readers generate author inferences as part of the literary reading process.

In the field of discourse processes very little research has examined readers’ generation of so-called author intent and attitude inferences (cf. Graesser et al., 1997b). The findings of the current study first of all suggest that this class of inferences is incomplete; readers’ generated author inferences are not limited to the author’s attitude or motive in writing, or to the point that the author is making, and the text that elicits these inferences is not necessarily the entire passage or text (Graesser et al., 1994). The results suggest that readers of literary texts can generate inferences concerning the author’s identity (features and characteristics, personality traits) and the author’s presumed communicative intentions, including a presumed moral or point. In the case of literary texts with a morally reprehensible

\(^2\) I do not suggest, however, that there is no implicit joint agreement between author and reader involved in non-fictional texts. Indeed, I think that the agreement from the reader’s perspective generates the expectation that the author is sincere in presenting facts instead of fiction.

\(^3\) People appear to be fairly able to discriminate between the genre of fiction and non-fiction. For instance, Hayward (1994) offers empirically attested support for the claim that people can determine very fast to which genre a text sample belongs: to fiction or non-fiction (history texts) (Hayward, 1994). Which surface or semantically related characteristics readers use to make this distinction is still a question that needs further empirical research.
narrator, the representation can also include assumptions about the moral position or attitude of an author. When exactly readers generate inferences about the text’s theme or point and how these inferences exactly relate to, or can be distinguished from, readers’ inferences about an author’s communicative intentions, is a question that needs further empirical investigation. As I discussed in Chapter 1, in my opinion, the point or moral reflects the author’s presumed stance or position towards a certain theme. I can imagine that the generation of thematic inferences can – eventually – point to an (implied) author, i.e. his position towards a theme. In addition, readers of literature may be more inclined to relate a particular inferred theme or point to an (implied) author if they have knowledge about other literary works by the same author. These readers share, from their point of view, a richer common ground with an (implied) author, and are possibly less hesitant to interpret certain text elements in terms of an author’s intentional signals that point to a certain theme or moral.

In addition to my remarks about the definition of author intent and attitude inferences, the definition of the concept inference itself, i.e. information that is activated during reading but that is not explicitly stated in the text, may be too narrow. At least, if it exclusively includes inferences that either explain, associate or predict and provide answers to why, what, how and what happens next questions (Trabasso & Magliano, 1996). Consequently, comments or positions that refer to the (implied) author, and which constitutes the question itself rather than providing an answer to a question, would not be considered as an inference. However, if a reader would say “I wonder why the author described Gabriel so extensively” the reader does use information that is not stated in the text and relate this to the context model, i.e. the author (cf. Chapter 2). The same is true for readers who, based on certain elements in the text, wonder about the author’s identity, intentions and moral position (cf. Chapter 3).

As for the status of this class of inferences, that is whether readers generate these inferences on-line, the findings of the present study cannot be decisive. What measures and tasks can uncover comprehension processes and representations that are constructed on-line has in discourse processes been subject to debate which is far from being settled (Graesser et al., 1997b). At this point I can say that results of off-line measurements, which show that readers have constructed a context model that includes an author representation, and results of on-line measurements, i.e. think-aloud protocols (although see the discussion in Chapter 2) and reading times, suggest that readers, at some point during the reading process, have generated inferences concerning the author’s identity, intentions and/or attitude. Hopefully, future research will contribute to answering the question whether and under what conditions readers generate on-line inferences about an (implied and/or empirical) author’s intentions, identity, and attitude.

From a constructionist theoretical point of view there are reasons to be pessimistic about the probability that author intent and attitude inferences are generated on-line during narrative text comprehension (Graesser et al., 1994 and Chapter 1). The constructionist theory predicts that only few inferences will be generated on-line during the comprehension of narrative text, and author inferences are not one of these classes. However, these predictions only hold under specific conditions. If the reader is convinced that the text is “inconsiderate” (lacks global coherence and a message), he is assumed to abandon attempts for search-after-meaning (Graesser et al., 1994). As literary texts are considered to be “inconsiderate”, in the sense that they require a much greater effort from readers than considerate texts, it is possible that readers of literary texts indeed generate author inferences. Moreover, these presumptions

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I would not say that literary texts lack global coherence and a message, though. Global coherence and a presumed message are likely more difficult to construct from literary texts than from texts with, for instance, explicit elements of text organization and explication of ideas. I therefore prefer to use a different definition of “inconsiderate” (see Chapter 1, § 4).
have not been tested empirically (cf. Chapter 1, section 4). What is more, readers of literature, i.e. readers who activate a developed literary control system (cf. Chapter 1, section 4), are expected to generate relatively many pragmatic inferences. The goal that is presumably generated once the literary control system is in effect, is to “construct a point for the text” and a sub-goal may be to “carefully inspect the surface structure for signals about the goals of the author and the point of the text and use these signals to form pragmatic inferences” (Zwaan, 1996: 156 ff.). Both goals are similar to Vipond and Hunt’s assumptions about a point-driven reading strategy (see Chapter 1), which include that these readers are expected to explain the narrative surface in terms of authorial intentions (Vipond & Hunt, 1984). Findings of the present study provide some support for the assumption that readers of literature read in a point-driven way (cf. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). However, more empirical research is needed to provide additional support for the above-mentioned assumptions.

Finally, the field of discourse processing generally distinguishes several levels of representation that are constructed when individuals read a (narrative) text. One of these levels is the situation model that is the content or the micro-world that the text is about, including constructions of a narrative text’s characters. In addition, readers are assumed to build a model of the communicative context in which they are involved (a context model). Pragmatic agents, such as the narrator and writer as well as the narratee and reader, are assumed to be part of the communicative context in which the text is embedded and consequently can end up in a reader’s presentation of that context. On the other hand, there are narrator-types that amalgamate pragmatic and character agents. Therefore, it is possible that both models, to some extent, will overlap. Although researchers in the field of discourse processing generally assume that context crucially influences the structures and processing of spoken and written discourse, context models have long been neglected in the psychology of text processing and only recently gained theoretical attention (Van Dijk, 1999, 2004, 2006). There is still much that we do not know about context models, such as how readers construct these models, how context models are structured, and how they function, i.e. constrain and control discourse comprehension (and production) (Van Dijk, 2006). It is assumed, though, that readers’ presumptions about the goals and intentions of the communicative participants, as well as mutual or shared knowledge, are a prominent component of context models (idem: 171). Based on the findings as well as some theoretical considerations that I discussed in Chapter 1 and 3, I expect that in literary reading processes the implicit mutual agreement between author and reader will play an important role in the construction of readers’ context models, because it temporarily anchors the communication situation and is part of shared knowledge or common ground. Presumably, readers of literary texts use this and other – presumed – shared knowledge to call upon during the reading process in order to keep track of the several communication layers, but also to signal stylistic features, tone and diction (narrative surface) and explain these in terms of authorial intentions (cf. Vipond & Hunt, 1984).

Finally, the context model is expected to specify relevant information to derive from the text and hence what to include in the situation model (idem 1999: 134). In this sense, the model is assumed to function as a controlling mechanism which seems much like the above-mentioned literary control system. However, at the same time it refers to a discourse participant’s mental construction of the communicative context and in this sense it is comparable to other levels of representations. Future research will be needed to get a better understanding of how these models – in the context of literary communication – are constructed and in what way they affect other levels of representation.
3. Some ideas about future research

The present work is a first attempt to investigate reader’s assumptions about an author during the process of reading literature. Readers’ cognitive processes that are involved in the reading of literature will likely vary with the characteristics of the individual reader, the nature and characteristics of the text, and the context in which the reading takes place. In effect, these three factors will presumably also affect readers’ constructions of a context model, including their representation of an author concept. We still know little though about, for instance, what specific text, reader, and contextual characteristics affect these processes. In the empirical studies that I have conducted I have included some of these factors, e.g. reader expertise and a textual moral dimension, but obviously more empirical research is needed to gain a better understanding of what and how particular factors affect the literary reading process, as well as readers’ representations of a pragmatic context. I will briefly discuss some potential reader and textual characteristics.

Research into reader characteristics in constructing author representations

Findings of the empirical study that I discussed in Chapter 2 showed that expert readers generated most author inferences and seemed more aware of a textual level, i.e. the text as an artifact, as they generated relatively many text generations compared to non-expert readers. Some caution in interpreting the results should be exercised though, since the study included a small number of participants. Results from other empirical research show that expert readers are able to use multiple, specific reading strategies in order to create a context in which author, text, and reader are positioned and interact. Expert readers viewed the text as a result of deliberate choices made by the author and their perception of these choices affected their understanding of the text (e.g. Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Haas & Flower, 1988; Shanahan, 1992; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). Also, reader expertise in terms of readers’ development of a literary control system and related reading strategies, will probably affect the extent to which they signal certain text elements, such as narrative perspective, stylistic devices, or certain aspects of the narrative surface, and use these elements to generate author inferences. These are premises that need further empirical investigation.

Narrator visibility and foregrounding as possible text factors in constructing author representations

Different textual characteristics can probably contribute to a reader’s representation of an (implied) author and his or her presumed intentions. In Chapter 1 I have briefly discussed two empirical studies concerning readers’ assumptions about an author’s intentions; one included reader’s recognition of (the object of) satire, and the other included reader’s understanding of metaphors (Gibbs et al., 1991; Pfaff & Gibbs, 1997). I would like to mention two kinds of textual characteristics that may contribute to readers’ generation of author inferences, and subsequently to their construction of a contextual model that includes a representation of an (implied) author. The findings of the empirical studies that I conducted firstly suggest that the modus of narration or the narrative perspective may be of importance, and secondly, so-called foregrounding, or evaluation points, also referred to as inference invitations or signals can be mentioned (cf. Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003; Clark, 1996; Miall & Kuiken, 1999; Mukařovský, 1964; Peer, 1986; Shklovsky, 1965; Vipond & Hunt, 1989).
NARRATOR VISIBILITY

To start with the first text characteristic, I believe that the modus of narration, the perspective that we adopt as we move and act in the fictional world, largely contributes to our construction of an implied author, especially if we have no biographical information about the empirical author and the text is all there is. Exactly how narrative perspective can contribute to readers’ constructions of an implied author is a question that needs to be addressed in future research. The few available empirical studies that address this question suggest that readers tend to attribute certain characteristics of narrators, i.e. gender, to implied authors (Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003).

In the experiments of the present study I transformed text samples from literary novels into first-person narration to help readers construct a representation of the narrator and his views in order to create a discrepancy with default assumptions about the implied and/or empirical author (Chapters 3 – 5). Not much empirical studies have investigated readers’ ability to perceive different types of narrators however. The few studies that are available suggest that under normal reading conditions readers do not construct third-person narrators, whereas first-person narrator are more salient to readers than normal character agents (Graesser et al., 1997a). Other studies have shown that readers are quite good at keeping track of who said what and who knows what in literary short stories, except in the case of third-person narrators (Graesser et al., 1999: 172).

It may be interesting though to explore empirically to what extent extradiegetic, impersonal narrators affect readers’ constructions of separate representations of a narrator and an (implied) author. As these types of narrators imply that “there is no identifiable person to whom one can ascribe the views and beliefs of the narrator”, I would expect that readers – with no well-developed literary control system – ascribe these presumed views to the (implied) author (Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003: 64). An empirical question could thus be: Can non-expert readers, who read a literary text that includes a story which is told from the perspective of an extradiegetic, impersonal narrator, distinguish between a narrator and an implied author? Will they construct separate representations of the narrator and the implied author? Or will the narrator and implied author representation be blurred in one representation? In addition, this group of non-expert readers could be compared to expert readers with regard to constructed text and context representations. Will expert readers be able to signal this type of narrator, and distinguish the narrator from an implied author? Based on the above-mentioned findings, I expect that only expert readers will be able to signal this type of narrator and separate him or her from the implied author.

Moreover, the narratological discussion, about how we can determine whether a narrator is unreliable and whether we need an implied author concept, suggests another interesting line of investigation. Unreliable narrators come in different sorts, as Ansgar Nünning has pointed out: “Most would agree that it does make a difference whether we have an ethically or morally deviant narrator who provides a sober and factual veracious account of the most egregious or horrible events, which, from his point of view are hardly noteworthy, or a “normal” narrator who is just a bit slow on the uptake and whose flawed interpretations of what is going on reveal that he or she is a benighted fool” (Nünning, 2005: 93). It would be interesting to investigate to what extent readers will construct separate representations of a narrator and an (implied) author, if the narrator turns out to be unreliable. For instance, one could think of a narrator that inaccurately presents (well-known) historical, traumatic events. Will readers assume that the narrator is mistaken, or the (implied) author, or both? Will readers assume that the (implied) author has deliberately created this narrator for some purpose? Perhaps literary readers, i.e. with a developed literary control system, in particular
will attribute (artistic) communicative intentions to an (implied) author. These are all empirical questions that need to be addressed in future research.

**FOREGROUNDING**

As for the second textual characteristic, in particular the findings of the first empirical study (Chapter 2), suggest that certain elements in a text that are foregrounded can contribute to readers’ ideas of an (implied) author’s communicative intentions. By *foregrounded* I mean that particular elements attract readers’ attention, because they deviate from the text’s norm or form a kind of parallelism because of repetition. In a way, these textual elements can be understood as discrepancies with regard to readers’ expectations that are based on conventional knowledge and/or their constructed text representation. Participants of this study (Chapter 2) seemed to interpret these elements as meaningful signals that can point to the text’s meaning. They also referred to these segments when asked to point to those text elements that contributed, in their opinion, to their idea of an implied author’s intention. An example of such a segment is an extensive description of the character Gabriel in the sample taken from James Joyce’s *The Dead*, the moral at the end of Borges’s text *Everything and I*, or the repetition of colours in the text by Stephen King and Peter Straub. Other elements that attracted readers’ attention and made them curious about the author’s identity were elements that refer to the text’s – presumed – context, e.g. the name Desplechin (Chapter 3). Future studies could explore what textual elements trigger readers to generate author inferences and which elements contribute to readers’ constructions of a context model. My guess is that these textual elements will mostly be semantic in nature, meaning that it may be difficult to identify syntactic markers that can contribute to readers’ generation of author inferences and constructions of a context model.

**Methodological difficulties and challenges**

There is one important issue that I have not fully addressed yet and that is: how well can we investigate readers’ generation of author inferences in the context of literary reading empirically? As I have mentioned above, it turned out to be difficult to measure generated author inferences on-line. Only a modest effect of biographical information on reading times seems to indicate that this information in some way has been activated during the reading process. However, off-line measurements show that readers have constructed a mental representation of the communicative context (context model) that includes an author representation. This implies that readers have generated author inferences at some point during the process of reading that have contributed to their construction of a context model. At what point during the reading process, i.e. the moment- by-moment process as opposed to post-comprehension processes, these inferences are being generated, the content of these inferences as well as on what textual or extra-textual information they are based, remain questions that need to be addressed in future research.

The affective priming paradigm appears not to be fit to measure the generation of on-line author inferences in the context of reading (literary) texts. Apparently, my choice of designs of the two experiments (Chapter 4 and 5) and the materials that functioned as primes differed too much from the classic paradigm. Possibly, the expected effect of author information could not be measured because the interval between the presentation of the author prime (biographical information about the empirical author) and the target was too long. What is more, readers’ information about the (implied and/or empirical) author is not a factor that is constantly activated during reading and it may be very short-lived. Therefore it is important to present the target word immediately after a presumed evaluation is being activated. Because I
presented the target word not immediately after the sentence in which I expected readers to activate certain author information, it is possible that the effect disappeared at the time that I presented the target word. In that sense the primes that I used differ from classical primes, such as single words or pictures. These types of primes are presented only for a short duration that is assumingly enough for participants to activate the related evaluation. More theoretical research is needed on the basis of which more specific predictions can be formulated about the location of the points in the text at which readers are expected to activate information about an author concept. In addition, other on-line measurements should be looked for to measure these methodologically complex inferences.

Moreover, what constellation of concepts constitutes this author representation is another question that needs some theoretical and empirical consideration. My experience is that the theoretical distinction between reader’s mental construction of an implied author and an empirical author appears to be difficult to operationalize and that the complexity of the literary reading process in which top-down and bottom-up processing take turns is hard to capture. Results of the first empirical study showed that when readers try to verbalize the thoughts that occur during reading, their protocols show conflagrations of several levels and concepts of communication, such as the implied author, the narrator, or they formulate assumptions about the text’s theme or point in terms of the text as an intentional agent. Presumably short-lived and automatically generated author inferences cannot be measured by the think-aloud method.

In addition, findings of the last two experiments (Chapter 4 and 5) have shown that if you provide readers with information about an empirical author (in these designs), it becomes too complex to measure readers’ constructions of an implied author construction, because readers’ mental representation of an empirical author seems to be interfering with their image of an implied author based on the text. In effect, responses to questions about readers’ evaluation of an author become ambiguous: they can refer to both readers’ constructions of an empirical author representation that is based on both biographical and textual information, or a constructed author representation that includes both an empirical and implied author representation. Perhaps there remains a grey area in which readers blur several author representations, much as my own multifaceted construction of Paul Auster includes theoretically different author concepts, but during reading these may be experienced as one fuzzy image.

Another theoretical distinction that appears to be difficult to operationalize is between readers’ constructions of a text’s point or theme and representations of an author concept in terms of identity and moral position. How exactly presumed intentions and representations of author concepts relate to each other is another question that needs to be addressed. On the one hand it seems that the literary reading process is intention-driven; readers read with the expectation that someone has written the text with some purpose or intention. However, this relation between the author as an intentional being, as a person with certain personality traits and representations of presumed intentions appears difficult to operationalize. The results of the verbal protocols (Chapter 2) as well as reported thoughts after reading as text sample (Chapter 3), for instance, showed that readers formulate questions that refer to the text’s point or theme in terms of “what is the story/it/this about?” or “I think it’s about...”, without referring to an author. Maybe these expressions are very much conventionalized and readers are not aware of how their presumptions about an author’s communicative intentions shape their reading process. Furthermore, especially readers without a particular literary reading competence may not be accustomed to verbalize their ideas about possible intentions in terms of “I think that the author wants to...”. In addition, results of the experiment that have been discussed in Chapter 3 show that readers questioned the implied author’s moral stance if the text included a morally reprehensible narrator, however, no significant differences between
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

the text conditions were found for thoughts that referred to the implied author's intentions or identity. Here is another methodological challenge, because by asking for readers’ considerations about an author’s identity, intentions, or moral position, the impression may be given that these are separate and independent concepts. Readers’ responses to these questions can only reflect what arises to their consciousness. Therefore, it is possible that they indeed generated inferences concerning an author’s communicative intentions or his identity and moral position, but did so unconsciously. After all, some have argued that understanding and attributing intentions is crucial for engaging in everyday communicative activities (e.g. Dennett, 1987; Gibbs, 1999; Searle, 1975). It is also possible that the above-mentioned theoretical distinction needs to be reconsidered; readers’ inferences about an author’s moral position may include assumptions about the identity and intentions as well. Perhaps that readers (of literature) automatically, and by default, attribute intentions to a person, i.e. an author, and subsequently try to find signals in the text that can help them to make presumptions about what those communicative intentions might be. Immoral text content has shown to point to the author’s moral position, and possibly in terms of an author’s intentions with a moral dimension.

Obviously, from a methodological perspective, the measurement of author inferences is rather complex, and much work lies ahead of us, including some methodological challenges in finding ways to measure on-line author inferences, and to make the interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing during the literary reading process more visible.

Author constructions in other art forms

The framework that I presented in this book was first of all intended to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in literary communication. Nevertheless, I think that the framework can be useful to the reception of other media or art forms as well. It would be interesting to explore to what extent recipients of other art forms differ from readers of (literary) fiction in constructing the different levels and participants in the communication model. For example, like prose, poetry has a communicational structure similar to the narratological communication model with a text-internal agency who acts as the subject, originator, or voice of the text. Theoretically, this speaker has to be distinguished from the empirical speaker, the poet. It would be interesting to investigate whether readers of poetry interpret the poem as an expression of an intentional subject, and to what extent they differentiate this speaker from the poet.

The framework could also be helpful to learn more about how recipients of art create an image of the artist and his or her intentions based on the artwork in addition to an image of the artist based on biographical information. An interesting example is the famous street artist known by the name Banksy, whose often satirical pieces of graffiti art, such as the girl with balloons on Israel’s highly debated West Bank barrier (Balloon Debate), have popped up unannounced on and in buildings across the world. These pieces of graffiti art are highly valued in the art world. This is reflected in the financial value as well; Banksy’s work attracts 6-figure price tags. However, nobody, except for his agent, knows the identity of this “guerilla artist”, and his fiercely-guarded identity only seems to add to his subversive appeal. Last year, the English newspaper Main on Sunday claimed to have discovered the true identity of Banksy, who presumably is a 34 year old man from Bristol who visited an expensive private school when he was a schoolboy. Interestingly, it was speculated that the discovery would not only have judicial implications (claims for damages), but possibly would also dissolve the mystery surrounding his being an artist, and may even have an effect on the value of his work: “Banksy was duister, spannend, mysterieus, en vooral: van de straat. Nu is hij een mid-dertiger met een keurig kostschoolverleden. Het effect daarvan op de verkoopwaarde van zijn
werk kan groot zijn” [Banksy used to be obscure, exciting, mysterious, and most of all: streetwise. And now he turns out to be someone in his mid-thirties with a decent boarding-school history] (Zeil, 2008). Apparently, (some) people prefer to hold on to their created image of the implied artist, the street artist, and do not like the image of an empirical artist that is hard to unite with their mental representation of the implied artist. Banksy himself said once in a telephone interview: “…it’s a pretty safe bet that the reality of me would be a crushing disappointment to a couple of 15-year-old kids out there” (Verkaik, 2008).

The framework can also be applied to viewers of film, although this is of course somewhat more complex in the sense that there usually are multiple participants that realize a joint pretence. The director, the scriptwriter, the editor, the cameraman, and the person in charge of the cinematography, to name a few, together with a large collection of cinematic devices that they can use, all contribute to the way a particular story is communicated to its viewers. There is not a single “author” (see the debate on cinematic authorship in (Chatman, 1978)). In addition, we actually see the characters and the actors who play them. Together with all kinds of cinematic devices, such as unobtrusive camera work, this adds to our immersion into the fictional world and temporal illusion. Consequently, from the viewer’s perspective the director moves towards the background. At least, as long as there are no discrepancies between what we see and our expectations with concern to, e.g., style and generic knowledge or coherence breaks in the story. Results of a pilot study suggest that viewers tend to solve such a discrepancy by attributing a meaning in terms of an author’s intention, that is if they cannot solve the discrepancy by relating the information to the story context (cf. Claassen, 1999). There are of course so-called auteur-directors who have a clear signature and a poetical view about the function of film, such as David Lynch, Michael Haneke and David Cronenberg, to name a few contemporary directors. I think that from a viewer’s perspective we are involved in a joint pretence as well at the moment we accept an “author’s” invitation to watch a movie and jointly pretend that the events on screen actually take place. The very motivation to watch a movie supposedly is stimulated by affective and cognitive needs, and viewers are said to aim at a preferred final situation in which all falls into place and they leave the cinema feeling good, i.e. closure (Tan, 1996). Just as readers of literature grant the author some trust, film viewers also grant the “author” (director) some trust that he will not confront them with a world that deviates from our moral standards and judgements. Maybe we lean even more heavily on this sense of trust, because we do not have to picture a situation from the words on a piece of paper, but actually see what is happening on screen, and there is no escape (except covering your eyes, leaving the cinema, or pressing the stop-button on the DVD-player). In addition, the theoretical distinction in the framework between readers’ representations of an implied and empirical author as well as a narrator can also be applied to the context of viewing films. It would be interesting to investigate under what conditions film viewers construct separate mental representations of an empirical author, an implied author and a narrator. My guess is that viewers usually will not identify the narrator’s voice over as the director’s voice, also because usually the source of the voice-over – at some point – will be visualized on screen, and viewers are therefore expected to create separate mental representations of an (implied) author and narrator. As for the distinction between on the one hand an image of the director (to keep it simple) based on a movie, and on the other an image of the flesh-and-blood director, nowadays it is not uncommon to include extras to a DVD’s that often include the director’s commentary on the film or an interview. Viewers can thus create an image of the empirical author so to say, in addition to their constructed image of the director based on the film. Maybe most conventional films do not stimulate their viewers to create an image of the implied director; that would be a question that needs an empirical investigation. Also of interest would be to explore further what factors, e.g. themes and cinematic devices, can challenge the joint pretence between viewers
and “authors” and how they contribute to viewers’ construction of an image of an “author”; his attitude as well as his identity and presumed intentions.

Obviously, there is still much work to do, but I hope that the present study has to some extent contributed to a better understanding of the literary reading process, and more specifically, to a better understanding of how readers’ constructions of author concepts are involved in this process. My intention was to show that the theoretical statement that authors are to be dismissed from the interpretation of literary texts, from a cognitive psychological perspective is not tenable. Even if readers do not know anything about an empirical author, they construct a representation of an implied author. My impression is that these readers sense a – maybe faint – trail of the author’s footsteps once they join him on a journey into a fictional world.