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CV

Harald Allacher was born November 13, 1980, in Eisenstadt, Austria. From 1987 until 1995 he received primary education in Volksschule and Hauptschule Gols. In 1995 he entered Handelsakademie Neusiedl/See for a business education, but after finishing in 2000 switched to a different field of interest and – after completing his military service – started studies in „Comparative Literature“ as well as „English“ at the University of Vienna, in the course of which he also moved to Vienna, while working as a part-time shop assistant at Adidas Outlet Store Parndorf.

Harald's research interests include intermediality, translation theory, postmodern literature, philosophy and the origins and genesis of myths and fairy tales.

LEBENS LAUF

Harald Allacher kam am 13. November 1980 in Eisenstadt zur Welt. Von 1987 bis 1995 besuchte er die Volksschule sowie die Hauptschule in Gols. Im Jahre 1995 startete er eine wirtschaftliche Ausbildung an der Handelsakademie Neusiedl/See, verlegte sich aber nach der Matura im Jahr 2000 auf ein anderes Interessensgebiet und begann – nach dem Militärdienst – ein Studium der „Komparatistik“ sowie der „Anglistik“ auf der Universität Wien, während dem er seinen Lebensmittelpunkt auch nach Wien verlegte. Nebenher war er als Verkäufer im Designer Outlet in Parndorf angestellt.

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ABSTRACT

Communication in a work of art is only perceived to be „typical“ or „normal“ when it follows a certain set of rules; any form of communication that goes against those rules – and which the recipient often perceives as „unnatural“ - is known as metalepsis. While metalepsis is by no means an invention of the modern (or post-modern) age it is notable that the technique has become used in increasing frequency, also conditioned by the development of (in relative terms) new media such as cinema, television or the graphic novel, which heavily build on traditional art forms, but do, in fact, more than merely imitate what has been done before.

This thesis will not primarily be concerned with why these developments have taken place, nor – apart from a chapter on the history of the aside – with how this development proceeded, but rather with how these phenomena must (or can) be interpreted. Thus, the present approach can be said to be philosophical rather than historical. Also, while the thesis is especially interested in literature – which will be the starting point as well as the terminal point of the work in question – other media will be used to both contrast the data with literary texts and to grant new perspectives that a purely literary approach could not provide.

KURZDARSTELLUNG DER ARBEIT

Kommunikation innerhalb eines Kunstwerks wird nur als „typisch“ oder „normal“ empfunden wenn sie einem bestimmten Regelwerk folgt; jede Kommunikation, die diesem Regelwerk nicht mehr folgt – was der Rezipient oft als „unnatürlich“ empfindet – wird Metalepsis genannt. Während Metalepsis keinesfalls eine Erfindung der Modernen (oder Postmodernen) Ära darstellt, so ist doch bemerkenswert, dass die Technik mittlerweile gehäuft Verwendung findet, auch bedingt durch die Entwicklung von (relativ) neuen Medien wie Kino, Fernsehen oder dem Comic, die allesamt auf traditionellen Kunstformen aufbauen, aber diese tatsächlich mehr als bloß imitieren.

Diese Diplomarbeit wird sich nicht primär mit der Frage beschäftigen worin diese Entwicklungen ihren kausalen Ursprung haben, noch – abgesehen von einem Kapitel über die Geschichte des Asides – damit, wie diese verlaufen sein mögen, sondern vielmehr damit, wie diese Phänomene interpretiert werden müssen (oder können). Daher muss der gegenwärtige Ansatz eher als philosophisch denn historisch betrachtet werden. Zudem werden, obwohl diese Arbeit speziell an Literatur interessiert ist – die auch den Start- sowie Endpunkt darstellen wird – doch auch andere Medien Verwendung finden, einerseits um die aus der Literatur gewonnenen Daten daran abzugleichen, andererseits um neue Perspektiven daraus zu gewinnen, die ein rein literarischer Ansatz nicht bieten könnte.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the artists.

I am indebted to those artists who have attempted to blur the borders between fact and fiction, who have set out to question the nature of „truth“. Some of these inspiring individuals' texts I have managed to incorporate in my thesis, many others – for want of space – not. They have opened up a whole universe of questions – the foundation stone for my work.

However, there are some people who have had a very direct influence on my last year-or-so and its outcome and to whom I feel obliged to express my gratitude.

First and foremost thanks go to my parents without whose persistent support my studies would not have been feasible and without whom this text, consequently, would never have seen the light of day.

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May all of the above accept my most humble gratitude.

Harald Allacher

July 20, 2009

From Plato to metalepsis

“One could not sit on a painting of a chair or rather one could but that was hardly the same thing as sitting on a real chair.”

FACT VS. FICTION

I'm not bad. I'm just drawn that way.¹ ("Who Framed Roger Rabbit")

A central concept for this thesis will be the border between fact and fiction, of which everybody might have (or believe to have) a reasonably clear idea. However, on second consideration, the notion can be harder to pin down than one tends to think at first. It therefore seems wise to become acquainted with the concept and find ways to define it (at least for the scope of this thesis), so that mutual understanding does not fall through terminology issues.

An early examination of fact and fiction can be found in one of Plato's most important theories, which speaks of forms that underlie the material world. The following is taken from Plato's *Republic* as quoted in Edith Watson Schipper's *Forms in Plato's Later Dialogues*.

We say that many beautiful things and many good things each exist, and we define them in our argument. And we assume the beautiful itself and good itself, and so for all which we formerly assumed as many, considering them again according to one form of each thing, existing as one; and we call each thing what it is ... and we say that the former are seen but are not thought, and the latter, the forms, are thought but not seen. (Watson Schipper, 2)

This might need some untangling: The forms Plato speaks of – in the above example "the beautiful itself" or "good itself" – are perfect, an ideal model, which the things we know and perceive (however "beautiful" or "good" they may be) are only imperfect representations of. It becomes obvious that his theory values the material reduplications (as they could be called) less than the idea that governs them. For Plato a human-crafted chair is obviously inferior to an "ideal" chair, but it still fulfils its purpose. Now what about fiction, or, less specifically, what about art?

The truth of the matter is, that for Plato art was nothing more than a copy of a copy, a duplicate of the material, but also sensual world, which was itself

¹ Spoken by Jessica Rabbit, a drawn girl in a movie where cartoon characters and real people are depicted living side by side.

already a duplicate of the form underlying it. And worst of all: it could not be put to use. One could not sit on a painting of a chair or rather one could but that was hardly the same thing as sitting on a real chair. Also, what good was a description of a chair however lively, accurate and poetic? A solution to these central questions was only found by Plato's pupil Aristotle with his theory of catharsis, which also considered the emotional effect of art on its recipient and thereby went beyond mere material value.

Of main importance for this thesis, however, is Plato's view on the factual and the fictional – and this is highly ironic in view of the fact that he had wanted to become a poet himself² and that other than his admired teacher Socrates he put down all his philosophy in dramatic dialogues. Still, his theory could be interpreted as follows: While the factual, the world that we see, is the failed attempt at recreating an ideal world, art is a deliberate lie, only pretending to be real. So, while Plato shows some sympathy for reality, he is rather unsympathetic towards that which is not: fiction.

What is crucial about art for Plato – and also his main point of criticism, it seems – is its tendency to create illusion, to not adhere to the guiding principle of truth. Indeed, art, especially literature, is frequently illusionist, trying to distract its recipients from the bleak fact that it is just make-believe and in some sense either an imitation or a "travesty" of life. While defending the moral value of literature or art would be immaterial for this thesis, another point of criticism on Plato's theory arises – admittedly voiced from 2400 years distance with the benefit of hindsight. Fact is, in the history of literature there have been, time and time again, tendencies to counter the literary illusion.

One very famous example of such an anti-illusionist work of fiction, which has become an important text of reference and to a certain extent also role-model for later novelists, is *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. While the degree to which it can be seen as illusionist or anti-illusionist is still under debate³ it has undoubtedly cleared the way, especially for the postmodern genre. In the English speaking world Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is

² Cf. Blum, 12

³ Cf. Wolf's categorization of *Don Quixote* as „soft anti-illusion“, 484

usually perceived as an important early work in this respect and one can go even further back to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, only to find that already this medieval text bears the mark of anti-illusion, as it is playing with the realms of reality and fiction, one floating into the other.

Now, what are the main characteristics of an anti-illusionist text? How does an author create the literary illusion and how can he destroy it? According to Werner Wolf one has to differentiate between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic illusion (the first of which will be in the focus of the present thesis). This aesthetic illusion can be counteracted by a number of techniques, such as explicit metafiction (a reference to the extratextual, non-fictional world), by referring to the mediation as such, or by a number of factors which devalue the story, for example through clustering highly improbable events. Last but not least the comic effect does also seem to play a role for Wolf, in that it can serve to make a text seem ridiculous and therefore unreliable.

However, the literary illusion is not as easy to pin down as it seems on first glance. Certain inconsistencies arise when, on the one hand, Wolf asserts that in order to further the illusion a narrative text has to be interesting and, on the other hand, it must not be improbable. But how often does a fictional character tie his or her shoes? How often does a fictional character buy toilet paper? How can one account for the fact that literary characters hardly ever do certain things that one is used to in the real world? It might be more interesting for a story to leave out such events but it is highly unlikely that they never happen. Those blank spaces do not lead to an accurate presentation (or imitation) of reality. On the other hand, it would make little sense for a narrative to incorporate all those little things, the mundanities of everyday life, as – according to Werner Wolf – the text would become uninteresting and thereby anti-illusionistic again. Consequently, one might say that even though those factors seem to play a role in literary illusion, it is the way they are balanced which determines whether the trick works or not. Of course, Wolf is fully aware of this.

Ähnlich wie der wirkungsästhetische Effekt der illusionsbildenden Verfahren häufig als Resultat einer Balance zwischen gegenstrebigen Prinzipien zu beschreiben war, was im Fall einer möglichen Multiplikation

solcher Balancewirkungen zu netzartigen Zusammenhängen führen kann, ist auch der entgegengesetzte Effekt illusionsstörender Techniken oftmals das Produkt komplexer Zusammenhänge. (Wolf, 213)

In the world of theatre it is mostly Bertold Brecht who is associated with anti-illusionist theatre. One could argue whether traditional illusionist drama is primarily interested in entertaining its audience. At least Brecht seems to have believed that by granting the audience catharsis at the end of a play they would not be challenged to keep themselves occupied with what they were presented with. He postulated a kind of theatre that should educate, so instead of providing constant illusion he developed techniques to keep the audience aware of the fact that they were watching a play, a mere representation of reality and not reality itself. Thus, they would be denied the comfort of emotionally identifying with what was presented and the feeling that “all is well” at the end of the play. Instead the audience would have to critically reflect on the action and relate the social ills on stage to their own lives. Many of those techniques developed by Brecht can later be found in the Theatre of the Absurd, even though the conceptual aim is clearly a different one here.

Brecht’s theatre of alienation is also often associated with so-called metadrama (cf. also “metanarrative”), which is conscious of itself as being “but a play” and ultimately self-reflective in its attitude towards the audience. There are quite a number of recent plays that can be seen in connection with this concept but it can also be easily attributed to a great deal of Shakespearean drama. James L. Calderwood, in his book *Shakespearean Metadrama*, introduces the term “duplexity” for what can be seen as the main characteristic of such a meta-play.

Not just characters of course but all that enters a play – language, actions, historical events, actors, stage properties, etc. – has this curious ambiguity about it (what might be called to distinguish it from ordinary ambiguities, “duplexity”. (Calderwood, 12)

“Duplexity”, for Calderwood, refers to the dual meaning anything in a play might be attributed with. First, one has to accept that a character in a play can be seen as both ‘a realistic person in a realistic world and as a device fashioned by [the author] himself to insert into an artificial environment’ (Calderwood, 11). Both those interpretations are important to consider in a scene like the one from

Hamlet, where the prince talks to his mother Gertrude about his father, who is present on stage as a ghost.

HAMLET: Do you see nothing there?

QUEEN: Nothing at all, yet all that is I see. (*Hamlet*, 107)

On the one hand, this exchange refers to the actual situation in the play: Hamlet asks his mother whether she can see the ghost. She replies that she cannot and that there is nothing to be seen. On the other hand, Shakespeare is communicating with the audience. 'Do you see nothing there?' This is a hint to the fact that the action presented is not real and the figure on stage is actually just a man pretending to be a ghost. It depends on the willingness of the audience to ignore this vital aspect, to apply what Coleridge once called "willing suspension of disbelief" and what has since become an important term for theatre and film studies alike. Another example of this can be found after the play within the play in *Hamlet*, in a brief remark by Horatio, 'You might have rhymed' (*Hamlet*, 95), which can either be seen as Horatio talking to Hamlet or as a self-conscious comment of the author. Undoubtedly, this little sentence could be interpreted in numerous other ways as well. However, while there is an overlap of different layers of meaning in the above cases, the line between fact and fiction is still fairly easy to draw.

This is different for certain genres that have developed rather recently with the advent of the postmodern. Travelogues, for instance, have been around for a long time. They have usually been seen as accurate accounts of past events and no one has questioned their truthfulness. On the other hand, there have been tendencies to present fictional events as fact in order to create an illusion of authenticity, especially when the English novel began to emerge in the 18th Century,. The following is the title page of *Robinson Crusoe*, which is often considered "the first English novel":

The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York. Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, where in all the Men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates. Written by Himself. (*Robinson Crusoe*)

Not only does this text not give us the name of the real author (Defoe) but even suggests that it was “written by himself”, meaning the man on the island (Crusoe), whereby it is pretending to be an autobiography rather than a novel. Obviously, at the time it was customary to heighten the prestige of a text by giving it the appearance of authenticity, which is understandable, considering that the novel was a new genre and therefore not prestigious in itself. However, one ends up with a dilemma, namely that, on the one hand, authenticity can easily be forged and, on the other hand, people were easily manipulated to believe in the truth of such an account. As becomes obvious, truth is not as straight-forward a criterion as was initially taken for granted and the flow of information itself deserves a close analysis.

Now, the postmodern travelogue takes up this discrepancy and plays with it in the text, deliberately mixes fact and fiction in order to alienate the reader and make him aware of the precarious nature of truth. Very similar methods can be found in historiographic metafiction, for example Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*, which examines the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953 for espionage, predominantly from the point of view of Richard Nixon, vice-president at the time. Even the first paragraph of the novel makes clear that fact and fiction form a strange union in this text.

On June 24, 1950, less than five years after the end of World War II, the Korean War begins, American boys are again sent off in uniforms to die for Liberty, and a few weeks later, two New York City Jews, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, are arrested by the FBI and charged with having conspired to steal atomic secrets and pass them to the Russians. They are tried, found guilty, and on April 5, 1951, sentenced to death by the Judge to die – thieves of light to be burned by light – in the electric chair, for it is written that “any man who is dominated by demonic spirits to the extent that he gives voice to apostasy is to be subjected to the judgement upon sorcerers and wizards.” Then, after the usual series of permissible sophistries, the various delaying moves and light-restoring countermoves, their fate – as the U.S. Supreme Court refuses for the sixth and last time to hear the case, locks its doors, and goes off on holiday – is at last sealed, and it is determined to burn them in New York City's Times Square on the night of their fourteenth wedding anniversary, Thursday, June 18, 1953. (*The Public Burning*, 3)

The whole first paragraph is comprised of well-documented facts about the

Rosenberg case, exact dates even. The narrator's point of view can be described as not entirely neutral, slightly patriotic, still critical, ambivalent in any case – as are fact and fiction here. It is only one phrase in the final sentence that deviates from the historical truth: The Rosenbergs were not (and never meant to be) executed on Times Square. The idea of such a public act puts emphasis on the symbolic character of this particular execution, the fact, that the United States would not tolerate undermining from within the country. The execution is a demonstration of power and therefore – by picturing this publicly on Times Square – Robert Coover shows a different kind of truth than just historical truth, what could be called metaphorical truth: that indeed all eyes were on this very publicly staged court case.

Postmodern travelogues and historiographic metafiction not only illustrate the precarious nature of fiction but also the precarious nature of facts. One might expand this argument and re-evaluate the concept of “history” itself, as has been done in recent research, most prominently by Hayden White. In *Metahistory – The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* he writes that

The eighteenth century had conventionally distinguished among three types of historiography: true, fabulous, and satirical, with philosophy of history being regarded as merely the serious reflection on the implications for mankind on the facts provided by the first, or true, variety of historical representation. The nineteenth century tended to stress the difference between “true” historiography on the one hand and “philosophy of history” on the other. In order to count as such, it was maintained, historiography had to be a *true* account of what had happened in the past, without any interest in the fanciful per se, and it had to be offered in a spirit of objectivity and from a vantage point above all contemporary party strife, without the distortions and abstractness which a genuinely “philosophical” reflection on their meaning might produce. (White, 267)

A modern approach to the concept of history would most probably tend to question some of the terms and concepts, which were used in the nineteenth century quite naturally, such as historiography as a “true” account of the past, already highlighted by White through his italics, furthermore a concept such as “objectivity” would be strongly challenged. Historians nowadays have come to look at history not as a (supposedly objective) chain of past events but as a

narrative and the evaluation of historical data according to certain criteria has become increasingly important. The underlying idea is that history is “made” rather than simply “recorded” and in this respect we could see historiography as the fictionalisation of past events. This is clearly visible in the German word for history, “Geschichte”. It encompasses both the concepts “story” and “history”, which are also closely related in the English etymology. Even here, in the realm of what has for a long time been deemed concrete knowledge – the history of the world – the relationship between fact and fiction has become increasingly more complex.

Finally, despite this thesis being concerned predominantly with literature, there will be a little detour to the medium of film, an approach that will be kept throughout the whole text: Like historiography the recently flourishing genre of biopics – films re-narrating the biography of famous persons – also aims to capture the essence of the past, in this case the essence of a real-life person. The inherent problems are basically the same: Both genres have to be very selective in what they present, as their scope is limited and this selection naturally determines the way something is presented and ultimately received. After a line of rather conservative biopics (“Ray”, “Walk the Line”, etc.) the recent development appears to have arrived at what could be described as more of an avant-garde approach, which seems to focus on the fragmentation of the characters.

In Todd Haynes film about Bob Dylan “I’m Not There” the name Dylan is never mentioned. Paradoxically, we can say, Dylan is absent in what is meant to be his own biography, but on the other hand many of the appearing characters can be associated with him in one way or the other. Actually, they seem to represent splinters of his personality or of the artificial image the real Dylan very consciously created of himself and which greatly changed throughout the years. So, the question “Who is the real Dylan?” is not only valid for the film but also for Dylan’s life. Also, there is the question whether the film is true to the “real” Dylan and taking into consideration the untrustworthiness of what on first glance seem to be reliable data (which has already been discussed in connection with “history”) Haynes’ approach might actually be seen as capturing Dylan in all his

facets better than a more traditional film could.

There are manifold ways to approach fact and fiction, to determine where one ends and the other starts and it has become clear that the borders between fact and fiction can sometimes become blurred. Anyhow, looking at the basic ideas presented so far has prepared for what is in the main focus of this thesis: the crossing of borders, metalepsis, which will be the object of investigation when dealing with individual texts.

TOOLS & FRAMES

Gérard Genette points out the ambiguity that is inherent in the word **narrative**⁴, its first and – as Genette argues – most evident meaning nowadays is as a reference to the narrative statement as such, the oral or written discourse. Note however, that “what is told” is in the focus here, as “narrative” can also refer to the act of narrating instead of its content. A third meaning is – in Genette’s view – given to the term by literary theoreticians, who ‘have *narrative* refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of linking opposition, repetition, etc.’ (*Narrative discourse*, 25)

While it is an interesting observation that the term “narrative” refers to at least three slightly distinct concepts at once (and one has to keep the multiple reference of the term in mind) it can be safely assumed that this will seldom lead to misunderstandings. The present thesis will therefore be more interested in a narrative text’s functions and in the tools to effectively analyse it, which will be introduced throughout this chapter and which will hopefully provide a solid backbone for working with individual texts.

First of all, one has to get used to the fact that a narrative in many ways follows different rules than real life. The reader has to adjust to alternative ideas concerning time and space. For instance, there are different concepts of time in interaction with each other in a narrative text. One basic opposition is between story time and narrative time. **Story time** basically refers to the time covered by or in a text, independent from the chronology of events. However, it is a striking feature of narrative that other than in real life time is not running in a straight line but there may be so-called flashbacks (**analepsis**) and flashforwards (**prolepsis**); the reader is not only easily led to a different place, but also a different time in a narrative. **Narrative time**, then, refers to the time covered in reading a text, which can only be a rough estimation, as any reader will find his or her own tempo. Therefore, narrative time is often measured in pages or

⁴ Cf. Genette (1990)

words, something that is quantifiable.

The relationship between story time and narrative time is also important in that it shows whether something is told in either accelerated or decelerated fashion or none of both, i.e. they roughly overlap, which would mean that the time it takes to read a story would equal the time that elapses on the story-level. Slowing a story to a complete standstill is not only a mere theoretical possibility, but something that has been vastly explored by modernist writers, perhaps most prominently by Virginia Woolf.

Basically, one can divide a text into the levels of **story** and **discourse**, the first of which covers the question “What?” (as in: What is told?) and the second one the question “How?” (as in: How is it done?). Stressing the story-level shows a tendency to appear illusionistic, while stress on the discourse-level appears to be anti-illusionistic. This is because discourse basically refers to the mediation between the text and its recipient and by focusing the reader's attention on the level of mediation the experience consequentially becomes less immediate.

A basic feature of every narrative text is the so-called **narrator**. According to Franz Stanzel⁵ the basic narrative situations are first-person narrative, authorial narrative and figural narrative, and they differ in quite a number of ways. In a **first-person narrative**, for instance, the experiencing and narrating I overlap, the narrator is at the same time a character in the story. Taking into account whether the narrator is either the main character or a minor character one also frequently distinguishes between I-as-protagonist and I-as-witness. On the other hand, the narrator of an **authorial narrative** is absent from the story and renders it from an outsider's position. A special case would be an omniscient narrator, who – as he does not belong to the same world as his characters – is not subject to the same rules as they are and is therefore all-knowing and all-seeing. He knows about the characters' inner lives as well as their past, present or future. An omniscient narrator is almost like a god, and he often comments on the action or reflects on it philosophically. He filters the action through his very distinct personality. The narrator of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (also

⁵ Cf. Stanzel

analysed by Stanzel at some length) is a good example here. A **figural narrative** is again considerably different. Here, the story is presented in immediate fashion, through the eyes of a character, who is, however, not telling the story but functions as a so-called reflector character. Importantly, the point of view may shift in a figural narrative, but there is no apparent narrator.

In this respect it is also helpful to distinguish between covert and overt narration. Even though he will not necessarily appear as a character an **overt narrator** draws attention to himself, but not as character – instead, he will be very much in the centre as a narrator, as a mediator. An overt narrator is often said to “intrude” into the story as a distinctive voice, whereas a **covert narrator** neither refers to him or herself nor addresses any narratee directly. Instead he tries to be as invisible and transparent as possible, so one can almost forget his very presence. This is often achieved by internal focalization.

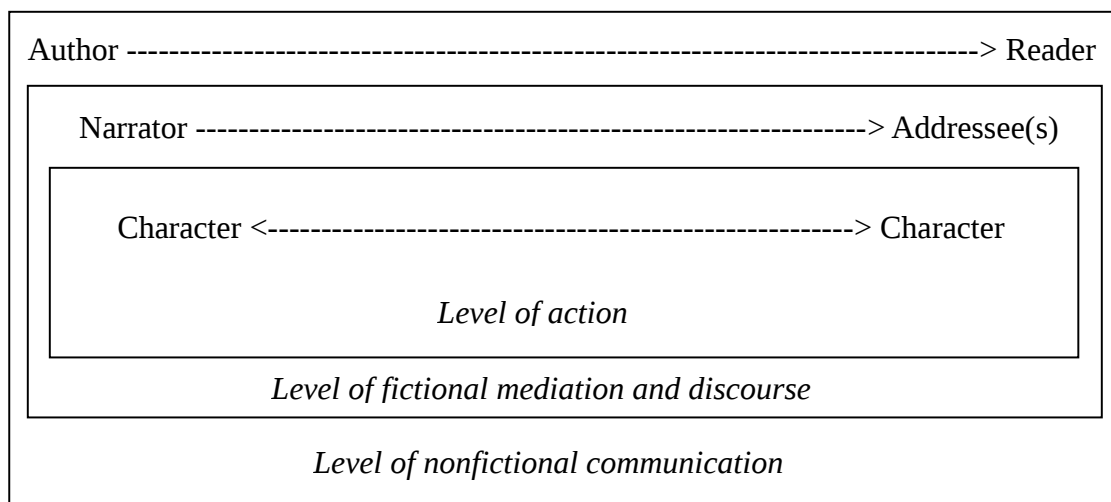
The story is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism', 'perspective', 'angle of vision', verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his. (Rimmon-Kenan, 71)

“**Focalizer**” is a Genettian term⁶. A focalizer is an agent through whose eyes the story is presented. This focalizer must not be confused with the narrator, who is merely narrating. A focalizer instead is observing. Basically, there is **external focalization**, where the narrator works as focalizer, and **internal focalization**, when the restricted point of view of a single character is the point of focalization. The limited information such an internal focalizer is able to give can often create a certain tension. Another point that must be stressed is that focalization not only refers to the visual sense, but as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes in *Narrative fiction – contemporary poetics* 'has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation.' (Rimmon-Kenan, 71)

Our primary attention is no longer directed toward finding out which narrative situation prevails in a narrative, but rather toward the particular profile or, to replace the spatial metaphor with a temporal one, toward the rhythmical pattern resulting from the succession of various narrative situations or from various modulations of a specific narrative situation. (Stanzel, 63)

⁶ Cf. Genette (1990).

However clear-cut the distinctions between the different narrative situations may sound, Stanzel argues that the narrative situation within a given text may change (which is especially true for modern and postmodern texts). He refers to the variations of the narrative situation as **dynamization**. Now that it has been established how the narrator usually communicates with his addressee it is vital to point out that this is only one level of communication in the narrative process, that narrative discourse is actually taking place on various communication levels. In narrative fiction those discourses can be presented as follows:

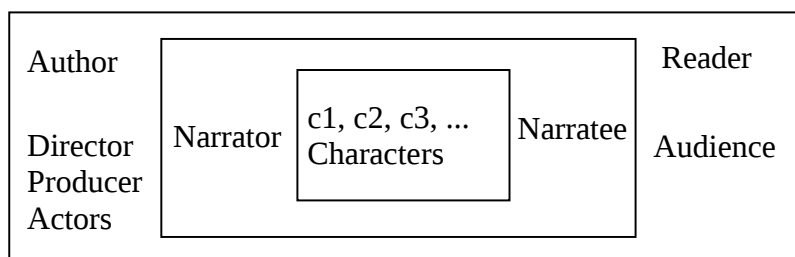


The above is often called a “Chinese boxes” model. It shows that the author and the reader of a novel are usually considered to be on the same level, namely the level of **nonfictional communication**, as are the narrator and his addressee (on the level of **fictional mediation and discourse**). Finally, there is the level of **action** (which might embrace an infinite number of further “boxes”). Here, communication can only take place between characters. Importantly, the first level can also be described as **extratextual** – both author and reader do not belong to the fictional world. On the other hand, there is **intratextual** communication both between the narrator and his addressee and between different characters.

As the arrows illustrate communication from one of those levels to the other seems either “forbidden” or “impossible” according to the given model or is at

least not provided for. The narrator, for instance, can only take part in the action and communicate with characters if he is himself a character in the story. He would be called a **homodiegetic narrator** then, opposed to a **heterodiegetic narrator**, who is not physically present in the story and who, according to this model, would typically have no means to communicate with the characters. Also, the characters are not aware that they are only characters in a story, which again goes back to the above hierarchy. A lower level agent is never aware of the existence of a higher level agent, and in a way this boxes structure also symbolizes a kind of power structure.

Furthermore, one must not forget to mention that nonfictional communication and fictional mediation are usually a form of one-way communication, i.e. the reader and the narrator's addressee usually do not “talk back”. Communication between characters is naturally two-way communication and therefore not restricted in the same sense as it is on the first two levels. However, this thesis shall concern itself specifically with those cases where the above model cannot provide an accurate description of what is happening, be that communication on one and the same level but in a direction that is usually seen as impossible or between separate levels. How can the real author talk to a character in his novel? How can the narrator talk to the reader? And does that really happen? In what way can real world people enter the world of fiction? These are the kind of questions this thesis will be concerned with. Basically, said phenomenon, when the frames cease to fulfil their function, is known as **metalepsis**.



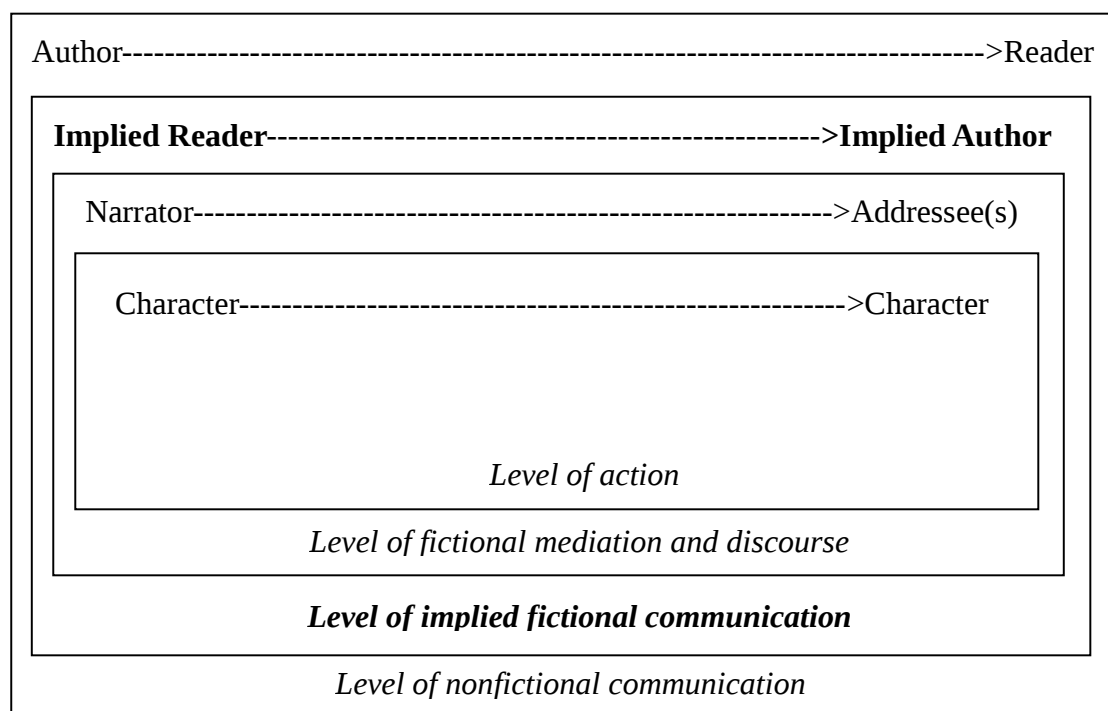
For drama, which this thesis will also be concerned with, the communication model would be similar. However, it is also special in a number of ways. First of all, there is not only an author and a reader but there is also a director, a

producer and the actors on one side, and there is not only the reader of the play at the other (receiving) end, but also the actual theatre audience. A play is usually written to be performed, thus the actual performance needs to be taken into consideration as well. A play, in its performance, is able to use not only verbal but also nonverbal codes. As Manfred Pfister writes in *The theory and analysis of drama*: 'As a "performed" text, drama, in contrast to purely literary texts, makes use not only of verbal, but also acoustic and visual codes. It is a synaesthetic text.' (Pfister, 7)

One tends to distinguish three different schools of drama theory: **Poetic drama**, which prioritizes the dramatic text; **theatre studies**, which in turn prioritizes the actual performance; and **reading drama**, which combines the two positions and assumes an ideal recipient, a reader who bears an actual performance in mind and a theatregoer who bears the original text in mind. For the present thesis the latter position seems most suitable, as it will be concerned with both the dramatic text and the actual performance and it would be a shortcoming to disregard the one or the other. In fact, the most revealing findings might be hidden in between the two conditions of a play, the fact that it is both a written text and its realization. As concerns the level of fictional mediation one can say that it is not always relevant in drama. It usually comes into play in so-called **epic drama**, where there is a distinct narrator figure as in many narrative texts. In **absolute drama**, which seems more common today, the particular frame for fictional mediation is missing, instead the action is presented to the audience directly.

For the analysis of film the model for narrative discourse should be more or less suitable as well, at least as a starting point, and even though the terminology would naturally have to be revised. Generally, film could be seen as a performance (like a theatre performance), usually also based on a written text (a screenplay, story-board). The main difference lies in the fact that a film is recorded and therefore fixed and – at least theoretically – also infinitely repeatable, other than drama, without even the slightest changes. However, film is a highly narrative genre as well and therefore works in similar ways.

Some narratologists like to install an additional frame between nonfictional communication and fictional mediation, a level called **implied fictional communication**, which introduces both an **implied author** and an **implied reader**. These notions may prove to be of major importance for the present thesis, as they seem to bear the potential to account for many of the phenomena and many of the questions that will come up in the following chapters. Basically, they are both intratextual authorities, the implied author above the narrator, the implied reader above the narratee (the narrator's addressee).



An author may embody different ideas, beliefs and emotions in different works. Thus while the flesh-and-blood author is subject to the vicissitudes of real life, the implied author of a particular work is conceived as a stable entity, ideally consistent with itself within the work. (Rimmon-Kenan, 87)

According to Rimmon-Kenan's model of narrative communication (based on Seymour Chatman's *Story and discourse: narrative structure in fiction and film*) the implied author is distinct from both real author and narrator and the implied reader is distinct from both real reader and narratee. The concept of implied

fictional communication could be loosely compared to Plato's forms⁷. An implied reader may not be an ideal reader (another concept that does actually exist in literary theory) but is more closely connected to the basic idea of a reader as introduced by a text and not at all (or only vaguely) to the actual reader who – in Plato's concept – would be more like the realization of this idea. Any reader can fill the form introduced by the author in the text, but the question remains: Is it possible (or rather: does it make sense) to say that the "author" is talking to the "reader"?

Generally two categories emerge, in accordance with whether the critic is concerned with the history of responses or the potential effect of the literary text. In the first instance, we have the 'real' reader, known to us by his documented reactions; in the second, we have the 'hypothetical' reader, upon whom all possible actualizations of the text may be projected. (Iser 1978, 27)

Wolfgang Iser, in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, illustrates the basic distinction between the so-called "real" reader and the so-called "hypothetical" reader (an umbrella term for similar but not identical concepts such as implied reader, ideal reader, etc.). The real reader, who is mainly important when determining how a particular text has been received by a specific reading public, will, in fact, prove to be of less significance to this thesis than the hypothetical reader, who is created by the text.

In his famous essay "The Death of the Author" Roland Barthes concludes that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.' (Barthes, 148), but it would be wrong to associate the reader Barthes is talking of with the actual reader of a novel. Here again, the reader is only an abstraction, an idea, what could be called an ideal or implicit reader.

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (Barthes, 148)

⁷ Cf. this thesis „Fact vs. Fiction“

Frames in action

“As the frame-model tells us: at one end of the line is the author, who creates the narrator, who – through his narration – creates a character, who in turn might turn into a narrator, a creator, himself, etc. etc.”

A SUDDEN REVELATION IN *THE COMFORTERS AND STRANGER THAN FICTION*

So far an overview has been given as concerns the construction of a narrative text, the way different agents are able (or not able) to communicate with each other. It has also been attempted to show that fact and fiction are not as clearly defined as one might think. The following sections will now try to put this information to use in the analysis of individual texts, films and a graphic novel. One could start this investigation with a simple question:

What if a novel's character could hear the narrator's voice and consequently learn that he or she only exists in the fictional world of a book?

Muriel Spark introduced this peculiar situation in her early novel *The Comforters*. Also, and probably influenced by Spark's novel, *Stranger than Fiction*, a recent Hollywood movie, developed the initial idea even further. Inevitably, problems must arise caused by this uncommon constellation.

[...] she could rely on him to take her side, should there be any difficulty with Helena over her rapid departure from St. Philomena's. On the whole she did not think there would be any difficulty with Helena. Just then she heard the sound of a typewriter. It seemed to come through the wall on her left. It stopped, and was immediately followed by a voice remarking her own thoughts. It said: *On the whole she did not think there would be any difficulty with Helena.* (*The Comforters*, 42)

In *The Comforters* Caroline Rose, a recently converted Catholic, at one point hears the sound of a typewriter, followed by a chorus of voices (in the above paragraph referred to as "a voice") narrating her present situation, an experience which is repeated from time to time henceforward. Of course, these voices could be connected to her newly found faith (which she seems to be struggling with still), but Caroline notices quickly what these voices more likely indicate: 'But the typewriter and the voices – it is as if a writer on another plane of existence was writing a story about us.' (*The Comforters*, 63).

Still, one cannot but realize the implication of both notions combined: The author is God to her characters. As Caroline indicates correctly, the writer is "on

another plane of existence". The frame-model confirms this, but from her inferior point of view it is impossible to determine on which of the numerous higher ranking narrative levels (the level of fictional mediation, implied fictional communication or nonfictional communication) the voice she hears is to be located. The fact that she hears a typewriter, however, leads her and the reader to suspect the voice to be that of the author herself, Muriel Spark, as if a door to the nonfictional world had opened. Whether or not it is justified to associate this author with Muriel Spark, to associate Caroline's story with the book the reader holds in his hands remains to be determined, though.

At this point in the narrative it might be as well to state that the characters in this novel are all fictitious, and do not refer to any living persons whatsoever.

Tap-tappity-tap. At this point in the narrative ...

Caroline sprang up and pressed the lever on the dictaphone. Then she snatched the notebook and pencil which she had placed ready and took down in shorthand the paragraph above, she did not start to tremble until after the chanting chorus had ended. She lay trembling in the darkening room, and considered the new form of her suffering, now that she was well again and committed to health. (*The Comforters*, 69)

One could argue that it becomes explicitly clear after the above paragraph that Caroline's suspicions were right: She is a character in a narrative and she as well as the people she knows are fictional creations. On the other hand, one has to say that all of this fits her initial theory, wherefore looking at it as her hallucination remains a likely interpretation. Also, the voice only refers to things Caroline has already thought or perceived, so up to that point it is at least possible that she herself is the source of the voice. Later, however, she hears passages that do not concern her personally; the voices reveal information that she cannot know of, which – at least to the reader – finally confirms that she is not crazy.

Caroline starts to see evidence to support her theory everywhere. In an argument about the revelations with her friend Laurence she says: 'Your grandmother being a gangster, it's taking things too far. She's an implausible character, don't you see?' (*The Comforters*, 104), which shows that she is determined to look at everything surrounding her as if it was part of a narrative. Obviously, Laurence does not share her point of view. He forces her to question

her theories, argues against them, obviously in an attempt to cure her hallucinations (as he thinks), but instead his questions seem to stir her curiosity.

He argued a little, questioned her. Was the author disembodied? - She didn't know. If so, how could he use a typewriter? How could she overhear him? How could one author chant in chorus? - That she didn't know, that she didn't know. Was the author human or a spirit, and if so -" (*The Comforters*, 95)

Her initial reaction to the voices, understandably, is fear, followed by a nervous breakdown. However, Caroline accepts her new situation astonishingly fast, soon becomes interested in the phenomenon, develops her own theories and consequently starts experimenting, tries to prove either herself or the voice wrong. She thinks she must only prove her free will, not act according to what the voices tell her she will do.

'I've just jerked up to the fact,' she said 'that our day is doing what the voices said it would. Now, we chatted about Eleanor. Then about ourselves. All right. We've fritted the day. The narrative says we went by car; all right, we must go by train. You do see that don't you, Laurence? It's a matter of asserting free will.' (*The Comforters*, 97)

As it turns out, contrary to Caroline's plans, they do go by car, and one might start to think that there is no way for the characters to overcome their destiny. This might be seen as reminiscent of Greek mythology, in particular Cassandra, daughter of Priam and Hecuba of Troy, who was able to foresee the future. Her gift was also a curse, as no one would believe her and she was therefore unable to influence what she could see. Since antiquity prophecy has often been connected to insanity. The Trojans did not believe Cassandra in the same way that no one believes Caroline, as they think she is mad – and of course they might be right: How could a sane mind foresee the future? How could one see the future and not turn insane? Cassandra could not circumvent the destruction of Troy. In the same way Caroline at first seems to be cursed with knowing that there is a great design at work, that her own actions are out of her hands and that she is unable to exert influence, unable to determine her own fate.

Later in the story, however, there are clues that Caroline CAN consciously effect

the story, which was triggered by her hearing the voices. This, in turn, could indicate that the incident was not planned beforehand, that it was actually an accident, that something that was not supposed to happen did happen. On the other hand, the influence Caroline now seems to have could be merely the illusion of influence. All of this could be according to plan, still. One must distinguish between the levels of fictional mediation and nonfictional communication again: It is easier to imagine that something goes against what the narrative voice (a creation of the author Muriel Spark) has designed than what Muriel Spark herself (the ultimate controlling authority as concerns the fictional world) has planned for her characters.

One day she informed him, 'The Typing Ghost has not recorded any lively details about this hospital ward. The reason is that the author doesn't know how to describe a hospital ward. This interlude in my life is not part of the book in consequence.' It was by making exasperating remarks like this that Caroline Rose continued to interfere with the book. (*The Comforters*, 161)

Towards the end of the book Caroline decides to write a novel and some readers might suspect that it could be the book they are holding in their hands. The final passage of the novel seems to point in that direction: Laurence first visits Caroline's flat to collect some books and send them to her, then writes her a letter, which he tears up and throws away after he realizes that it cannot express what he wanted to tell her. Interestingly, the letter, which allegedly nobody but Laurence has ever seen appears in Caroline's book as well as in Muriel Spark's book. Caroline Rose and Muriel Spark seem to have written the same book.

His letter had failed to express his objections. He took it out of his pocket and tore it up into small pieces, scattering them over the Heath where the wind bore them away. He saw the bits of paper come to rest, some on the scrubby ground, some among the deep marsh weeds, and one piece on a thorn-bush; and he did not then foresee his later wonder, with a curious rejoicing, how the letter had got into the book. (*The Comforters*, 203)

As mentioned before, *The Comforters* bears a certain resemblance to *Stranger than Fiction*, a 2006 film, directed by Marc Forster, starring Will Ferrell, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Dustin Hoffman and Emma Thompson. However, film – as a

different medium – offers an entirely new form of representation, which then in turn might result in complications. Certain tricks that do work in literary fiction might be impossible or at least difficult to reproduce in film. *Stranger than Fiction* is clearly a comedy, which sets it off from Spark's novel (not an entirely serious book either, but different in tone). In *Stranger than Fiction* the dilemma of Harold Crick, the film's protagonist, is also far more central than that of Caroline Rose and the situation she finds herself in. Caroline Rose is only one of many major characters in Spark's novel and her delusion or revelation (however one would like to interpret it) is only one of several intertwined story lines. Also, *The Comforters* is a novel commenting on the nature of a novel, while *Stranger than Fiction* is a film commenting on the nature of a novel, which clearly means that only the former is self-referential.

“Dude? You Okay?”

“Dave, I'm being followed.”

“How are you being followed? You're not moving.”

“It's by a voice.”

“What?”

“I'm being followed by a woman's voice.”

“Oh. Okay. What is she saying?”

“She's narrating.” (*Stranger than Fiction*)

Stranger than Fiction tells the story of Harold Crick, who, while brushing his teeth, suddenly hears the voice of a female narrator commenting on what he is doing. He tries to communicate with the voice but does not succeed. Also, throughout the film the voice never refers to itself, to the fact that Harold can hear it and to his attempts to communicate, which indicates that the voice is unaware of itself being audible to Harold, that the actual story continues as it should. Consequently, the fact that he can hear the voice clearly is accidental, in no way intended by the voice itself and it becomes particularly interesting when one day that voice announces his death. It says: 'Little did he know that this simple, seemingly innocuous act would result in his imminent death.' (*Stranger than Fiction*). Naturally, Harold is determined to solve the mystery and talks to a psychiatrist first.

“I'm somehow involved in some sort of story, like I'm a character in my own life. But the problem is that the voice comes and goes like there are other parts of the story not being told to me and I need to find out what

those other parts are before it's too late." (*Stranger than Fiction*)

As the psychiatrist obviously cannot help him (the peculiarity is, that the voice is not talking TO but ABOUT Harold), she sends him to a professor of literature, Professor Hilbert, who is more likely to be able to help him with his narrator problem. This Professor Hilbert at first doubts Harold's case. He doubts that Harold's life could be a story in a book not because he thinks it impossible per se but because Harold's life simply is not interesting enough. What kind of story would it be? Professor Hilbert looks at Harold's case in a matter-of-fact way – neither as a sceptic nor with enthusiasm – and determines that he must be wrong for narratological reasons.

"I'm not an expert in crazy, I'm an expert in literature theory and I gotta tell you, thus far there doesn't seem to be a single literary thing about you. I don't doubt you hear a voice, but it can't possibly be a narrator because, frankly, there doesn't seem to be much to narrate." (*Stranger than Fiction*)

Professor Hilbert also remarks: 'The voice seems to be dependent on actions you take.' (*Stranger than Fiction*). To clarify this: One can either say that a character is dependent on the story, tied to it, can only exist if the story exists and only act if the story demands him to do so. One can also, as Professor Hilbert does, say that the story is dependent on the characters to act. If Harold does not act the story is stuck. That is what Professor Hilbert is suggesting. Of course, in the case of *Stranger than Fiction*, especially for the professor, the character seems more substantial than the story. Harold is standing right before him. On the other hand, he has to believe that there even is a story.

"If I go through that door, the plot continues. The story of me through the door. If I stay here the plot can't move forward, the story ends. Also if I stay here I'm late." (*Stranger than Fiction*)

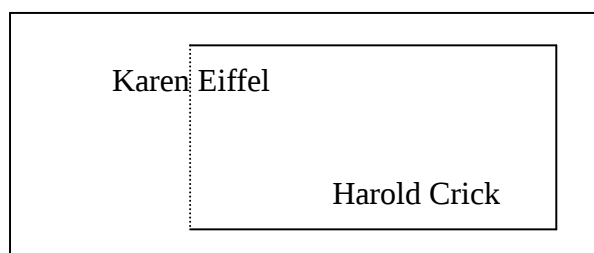
The passages with Professor Hilbert are highly analytical. He, as well as Caroline Rose in *The Comforters*, analyses the possible nature of fiction. He also orders Harold Crick to determine whether his life is a comedy or a tragedy (it has to be the one or the other if it is to be considered literature), whereby he is forcing Harold to categorise everything he is experiencing as a fictional event.

Like Caroline, Harold is now looking at his life as a work of fiction, which is subject to certain rules.

“Harold. You don't control your fate.”
“I know.” (*Stranger than Fiction*)

Still, it is not certain that Harold can himself determine the way the story goes. The film leaves that open to speculation. He is definitely trying to gain control just as Caroline is trying to gain control in *The Comforters*, but while Caroline is trying to do the opposite of what the voice told her beforehand, Harold – according to Professor Hilbert's advice – does nothing, sits at home in front of the TV, does not pick up the phone, does not switch channels. He tries to be as uninteresting as possible a character, to stop the story, the line of events which is threatening to kill him.

As a further complication the film introduces a second storyline, focusing on Karen Eiffel, a best-selling novelist, who suffers from writer's block. She does not know how to kill her new novel's hero: Harold Crick. Obviously, she is the one who determines Harold's fate. The twist – and the audience discovers this late in the story – is that they exist on the same plane of being. Karen Eiffel is a novelist in Harold Crick's world. And when Harold finds out he tries to contact her, tries to keep her from killing him. As becomes apparent Forster is determined not to stop in his movie where Spark has drawn the line in her novel. What in *The Comforters* remains a mystery (the nature of the voices) is presented to the film's audience in the form of Karen Eiffel. Thus, the film becomes at once more complex and more problematic.



Karen Eiffel is at the same time a character on the level of action and the author of Harold's life, who also exists on the same level of action. The introduction of Karen Eiffel does something else as well: While in Spark's novel the idea is still

prevalent that the voice might in some way belong to Muriel Spark, the highest authority, *Stranger than Fiction* introduces the additional level of the author on the level of action, which to the audience is obviously only an intermediate level. Karen Eiffel is only an intermediate authority. But even if one disregards that fact and looks at *The Comforters* and *Stranger than Fiction* as similar cases, there are a number of differences.

First of all, there is a certain kind of interaction with the narrator in *The Comforters*, at least those passages where the text admits Caroline's influence could be interpreted as interaction in the widest sense. In *Stranger than Fiction* the voice shows no direct reaction to what Harold says. It talks ABOUT him, he tries to talk TO it, but does not succeed. He does, however, gain the opportunity to talk to the author Karen Eiffel. Is the author the same thing as the narrator? Of course not, but as becomes clear in the movie the audible voice of the narrator is identical with the voice of the author Karen Eiffel, an observation which would be impossible to make in *The Comforters*, as in a book there is no sound, obviously, a voice is just an imagined voice, an abstraction, dependent on the reader's imagination.

The question arises both in *The Comforters* and *Stranger than Fiction*: Is it possible for the characters to influence the story? Free will certainly plays an important role in both works and is discussed at great length. And – in conjunction with this – one also has to ask in how far the author (or the voice) controls the story. If one could determine that the characters were able to hear the narrator's voice by accident this would mean that the author/the voice is not in full control of events. Indeed, as concerns *Stranger than Fiction* this seems to be the case. Karen Eiffel is genuinely surprised when Harold calls her and tells her about his situation. Something seems to be wrong with the space-time continuum. For *The Comforters* the situation is a little more complicated. Even though the voice pretends to be bothered by Caroline's attempts to assert influence and thereby admits that Caroline has an impact on the story, there is always the possibility that this is just a trick, that all goes according to plan, that the author (or the voice) is giving the events merely an appearance of coincidence. In this particular point *The Comforters* is more open to

interpretation, which makes it also less problematic. In “Stranger than Fiction” there is the dilemma that the author appears on the same level as her protagonist, which means that if she is able to influence him she is God not only to the level of her fiction but to her own plane of existence.

JOHN BARTH'S "MENELAIAD": A BOTTOMLESS PIT OF STORY

In his book *Narrative Discourse Revisited* – as the title says: an afterthought to his famous *Narrative Discourse* – Gérard Genette acknowledges and honours the work of a certain John Barth, who – as Genette claims – was not familiar with his work but whom he considers an expert in the field of metalepsis⁸. In this statement, Genette seems to be primarily referring to John Barth's article "Tales within Tales within Tales"⁹. Obviously, both John Barth and Gérard Genette are interested in the same phenomena.

However, what separates the two of them is that Barth is primarily a writer of fiction himself and interested in working with progressive theoretical theories, stretching the limits of fiction. In his short story "Menelaiad", which is considered particularly outstanding by Genette, Barth boldly illustrates what Genette means when he talks about a first narrative, second narrative, etc.; he explores the notion of frames, interlinked narrative levels. One could say that Barth takes up a technique already prominently used in "The Thousand and One Nights" and tries to take it to its extremes.

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, harried for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
on the proud height of Troy ... (*The Odyssey*, 1-5, translation by Robert Fitzgerald)

„Menelaiad“, which is included in his short story collection *Lost in the Funhouse*, is based on Greek Myth, in particular the story of the Trojan war, which was fought over Menelaus' wife Helen. In many ways Barth uses scenes from Homer's "Odyssey" (whereas obviously the focus changes from Odysseus to Menelaus), reinvents and reinterprets them and shows the characters in a different light, grants them new facets in contrast to more traditional interpretations. Menelaus, for example, can be said to appear as narrator for all

⁸ Cf. Genette (1988), 92

⁹ Cf. Barth (1981), 45-63

levels of story, but is at the same time a character in all of them. Thus, Menelaus is presented from various perspectives. Barth does not present Menelaus as a natural being and instead stresses the notion of him as a being created by stories, a voice that is nothing but a voice created by narratives revolving around it. For Menelaus there is no independent existence.

Menelaus here, more or less. The fair-haired boy? Of the loud war cry!
Leader of the people. Zeus's fosterling.
Eternal husband.
Got you, have I? No? Changed your shape, become waves of the sea, of
the air? Anyone there? Anyone there?
No matter; this isn't the voice of Menelaus; this voice *is* Menelaus, all
there is of him. When I'm switched on I tell my tale, the one I know, How
Menelaus Became Immortal, but I don't know it. (*Lost in the Funhouse*,
130)

The narrator is trying to grasp the essence of Menelaus by referring to different descriptions of him, stereotypes mostly, but admits that he cannot be grasped by such descriptions. He withdraws, becomes “waves of the sea” in the sea of stories that revolves around him, stories that circle him like vultures. As has been said before, the narrative voice claims to be Menelaus' voice alone, “all there is of him”, which allows the narrator to tell parts of the story – like this opening passage – as an I-narration and other parts from a certain distance, eyeing Menelaus from afar and talking of him as if the voice and the character appearing in the stories were not related. In fact, all the manifestations of Menelaus adopt a dual function: Menelaus appears as protagonist in his own story, starts to tell another story, in which he again appears, and in turn starts to tell ... As Benzi Zhang writes in an article called “Paradox of Origin: John Barth's 'Menelaiad'”: '(...) Menelaus is trapped in a bottomless Chinese box of language with compound ironies, evasions, and disguises.' (Zhang).

A connection can be made to what has become known as “mise en abyme”, where an image contains a smaller version of itself, which in turn contains a smaller version, etc. In fact, it can best be described as the image that is created when standing between two mirrors. The image is reflected infinitely from one mirror to the other. In literature the term usually refers to frame-stories like “Menelaiad”. Of course, it would not be feasible to create an infinite number

of stories within stories, but the possibility is indicated. The idea is that one can never reach the bottom, any safe ground to tread on, the truth behind language. Here, for further orientation, is a possible interpretation of the different narrative levels in “Menelaiaid”:

1. Menelaus talks to himself (as he claims)
=====>
2. Menelaus talks to Telemachus and Peisistratus
=====>
3. Menelaus talks to Helen on a ship
=====>
4. Menelaus talks to Proteus after managing to catch him
=====>
5. Menelaus talks to Eidothea, Proteus' daughter, on the beach
=====>
6. Menelaus talks to Helen, rescued from Troy
=====>
7. The story of Menelaus, Helen and Paris before the Trojan war;
Menelaus visiting the Oracle in Delphi

As is plain to see, the narration is drifting into ever new stories, ever new versions of one and the same event. Consequently, the scenery changes frequently, the voice is lost in the tales, switching in and out of levels, meandering. He meets other voices, must recalibrate, remember where he is. When talking to Telemachus Menelaus seems confused at one point, unable to tell where and when he is located. He says: 'Where in Hades are we? Where'd I go? Whom've I got hold of? Proteus? Helen?' (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 132) and Telemachus has to conciliate him, place him in the right time-frame (or narrative frame) again, tell him who he is. For a moment the voice of Telemachus for Menelaus had just been A VOICE, the same way that the narrator describes himself as just a voice, a remnant of what once might have been Menelaus, but there is insecurity even about that. The reader must not look at Menelaus in all the separate stories as different versions of one man. Instead, Menelaus (or the voice that is left of him) is all of them at once, an overlap of Menelaus in

different stages of his life – a confusing constellation, one has to admit, likely to put one out of balance for a moment. Also, the idea of Hades as a place of lost souls which are trapped and bound to frantically re-live their lives might be a good clue to reading the story.

“That scene glowed so in my heart, its beat became the rhythm of her needles; Egypt's waves hissed on the foreshore like sapwood in the grate, and the Nile-murk on my tongue turned sweet. But then it seems to me I'm home in Sparta, talking to Nestor's boy or Odysseus's; Helen's put something in the wine again, I know why, one of those painkillers she picked up in Africa, and the tale I tell so grips me, I'm back in the cave once more with the Old Man of the Sea.” (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 131)

Despite the story's obvious and seemingly random leaps – what can be seen as digressions – there are a few central topics the narration is revolving around: One central theme is obviously Helen and her relationship to Menelaus. She is present in almost all of the scenes, at least she is present as an idea and her identity is questioned throughout the story. Did she love Menelaus? Has Helen even been to Troy? Or was it a cloud-Helen Zeus had created to take her place? Also, Menelaus himself seems conscious of the fact that she is very much at the core of the narration when he comments: 'When will I reach my goal through this cloak of story? How many veils to naked Helen?' (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 144). In a way – if one takes this statement seriously – the narrative structure serves to hide the central issue, Helen. It introduces too many layers, too many complications. On the other hand, the reader as well as Menelaus is dependent on the story in order to find the “real” Helen, to unveil and unravel her. Without the stories there would be no Helen.

The other central topic of the story – also foregrounded by the narrative structure, the intermingling of levels, – is Menelaus' own identity, which he himself questions numerous times. In a central scene he catches Proteus and asks himself whether it might be possible that perhaps it was not he who managed to catch Proteus by resisting all his transformations, but instead Proteus might have changed into him, Menelaus holding Proteus. An abstract idea, but one that holds his attention and terrifies him throughout the story.

To indicate the different narrative levels John Barth uses inverted commas, but

is very convincingly explained by Menelaus by mentioning that Proteus is a seer, and as such he actually has the power to know what Telemachus says, even if this happens on another plane of being. If he knows EVERYTHING, this is not restricted to his own narrative level (and all underlying levels). Of course, there is always the possibility that Menelaus is making the seer's comment up to silence Telemachus. But that would be a different starting point altogether.

Additionally, meta-narrativity is important in the exchange between Peisistratus, Menelaus and Proteus. It is imperative to notice that, when Peisistratus is commenting on Menelaus' way of narrating, the author is commenting on his own way of narrating and pointing it out to the reader at the same time. This has an anti-illusionary function. John Barth makes the reader aware of the artificiality of the frame-structure and in a way even makes fun of it. It is a device Barth uses numerous times in "Menelaiaid" and something he is particularly famous for in his fiction.

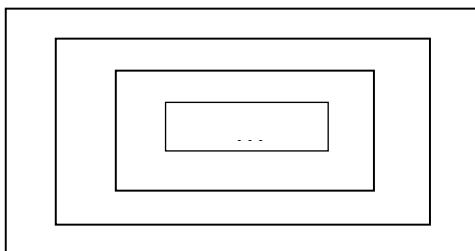
One can also say that the sea God Proteus in a way mirrors the story itself. The fact that he not only knows all things but can assume different shapes as well reminds one of the way the story, just like Proteus, is changing shape (inventing ever new levels and switching between them) and trying to escape its central question. The reader has to struggle with the story (as Menelaus has to struggle with Proteus) in order to find answers. However, the story, like Proteus, does only offer ambiguous answers, refuses to give it all away. When Menelaus questions the Oracle of Delphi "Who am I?" the answer is just a blank. But even the question itself is significant: If Menelaus himself does not know who he is, how is the reader supposed to find out? Like Proteus, even Menelaus is changing shape: 'For I changed too as the long day passed: changed my mind, replaced myself, grew older. How hold on until the "old" (which is to say the young) Menelaus rebecame himself?' (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 142).

Also, it is not only Proteus who has the gift of foresight. Towards the end of the story there is an incident where Menelaus (overtaken by Proteus?) gives away details of what is happening (or going to happen) to Agamemnon, Idomeneus, Diomedes, Clytemnestra, Odysseus and Penelope while he is still with

Peisistratus and Telemachus, talking to them, and obviously not in a position where he could know. Could it be that for a moment he was confused, mixed levels, could not fill his present role according to its demands? Is it a slip of the tongue?

“What's this?” cried Peisistratus. ‘Telemachus swears they've had no word since he sailed from Troy!’ ‘Prophets get their tenses mixed,’ I replied; ‘not impossibly it's now that Mrs. Odysseus goes the rounds, while her son's away. But I think he knows what a tangled web his mother weaves, otherwise he'd not sit silent, but call me and Proteus false or run for Ithaca.’” (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 161)

In the end the question remains: Who is talking through whom? This is a central question for the present thesis as well. As the frame-model tells us: at one end of the line is the author, who creates the narrator, who – through his narration – creates a character, who in turn might turn into a narrator, a creator, himself, etc. etc. The possibilities are potentially endless, which makes it possible to create the above mentioned “mise en abyme” structure, a bottomless pit of story.



Then when as must at last every tale, all tellers, all told, Menelaus's story itself in ten or ten thousand years expires, yet I'll survive it, I, in Proteus's terrifying last disguise, Beauty's spouse's odd Elysium: the absurd, unending possibility of love. (“Menelaïad”, 167)

Crossing the borders: Character transfer

“[...] it is always unclear as to what extent the characters do, in fact, influence the story and to what extent they are still following their fate. It is impossible to determine as to what extent their perceived freedom is part of the author’s initial plan.”

AN ANALYSIS OF JASPER FFORDE'S *THE WELL OF LOST PLOTS*, INCLUDING SOME REMARKS ABOUT PARATEXT AND THE INTERNET

One might say that in John Barth's "Menelaiaid" Menelaus, by telling stories and being the central character in all of them, creates different versions of himself. One might alternatively say that he transfers himself to ever new narrative levels, that he constantly crosses the borders between the respective levels. In a far more concrete sense this also happens in Jasper Fforde's *The Well of Lost Plots*.

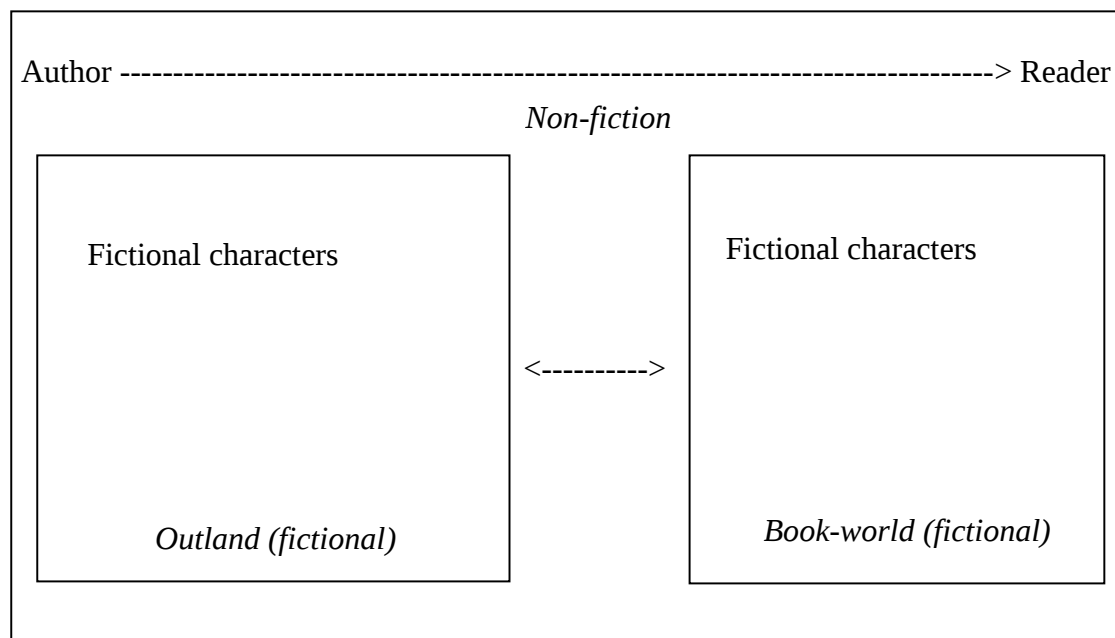
The Well of Lost Plots could be described as a detective novel in the widest sense, a surreal detective novel which is mainly set in the book-world. Luckily, the reader is not thrown into this obscure scenario without an introduction. As this is only one in a series of novels starring Thursday Next, the author grants his reader a very compact summary called "Thursday Next: the story so far ..." on little more than one page, but, already in the first paragraph, Jasper Fforde overwhelms the reader with impossible settings and a quick succession of unlikely incidents, as he is going to do throughout the novel.

Swindon, Wessex, England, *circa* 1985. SpecOps is the agency responsible for policing areas considered too specialised to be tackled by the regular force, and Thursday Next is attached to the literary detectives at SpecOps 27. Following the successful return of Jane Eyre to the novel of the same name, vanquishing master criminal Acheron Hades and bringing peace to the Crimean peninsula, she finds herself a minor celebrity [...] (*The Well of Lost Plots*, "Thursday Next: the story so far ...")

What is given in this first paragraph sounds highly surreal and does not connect well with the reader's world, so – even though there may be some parallels – it can be maintained that the setting is entirely fictional. One could even speak of a science fiction setting, in so far as Fforde introduces numerous technical devices, which go far beyond what is usually considered possible. The year "1985" is not particularly significant in this respect. It merely determines that the world which is presented should be seen as a parallel universe rather than some unspecified time in the future.

For this thesis the narrative situation is of particular interest but in the case of Fforde's novel it may prove useful to start with the way the idea of "crossing borders" is presented on the story-level. Fforde introduces his own idea of how a book might "really" come into being, which makes *The Well of Lost Plots* a book on the creation of books. However, it would be misleading to call it self-reflexive, as the way fiction works in the novel clearly differs greatly from the typical reader's perception of fiction, wherefore it is a false self-reflexivity. Fforde introduces numerous new concepts, even though he may not be too serious about them.

Generally, there are two worlds in the story: the outside world (called Outland) and the book-world, existing side by side. So, the book-world is not embedded into the real world as one would expect it to be. A simplified frame-model, which incorporates said structure, could look like this:



The relationship between the characters in the so-called Outland and those in what is called the book-world (equally fictional to the reader) is a peculiar one because the latter are the ones who know about the outside world and work invisibly and unnoticed by their readers – a quite powerful position, usually assumed by entities in higher-ranking frames. Anyhow, there is clearly interaction between the worlds, as is made obvious by the fact that on the one

hand book-world characters can escape to the outside world and on the other hand Outlanders (like Thursday Next, the novel's heroine) can travel to the book-world and even live there.

It would be a mistake, though, to think of the people in the book-world as simply the characters one knows from novels. Actually, these are only roles to be filled by what could be called actors, beings specifically created and trained to take over those roles in books, and – should something happen – they are replaceable. Similarly, even people who do not originate from the book-world can take over such roles, as is the case with Thursday Next, who is taking part in a so-called “character exchange programme” and hiding within a not very promising (and therefore unsuspicious) novel.

The Well of Lost Plots also claims that literature is less fixed than one tends to think because if a novel would change the readers could usually not notice this. There is of course a kind of script, which the characters have to follow, but at the same time there is some tolerance to improvisation. In one scene towards the end of the novel, the characters are at an annual award show (with a certain – clearly not unintentional – resemblance to the “Oscars”) and their stand-ins have to take over.

The Generics who had remained in the books as a skeleton staff to keep the stories in order were kept up to date with a live footnoterphone link from the Starlight Room. With all the usual characters away at the awards, fiction wasn't *quite* so good, but no one generally noticed. This was often the reason why people in the Outland argued over the quality of a recommended book. They had read it during the Bookies. (*The Well of Lost Plots*, 331)

As is the case here, Fforde frequently tries to explain peculiarities of specific works of fiction or the way fiction works by referring to book-world logic. It is in the light of this that one has to see the announcement that ‘All the punctuation has been stolen from the final chapter of *Ulysses*. Probably about five hundred assorted full stops, commas, apostrophes and colons.’, closely followed by the somewhat wicked remark that ‘the thief thought no one would notice as most readers never get that far into *Ulysses* ...’, only to close the proclamation by stating that ‘initial reports show that readers are regarding the lack of

punctuation as not a cataclysmic error but the mark of a great genius ...' (*The Well of Lost Plots*, 108/9). Similarly, the characters are continually waiting for Godot, only to find out at the end that he has been murdered. Only his head remains.

It is also shown that living in the book-world is decidedly different and demands quite an adjustment from an Outlander. On the one hand, Thursday Next is glad to find that all the banal things one has to deal with in the outside world are avoided in the book-world. They could interfere with the narrative flow – and destroy the illusion. Also, communication works differently in a book, as there are no acoustic signals to follow but only words: 'The voice had an empty ring to it and was neuter in its inflection – I couldn't tell whether it was male or female.' (*The Well of Lost Plots*, 10). And, when they ask her whether two people can really talk at once in the Outland and Thursday responds that yes, it happens all the time, this underlines the gap between life in Outland and life in a book and these are only some of the incidents in the novel when said differences are thematized.

Jasper Fforde seems to try and transfer part of this peculiar concept of literature, the open borders between fact and fiction, to his own book. In the closing credits he thanks Shakespeare (William) Inc. for supplying some of the characters, he thanks Heathcliff (from *Wuthering Heights*) for his appearance in the novel and he even acknowledges the trademark of UltraWord™ by Text Grand Central, as well as mentions that Mrs Bradshaw's gowns were supplied by Coco Chanel. Clearly, he treats the things he invents here as something more than just fiction. However, the above credits stand side by side with references to, for example, Rosie Fforde, for minor ideas and contributions to the book. In this respect, the credits cannot be seen entirely as part of the fiction but as a mixture of both fact and fiction and the blurring of the borders between them.

On the whole Fforde's use of paratext seems to follow this concept. And the concept of paratext as such is interesting for the present thesis as well. Usually, paratext is seen as referring to any additions to the main text of a book, such

as, for example, a foreword, footnotes, the title page, etc., but in a wider sense also what Genette calls epitext (such as book reviews). As such it is also a threshold, mediating between fiction and non-fiction and belonging to neither of the two worlds entirely. As Gerard Genette writes in "Paratexts":

It [paratext] is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text". (*Paratexts*, 2)

An important example from German literature is E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*, a kind of collage text which pretends having been written by a male cat called Murr. In this novel, the production process is fictionalized: actually two separate stories are told which are in no way connected to each other – this is explained in a preface by the editor of the book (Hoffmann himself) to the reader, where he claims that Murr has used the backside of the pages from another manuscript to write his life-story on, and somehow, in the printing process, these two separate texts came to be messed up. Even though the audience will not believe that a cat wrote the book in question, some insecurity is created by this attempt at faked authenticity. In any case – and most importantly for this thesis – the preface, typically non-fictional, already refers to the fictional world of the novel. Similarly, there is a preface by the author Murr, again commented on by the editor, and this seems in many respects comparable to the closing credits in Fforde's novel.

Mit der Sicherheit und Ruhe, die dem wahren Genie angeboren, übergebe ich der Welt meine Biographie, damit sie lerne, wie man sich zum großen Kater bildet, meine Vortrefflichkeit im ganzen Umfang erkenne, mich liebe, schätze, ehre, bewundere und ein wenig anbete. Sollte jemand verwegen genug sein, gegen den gediegenen Wert des außerordentlichen Buchs einige Zweifel erheben zu wollen, so mag er bedenken, daß er es mit einem Kater zu tun hat, der Geist, Verstand besitzt, und scharfe Krallen.
Berlin, im Mai (18-)

Murr
(Homme de lettres très renommé)

(*Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*, 13)

In *The Well of Lost Plots* it is very often footnotes (again: paratext), which are a medium of inter-fictional communication (communication between characters). This is exceptional in that the accustomed function of footnotes is providing the reader with additional information, which does not necessarily belong to the text proper and is consequently separated. In fact, footnotes are by far more common in secondary literature than in primary texts. On the other hand, creative use of footnotes in primary literature is not an entirely new invention. A fairly recent novel by Paul Auster, *Oracle Night* from 2003, serves as a good example here. Auster uses footnotes to continue the story on a separate level – one could say he splits the story up and creates parallel storylines, one in the text proper and the other one within the footnotes. Still, they serve to give additional information as well.

Twenty years have elapsed since that morning, and a fair amount of what we said to each other has been lost. I search my memory for the missing dialogue, but I come up with no more than a few isolated fragments, bits and pieces shorn from their original context. One thing I'm certain of, however, is that I told him my name. It must have happened just after he found out I was a writer, since I can hear him asking me who I was – on the off chance he ran across something I had published. "Orr" is what I said to him, giving my last name first, "Sidney Orr." Chang's English wasn't good enough for him to understand my response. He heard Orr as *or*, and when I shook my head and smiled, his face seemed to crumple up in embarrassed confusion [...] (*Oracle Night*, 8)

The above is the first footnote in Auster's novel. The first part is interesting because it devaluates the information the narrator is about to give (and in a way the whole novel): The I-narrator admits quite bluntly that what he can provide is merely fragmentary information, which may even be out of context – so all in all what he is going to tell is quite doubtful and unreliable. The second part of this footnote renders a rather banal anecdote, which continues in the novel. It deals with a simple misunderstanding, immaterial information for the reader, as could be argued, and maybe that is why it goes into the footnote, to separate it from the core of the narration. Still, Auster's footnotes are fictional only. They are concerned not with nonfictional communication but with the level of fictional mediation and discourse, as it is still the same I-narrator talking to the same addressee, even though the kind of information presented may be of a different nature.

Now, the way Jasper Fforde uses footnotes as a means of communication between characters really seems unique, as it again differs from the way Auster uses them in *Oracle Night*. Here, footnotes are incorporated into and work on the level of action, as they allow characters to communicate through a device called “footnoterphone”. However, even this highly developed technology is not immune to annoying advertisements, which can be called “spam”, but that may be the fate of any medium of communication:

... Soon to be launched: UltraWord™ – The Ultimate Reading Experience. For FREE information on the very latest Book Operating System and how its new and improved features will enhance your new book, call Text Grand Central on: *freefootnoterphone/ultraword* ... (*The Well of Lost Plots*, 50)

However, while footnotes may work as a means of communication in *The Well of Lost Plots*, this does not cover all of their functions in the novel. In the same way that Outland and the book-world are parallel planes of being and characters may move from one to the other, it also seems possible to hide within footnotes. Towards the end Thursday Next is forced to escape into the footnote channels. Here she is plotting how to keep the villains from executing their evil plan, which in fact involves destroying the footnoterphone system.

Mimi nodded to Quasimodo, who pulled the string. The steel plate shot out and *Das Kapital* and *Mein Kampf* came together, their conflicting ideologies starting to generate heat. The books turned brown, smouldered for a moment and then, as Mimi and Quasimodo scurried away, the two volumes reached critical mass, turned white hot, and exploded. The detonation echoed down the footnoterphone pipes, followed by a deathly silence. They had done it. The footnoterphone conduit was destroyed – Libris and Tweed were cut off from Text Grand Central. (*The Well of Lost Plots*, 344)

For Jasper Fforde it is not enough that his fiction spreads into areas of his book that are usually reserved for non-fiction, like paratext, he even pretends that his own book was subject to the same rules as all books in the book world by declaring that it has been constructed not with the use of UltraWord™, but with the standard BOOK V8.3 ImaginoTransference operating system. Thereby he again breaches the border between fiction and non-fiction. Before the beginning

of the actual novel, Fforde even refers to the special features (making of, deleted scenes from all three books, out-takes, etc.), which can be accessed via the internet at www.jasperfforde.com/specialfeatures.html. The code word is hidden somewhere in the novel, but easy enough to find if one reads carefully. Why not give it away? It's "sapphire". In Genettian terms this material could be seen as epitext.

Quite generally, the internet seems to have developed into a place where fact and fiction go hand in hand and one has to be aware of this. In the past ten years or so it has been widely used to promote the "authenticity", primarily of films like *Blair Witch Project* or *Cloverfield*. In the case of *Blair Witch Project*, a very low budget horror film about three students filming a documentary on the so-called "Blair Witch", the cheap pseudo-documentary style and the way it was promoted go hand in hand and can account for its widespread reception. In fact, the film's overwhelming success was closely connected to one of the biggest internet hypes of all times.

The marketing strategy was to give away misleading information on the internet, to pretend that the documentary was real. The actors even kept their civil names for the film and the fact that they were not well-known actors but no-names, so to speak, was naturally helpful in that it boosted credibility. So, before the film even hit the cinemas, there was quite a rumour and the public interest was immense. This big hoax made a lot of money, but it also pointed out how easy it was to manipulate the public with the new mass-medium, the internet. Of course, in such breadth this works only once, but the basic idea was stored for further use by the film industry.

Cloverfield, then, revives the idea with a different twist. *Cloverfield* is the latest film by director, writer and producer J. J. Abrams, who is also the creative mind behind the TV series *Lost*, and this is actually a good point of reference, as both *Lost* and *Cloverfield* rely on a devoted fan base which is frantically trying to find possible solutions for the mysterious events in both the series and the film. The trick is to give away clues that might lead to something but not necessarily lead to anything in particular. Thus, the story always stays open-ended and open to

discussion. Abrams' spleen with suspense and mystery makes it only a natural choice to include the internet in the marketing strategy for his film.

Cloverfield covers an assault on New York by a gigantic monster, but it is told from the perspective of and filmed by civilians, who do not get any insider information on what is actually happening and who are merely stumbling through what has suddenly become a war zone. Additionally, the audience gets to know the characters through little pieces of previous recordings on the video tape.

Of course, the creative minds responsible for marketing must have been well-aware that the public would not believe this to be a documentary (opposed to *Blair Witch Project*), so they did not seem to be too serious about it, but found a rather postmodern way of going about the new media. They set up internet pages, even one for a fictional company called "Slusho!", and they produced little clips for You-Tube, both commercials for Slusho! and newsflashes, for instance about the inexplicable destruction of an oil platform, including extremely blurry clips done with mobile phones. The question is, how does one tell the difference between a real newsflash on You-Tube and a fake one, created only for marketing a product? It relates well to an American radio broadcast from 1938, an adaptation of H.G. Wells' novel *War of the Worlds*, created by Orson Welles, which caused a panic, as many people were led to believe that a martian invasion was actually under way. A fake news report in a medium that is usually a platform for real news is likely to cause some confusion. Again, this works only once and so long as people are to a certain degree unfamiliar with the medium in question.

What is utilized here has come to be known as viral marketing, which relies on word-of-mouth propaganda to attract a wide audience. Obviously, this is not only cheap, but – as long as it is well done – also a very effective tool. Through all this embellishing additional information floating around the internet, readily available to anyone who is willing to delve deeper into it, the film itself becomes part of a bigger whole, embedded in a cocoon of fictional reality, which (as You-Tube shows) co-exists side by side with non-fiction.

So in the case of “Blair Witch Project”, “Cloverfield” and ultimately also *The Well of Lost Plots* – which again contains numerous allusions to film – the claim for authenticity does not end with the actual product, the film or book, but encroaches on aspects of daily life like the internet, which is no longer a storage space for reliable data but a postmodern playground for geeks and big companies who play along. This could be regarded as another evidence for the intangibility of truth.

REBELLION OF THE CHARACTERS: *SOPHIE'S WORLD AND AT SWIM-TWO-BIRDS*

As has been discussed, in Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* one of the major characters, Caroline Rose, comes to suspect that she is merely a character in a novel and experiments with this theory, tries to break free of her role by attempting to do the opposite of what the voice of the narrator says, but finally does not succeed. For Caroline there is no way out of the framework of Spark's novel. In Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (first published in Norwegian in 1991) one encounters a similar undertaking: Characters become aware of the workings of an author-god and try to counter his influence. They try to breach the border between fiction and reality and escape into the "real world".

Sophie's World is two things at once: It is an introduction to the history of philosophy and it is the realization of these developments on the story-level. Sophie Amundsen, the novel's protagonist, is a young and curious girl, who starts to receive mysterious letters of unknown origin giving her an introductory course to philosophy and thereby encouraging her to question her beliefs and her world-view. The originator of the letters turns out to be a certain Alberto Knox, a philosopher who finally discloses to her that the two of them are merely characters in the novel of a United Nations major, Albert Knag, stationed in Lebanon.

Finally Sophie had been given a book about herself. Was it the same book that Hilde now had in her hands? This was only a ring binder. But even so – how could one find a book about oneself in a book about oneself? What would happen if Sophie began to read that book? (*Sophie's World*, 466)

Early on in the story Sophie receives a letter addressed to Hilde, who turns out to be the daughter of the major. The major in turn can be sure that Hilde will get his letter because he is writing the story for her; everything that Sophie experiences, everything the reader learns of Sophie and Alberto also finds its way into Hilde's hands. However, one should not make the mistake of thinking the book the major is writing for Hilde and Gaarder's book to be identical. At one

point Sophie finds a book called *Sophie's World* in a book-store and buys it. Hilde realizes that it cannot be the same book she is reading because hers is merely a ring binder. She also ponders on the possible consequences: "What would happen if Sophie began to read the book?". Gaarder's book, the one that exists on the extratextual level, can also not be identical with either of the books that appear on the fictional levels, as it incorporates both worlds: Hilde's and Sophie's.

In some way Hilde sympathizes with Sophie and Alberto and she does not agree with how they are treated by her father, who presents himself as their antagonist. While, as will be shown, the two of them cannot reverse power structures and punish him for what he does to them, it is Albert Knag's daughter Hilde who – in a playful manner – manages to turn the situation around by leaving a number of envelopes with messages for him at the airport.

Major Albert Knag's first impulse was to smile. But he did not appreciate being manipulated in this manner. He had always liked to be in charge of his life. Now this little vixen in Lillesand was directing his movements in Kastrup Airport! How had she managed that? (*Sophie's World*, 485)

Of course, the basic dilemma of *Sophie's World* already comes to show at an early stage: How should the reader look at Sophie, as merely a construction of the major with no influence of her own whatsoever or as a being potentially capable of rebelling against the oppression of the author? In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a particularly Irish novel by Flann O'Brien (a pseudonym of Brian O'Nolan) first published in 1939, overthrowing the author is also a key theme. *At Swim-Two-Birds* incorporates figures from Irish mythology as well as from American pop culture to an extent. Its protagonist is a student in Dublin, who is living with his uncle and who is, at first, not particularly interested in his studies. Instead, he is frequenting Dublin's pubs and attempting to write a novel, the content of which is also going to be presented in O'Brien's book:

In the student's novel there is another author, a certain Trellis, who is keeping his characters locked in his house, enslaving them, so to speak, forcing them to work for him (a parallel to *The Well of Lost Plots* in that the figures Trellis uses for his books are merely acting their roles and have a personality independent

of that role). What is more, most of his characters are actually stolen from another author called William Tracy. While Trellis is especially sadistic, the basic idea that he is keeping his characters as slaves can, of course, be seen as allegorical of the way every character is subject to his or her author. Every author is – willingly or not – enslaving his or her characters.

While the characters Trellis keeps locked in his house are taken from diverse backgrounds (as concerns genre) they can talk to and interact with each other inside Trellis' house. In fact, they can even interact with Trellis, which suggests that they are on the same narrative level, which in turn rather contradicts the idea of an author creating a fictional world independent of his own.

All the characters represented in this book,
including the first person singular,
are entirely fictitious and bear no relation
to any person living or dead. (*At Swim-Two-Birds*)

Before the start of the novel O'Brien affirms that the characters in his book "bear no relation to any person living or dead" and explicitly points out that this also refers to the first person singular, that the reader should not draw parallels between the student represented in the book and the author Flann O'Brien or Brian O'Nolan as a student, a relationship that has often been pointed out in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Consequently, this is the kind of discussion which must have been in heavy circulation at the time when O'Brien wrote the novel. Of course, *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a particularly playful book, where there are often hardly any borders between the various authors and their characters, which means that one can either look at these introductory lines as an honest statement or as just another joke on part of O'Brien, another ambivalent remark which one can either trust or choose not to. However, in spite of these considerations, it is possible to say that some of the characters DO refer to the world of the author Flann O'Brien and the reader in that they are taken from Irish mythology. A few of these will be briefly introduced:

The arms to him were like the necks of beasts, ball-swollen with their bunched-up bawstrings and blood-veins, the better for harping and hunting and contending with the bards. Each thigh to him was to the thickness of a horse's belly, narrowing to a green-veined calf to the

thickness of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was wide enough to halt the march of warriors through a mountain-pass. (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 14)

Finn MacCool (or Fionn mac Cumhaill) is known as the most important character in the so-called “Fenian Cycle”, called after him and also known as “Ossianic Cycle” after Oisín, Finn’s son. There are basically two traditions: in the learned or manuscript tradition Finn appears mainly as a heroic and prophetic figure, whereas in the oral tradition the depiction of Finn as a comic and burlesque old man predominates. O’Brien sticks more closely to the oral tradition and depicts Finn as a comic character in a literary style that is clearly mock-heroic, but one could argue that there is also a certain tragedy in O’Brien’s portrayal of Finn. The same could be said of the mad king Sweeny (or: Suibhne), another popular figure from Irish literature, which could be interpreted as depicting the downfall of the great Irish mythological heroes.

Traditional Irish folk tales also play a role in that they are the source of two other characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*: The pooka and the good fairy, who only appear to be constructed as representing good and evil on first glance, but, in fact, both the pooka and fairies are far more complex figures, which goes back to their traditional representation: The pooka, despite being a kind of devil, can be helpful if he is treated well and fairies are usually seen as fallen angels, creatures which are supposed to be good but do not always meet the prerequisites.

One could ask why these mythological characters are relevant for the present thesis. First of all, they are not inventions of O’Brien, which inevitably makes them refer outside his fiction, which creates an intertext of some kind. And what is more, even though they are clearly fictional characters they are anchored in Irish tradition and therefore in the minds of the Irish people and one might say that there is a difference between fiction and mythology. The latter, one could argue, has a closer connection to the real world, is in some way believed to be true world history. Therefore, using a mythological figure in fiction is similar to working with a historical person, in that it builds a connection between the two worlds.

After an interval Finn MacCool, a hero of old Ireland, came out before me from his shadow, Finn the wide-hammed, the heavy-eyed, Finn that could spend a Lammas morning with girdled girls at far-from-simple chess-play. (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 13)

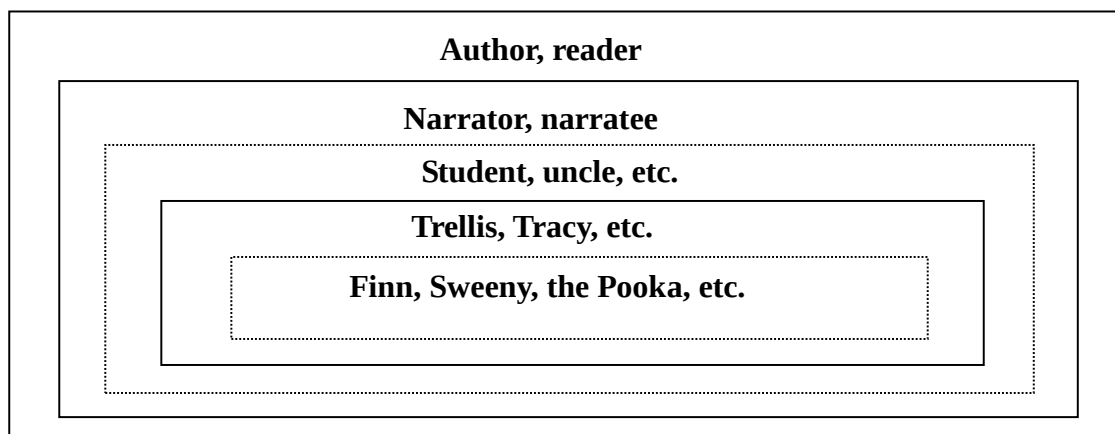
Even though an intertextual reference is inevitably indicating the crossing of borders, it is far more revealing when those borders are transgressed in a direction that is not allowed for by the frame-model. In the above passage it might appear as if Finn MacCool, out of the shadows, enters the world of the student, even though one will notice that Finn is not actually entering the bedroom of the I-narrator. The student's mind is merely wandering to the mythological Finn, whom he wants to use in his book, and Finn therefore enters the room in the sense that he enters the narrator's mind, nothing more.

The world of the student, therefore, despite his vivid imagination, stays clear of any merging with the world of his fiction and appears more realistic than the worlds he himself creates. Trellis' characters, on the other hand, do indeed inhabit the same house Trellis lives in, which shows that their world is not bound to the same rules. The student tells one of his friends that Trellis is only in control as long as he is awake and that, once he is sleeping and therefore not paying attention, the characters can do whatever they want. They seek to prolong his sleep and administer him drugs, so that they can experience longer periods of freedom and independence from their master and creator.

In *Sophie's World* the characters also develop plans to rebel against the author's rule, but it is not until the very end of the book that they manage to leave the major's story and enter his world and the world of his addressee, his daughter Hilde. Actually, it is still an in-between world they end up in. They can see and hear Hilde and her father but they cannot be seen or heard themselves. They no longer belong to the world of fiction, but neither do they belong to the world of the major and his daughter. They may have escaped the clutches of their creator, but they are condemned to watch the world they have now entered without any means to interfere, so whether or not one can speak of them as being in control is difficult to decide.

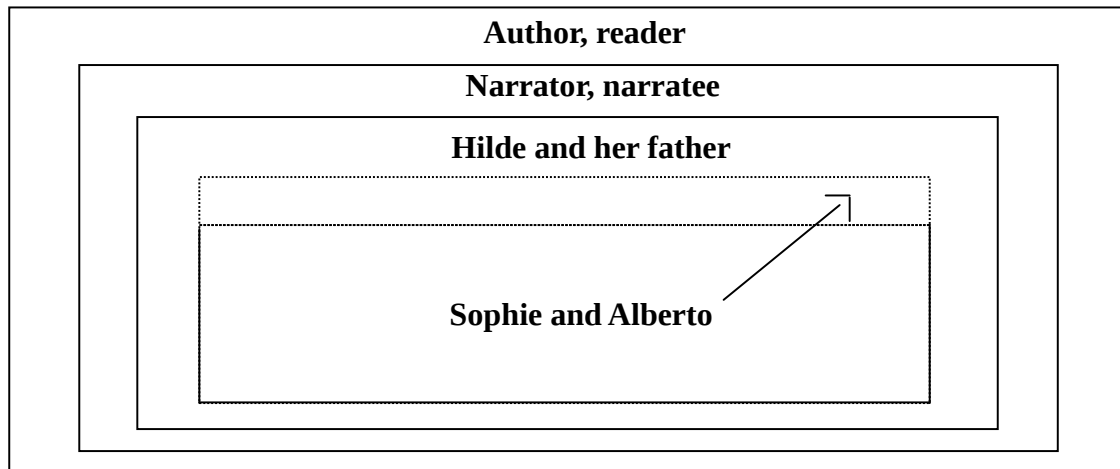
It's the price we have to pay. Although we have sneaked out of a book, we can't expect to have exactly the same status as its author. But we really are here. From now on, we will never be a day older than we were when we left the philosophical garden party. (*Sophie's World*, 482)

This limited form of interaction cannot be found in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, where Trellis even manages to father a son with one of the characters he himself created (Sheila Lamont) who is then involved in bringing his father's reign to an end. The rebellion against the author goes further here: While Sophie and Alberto simply manage to escape from the major's influence, the characters of Trellis' fiction seek to entirely destroy him (by reversing power structures, making him subject to his son Orlick's fiction) in order to secure their freedom. For a more detailed analysis the frame-structure of the novel might be helpful:



The author and the reader are – as always – situated on the extratextual level, clearly set apart from all others. Even though the level of narrator and his addressee is present in any narration there is little distance to the underlying level of the student and his uncle in Dublin in this particular case, which is due to the student himself telling the story and therefore being in the dual position of both narrator and character. However, it remains unclear who he is talking to. The world of the student, then – as has been established – is set apart from the world of his fiction, which depicts Trellis and his characters (almost) on an equal level. They live in his hotel, he has a child with one of them, so there seems to be no spatial distance. One could say, what separates them is the power structure. However, Trellis might be in charge but he cannot always control his characters, and they manage to drug him and finally even threaten his life, so he is not in the safe haven of an author god – quite on the contrary: he is made

into a character of Orlick's story towards the end of the novel, which completely reverses his position. The structure of *Sophie's World* reveals a few decisive differences, which also determines how the characters and the way they seem to cross the borders need to be looked at:



Other than in *At Swim-Two-Birds* the narrator is not himself a character in the novel, but while the narrator is clearly covert, does not develop a personality of his own, the level of fictional mediation is more clearly set apart from the underlying levels in *Sophie's World*. The main characters Hilde and her father Albert Knag, as well as Sophie and Alberto exist on clearly separate planes of existence. This division is much more thorough than it is the case for Trellis and his characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. The only instance when this border is crossed is when Sophie and Alberto manage to distract the major and escape from his grasp. However, while they end up in a world that is very close to that of their author, they remain unable to exert any influence or interact with this world, as if they were out of phase.

The frame-models indicate, that the author who is (and can be) rebelled against is never the one writing the book the reader holds in his hands, but always an intermediate author, a fictional author, who is himself subject to another (extratextual) author's rule and who can be tricked because he is not himself in control. The rebellion – one might say – is therefore in vain. In those cases when the rebellion actually goes against (or appears to go against) a real-world author (as in Spark's *The Comforters*) it is always unclear as to what extent the characters do, in fact, influence the story and to what extent they are still

following their fate. It is impossible to determine as to what extent their perceived freedom is part of the author's initial plan.

In Jostein Gaarder's novel the major is not aware of being merely a character. In *At Swim-Two-Birds* – while it is Trellis who is rebelled against – the student might be safe from metalepsis, but is equally unaware of himself being an author's creation. There is a certain irony in the image of the fictional author, who believes that it is HE who is playing god.

CHARACTER TRANSFER IN FILMS: AUTHENTICITY, THE FICTIONAL CELEBRITY AND THE AVATAR

While this thesis is essentially concerned with the study of literature widening the scope may grant some useful insight. The following chapter will therefore be concerned with similar phenomena as have been discussed and how they take shape in a series of diverse and (as the oldest of them appeared in 1999) also rather recent films.¹⁰

A starting point is provided by Ben Stiller's comedy *Tropic Thunder* (2008), which already encompasses what will continue to come up in the ensuing discussion of film examples: questions of authenticity and identity. *Tropic Thunder* is essentially a movie about making a movie: A couple of high-paid, divaesque actors are shooting a war-picture. The group is comprised of stereotypical Hollywood characters, such as the rap-star, the well-reputed method actor or the action-movie-hero, and the film builds suspense on how they do or do not get along. In the course of events they end up in actual combats, while still believing to be on a set. It is basically a comedy on Hollywood and the way it works (or the cliché of how it works), but – on a deeper level – it is also a film about fiction and reality.

You know, there were times when I was doing “Jack” that I actually felt retarded, like really retarded. (*Tropic Thunder*)

Tropic Thunder starts with a series of commercials and trailers before the actual movie, which can – on first glance – not be told apart from authentic commercials or trailers one would encounter in a cinema. In fact, the main characters of *Tropic Thunder* are introduced to the audience as if they were real actors. The audience can hardly tell the difference between a “fake” and a “real” movie trailer when it appears prior to (and thereby outside) the actual movie. However, it is highly important for the audience to notice that they are already immersed in the fictional world of *Tropic Thunder* in order to make sense of

¹⁰ Some of the differences between literature and film have already been pointed out in „A sudden revelation in *The Comforters* and 'Stranger than Fiction'”.

these clips. The trailers appear to be a kind of fictional paratext¹¹. They create a context in which the characters can be embedded, they create a history for them and thus make them stand out as real to the audience. A further complication arises when in one of those fake trailers the character of Kirk Lazarus (played by Robert Downey Jr.) stars side by side with Tobey Maguire (played by Tobey Maguire), which can be seen as a further attempt to bridge the gap between fact and fiction. It is a trick to merge the levels of fiction and reality into one single (fictional) level.

Man, I don't drop character till I done a DVD commentary. (*Tropic Thunder*)

While one could say that the clips before the film attempt to create a fake authenticity, the actors in the film often reflect on their role as actors and the degree of authenticity that is connected to it. At one point Kirk Lazarus remarks: 'I'm a dude playing a dude disguised as another dude' (*Tropic Thunder*), which might be seen as a hint at the loss of identity that is connected to acting: In order to be someone else one has to lose oneself, immerse the self completely in another identity – otherwise there is an overlap of different identities. The actor, like the patient suffering from multiple personality disorder, houses an array of personalities, but as long as he is in control this does not turn into a problem. Another notion which seems to come up in the above statement is that stardom as such often demands a certain amount of acting in the public sphere; that every person who is frequently in the media, etc. is likely to (at least to an extent) play a role, create a persona, a more favourable image of him- or herself for the public. Two films where this image plays an important role are – on the one hand – Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and – on the other hand – Mabrouk El Mechri's *JCVD* (2008).

MAXINE: Tell me Craig, why do you love puppeteering?

CRAIG: Well, Maxine, I'm not quite sure exactly. Perhaps it's the idea of becoming someone else for a little while, being inside another skin, thinking differently, moving differently, feeling differently. (*Being John Malkovich*)

¹¹ Cf. Genette. *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation*. And this thesis, “An analysis of Jasper Fforde's *The Well of Lost Plots*, including some remarks about paratext and the internet”

Being John Malkovich tells the story of the puppeteer Craig Schwartz, who discovers a door which leads into the head of the well-known actor John Malkovich and which enables one to see through Malkovich's eyes for a certain amount of time. First of all, puppeteering – on the one hand – is important as a metaphor for the characters being subject to their master (the author, the puppeteer, etc.). On the other hand puppeteering is similar to acting (as becomes apparent in the above quote) – in this sense every actor can be called a puppeteer in that he brings something (a character) to life. One might say there are two distinct concepts: becoming someone else entirely and controlling someone else, both associated with puppeteering. While the first one seems to be dominant throughout the first part of the film, the second idea, the power-game, becomes dominant later on. Not only does Craig learn to influence Malkovich's actions in the course of the film – who thus becomes his new “puppet” – it is also Maxine who uses her power over Craig to exert an indirect influence on Malkovich. The ensuing relationship(s) between Craig, Maxine, Lotte and John Malkovich are primarily characterised by the power-structures between the respective characters.

I mean, it raises all sorts of philosophical-type questions, you know, about the nature of self, about the existence of a soul. You know, am I me? Is Malkovich Malkovich? (*Being John Malkovich*)

Early on the attentive audience might wonder: What will happen if John Malkovich himself would use the door and be transported into his own head? The idea is absurd. When, however, at one point Malkovich does find out about the door and uses it the audience is not provided with any conclusive answers. Malkovich – inside his own head – is witness to a surreal scene in a restaurant: everybody looks like him and his copies constantly repeat the only word they seem to know, which is “Malkovich”. The whole scene appears to be a strange dream, nothing more. The “nature of self” cannot be uncovered, it seems.

Being John Malkovich bears certain similarities with a more recent movie, *JCVD*, which is an acronym for Jean-Claude Van Damme, the Belgian action star, and despite him being the main character *JCVD* is far from a biographical film. It tells the story of how Van Damme becomes involved in a robbery and

cannot live up to his heroic film roles. El Mechri's film depicts Van Damme as a broken character who has made mistakes in the past, who has had drug problems, is involved in a child custody case and in financial troubles. One could say, El Mechri's film takes the real Van Damme as a starting point, but introduces him into a fictional story. However, where and when the line between Van Damme, the real-life person and Van Damme, the character of *JCVD*, must be drawn is not easily determined.

It is especially noteworthy in *JCVD* how people constantly act as if they personally knew Van Damme, which is obvious when they call him "Jean-Claude". This shows the peculiar (and, as will become obvious, one-sided) relationship between ordinary people and the celebrity. While THEY may at least think to know HIM, via the information they get through the media, HE – on the contrary – obviously does not know THEM. Therefore, one can speak of a discrepancy between the ways their relationship is perceived by the respective parties. Certainly, it is also questionable whether the public image of Van Damme is really accurate, as it is very much influenced by his film-roles.

The underlying theme, which can be traced in both *Being John Malkovich* and *JCVD* is the relationship between the real actor and the character of the same name in the film. At one point in *JCVD* Van Damme is elevated above the set and starts talking (in a kind of soliloquy)¹² about his life so far and the situation he finds himself in. By elevating Van Damme above the set (and therefore using a Brechtian device¹³, showing the constructedness of the action) Van Damme's monologue may appear to be meta-reflection at first, but this impression is shattered when he starts talking about the current action, whereby he is taking his role in *JCVD* more seriously again. Through the way he links his past with the obviously fictional story of El Mechri's film it becomes even more difficult to separate fact from fiction. The role of this particular scene and its significance therefore remain doubtful.

In any case, there may be overlaps but Jean-Claude Van Damme cannot be identical with his alter ego in the film. One may say: strictly speaking he is not

¹² Cf. this thesis, "A brief history of communication with the audience or: who is talking to whom?"

¹³ Cf. this thesis, "Fact vs. fiction"

even playing himself. The same could be said of *Being John Malkovich*. The film creates a character out of the “real” Malkovich, but these two are no longer identical. One could notice certain parallels to historiographic metafiction, which takes real-world history and characters as a starting point for a predominantly fictional chain of events. There are also parallels to something that will be in the focus in the next part of this thesis: when an author decides to become part of his own work and writes himself into his fiction. Connected to the author entering the world of his fiction and the movie-star entering a film as “himself” or the “self-reflective” character in a movie like *Tropic Thunder* is something that will be important in the analysis of the Belgian movie *Ben X*: the idea of the avatar.

Ben X (2007), by Nic Balthazar, tells the story of the slightly autistic teenager Ben and how he struggles with himself and his surroundings. While it could be argued that through his autism and the altered perception that comes with it Ben lives – as people say - “in his own world”, there is another – clearly fictional – world for him to draw back to, which is cyberspace, the world of the computer game “Archlord”. “Archlord” is a so-called MMORPG, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, a world where thousands of people from around the globe can meet in a fictional setting and – most importantly – not as themselves, but as an avatar of their choice.

The idea of the avatar is not an entirely new invention. In fact, it goes a long way back to the Sanskrit word “Avatāra”, which literally means “descent” and often refers to gods who take human form when they appear on earth. There is also a close connection to the term “incarnation”, a term mainly used by Christian theology, which shares the common belief that Jesus is to be seen as an incarnation of God. (Whether this should be taken literally or metaphorically has come under debate in recent years, however.)¹⁴

The avatar, one could say, is merely a host to be filled with life by the being which enters it. In a wider sense of the word every character in a dramatic text can be considered an avatar, to be filled with life by the actor. And, of course,

¹⁴ Cf. Hick. For a comparison of the concepts „avatar“ and „incarnation“ in their respective contexts see also Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*.

this seems to tie in with Craig's ideas about puppeteering in *Being John Malkovich*.

A roleplaying game is certainly characterised by freedom in creating an avatar of one's choice, its looks and its role in society. An MMORPG offers a world that is complex (for a computer game), but easy to handle compared to the real world. It also offers interaction with real-world people, but in a safe environment. These factors make it a likely choice as a safe haven for Ben, who is constantly struggling to find an identity for himself in the real world, who is constantly characterised as the one who is different by others. In the game he has freedom of choice, he can blend in.

Ben X makes clear (even visually) that Ben cannot keep the levels of his reality and the reality of the computer game entirely apart. When he is standing in front of the mirror the audience can see parts of the game's interface overlap with his reflection in the glass. The two worlds appear to merge. This shows how Ben can only grasp his world by drawing parallels to the computer game, but he does see the difference: 'In games you can be who or whatever you want, but here you can only be the one, the dimwit you see in the mirror.' (*Ben X*).

As has been mentioned, what all those films have in common is that, on some level or other, they are dealing with identity and identity crisis, which comes to show in how the borders between various levels become blurred: Ben is in some sense always in the computer game, Kirk Lazarus is on the brink of losing his own self in his numerous film roles and of course the relationship between the actors John Malkovich and Jean-Claude Van Damme and the characters of the same name they play is a dubious one as well.

Another thing these films have in common is that all of them were shot under uncommon circumstances. For *Being John Malkovich* and *JCVD* this might be rather obvious: One can imagine that it will be challenging for an actor to play a character that one is connected to in many ways and the construction of which many people will confuse with the real John Malkovich or the real Jean-Claude Van Damme, that it can be an emotional experience and – even though it has

been argued that there is no 1:1-relationship – that it inevitably means an exposure of the self. In *Tropic Thunder* and *Ben X* the term “uncommon circumstances” refers to something different.

Parts of *Ben X* were literally shot in the fictional (or virtual) world of the game “Archlord”, which has a certain impact on the filming process. According to director Nic Balthazar shooting a film in cyberspace has advantages, such as the fact that the camera can be moved freely by simply using a mouse or that both the backdrop and the actors are provided by the game for free, so to speak. Of course, there are also disadvantages: There is no way to block off a certain area for shooting. Every player who comes along must be argued with and persuaded to cooperate. There is no way to keep anyone out of a certain area or keep anyone from messing up a take. There are different rules in cyberspace.

real-world		fictional	
Ben Stiller (director)	==>	Tugg Speedman (actor)	
Steve Coogan (actor)	==>	Damien Cockburn (director)	

As for *Tropic Thunder* there is a peculiar constellation because Ben Stiller was involved as both director and a character in the film. As the character Tugg Speedman he was part of the cast of the fictional movie *Tropic Thunder*, the director of which is called Damien Cockburn (and played by Steve Coogan). This shift in competences led to difficulties in shooting the movie, as sometimes it was not clear whether Stiller was still in character and Coogan was therefore unsure how to evaluate certain comments, whether to obey a command or not.

COOGAN: Well, the most confusing time for me was when Ben is in character in the scene, and his character is telling me to cut.

STILLER: So Downey and I are acting in the scene and Steve Coogan is the director, so we're filming the scene of us filming the scene in the movie and within the movie I'm saying "I'd like to cut." And the director's saying "No, don't cut. Keep it rolling."

COOGAN: And I'd be thinking, does Ben Stiller want me to cut or is it the character in the movie that he's playing, Tugg Speedman, saying "Cut"? In which case, if it's the character saying "Cut" I'm gonna say "No, we're not cutting. We're still filming." But if it's Ben Stiller saying "cut" then I just got to shut up and we're gonna cut. (*Tropic Thunder*, Documentary)

These anecdotes serve as additional (often quite perplexing, but also funny) examples that illustrate how the borders between fact and fiction are sometimes not as clear-cut as one believes them to be. However entertaining these anecdotes may be the present thesis will turn to something more closely analytical again. By now there have been fictional authors crossing borders (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, *Sophie's World*) as well as real-life persons crossing borders (*JCVD*, *Being John Malkovich*). The next chapters will combine these two elements and attempt an analysis of the real-world author inside his own fiction.

Crossing the borders: Author transfer

“The author as he appears in the novel is more like an image of the real author, a photograph, a painting; in a certain light and from a certain angle, missing some features, emphasizing others more prominently.”

THE REBIRTH OF THE AUTHOR IN MONEY AND “CITY OF GLASS”

It is peculiar that the death of the author, as postulated by Roland Barthes¹⁵, was followed by an increasing number of texts where the author himself made an appearance. To reconstitute awareness of his position and role? To regain his seemingly lost power? Or maybe just to weave an even tighter web of voices, for clearly the voice of the author who appears in the novel cannot be identical with the voice of the author writing it. But there is still a connection: The author as he appears in the novel is more like an image of the real author, a photograph, a painting, in a certain light and from a certain angle, missing certain features, emphasizing others more prominently.

Two of the authors who followed this trail are Martin Amis and Paul Auster, Amis in *Money*, Auster in *City of Glass*, which is part of his *New York Trilogy*, and which tells the story of Daniel Quinn, an author living in New York, writing detective novels under the pseudonym of William Wilson. The name of his main protagonist is Max Work and it soon becomes clear that Quinn – lost since his wife and child are dead (the circumstances of this are not disclosed to the reader) – seems to find himself in between this trinity of identities.

Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. (*City of Glass*, 6)

The name William Wilson is of particular interest, as it refers to a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, which even bears that title. Its protagonist calls himself William Wilson and does not give his real name. The name William Wilson in Poe's story appears as a pseudonym, parallel to Auster's text. He meets a doppelgänger of himself, who – as he claims – is not related to him. Furthermore, literary criticism has often seen a connection between Wilson and the author of the story, Poe. In any case, the story is about characters (or more

¹⁵ Cf. Barthes, „The death of the author“

generally: entities on different levels) who are in one way or other “the same”, different versions of one being, and this clearly connects it to Auster's narrative.

Quinn, in “City of Glass”, comes to assume yet another identity through a telephone call: In the middle of the night the phone rings, the man on the other end of the line demands to speak to a certain Paul Auster of the Auster detective agency. At first, Quinn tells the caller that he has dialed the wrong number, but when, after a few days, Quinn is called again he pretends to be Auster and takes the case. And it is this disguise he will assume throughout most of the story to come.

So far the reader has not encountered Paul Auster, the author of the story at hand, nor was he even mentioned. Quinn assumes the role of Paul Auster, the detective. Why should not two people have the same name? However, there is also a writer called Paul Auster in the novel, the one Quinn contacts later in the story, the only one in New York's phone book. A Paul Auster, who, like the novel's author, has a wife called Siri and a son called Daniel. Parallel to this, in Martin Amis' novel *Money* the first-person narrator John Self first talks about, then meets a Martin Amis, an author, in London. His father, like the real Amis' father, was a famous writer as well. The details seem to fit.

Oh yeah, and a *writer* lives round my way too. A guy in a pub pointed him out to me, and I've since seen him hanging out in Family Fun, the space-game parlour, and toting his blue laundry bag to the Whirlomat. I don't think they can pay writers that much, do you? ... He stops and stares at me. His face is cramped and incredulous – also knowing, with a smirk of collusion in his bent smile. He gives me the creeps. '*Know me again would you?*' I once shouted across the street, and gave him a V-sign and a warning fist. He stood his ground and stared. This writer's name, they tell me, is *Martin Amis*. Never heard of him. Do *you* know his stuff at all? (*Money*, 71)

Who could know whether the writer in both novels is meant to be the author writing them? But the possibility is obviously foregrounded – It is easy to assume this relationship, harder not to do so. Maybe the Paul Auster character is not the real Paul Auster, maybe the Martin Amis John Self encounters is not the real Martin Amis, but the reader is encouraged to take the possibility into consideration. And it would be wrong to speak of coincidence, taking into

account that the author may design his novel, his characters, their relationships and their relationship to the real world as he likes.

And then, most important of all to remember who I am. To remember who I am supposed to be. I do not think this is a game. On the other hand, nothing is clear. For example: who are you? And if you think you know, why do you keep lying about it? I have no answer. All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not my real name. (*City of Glass*, 49)

In both novels the protagonist at one point starts to identify with the author character, to merge, to lose his own identity and become the author. In *City of Glass* Quinn is already in the process of losing his identity when he starts to become Paul Auster. In Amis' novel there is one scene in a brothel where John Self claims that his name is Martin and that he is a writer. Quite obviously, Self is fascinated by this writer whom he barely knows or has any apparent connection to. While it is often crucial to keep the author and the protagonist apart (even if there might be considerable parallels), to keep literary critics from examining the main character as an avatar of the author and to track down the persona of the author in his fictional characters, it is also noteworthy that there is indeed a very special relationship between them: The character stems from the author, whereby some part of the author is also in his creation. A literary character is the author, but also something more and less than that. The relationship between author and character can be seen as *pars pro toto* for the relationship between reality and fiction, it can be astonishingly close but sometimes the connection is hard to identify at all. Of course this applies to all characters in a novel: heroes, villains, major as well as minor characters. There is obviously a great portion of Auster in his main protagonist Quinn, who is also a writer in New York.

Especially in the light of this it is interesting to watch how the author character and the protagonist get along in both novels. When Daniel Quinn meets Paul Auster in his apartment they seem to like each other. As Auster opens the door the reader is presented with a description of him through the eyes of Quinn, but of course it is in a certain way also a self-description. This passage is neither favourable nor unfavourable, but seems to refer to the stereotype of the

reclusive writer (the pen in his hand ...) and in this it is highly self-ironic.

It was a man who opened the apartment door. He was 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. The man seemed surprised to find a stranger standing before him. (*City of Glass*, 111)

Auster invites him for dinner and finally agrees to help Quinn as much as he can. They act like old friends. The text even says: 'This Auster was the first intelligent person he had spoken to in a long time' (*City of Glass*, 115) – which is clearly meant as a joke. However, despite this hearty welcome, and due to the fact that they are constructed as parallels, Quinn cannot help but feel jealous, cheated of all the things he has lost and Auster still owns:

He felt as though Auster were taunting him with the things he had lost, and he responded with envy and rage, a lacerating self-pity. Yes, he too would have liked to have this wife and this child, to sit around all day spouting drivel about old books, to be surrounded by yoyos and ham and omelettes and fountain pens. (*City of Glass*, 121)

The story presents the two of them as two sides of the same coin, different versions of one being. Auster represents what could have become of Quinn if his wife and child had been still with him and his life would have turned out differently. His identification with Auster follows him even into his dreams, where he 'found himself walking down Broadway, holding Auster's son by the hand' (*City of Glass*, 126).

The relationship between John Self and Martin Amis is also highly ambivalent. It starts out – quite differently from *City of Glass* – in a bar where Self attempts to start a conversation with Amis, and approaches him, who is obviously not interested and provides rather monosyllabic contributions until Self becomes angry and starts vituperating.

'You calling me a cunt?' I said loudly.
'What?'
'You called me a cunt!'
'You're mistaken.'
'Ah. So you're calling me a liar now. You're calling me a liar!'

'Hey, take it easy, pal. Christ. You're fine. You're great. I'll see you around.'
'...Yeah.'
'Take care now.'
'Yeah. All right then, Martin,' I said, and swayed out through the open door. (*Money*, 88)

This is the first time they talk to each other but it is not the last time and their relationship develops from there on. Like Auster and Quinn they behave like friends eventually, even become business partners, but as is customary in John Self's world it is a friendship of false smiles and constant fear of betrayal. The reader does not learn much about Amis, who remains a mystery throughout the novel. Towards the end they play chess, which – quite obviously – turns into a power-game between them. Amis wins, Self starts a fight and is knocked out. The way the passage ends makes it hard to say whether Amis is even real in the fictional world of the novel.

When I awoke, Martin was still in the room, and still talking.
When I awoke, Martin was gone and there was no sound anywhere.
(*Money*, 379)

A potential for jokes is created when an author appears in his own novel. This is one form of what Calderwood¹⁶ calls “duplexity” and Amis, like Auster, makes use of it. At one point Amis tells Self 'I'm in the book. Call me when you know.' (*Money*, 234) Obviously, what his counterpart understands is the telephone book, but the second (underlying) meaning is the book the reader holds in his hands. One page later Amis continues this: 'Martin Amis was in the book all right – in fact he was there twice, once as Martin, once as M.L. Some people will do anything to get their names in print.' (*Money*, 235) One can also sense this duplexity at the end of the novel, when the two of them meet again in a bar and Amis asks Self what he is still doing there, because – as he says – 'You're meant to be out of the picture by now.' (*Money*, 389) Is this the author who is strangely surprised to find his creation still alive after his suicide attempt? One can even sense this duplexity in numerous scenes when Amis is lecturing John Self on how fiction works, on the distance between author and narrator, the distance between author and protagonist and on the fact that the former is at

¹⁶ Cf. Calderwood

liberty to do anything to the latter. This is a metafictional remark – talking about fiction inside fiction – but also the author telling the reader that he can do to his creation whatever he likes. As Amis states in the novel: 'The author is not free of sadistic impulses.' (*Money*, 247)

But who is then talking? It might be said that Martin Amis, the fictional character, is talking to John Self, a being of his own space-time. Or that Martin Amis, the author of the novel, is talking to the reader of that same novel. Or that Martin Amis, the fictional character, in the form of an aside, is talking to the reader, thereby admitting that he is not an ordinary character. Still, he would only be an avatar of the author, a host for his clever remarks on the nature of fiction, because those remarks will be taken more seriously once they originate from someone who in many respects resembles the author of the novel.

In *City of Glass* Quinn, the real-life person, who is actually writing the story is described as the dummy; Wilson, his fake alter-ego, who supposedly writes the stories, is called the ventriloquist; and Work, the fictional character, is the animated voice, the purpose of the enterprise. Work talks through Quinn, the author. However, this can also be turned around. Quinn, the author, talks through Work, who is the animated voice of his creator. In this view the fictional Martin Amis would be the dummy of the author Martin Amis, as would be all characters, with the notable peculiarity that the Amis-dummy bears a striking resemblance to the man holding and controlling it. This could indicate a connection that goes beyond the usual relationship of author and character.

Especially in *City of Glass* it is plain to see that the fictional Paul Auster is unaware of himself being a fictional creation. Moreover, he does not identify Quinn as one of his own creations – another clue that he cannot be identical with the author of the story. For *Money* this might be different because Martin Amis is a highly mysterious character and the reader cannot shake off the feeling that he knows more than he admits, perhaps even about his own identity and the world he lives in.

Finally, it seems crucial to also consider the way the two stories are told. *Money*

is told from the point of view of John Self as an I-narration, which might help to explain why one gets to know so little about the other characters, especially Martin Amis. Self is often drunk, on drugs or immersed in his own thoughts and – as he is only a character – his knowledge is limited per se. *City of Glass*, on the other hand, is told by an authorial narrator, who is particularly interesting because even though one must not confuse the two or look at them as one and the same entity, such a narrator is often seen as yet another manifestation of the author in the novel. Would the character called Paul Auster or the nameless narrator be the more noteworthy manifestation of the author? As we get to know at the end of *City of Glass* the two of them even know each other.

At first the reader might think of Auster's narrator as omniscient. He knows about Quinn's inner life, knows certain details he could hardly know as an outsider. This becomes more complicated in the second paragraph, when the narrator tells us 'We know, for example, that he was thirty-five years old.' (*City of Glass*, 3), which could be seen as a first indicator that he does not actually know everything. However, this narrator is not given an identity of his own until later in the story when he starts to talk of himself as "the author" and makes an explicit connection between author and narrator thereby.

The account of this period is less full than the author would have liked. But information is scarce and he has preferred to pass over in silence what could not be definitely confirmed. Since this story is based entirely on facts, the author feels it is his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention. Even the red notebook, which until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn's experiences, is suspect. We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip. (*City of Glass*, 135)

A few interesting details can be found in the above paragraph. First, it is made clear that the narrator either admits or pretends that he is not all-knowing; but if the narrator should, on the one hand, be identical with the author (as he himself suggests) and at the same time limited in his knowledge there are only two possibilities: One could assume that the narrator indeed (as he pretends) only works with facts, not fiction. This would imply that the whole story is based on true events and that Paul Auster, the author, only relies on what he knows about

the case. It would, of course, also imply that the real Paul Auster is friends with another Paul Auster, whose wife is also called Siri and who has a son called Daniel. This is – obviously – a highly unlikely scenario. An alternative option is provided by acknowledging that the narrator is either lying as concerns his relationship with the author of the novel or he is indeed misled as concerns his position in the narrative, something that is provided for by the communication model in fiction, which makes clear that a narrator, who is part of the level of fictional mediation, cannot know anything about the level of nonfictional communication. The narrator can easily be tricked by the author.

Second, the way he pretends to rely on sources, primarily the red notebook Quinn used, is highly reminiscent of another work of fiction, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which is often referred to in the story, extensively by Paul Auster, who tells Quinn that he is currently writing on that topic. Third, the narrator admits the unreliability of the source.

I returned home from my trip to Africa in February, just hours before a snowstorm began to fall on New York. I called my friend Auster that evening, and he urged me to come over to see him as soon as I could. There was something so insistent in his voice that I dared not refuse, even though I was exhausted. (*City of Glass*, 157)

Actually, the reader gets to know more about the narrator when he steps into the story (which suddenly becomes a homodiegetic narration) for the last two pages. The reader gets to know that this narrator is a friend of Paul Auster, the author whom Quinn had visited and asked for help. It is also mentioned again that he reconstructs his information from the red notebook Quinn used throughout the story, but it is doubtful whether it would be possible to reconstruct the whole story accurately only from Quinn's notes and what Auster knows about the case. Moreover: once the source is doubtful the whole text becomes so. The nameless narrator is fully aware of this:

The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand. As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout. If our friendship has ended, he has only himself to blame. As for me, my thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always. And wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck. (*City of Glass*, 158)

Unfortunately, the text does not give away the name of its narrator, even though it has him appear at the end. What the text does is mislead the reader on purpose, refrain from granting him any safe ground. The reader has to constantly adjust his concept of author, character and narrator so that it can encompass all of the above complications, which is not an easy task. There are different theories for any character in the story, it seems, every identity is at stake, particularly Quinn is constantly taking up new identities until he finally loses all of them and literally vanishes. One fictional being, the text's protagonist, is at the same time Daniel Quinn, William Wilson, Max Work and Paul Auster. On the other hand, Paul Auster fulfils different functions (author, narrator, character) and, as a side-effect, the text develops a diffuse picture of him as well.

Money does not take it as far as this, but instead creates an even more mysterious relationship between Martin Amis, the author, and Martin Amis, the character, by telling the story from John Self's restricted point of view. What separates Auster and Amis in their respective novels is that while Paul Auster tries to help his protagonist, Amis could even be the villain of the whole piece, but one is not sure about that, because Self does not find out. How can the author be dead if he appears in so many guises inside his fiction? If one thing has become clear it is this: An author is more than just an entity writing a text.

LOVECRAFT: A META-COMIC-BOOK

The following chapter will concentrate on a comic-book, *Lovecraft*, by Reinhard Kleist and Roland Hueve, which features two separate stories, the first of which will be in the main focus. As the title indicates it is essentially about the American author of Gothic fiction Howard Phillips Lovecraft. One could actually say that the blending of Lovecraft's life with his stories is at the centre of (at least the first part of) the book and it can therefore more accurately be described as a collage of ideas rather than a linearly developed storyline.

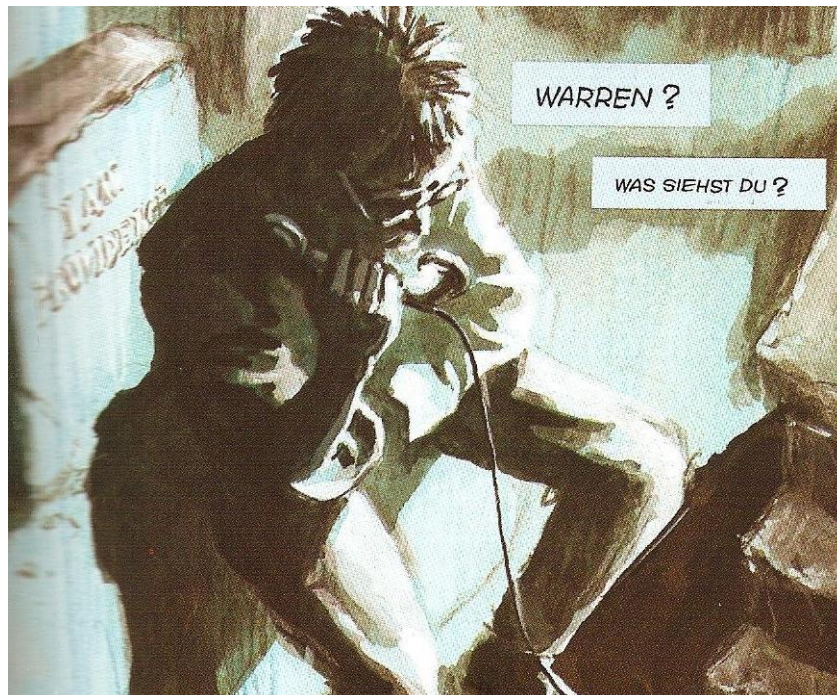
The subtitle of this chapter "a meta-comic-book" is derived from the following complications of the story: an author blending with his own work of fiction, the alter ego he created; a cartoonist appearing on the level of story and the frail nature of identity that is pointed out by these developments. In fact, the whole comic could be seen as a comment on the nature of fiction. In an introductory passage the authors talk about Lovecraft's "The Statement of Randolph Carter" (which provides one of the three basic narrative levels in the comic) and claim that it can be seen as a parable on reading. While Kleist and Hueve say that Lovecraft is talking ABOUT fiction through the FORM of his story, one could say the same thing about their graphic novel.

Die Geschichte ist also ein Musterbeispiel dafür, wie man in die visionäre Welt des Lovecraft'schen Grauens hineingezogen wird; wenn man sich darauf einlässt, eine Parabel für Lektüre schlechthin ... (*Lovecraft*)

A good starting point for analysis may be said short story, "The Statement of Randolph Carter" from 1919, which is mentioned as the dominant influence on the comic itself. As the title suggests it is indeed the statement of a man called Randolph Carter, a recurring character in Lovecraft's fiction and often described as his alter ego. It is a story told in retrospect, and from the very first sentence Carter addresses an unidentified crowd of addressees referred to as "gentlemen". As to where and when (and obviously also to whom) Carter speaks remains a mystery throughout the story – even though a likely interpretation would be provided by looking at his audience as the police, interrogating Carter after the actual events. However, this is never explicitly

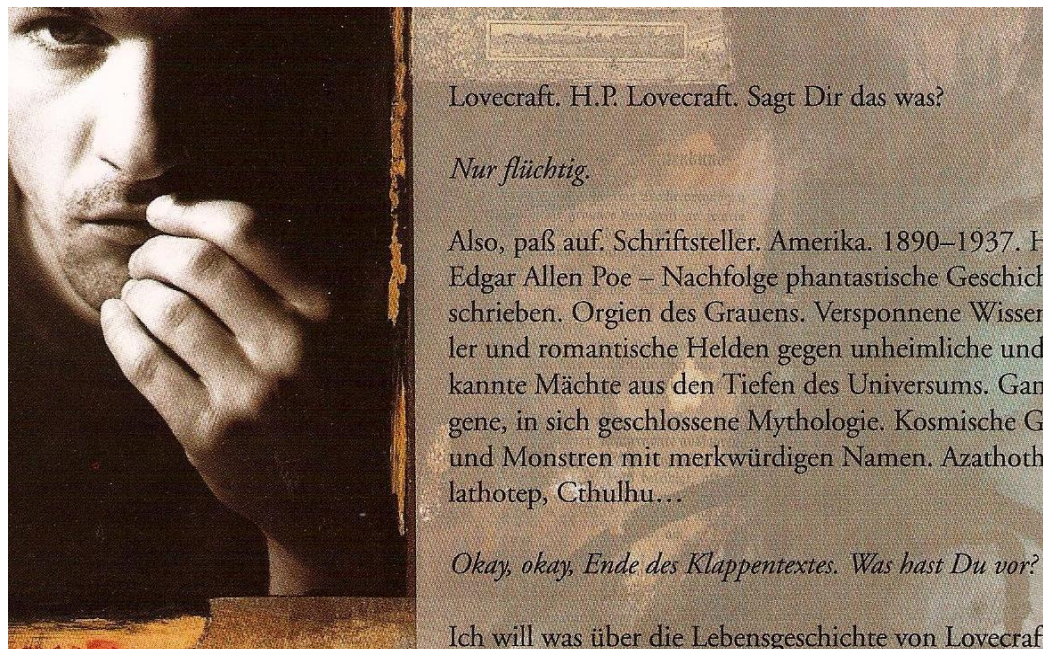
stated. Also, the reader learns very little about Carter and Warren's previous history. Warren, however, seems to have been the driving force in their endeavour. He did not disclose the actual purpose of their enterprise to Carter, which leaves both Carter and the reader in doubt as to what really happened that same night.

I repeat to you, gentlemen, that your inquisition is fruitless. Detain me here forever if you will; confine or execute me if you must have a victim to propitiate the illusion you call justice; but I can say no more than I have said already. Everything that I can remember, I have told you with perfect candor. Nothing has been distorted or concealed, and if anything remains vague, it is only because of the dark cloud which has come over my mind – that cloud and the nebulous nature of the horrors which brought it upon me. (*At the Mountains of Madness*, 353)



What the reader does learn is that Carter and Warren go to a graveyard that night, armed with electric lanterns, spades and a kind of improvised telephone device. At the graveyard they excavate a grave, reveal a flight of stairs and Warren goes down while Carter stays on the surface. They are able to communicate via the telephone device they brought with them. Suddenly Warren cries out 'Carter! for the love of God, put back the slab and get out of this if you can! Quick!' (*At the Mountains of Madness*, 358). After that incident the line is silent. Carter waits, frightened, shouting into the receiver, until

suddenly there is a click and a non-human voice says 'You fool, Warren is DEAD!' (*At the Mountains of Madness*, 360). This is what Lovecraft's readers learn about the events on the graveyard and it is basically what Kleist and Hueve present in their comic, albeit they add a certain twist to it.



Kleist and Hueve's graphic novel starts with a kind of introductory passage, a dialogue situation between two voices, easily to be identified as Kleist and Hueve themselves. They talk about H.P. Lovecraft and about working out a comic book about his life. They also develop the idea of using "The Statement of Randolph Carter" as a second source. The authors appear in this introduction as fictionalized versions of themselves. Even though the discussion might have happened the way it is presented here the reader can never know and is left in doubt. In fact, fiction can be described as a thing of doubt, it is everything that is not strictly truth or fact, an insecurity of information. Still, the reader has to believe (on a certain level) that what is presented is true or suspend his disbelief, embrace the action that he is presented with, allow himself to be drawn into the world that the author creates. This introductory passage works best once one decides to look at the voices talking as Reinhard Kleist and Roland Hueve, making plans for the comic book that is going to unfurl before the reader's eyes.



The actual story starts with an author/cartoonist (and one is inclined to believe that this is supposed to be Kleist), who does a series of illustrations on Lovecraft's life, is in need of viable ideas for his work and tries to call H.P. Lovecraft in order to get new input to his project. The time lag between the respective worlds, the fact that Lovecraft (1890 - 1937), at the time when the man is making his call, has obviously been long dead does not seem to matter much. However, he does not reach Lovecraft but one of his characters, Randolph Carter, who starts to tell his story – word by word – as it is stated in Lovecraft's text. Considering that the caller is trying to bridge time levels (and does not realize the impossibility of his endeavour) it should not be too surprising, at least for the reader, that he is breaching the borders between fiction and reality as well. Once one enters the realm of the impossible anything is possible. In its deliberate surreality the comic clearly mirrors Lovecraft's body of work.



Parallel to this, there is a second storyline which shows distinct stages in the life of H.P. Lovecraft. These two storylines, however, meet at two points in the story: Once, when Lovecraft looks out of the window, sees two men with a shovel and thinks about making a story out of it, and a second time when Carter and Warren are in the cemetery, and a man shows up, introduces himself as Lovecraft – it is obviously the funeral of his mother – and asks them what they are intending to do there. Interestingly, at that point in the story Carter is not only Carter but in a way also the cartoonist who was trying to call Lovecraft at the beginning of the story. This is due to certain transformations, which are taking place in the course of the narration.

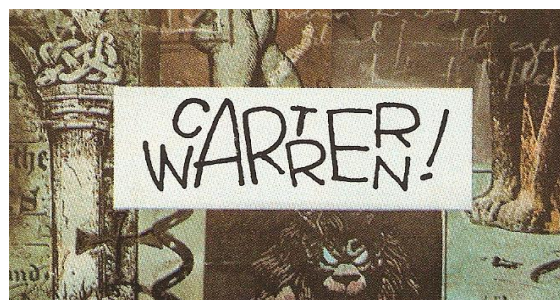
As has been shown time is unstable in Kleist and Hueve's comic-book. The cartoonist calls Lovecraft from almost a hundred years distance, Lovecraft sees Carter and Warren outside his window and meets them years later in an entirely different cemetery. Also, the narrative levels are unstable. In what could be called parallel universes that start drifting into one another Lovecraft is able to meet his characters and the cartoonist of a comic book on Lovecraft (in all probability the book the reader holds in his hands) meets both Lovecraft and his characters. In the course of events identities become unstable as well, one starts to drift into the other.



It is widely accepted that Randolph Carter can be seen as Lovecraft's alter ego, as a projection of Lovecraft himself in a text and as a mask disguising Lovecraft when he decides to appear in his own fiction. Kleist and Hueve use this conception right at the beginning of the story when the man trying to call Lovecraft reaches Carter instead. One could argue that it is – strictly speaking – not necessarily a misguided phone call as there are no clear-cut borders between Randolph Carter and H.P. Lovecraft. Also, while in the beginning there is a cartoonist, who can be identified with Kleist himself, talking to Randolph Carter, in the end it is Carter who is talking to Warren on the phone. So, identities seem to shift at one point in the course of events.



One could – and this is marked by colours in the book – basically decide on two different speakers in the initial dialogue situation, one marked as blue (A), the other as orange (B). There is also the colour grey, which is used for the passages concerning Lovecraft himself, whether this be dialogue or narration.



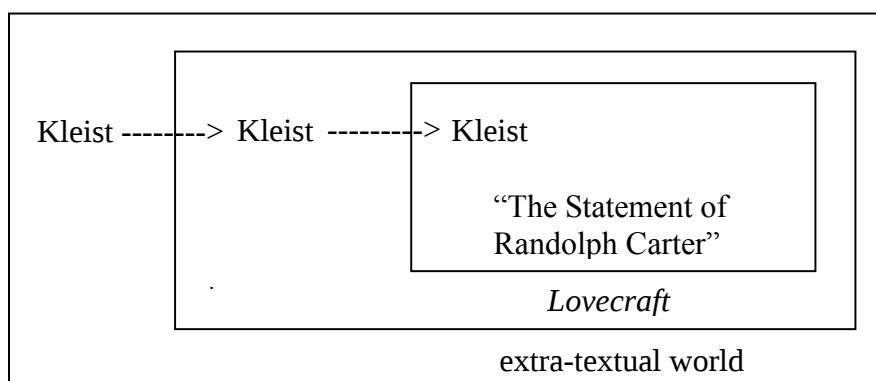
At the moment when Warren descends into the grave his counterpart shouts one word, one name, which shows the dual position he is in at that moment. It is an overlap of the names “Carter” and “Warren” and in that instant he is at the same time still the cartoonist calling out to Carter, whom he has talked to so far, and he is already Carter, a role he takes over from there on, calling out to Warren. It is also at this point that the focus of the narration changes. While so far the initial telephone call itself had been important and Carter's story had only

intruded through his narration of it, now the location changes entirely to the cemetery, Carter's story is no longer told but shown; it becomes the centre of attention. The level of narration, the narrative frame has changed. Towards the end they switch back into their original roles. The transformations could be summed up as follows:

A: cartoonist --> (acting out) Carter --> cartoonist

B: (supposed to be Lovecraft but pretends to be) Carter (narrating) --> (acting out) Warren --> Carter (narrating)

All in all there are numerous authors, who are transferred to numerous levels: Lovecraft, Kleist and (considering the foreword also) Hueve. While Lovecraft functions merely as the focal point of the whole project, Kleist and Hueve, besides appearing in *Lovecraft* in one way or another, are also involved in the process of bringing it to life and therefore they are in a dual position. In a way they use a similar technique as Lovecraft does when he enters his own fiction under a false name as Randolph Carter. Kleist and Hueve's approach is different in that they do not even have a name, they appear only as voices. Also, the story does not focus on them. Kleist (who grants himself more space) appears as an outsider who is drawn into the actual story and, ultimately, even finds himself taking the place of a character. The real-world illustrator Kleist first becomes a character in his own book, then becomes a character in one of Lovecraft's stories within that same book.



One may ask the question where a comic book's advantages lie concerning the use of meta-levels? The most obvious difference is that a comic book does (like

fiction) tell a story, but is essentially a graphic medium (hence the term “graphic novel”). While there have been experiments, especially in poetry, to work with the visual impression of a text, this has been largely ignored by novelists for a long time. It is only postmodern authors who have tried to break the boundaries of straightforward narration and incorporated visual images into their texts, to give them the certain collage character that is also characteristic of *Lovecraft*, and of course they related themselves to an early “postmodern” text by Laurence Sterne thereby, namely *Tristram Shandy*.

Kleist and Hueve exploit the possibilities of their medium through superimpositions, the partial overlap of pictures (when the system of frames a comic book is composed of cannot hold its content any longer), but also superimpositions of text, as when the names “Carter” and “Warren” merge to create an insecurity on part of the reader. There would be no adequate way of achieving this effect in a traditional novel, which may largely be due to a narrative text not allowing for the simultaneity a visual medium can offer. In fact, there are considerable difficulties in conveying the “story” without also referring to the visual level, to how it is done, and it is almost impossible to separate what is happening and how it is happening. One could say the numerous transformations do not take place on the level of story but on the level of their visual representation and they can therefore not be fully conveyed by language alone.



Talking to the audience

„In some cases the same information is communicated from the author to the reader, the implied author to the implied reader, the narrator to the narratee and characters to other characters (in first, second, third, etc. narratives) at the same time.”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE AUDIENCE OR: WHO IS TALKING TO WHOM?

Once more one might refer back to Muriel Spark's *The Comforters*. The situation was this: A voice (and one is led to believe the voice of the novel's narrator) becomes audible to a novel's character. In other words: A higher ranking authority had intruded into the narrative level of action. The next section of this thesis introduces another so-called impossibility of narrative discourse: the crossing of borders in the opposite direction, communication with the audience, and it might be surprising that this phenomenon actually has a long tradition, especially in drama.

The following chapter will try and trace the development of communication with the audience in different stages in history. Since a complete overview of this phenomenon cannot possibly be given within the scope of one single chapter, individual examples have been chosen to illustrate the stages in this development. They can then be compared to each other in order to establish whether it is possible to speak of a linear process.

A suitable starting point as concerns communication with the audience is provided by classical Greek plays in antiquity. One typical feature of those plays is a so-called **chorus**, which consists in tragic plays of twelve or fifteen, in comic plays typically of twenty-four actors. Basically, the chorus is in a position to comment on both the action and the characters' feelings. It has also been claimed that it represents an ideal audience, that it shows the actual audience how they are supposed to react to what is presented. The chorus also often represents the population of, the common people in a play. Finally, it has to be said that – like the narrator of a narrative text – the chorus acts as a mediator between the play's action and the audience, sometimes even provides brief summaries, so that the audience can follow the play more easily. This is also the main distinctive feature between epic drama and what is more common today: absolute drama.

CHORUS: Go where you will, and good luck to you.
[To the audience]

And you meanwhile,
you countless tens of thousands,
for the time being take care
that the wise words that are coming do not fall like trifles
to the ground.
That's a thing to happen
to stupid spectators – not like you at all. (*Wasps*, 99)

Of particular importance for this thesis is the so-called **parabasis**. It is the point in a play when the chorus alone stays on stage to address the audience directly. Usually this goes hand in hand with the chorus slipping out of character and referring to the world outside the play. In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, for example, the audience is first flattered (easy to see through the trick – the poet cannot know who will watch his play), followed by the chorus-leader talking about Aristophanes himself, referred to as “the poet”, and his career to date, as well as numerous remarks which only those who are familiar with Aristophanes' life and body of work can understand. The whole parabasis lasts for several pages.

CHORUS-LEADER: Now then, all ye folk, pay attention, if you like some plain talking. Today our poet desires to reproach his audience. He says that he has suffered an unprovoked injury after conferring many favours on them. At first it was not openly but secretly, giving assistance to other poets, slipping into other people's stomachs in imitation of the method of the seer Eurycles, that he poured forth many comic words; after that he did try his luck openly on his own, holding the reins of a team of Muses that were his, not someone else's. And when he was raised to greatness, and honoured as nobody has ever been among you, he says he didn't end up getting above himself, nor did he puff up with pride, nor did he gallivant around the wrestling-schools, making passes; and if a man who had had a lover's quarrel pressed him to satirize the youth concerned, he says he never complied with any such request, having in this the reasonable purpose of not making the Muses he employs into procurers. And when he first began to produce, he did not, he says, attack mere men, but with a spirit like that of Heracles he tackled the greatest monsters, boldly facing up right from the start to the Jagtoothed One himself, from whose eyes shone terrible rays like those of the Bitch-star, while all around his head licked serpentlike a hundred head of accursed flatterers; he had the voice of a torrent in destructive spate, the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arse of a camel. On seeing such a monstrosity our poet did not, he says, take fright and betray you for a bribe; no, he's fought for you right through till now. And he says that after the monster, last year, he tackled the agues and the fevers, the demons that by night throttled fathers and strangled grandfathers, that lay down on the beds of the peaceable folk among you and stuck together affidavits, summonses and depositions, so that many jumped up in terror to go to the polemarch. Such was the deliverer from evil, the

cleanser of this land, whom you had found; but last year you let him down, when he sowed a crop of brand-new ideas which you blighted through not understanding them clearly – though he still swears by Dionysus, over any number of libations, that no one ever heard better comic poetry than that. So that puts you to shame, for not having recognized it immediately; but our poet is none the worse thought of by the wise, if while overtaking his rivals he wrecked his new concept. [...] (*Wasps*, 100)

Even though one could say that the chorus lives on in various forms today, such as, for instance, in musicals – albeit with a different function – the traditional Greek chorus as Aristophanes used it has vanished from the theatre scene over time. However, interaction with the audience continued to appear in other forms. In the time of England's greatest poet, William Shakespeare, there was no longer a chorus (i.e.: a group of people) responsible for communicating with the world outside the play. Instead, the audience was addressed in so-called **asides**, a device which can potentially be used by any character in the play and which is used both in comedies (for dramatic irony) and tragedies (to create suspense).

However, before addressing the aside in greater detail it seems advisable to first become acquainted with a few terms of theatre studies, which are related to the aside in some way or other. First of all, there is a basic distinction between a **monologue** and a **dialogue** as concerns a play's utterances. A dialogue could be defined as verbal interaction involving two or more people. Manfred Pfister, in *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, claims that the monologue, on the other hand, can not be that easily defined or rather cannot be defined independently of its opposite, i.e. is dependent on the binary opposition between monologue and dialogue.

The only thing that the various standard definitions of monologue actually have in common is the fact that they define it as the opposite of dialogue and that they then assign every dramatic utterance to one or the other of these two formal categories. (*Pfister*, 126)

Pfister, based on Anglo-American criticism, further establishes a terminological distinction between the **soliloquy** and the **monologue**. While the term “soliloquy” refers to the “situational” criterion of the speaker's solitude on stage

the term “monologue” is rather seen as referring to the “structural” criterion of an utterance having a certain length and degree of autonomy. As is plain to see, an utterance is always “more” or “less” and never “entirely” or “not at all” monological. The situational criterion, on the other hand, according to Pfister, is rather unambiguous, as either a speech is addressed at another character on stage or it is not. However, the present thesis may to an extent disagree with Pfister in this particular point: An utterance can be presented in an unambiguous way, but it can also be staged in such a way that its evaluation depends on the audience's interpretation and an utterance may consequently become more or less likely to be interpreted as the one or the other.

As concerns the aside one usually distinguishes between three types: There is a *soliloquy*, which is similar to a soliloquy in that it is not addressed at another character on stage. On the other hand, it is also different in that the speaker is not alone on stage and does not believe this to be the case. A **dialogical aside**, is directed at a specific hearer on stage and heard by no one else. It is therefore dissimilar to both soliloquy and monologue and rather represents a particular form of dialogue. Finally, there is an **aside ad spectatores**, which is explicitly aimed at the audience. The invisible fourth wall – as it is often called – between the audience and the character on stage is ignored here.

Like the soliloquy, the aside can also be imbued with dialogical elements if it is addressed *ad spectatores*, and, in the same way that the soliloquy *ad spectatores* can break through the internal communication system and establish an explicit mediating communication system by addressing the audience, the aside *ad spectatores* is also assigned a definite epic and mediatory function. (Pfister, 139)

The “mediatory function” mentioned by Pfister in the above quote has already been talked about in connection with the chorus. It refers to the aside taking over certain functions that the narrator would have in a narrative text. Important in this context is that Pfister speaks of three systems of communication, which more or less corresponds with the levels of narrative discourse frequently referred to in this thesis: The **internal communication system** (referring to communication between characters), the **mediating communication system** (referring to the narrator talking to the narratee) and finally the **external**

communication system (referring to both the levels of nonfictional communication between author and reader and the level of implied fictional communication).

The mediating communication system is missing entirely from the communication model in drama, as there simply is no entity narrating (i.e. mediating) all the time, but – as has been established – this function can instead be fulfilled – besides nonverbal codes and channels – by a more flexible internal communication system, by characters who take over this particular task and speak with a voice not their own. As soon as an utterance breaks “through the internal communication system” one might say that there is no longer a character talking to himself or another character but the author talking to his audience.

A decisive difference between conventions at Shakespeare's time and ancient Greek theatre is that meta-dramatic remarks (slipping out of character and referring to the world outside the play) are possible for every character. Every character can talk to the audience about his or her feelings at a certain point and thereby break the theatrical illusion. The chorus, through his exceptional position, was clearly marked as the only mediating device between the audience and the action on stage, and one could argue that this device has disappeared in Shakespeare's time. A counterexample, however, could be found in *Othello's* villain Iago, who takes up the mediating position of narrator throughout the play by his frequent asides, and thereby becomes an additional tie between the audience and the action. Even though the audience is unlikely to take his side he thus becomes a kind of identification figure.

Richard III is another case in point: The title character is on the one hand a dark anti-hero but, on the other hand, manages to bring the audience to his side. There is a certain tradition in the villain also fulfilling a comic function, which is true for both Richard III and Iago. They lure the audience to taking their point of view, gain their trust by their jests and they offer a different (and – one might argue – often more interesting) point of view than the hero could. Of course, there are also numerous cases where the hero of a play – through frequent

asides – is meant to strengthen his bond to the audience, to make them take pity on his suffering. Such is the case in Shakespeare's most famous play *Hamlet*.

The interesting question, of course, is when does an aside truly address the audience and when does a character merely speak to himself? Shakespeare, as was customary at the time, is not overly explicit as concerns the way he marks his asides. Whether an aside is meant as an aside ad spectatores or as a simple monological aside is often not clear from the text alone and therefore dependent on the interpretation of the director of each individual production. As concerns the play in its initial stage as text one can therefore speak of a dual nature of particular lines, something that lies, in all likeliness, already in the author's intention.

However, one could argue that certain lines keep this dual nature when they are staged. Sometimes, a character seems to address the audience and the other characters at the same time. For example, Polonius' comment 'This is too long.' (*Hamlet*, 75) can be seen as either the character's opinion or as an insider joke, a self-conscious remark by Shakespeare himself directed at the audience rather than Hamlet. Also, when the gravedigger speaks badly of the English it could be interpreted as Shakespeare – in a meta-dramatic remark – judging his own countrymen and -women. Or when – as in the quotation below – Hamlet talks to the Player about acting one could say that Shakespeare at the same time communicates HIS preferred style of acting to the audience. As should be plain to see, there is often a comic effect in the duality of these lines.

HAMLET: Be not too tame neither: but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance: that you o'erstep not the modesty of Nature: for any thing so overdone, is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one, must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. Oh, there be Players that highly (not to speak it profanely) that neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have

thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. (*Hamlet*, 86)

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also is the point of origin of one of the 20th century's most famous plays: Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Stoppard's play tells the story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters in Shakespeare's masterpiece. Stoppard sticks with Shakespeare's text in those scenes which are taken directly from *Hamlet*, but – as his two protagonists are rather unimportant in Shakespeare's play – also finds room to improvise, to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern philosophize about who they are, what they are, why they are here and whether or not they are able to exert influence, determine their own fate.

The insecurity that is characteristic of Stoppard's plays seems to be influenced by Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter who were both radically exploring the possibilities of drama at the time. In an interview with the theatre critic Mel Gussow Stoppard explicitly refers to this influence and the realization that a line in a play can sometimes have various possible meanings:

I think Pinter did something equally important and significant. He changed the ground rules. One thing plays had in common: you were supposed to believe what people said up there. If somebody comes on and says 'Tea or coffee?' and the answer is 'Tea,' you are entitled to assume that somebody is offering a choice of two drinks and the second person has stated a preference. With a Pinter play you can no longer make that assumption. You are forced to consider possible alternatives, such as the man preferred coffee but the other person wished him to have tea, or that he preferred the stuff you make from coffee beans under the impression that it was called tea. There are many different possible interpretations for that scene. All of them had been discounted until Pinter exploited the off centre possibilities. (*Conversations with Stoppard*, 6)

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* it is – apart from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves – significantly only the Player who is able to step out of his original role and talk to the two main characters independently from Shakespeare's text. It is the player who is trained to step into a play, who is able to reverse this process and occupy a meta-position. However, while free will is at the heart of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, in the end neither the

Players nor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can escape the clutches of Shakespeare's play or Stoppard's play. They are ultimately trapped in a double prison.

GUIL: Perhaps I can use my influence.

PLAYER: At the tavern?

GUIL: At the court. I would say I have some influence.

PLAYER: Would you say so?

GUIL: I have influence yet.

PLAYER: Yet what?

Guil seizes the Player violently.

GUIL: I have influence! (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 16)

Obviously the focus changes from Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who mostly talk to each other and to the Player. Another important aspect is the dependence on and the partial overlap with *Hamlet*. While already Shakespeare presents a play within a play, Stoppard's play is a play within the borders of Shakespeare's original text, which again features a stage production on the story level. One could therefore claim that Stoppard adds one further level.

At the beginning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play the game of heads and tails, where the both of them throw a coin to see on which side it will land. There is an unlikely succession of heads seventy-four times in a row and Guildenstern comments: 'There is an art to the building up of suspense' (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 2). In this very first sentence Guildenstern hints at something that is characteristic of Stoppard's oeuvre in general: the awareness of how a play is constructed and the conscious display of these rules in the text itself, both woven into the dialogue and reflected by the way Stoppard himself constructs it. Guildenstern remarks to Rosencrantz, but also Stoppard remarks to his readers that suspense can be consciously created. However, Guildenstern continues by saying "though it can be done by luck alone" (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 2) and thereby creates an insecurity on part of the reader: How much is constructed by the author, how much is designed by fate?

GUIL: Who decides?

(switching off his smile)

PLAYER: Decides? It is written. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are*

Dead, 72)

As has been shown, the “duplexity” Calderwood attributes Shakespeare's work with¹⁷ is also characteristic of Stoppard's style, but the question is rather in how far – if at all – Stoppard deviates from the way Shakespeare allows his characters to talk to the audience. Is it that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are aware (or on the brink of being aware) of the situation they are in? Is it their constant games and reflections on their role?

GUIL: Do you like being ... an actor?

ALFRED: No, sir.

Guil looks around, at the audience.

GUIL: You and I, Alfred – we could create a dramatic precedent here.

And Alfred, who has been near to tears, starts to sniffle.

Come, come, Alfred, this is no way to fill the theatres of Europe.
(*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, 23*)

Of course, sometimes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do turn to the auditorium directly, which has a certain effect, creates a certain feeling on part of the audience, but it is not always explicitly clear what it should be taken to mean. In the above example Guildenstern looks at the people looking at him. While he does not talk to them the audience can already feel his gaze, becomes aware of the invisible wall between them and the double meaning of “the theatres of Europe” thus becomes more explicit. Another example:

A good pause. Ros leaps up and bellows at the audience.

ROS: Fire!

Guil jumps up.

GUIL: Where?

ROS: It's all right – I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To prove that it exists. (*He regards the audience, that is the direction, with contempt – and other directions, then front again.*) Not a move. They should burn to death in their shoes. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, 51*)

Here it is quite clear that Rosencrantz is addressing the audience. However, when he turns towards the auditorium and shouts “Fire!” it is Guildenstern who is alarmed, not the audience, most obviously because the typical theatre goer does not anticipate this turn of events. Of course, Stoppard is trying to anticipate

¹⁷ Cf. this thesis „Fact vs. fiction“

his audience's reaction – Rosencrantz's following lines only make sense if Stoppard is right. It is also vital to consider the phrase "free speech". When Rosencrantz uses this wording he is referring to speaking independently from what is predestined for the two of them by the playwright. And he proves nothing. The freedom they might experience outside of the *Hamlet*-scenes is merely illusionary. They are always someone's puppets.

GUIL: But we don't know what's going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don't know how to *act*.

PLAYER: Act natural. You know why you're here at least.

GUIL: We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true.

PLAYER: For all anyone knows, nothing is. Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 58)

In the above exchange the Player might appear to draw a parallel between the status of fictional characters and real-life persons. Both have to rely on what they are told, have to trust their sources of information. If these sources prove to be false there is nothing left to do. However, as long as the character or the real-life person does not question his or her identity it does not make any difference whether they are in control or whether everything is predetermined, whether they are real or not.

So what are the essential differences as concerns interaction with the audience in *Hamlet* and in its adaptation *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*? First of all, one has to note that in any Shakespearean line with a double meaning the reference to the real world is the underlying meaning; the play's action is always foregrounded. In Stoppard's play the focus changes, the underlying meaning becomes more prominent, sometimes even dominant. When Rosencrantz bellows "Fire!" he is clearly directing this off stage. If he is not talking TO the audience he is at least talking AT it. Also, he is trying to make the audience DO something rather than just LISTEN. This might also be the reason why people in Shakespeare's time did not perceive the aside as invasive. It was simply part of a convention. Stoppard's asides, in contrast, are far more disturbing for his audience.

Another important point is that Stoppard's characters are almost aware of their status as fictional characters and in some scenes they appear to be conscious of the people in the auditorium. It makes quite a difference for an audience which is used to seeing without being seen when the characters on stage suddenly start to notice that they are looked at and gaze back. Also, it makes a difference whether the playwright manages to talk to his audience over the heads of his characters, without them noticing or whether the characters themselves suddenly start to become aware of this double meaning.

GUIL: You're evidently a man who knows his way around.

PLAYER: I've been here before.

GUIL: We're still finding our feet.

PLAYER: I should concentrate on not losing your heads.

GUIL: Do you speak from knowledge?

PLAYER: Precedent.

GUIL: You've been here before.

PLAYER: And I know which way the wind is blowing.

GUIL: Operating on two levels, are we?! How clever! I expect it comes naturally to you, being in the business so to speak. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 57)

In going against all these conventions – the characters being unaware of their fictional status, the audience, etc. – Stoppard is clearly not playing by the rules. However, it is quite consciously that he plays with the audience's expectation and by ignoring what is usually taken for granted he also creates an awareness of the theatrical rules; destroying them paradoxically also makes them stand out more prominently. Stoppard might put a strain on his audience, but it is an education, really.

So far interaction with the audience has always been one-sided, has always been a one-way communication. Either a group of or individual characters have gazed at, have talked to the audience, the audience's reaction has been anticipated, but never has the character's actions on stage found a counter reaction from the audience. However, there is one scene in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which paves the way for what could be called "real interaction". In one scene Hamlet comes to the front, spits into the audience and someone from the audience spits back. Or this is what should be conveyed by

Hamlet wiping his eye. If drama is an imitation of life then this could really happen. Two-way interaction with the audience must be possible.

Hamlet comes down to footlights and regards the audience. The others watch but don't speak. Hamlet clears his throat noisily and spits into the audience. A split second later he claps his hand to his eye and wipes himself. He goes back upstage. (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, 108)

At the time when a play is performed the stage is a place of make-believe, a fictional world is created, treated as if it was real, while at the same time the auditorium, which is situated close to the stage, is unaffected by this phenomenon. However, it is possible to break this invisible fourth wall, to merge the fictional world with the world of the audience. The actors may leave the stage, step into the auditorium and interact with the people there. Indeed, this is the main intention of *Paradise Now*, an improvisational piece by the Living Theatre, an experimental theatre group founded in 1947 in New York, which is devoted to creating a radically new kind of performance.

The Living Theatre was founded by Judith Malina and Julien Beck. In the 1950s they performed works by Bertold Brecht, T.S. Eliot or Gertude Stein. They played in small venues and were heavily involved in the creation of an Off-Broadway theatre scene. From the beginning the Living Theatre was pacifistic and anti-authoritarian, if not to say anarchistic, in nature. This is also why their performance of *Brig*, a play about the state of things in prisons of the US military led to the closing of one of their venues in 1963. The repressive political climate was responsible for the group to go into exile in Europe, where they stayed until 1968. This exceptionally revolutionary year is also the time when their most famous play *Paradise Now* came into existence. *Paradise Now* is usually described as semi-improvisational.

In the Jim Morrison biography *No One Here Gets Out Alive* there is a rendering of Morrison's encounter with the Living Theatre. Being influenced by the French theatre visionary Antonin Artaud, just like the members of the Living Theatre, Morrison was naturally fascinated by the radical goals of the group. He describes a performance as follows: Right at the beginning the actors mixed

with the audience. Then they spoke together one of five key sentences. All of those sentences echoed social taboos. They involved the audience in dialogues, forced answers from them, shouted their lines. After a while the audience became hysterical, stood up, shouted with the actors. Finally, the actors said they had no right to remove their clothes, upon which they did exactly that; started to undress until the police intervened and aborted the performance.

In the above rendering the border between the theatrical performance and its (traditionally passive) reception is torn down in many ways. In fact, there is no longer “the stage” and “the auditorium”; the auditorium becomes the stage, the actors are always at the same time audience of their own performance and the audience proper, through their involvement in the performance, become actors. As Mark Amatin, one of the members of the group tells Morrison, the Living Theatre is comprised of people who came as spectators and could not go away after the performance, so the conversion from mere spectator to active participant was sometimes even a permanent one, it seems.

While in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* the characters as well as the audience become aware of the invisible fourth wall this border is now torn down entirely. The audience of *Paradise Now* shows an unwillingness to participate in the performance at first, the people are initially shocked by how the actors behave, how they are themselves supposed to take part in what is going on but can finally be persuaded to ignore what they are used to, to go against the rules. The Living Theatre is therefore anarchistic not only in its content but also in its form.

It is, of course, difficult to compare *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with *Paradise Now*, or: in doing so one has to be careful. While the former is still a traditional play where the characters become aware of what they are, the latter is a performance rather than a play. There is no story and it is doubtful in how far the actors are playing roles. Therefore *Paradise Now* is an exponent of an entirely different kind of theatre.

What can be more easily compared, as it is – despite the different medium – more closely connected, is Woody Allen's Academy Award winning movie *Annie Hall* (1977), which illustrates that the relatively young media, cinema, heavily draws from dramatic as well as narrative conventions. Allen's film illustrates how the aside can be directly implemented into film. *Annie Hall* is a kind of collage film, jumping back and forth in time and space but also in different narrative levels. It starts with the protagonist Alvy Singer (played by Woody Allen himself) talking to the camera about himself and his view on life. Unexpectedly, he turns to private details. He says: 'Annie and I broke up. And I still can't get my mind around that.' (*Annie Hall*).

As this first scene shows the film could be called a fake, un-chronologically structured autobiographical documentary. As Alvy is narrating or reminiscing about his past he is at the same time re-living these scenes, but he is always able to step out and comment on them. At one point Alvy admits: "I have a hyperactive imagination. My mind tends to jump around a little. I have some trouble between fantasy and reality," which might account for how the film is structured. However, not only does this quote explain why he constantly digresses in telling his story, it also devaluates the information he gives. It is unsure whether everything happened in exactly the same way that he presents it. Especially characteristic of the way Alvy Singer is at the same time playing the roles of both narrator and main character is a scene where he is waiting in line at the cinema. During an argument with his girlfriend Annie (Diane Keaton) and while a man behind Alvy is lecturing his date on Marshall McLuhan, the famous Canadian communications theorist, Alvy suddenly steps out of the line:

ALVY (*to the camera*): What do you do when you get stuck in a movie line with a guy like this behind?

GUY: Why can't I give my opinion? It's a free country.

The guy steps out of the line as well.

ALVY: Do you have to give it so loud? Aren't you ashamed to pontificate like that? The funny part is you don't know anything about Marshall McLuhan.

GUY: Really? I happen to teach a class at Columbia called "TV, Media and Culture". So I think my insights into Mr. McLuhan have a great deal of validity.

ALVY: Oh, do you? That's funny, because I happen to have Mr. McLuhan right here. Just let me ... Come over here a second.

He pulls McLuhan out from behind a poster.

MCLUHAN: I heard what you were saying. You know nothing of my work. You mean my whole fallacy is wrong? How you ever got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing.

ALVY (to the camera): Boy, if life were only like this. (*Annie Hall*)

In the above scene the protagonist is stepping out of the action to become the narrator again, who is able to directly refer to the audience. It seems that during the scene so far he had been enacting his own life. However, it is not only Alvy who can leave his role; also the guy behind him can suddenly react to what Alvy accuses him of. The fact that Alvy is able to fetch Marshall McLuhan himself from behind a nearby poster to advocate his case is only the tip of the iceberg. It boldly illustrates how Alvy has indeed a “hyperactive imagination”, how the film is not necessarily an accurate rendering of past events.

Also, it is usually impossible to tell at what level of storytelling the current action is taking place. In one scene, for instance, Alvy talks to Annie about her former relationship with Jerry. There is a cut to a past scene with Annie and Jerry, but suddenly the reminiscing Annie and Alvy also enter the room. Alvy comments: 'Look at you. You're such a clown.' (*Annie Hall*). In another scene Woody Allen depicts two flashbacks in split-screen, to compare the typical dinner table conversations in Alvy's and Annie's family. The scene becomes especially interesting when the people in the flashbacks start to communicate with each other as if they were in the same room, thereby bridging the gap between two separate narrative levels.

On top of that, as in *Hamlet* or *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, there is also a play which mirrors the action of the film. At the end Alvy has made a dramatic piece out of his experiences and his relationship with Annie Hall. However, he provides another, more Hollywood-like closure. Alvy Singer's play, other than Woody Allen's film, offers a happy ending.

Basically, most techniques that Allen takes over from literature work in a similar way in the medium of film. A great advantage of film lies in its ability to easily switch scenes, which he makes extensive use of. Another advantage is that things can literally be presented at the same time, while in a text this is only

possible alternatingly. As concerns the aside, however, what is known as the invisible fourth wall in the theatre is provided here by the camera. A character looking directly into the camera is looking at the movie audience – at least the audience perceives this to be the case. Other than *Paradise Now* this is clearly one-way communication. For the simple reason that the actors are not physically present there is not even a theoretical possibility for the audience to influence the action, to take part in what is going on. A film is always infinitely reproducible in identical fashion.

While Woody Allen may use an experimental and therefore modern (or postmodern) formal framework for “Annie Hall” he is actually following a long tradition of communicating with the audience. However, while the given examples might seem to portray the development from the chorus to modern forms of the aside in film or direct interaction with the audience in performances of the Living Theatre as a linear process, the amount of data given is not sufficient to reach any conclusive results. The present chapter is only meant as a first step, as a thought provoking impulse as concerns tracing this development. It would need an analysis in broader scope and greater detail to make a more substantiated proposition.

Despite the chapter so far having been primarily concerned with drama it is quite clear that communication with the audience also happens in narrative texts, whereas the audience in such a case, obviously, would be the reader. Theoretically imaginable are both scenarios: one where the reader is either addressed by the narrator (the mediator) and another one where he or she is addressed by a character and examples for both will indeed briefly be provided.

Considering drama merely as a text there are quite a number of similarities to narrative. However, it is characteristic of most plays that they are designed to be performed and in their realization an actual actor embodying a character can talk to an audience that is physically present. This kind of interaction, one has to be aware, is not inherent in a narrative text, which is the defining difference as concerns interaction with the respective audience in both literary forms. Still, physical presence of both speaker and listener is not a condition for

communication to take place. Written conversation – from a linguistic standpoint – has the same value as spoken language. Therefore, the text itself must be as relevant as its realization.

Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, analyses key texts in the history of literature, two of which will be briefly introduced here: Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. In *Don Quixote* the I-narrator, who – through the way he is constructed – is likely to be confused with Cervantes himself, claims to have acquired a manuscript by a certain Cid Hamete Benengeli, and to be himself merely the editor, not the author of the work at hand. Of course, this is a big hoax: Benengeli is a mere fictional creation. The narrator, by introducing this fictional background, creates a story around himself. As Booth says: 'The narrator has made of himself a dramatized character to whom we react as we react to other characters.' (Booth, 212). Benengeli, on the other hand, should rather not be seen as the implied author of the story, the man who has SUPPOSEDLY written *Don Quixote*, as he is not meant to be the author of the text at hand but the author of the fictional source text. Cervantes creates additional (fictional) levels between himself and the level of action and the reader has to make sense of these in order to make sense of the narration.

The reader, from what hath been said, may imagine that the reconciliation (if indeed it could be so called) was only matter of form; we shall therefore pass it over, and hasten to what must surely be thought matter of substance. (*Tom Jones*, 17)

The above passage is taken from Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a foundling*; THE classical example of authorial narration. The narrator of *Tom Jones* is for some parts of the book almost invisible, but – as in the passage given – points to the fact that he (and with him the audience) can jump around in space and time; he can deconstruct the action, make clear that it is a story, only imitating real life. He may sometimes even get involved in a (certainly one-sided) discourse of a more general nature with his addressee, in which he (as in the foreword, which may or may not belong to the novel proper) even refers outside the world of *Tom Jones*, to persons belonging to the same world as the author Fielding. One could say, that – as in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – this

suggests an identification of the narrator with Fielding, the author. It is probably also why Booth calls the narrator in *Tom Jones* the “dramatized Fielding”, but this – as has hopefully been established by now – is difficult to argue from a narratological point of view.

Booth claims that 'much of his [i.e. the narrator's] commentary relates to nothing but the reader and himself' (Booth, 216). One could look at those passages as essay parts, therefore, which clearly contradicts the notion of *Tom Jones* as a unified work of art. However, Booth also claims that the passages in question can be seen as a kind of sub-plot, a “story” of its own right, which becomes clear once one disregards the story of Tom and only considers the narrator's digressions. There is a relationship between narrator and narratee, which evolves along the sidelines of Tom Jones' story. Anyway, in how far this narrator correlates with the real author is rather beside the point for Booth: 'It is not Fielding we care about, but the narrator created to speak in his name.' (Booth, 218). The two of them might be related, but the reader's focus is clearly on the dramatized version of the author, the construction of the text.

For a more recent example of communication with an audience in narrative texts one might again turn to Amis *Money*, which has already been discussed in connection with the author appearing in his fiction. Amis novel, however, offers another interesting aspect, as it introduces an I-narrator, who is himself the main protagonist and constantly talks to someone whose identity remains a mystery. The way Amis constructs this addressee is particularly interesting.

Money is told from the point of view of John Self, a rather unreliable narrator as one might already deduce from his name. “John” is probably the most common name in the in the English-speaking world. And what does “Self” mean? Everyone is oneself. Therefore, “John Self” could be interpreted as a pseudonym, which means that he does not want to give his real name to his addressee, which in turn tells the reader something about their relationship and the lack of trust involved.

While the “real” identity of John Self is rather immaterial for the present thesis it

is the identity of Self's addressee that seems more important here. First of all, the narratee is directly addressed, often by the pronoun "you", which, in English, does not give away the sex of the person addressed. Also, when Self is referring to the person he is talking to as "brother" he is also adding "sister" to cloak the addressee's real sex. What is more, "brother" does not appear to have its biological meaning when John Self uses it.

I love giving money away. If you were here now, I'd probably sip you some cash, twenty, thirty, maybe more. How much do you want? What are you having? What would you give me, sister, brother? Would you put an arm round my shoulder and tell me I was your kind of guy? I'd pay. I'd give you good money for it. (*Money*, 46)

The above passage is rather revealing as to how Self sees his relationship with his addressee. The giving away of money for affection constructs his counterpart as a prostitute, an interpretation that goes well with how Self comes across in the story. He would rather tell personal things to a stranger than to someone close to him (if there is such a person). Also, Self would have a certain power over a prostitute, who is dependent on his money – a relationship which keeps him in control, grants him safety. This interpretation would also comply with him not giving his real name. And indeed, once in the story, he gives a false name in such an establishment: That of the author Amis.

Hey, if you were here now, sister mother daughter lover (niece, auntie, granny), maybe we could talk a bit and cuddle down together – nothing dirty. Only spoons. Maybe you'd let me rest my great face in the gentle bracket between the wings of your shoulderblades. That's all I have in mind, believe me. I know you're a pure creature. You don't drink or smoke or screw around that much, I'll bet. Am I wrong? That is what I love in you ... (*Money*, 111)

There is another possible interpretation of the narratee's identity – quite relevant for the present thesis: One could look at Self's addressee as a reader. This view is supported by the narratee appearing to be of indeterminate sex, as exemplified above. Not the pronoun "you" (as it can be both singular and plural), but the persistent use of singular forms hints to an individual (a reader) rather than a group of people (the readership). This means that each individual reader will feel targeted and – as a level such as implied fictional communication is not

something the typical reader would perceive – will feel targeted DIRECTLY.

An additional point in favour of this theory is this: Self's addressee appears to be physically present when Self is narrating and not present at the same time. In the paragraph given above Self uses the phrase 'If you were here now, sister mother daughter lover (niece, auntie, granny) [...]'. Later in the story he says 'Come on, let's feel a little fear together. Give me your hand. Shake ...' (*Money*, 380). How can the narratee be present and not present at the same time? Well, one could say that the same is true of a reader.

When reading a fictional text a reader is of course physically outside the world of fiction, but inevitably has to use his imagination to enter the fictional world in order to make sense of it. One could say that the typical reader of a novel, therefore, enters the fictional world as an observer. For those readers who perceive themselves to be addressed by John Self's "you" this reference makes them feel part of the narrative process even more so.

There are omissions, which could be interpreted as actual comments by the narratee, such as in 'Now how bad do you assume I'm feeling? ... Well, you're wrong.' (*Money*, 29). John Self's "Well, you're wrong." implies that his addressee must have said something, reacted to his previous line. Why is this response not part of the novel's text? One might be tempted to say that it happens outside the actual novel on the level of non-fictional communication. It is a comment made by the individual reader and can therefore not be part of the text. There are a number of arguments against this:

Not even the author can accurately predict a statement from the reader, a being of his own plane of existence. While Amis is God to all narrators and characters he may create in his fiction, the reader has a will of his own and may always react contrary to Amis' predictions. It is similar to the scene in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* when Rosencrantz shouts "Fire!" at the audience and Stoppard anticipates a certain reaction, which in some cases he might not get. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* one could speak of an implied audience, therefore, and this is quite similar in *Money*, where the implied

remarks (indicated by "...") necessarily have to come from some source inside the fictional world, even if neither the originator of these remarks nor the remarks themselves appear in the text.

As becomes clear in the course of the story John Self is in a rather distressed mental state. Therefore, his addressee could likely only be imaginary. One could say: HE constructs (or implies) his own addressee (or reader). He also predicts the responses. While John Self could – for reasons laid down numerous times – not communicate with the individual reader of a novel, this would be rather unproblematic if this reader is his own creation and therefore subordinate to him on the communication model. It would be a reader FIGURE therefore, a “dramatized reader”, similar to how Wayne Booth has called the narrator of *Tom Jones* the “dramatized Fielding”.

In how far would this “dramatized reader” be different from an ordinary narratee? Quite truthfully, the only difference is that the “real” reader could to an extent identify with the reader created by John Self, but it is rather arbitrary to do so or not. It is up to each individual reader what to make of Martin Amis' clues, how to interpret them.

What the examples from narrative texts might have shown is that the levels of communication that are inherent to any narrative are often difficult to tell apart. An entity like an implied author, for instance, will be rather irrelevant (and therefore invisible) to most readers, but is of vital importance in some cases for interpreting and analysing a text more closely. Some confusion may be created by the fact that communication on different levels is taking place SIMULTANEOUSLY: In some cases the same information is communicated from the author to the reader, the implied author to the implied reader, the narrator to the narratee and characters to other characters (in first, second, third, etc. narratives) at the same time. It might be because of this overlap that one might confuse the communication levels involved.

THIS IS HOW IT GOES – THE TWO NARRATORS

I suppose it's ironic that we must gather together in the dark around a little stage to hear the truth rather than tell each other face to face on our lawns, but that is how it goes. No pun intended. ("This Is How It Went", ix)

This Is How It Goes is a fairly recent play by Neil LaBute and it poses a challenge to its audience as well as to its readers. As LaBute admits in his foreword he does not intend to give straightforward answers to anything that might come up in the play, to provide a detailed account of what has "really" happened. He even admits that neither he nor his characters can be trusted.

Besides, the worst offense a writer of fiction can perpetrate on his suspecting readers is this old chestnut: 'Trust me.' I mean, where's the fun in that? ("This Is How It Went", ix)

The play itself features a narrator, which – as has been established – is a typical device of epic drama and rather uncommon nowadays. This narrator is also the main protagonist and seems himself to determine the way he wants to tell the story. However, to anyone reading the play it becomes obvious that "This Is How It Goes" is primarily designed to be read – at least the theatre audience will miss a certain aspect of it, namely the presence of what could be called a second narrator, who exerts this presence through the stage directions. Communication with the audience is twofold in LaBute's play.

For this purpose it might be helpful to consider again the three different approaches to how drama can be received: poetic drama, theatre studies and reading drama¹⁸. Obviously LaBute's play does not prioritize the actual performance but rather the reading experience, which hints at poetic drama as an ideal approach. However, disregarding the actual performance – and the resulting discrepancy between the text and this actual performance, the fact that not all of it can be transported – would also mean disregarding a vital aspect for analysis. Therefore, the present approach shall likely be similar to that of reading drama. For the sake of convenience the two narrators will be analysed

¹⁸ Cf. this thesis „Tools & Frames“

separately. Consequently, the first part of this chapter will primarily be concerned with what a theatre audience will perceive, the second part will then encompass the additional level that is granted to a reader.

There are only three characters in this play called Man, Woman and Cody. The Man is the one narrating, even though he does not appear in some of the scenes. He determines what to tell and what to leave out and he decides how to present it. The Woman (later also called Belinda) knows the Man from high school. It seems that he had a crush on her then, but never told her and they have not seen each other for quite a while. Cody is now the Woman's husband and also knows the Man from school. He was always the star athlete and ladies man, while the Man was overweight and shy back then. Besides, Cody is black, which is important as the Man's predominantly covert racist tendencies create some tension throughout the play. In a review in the *New York Times* Ben Brantley claims:

"This Is How It Goes" is really about what almost all of Mr. LaBute's work is about: the theory that all men (he means men, not men and women) are animals, except that most animals are probably nicer. ("Interracial triangle at odds with truth")

The Man opens the play by saying: '... Okay. This is how it goes. I mean, went. This is the way it all played out. Or, is going to ... right now.' (*This Is How It Goes*, 3), and by doing so he reveals a few details about himself and the role he is going to play both as narrator and character. Obviously, the time-frame seems to be important, as he cannot decide how to phrase the above sentence. On the one hand, what he is going to present is his past, as he is rendering this from a position where he would know how it all turned out. However, it is at the same time his immediate future, as it will be acted out before the audience's and his own eyes, in an instant. As a character he will be playing himself in the flashbacks, but he will also be in the superior position of a narrator and switching between those two positions, which creates a kind of split personality.

When he says: 'What you need to know, I mean *right* at this moment, is that there was a girl.' (*This Is How It Goes*, 3) the audience might realize that he is only sparsely giving away information and the question arises whether he

knows more than he admits. At least he defends himself on this point by – on the one hand – straightforwardly admitting his unreliability, and at the same time pointing out that he himself does not know how it will all turn out.

MAN: You know what I'm saying! Sort of. And which is okay, because I only sort of know, too, at this point. (*Beat.*) Geez, I think I might end up being an unreliable narrator ... (*This Is How It Goes*, 3)

How does he still fit the profile? Either he does know about what happened (and consequently what will happen during the play) or he does not. His unreliability, however, is out of the question, as he must have been lying at least once so far. As a narrator he is not restricted to what he knows at a certain point in the story or what is possible for a mere character, instead he is able to change the scenery. How can he possibly be able to steer the course of events and not know what is going to happen next?

MAN: Why don't we just meet the guy? Save a little time. You know, I could talk all night about Cody Phipps – longer about Belinda – but if we were to meet him, just take a second and get acquainted – I think it'd give you a real sense of the dynamics we've got going here. Okay? Cool ... (*This Is How It Goes*, 16)

Additionally, one might find that the Man very often appears to be re-shaping instead of re-narrating things and this would of course create the illusion (if it is one) of him controlling the play. There is even one scene which is presented twice: Before the first rendering of this particular scene the Man says 'Now, I'm not going to be in this next bit, I mean, I will in *spirit* or whatever, because I'll be talked about, things like that, but I won't actually be in there.' (*This Is How It Goes*, 32) The attentive audience might ask itself how he can present what he does not know or where he knows the next bit from and indeed after the first attempt at presenting the scene he admits that it was all made up.

MAN: Whoah! Geez, that was a bit much! Alright, so maybe it wasn't exactly like that. I dunno. Hey, look, I'm a writer – would-be writer, anyway, so, what can I tell ya? It could've happened that way! Easily – I mean, she did get the eye once, this black eye, and so, I'm just guessing. That's all. (*This Is How It Goes*, 37)

The second version is what he claims Belinda told him after the event.

Interestingly, he says he did not believe her entirely and thinks that it does not fit. This makes both versions at least doubtful – the audience will not be able to reconstruct the true course of events from his account only. At least he at no point refers to his story as fictional, always claims that what he tells his audience really happened. He acts as if he was a real person and even though he makes things up he still clings to there being an objective truth, a real story behind what he tells, as can be taken directly from what he later claims in the play: 'It *happened*, that much I can tell you.' (*This Is How It Goes*, 74). Explicit metadramatic remarks, which do occur, occur primarily in the stage directions. On the other hand, and quite contrary to that, the Man does seem aware of his audience as a theatre audience and his position as character, narrator and also focalizer.

MAN: By the way, funny how you never see the kids, isn't it? Yeah. It's not weird or anything, like in Virginia Woolf or like that ... it's just my main concern is the two of them. So, no problem ... Okay? Good. (*This Is How It Goes*, 45)

The question arises who this Man is, what he is like. Strangely, when he says 'But this time – 'cause we're about to finish this off right now – this time out I'll be a bunch more like I was in the beginning. 'The Sensitive Guy.'" (*This Is How It Goes*, 75) the reader notices that indeed his behaviour has changed throughout the play. Once one decides to look at the Man as character and as narrator separately it proves even harder to pinpoint what the narrator is like. An interesting occurrence in this respect may be when the narrator, while talking to the audience, reveals – presumably unconscious – racist tendencies in a monologue towards the end of the play: "See, Cody Phipps was born a nigger. Still is, to this day. And I do know the difference, believe me, between regular black people and what Cody is [...]" (*This Is How It Goes*, 81). This is like a slip of the tongue – the mask almost comes off in that particular scene.

MAN: ... This could be my deposit, what I gave them when I moved in. Maybe. Or it's a pay-off for me to take Belinda off of Cody's hands. Or for that baseball card, even! Hell, I don't know. I really don't. All I do know is we met in passing at the airport, I moved back to town and she's with me now ... (*This Is How It Goes*, 75)

And finally, at the end of the play, the audience is confronted with the same dilemma, that the Man either seriously does not know or just pretends not to know about the details of how it all went. He provides different possibilities and swears to be ignorant of the actual course of events, while shortly before that he had claimed 'Hey, that's stuff for you to decide. (*Beat.*) Can't help you out with everything, wouldn't be any fun!' (*This Is How It Goes*, 74), which indicates that if he wanted he could provide answers.

MAN: But I work at it every day, I do, because I love her ... always have. And I can see it on her face, at night or when we're on the back patio, at that blue hour when the sun's just dropped down ... she is finally at peace. So what the hell am I going to tell her right now to ruin it all? Huh? Nothing, that's what ... (*This Is How It Goes*, 80)

As was initially suspected (and even the first sentence by the Man indicated) the time-frame seems important. In the above example the Man exists at once in what could be called a possible future (or maybe the narrator's present), when the Man and the Woman live together, and the play's present, at the moment when it is decided whether this future will actually come true. If the narrator is telling this from a future point the decision is already made and he is merely justifying that decision. On the other hand, the part about the back patio and the blue hour could also be imagined.

In many ways *This Is How It Goes* shows a similar structure as Woody Allen's "Annie Hall"¹⁹: There is a narrator, who is rendering what appears to be past events, his own story, but he frequently digresses from mere storytelling to comment on what is presented, sometimes even to admit that what was shown was not entirely true or at least doubtful. In this, the action presented is closer to the concept of a fictional story than one man's history, the events that happened in chronological fashion.

So what can basically be said about the Man, the play's narrator, is that the audience cannot lean on anything it learns about him or the story he is trying to tell. He talks a lot, but little of it is verifiable or even reliable. During the play the audience learns not to trust its only source of information. In a way, the effect of

¹⁹ Cf. this thesis „A brief history of communication with the audience or: who is talking to whom?“

the Man's behaviour is one of alienation. It draws attention to the play's constructedness and is therefore reminiscent of Brechtian drama²⁰. However, one has to be careful when comparing LaBute to Brecht. While LaBute may use similar techniques the intended goal is a different one. Brecht's main intention is to educate his audience, to appeal to and question the audience's perception of morality and social norms. LaBute, on the other hand, questions their sense of reality and truth. It is a playful deconstruction of theatrical norms. However, LaBute wants to make people uncomfortable rather than to provide an outright shocking experience, as can be deduced from an interview with Liesl Schillinger.

SCHILLINGER: You must like shocking people.

LABUTE: I feel nothing one way or the other about it. That's not my drive. I like challenging an audience, providing them with something that's interesting. But shock is not something that I need to do. ("Is Neil LaBute getting ... nice?")

Now, as was already mentioned, those who read the play are provided with a second source of information, the secondary text. In this particular case it does more than merely provide instructions for the staging of the play. The text presents an alternative perspective. It almost seems as if somebody is intruding, talking through this traditionally rather neutral device, misusing it for a different purpose.

A man walks on stage. Let's give him a little light. There, that's better. Now what? Wait – I think he's going to say something. Yes, he is. Good. (This Is How It Goes, 3)

As is obvious in the above example the voice in the stage directions at once observes, instructs and creates by mere words – sometimes with a focus on the first, sometimes the second, sometimes the third function. It definitely seems as though the voice grants light to the man, instead of just observing that the light is coming on or instructing the play's director to have the light turned on at that particular moment. In many respects this voice seems to be actually present either on stage or off stage, but close to the action and the characters. The phrase "I think", in particular the fact that the voice makes a reference to itself

²⁰ Cf. this thesis „Fact vs. Fiction“

as “I”, separates these stage directions from traditional instructive stage directions one would usually find in a play. The fact that the voice does not seem to know beforehand whether or not the man is going to say something also goes against convention, but interestingly also goes against what was observed when the light was turned on: the creative power of the voice. A similar problem arises as with the actual narrator of the play, the Man: Either they have an influence on what is going to happen (in which case it is at least strange of them to pretend not to know what is coming next) or they genuinely do not know (in which case the power they seem to have would be an illusion). How can the voice in the stage directions have influence on one aspect of the play (the light) and not on the other (the dialogue)? A few more examples may either serve to solve that mystery or add further layers to it.

First, consider the following remark: *'Out of nowhere, a hug. Nice. Now we're getting somewhere. The man hugs her right back.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 4). Here, the voice is again only observing, commenting what is observed. “Nice” is clearly a personal opinion. To a director – the traditional target audience of a stage direction – this might be of little relevance, whereas to a reader this has a similar effect as a narrator's remark in prose. Shortly after that the stage directions say: *'They laugh – what the hell, let's have another hug.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 5), which could be taken as an observation again, but is more likely an instruction for the characters to hug.

On the other hand, the voice sometimes seems surprised by how the play develops. At one point it says *'The lights change to some sort of restaurant. Now there's a table and some chairs – I didn't even notice that before.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 15). It also shows that this heterodiegetic narrative voice knows about the reality of this being a play, which is obvious when it says *'She moves off toward the kitchen. Well, backstage, actually, but we'll pretend there's a kitchen.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 20). The narrator of the secondary text, as the voice could be called, shows sympathy for fictional characters, which is not unheard of – it is expected of any theatre audience, any reader. Why should a narrator-like voice be incapable of this?

The reader may learn where to place the narrator from the following utterance: *'The Woman stops, working to remember this. The Man steps away for a minute. Toward us.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 6). Here, the voice clearly identifies with the audience, as is indicated by the use of “us”. This voice evokes the illusion of sitting in the auditorium and sharing the audience's point of view. By using “we” and “us” the voice shows solidarity with the auditorium, but these remarks would never reach a theatre audience. They would, however, reach the director of a production and his team, who this particular line could also be aimed at and who might even choose to incorporate this particular form of mediation in some way or other.

Strangely, it becomes clear that this second narrator knows what the characters feel and think, as, for instance, in the following example: *'Cody smiles at this – an easy smile. He doesn't mind being called that. Some things he doesn't like, but this is okay.'* (*This Is How It Goes*, 17). The voice seems to be split: It is at once in the auditorium with the audience and inside the characters' heads, like an authorial narrator. Fact is also that other than in this bit of monologue the voice often pretends not to know about the inner lives of the characters, which seems contradictory again, but which might be a mere pose. Another explanation, however, would be provided by looking at remarks like “He doesn't mind being called that” as assumptions on part of the voice, not as an objective truth. Unfortunately, written language is especially tricky to analyse, as it lacks auditive qualities that might help evaluate a statement.

Actually, many of the problems introduced above could be – at least partly – explained by looking at the voice in the stage directions as the author's voice. (One might always add the additional level of an implied author, of course.) A basic dilemma, for instance, is that the voice in the stage directions seems to be able to change the course of events (at least have an influence), which suggests that it is not only all-knowing but omnipotent. On the other hand, this voice is unaware of what will happen and consequently surprised by how things turn out. Of course, one can always assume that this surprise is just pretence. It is far easier to fake ignorance than pretend to be all-knowing. However, it could also be resolved by looking at the stage directions as a manifestation of the

author's voice when he was writing the piece. Neil LaBute admits in the introduction that he did not know beforehand where he was going with this play, that the only thing he had was the title, that he was starting the play without any further plans, that – and here the present thesis must disagree – 'it's best not to ask too many questions'.

I'm not sure where this one came from. This is one of those plays that just sort of dropped out onto the page and I figure it's best not to ask too many questions; it's here now, so we'll have to live with it. ("This Is How It Went", vii)

The basic assumption would be that an author can be surprised by what is happening in his own fictional work. Much like in associative writing an author sometimes goes from one idea to the next without following any scheme and by doing so he might not anticipate some turns in the plot. From this angle, one could look at the stage directions of *This Is How It Goes* as the voice of the author commenting on the development of his play, which would naturally also explain why the voice is aware of the fact that it is only a play it is commenting on and still care for the characters (assuming that most authors will do so). It is the creating spirit but does not (yet) know where it is all heading. Naturally, this is only one way of reading the play, but manages to account for a range of contradictions that arise otherwise.

It is interesting that Manfred Pfister, in "The Theory and Analysis of Drama" talks about how stage directions – which are typically associated with secondary text – can sometimes intrude into the primary text of a play, something that is particularly true for plays that offer little secondary text as such. When, for instance, a character comments his or her surroundings this can often be seen as an instruction aimed at the director, telling him how to present the scene or the audience what to make of it. One could argue that LaBute turns this process around, externalizes elements of the primary text and enriches the secondary text with emotional elements which it usually does not contain.

As has become clearly visible, the reading experience of *This Is How It Goes* may differ greatly from the experience the play offers to a theatre audience, which is why one could look at it as a "closet drama". Basically any drama in

written text, which is therefore independent of improvisation, could be called a “closet drama”, however, in a more narrow sense, it stands for a play that is designed for reading. There is usually little action but philosophical dialogue as in Goethe's *Faust* (not a closet drama per se), but numerous plays of English literature as well. It could be questioned whether *This Is How It Goes* meets the prerequisites of “closet drama” in the narrow sense: On the one hand, there is no lack of action but, on the other hand, it is indeed frequently interrupted in order to question the action presented, its level of truth and reality, the relationship between the Man as character and the Man as narrator or the relationship between the narrator of the secondary text and the action on stage. Anyhow, *This Is How It Goes*, seems to grant an additional reward to its reader as compared to a theatre audience in that it poses further questions.

The curtain falls

“[...] the author may also willingly give up control to an extent, develop the storyline by free association or at least not have everything planned out beforehand. The process of writing itself, one could say, might contain certain loopholes in this respect.”

AFTERTHOUGHTS

Now that a wide array of phenomena – all of them connected to metalepsis in some way or other – have been introduced and illustrated by examples (not only from literature) it seems necessary to both give an overview of what has been done (and consider what insights were granted by so doing) as well as make connections that might not have been made before or merely hinted at. How does it, finally, all fit together?

As Barth's "Menelaiad" has shown, it is theoretically possible to construct an infinite number of frames by the act of narration, to expand the communication model without end. However, all of these additional levels, what Genette calls first, second, third, etc. narrative, were levels of story. One might be tempted to assume, therefore, that there is always precisely one level of fictional mediation, one level of implied fictional communication and one level of non-fictional communication. In fact, even this assumption has to be relativized.

The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation. Any other form of transit is, if not always impossible, at any rate always transgressive. (Genette 1990, 234)

The narrator of a story (as is especially the case in a figural narrative situation) can withdraw and become virtually impossible to detect in a text, which consequently reduces the level of fictional mediation almost to non-existence. On the other hand, the overall importance of the level of implied fictional mediation is still under debate and its relevance certainly, again, depends on the narrative situation in question. Still, the concept has proved its value to the present thesis.

As concerns the actual transfer of characters from one level to the other, this has become a frequent phenomenon in recent years (also in the medium of film) and – again – metalepsis on the story level is rather unproblematic, whereas metalepsis that incorporates either the author or the reader (or both)

seems rather unlikely if not to say impossible, even though there are attempts to introduce a real-life person (in some cases the author himself) into the fictional world. The problem is that as soon as something enters the world of fiction it becomes part of this world, becomes itself fictional.

When John Malkovich plays John Malkovich in “Being John Malkovich” he is merely playing a character of the same name based on himself just like any author of historical metafiction, one might say, creates a fictional world based on the real world at some point in history. And an author who, like Paul Auster or Martin Amis, attempts to enter the world of his fiction has to create an image of himself first, an avatar, in which he can move and talk in the world of his creation. In doing so, Amis and Auster are following a long tradition of gods, who use vessels for their excursions into a world created by themselves but not their own.

Of course, then, one could go as far as claim that an author writing an autobiography, however accurately, will inevitably create an image that is similar, but not identical with himself. In the light of postmodern developments this seems indeed a valid statement. In the same way that a history book might be said to contain the (or a) story of the world, an autobiography can be seen as containing the (or a) story of the self.

One could, of course, speculate as to what the function of such an author-avatar might be in a text. It is safe to assume that the reader of a text containing a fictional author will focus his or her attention on that character and the relationship to the real author as it is, on the one hand, an uncommon phenomenon and, on the other hand – as has been shown throughout this thesis – this relationship is difficult to explain in narratological terms. Thus, the introduction of an author-character creates a certain insecurity on part of the reader. It can be said to hint at the metanarrative nature of a text and is therefore an anti-illusionary device. The introduction of an author, whether this author bears the name of the author whose text he or she is in or not, inevitably makes the reader aware of the fact that what is witnessed is fiction. It counteracts the willing suspension of disbelief.

An additional function of such an author-avatar might lie in its potential to distract the reader's attention. Even if such an author is not in the centre of the story's attention (as is the case in Amis' *Money*, for instance) the reader will grant such a character additional attention, will perceive the fictional Amis to be of a certain importance even if nothing else but his similarity to the real Amis points in that direction. It is because of this that such a fictional author can be seen as a decoy, an attempt to lead the reader's attention astray.

A frequent connection has been made between the concepts of author and God, which is due to the power both have over the world they create. Of course, there is another connection as well, unmentioned so far: The biblical God of the Christians can be said to be an author as well, a storyteller at least, as is obvious from reading the Genesis, the story of the creation of the world. Here, God is using language to create, words to make the world appear out of nothing, as in "Let there be light". It seems there is a long tradition to the author-God.

The concept of the author as God (or at least the power an author has over his world and consequently his readers) has already been hinted at numerous times, but is boldly illustrated by one of William Boyd's short stories called "Long Story Short", contained in *On the Yankee Station*, in which he introduces a rather immaterial plot as a means to ponder on the nature of fiction, the relationship between author, narrator and character and the possible manipulation of the reader, the traps the reader is prone to fall into.

No, it's no good. It keeps getting in the way, this dreadful compulsion to tell lies (you write fiction and what are you doing? You're telling lies, pal, that's all). (*On the Yankee Station*, 220)

Right at the beginning he starts the story in the first person, breaks off to start again in the third person (calling his main character "William") and breaks off one more time to remark that, again, he was not entirely telling the truth. This seems not only vaguely reminiscent of LaBute's *This Is How It Goes*, the whole story bears certain similarities, it seems, creates an insecurity on part of the

reader (or the audience in LaBute's case). Neither Boyd's nor LaBute's narrator can be trusted. It also fits this concept that Boyd gives his character the name William and reflects on the reader's possible reaction to this, how one can easily assume that the name refers to the author William Boyd. However, it could be misleading to make that connection, as 'There are a lot of Williams about. Lots. It doesn't need to be me.' (*On the Yankee Station*, 221)

But now, having got rid of all this obfuscation, I am speaking to you directly. The author talking to the reader – whoever you are. Imagine me as a voice in your ear, unmediated by any notions or theories you might have heard about books and stories, textuality and reading, that sort of thing. (*On the Yankee Station*, 221)

As if to counter this, Boyd then claims to be speaking directly to the reader – an impossibility as this thesis has tried to make clear – and indeed, as the ending of Boyd's story shows, he is merely playing games with the reader, can at no point in the story be trusted entirely and everything he says has to be taken with a grain of salt.

What Boyd's text does is illustrate one more time the strange union of author, narrator and character and how difficult it can be to keep them apart, especially when the author constructs the story in such a way that those entities are connected. It is not always clearly discernible who the voice speaking in a text belongs to. Boyd's story, however, also shows how one can best deal with those traps: It reminds one to always stay alert, never to trust the author, the narrator or a character as soon as there are the slightest signs of insincerity. What might be taken as paranoid behaviour in the real world, is a useful stance for the postmodern reader.

The main point Boyd seems to make, however, is illustrating the power of the author over his subjects. As mentioned in a previous chapter²¹, contrary to all claims that the author was dead he actually seems to be very much alive and kicking, precisely because of the power he is able to exert. Even if Wolfgang Iser's reader oriented approach²² is right and a text is only created by the

²¹ Cf. The rebirth of the author in *Money* and „City of Glass“

²² Cf. Iser (1978)

reader the author is in a position to heavily guide this reception, even if he does not have total control he can still give directions.

The more controversial question, probably, is whether or not there is a possibility that fictional characters can rise to the challenge of taking over the course of the action. Whether they can, at least to an extent, overthrow the author's rule. It has proved to best be sceptical as concerns this phenomenon. Most attempts to overthrow the author's rule have been in vain or at least it has not been clear as to what extent they might have been successful. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (in Stoppard's famous play) become aware of being trapped in a world that is in some way predestined, but can never escape both Shakespeare's and Stoppard's text. Sophie and Alberto (in *Sophie's World*) at least manage to escape the fictional world created by Major Knag but cannot enter his world entirely, nor have they been able to realize that even the Major himself is fictional and subject to the author Jostein Gaarder. Similarly, there is a rebellion of characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which – on the one hand – fails and – on the other hand – is again not directed at the real-world author Flann O'Brien, but at a fictional author within O'Brien's book.

As these examples make clear rebellions are usually misdirected (as one could say) as they are not aimed at the one holding all strings in his hands, but at another puppet (an author-character), a decoy. This is also true for "Stranger Than Fiction", where the author of the novel Harold Crick is the main character of the author Karen Eiffel's novel, who appears on the story level ... and becomes herself fictional thereby. In *The Comforters* the voice Caroline hears stays merely a voice throughout the whole novel, but it also stays unclear whether this voice should really be associated with Muriel Spark, the author. Therefore, Caroline's attempt to rebel against her role in the work of art might, again, be misdirected.

Is each character's attempt to escape the role they are destined to fulfil inevitably doomed to fail? Is there no way to influence the author? It almost seems like this was the case. However, as the interpretation of *This Is How It Goes* has suggested, the author may also willingly give up control to an extent,

develop the storyline by free association or at least not have everything planned out beforehand. The process of writing itself, one could say, might contain certain loopholes in this respect.

Writing is not always a conscious process. While it is evidently not the characters who are in control when the author's unconscious is influencing his writing, the author himself is also less in control and his characters are therefore slipping his grasp to an extent. *Don Quixote* is a famous case in point again: Miguel de Cervantes originally constructed his eponymous hero and his companion Sancho Pansa as pure types, as functional characters to make fun of the romance novels circulating at the time.

However, when *Don Quixote* ends Cervantes seems to have developed sympathy for his characters; their defects are no longer laughed at but appear as rather positive character qualities that set them apart from the often cruel, harsh and too realistic world they live in. The downfall of idealism and heroism suddenly appears as somehow tragic. Cervantes' characters seem to have successfully influenced their maker. They are – one might say – in control.

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