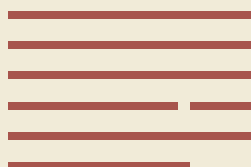
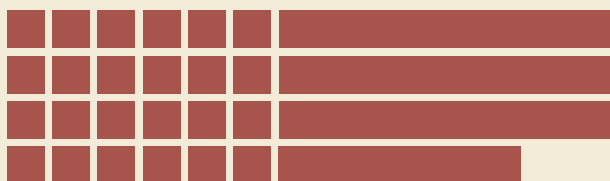
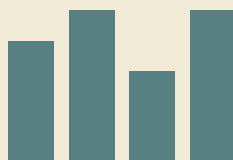


RESEARCH METHODS IN LITERARY RECEPTION STUDIES



**JEROEN DERA, ANNE OERLEMANS
& FREDERIK VAN DAM (EDS)**

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Research Methods in Literary Reception Studies

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Jeroen Dera,
Anne Oerlemans
and Frederik Van Dam (eds.)

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Introduction

Jeroen Dera, Anne Oerlemans and Frederik Van Dam

While millions of books are read by far fewer people than their authors might have hoped, no book is conceivable without its readers. This premise lies at the heart of the discipline known as literary reception studies, a branch of literary scholarship that focuses on what readers *do* with literary texts: how and why they evaluate, interpret, use, reward, purchase or teach literature. Given the broad spectrum that such a conception of literary reception encompasses, it is not surprising that the systematic study of literary reception has been a central discipline in the field of literary studies. Its roots can be traced to the theoretical writings of Hans Robert Jauss (1967) and Wolfgang Iser (1972) in the late 1960s and 1970s (see Holub 1984). Over the past few decades, various subfields have emerged within reception studies (Machor and Goldstein 2009). Ika Willis (2018) delineates three distinct categories: *reception study*, which examines how readers and audiences interpret and utilize literary texts; *reception history*, which focuses on the afterlives of texts from the past and the histories of books and reading; and *reception theory*, which seeks to capture the nature of interpretation, language and meaning. These three branches all cover a plethora of approaches.

In reception study, some forms of research are oriented towards the evaluations and interpretations of professional readers (such as those involved in book reviewing, literary juries or literary criticism), while others are concerned with the reading experiences of common readers (who may share their thoughts and feelings on social media, via online literary platforms or as members of reading groups). In reception history, the role assigned to the literary text has varied significantly: some scholars adopt the text as the object of study and explore the reception process in dialogue with the literary work, while others largely set the primary text aside and focus instead on extra-textual factors. And reception theory is marked by different conceptions of the reader: some studies are structured empirically, involving the reader as a subject or participant, whereas others

conceptualize the reader more as a theoretical construct or as a producer of reading responses that are (privately or publicly) available.

The field of literary reception studies, then, is rich and varied. This diversity also comes at a cost: the contours of the field are sometimes blurry, making it more difficult for researchers, and young researchers in particular, to get a sense of direction. With few notable exceptions (e.g. A. Nünning and V. Nünning 2020), this situation obtains in literary studies as a whole: in contrast to the prodigious wealth of primers on literary theory, there have been relatively few discussions of ‘literary methods’ – the phrase itself sounds, unlike ‘literary theory’, a bit outlandish. The present volume aims to provide a guide or map to help scholars get their bearings. By systematically addressing some of the principal methods prevalent in the field, it initiates the reader in the various research methods that can be adopted when scrutinizing the myriad forms that acts of reception may take. By using method rather than theory as an organizing principle, it aims to be both pragmatic and reflective.

On the one hand, it provides a hands-on description of particular research questions and the steps to be taken or considerations to be made in order to address them. As this observation suggests, the relation between a research question and a method is symbiotic. A research question is usually based on a preliminary exploration of existing views and models; it provides a starting point and limits the number of methods that will be fitting or adequate. The method, in turn, provides a set of steps or rules that researchers should follow in order to arrive at a more refined understanding of a particular entity or phenomenon. In other words, the nature of one’s inquiry determines the choice of a particular method. This process is rarely straightforward and it is not uncommon for a method to be tweaked along the way; in an ideal world, a research project may even yield a better version of the method with which it began. Accordingly, each chapter in this volume begins with a brief introduction identifying the kinds of research questions a method aims to address and the kinds of research objects it is designed to analyse. The introduction is followed by a detailed description of the method’s theoretical or historical background, which segues into a section on the tools, techniques and concepts that the researcher may have recourse to. The method is then applied in a case study, explored step by step.

On the other hand, this book recognizes that the use of a method also involves a reflection on its principles. Since certain questions could be

addressed by means of a number of methods, there is also a need for methodology, that is, for the study of the theoretical presuppositions by which a method is governed. This introduction could be seen an example of methodological reasoning, as we attempt to explain how this handbook has been structured and what it seeks to achieve. Methodological reasoning also occurs in the chapters themselves, however; although this book is meant as a handbook and not an exercise in scientific logic, our contributors do address methods' conceptual underpinnings. As such, this book also aims to prompt researchers to think more deeply about the decisions and rationales behind research design in the humanities. As Grant Wythoff argues, the question of method in the humanities is important "because it allows us to produce useful portraits of the work we do: our assumptions, our tools, and the assumptions behind our tools" (2018, 295). We hope that this handbook will make its readers consider these assumptions. To provide some guidance, we have grouped our chapters into four methodological clusters.

Our first constellation covers empirical methods that are used to elicit information from actual readers: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and the analysis of elicitation data. The guiding questions for these methods pertain to the ways in which actual readers engage with texts. These methods have a strong quantitative dimension, as they use statistics to make sense of the numerical data that their different tools yield. There is a qualitative dimension to these methods as well, however: the design of a questionnaire and the coding of interviews, for instance, are not possible without a modicum of interpretation. As such, the chapters in this constellation provide a practical and reception-oriented elaboration of advances in the vibrant field of empirical literary studies (see e.g. Alber et al. 2020; Kuiken and Jacobs 2021).

The avenue for the increasing importance of empirical methods in reception studies was paved in the 1980s and 1990s. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu played an instrumental role in creating a theoretical framework for the use of interviews and surveys (Bourdieu 1991). One of the most influential interpreters of Bourdieu's work in France is Gisèle Sapiro, who argues that reception is mediated by social agents, institutions and historical conditions including political contexts (e.g. censorship, literary trials), cultural hierarchies (e.g. genre distinctions, cancellations) and market structures (e.g. literary festivals, mass versus elite publishing) (Sapiro 2023). The chapters in our second constellation build on Bourdieu's

thought to offer models and methods for the analysis of the institutional and infrastructural frameworks by which readers are conditioned, such as literary prizes, branding, libraries, print runs and reviews.

The reception of literary texts can also be pursued by means of digital methods. The contributors in our third cluster use different software packages and algorithms to unpack three different kinds of texts (literary reviews, fanfiction and periodicals) to better understand how reviewers and writers respond to specific texts and tropes. Together with the first methodological cluster, these chapters are instances of a paradigmatic shift in literary studies. Whereas before the turn of the century the truth-value of one's conclusions relied on evidential support such as quotations or citations, these digital methods strengthen the validity of scholars' findings by presenting results that can be subjected to falsification and replicability: with the same toolset and the same corpus, another researcher should arrive at the same results (see Piper 2020).

The chapters in the fourth constellation draw on methods from the related area of textual analysis (discourse analysis, close reading, translation) to focus on the ways in which texts themselves condition the ways in which they are read. As such, these chapters provide methods that are reminiscent of the reader-response theories with which this introduction began. This view on literary reception has a long pedigree and a full account should include psychoanalysis and intertextuality as well as more recent revivals of these schools in the form of cognitive theories of mind (Zunshine 2006) and post-critical reading (e.g. Felski 2020).

As this final cluster makes clear even more than the others, this handbook is by no means exhaustive. In ways more than one, it is itself conditioned by the environment in which it originated, that is, the research unit for Studying Culture Infrastructure and Reception across Borders at Radboud University, Nijmegen. As such, it represents a particular, perhaps even 'Dutch' way of looking at literary reception. To conclude, therefore, we will spell out how reception features in adjacent and more distant research fields, which will also allow us to spell out more clearly the distinctive nature of our handbook.

For one, *Research Methods in Literary Reception Studies* focuses on modern, printed literature, at the expense of older forms of literature, such as mediaeval literature. In this regard, one might think of Brennan W. Breed's proposal (2014) that the production, transmission and interpretation of biblical text are interwoven elements of its overarching reception

history. This call to attend to the importance of what texts do instead of what they mean is one that our handbook heeds, even as it explores this in a wider variety of more recent contexts. In a similar way, we hope that our discussion of digital methods echoes exciting advances in the field of transmission studies (e.g. Pinche and Stokes 2024).

Furthermore, the handbook stays within the disciplinary confines of literary studies and does not consider significant crossover phenomena such as transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006) or the function of literature in the experience economy (Reijnders 2013). Virginia Nightingale (2014), for instance, discusses reception in her comprehensive overview of the complexity and diversity of audience studies in the advent of digital media. Her study recognizes and appreciates valuable traditional approaches and identifies how they can be applied to, and evolve with, changing media. It argues that the field works best by identifying particular ‘audience problems’ and applying the best theories and research methods available to solving them (see also Patriarche et al. 2013). *Research Methods in Literary Reception Studies*, however, is concerned with readers, not audiences. This limitation should not be taken as a sign that we are wary of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches. Rather, this volume seeks to explore how certain methods operate within the disciplinary confines that structure the scholarly environment in which we work and publish.

To conclude, *Research Methods in Literary Reception Studies* foregrounds how to implement methods and downplays their ideological and social investments, although we realize that there are also approaches that have a more critical and, indeed, activist approach. In *Reading as Collective Action: Texts as Tactics*, for instance, Nicholas H. Fox (2017) focuses on the ways in which readers use literature to respond to societal wrongs by republishing poems, organizing reading programmes or creating literary websites. It suggests how we can create more politically effective forms of service learning and community engagement grounded in a commitment to tactical, grassroots actions. That said, our contributors are aware of the importance of ethical issues: especially in dealing with (the output of) actual readers, it is vital that researchers are neutral and respectful towards participants and their data. In a similar way, we cannot but draw attention to the use of open-source software and a data management that is FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable).

By highlighting the limitations of our work, we hope to have made clear not only how our volume aims to cover terrain that is, as yet, uncharted,

but also that there is exciting work outside the boundaries of our field with which our own methods can be refined and enriched.

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Suggestions for further reading

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PART I

EMPIRICAL METHODS

Designing Self-Completion Questionnaires in Literary Reception Research

Jeroen Dera

1. Introduction

When countries worldwide implemented lockdowns in the winter of 2019–2020 in an attempt to control COVID-19, this sparked a sudden surge in literary production. Across various media, so-called ‘lockdown poetry’ emerged, offering lyrical reflections on the ominous situation humanity found itself in (cf. Dera 2021). Naturally, the effects of the pandemic manifested in other realms of the literary world as well. For many, reading experienced a literal resurgence, partly due to a lack of alternative leisure activities, but also because books such as Camus’ *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1947) or Saramago’s *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* (*Blindness*, 1995) provided a reflection on the ongoing situation (see also Davies et al. 2022). Simultaneously, the physical trade of books through bookstores and libraries was largely halted, and literary festivals or readings were inevitably cancelled.

The issue of the early COVID-19 lockdowns serves as an interesting starting point for contemplating the methodology of literary reception studies. For instance, if we want to understand how readers during a pandemic respond to a novel like *La Peste*, what research method should we employ? It is possible to compile a corpus of reflections on that novel, for example through databases collecting newspaper articles or through online searches on platforms such as Goodreads and LibraryThing. However, it remains questionable whether enough data can be gathered in this manner to obtain a somewhat representative picture of the response. After all, most readers do not leave public traces of reception. This challenge is even more pronounced in the case of a genre like occasional poetry: while tens of thousands of readers worldwide encountered COVID poems published in national newspapers, there are hardly any reader reactions to those texts available for research.

This latter point underscores a challenge in literary reception studies in general, wherein reception is often narrowed down to literary-critical actions by relevant stakeholders in the literary field, such as professional book reviewers, literary prize juries and scholars in the field of literary studies. Influenced by the rise of online reader reactions, this research tradition has significantly expanded to studying so-called ‘common readers’ who share their reading experiences on social media platforms like Goodreads, TikTok or YouTube (see e.g. Driscoll 2024). However, even within this subfield of reception studies, these real flesh-and-blood readers are primarily examined based on the written or spoken products they have left behind in cyberspace.

The example of COVID-19 illustrates how limiting this approach can be. In the case of lockdown poetry, reception research would falter if researchers were to confine themselves to publicly available responses from professional and common readers. Instead, it is necessary for them to *collect responses to such poems themselves*, thus utilizing elicitation – the extraction of useful data from participants in scientific research. A commonly used method to generate elicitation data is through the administration of self-completion questionnaires, also referred to as self-administered questionnaires. This chapter elaborates on this research method within the framework of literary reception studies to demonstrate that it is meaningful to supplement established hermeneutic methods of literary research with empirically collected data among large groups of readers. In this manner, research questions that would otherwise be beyond reach can be answered, such as those relating to the composition of the reading audience, the familiarity with certain texts or authors or the motives for reading or not reading certain books/genres. Since self-completion questionnaires often reach large groups of participants, it is also possible in data analysis to gain insights into group differences regarding issues of literary reception (consider gender differences in the appreciation of certain text genres or differences in academic disciplines within the population of university students who read).

This chapter will primarily focus on the design of a survey – reflections on data analysis can be found in Chapter 5. The chapter begins with a brief reflection on the nature of questionnaires as a research instrument, followed by a step-by-step explanation of the procedures one can follow in literary reception research when employing this method.

2. The method

A questionnaire can be defined as a series of questions aimed at gathering information from respondents. In essence, oral interviews also meet that definition. For this reason, in line with Clark et al. (2021), we refer to them here as self-completion questionnaires. In this type of survey research, it is the participant who navigates through the (paper or digital) questionnaire from start to finish, at their own pace, without the researcher being able to intervene in that process.

As questionnaire research involves interacting with human participants, it inherently constitutes a form of social research. In the context of literary reception research, this entails the integration of questions and methodologies from literary studies with those of the social sciences. Characteristic of social research is its aim to provide a representation of social life – a means of “telling about society” (Ragin and Amoroso 2011, 8). Within literary reception studies, this specifically pertains to the social lives of readers, encompassing their evaluations, poetics, reading habits and so forth.

When endeavouring to depict a readerly society through the administration and analysis of self-completion questionnaires, it is essential to recognize that these questionnaires themselves serve as *representations* of respondents’ views of the world. What respondents fill in does not perfectly align with ‘reality’, if such a concept can even be articulated. For instance, consider a study on first-generation students’ familiarity with Emily Brontë’s work, employing a questionnaire where respondents must indicate, from among a list of eighty names, who they firmly believe is an author (the so-called Author Recognition Test; Stanovich and West 1989). Does circling the name ‘Emily Brontë’ guarantee that a respondent actively possesses this knowledge? We cannot rule out the possibility of guessing, prolonged deliberation or the respondent only knowing the surname Brontë and actually having Charlotte’s oeuvre in mind. From an epistemological perspective, answers to survey questions should therefore never be assumed to be unwavering certainties. In this regard, such data do not fundamentally differ from the sources typically used by literary scholars. An important distinction, however, is that the quantity of data obtained in survey research can be substantial, enhancing the power of the analysis. If 200 students are asked whether they are familiar with Emily Brontë and 150 respond positively, the likelihood decreases that this is attributable to chance or error.

Because self-completion questionnaires can yield a large number of respondents, this type of research instrument is often suitable for quantitative analysis, wherein numerical data are processed to identify patterns, ascertain causal relationships, or make and test predictions. However, within literary reception research, a purely quantitative survey is uncommon, as the unique experiences readers have in response to a literary text are challenging to encapsulate on a numerical scale. Therefore, closed-ended questions, which are conducive to quantitative analysis, are often combined with open-ended questions allowing respondents to express their individual experiences. Responses to open-ended questions are textual in nature and lend themselves to qualitative analysis, wherein the content of the responses undergoes focused close reading.

Given that questionnaire research involves dealing with flesh-and-blood individuals, it is inconceivable that such research would be conducted without the involvement of an ethical review board. Depending on the research question, the data obtained may be more or less sensitive. For instance, a study investigating readers' preferences for hardcovers versus paperbacks may require fewer precautions than a study examining readers' reactions to sex scenes in novels. In all cases, however, respondents must consent to the collection, storage and use of their research data (generally anonymized) for scientific purposes. They should be informed of this prior to the research (most universities have templates available for such matters) and must actively give consent for the collection of their data, a process commonly known as informed consent. Note that minors are not legally allowed to decide on participation independently, which can make survey research targeted at young people somewhat paperwork-heavy. Additionally, respondents should be made aware that they have the right to terminate their participation in the research at any time if they no longer wish to proceed.

3. Tools and techniques

Considerations regarding recruitment of respondents

The individuals who participate in a survey always represent a specific group to which the research pertains. This entire group targeted by the research is also referred to as the population. It is only occasionally

feasible to survey the entire population. In literary reception studies, this may occur, for instance, when conducting research on the literary views of literature students at specific universities in a particular academic year, or when the population consists of members of a specific writers' guild or literary association. However, in the vast majority of cases, the population is either too large or too diffuse to survey in its entirety. For example, if one wishes to investigate British millennials' familiarity with Victorian literature, this group is both too large to make the research practically feasible and, as a researcher, one (luckily!) does not have access to a comprehensive list of all British millennials. In such cases, a sample must be utilized within the framework of the research. This means that a specific portion of the population is surveyed, and based on this, inferences are drawn about the population as a whole.

There are various methods that may be used to obtain a suitable sample for literary reception study based on self-completion questionnaires. For instance, suppose you are investigating the perception of young adult literature among high school students at a specific urban high school and have obtained permission from the school administration and the students' parents or guardians to conduct a survey during the literacy class. In principle, you could administer the survey in every class, but this would be more time-consuming than necessary, assuming that the population under study is homogeneous and thus not likely to have significantly divergent views on young adult literature. In such cases, it is advisable to draw a sample. To obtain a representative sample and draw statistical conclusions about the population under study, it is crucial to determine the desired sample size first. A mathematically precise approach for this is to use the formula for proportional sampling, which takes into account the population size, the desired level of confidence and the margin of error. A practical guideline for a representative sample size is provided in Table 1, typically based on a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, as commonly used in quantitative questionnaire research. For example, if 40% of the surveyed students in the urban high school example indicate familiarity with young adult literature, we can say with 95% confidence that the actual percentage of students familiar with young adult literature falls between 35% and 45% (considering the 5% margin of error at the lower and upper bounds of the 40% found). Together, the level of confidence and the margin of error provide an indication of the accuracy of the sample results.

Table 1: Desired sample size for a representative sample of homogeneous populations, with a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%

Population size	Estimated size of representative sample
100	80
500	217
1,000	278
2,000	307
5,000	334
10,000	348
25,000	361
50,000	364
100,000	366
500,000	368
1,000,000	368

Based on this information, we require a sample size of 307 students for the urban high school with 2,000 students. The next question is how to select these students. Methodological literature distinguishes between random samples and selective samples. Characteristic of the former category is that the researcher and respondents have no influence over whether or not they are selected, whereas such influence does exist in non-random samples. In a pure random sample, each student at the urban high school has an equal chance of being selected as a participant in the study. It is as if the names of all the students are placed in a bowl and random draws are made until there are 307 participants. However, some research questions call for a different approach. For instance, in examining perceptions of young adult literature, one might hypothesize that older students have a different perspective than those in the first grade, and differences between genders may also be expected. In such cases, a stratified sample may be more appropriate, where the researcher determines in advance the minimum distribution between categories that must be present in the sample (for example, half of the sample must consist of boys and upper-secondary students, if that is in line with the population composition). Additionally, considering the school context, it may be practical to consider a cluster sample, where the population is divided into clusters and these clusters are then randomly selected. As students are already divided into classes

(an example of clustering), it may be more practical to randomly select classes for participation in the study.

In the realm of literary reception research, selective samples are more common than random ones, primarily due to the inherent difficulty in accessing most relevant populations in a randomized manner. Simply put, there is no database of common readers or professional critics that can be randomly sampled for inclusion in a study. For instance, if one aims to understand the factors attracting fans to the literary dark academia subculture, there are no respondent tokens that can be simply drawn from a metaphorical bowl. Instead, one must employ a selective sampling technique, recognizing that this may not yield directly generalizable statements about the entire population. In much student-led research, convenience samples are often utilized, wherein participants are chosen based on their availability and willingness to partake in the study. For example, if one knows someone from the dark academia subculture, they might specifically ask them to complete a questionnaire. A more targeted approach is the purposive sample, where participants are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research. For instance, one could approach individuals who have listed dark academia shelves on Goodreads, thus explicitly identifying themselves as enthusiasts of the subculture. Another option is the snowball sample, wherein a small number of participants are approached and asked to recommend other suitable participants – in this case, perhaps friends or acquaintances who also share an interest in dark academia. This type of sampling is particularly suitable when investigating hard-to-reach populations. Finally, a common sampling method within literary reception studies is the self-selecting sample. This involves disseminating a call for participation in a survey through relevant channels, allowing interested individuals to independently sign up for the research. In the case of the dark academia example, for instance, one could distribute a link to the study on a forum or social media platform known to attract users interested in the subculture.

When employing selective samples, it is crucial to be aware of selection bias, meaning that research outcomes may be influenced by the chosen sample. For example, if conducting research on reader responses to the world-renowned series *The Seven Sisters* by Lucinda Riley and spreading a survey link via social media and book-based platforms like Goodreads and LibraryThing, it is likely that fans of the series would be willing to dedicate their time to completing the survey, whereas those with negative or neutral reading experiences may prefer to spend their time elsewhere.

In such a scenario, the results may appear more favourable than if a different type of sample had been chosen.

This example also highlights the importance of considering the respondent's perspective within questionnaire research, specifically how they approach a survey. Krosnick and Presser (2018) differentiate between optimizing and satisficing in survey completion. Respondents engaging in optimizing invest their mental energy fully in the survey, striving to provide comprehensive answers by carefully considering the options. Conversely, satisficing respondents aim to minimize mental effort and breeze through the survey with minimal engagement. This can be observed in short response times to closed-ended questions and brief answers to open questions. To prevent respondents from satisficing and thereby negatively influencing the reliability of results, it is essential to make thoughtful choices in constructing the questionnaire.

Considerations regarding question design

When designing a self-completion questionnaire, it is essential to keep in mind that the questions posed to respondents serve the purpose of thoroughly addressing the research question. In essence, the constructs queried in the survey must be linked to the conceptual embedding of the research question and the theoretical framework used to approach this issue. For instance, if one is investigating the appeal of #BookTok for adolescent readers, it might be tempting to simply ask 'How appealing do you find #BookTok?', using a scale of 1 to 7. While the average response to this question may provide a general indication of the appeal in the eyes of the sample, it does not lead to a profound understanding of the phenomenon. To achieve this, the concept of 'appeal' should be more precisely operationalized by explicating its various dimensions (such as the autonomy offered by #BookTok, the degree of social interaction, the multimodal form, etc. – see Dera et al. 2023).

In order to provide a thorough answer to the research question, it is often crucial, in addition to establishing a connection between survey questions and the conceptual framework, to gain a clear understanding of the background characteristics of the respondents. These are typically elicited in the form of demographic data, such as age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, occupation and so forth. For example, in the case of the appeal of #BookTok, it is conceivable that adolescents aged 15 may have different opinions from those aged 22, or that gender differences

may arise. In the context of literary reception studies, besides demographic data, other respondent characteristics are also significant, such as the number of hours spent reading per week, the extent to which the respondent values the literary aspects of books, or their favourite genres.

There is ongoing debate within methodological literature regarding the placement of such background information in surveys: whether at the beginning or at the end. An argument for placement at the beginning is that the response rate for these questions tends to be higher when the survey begins with them, with non-demographic questions maintaining a similarly high response rate (Teclaw et al. 2012). An argument for placement at the end, besides potential respondent fatigue, is that respondents, once they have explicitly answered such questions, may begin to conform to corresponding expectation patterns (Gilovich et al. 2006). In the context of literary reception studies, this could mean, for example, that female respondents might rate their attitude towards literature more favourably, as they are aware that women are more commonly perceived as readers than men. However, no evidence of such stereotype threat has been found in the context of reading research. Therefore, it is advised to carefully consider the placement of demographic questions and to thoroughly justify this decision in the research report.

In constructing surveys, it is also important to consider the level of measurement of the data that a question yields. For quantitative analyses, it is recognized that the higher the level of measurement, the greater the potential for statistical analysis generally is. Let us revisit the research idea on the awareness of Charlotte Brontë among first-generation students. For instance, in a questionnaire, the following questions could be posed:

1. *Have you ever heard of the novel Jane Eyre?*
yes / no
2. *How interested are you in the works of Charlotte Brontë?*
very uninterested / uninterested / neutral / interested / very interested
3. *On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Brontë's novel Villette?*
4. *How many books by Charlotte Brontë do you estimate the average student of English literature has read?*

The first question is posed at a categorical or nominal level of measurement: in this case, there are two choice options that divide the respondents into categories without a specific rank order (the 'yes' group and the 'no' group).

Something different is at play in the second question: although there are choice options, there is a rank order among the responses. However, this order cannot be expressed numerically: there is no numerical distance between ‘interested’ and ‘very interested’. This level of measurement is termed ordinal. Once the data becomes truly numerical, as in questions 3 and 4, we move to statistically higher levels of measurement. The interval level of measurement entails a scale where the distances between the points are equal, as in question 3, although there is no true zero point. The latter is the main difference with the ratio level of measurement, where a true zero point indeed exists (like in question 4). For statistical models, the latter level of measurement is optimal – hence why question 3, for example, could be rephrased as: *How would you rate Brontë’s novel Villette if you were allowed to give it a percentage score (0% to 100%)?*

The first two questions above are considered closed-ended questions, defined as questions with predetermined answer options from which respondents must choose one or more options. Questions 3 and 4 are therefore open-ended questions: the respondent must input their own answer (‘text entry’). Closed-ended questions may facilitate comparisons between (groups of) respondents, but also require careful considerations in question construction. Common pitfalls include:

- Formulating multiple-choice questions with incomplete answer options, as in this example:

How did you become acquainted with the works of Charlotte Brontë?

- a. At school
- b. Through my parents’ bookshelf
- c. Through the public library

Other options, such as ‘at the thrift store’ or ‘through a friend’, are missing here. It is therefore important to always add the option ‘Other, namely...’.

- Formulating multiple-choice questions where the answer options do not mutually exclude each other, as in this example:

When did you last read a novel by Charlotte Brontë?

- a. Within the past month
- b. Within the past six months

- c. Within the past year
- d. 1–2 years ago
- e. 2–5 years ago
- f. 5–10 years ago
- g. More than 10 years ago

If a respondent read a Brontë novel two years ago, it is not clear whether they should choose d or e. The same problem arises with the answer five years (e or f).

- Formulating compound questions, also known as double-barrelled questions, where multiple constructs are presented in one question or statement (*What rating on a scale of 1 to 10 would you give the form and style of Jane Eyre?*).
- Formulating questions in a way that bias occurs, for example: *The most famous novel by Charlotte Brontë is Jane Eyre. Are you familiar with this novel?* In this case, the addition about the fame of *Jane Eyre* may lead the respondent, even if they are not familiar with the novel, to give a positive answer to the question out of social desirability.

A particular type of closed-ended question is the so-called Likert statement, such as question 2 in the examples given earlier. With Likert statements (measured at the ordinal level), attitudes and opinions can be mapped in a more nuanced way than with a binary yes/no question. In many cases, researchers opt for a five-point scale or a seven-point scale, with the midpoint labelled ‘neutral’. If you want to compel respondents to express a positive or negative opinion, it may be useful to choose a four- or six-point scale.

The optimal choice for a scale is often a matter of semantics. For example, consider the statement: ‘I think it’s important that my friends can discuss canonical literature.’ With a five-point scale, you would expect the options ‘Strongly (dis)agree’ and ‘(Dis)agree’. With a seven-point scale, the matter becomes more refined because the option ‘Somewhat (dis)agree’ could also be added. If you expect respondents to understand such subtlety in relation to the statement, a seven-point scale is definitely worth considering, also because that scale moves somewhat closer to the interval level compared to the five-point scale.

In terms of validity, it is crucial that respondents cannot be confused about what you are specifically asking when presenting a Likert scale statement. Therefore, avoid jargon ('I find *Jane Eyre* representative of Victorian literature'), but also double-barrelled statements ('I find the style and language of *Jane Eyre* beautiful') and questions containing negations ('I don't find *Jane Eyre* an engaging novel'), because the latter require too much cognitive effort in relation to the scale's semantics. In addition to formulation, it is also important that, in the case of a large number of Likert statements, you vary the way you present the scale by placing 'Agree' sometimes on the left and sometimes on the right. This way, you might identify respondents who read carelessly, which enhances the reliability of your results. For this reason, it is also wise to query constructs with multiple, similar statements (i.e. 'I think *Jane Eyre* is well-written' / 'I think the language in *Jane Eyre* is good'). This way, you can identify conflicting answers from respondents.

A methodological drawback of closed-ended questions, including Likert statements, is that they necessarily remain superficial. If a respondent indicates that they find the language usage in *Jane Eyre* to be good, it tells us little about the poetic demands the respondent in question makes. For this reason, especially in the context of literary reception research, it is important to also include open questions in the survey to deepen the results. Because answering open questions can be time-consuming for respondents, it is important to dose this type of question properly. It can also be useful to provide an indication of the desired length of the response (for example, approximately 100–200 words) and to give respondents sufficient context to increase the likelihood of usable data. For example, when asking an in-depth question about the language usage in *Jane Eyre*, it is wise to present a passage from the novel and ask respondents to judge the language usage in that specific fragment. One may also consider working with scenarios, for instance: 'Imagine someone at a party asks you why *Jane Eyre* is an important book. What would you reply?'

Open-ended question formats generally work better in digitally administered surveys than in paper-based surveys, because respondents typically type faster than they can write. In addition, for data analysis, using survey software such as Qualtrics or SurveyMonkey is a pragmatic choice because digitally collected data can be directly loaded into relevant analysis software. However, in some contexts, working with paper surveys can improve the quality of your research because, as a researcher,

you have the opportunity to verify whether a respondent has completed the entire survey – and just the awareness of that fact among respondents can reduce the dropout rate in the research.

Whatever choices you make, always keep in mind that you should conduct a pilot study before distributing the survey call. This ensures that actual respondents understand the questions well and that no technical issues arise. To validate the survey, seeking feedback from experts in your (sub)field of research is also recommended.

4. Case study

Returning to the lockdown poetry written during the COVID-19 pandemic, suppose we want to assess readers' judgements about the COVID poems that appeared in newspapers and on social media during the summer of 2020, amid the pandemic. What steps should we take? We apply the theory described above in summary form to this case.

Firstly, we establish the research population, comprising readers of lockdown poetry. Given the uncertain size of this population, a representative sample is not feasible. Therefore, we opt for a selective sample by issuing a call to reach readers of lockdown poetry (self-selecting sample). This call will be placed in poetry communities on social media and disseminated through newsletters of libraries and other organizations that reach many readers. The call will include a link to the digital survey on Qualtrics.

As we cannot predict the characteristics of the respondents, we broaden our inquiry beyond standard demographic data like gender and age, focusing on their poetry-reading habits, since someone who reads a lot of poetry may evaluate the poems occasioned by COVID-19 differently from someone who rarely reads poetry. Thus, we pose questions on ordinal and ratio scales to gauge this reading behaviour:

- *How often do you typically read poetry?*
daily / weekly / several times a month / monthly / every three months / every six months / yearly / less often than yearly / never
- *Approximately how many poetry collections do you read per year?*

Our non-demographic survey questions aim to assess the *evaluation* of lockdown poetry. Therefore, the construct of ‘evaluation’ needs to be operationalized based on a theoretical framework. In this case, we adopt the tension between autonomy and heteronomy in poetry evaluation (see Dera 2021). Those evaluating a poem primarily based on autonomous criteria tend to consider the text as an artwork in itself, focusing on language usage, stylistic devices and poetic form. Conversely, those prioritizing heteronomous criteria lean more towards the poem’s relationship to the external world, considering aspects such as its relevance to current events or the emotions it evokes.

When designing survey questions, we keep this distinction between autonomy and heteronomy in mind. We employ a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Firstly, we inquire whether respondents have encountered lockdown poetry in the past three months (closed-ended, yes/no) and provide a list of possible media where they might have done so (closed-ended, multiple choice). Respondents who answer positively are then asked to rate the quality of the lockdown poetry they read on a five-point Likert scale (‘very low’ to ‘very high’). Subsequently, they are requested through an open question to provide a rationale for their answer in approximately 100–200 words. Then, we present a specific COVID poem, published in a widely read newspaper, that is representative of the poetry many may have encountered. Here, too, we provide a Likert statement for evaluation followed by an open question for elaboration. Further, we deepen the survey by activating the theoretical distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. To prevent bias, we consciously introduce this after respondents have answered the open questions. We ask respondents to rate on a seven-point Likert scale how important they consider a set of ten aspects to be in evaluating poetry in general and how well they believe these aspects are represented in the COVID poem presented. Based on a literature review, we select five items corresponding to autonomy (distinct language usage, imagery, stanzaic structure, intertextuality, stylistic devices) and five items corresponding to heteronomy (being moved emotionally, gaining insight into current events, learning a lesson, relatability, therapeutic effect).

5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has elucidated how self-completion questionnaires can be employed in literary reception research to gain insight into how flesh-and-blood readers evaluate texts or shape their lives as readers. The primary value of this method lies in eliciting data that remain unseen when relying solely on written sources and the familiar analytical arsenal of literary studies. Compared to non-empirical approaches, questionnaire research evidently brings us closer to the reader. Nevertheless, an inherent distance still remains, as during a self-completion questionnaire it is impossible to follow up with probing questions. Ultimately, this compromises not only depth but also the potential to truly emancipate the reader as an object of study. Hence, it is advisable to combine survey research with that other form of interrogation: the interview.

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Using Interviews in Literary Reception Research

Jeroen Dera

1. Introduction

It is not difficult to conjure the clichéd image of a reader: someone nestled in a corner, in a cosy armchair by the fireplace, engrossed in a story and heedless of their surroundings. Even in the highly digitized twenty-first century, this practice persists – fortunately! – but it is merely one of the many ways in which people engage with literature. We can effortlessly envision a 27-year-old woman (let's call her Amy) who documents her reading life on Goodreads, occasionally shares reading recommendations in her Instagram Stories, draws inspiration for her book choices from videos on #BookTok, and participates in a book club with contacts she has made on social media. Amy reads books with her mobile phone beside her, and when she encounters a beautiful sentence, she shares it with her book club via Snapchat. Her father refuses to understand this and often brings the newspaper for her, hoping she might glance at the cultural section. In *his* book club, reviews of the book to be discussed are eagerly collected, but responses on Goodreads are not considered. For him, the critic of an esteemed newspaper remains a cultural authority, whereas his daughter values her online peer group more.

The example of Amy and her father raises various issues that have attracted significant attention in institutional literary studies: the circulation of literature, differences in reception practices over time, and changes in the cultural prestige of literature and its gatekeepers. As so-called 'common readers', that is, readers who are not professionally engaged with literature, Amy and her father can offer numerous insights into such research themes. In terms of literary reception practices, however, they leave few traces. Amy's contributions on Instagram and Snapchat are subject to rapid digital erosion; the discussions in her book club are not documented, and her occasional reviews on Goodreads blend into the millions of messages collected on that platform. While Amy's life as a

reader is somewhat more visible than that of her father, whose reactions to books are nowhere publicly available, as researchers we have few clues that we can use to answer targeted questions about their literary reception practices – which makes Amy and her father similar to millions of readers throughout history (cf. Elfenbein 2006). That is to say, if reception is not converted into data, the reception studies scholar is literally empty-handed.

As in the previous chapter, the solution here lies in elicitation, employing a research technique whereby the researcher extracts data from participants. For instance, we could present Amy with a self-completion questionnaire about her use of Goodreads. When does she decide that a book is worthy of a review, and when does she merely give a rating? What does she believe a review on Goodreads should entail? When does a review from her online friends convince her to actually read a book? Undoubtedly, this would provide information that enhances our understanding of digital reading practices, but a survey remains inherently superficial, and thus the tool is unsuitable for getting to the core of Amy's reception practices. It is beneficial, therefore, to choose a research method that is more conducive to this: the interview.

2. The method

In the classical definition provided by Brenner et al. (1985), a research interview is defined as a “conversation conducted to gather research-relevant information” (148). From the interviewer's perspective, it is therefore insufficient merely to engage in question-answer sequences; the answer must yield research-relevant information and the conversation should be inquiry-oriented. Whether an interview is the most suitable instrument to employ in a study heavily depends on the chosen research question. Interviews are particularly suitable for examining constructs that are not readily observable (Brinkmann and Kvale 2009). While a self-completion questionnaire is highly suitable for surveying large groups of people on easily observable concepts, such as the number of books they typically read or the money they anticipate spending on literature every month, interviews are better suited for investigating complex concepts. Participants in interviews can be extensively questioned about their thoughts, emotions, beliefs and experiences related to the construct under consideration. Moreover, interviews afford a multilayered portrayal of the subjectivity of experiences and the specific context of the interviewed participant.

The latter aspect is deemed crucial for the research interview by some methodologists. Richards (2003, 53) proposes a rule of thumb in this regard: “Always seek the particular.” By this, he means that in interview research, one should strive for specific and precise information, avoiding abstractions where possible. A concept frequently encountered in this context is ‘lived experience’, which can be understood as the “representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject’s human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge” (Boylorn 2008, 490). Exploring the particulars and the core of participants’ experiences may ultimately lead to a very personal level, delving into how people live through and respond to their experiences.

An illustration may clarify this latter point. An intriguing question for literary reception research is what types of reading experiences lead individuals to designate a particular book as their favourite. This question is well-suited for interview research because (1) this type of reading experience is difficult to objectively capture in a survey, and (2) because the participant’s personal narrative is crucial to include in the research when addressing this specific question. A participant’s personal narrative will often encompass a life story in which they share experiences that have shaped their worldview – consider, for example, a reader who found solace in a book or experienced a particular moment of recognition, or a reader who identified so strongly with a character that it became a defining figure in their life. Through the interview method, abstract concepts such as solace, recognition and identification can acquire a highly personal dimension; they are embodied, as it were, by the participant’s story.

For this reason, listening in interview research is at least as important as, or perhaps even more important than, asking questions. While questions are the primary source of elicitation, an active listening attitude is an absolute necessity for obtaining research-relevant information. Active listening entails maintaining genuine engagement with the interviewee, including eye contact, affirmative nods, and attentive observation of both verbal and non-verbal cues, in order to comprehend their message thoroughly. In a study on the consumption of audiobooks via apps like Storytel, a participant could, for example, remark in response to a question about what is appealing about this method of consuming books:

I love that I can simply put in my earphones and listen to a story while doing groceries, as if you’re empathizing with a character while standing by the

bananas. Or that you can tidy up the laundry and still read, or well, listen. So yeah, it's mainly that you can be with your book everywhere and at all times.

At first glance, this response provides a clear answer to the question asked, and furthermore, it contains research-relevant information. However, the word 'mainly' in the last sentence suggests that there are additional, albeit less important, aspects at play – which underlines the need for researchers to ask follow-up questions based on participants' answers. Such subtleties underscore the importance of an active listening attitude, which therefore plays a significant role in the validity of the interview.

Concerning the validity of interview research, it is furthermore important to be vigilant about participants' tendency to present themselves differently or better than they are, and to reflect on the specific role from which an interviewee speaks. The methodological literature on interview research points out that participants have multiple footings; in other words, they enact multiple roles and perspectives in their everyday lives that may influence their responses and may also conflict with each other (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Beitin 2012). This issue is particularly pertinent in the case of literary reception studies. For example, if one were to question literary studies students about their experiences with canonical modernist poetry, the perspective of the academic reader and that of the recreational reader may overlap, raising the continuous question of from which role the interviewee is speaking. This issue is even more striking when interviewing individuals who occupy a professional role in the literary field, such as writers, critics and editors. It is not inconceivable that answers given in such an interview may be seized upon to influence the perception surrounding their own (literary) product or literary persona. What is intended as a research interview may, in such a case, degenerate into a literary (marketing) game – raising fundamental questions about the reliability of the information obtained. Unfortunately, this stalemate is unbreakable, and researchers would do well to reflect on it in the reporting of their findings.

Certainly, in contrast to self-completion questionnaires, interview-based research is predominantly qualitative in nature. The research-relevant information obtained through this method necessitates meticulous analysis of transcripts through targeted close readings. Given the involvement of real-life participants, at most universities ethical clearance from an ethics review board is imperative prior to any direct engagement with

participants. Additionally, participants must provide informed consent for their involvement, with parents or legal guardians also required to grant consent for minors. Typically, this consent is two-fold, encompassing participation in the research and permission for audio recording of the interview (including data storage) via a voice recorder.

3. Tools and techniques

Types of research interviews

Scholars in the field of qualitative methodologies differentiate between various types of research interviews. The most appropriate type for your study primarily depends on your research question. Traditionally, interviews can vary in their level of openness. In a highly open interview, no interview protocol with specifically formulated questions is prepared in advance. As a researcher, you might have only created a list with keywords or prompts, allowing the conversation to adopt an open and flexible nature. Consequently, participants have ample space to introduce their own ideas and experiences. Open interviews are therefore suitable for exploring complex subjects where little is known, or for questioning participants with considerable expertise in a field that is still scantily documented scientifically. For instance, within literary reception studies, one might contemplate a study where employees of a newspaper editorial office are queried about their policy regarding the book review section. Because gaining insight into such behind-the-scenes perspectives necessitates complex knowledge, it is more appropriate to compile a list of discussion topics than a structured list of questions with little room for input from the interviewees.

A structured interview serves as the natural counterpart to the open interview. In a structured interview, an interview protocol is utilized where each question is predetermined, meaning all participants receive precisely the same questions in exactly the same sequence. This facilitates comparison between participants and sometimes permits a more quantitative analysis. In this regard, compared to an open interview, a structured interview appears more akin to a written questionnaire, with the primary distinction being that the researcher can probe further in cases of ambiguity during an interview, which is not feasible in

a self-completion questionnaire. Since human interaction with literary texts is almost inherently complex, structured interviews are generally not the preferred research method within literary reception research. Nevertheless, there are situations where they prove advantageous, such as when questioning customers in a bookstore about their considerations for purchasing a book using standardized questions. In such a context, a structured interview might be less time-consuming for the customer than completing a questionnaire.

The interview type likely most prevalent in literary research scenarios is the semi-structured interview, which essentially straddles the midpoint between an open interview and a structured interview. In a semi-structured interview, predetermined questions are outlined in an interview protocol, which is a major difference from a truly open interview, but there is also room for input from the interviewee and for delving deeper into topics that emerge during the conversation. Because of the latter, the sequence of questions does not need to be fixed. This conversational style thus strikes a balance between flexibility and structure. Semi-structured interviews are employed in situations where the research question cannot be entirely standardized due to the complexity of the study, as is often the case in literary reception studies, but where sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation already exists. Consider, for example, a study where fans of *The Hunger Games* are questioned about their motives for participating in online spaces related to this saga. This delves into a complex network of lived experiences, yet guiding questions can be established based on theoretical concepts surrounding fan culture (e.g. Duffett 2013) and online affinity spaces (e.g. Curwood 2013) to structure the interview protocol.

A particular form of research interview is the stimulated-recall interview, where participants are asked to recollect specific events or situations that occurred earlier and to reconstruct their thoughts, feelings and actions during those events. Typically, participants are presented with a video recording, audio recording or written product that they created earlier (the stimulus), after which they are prompted to share their thoughts and considerations when they see themselves or their work again. This method is highly popular in educational research and cognitive-psychological research but also offers numerous opportunities for contemporary literary reception studies. For instance, BookTokers, BookTubers and Goodreads users could be asked to share their considerations while

viewing their own contributions to the platforms they are active on, thereby gaining more insight into the choices underlying such forms of online book reviewing. However, in the case of online reading communities research, such empirical inquiries are still quite scarce (compare Dera, 2024b).

Considerations regarding recruitment of participants

Because interviewing is an intensive and time-consuming research method, it is often not practically feasible to interview hundreds or even dozens of participants. However, it is generally unnecessary to do so, as the type of questions answered through interview research is typically not quantitative in nature, thus large samples are not a necessity. Due to the focus on understanding and interpreting complex experiences, as is characteristic of open and semi-structured interviews, interview research is not primarily aimed at establishing generally applicable regularities based on a representative cross-section of the population, but rather at exploring the profound insights and perspectives that individuals can offer, thereby enabling a richer and more detailed understanding of phenomena. In this sense, the number of participants for interview research is related to the question of when, as a researcher, you have collected sufficient information and experiences to draw valid conclusions about your research question. In this context, we also refer to theoretical saturation, or the point in data collection where no additional issues or insights emerge from the data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified, explored and exhausted. A recent review of qualitative research demonstrates that this stage can be reached between nine and seventeen interviews (Hennink and Kaiser 2022). If one wishes to conduct thorough interview research, a sample of around fifteen to twenty participants is therefore considered safe – and it might even be on the large side.

Critical to the yields of interview research is the composition of your sample. Depending on the objective of your study, you may aim for a homogeneous or heterogeneous composition of the group of participants you interview. A homogeneous sample, where there are minimal differences in the background of your participants, is logical when that group more or less corresponds to your research object, such as when you want to understand how highly educated female readers of literary magazines from the 1980s reflect on the literary infrastructure of that

decade. Considerations regarding representativeness may also play a role in opting for a homogeneous sample. For instance, quantitative research indicates that the average Goodreads user is a highly educated woman between the ages of 25 and 34 (Murray 2021), which may justify specifically recruiting members of this group if you wish to delve deeper into user experiences on this platform. However, for many inquiries in the domain of literary reception studies, heterogeneous samples are more appropriate, as questioning individuals with different background characteristics can provide a nuanced picture of the complexity of literary phenomena. Consider, for example, research on the widespread appeal of novels by contemporary authors who are popular across the globe (e.g. Margaret Atwood, Haruki Murakami and Sally Rooney): by interviewing participants of various genders, generations and geographical origins, it is more possible to delve deeper into the themes under examination than if a highly homogeneous sample were employed. Keep in mind, however, that heterogeneity can also be time-consuming, as achieving theoretical saturation may take longer when interviewing individuals with entirely different background characteristics.

Considerations regarding interview design

When designing a research interview, the primary consideration typically involves constructing a topic list or more comprehensive interview protocol to prepare the conversation's trajectory. However, there are also other aspects to carefully consider in the setup of your research. A first consideration to make concerns the location and physical form of the interviews. Participants can be interviewed in a face-to-face setting or through an online application such as Zoom or Teams. The latter can be efficient from both the researcher's and the interviewee's perspective, especially when participants are located at a distance or have a busy schedule. In the case of sensitive topics (such as violence, sexuality and health issues), online interviews often even yield richer data than face-to-face interviews (Thunberg and Arnell 2022), which prompts consideration for the study of such phenomena in literary reception studies, such as investigating the reception of trauma literature or the use of literary texts in therapeutic contexts.

An undeniable disadvantage of digital interviewing is the researcher's dependence on technology (a malfunctioning connection can literally ruin the research) and the fact that active listening requires more effort due

to the limited cues provided online from the participant's body language, with typically only their head being shown. If you have sufficient time and resources to conduct an interview in person, then that is generally preferable to a digital interview. In a physical setting, conversation generally flows more smoothly and naturally, and besides richness in detail, a natural flow is particularly characteristic of a successful research interview (Dörnyei 2007). To achieve such a natural flow with an unfamiliar interviewee, it is important to take enough time to put your participants at ease before the interview. For example, schedule preparatory conversations in which you precisely explain how the interview day will unfold and take ample time to speak informally with the participant before actual data collection begins. This increases the likelihood of the interviewee feeling comfortable enough to share rich details. With regard to comfort, the physical setting of the interview also plays a role. If the conversation takes place in an environment familiar to the participant, or in an inviting space with relaxing furniture, it is more likely to stimulate a natural flow than if the interview were conducted in a clinical space with coffee from a machine.

Once you have made a decision about the interview conditions, it is important to develop the interview itself. If you aim to work inductively, deriving your theory formation from the data you find, open interviews are often appropriate. However, if you operate deductively from existing theory formation, you are more likely to employ semi-structured or structured interviews. A useful starting point for constructing interview protocols is provided by Milagros Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework, which divides the preparatory phase of interview research into four steps. The first step involves aligning the research question with the interview questions. Since the interview is essentially a technique for gathering research-relevant information, your interview questions must be well aligned with the concepts underlying your research question. For example, if you want to understand what kind of reading experiences participants seek when reading literary novels, it is essential to first determine the theoretical dimensions of the concept of 'reading experience' and then cover these in the interview questions or conversation topics you develop. To put it more concretely, if you were to theoretically reason from the four 'uses of literature' distinguished by Rita Felski (2006), namely recognizing the world or oneself in a novel (*recognition*), being enchanted by a book (*enchantment*), gaining knowledge about human relationships and society (*social knowledge*), and being disrupted

(*shock*), then you would need to formulate questions that provide insight into participants' relationship to precisely these four dimensions of reading. To sharpen the relationship between your conceptual framework and your interview design, you can work with an interview matrix (see paragraph 4 for an example).

The second step of IPR is the construction of an inquiry-based conversation. As mentioned, this is partly facilitated by choices you make regarding the physical conditions of the interview, but the sequence and form of your questions are also important here. Participants in interview research often require some time to fully engage in the conversation, which is why it is advisable not to place the key questions of the interview, which are deemed most crucial for addressing the research question, at the beginning of the conversation (Creswell 2007; Castillo-Montoya 2016). It is better to commence with introductory questions: simple, neutral (i.e. non-intimidating) questions that encourage narrative descriptions from the participant. For example, if interviewing university students about their experiences with the classroom reading of controversial literary texts in light of contemporary discussions on cancel culture, it would be rather abrupt to open the interview with a question regarding whether they perceive cancel culture in their own educational context and then immediately inquire about their thoughts on their own identity as readers in relation to controversial literature. It is much more effective to commence with the neutral inquiry about the participant's knowledge of cancel culture, and then funnel towards the core of their experiences in a classroom context.

To funnel the conversation effectively, transition questions are employed; these are questions that, as the name suggests, mark the transition from introductory questions to key questions. If one aims to maintain a good balance between inquiry and conversation, it is advisable to explicitly relate these transition questions to what a participant has expressed. For instance, in the example above, if an interviewee indicates that they associate cancel culture with book bans in school libraries and trigger warnings in relation to literary texts, a transition question could be formulated as follows: 'You just mentioned associating controversial texts with trigger warnings in the context of a university course. Have you encountered any examples of this yourself?' In this way, the conversation is directed towards the data that are crucial for the research question, and you will be able to naturally address the key questions outlined in your interview protocol.

Once all key questions have been posed, it is appropriate to guide the conversation towards its conclusion. This is achieved through closing questions: brief and straightforward questions that allow the participant to contribute any final thoughts (i.e. ‘Are there any further aspects you’d like to share about your experiences with controversial texts in the classroom that we haven’t covered in our discussion?’). Such a question serves not only to naturally conclude the conversation, but is also important in terms of achieving theoretical saturation. After all, it is entirely possible for the participant to offer perspectives that had not been considered based solely on the existing literature.

Once the interview protocol or topic list has been finalized, it is time for the third phase in Castillo-Montoya’s (2016) IPR framework: soliciting expert feedback. Specialists in the field of your research question serve as excellent sounding boards to assess the quality of your interview questions and thereby ensure the validity of your research. Following the refinement of the protocol based on their feedback, the fourth and final phase of the framework involves conducting a pilot study with a few interviewees who meet the selection criteria of your research. Such a pilot study helps determine whether your questions are formulated clearly for the target audience, provides insight into the effectiveness of transition questions, clarifies the approximate duration of the interview, and may uncover additional topics of conversation that were not previously considered in earlier phases.

Considerations concerning your role as an interviewer

It cannot be emphasized enough that, as an interviewer, you have the role of a researcher, which means you assume a distinct role in the conversation compared to everyday interactions. Apart from ensuring the anonymity and comfort of your participants, you should always bear the following principles in mind:

- Avoid asking leading questions and maintain a neutral tone. Leading questions may prompt participants to echo your sentiments or create barriers to expressing their own opinions. For instance, when researching how readers of Nabokov’s *Lolita* engage with the ethical dilemmas in that novel, disclosing your own struggle with Humbert Humbert’s ideology could compromise the credibility of your research.

- In line with the above: respect your participants and their perspectives. If you disagree with a participant's viewpoint, a research interview is not the appropriate forum for debate.
- Pose one question at a time. Double-barrelled questions not only confuse participants but also pose challenges during interview analysis.
- Regularly check whether your questions are clear to participants. Avoid jargon and ensure mutual understanding of key terms. In an interview about the contextual usage of poetry, for example, your participant might have a different definition of poems than you, which can lead to miscommunication (and misinterpretation!) if not addressed.
- Following the previous point: periodically echo participants' responses back to them to confirm understanding of the core points – and do not hesitate to ask follow-up questions or return to remarks made earlier in the conversation.
- Particularly for key questions, attempt to revisit the same topics multiple times. This helps gauge the consistency of participants' responses and provides an opportunity to address any inconsistencies. It is advisable to announce beforehand that you will be eliciting specific information multiple times, so participants do not perceive the conversation as unnecessarily repetitive.

Considerations concerning data storage

Research interviews often last between forty-five minutes and ninety minutes. For analysis purposes, then, it is crucial to record these interviews. As mentioned earlier, due to privacy concerns, consent must always be obtained from participants. In most institutions, participants must not only consent to being recorded but also specify how the recording may be used afterwards (e.g. playing excerpts during academic conferences or classes). Depending on the research objectives, you may opt for audio recordings (common in literary reception research) or video recordings (useful when studying interaction and non-verbal communication, such as expansive gestures to emphasize opinions about an author).

Recorded interviews are typically transcribed for analysis. This is usually done verbatim, meaning participants' words are transcribed exactly, including pauses, stuttering and errors. Alternatively, you may choose verbatim transcripts, where you render participants' responses into coherent sentences. Verbatim transcripts are often sufficient when the focus

is primarily on the conceptual content of participants' responses, as is typically the case in literary reception research. AI-assisted transcription software such as Amberscript and Cockatoo is available on the market, and most word-processing programs nowadays include a transcription function. This can significantly expedite the process. For manually transcribing one hour of interview material, you can expect to allocate approximately six hours.

4. Case study

At this juncture, we revisit the case of Amy, introduced at the outset of this chapter. The manner in which she utilizes digital media to share and sustain her passion for literature presents an excellent opportunity for interview-based research. Interviews offer a pathway to accessing the thought processes, perspectives and lived experiences of actual readers, enabling the formulation of theories concerning the reading culture to which they belong. As a synthesis of the guidelines discussed in this chapter regarding interview research, a specific research idea is now delineated, with a particular focus on the *construction* of the interview. For details on the analysis of interview data, we refer to the chapter on qualitative data analysis.

Considering Amy's reading practices, so-called 'reading challenges' on platforms like Goodreads and The StoryGraph present an intriguing subject for investigation. A reading challenge constitutes an online phenomenon wherein users establish a goal for themselves regarding the number of books they aim to read within a year. In 2023, nearly eight million members engaged in such challenges on Goodreads, collectively adding 342,756,338 books to their to-read lists (also referred to as 'pledging'), averaging to forty-three pledged books per participant. This substantial population lends itself to quantitative examination through computational methods. However, to understand participants' experiences in such reading challenges, interview research proves to be a suitable methodology.

An exemplification of this approach can be found in Dera (2024a), where the research question is posed as follows: *What motivates middle and late adolescents to participate in reading challenges, what benefits do they derive from it, and how does participation affect their reading habits?*

Key question	Concept: <i>participation motives</i>	Concept: <i>participation gains</i>	Concept: <i>reading routines</i>
Why did you decide to participate in a reading challenge?	X		
How important do you consider it to be to actually complete the challenge?	X		
What positive outcomes do you associate with participating in a reading challenge?		X	
Are there any negative consequences of participating in a reading challenge?		X	
What is your fondest memory of participating in a reading challenge?		X	
Do you notice that participating in a reading challenge has influenced how you read compared to when you did not participate?			X
Do you find that participating in a reading challenge has led you to read different types of books compared to when you did not participate?			X
Precisely how do you use your smartphone or other devices while reading for the reading challenge?			X

Figure 1: Example of an interview matrix

This tripartite inquiry is rooted in existing research on young people’s online reading culture and adolescent reading behaviour. Consequently, the research can build upon existing knowledge and insights, combined with a literary practice that has received scant attention in research, namely reading in the context of an online challenge. Given this combination, semi-structured interviews are the preferable form of inquiry in this case.

Another consideration to be made pertains to participant selection. Since the research focuses on middle and late adolescents, participants in the age range of 15–20 years old who engage in reading challenges are approached. They are recruited via the snowball sampling method, utilizing the social networks of high-school teachers and students as mediators.

With the aim of achieving theoretical saturation, the study targets twenty participants from the Netherlands who are active on either Goodreads or The StoryGraph. To gather diverse perspectives on the phenomenon, a heterogeneous sample is chosen, encompassing variations in gender, age, annual book consumption, genre preference and educational background. Given the relative difficulty in reaching the targeted demographic and the consequent geographical dispersion of participants across the Netherlands, online interviews are chosen as the mode of data collection.

The interview commences with general inquiries about how participants encountered reading challenges. As a transition question, participants are asked about the moment they decided to partake in a reading challenge. This facilitates the transition from acquainting themselves with the phenomenon to exploring a central concept in the research question, namely *participation motives*. The interview matrix visualised in Figure 1 delineates which key questions correspond to this concept and the other two concepts from the research question.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants are invited to share any additional thoughts regarding their participation in reading challenges that have not been addressed. To ensure the validity of the interview protocol, which was deductively formulated after consulting literature on the online reading behaviour of middle and late adolescents, it was reviewed by five fellow researchers specializing in online literacies.

5. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have explored when to employ interviews and the considerations involved in designing this research method. Especially when interviews are combined with self-completion questionnaires, literary reception research allows for a deep understanding of empirical readers. However, it is crucial to remember that your presence as a researcher may influence the participants' responses. Despite efforts to achieve a natural flow in conversation, the research interview setting may hinder truly authentic participant engagement. Socially desirable responses are always a possibility, and participants might strive to present themselves in a more favourable light. Nevertheless, with awareness of this issue, interview research serves as a valuable means to gain insights into literary reception from a user's perspective. However, if you believe that

a one-on-one setting with a researcher is not the most suitable method for data collection in your research, you may also consider the method outlined in the next chapter: the focus group interview.

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Using Focus Groups in Literary Reception Research

Helleke van den Braber

1. Introduction

The online platform Patreon.com advertises itself as “the best place for creators to build community with their biggest fans, share exclusive work, and turn their passions into lasting creative businesses”.¹ Scrolling through the top creators in Patreon’s Writing section, you will find authors creating translations, original works of fiction, comics, newsletters and blog posts. Some of them are well known, with publishing contracts and bestseller credentials. Others choose to work more independently of established industry formats and disseminate their work mostly online. The Patreon platform helps both traditional and ‘indie’ authors to not just engage with their audience, but actively ask them to pledge monthly donations. Sometimes with considerable success: acclaimed SFF author N. K. Jemisin currently has over 900 patrons, adding up to more than \$3,000 per month.² Jemisin started her Patreon page in order to be able to quit her day job and work full time on her fiction, and succeeded; she now continues to use it to supplement her writing income.³ Similarly, award-winning author Seanan McGuire currently has around 3,600 patrons. Her account does not operate on a monthly model; rather, backers pledge an amount per short story McGuire releases – and with the number of backers she has, this currently adds up to over \$11,000 pledged per story.⁴

The business models of literary authors are a very interesting research theme in themselves. In this chapter, however, we focus on a different object of study: the interaction between literary authors and their benefactors, and the impact of this interaction on their artistic choices. This interaction may take place online, through platforms like Patreon, but there are many examples of durable, offline (real-life) relationships between authors and funders as well (Van den Braber et al. 2023).

Both online and offline, it is important to remember that individual backers involved in the private funding of authors are first and foremost engaged readers, albeit readers who are prepared to support creators in other ways than by just purchasing their books. As backers, they take up the role of benefactor, by pledging money to support the authors they believe in and would like to read more of. The authors reciprocate by offering their patrons – through online or offline means – privileged access to new work, insight into (and sometimes impact on) their artistic process, and usually forms of personal attention and interaction as well.

Many authors boost the connection with their funders by building dynamic communities of readers, and inviting them to engage interactively with their work. Typically, backers show their engagement in multiple ways: they read the work of the writers they support, form an opinion on it, give feedback on it, discuss it with fellow backers, and – importantly – base any further decisions to increase or decrease their support on their appreciation of it. In that sense, the (quality of) the literary work itself actively and powerfully connects artist to benefactor, and helps mediate their connection.

Possible research questions and primary sources

The object of study introduced in the previous paragraph foregrounds processes of (1) *interaction*, *exchange*, *connection* and *reciprocity* between two categories of people, and (2) their *perceptions* of those processes. This chapter focuses on a method to research both (1) and (2). Collecting elicited data through the method of focus groups helps in finding answers to research questions that address precisely those aspects: the *connection* and *interaction* between respondents (in this case artists and patrons), and their *perception* of their exchange. This method lends itself well to the investigation of the kind of questions hinted at above: how do participants view each other's role and position? What is it that they feel they can and cannot expect of each other? Do they try to align their wishes and interests to those of their exchange partner – and if so, how? What kinds of *meanings* do they attach to the process of requesting and granting support, and of interacting with each other more generally? Finding answers to these questions would be a valuable contribution to the fields of patronage studies as well as – potentially – reception studies. The focus group method does not limit itself in any way to those two fields, however – it

lends itself to any research into the views of (groups of) people, and into their interaction and positioning.

Elicited data emerge in direct response to deliberate action or intervention of the researcher, and are created especially with a specific research project in mind. In this case, the deliberate action of the researcher could consist of sampling and approaching a selection of stakeholders involved in patronage relationships (authors and patrons), and creating data by asking them questions, listening to their views and observing their interactions. In this chapter, we will demonstrate how to employ the focus group method to collect this type of data.

Researchers could also opt to work with non-elicited or authentic data. Authentic data are not created by deliberate action or intervention, but are ‘found’ or encountered in, and collected from, real-life phenomena or environments. Taking the subject of artist–patron interaction as our example, authentic data may for instance be found on the creator pages of platforms like Patreon. Many artists post specific texts there to explain the impact the interaction with patrons may or may not have on the texts they write. Those online texts can be collected as authentic data, and analysed through discourse analysis, allowing researchers to map the different lines of reasoning authors put forward to justify their engagement with benefactors. Historic sources like letters, diaries, invoices, commissioning contracts and memoirs also count as authentic data, and can be collected and analysed to research historic patronage interactions.⁵

2. The method

Goals of the focus group method

The focus group is a form of group interview in which researchers bring several participants together to collectively discuss a certain topic. Conducting focus groups allows researchers to understand not only how *separate* individuals make sense of the world around them (as conducting research interviews would), but helps to examine how individuals create those meanings and interpretations *together*, in interaction. It offers the opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon, and how they construct and compare meanings around it. The method allows us to develop an understanding not only of

why people feel the way they do, but also of how they react to others feeling or thinking either the same or (very) differently (Bryman 2016, 502). What do they agree or disagree on? How do they attempt to understand each other's perspective, or to convince others of their own way of looking at the world? This makes this method very useful for researching aspects of multi-perspectivity, (cultural) difference or diversity, exchange (for instance, between patron and artist, or reader and author), collaboration, friction or conflict. The emphasis on the group talking among itself rather than to a researcher often allows for a better examination of collective and conflicting beliefs, attitudes, values, perspectives, knowledge and ideas.

It is important to know that eliciting focus group data allows researchers to map not 'facts' or 'truths' but self-presentations. It helps them to interpret the social world from the perspective and in the terms of the people they study, and to primarily trace the meanings that their participants assign to the world around them (emic) instead of the meanings that they themselves, as researchers, assign (etic). Researchers working from an emic viewpoint aim to understand the cultural meaning and significance of a particular behaviour or practice as it is understood by the people who engage in it, whereas researchers working from an etic viewpoint try to understand those practices by looking at the world of the participants through the lens of a pre-set framework or theoretical model. Whether they take an emic or etic viewpoint, researchers working with focus groups are always and necessarily dependent on what their participants choose (not) to tell, or (not) to expose. It also means that it is important for any researcher conducting focus groups to always be aware of their own 'situatedness', possible bias and preconceptions.

The role of the moderator and the ethics of organizing a focus group

As a researcher, it is your role to facilitate and moderate the flow of discussion. By asking questions, focusing the conversation, inviting reflection, and offering examples and vignettes (see section 3), the moderator shapes the meeting without being too intrusive, directive or controlling. In successful focus group meetings, discussions flow in a relatively unstructured way, in order to give participants room to express and exchange their views and perspectives. Conducting focus groups ethically means avoiding, as a moderator, giving signs of assent or dissent (for instance by frowning, nodding approvingly, shaking your head). It also means striking

a balance between allowing all perspectives and (conflicting) views to come to the table on the one hand, and ensuring that all participants feel safe in speaking out and voicing their opinions on the other. Keeping a close eye on the allotment of speaking time is important as well. During the discussion, gregarious or dominant participants tend to take the floor more readily than introverted, quiet or underrepresented participants. One way to avoid this pitfall is to have moderators announce, before the start of the meeting, that participants should be aware that they may encounter instances of being cut short or interrupted by the moderator – but that they should in no way take this as a signal that their opinion is not valued or important. Another potential pitfall: it can be very valuable to bring two distinct categories of participants together in your focus group (for instance ‘patrons’ versus ‘artists’). Be aware, however, that this can lead to subtle us-versus-them dynamics, with each group unconsciously ‘orchestrating’ its views against the other-positioned group opposite them. It is recommended to gently regulate this dynamic (for example by thinking carefully about seating arrangements), as it might skew your results.

Reception studies and the focus group method

The focus group method forms part of a toolkit developed in the social sciences. Part of our argument in this chapter is that researchers in the humanities, and especially in reception studies, would do well to consider it part of their set of research instruments, too. Reception studies “involves looking at texts from the point of view of the readers, viewers, listeners, spectators and audiences who read, watch or listen to cultural productions, interpret them, and respond to them in a myriad of different ways”, reception studies specialist Ika Willis argues (Willis 2018, 1). She proposes a “reception-informed critical practice which takes account of the inextricably intertwined relationship between texts and their interpreters, readers or receivers”. The focus group method offers very valuable tools to map the views of any group of readers or receivers (in this case, patrons) – provided, of course, that they can be persuaded to meet up at a certain date and place.

Triangulation of methods (combining the analysis of focus group data with, for instance, the analysis of individual interview data, discourse analysis, or close or distant reading methods) helps to develop an even more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon you are researching.

Triangulation opens the door to using multiple datasets. This can also be a good strategy to test validity (the integrity of your conclusions), through bringing together information from different sources.

3. Tools and techniques

Selection of participants

It is important to think carefully about the type of participants most relevant to your research question. Focus group participants are not selected randomly, but sampled purposefully (through selective or snowball sampling), with the research goals and questions firmly in mind. Focus groups are typically used in small-sample qualitative studies; the low number of participants implies that representativity of the sample is not a relevant criterion. It is often appropriate to consider obtaining a stratified sample, where the researcher predetermines the categories that must be present in the sample. In this case, for example, the researcher might decide that half of the sample must consist of patrons; the other half of artists. It makes sense to strive for both variation and similarity in your selection. In this case that could mean selecting participants with variable roles (artist and patron) but similar fields (both active in the Dutch field of literature, for instance). The focus group method works particularly well if your sample consists of participants that are all known to have been involved in a particular situation, and can be asked about that involvement. If you decide to bring, for instance, a selection of artists and patrons together in a focus group, their discussion will flow more easily if your sample contains authors and readers with actual experience of patronage interaction. Your participants do *not*, however, need to have been involved *with each other* in that situation, or have met each other before. The ‘common ground’ between them will help the discussion flow easily and stay on topic. That said, some focus group specialists recommend working with natural groups, consisting of participants that are already acquainted or have an existing connection with each other (Bryman 2016). Whatever decision you make regarding sampling, it is important to always construct your selection criteria with care, and to document them clearly and verifiably in your research report or paper.

Focus groups take place on location, with all participants physically present. It is important to think carefully about location. Choosing to

organize the meeting in a neutral or business environment, or in a more informal, homely setting can make a big difference in the exchange atmosphere. The room setting is essential as well. Deliberately placing participant categories across from each other, or mingling them together can make all the difference. One of the goals of this method is to examine how individuals create meanings and interpretations *together*, in real-life interaction. How they are physically placed in the room can have major impact on the flow of discussion. Organizing focus groups online is recommended by some (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014), advised against by others (Bryman 2016, 518–519); our own experience is that group dynamics develop and evolve much more naturally and are far easier to observe in physical settings.

Enriching your data

Focus groups work best if they are not too large or small (four to six participants per group) or too long (meetings of a maximum of 60–75 minutes, depending on the number of participants). Most researchers organize not one but a series of several focus groups. It is also important that the questioning revolves around a fairly tightly defined topic. Again taking our artist-and-patron research as an example, a wide thematic focus on ‘all aspects of patron–artist interaction’ would be too broad; a strict focus on one aspect only (‘specific expectations and perceptions of the aspect of artistic autonomy’, for instance) too limited. That said, the data you elicit will be richer if during the meeting the ‘bandwidth’ of the discussion is kept narrow rather than broad. You do so by preparing a small number (five to ten, depending on the length of the meeting) of focused questions, topics or ‘prompts’. During the meeting you can use this topic list to start the discussion, keep it on track, ‘prompt’ your participants to deepen their reflections, or add more focus. You can also use the topic list to gain insight into particular themes that are important to your research question, or to fill in gaps in your own knowledge.

Another helpful way of enriching your data is to organize not one but a series of several focus group meetings, for instance by inviting three different groups of artists and patrons, on separate occasions, and presenting each group with the same topic list or vignette. You can diversify by first inviting a group of *early-career* and then a group of *established* artists to discuss the topic, or by inviting groups of *major* donors as well

as *minor* donors. The more clearly defined the groups, the easier it is to classify, categorize and analyse their multiple views in the coding phase later on (discussed in the next chapter).

It can be very valuable to make use of a vignette. Vignettes are short (sometimes fictional) scenarios around your research theme, often in the form of a text fragment or image in which a (fictional) position or dilemma is shown or outlined. During the meeting, you invite your participants to read the text or look at the image and respond to it. Ready-made vignettes can work very well. Think of a short newspaper clipping, a small documentary fragment, a photograph, an artwork or any other object that is clearly related to your research topic and can help stimulate and focus the discussion. Another option is to construct a vignette yourself, for instance by writing a short text (200–300 words) around a (fictional) scenario. In this text, you describe a situation that is recognizable for all participants. In this case, you could for example write a short, fictional dialogue between a patron and an artist in the midst of negotiating the terms of their exchange, with the patron demanding impact on the work of the artist in exchange for his gift, and the artist (not) going along with it. You then invite the participants to discuss questions such as ‘Does this situation sound familiar?’, ‘What might be the motivation of the patron to make these demands?’, ‘Do you understand the decision of the artist?’ and ‘What sort of advice would you give both parties?’

Data management and record keeping

All focus group meetings are audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. It makes sense to record video as well as audio only if you want to include body language and facial expressions in your analysis (Van der Voort et al. 2023), or if more than eight participants are involved. In large groups, voices tend to become distorted on audio recordings. Using video does, however, complicate the meeting’s setup considerably: you will need someone to operate the camera, or arrange for the use of a high-end on-site videoconferencing system. It is vital to present your participants with detailed consent forms, and get them to sign agreements on depositing, sharing, publishing and preserving the audio and/or video files as well as any other research data (check with your university or research institute – they all offer templates). It is important to invite participants to sign all consent forms before – not after – the meeting.

4. Case study

Between 2023 and 2025, a research team from Utrecht University conducted a multi-year research project into the solicitation behaviour of contemporary artists, and their perceptions of their (potential) interaction with private patrons.⁶ During the project, fifty research interviews and three focus group meetings were conducted. In this part of the chapter, we will take the preparation, organization and performance of these three focus group meetings as our case study, and organize our guidance into seven easy-to-follow steps.

Step 1: Establish research goals. In this case, this step was straightforward: the research goal was established by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, who decided in 2021 to fund the project as part of a broader programme aimed at helping to “increase awareness of the importance of private giving as a natural part of strengthening the earning capacity [of individual artists]” (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap 2021). In most other cases, researchers work at establishing research goals themselves, often guided by the aspiration to do research that has either clear societal or scholarly relevance, or both.

Step 2: Define research questions. The research team decided that a good way to reach the Minister’s goal of “increasing awareness” of the importance of private giving would be to work with a research question that focused on artists’ and patrons’ *perceptions* of their position, role and interaction strategies in patronage relationships. It took a lot of time and effort to bring the research *goal* and *question* in line; it always does. Research goals tend to be quite broad, and need to be translated into a more narrow set of viable and researchable questions. The more careful the alignment between the goals and the questions, the easier it will be to take step 3.

Step 3: Set up research design. The research team then took time to carefully consider what method to use, now the decision had been made to focus on the perceptions and ‘meaning-makings’ of two categories of stakeholders. They chose to triangulate methods by combining the method of in-depth individual (semi-structured) research interviews with the method of focus groups. Working with focus groups allowed them to bring the two categories of stakeholders together, ask them about their perception of (their own and each other’s) role and position, and then observe their interaction.

Step 4: Decide on sampling and pairing of participants. The team used selective sampling and snowball sampling to obtain their sample of participants (Table 1). Using online channels and newsletters of artist organizations and foundations, they invited large groups of artists to participate, offering them a fee of €75. This resulted in applications from more than fifty artists, across disciplines. They then asked the same artist organizations and foundations to propose any patrons they happened to know of. They also made an overview of the patrons in their own networks. This resulted in a list of prospective patron participants; these were then approached with an invitation to take part. The team then paired the participants according to two criteria: *role* (the aim was to bring together an equal number of artists and patrons at each meeting) and *discipline* (selecting participants with a corresponding disciplinary affiliation or preference). None of the participants knew each other beforehand; this would, the research team hoped, help participants to talk more freely. To this end, they were indicated as ‘patron’ or ‘artist’ only during the meetings, and asked to reveal their identities only at the end.

Table 1: Summary of participants’ positions and roles per meeting

	Positions	Disciplines
Meeting 1	3 x patrons	1 x pop music, 1 x visual arts, 1 x performing arts
	2 x artists	1 x pop music, 1 x performing arts, [1x visual arts – no show]
Meeting 2	2 x patrons	1 x pop music, 1 x visual arts
	2 x artists	1 x pop music, 1 x visual arts
Meeting 3	3 x patrons	3 x visual arts
	3 x artists	3 x visual arts

Step 5: Design a topic list and ready-made vignette. The team introduced a ready-made vignette at the beginning of the meeting (Figure 1). It consisted of a newspaper advertisement, published in 1984, in which an anonymous ‘talented, starting author’ took the step of asking prospective patrons for support. The vignette was selected in the expectation that it would trigger reactions and propel discussion. A topic list of eight questions, designed around the content of the vignette (see Chapter 3 on designing topic lists), helped focus the conversation even further. Two of the questions were put to the patrons first (before opening the floor to the group as a whole), two to the artists, and four to the group as a whole. This design



Figure 1: Personal ad in Dutch national newspaper *NRC* (May 5, 1984, p. 35). Translation: “Talented aspiring author seeks two people willing to support him with 500 guilders each. Am fed up with being on the dole, or to do work that’s breaking me. Honest intentions. Correspondence under reference number 42434886 addressed to this newspaper’s office.”⁷

allowed both categories designated time to first come up with in-depth reflections among themselves, before interacting with the other category of participants.

Step 6: Set up a script for the meetings. It proved very helpful to design a detailed script to help structure the meeting (see Table 2).

Table 2: Detailed focus group script

Introduction	Thanks for coming Clarification of research goals Explanation of audio recording setup, meeting setup and basic rules (avoid speaking over each other, speaking time is limited, free exchange and discussion is encouraged)
Filling out of consent forms	
AUDIO ON	
Icebreaker: the vignette	Presenting vignette; invitation to reflect and discuss
Discussion	Presenting eight questions (projected onscreen, using a PowerPoint presentation)
End	Thanks for participation Explanation of next steps
Identity reveal of the participants	
AUDIO OFF	

Step 7: Organize and conduct the meeting. This step involves creating consent forms, choosing a suitable location and recording the meeting. In this case, the team decided on a very atmospheric and cosy historical room in a university building. This, and the fact that the meetings were organized in the evening, helped participants to feel that even though they were in a certified research environment, they were also invited to relax and open up to each other. This step also involves organizing audio (and sometimes video) devices and storing the audio and video data carefully during and after the meeting. In this case, it also proved important to keep track of cancellations: two of the participants unexpectedly did not show up. One of them could be replaced at the last moment; one of them could not.

Step 8: Work towards creating usable research data by first carefully transcribing the recordings and then coding the transcriptions. Please see Chapter 5 for more details.

5. Conclusion

Reflection on the method used

What went well? Using a vignette proved successful: it acted as an excellent icebreaker and stirred up much valuable discussion and reflection. The participants reacted particularly well to being invited to consider a historical example of a contemporary issue they were very invested in themselves. The room arrangement, with patrons sitting across from artists, was designed to stimulate awareness of differences in perceptions of roles and positions; this worked excellently, and was reinforced by the way the topic list questions were arranged, with some of the questions addressed to one category only. The moderator managed to create an open atmosphere, in which all participants felt free to raise topics, approach other participants with questions, and interactively discuss and reflect on the issues raised.

What did not? The moderator tended to fill silences very readily; she also found it hard not to demonstrate assent with what the participants came up with, and kept encouraging participants by nodding, smiling and adding interjections like “yes”, “ah, I see” or “I can understand that”. This not only steered discussions in directions they perhaps would not have taken

otherwise, but may also have discouraged some participants from freely expressing private doubts or dissent. Another miscalculation was that the participants unexpectedly kept on talking after the meeting was formally closed; a lot of interesting discussion ensued *after* the audio recording was turned off.

In a more general sense, one of the pitfalls *and* opportunities of the focus group method is that it allows the researcher less control over proceedings than with the individual interview or questionnaire methods. The question of control raises issues for researchers of how far they can allow participants to ‘take over’ the course of the discussions or the running of the meeting more generally. There is clearly a delicate balance between how involved moderators should be and how far a set of prompts or questions should influence the conduct of a focus group. Yet some researchers value the method precisely *because* it provides greater opportunity than most other methods for research participants to have some ownership of the research process.⁸

Notes

¹ <https://www.patreon.com/about>.

² <https://www.patreon.com/nkjemisin>.

³ <https://writersedit.com/self-publishing/what-is-patreon-and-how-can-indie-authors-use-it/>.

⁴ <https://www.patreon.com/seananmcguire>.

⁵ See for instance Nelson and Zeckhauser 2008 and 2024.

⁶ <https://www.levehetgeven.nl/onderzoek-universiteitutrecht/>.

⁷ Retrieved from free, open access online repository of digitised printed material from the Netherlands *Delpher* on February 11, 2026: <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=getal-enteerd+beginnend+schrijver&coll=ddd&identifier=KBNRC01:000028043:mpeg21:a0272&resultsi-identifier=KBNRC01:000028043:mpeg21:a0272&rowid=1>

⁸ Bryman 2016, 520.

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Analysing Elicitation Data in Literary Reception Research

Jeroen Dera and Helleke van den Braber

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, we introduced three methodologies for eliciting empirical data: the self-completion questionnaire, the research interview and the focus group method. In this chapter, we delve into coding, a widely used analytical technique that you can employ to analyse the qualitative data obtained from these methods in relation to your research question. We will refer back to the case studies that concluded the previous three chapters: the survey on pandemic poetry, the research interview with participants in online reading challenges, and the focus group discussions with contemporary artists and patrons regarding solicitation behaviour.

Before we explore coding as a form of qualitative data analysis, it is essential to stress that this chapter serves only as a short, practical introduction to the topic. There are numerous comprehensive handbooks on the subject, and we are only touching the surface here. Please refer to the bibliography at the end of this chapter for a list of recommended readings. We also explicitly note that the purely quantitative analysis of data, particularly from questionnaires, falls outside the scope of this chapter. Extensive handbooks on this topic are available, which we recommend to readers (see ‘Suggestions for further reading’ at the end of this chapter). Researchers without any experience in statistics who want to delve into the field of quantitative literary reception studies are encouraged to acquaint themselves with the tests and procedures outlined in Box 1.

2. Coding in a nutshell

A widespread method for analysing qualitative data is coding. A code can be defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a

summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña 2021, 3). In coding, the researcher looks for concepts that encapsulate the core of the data. This can be done inductively by independently generating codes based on the elicitation data (open-ended questions in surveys; interview or focus group transcripts) or deductively by approaching the data with predefined codes derived from the literature. The overall aim of the coding process is to find *patterns* in your data by breaking your research materials up into smaller parts (and assigning them a code), assessing their relationships and then re-assembling them. Coding enables you to look for regularities or similarities in your data, and helps you establish dominant types, themes, processes or sequences in what is said by your sample of respondents (Boeije 2014, 76).

To clarify the above, let us consider an example from the study on readers’ opinions of pandemic poetry (Chapter 2). Since there was no prior research on pandemic poetry, the data analysis in that study initially followed an inductive approach. The analysis begins with open coding, where you carefully segment relevant information from the data, and choose a label for each segment. The procedure is considered ‘open’ because it does not rely on predetermined expectations, concepts or categories in assigning labels – although these may unconsciously influence the process. The goal is to create codes that closely align with the data and emerge naturally from it, a hallmark of the grounded theory approach (see Glaser and Strauss 1999). Sorting data and creating codes go hand in hand. By working your way through your data, slowly but surely the organizational building blocks (codes) you give form to your analysis process (Boeije 2014, 76). Establishing relevant codes is an indispensable aid to comparing, contrasting and connecting the data across the whole of your material – be it interview or focus group transcripts or open-answer questionnaires.

To illustrate what this means, let us consider an answer to the question: *Can you please explain why you do (or do not) feel attracted to poetry about the COVID-19 pandemic?* One respondent wrote:

Poetry can offer comfort in difficult times such as these. While everybody is in the same situation, it connects people. Personally, in these strange times, I would like to know what others are feeling and what goes on in their heads.

Given the focus on the appealing elements of pandemic poetry, you can decide to segment the data by assigning chunks of data to the following codes:

1. *Offer comfort in difficult times*
2. *Connects people*
3. *Know what others are feeling, what goes on in their heads*

As mentioned, open coding involves finding words or short phrases that encapsulate the data. Since open coding is a flexible initial step in the analysis process, the chosen codes are not fixed. This means that as a researcher, you are completely free to name your codes in any way that, in your view, best suits your research aims and research question. For example, chunk 1 could be coded as *comfort* or *emotional support*, chunk 2 as *connectedness* or *sense of community*, and chunk 3 as *insight into emotions*, *empathy* or even *identification*. Some researchers prefer to stay close to the respondent's words and use their formulations directly (in vivo coding). In such a case, the code for chunk 1 might be *offer comfort*.

Working through the questionnaire data, you may find the theme of 'comfort' popping up again and again, though each respondents will probably use slightly different words to describe it. Assigning all chunks related to the theme of comfort to the code *offer comfort* helps bring together all questionnaire segments related to this theme – an important step towards finding similarities and patterns.

During the open coding of survey responses, especially with large samples, dozens or even hundreds of codes may quickly emerge. Together, they can form a complex web that does not immediately bring you closer to answering your research question – often quite the opposite. After completing the open coding phase, it is essential to reduce the number of codes by merging or splitting similar or closely related codes into categories, a process known as axial coding. At this stage, synonymous codes are merged, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are retained. For instance, in the dataset on pandemic poetry, another participant's response reads:

The benefit of these types of poems is that they often express a sense of hope, a sense that things will improve soon. This truly supports me.

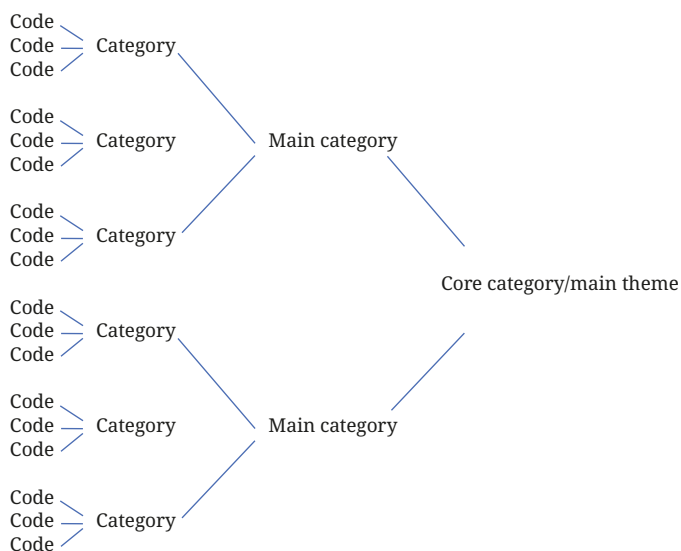


Figure 1: The coding process

Earlier, in the open coding phase, you may have decided to code the chunk ‘truly supports me’ as *providing support*, which is semantically close to the *comfort* assigned to chunk 1 in the previous example. Now, in the axial coding phase, you may decide to merge *support* and *comfort* into an overarching category of *emotional support*. Bringing codes together in categories helps to see regularities or patterns emerge that rise above the level of a single or a few transcript fragments. You will probably find that at this stage, your confidence grows in making choices on the basis of the connections you see between codes (Boeije 2014, 109). To reduce and reorganize your codes even further, it may be valuable to add a second round of axial coding to the first, combining (or splitting) your categories into even bigger or more general main categories. This is visualized in Figure 1, which encapsulates (from left to right) the results of open coding, followed by two rounds of axial coding, resulting in a final grouping of the nine resulting main categories into one central theme or core category.

Core categories are categories that are central to your research: a lot of other categories are linked to it. They are the heart of the analysis, and account for a large portion of the variation in the phenomenon you study. Ideally, they also facilitate analysis and make the pieces of the puzzle fit together better or in a more rewarding way. Having reached

this phase, you will find that, through the process of diligently coding and categorizing, the data have now been transformed into a more abstract framework – all through your hard work (Boeije 2014, 111 and 116).

Ultimately, the complete coding process (for which useful software tools are available, see Box 2) will lead to a set of axially established codes that encompass your data. These codes can be presented in a coding schema, which includes the code or name, a description of what it entails, and a representative example from the data. Below is an illustration of a portion of the coding schema that emerges from the data analysis of the open question on the appeal of pandemic poetry, focusing on responses from participants who had a positive view of the phenomenon:

Table 1: Portion of the pandemic poetry coding schema

Code	Content of argumentation	Example from data
Actuality	COVID poems are interesting/important, because they give expression to the current situation and/or have actual social relevance.	“There is a direct connection with social actuality; it is way to put the situation into words.”
Connection	COVID poems bring people together by relating to a collective experience.	“Everyone is in the same situation, it connects.”
Emotional support	Poems about the COVID-19 crisis have a comforting function and offer hope.	“Among others, poetry can offer comfort in difficult situations like these.”

An illustration of a portion of the coding schema that emerged from the data analysis of the focus group transcripts:

Table 2: Portion of the artist-patron relations coding schema

Code	Content of argumentation	Example from data
Dependency	The interaction between artist and patron is (not) complicated by feelings of dependency on the part of the artist	“I’ve done crowdfunding, and found that the relationship with someone who I know has given me money becomes different. I’m not allowed to be unkind to [them] anymore.”

Code	Content of argumentation	Example from data
Value	Patrons do (not) feel more dedication to artists if artists communicate that their support makes a difference	“I do not relate to the idea that without me [a work of art] would not come about.”
Impact	Relationships between artists and patrons do (not) work better if artists set clear boundaries on the impact patrons may have on their work	“If I have a good relationship with [a patron], and he tells me to now create something abstract, I would be open to that.”

Your research question will determine the next step you take after creating a coding schema.

3. Quantifying your codes

In the study on pandemic poetry, the research question focused on how poetry readers evaluated the phenomenon and why. Such a question suggests quantifying the found codes, as it matters significantly whether more than half of the respondents find ‘connection’ important or if it is only relevant to a few individuals. In such cases, you might add the relative frequency of each code to the coding schema or create a separate frequency table ranking the codes from most common to least common. In Dera (2021), it was revealed that most poetry readers who appreciated pandemic poetry did so because of the emotional impact of the genre, while readers who did not appreciate pandemic poetry often had an issue with the genre due to fatigue around the theme of COVID-19.

When you incorporate a quantitative element into qualitative analysis, it is crucial to verify the reliability of your coding schema. This can be achieved through inter-rater reliability analysis. Here, you provide your coding schema to one or more additional coders and have them code (a significant portion of) the data based on your schema, in order to test whether fragments have been systematically awarded the appropriate code (Boeije 2014, 106). You then input your independently determined scores into a statistical program such as SPSS, where you can calculate Cohen’s kappa to assess whether the schema is reliable enough to use in the analysis. Most researchers consider a Cohen’s kappa value of 0.61 or higher to be satisfactory. It is important to note that asserting inter-rater

reliability does not tell us anything about the inherent adequacy of coding, but only covers whether the coding has been approached systematically (Boeije 2014, 106).

Quantitative analyses may be less common in interview research and focus group studies, as these methods often involve lived experiences that do not easily lend themselves to being reduced to percentages. However, quantifications can still be useful in such research. For example, in the interview study with participants in reading challenges on Goodreads (Chapter 3), it may be beneficial to quantify how many participants report reading more due to participating in a reading challenge and how many believe this is not the case. After all, responses that are shared by multiple participants deserve special emphasis when presenting findings.

At the same time, we only fully understand the subject of experiences with reading challenges if we explore less frequently reported experiences as well. For instance, one participant in this study spoke at length about her work as a bookseller and the pressure to present herself as a sophisticated reader online. Although this was a unique story among the twenty interviews conducted, it had significant implications for the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon: participation in a reading challenge can involve social pressure and extrinsic motivation – a notable nuance to the dominant narrative about the love of reading among many participants and the inspiring and facilitating role of online reading platforms.

One way of doing justice to both frequently and less frequently reported experiences is employing ‘vague quantifiers’ such as ‘most’, ‘several’, ‘many’, ‘some’, ‘the majority’ or ‘a few’ to indicate frequency variations within and between groups of respondents holding certain views or engaging in different types of behaviour. Boeije (2014, 204) is in favour of employing vague quantifiers rather than using concrete indicators (‘a quarter’, ‘50 percent’), as those can be misleading if they are assumed to apply to a wider population than to the (often quite small) samples used in qualitative research.

Since interview and focus group research are inherently not anonymous, you can use participants from this type of research to validate your analysis. A common method for this is the so-called member check, where you present your coding schema and/or interpretation of the interviews to some participants from your study. This allows them to provide feedback on how their responses are represented in your study.

4. Analysing your codes qualitatively

As mentioned above, exploring the relative frequency of codes is one way towards finding an answer to your research question. In qualitative analysis, the aim is to uncover and explain the patterns that emerge, by thematically re-assembling your codes into categories, and your categories into coherent motifs, topics, arguments or logics. Re-assembling refers to the process of searching for relationships between the segments you have distinguished, and finding explanations for what is observed. Sometimes the search for explanation involves flashes of insight about how things do or do not fit together, while at other times it takes a long time and careful reflection to see any meaningful (dis)connection between your categories (Jorgensen 1989, 110). Analysis involves not only organizing your data, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them and searching for patterns, but also discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and how these learnings can be explained or linked to theoretical notions.

In the focus group study on patron–artist interaction, two different sets of respondents were brought together in order to examine how patrons and artists view each other’s role and position. This question suggests that the transcript should be segmented into chunks of data relating to the respondents with patron roles, chunks of data relating to respondents with artist roles, and chunks of data relating to their modes of interaction, ways of exchanging views and manner of relating to each other during the focus group meetings. Throughout the research, patron-related, artist-related and interaction-related codes emerged. These were then, in a process of re-assembling, regrouped into thematic categories in which patron-related, artist-related and interaction-related codes were brought together. For instance, the research team was able to assign the code ‘dependency’ to both segments relating to patron experiences and segments relating to artist experiences, and then decided to bring those codes together under the umbrella category ‘autonomy’. Looking closely at the interaction-related codes, the team then recognized that in the interaction between the groups during the focus group meetings, the sense of ‘feeling dependent’ or the need to ‘claim independence’ also played a clear role. Those codes were then added to the umbrella category of ‘autonomy’ as well.

Creating categories like ‘autonomy’ allowed the team to recognize a number of clear, dominant themes and arguments that related fairly straightforwardly to the theoretical literature. In this process, they looked

carefully at both low-frequency and high-frequency codes, and at codes that were easy to cluster as well as at codes that did not seem to hang as clearly together. When working towards an explanation and interpretation of your data, it is all too easy to overlook ideas, patterns and types which are not frequent or do not easily ‘fit’ into codes or categories (Boeije 2024, 114). Analysis is not just about the ‘hunt’ for salient core concepts, it is also about keeping an eye open for data that stand out in terms of richness and the insight they can yield, instead of standing out in terms of frequency or neat fit. In the focus group study, the team detected a curious data gap around the notion of ‘prestige’ or ‘social prominence’ (brought together in the category of ‘reputation’) in the patron-related codes. In the focus group meetings, the patrons did not comment on those notions as frequently or elaborately as the artists did, or as might have been expected from existing theories on the mechanisms behind donor behaviour. This ‘data gap’ puzzled the researchers at first, but turned out to be a very fruitful finding, prompting the team to find alternative explanations in additional literature, which helped them to gain more insight into the research problem.

Gradually, re-assembling, comparing and combining codes becomes aimed at explaining larger and larger parts of the data and at bringing the different parts back together. The coding process can be finalized when the distinction between codes and categories is clearly established, and the contents of the categories is known (Boeije 2014, 114). The end result of your analysis, possibly a coherent model or integrated understanding, serves as an in-depth view of the phenomenon that is studied (Boeije 2014, 79)

5. Coding in practice: a step-by-step guide

To conclude this chapter, we synthesize the aforementioned information into a concrete step-by-step guide for coding qualitative data in literary reception research. We will use excerpts from interview transcripts from the study on online reading challenges (see section 3.4), which aims to answer the research question: *What motivates middle and late adolescents to participate in reading challenges, what benefits do they derive from it, and how does participation affect their reading habits?* For the purposes of this guide, we will focus on the last element of the research question: changing reading habits.

Step 1: Segment your data

In this step, you distil passages from your transcripts that are relevant to your research question. These are the passages you will then code. In our case, these include all remarks in the interviews where participants discuss their reading habits, ranging from the amount of time they spend reading to their preferred reading locations. By segmenting these data from the transcripts, you divide your total dataset into smaller, more manageable chunks, such as these statements from (two different) participants about the types of books they read as part of their reading habits:

1. "I think I have started reading more Young Adult books lately. And I think that's because I read a lot of adult literature throughout the year, especially for school. So, I find it relaxing to read something easy for the challenge."
2. "Well, before the reading challenge, I only read books with a fixed story from beginning to end, you know, chronological books. Now, I am reading more books that are non-chronological and more books that are like documentaries in book form. I find these kinds of books on the 'Best books ever' page on Goodreads and think, maybe this one is interesting, and I start reading it."

Step 2: Open coding

In this step, you work through the segmented fragments and begin naming your codes. You are free to make your own choices here. In fragment 1, three issues related to reading habits are mentioned, which you may choose to capture in open codes: (a) reading more Young Adult literature, (b) reading adult literature for school, and (c) reading easy books for challenges. Since (a) and (c) are related in the participant's reasoning, you might also consider an open code such as 'reading more easy Young Adult texts for challenges', effectively merging two initially noted codes.

In fragment 2, you can identify a change in reading habits, which you can capture in the open codes (d) 'reading more non-chronological books' and (e) 'reading more documentary-like books'. Again, merging can be considered, resulting in a code like 'reading more complex genres'.

Step 3: Axial coding

After open coding all segmented data, it is time to look for patterns in your codes – the phase of axial coding. In practice, you may find that you want to split codes further, for example if the previously suggested code

‘reading more complex genres’ is not specific enough due to numerous variations appearing in the interviews (e.g. poetry, experimental novels, classics). You will also want to discard codes that do not appear frequently enough or stray too far from the main pattern. More often, you will want to merge codes. In the above example, you might merge the open codes ‘reading more easy Young Adult texts for challenges’ and ‘reading more complex genres’ into the overarching category ‘change in reading repertoire’. This provides a core category that is highly relevant to the research question.

Step 4: New coding round

Once you have established your axial codes, it is advisable to revisit your segmented data with these codes in hand. This exercise often casts the data in a slightly different light and forces you to critically assess whether the codes you have developed truly fit your data. In this phase, you might also benefit from an extra pair of eyes by having a colleague researcher review the data based on your axial codes and/or by applying member checking.

Step 5: Selective coding

In this phase, you seek to find the core variable that underlies your axial codes, facilitating the transition from data analysis to theory development. This also involves anchoring your analysis in the literature. In the study of online reading challenges, axial codes such as ‘reading more’ and ‘reading faster’ were identified in relation to reading habits alongside ‘change in reading repertoire’. These could be encapsulated under the core variable ‘binge-reading’, referring to a process of fast and immersive reading, typically of popular fiction. This term was introduced by English et al. (2023), and the interview study provides insights for further theorizing and adding nuance to this perspective on Goodreads (as fragment 2 above indicates, the ‘change in reading repertoire’ pertains not only to light, easily digestible texts highlighted by Goodreads algorithms but also to more complex texts requiring attentive reading).

Step 6: Develop a coding schema

After completing the entire coding process, you can present your findings in a coding schema – the final result of your exercise that covers the variation in your data and offers insights for answering your research question. This schema may include a quantitative element indicating the (relative) frequency of the codes in your segmented data.

Step 7: Reporting

Naturally, your research concludes with reporting, systematically covering the steps above. It is crucial to include concrete examples from your analysed material in your research report, accompanied by either absolute or vague quantifiers. By using examples based on quotes in your data (e.g. questionnaire answers, interview transcripts, focus group transcripts), you not only bring your material to life for your readers but also transparently justify how you arrived at your findings. Keep in mind, though, that you should usually respect participants' anonymity when reporting your findings – so refer to them with either codes (participant 7, participant F, etc.) or fictitious names.

Box 1: Statistical Tests and Procedures for Quantitative Data in Literary Questionnaire Research (Selection for Researchers with Limited Experience in Statistics)

*This box focuses mostly on parametric tests, which typically assume that population data follow a normal distribution. In practice, your data may not always be suitable for using a parametric test (see handbooks on statistics, such as Andy Field's excellent *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics* (sixth edition, 2024) for further explanation). Therefore, we also provide an example of a non-parametric test you could use as an alternative.*

Chi-Square Test of Independence: This test can be used to examine the relationship between two nominal or ordinal-level variables. For instance, you asked attendees of a literary reading event in a survey whether they purchased a book by a presenting author after the event (yes/no), and you want to determine if there is a difference between people above and below 40 years of age.

Independent Samples T-Test: This test can be used to investigate the relationship between an interval or ratio-level variable and a nominal variable with two distinct groups. For example, is there a significant difference between the average rating male and female readers give to *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë?

Non-Parametric Alternative: Mann Whitney U-Test.

Paired Samples T-Test: This test can be used to investigate the relationship between ‘paired measurements’ (at interval or ratio level), which means between two measurements of the same construct for the same individual. For example, is there a difference between enthusiasm for poetry before and after reading a particular poem (first and second measurement)?

Non-Parametric Alternative: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.

Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient: This test can be used to examine the correlation between two interval or ratio-level variables. For instance, is there a relationship between readers’ reading speed and the number of books they own?

Non-Parametric Alternative: Spearman’s Rank Correlation.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA): This procedure is used in exploratory data analysis to reduce a dataset with many variables to a smaller number of components (clusters). For example, you ask about genre preferences, reading habits and favorite authors in a questionnaire. PCA can help identify clusters in your data, such as those related to literary preferences.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA): This test can be used to investigate the relationship between an interval or ratio-level variable and a nominal or ordinal variable with more than two groups. For example, is there a significant difference in the average number of novels students from seven different faculties read annually?

Non-Parametric Alternative: Kruskal-Wallis H-Test.

Box 2: Using coding software

Many researchers use specialized research software to facilitate the analysis of qualitative data. Tools like **ATLAS.ti** and **NVivo** offer a systematic approach to data analysis, enabling researchers to efficiently manage large volumes of qualitative data. After uploading all transcripts or data, the tools help researchers to efficiently create codes, assign them to data segments, and connect and query the results. Software tools allow research teams to work collaboratively, enhancing the reliability and robustness of qualitative data validation. Moreover, software tools provide the opportunity for researchers to share coding schemas, findings and interpretations, fostering discussions and enriching the overall research process through collective knowledge.

Possible challenges include the (sometimes steep) learning curve associated with mastering the software tools. Researchers may require training and familiarization with the functionalities of the software, which can sometimes be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Additionally, the cost of software licenses may pose financial constraints, especially for smaller institutions or individual researchers (Mariano and Enciso 2024).

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PART II

SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

Field Theory: Researching and Mapping the Literary Field

Anne Oerlemans

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the field theory as developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). Bourdieu's intellectual contributions extend well beyond the literary field (Ahearne and Speller 2012, 1). Various scholars have interpreted his field theory in different ways, and it has been the subject of considerable critique and debate. Nonetheless, a significant strength of the theory lies in its capacity to elucidate the art world – specifically, the literary world – in relational terms.

Field theory facilitates the analysis of the relative positions of literary actors within the literary field at a given time (Bourdieu 1983, 312). These actors can include both individuals and organizations, such as authors, publishing houses, agents or literary prizes. In *The Sociology of Literature*, Gisèle Sapiro discusses a wide range of actors involved in the reception of literature, including, for instance, literary criticism, literary awards, education and literary festivals (Sapiro 2023, 113–136).

According to Bourdieu, these actors occupy positions within the field based on their possession of different forms of capital – economic, cultural and social. The next section will delve into these various forms of capital and how to determine them. But how do we decide what or who these actors are and which role they play within the field? How do we determine how these actors are interrelated and what power they have within the field?

In the following sections of this chapter, I will illustrate the concepts and terminology used by Bourdieu that are essential for conducting an analysis based on his field theory. A comprehensive understanding of these concepts and the theory itself is crucial for identifying the potential primary resources needed to map the positions of actors within the literary field, on which I will reflect as well.

For the case study in this chapter, I will attempt to determine the position of two different literary debut prizes for fiction within the Dutch literary field in the year 2018. This case study provides a step-by-step application of the theory to analyse a segment of the literary subfield of literary prizes. Questions that will be addressed include: What positions do these prizes occupy within the field? How are these positions interrelated? And most importantly, what types of data are useful for determining this?

2. The method

The theory as method

Bourdieu's field theory constitutes a theoretical framework rather than a methodology. Although the theory is frequently employed as a tool to map actors within the literary field, this mapping process is not straightforward. There is no established set of indicators readily available for researchers wishing to apply Bourdieu's field theory to their research.

Bourdieu's field is a field of production where actors derive their meaning and reputation from their positions relative to one another, rather than from their intrinsic characteristics. Actors situated at the top of the field's hierarchy hold significant power; for instance, they possess the authority to define what constitutes 'good literature' within the literary field at a given time:

In short, what "makes reputations" [...] is the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated. (Bourdieu 1993, 78)

The positions of different actors within the field are never static, implying that what is considered 'good literature' is also subject to change. These positions, along with the values and capital assets from which they are derived, are constantly in flux, as actors within the field are continually engaged in processes that enhance their position by acquiring more capital, thereby influencing the hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu (1983, 339) posits that: "The history of the field arises from the

struggle between the established figures and the young challengers.” While this may not universally characterize all contexts, the introduction of new actors into a field can precipitate conflict and competition, thereby reinforcing and contributing to its dynamic nature.

According to Bourdieu, an analysis using the field theory consists of three steps. The first step is to “analyse the position of the literary field within the field of power, and its evolution in time” (Bourdieu 1992, 214). This involves determining the literary field’s position relative to other fields exerting influence over it, such as the political field. In this chapter, we will not delve further into this first step. The second step is to “analyse the internal structure of the literary field [...], meaning the structure of objective relations between positions occupied by individuals and groups placed in a situation of competition for legitimacy” (214). This step will be examined in greater detail in the next sections of this chapter. The third step is to involve “the genesis of the habitus of occupants of these positions” (214). Bourdieu defines habitus as the historically established norms, values and traditions within the field. New actors must consider this existing habitus to compete effectively with established actors. The habitus thus orchestrates the field without the existence of explicit rules (Bourdieu 1990, 53).

The British sociologist John B. Thompson employs field theory to gain insights into the structure of the literary field in the United Kingdom and the United States in his work *Merchants of Culture* (second edition, 2012). He introduces the notion of ‘the logic of the field’, which heavily draws upon Bourdieu’s definition of habitus: “The logic of a publishing field is a set of factors that determine the conditions under which individual agents and organizations can participate in the field – that is, the conditions under which they can play the game (and play it successfully)” (Thompson 2012, 11).

The notion of capital

For the analysis of the internal structure of the literary field and the different positions of the actors within it, the notion of capital is key. Since the positions of actors within the field depend on the possession of various forms of capital, it is essential to identify the types of capital that hold value for the actors within the field: “First, an inventory must be made of which forms of capital shape the field, then a representation of the field should reflect the distribution of those forms of capital” (Franssen 2022,

264, own translation). The possession of these different forms of capital by each actor will determine their relative positions within the field.

Bourdieu distinguishes four different forms of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Economic capital equates to money or assets that can be directly converted into monetary value, such as property rights. Cultural capital pertains to an individual's social background and education; in the context of authors, it also includes their written works or oeuvre. Cultural capital can serve as a means of power and exchange within the field. Social capital comprises a network of connections that can similarly be leveraged to enhance economic capital over time, and may be institutionalized in forms such as titles of nobility (Bourdieu 1986, 243).

Symbolic capital is acquired when an individual or institution successfully converts cultural and social capital into prestige. This form of capital is acquired through attribution and relies on recognition from others, although it is fundamentally dependent on one's accumulated social and cultural capital. In the literary field, such recognition may come from critics, publishers, editors, fellow writers or readers and can, for example, manifest as literary prizes (Bourdieu 1999, 130–131). Every form of capital is dynamic and therefore subject to being gained or lost in competition with other actors in the field.

Acquiring symbolic capital is often the highest aim for actors within the field, as it signifies a dominant position. While cultural and social capital are crucial for obtaining symbolic capital, economic capital is not a prerequisite. In fact, Bourdieu (1992, 142) argues that individuals or institutions pursuing symbolic capital often need to conceal their quest for economic profit, at least in the short term. Over time, however, symbolic capital may be converted into economic capital and vice versa, as the two forms of capital remain interconnected and inseparable, particularly in contemporary contexts (see also Van den Braber et al. 2021, 16–19).

3. Tools and techniques

As previously mentioned, there is no established set of indicators readily available to determine the different types of capital an actor possesses. Researchers must invent and establish the necessary indicators tailored to their specific research question. This process requires creativity and can be challenging, necessitating innovative methods for utilizing

available information and data, as well as robust justification for the chosen approach.

Researchers must address questions such as what information can be used to measure the economic capital of a literary prize, publishing house or author. Additionally, determining how to measure cultural capital and identifying the contributing factors are crucial. Researchers must also assess whether they have access to this information and whether gaining access can be done in an ethical way. Often, most information must be gathered from the actors themselves, for example by accessing their archives. It is important to note that information and data found in archives might not be suitable for publication for ethical reasons. Researchers must exercise caution and adhere to ethical guidelines when handling such data.

Even in the absence of direct access to archives, effectively utilizing publicly available data can yield substantial insights (as evidenced by the case study in this chapter). Using public sources such as organizational websites, annual reports and financial statements from foundations and associations might prove valuable. Sales data could be obtained from bestseller lists or national libraries, while news articles can provide additional context. The Nexis Uni database offers a comprehensive collection of Dutch newspaper articles alongside publications from other countries, including the UK, with coverage spanning up to forty years. For historical research specifically focused on Dutch sources, Delpher provides access to millions of digitized texts from historical newspapers, books and magazines from various libraries and archives. Researchers seeking an international scope may also turn to resources like Gale Primary Sources, the British Newspaper Archive or ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

After determining the actor's possession of different forms of capital, how do we visualize their positions within the field? Recent discussions about this visualization among Dutch researchers (Bax et al. 2022; Franssen 2022; Joosten 2023) have led to the proposal of a two-axis diagram, reminiscent of the diagrams proposed by Bourdieu in his work (Franssen 2022, 265). Different actors can be assigned a position within this diagram (Figure 1), across the space of possible positions, based on their capital strategies.

On one axis, we have economic capital. Actors with relatively low economic capital will be positioned on the left of the diagram, whereas actors with relatively high economic capital will be positioned on the right. The

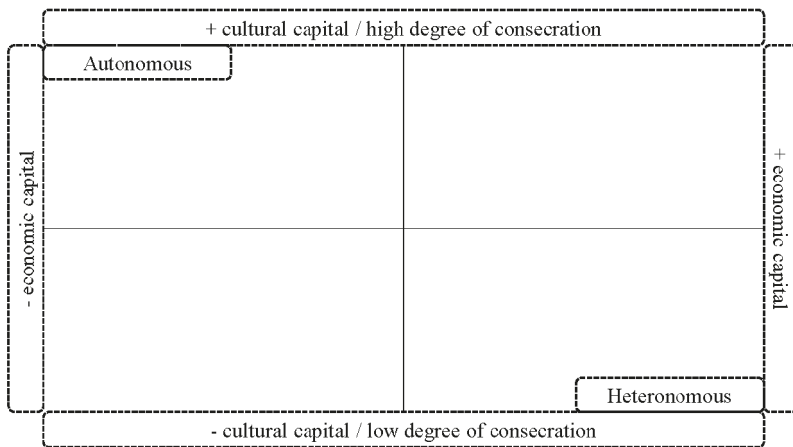


Figure 1: Two-axis diagram using cultural and economic capital as axes based on Franssen (2022)

second axis represents cultural capital; note that cultural capital is in this context not defined as ‘social background’, as discussed in section 2, but as a high degree of consecration. Actors with substantial cultural capital are positioned at the top of the diagram, indicating a greater capacity to convert cultural capital into symbolic capital. Conversely, actors with minimal cultural capital appear at the bottom.

In his work on Bourdieu’s field theory for media studies, Rodney Benson states that, according to the theoretical framework, “society is structured around a basic opposition between ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ power” (Benson 1999, 464). He further elaborates:

Each field is structured around the opposition between the “heteronomous” pole representing economic and political capital (forces external to the field) and the “autonomous” pole representing the specific capital unique to that field (e.g., artistic or scientific or other species or cultural capital). (464)

Actors positioned in the bottom-right part of the diagram possess significant economic capital but little cultural capital within the literary field, thus categorizing them as heteronomous actors. Conversely, actors positioned in the upper-left part of the diagram possess substantial field-specific cultural capital and little economic capital, categorizing them as autonomous actors. But how do we determine an actor’s position

within this framework? The following section outlines a step-by-step approach to this process, illustrated through a case study.

4. Case study

The first step in analysing a field is to clearly define the field under investigation. This case study will focus on examining the positions of two Dutch literary debut prizes within the Dutch literary field in 2018. Although five different debut prizes for prose were awarded in the Netherlands that year, this chapter will be limited to two specific prizes to allow for a more detailed discussion of the chosen indicators, methodologies and decisions made. The primary focus of this case study will be on the methodology and practice, rather than the results themselves.

To determine the positions of these two literary prizes based on the capital they possess, it is essential to define the forms of capital valuable to actors within their specific field. By employing Benson's notion of field-specific capital alongside Franssen's proposed two-axis diagram, we can assess the possession of both economic capital and cultural capital as significant indicators of an actor's position in the literary field.

In the context of literary prizes, another form of capital, termed journalistic capital, has been introduced by James English in his research on capital forms in literary prizes. English defines this capital as comprising visibility, celebrity and scandal (English 2002, 123). Journalistic capital can be viewed as a mediating force between cultural and economic capital. For instance, winning a literary prize can facilitate the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital. Claire Squires, in her research on literary prizes, notes: "Literary prizes frequently intend to reward literary value [...] but can also have the effect of increasing sales and promoting business" (Squires 2004, 42). In this context, literary value is regarded as a form of cultural capital, whereas increasing sales represents a form of economic capital.

The two debut prizes analysed in this case study are the Anton Wachterprijs and the Hebban Debuutprijs. Our primary research question can be formulated as follows: what positions do the Anton Wachterprijs and the Hebban Debuutprijs occupy within the Dutch literary field in 2018? With the field, the valuable forms of capital and the actors to be positioned within this field now clearly defined, it is necessary to identify the various factors or indicators that will aid in analysing the forms of

capital possessed by these actors and the sources needed in order to be able to analyse these factors.

It is important to consider that the results represent a point-in-time analysis; examining the same factors within a different time frame (e.g. 2021 rather than 2018) may yield different outcomes and consequently position the analysed actors differently within the framework. As previously mentioned, there are no fixed indicators for mapping the field. The indicators required to map different actors can vary widely, depending on your research question, the choices you make as a researcher and the data available to you.

Economic capital

Researching the amount of economic capital a literary prize possesses requires an understanding of its financial aspects. The most direct indicator available for determining a prize's economic capital is the prize money. This data is typically accessible from the prize's website, (web) archives or journalistic articles about the prizes in a given year.

There are additional indicators that can be useful in determining the economic position of the prizes. Beyond the direct economic value represented by the prize money, prizes can influence book sales, thereby increasing economic capital for the publisher and author of the winning book. However, publishing houses are generally protective of their sales data and are unlikely to disclose the sales figures for specific titles. Consequently, researchers must identify other indicators to analyse the impact of the prize on book sales.

One useful indicator is the Dutch weekly bestseller list (Bestseller 60). This database is accessible online and allows users to search for specific titles. It shows the position of a title over time, enabling researchers to observe whether a prize-winning title experiences increased sales following the award. Although this is not necessarily proof of causality between winning and sales growth, it could indicate an economic benefit from the prize.

Another helpful indicator for estimating sales figures is the number of reprints a publication has. In the Netherlands, this information can be obtained from the (online) catalogue of the National Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek), where every reprint or edition is documented.

Applying the aforementioned indicators and sources to the two prizes will provide insight into the amount of economic capital they possess.

Various pieces of data were collected from the prize secretary for the Anton Wachterprijs from their archives. According to a document containing general information about the prize in 2018, the winner receives a replica of the statue of Anton Wachter designed by Dutch sculptor Suze Boschma-Berkhout, and the sum of €2,000 (Anton Wachter Prize Secretariat, 2018).

For the Hebban Debuutprijs, which is awarded by the Dutch online readers' community Hebban.nl, an article on the Hebban.nl website from 2018 announced the shortlist for that year and provided more information about the prize in monetary terms. The winner receives an award, a sum of €2,500, promotional activities on Hebban.nl valued at €2,500, and a marketing campaign in collaboration with the bookstore chain Libris. Despite the relatively modest monetary amount associated with the prize, the promotion and campaign in collaboration with Libris ensure that the Hebban Debuutprijs represents significant economic value for the winning author: the increased visibility within the Libris bookshops will likely result in an increase in sales.

The winner of the Anton Wachterprijs 2018, *Onder het ijs* by Ellen de Bruin, does not appear on the Bestseller 60 list. While this absence does not necessarily indicate that winning the prize had no impact on the novel's sales, any potential increase in sales was insufficient for it to make the list. The 2018 winner of the Hebban Debuutprijs, *Mijn vader is een vliegtuig* by Antoinette Beumer, appeared on the Bestseller 60 list from 15 to 28 January 2018, prior to winning the prize on 30 September 2018. This can be attributed to the selection method used for the prize: a book already popular with readers (and consequently sold frequently) has a higher likelihood of winning. Hence, both prizes do not have a direct influence on the position of their winning titles on the bestseller list.

According to the online catalogue of the Dutch National Library, *Onder het ijs* had two editions in 2018. While there is no specific information about the month the second edition was published or the number of copies printed in each edition, it indicates that the novel received a second print run within the same year it won the Anton Wachterprijs. Similarly, *Mijn vader is een vliegtuig* also had two editions in 2018, followed by a cheaper paperback version in 2019.

Based on the analysis of economic indicators, it is evident that the Hebban Debuutprijs has greater economic capital than the Anton Wachterprijs and thus would be placed more on the right-hand side of the diagram in Figure 1. While both prizes carry modest direct monetary

awards, the Hebban Debuutprijs includes additional promotional support and a marketing campaign, which enhances its economic impact, whereas the economic impact of the Anton Wachterprijs is more limited.

Cultural capital

An important way for a literary prize to obtain cultural capital that can be converted into symbolic capital is through its jury. As English states: “it is the first axiom among prize administrators that the prestige of a prize is reciprocally dependent on the prestige of its judges” (English 2005, 122). The prestige that jury members confer upon the prize is contingent upon their own position within the field and the symbolic capital they themselves possess. Prizes with a professional jury, whose individual members hold prestige or authority within the literary field, typically achieve a higher level of consecration than prizes awarded by a jury of readers, for example.

Information about the juries of prizes is usually available to the public and media, making it easily accessible. While it extends beyond the scope of this case study to analyse the position of each individual jury member of the two prizes in terms of capital within the field, an important indicator to consider is the jury members’ affiliations.

As Brian Moeran states in his study on awarding prizes, judges also serve the organization that ‘owns’ the prize they allocate. The bestowing organization is the entity that owns the prize (Moeran 2012, 13). The history, mission statements and potential sponsorships of awarding or involved institutions provide information about the cultural capital they bestow upon the prize as a literary actor within the field.

English, too, emphasizes the role of prize administrators, stating that they play a crucial role in formulating and enforcing rules of eligibility, the nomination process and pre-judging. Their screening process proves to be essential for the eventual outcome (English 2005, 130–135). The requirements for participation, as determined by the prize administrators, can serve as an indicator of cultural capital. For instance, the eligibility of certain genres, with literary fiction typically holding more prestige than genre fiction such as thrillers or romance, can reflect the cultural capital of the prize. Sources of information about the bestowing organizations and their administrators include archives, public annual reports, letters and details about the prize’s regulations.

The general information document for the Anton Wachterprijs states that the prize is a biennial award for the best Dutch literary novel debut, judged by a professional jury. Established in 1977, the prize was organized by the Central Committee 1945 Harlingen in 2018, in collaboration with the Vestdijkring and the municipality of Harlingen, birthplace of the renowned Dutch writer Simon Vestdijk (1898–1971). The prize is named after one of Vestdijk's main characters.

Immediately following the Second World War, the Central Committee 1945 had the objective of “the restoration, stimulation and initiation of association life, social and sporting life and cultural expressions in the Harlingen community”. The Vestdijkring, founded in 1972, aims to promote interest in, knowledge of and insight into the work of Simon Vestdijk. “Cooperating with the biennial presentation of the Anton Wachterprijs in Harlingen” is listed as one of the Vestdijkring's main activities on its website.

Identifying which institutions support the prize financially could provide insights into its cultural and economic capital. The Vestdijkring, as an association, publishes public annual accounts that are available on its website, revealing that it does not contribute to the prize money. Both the Central Committee 1945 Harlingen and the municipality of Harlingen possess little to no cultural capital or literary prestige. The Vestdijkring, as a literary association, endows the prize with the necessary prestige. Additionally, the prize draws cultural capital from its own history and past achievements, as noted in the general information: “Almost all of the debuting authors whose writing talents have been recognized by the professional jury have made a name for themselves in the literary field.”

A letter sent to Dutch publishing houses by the prize's secretary in 2018 states that all literary prose debuts from the Netherlands and Flanders published in the two years preceding the award ceremony are eligible for the prize. To limit the number of contenders, literary non-fiction, literary thrillers, children's literature and collections of columns are expressly excluded from consideration. Submitting publishers are not required to make a financial contribution.

In 2018, the professional jury comprised three Dutch authors, two of whom were also literary critics for *De Groene Amsterdammer*, an independent Dutch weekly news magazine with a special focus on literature. Additionally, a PhD literary scholar and literary critic served on the jury, which was chaired by the director of the Historical Centre Leeuwarden,

who is also a journalist. This jury confers substantial cultural capital to the prize, enhancing its prestige and symbolic capital.

Hebban.nl was developed in 2014 by Book Communities, a joint venture between investor and Dutch Media owner Cees Wessels and Michel Suijkerbuijk, director of the eReaders Group. Unlike the Anton Wachterprijs, the Hebban Debuutprijs is therefore rewarded by a commercial entity. Consequently, the prize has limited cultural capital based on its awarding institution (Hebban.nl itself being a commercial entity). The first Hebban Debuutprijs was awarded in 2016.

The formal eligibility requirements and submission regulations governing entry to the Hebban Debuutprijs are no longer available on Hebban.nl. Inquiries to Hebban indicated that these documents have not been archived. Fortunately, the email sent to publishers regarding the prize in 2018 was retrieved from the publishing house De Arbeiderspers (one of the publishing houses shortlisted for the prize in 2018). It states: "The Hebban editorial team is putting together a draft shortlist. Debuts published between 1 July 2017 and 1 March 2018 will be considered. Nominated publishing houses will receive a message asking them to participate in the Hebban Debuutprijs programme." If participation is agreed upon, a one-off contribution of €500 will be requested (for this sum, the publisher will receive promotion for the title on Hebban.nl). Additionally, a contribution of €250 applies to the first title on the shortlist, and an additional contribution of €150 is required for any subsequent titles. The publisher must also provide epub files to the jury.

A publishing house that is nominated and decides to participate with one title on the shortlist, therefore, pays the sum of €750, and a publishing house with two titles on the shortlist pays €900. This underlines the commercial nature of the prize; being nominated for the prize is hardly an honour, it is a business deal.

The article on Hebban.nl about the prize in 2018 states that "the Hebban Debuutprijs is the only jury prize in the Netherlands and Flanders with a major influence from readers and focuses on literary fiction and narrative non-fiction." Debut novels originally written in Dutch are eligible. From 2018 onwards, the shortlist for the prize is determined based on the statistical data from Hebban.nl: "This includes looking at the 'reader activity' of the books (the bookshelves), the ratings (reviews and stars) and the popularity of the books based on the historical data of the Hebban Ranking." Readers can also nominate their favourite Dutch debut novel.

The shortlist is assessed by a jury of a hundred readers, some of whom are reviewers and genre club members who voluntarily write for Hebban.nl, and some of whom are other readers who registered for this role. This assessment results in a second shortlist of three titles, which is then evaluated by the final jury. In 2018, this final jury consisted of five editorial staff members from Hebban.nl, the editor-in-chief of Hebban.nl as the jury chairman, and five booksellers.

The substantial involvement of readers, combined with the less prestigious institutional affiliations and symbolic authority of its professional jury members, confer more limited cultural capital, thus imparting little literary prestige to the prize itself. The method of selection for the shortlist also primarily represents commercial value (based on reader statistics) rather than cultural value or prestige.

Journalistic capital

As previously stated, journalistic capital can be converted into economic capital, for example when winning a prize garners significant media attention, leading to increased sales. I argue that mentions of the prizes within the literary sections of newspapers can also indicate their cultural consecration. Being mentioned in the literary or cultural sections of national daily newspapers converts cultural capital from these sections into prestige for the prize.

The daily newspapers with a literary or cultural section in the Netherlands are *Trouw*, *Het Parool*, *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*. Using ‘Anton Wachterprijs’ as a keyword in Nexis Uni and filtering for articles published between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2018 in the aforementioned newspapers reveals that *Trouw* mentioned the nominees and the winner in two brief pieces in 2018. *Het Parool* and *de Volkskrant* also briefly mentioned the winner. *NRC Handelsblad* published an interview with the winning author Ellen de Bruin (also an editor at this newspaper) and NRC.NEXT featured an extensive article about Vestdijk in response to the award, along with a report of De Bruin’s visit to Harlingen after the award ceremony.

A similar search for ‘Hebban Debuutprijs’ with the same filters and sources resulted in a short mention of the nominees and the winner in *Het Parool*. *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* also published brief mentions of the winner.

While the conclusion that the Anton Wachterprijs received more attention from daily newspapers in 2018 is somewhat influenced by the fact that Ellen de Bruin, the winner, is also an editor at one of these newspapers, it can still be cautiously concluded that the Anton Wachterprijs holds slightly more journalistic capital that can be converted into cultural capital than the Hebban Debuutprijs.

Determining positions

Given the analysis of the forms of capital possessed by the two prizes, as illustrated in the previous sections, we can determine their positions within the proposed diagram in Figure 1. If we were to compare the two prizes using a single indicator, such as the prize money, this would position the Hebban Debuutprijs towards the axis of high economic capital on the proposed two-axis diagram, while the Anton Wachterprijs would be positioned more to the left, indicating lower economic capital.

Taking into consideration all of the analysed indicators related to economic capital, the positions previously determined based on the prize money remain largely unchanged. Consequently, the Hebban Debuutprijs is positioned towards the right of the diagram as a commercial prize with significant economic capital, while the Anton Wachterprijs remains positioned more to the left.

Overall, we can conclude that the economic capital of the Anton Wachterprijs in 2018 was modest, but its history and professional jury confer a reasonable share of cultural capital. The number of mentions in the daily press also supports this. Taking all this into consideration, the Anton Wachterprijs occupies a position in the top left corner of the diagram, indicating the possession of considerable cultural capital and less economic capital.

As concluded from all the indicators above, the Hebban Debuutprijs is an explicitly commercial prize that represents a large amount of economic capital but has little cultural capital. Therefore, it would occupy a position in the bottom right corner of the diagram. The positions of the two prizes, relative to each other, in the year 2018, are illustrated in Figure 2.

Note that these positions are not final and only indicate the prizes' positions relative to each other. When more actors are added to the analysis, their positions might shift depending on the positions of the newly added actors.

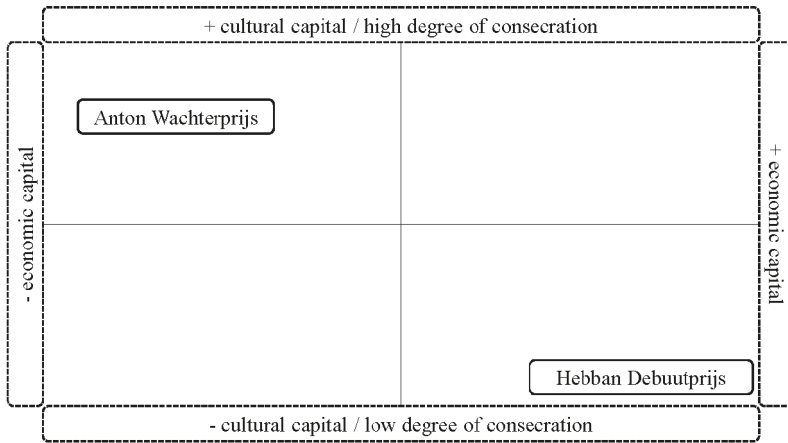


Figure 2: The position of the literary debut prizes in 2018

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, using Bourdieu's theory on literary fields as a method for mapping the positions of actors within these fields is not without risk or difficulty. It is almost impossible to objectively measure the possession of different forms of capital held by various actors, and determining the appropriate indicators, sources and data to do this is challenging. It is crucial to keep in mind the ethical considerations when gathering sensitive data from literary institutions, such as literary prizes or publishing houses. Often, a great deal of creativity is required to draw valid conclusions about certain indicators without access to precise data. This can make the analysis an educated guess in some respects, but a very helpful one if successful. The positions of different actors within the literary field provide important information about these actors and the literary field as a whole, helping us understand the values and forms of capital at stake.

In this chapter, I aimed to demonstrate one of the many possible ways to apply Bourdieu's theory, based on his own work and the contributions of other researchers who have engaged with the notions of the field and different forms of capital. Researchers using this theory as a tool or method should always start by defining their understanding of the field and the forms of capital that play an important role within it. When mapping various actors within the field, researchers must always

justify their choices of indicators and how these indicators contribute to understanding the actors' positions within the field. The materials often used for this type of research include documents from the (web) archives of relevant literary actors, such as correspondence, press releases, jury reports, mission statements and regulations. However, the possibilities for usable data sources are endless but require creativity.

The proposed two-axis diagram in this chapter is one example of visualizing the field, as offered by Franssen (2022), but there are other possibilities to explore as well. Additionally, the literary field is always in motion, as we have concluded in this chapter, which means that a mapping of the field or a diagram has an expiration date. For instance, the particular field exercise in this chapter shows how the investigated actors relate to each other at a certain point in time on the diagram of cultural and economic capital. Nonetheless, if this study had included other debut prizes or even other literary prizes within the field, the positions of these prizes might have been different. The same applies to a diagram featuring the same two prizes in a different year. Analysing sources from 2019, 2021 or 2023 might have resulted in a completely different diagram.

The researcher's (or reader's) perception of literary value or prestige is also a significant factor. While a full exploration of this topic exceeds the scope of this chapter, a few critical points merit consideration. Does prestige or literary value hold the same meaning for contemporary readers as it did through the twentieth-century lens of Bourdieu? Is an analysis based solely on newspapers outdated in the twenty-first century? Should we consider online responses to a prize when measuring its impact? Furthermore, do current readers still value the opinions of established jury members and critics within the literary field, or are they more influenced by the views of their fellow readers? Does the name Vestdijk still resonate today, and for whom does it add significance or prestige to the Anton Wachterprijs? These are all questions that we, as researchers, must continually reflect upon, remaining conscious of our own interpretations of symbolic capital when analysing the various actors within the field.

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Posture Analysis

Jos Joosten

1. Introduction

‘Posture’ is, very briefly, the image of an author that is created either by the author or by a society’s self-created or assigned *image* of a literary author. Posture research is the study of this image, and its creation both in and outside the work of the author in question. It is not surprising that posture research boomed in the first decades of the new century, when the literary field was affected by the digital revolution and the associated influence of an image-saturated media culture image, influencers and the personal narrative as a market commodity. This heightened importance is not to say that *posture* is restricted to the twenty-first century. Think of Charles Bukowski, Ernest Hemingway, Stefan George or Multatuli: all of them, consciously or unconsciously, created images around their person and work. In his classic study *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), Stephen Greenblatt showed that self-representation already played a role among authors in the early modern era. And when Renato Poggioli, in his standard work *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968), mentions the “tough guy act” as one of the characteristics of the nineteenth-century avant-gardist (33), this can in fact also be seen as an early form of *posture*: “displaying its own antagonism towards the public, towards the convictions or conventions characterising the public, by a polemical jargon full of picturesque violence, sparing neither person nor thing, made up more of gestures and insults than of particular discourse” (36–37).

Posture research is, at first sight, perhaps a somewhat curious form of reception research. It is not limited to the more traditional research objects of reception research, such as reviews and critiques, or their associated actors, such as critics and literary historians. For posture research, all types of documents that contribute to the image formation around an author can serve, from interviews to readings, from book covers to (self-)presentation in the (digital) media. Nevertheless, like more

traditional reception research, its focus is on the effect on the (implied) reader.

Systematic research on posture in literature emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was initiated by the Swiss literary sociologist Jérôme Meizoz who, with his 2007 book *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, initiated this type of research. Meizoz is a disciple of Pierre Bourdieu, both literally (he studied for some time with the French sociologist in Paris) and figuratively: posture theory fills a gap in Bourdieu's field theory. Institutional research, as the name suggests, takes institutions as its starting point and often considers individuals within the field as abstract actors. Whereas Bourdieusian institutional research tends to consider individuals within the literary field as abstract actors, Meizoz aims to analyse the author's *singular* role in the field. He describes himself as "[t]oo Bourdieusian for some, not orthodox enough for others, since I took some liberties with the theory" (Meizoz 2010a, 199).

After the publication of *Postures littéraires*, Meizoz's insights found their way onto the international stage, including through Spanish and Italian translations, and the concept led to much debate (Meizoz 2011, 13). In the Netherlands, his work was introduced by Groningen professor Gillis Dorleijn (Dorleijn 2007). Most of Meizoz's French-language oeuvre has not yet been translated, but there is an English article of his that can serve as a further introduction (Meizoz 2010b).

2. The method

What does posture theory entail? Meizoz designed the first chapter of *Postures littéraires*, in which he introduces and defines the concept, as a dialogue between a 'curious' questioner (*'le curieux'*) and the researcher (*'le chercheur'*). Afterwards, he explained this somewhat strange form for a fundamental scholarly treatise:

I didn't want to write a heavy theoretical chapter and I felt the need to add a little humour to the research... It's a nod to Diderot [...] The form also seemed to me to be didactic, with the questions asked by an "onlooker" who might still appear to know little about these issues. (Mertens 2011, 212)

Right at the beginning of the dialogue, Meizoz gives his often quoted definition of posture:

Posture is the singular way of occupying a “position” in the literary field. If we know what that position is, we can describe how a “posture” plays it out or thwarts it. Whoever prints a work (a record, an engraving, etc.) imposes a self-image that goes beyond the coordinates of the citizen’s identity: for example, by means of a pseudonym [...]. So common in all the arts, the pseudonym is not just a precaution against censorship, or a way of arousing curiosity through mystery. Of course, all these uses are commonplace, but we can also read it as an indicator of posture. It marks out a new enunciative identity, distinguishing it from that given by civil status. Basically, the pseudonym makes the author a fictitious enunciator, a character in his or her own right. (Meizoz 2007, 170)

We see here, first of all, the traces of Bourdieu. Meizoz, too, takes the literary field as the basis of relations in literature. While Bourdieu designed universal field theory and applied it to the literary field, he was not deeply concerned with how individual authors gain their prestige. Meizoz uses the pseudonym as an example to point out the difference between the *author* and the *private individual*. The status of the literary writer as an entity in its own right thus becomes clear. Here, Meizoz follows the triad of ‘identities’ previously formulated by Dominique Maingueneau in his *Le discours littéraire* (2004).

In this seminal work (see Chapter 13), Maingueneau distinguishes three ways in which writers can present themselves. There is *le personne*, there is *l’écrivain*, and there is *l’inscripteur* (Maingueneau 2004, 107–108). As an example, Meizoz refers to Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s novel *Mort à crédit* (1936). Here the three roles are clearly distinguished: the *inscripteur* is main character ‘Ferdinand’ who composes the novel text, the *écrivain* is ‘Céline’, and the *personne* is Louis Destouches, as Louis-Ferdinand Céline was called in everyday life (Meizoz 2007, 24).

At first glance, these seem like obvious distinctions. But it is not hard to find complications. Take the case of Dutch author Jan Cremer, author of the 1964 classic ‘road’ and picaresque novel *Ik Jan Cremer* (*I Jan Cremer*). This controversial book, with its iconic cover, cannot be captured by Maingueneau’s tripartite division. After all, *personne*, *écrivain* and *inscripteur* are all called ‘Jan Cremer’ here, and the proper name also forms the title of the novel. This is a first warning that posture research can be



Figure 1: Cover of *Ik Jan Cremer*. © Bertram Mourits, Collections Museum of Literature, Den Haag

complicated. *Ik Jan Cremer* is a nice case study to show how a posture can take shape. The course of events surrounding Cremer's debut novel had been a deliberately planned campaign, writes literary historian Bertram Mourits, who reconstructed the publication process (Mourits 2023, 197).

The cover illustration of the novel (Figure 1) has become iconic, with the picture of the young author on a motorbike, accompanied by the caption 'De onverbidelijke bestseller' ('The inexorable bestseller') (which nowadays has even become a more or less common expression in Dutch) even for first edition, when literally not a single copy of the book had been sold. Art school alumnus Cremer designed this cover himself and thus had a first hand in building his posture.

Internal and external posture

Back to Meizoz. Posture initially constitutes something like a 'literary identity' constructed by (or around) the author, which is then transmitted to the public by media (Meizoz 2007, 18–19).

So, as will be clear by now, posture is about the way authors occupy (and shape) their unique, singular place in the literary field. Meizoz speaks of a *literary* identity which the author constructs themselves and which is made public through media intervention. In doing so, Meizoz distinguishes *two* forms of posture:

on the one hand *external*, that of presentation of oneself in contexts where the person embodies the author function (interventions in the media, literary prize speeches, biographical sketch, letter to critics, etc.); *internal*, on the other hand, as to the construction of the image of the speaker in and through the texts. (Meizoz 2007, 23)

Meizoz' concept attempts to bring together two facets of authorship. On the one hand, the 'formal', textual aspects of authorship (i.e. the text of the poems, stories or novels), so to speak, the *poetics* of the author. On the other hand, he suggests analysing extra-textual aspects: public appearances, interviews, reactions to reviews, and so on. In the following pages, Meizoz' classification will be further developed, following an already existing model of classical poetics. The posture, Meizoz says, "allows the author to think about both the 'strategy' in the field and the formal options, i.e. one's own poetics" (Meizoz 2007, 16). In the second volume of *Postures littéraires*, he is explicit about the need for *interaction* that makes posture analysis meaningful:

[W]e can think in terms of the position in the field, its staging in a "posture" that includes a formal strategy and a presentation of oneself in public. Such an approach takes account of the data contained in an author's "sociological biography", but considers them within the conflicting space of literary practices and codes. (Meizoz 2011, 9–10)

Finally, Meizoz makes it clear that a posture analysis should be multi-perspective:

It evolves in a dialectical relationship of proposition and reaction. Although it seeks to be *singular*, a posture is nonetheless linked to a postural repertoire present in the cumulative memory of literary attitudes, images and accessories. To set themselves apart, authors use variations on a postural repertoire that is itself constantly evolving. (Meizoz 2014)

In summary: a *posture* is the image surrounding authors and their unique position in the literary field at a given moment. Posture arises from possible combinations of textual elements (content of a work or oeuvre), the way it is put out by an author, and the way media pick up and (further) shape this image.

Looking for a method

Research questions related to posture are in themselves obvious: what is the posture of writer *x* or *y* at a given time? What development shows the posture of writer *x* or *y*? What medium was decisive in shaping the posture of writer *x* or *y*? One problem here is that Meizoz set out the concept in his two books and later commentaries, but never provided a systematic research method. In an interview, he said:

I am not an epistemologist of my own practice. I work on a “case-by-case” basis, based on problems that I ask myself in a very concrete way, like an ethnologist. [...] It’s my sociological training, I think, that leads me to ask myself questions of “practical sense” (*sens pratique*) rather than theorising. (Mertens 2011, 201)

The only helping hand Meizoz offers in *Postures littéraire* is to indicate globally different forms of posture in diverse case studies, such as “Authenticity and posture”, or the posture of the *scribe de la tribu*, the “tribal writer”, who manifests himself emphatically with his “fidelity to his simple origins” (Meizoz 2007, 66).¹ Guidelines for a systematic posture analysis are not provided by Meizoz, resulting in the fact that in the posture studies of recent years, all researchers designed their own method. It is therefore necessary to come up with a proposal for a systematic research methodology. Most straightforward is the compilation of the research corpus. This, of course, is related to the focus of the study: is the emphasis on internal or external posture, for example? In a *work-internal* analysis, the research corpus will consist of – a selection from – the work of the author whose posture is being studied. In a *work-external* posture analysis, all materials *about* the author and their work will be of interest: interviews in all sorts of media, blurbs, publisher’s publicity, lectures, speeches, public words of thanks for awards, reviews and essays. Material that Meizoz does not mention, but that is certainly relevant, are images: author photos, book covers and other pictures (public appearances, parties).

Strangely, too, even in later, supplementary texts to *Postures littéraires*, Meizoz pays no attention at all to the digital revolution. This oversight is extremely curious because, firstly, the internet is a place where one can easily find texts and images from traditional media (including radio and TV) as well, and, secondly, because websites of authors and publishers, but especially social media, are pre-eminent channels through which an author's posture takes shape.

How, then, to systematize the analysis of the corpus? As mentioned, Meizoz does not provide guidelines. It is therefore a good idea to resort to a somewhat older model for this purpose, which, with modifications, could lend itself well to a posture analysis. Wiljan van den Akker, following on from A.L. Sötemann's poetics model (conceived analogously to M.H. Abrams' well-known four-part model (Sötemann 1985)), designed a more refined categorization of the four ways in which an author's poetics can take shape, as schematized in Figure 2.

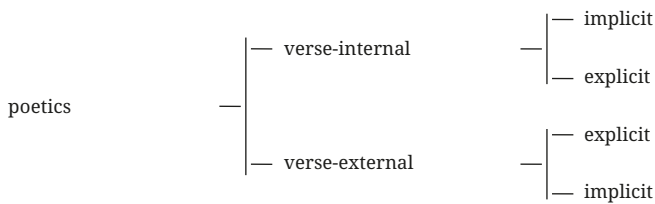


Figure 2: The four ways in which an author's poetics can take shape (Van den Akker 1985, 14).

The different possibilities mapped out by Van den Akker, with adjustments, of course, also seem appropriate for a systematic analysis of a writer's *posture*. Briefly, Van den Akker distinguishes four variants (with the caveat that 'poet' and 'poetry' may also refer to prose and prose writers):

1. The *implicit verse-internal* poetics. This is "the most important, but at the same time the least concrete category" (Van den Akker 1985, 14): it involves tracing a poetics on the basis of *analysis* and *interpretation* of texts.
2. The *explicit verse-internal* poetics. "The conception of poetry [...] is subject of the poem itself" (Van den Akker 1985, 15). It thus concerns texts that are explicitly about writing (for instance defining: 'Poetry is...').

3. The *explicit verse-external* poetics. This concerns all forms of text *outside* an author's fictional oeuvre in which they reflect on literature, such as manifestos, essays, reviews, correspondence (Van den Akker 1985, 18–23).
4. The *implicit verse-external* poetics. This refers to that “which belongs to the verse-external poetics, [but is not] explicated by the poet” (Van den Akker 1985, 24). Like (1), this is a complex category. It includes matters that go unmentioned, for example which other authors does the writer under study ignore?

Of course, this schema cannot be transposed one-to-one to the phenomenon of posture, but it can serve as a guide for systematic posture research. Figure 3 shows what it would look like with respect to posture.

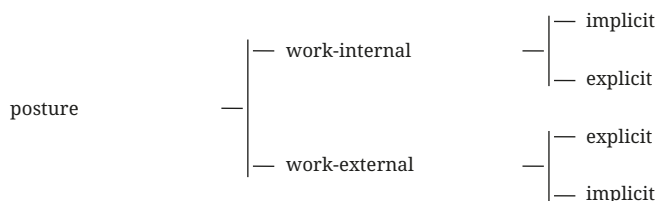


Figure 3: Ways in which an author's posture can take shape.

To briefly explain each category:

1. The *implicit work-internal* posture. As with the poetics model, this is a large category, with many possibilities for analysis and interpretation. What matters here is the posture as it can be deduced from the work-immanent aspects or, in other words, from the literary text itself. Does the author, for instance, opt for a story about a knave on a road trip, like Jan Cremer, or, as a poet, for an experimental stylistic register – and what does this say about their image?
2. The *explicit work-internal* posture. Here we are talking about *explicit* statements that the writer makes in a text regarding the posture. The interpretive step can be skipped, because the writer himself dwells in so many words on the imagery around himself. This category includes (poetic) essays, lectures, manifestos, words of thanks to awards – in fact all texts in which authors directly speak out about their work.

Non-verbal expressions, such as an outfit or other outward appearances are also included. Incidentally, with the latter, overlap with (3) is inevitable.

3. The *explicit work-external* posture. This is undoubtedly a very important category: it involves texts (and images) in which an author is manifested: interviews, appearances in (digital) media, photographs, cartoons, promotional texts, blurbs, reviews, etc. So this is about the image as *others* display or confirm it. Sometimes the separation from other categories is not entirely clear in this regard. It is known, for example, that blurbs are often written by authors themselves. In any case, such texts, like all official promotional material, are never published without the author's approval. Interviews are a rewarding and very useful source for posture research.
4. The *implicit work-external* posture. As with the poetic model, this category is the trickiest. It deals with things that an author or the actors around them *do not* mention when it would make sense to do so. Why does author *x* not mention the obvious author *y* – in an essay, pamphlet, acknowledgements? From what list of related authors is he or she missing? Of course, this demonstration of absence remains a tricky question. For instance, can you prove you do not speak a language?

3. Case study

As a concrete case study, we take the work and person of Dutch poet, novelist and essayist Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer. We have chosen him because there is much exemplary material available around his authorship, relating to all four categories. As such, this is obviously a choice motivated by 'didactic' reasons. After all, *every* author has a posture. Not wanting to appear, in whatever form, in publicity or being deliberately very modest and selective with media interventions are also forms of posture.²

From the beginning of his literary career, Pfeijffer has been very visible *in-* and *outside* his work. He initially appeared on the literary stage as a poet. His 1998 debut collection *Van de vierkante man* (*Of the Square Man*) is an obvious positioning of the kind of poet he aspires to be. This is reflected in his *implicit work-internal posture*. He opens with the poem 'Afscheidsdiner' ('Farewell Dinner'). At the beginning of a debut, the very

title is obviously a statement, and it therefore makes it immediately clear where he stands:

Afscheidsdiner

u kunt afruimen

de witomrande amuse gueule uit de nouvelle cuisine
van chrysanten die in de vaas op de tafel bij het raam staan
maar niet in de vaas op de tafel bij het raam staan
vegetarische stilleventjes geschetst met de zilverstift

laat met de lardeerpriem doorregen goed gevulde
wildbraad aanrukken en op een rondborstig banket
van dansend vlees zappen naar glimmend wellustig vlees
als een clip in grootbeeld kleur

serveer mij in roomboter gebakken beelden
en verzen met boulemie.³

It would have been immediately clear to enthusiasts at the time that lines 2–4 refer to a classic by Dutch poet Hans Faverey, the first poem in the series ‘Chrysanten, roeiers’ (‘Chrysanthemums, rowers’). There is a poetry that Pfeijffer rejects: the monotonous, deliberately sparse, often hermetically named, autonomous work of poets like Faverey.

Work-internally, the early Pfeijffer manifests himself in consecutive works as contrarian and deliberately *fussy*, as in his novel *Het grote Baggerboek* (*The Big Dredging Book* (2004)), in which one of the main characters is an extraordinarily foul-mouthed dredger who employs an extremely scabrous but virtuosic Dutch.⁴ A striking detail is that in this novel, the classical story of Aeneas and Dido forms a minor thread. Pfeijffer has a PhD degree in classics and that too has played a role from his debut (which includes a translation of an Ode by Pindarus, the author about whom he wrote his PhD thesis) to his most recent novel *Alkibiades* (2023). Meanwhile, Pfeijffer’s work (as well as his posture) was steadily evolving. In 2008, his anthology *De man van vele manieren* (*The Man of Many Ways*) appeared, after which he did not publish any more collected poetry for many years, until the acclaimed 2015 collection *Idyllen*. Meanwhile, with his new Italian partner based in Genoa, he emerged as a successful novelist. In the form and style of his successful novel *Grand*

Hotel Europa (2018), a Pfeijffer that is very different from the emphatic iconoclast reveals himself: here, in style and composition, we see the Writer (with a capital letter) of the Great European Novel, with insights on the decline and decay of old Europe.⁵

In his early period, Pfeijffer also made his presence felt as an essayist. And this brings us to examples of the *explicit work-internal posture*. He caused quite a stir with his fight against poetry that was all too intelligible, including in the 2000 essay ‘De mythe van de Verstaanbaarheid’ (‘The myth of Intelligibility’), in which he opposes the then emerging performance poetry, with a statement that has become classic:

I am concerned here with an issue that even transcends the importance of their poetry. The view that intelligible poetry is better than difficult poetry is a fallacy. In fact, it is the exact opposite of the truth. Incomprehensible poetry is always better than easy poetry. (Pfeijffer 2000, 78)

Soon after, he included the text in the collection *Het geheim van het vermoorde geneuzel* (*The Mystery of the Murdered Nigglings* (2003)), which contains strongly polemical position papers (e.g., “He who does not like bloodshed, better keep away from the holy war that is poetry”⁶ (Pfeijffer, 2003: 13)). With only one collection to his name, Pfeijffer cast himself as a possible ‘Poet Laureate’. In doing so, he asserted himself with statements such as: “Lack of self-confidence is a character flaw I do not possess” (*Vrij Nederland*, 16 February 2002). Such explicit expressions of (conscious) self-positioning can be found with Pfeijffer to this day, now as him being a Great European Writer. With this change in his poetics, his appearance also changed. Initially, Pfeijffer presented himself as a smoking, long-haired, scruffy-looking bohemian poet, visibly present in pubs in Leiden. Nowadays, he is a dandy author dressed in chic Italian suits. We will come back to this change in a moment. His present-day appearance features in a remarkable way in *Monterosso mon amour*, the ‘Book Week Gift’ Pfeijffer published in 2022. The ‘Book Week Gift’ is a new book from an eminent writer, hundreds of thousands of copies of which are distributed every year on the occasion of the annual ‘Boekenweek’ (‘Book Week’) by national booksellers in the Netherlands. Pfeijffer’s novella features writer ‘Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer’, who is invited to perform at the public library in a provincial town during Book Week. We see ‘Pfeijffer’ through the eyes of Carmen, the organizer, who is a librarian:

He has come in full costume, in a dark suit with pinstripe, shiny cufflinks, baroque rings, a tie that colours with his socks and a tie pin with fake mother-of-pearl. He looks like the director of the bumper cars at the fair.

[...]

His reading is superior in the sense that he unapproachably and confidently fulfils all expectations. With feigned modesty and a few masterfully timed bursts of self-irony, he camouflages his hyper-conscious self-promotion. He knows exactly what he is doing. He speaks as he writes. (Pfeijffer 2022, 19)

When Pfeijffer wrote the novella, he had been living in Genoa for a long time and had long since adopted the new image of the writer/dandy in fine-cut suits. He paints exactly that image of himself in the first sentences. Furthermore, it is interesting how, in the sentences that follow, he actually gives a concise definition of posture. An explicit text-internal posture is not likely to manifest itself more appropriately.

Explicit work-external posture will be the most obvious area for many posture researchers. Obviously, interviews, public and television performances, and written portraits are a rewarding source to draw from for the purpose of a posture analysis. But at the same time, the main issue here is to remain vigilant. With these types of texts, it must be taken into account that these are deceptively realistic genres. Many interviews are intended for a large reading audience and are therefore written in an accessible way. As a result, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are always looking through the eyes of interviewers, with their prior knowledge, intentions and context. Thus, it is never clear what final selection an interviewer will have made from the interview conducted, the duration and other circumstances of the interview, or manipulations to the form: whether it was a monologue, a question-and-answer text or one providing details about the location where the interview was held (e.g. ‘a cosy little pub in the old town centre’). Moreover, the interview is also quite often an echo chamber, with repetition upon repetition of previous utterances. A statement like Pfeijffer’s previous quotation about self-confidence recurs regularly in interviews afterwards (for example, as recently as 2014, where a journalist states: “‘Lack of self-confidence is a character flaw I don’t possess,’ you once had it recorded” (*Brabants Nieuwsblad*, 12 March 2014).

The complexity of *explicit work-external posture* can be illustrated by the example of the description of ‘Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer’ in *Monterosso mon amour*, through the eyes of the librarian: “He looks like the director

of bumper cars at the fair” (Pfeijffer 2022, 18). This description of Pfeijffer was first recorded from the mouth of writer Christian Weijts, who knew Pfeijffer back in his early Leiden ‘bohemian’ days. In an interview with the *Financieel Dagblad* in 2020, two years before *Monterosso mon amour* was published, Weijts looks back on that time:

At the Leiden pub “Burgerzaken”, Pfeijffer sat pontifically at the window displaying that authorship in front of the window, says fellow writer Christiaan Weijts, who stayed with him in the same café for years. “Everyone in town also knew Ilja as such. That was also because of his appearance, of course. That was, like engaging in that polemic, part of his strategy to get noticed. Even then, he looked like Michiel de Ruyter, only less ostentatious than now.” Laughing: “With those tie pins, today he looks like the director of the bumper cars at the fair. Very witty.” (Theunissen 2020)

So here we find the first occurrence of the bumper car quotation. Two years later, Pfeijffer himself uses it in his own novella as a characterization of his alter-ego, after which it is then regularly quoted in reviews of *Monterosso mon amour* with a reference to the present Pfeijffer’s style of dress. Two years later, Weijts attributes the quotation to a mutual Leiden friend, in a review of a book on posture research:

About Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, a mutual friend once remarked years ago, above a photo of him in Genoa, in full costume – cape, rings, gold tie pin: “Ilja looks like the director of bumper cars at the fair these days.”

I still don’t know exactly through which link that remark was channelled to the Ligurian port city, but in his Book Week gift *Monterosso mon amour* (2022), Pfeijffer introduced himself, viewed through the eyes of the protagonist, a jaded librarian, who concluded: “He looked like the director of the bumper cars at the fair.”

One might see this as self-mockery, were it not for the fact that moments later this observation follows: “With feigned modesty and a few masterfully timed bursts of self-irony, he camouflages his hyperconscious self-promotion. He knows exactly what he is doing.”

That’s right. The bumper cars had been expertly disabled and tactically deployed as camouflage vehicles that turned the banter into apparent self-mockery. The anecdote illustrates how he is indeed “hyper-consciously” working on his image-making. (Weijts 2024, 62)



Figure 4: Back cover portrait of *Het glimpen van de welkweek*. ©Jiri Buller

When one carefully adheres to an interview text as a starting point, it obviously counts as a valid source for research: such a text is both outcome and starting point of the work-explicit posture. But the bumper car example also shows how relevant and enlightening it can be to investigate how a well-defined (even small) aspect of a posture came about.

Another complication in the work-explicit category occurs with the blurb phenomenon. The first sentence of the text on the back of Pfeijffer's *Het geheim van het vermoorde geneuzel* reads: "This book will change Dutch poetry" (Pfeijffer 2003). What is the status of this quote? It fits the stature of the immodest iconoclast and trailblazer. The question, however, is who authored this line? Blurbs are often written by the author himself and approved in each case, but they are presented anonymously and 'neutrally' to the reader. Nevertheless, they are suitable material that contributes to the posture, given the reactions to it alone, as evidenced by Olaf Risee's review of the essay collection:

And as if the subtitle were not pretentious enough, the back of the book reads: "This book will change Dutch poetry." Whew! Anyone who dares to make such a claim in an era in which not only poetry both on and off paper seems to be grossly outdone, but also the countless styles in which it presents itself, must be a haughty arrogant bastard. Right? (Risee 2003)

The rest of Risee's review offers a handy overview of the iconoclastic posture of Pfeijffer in 2003.

Pfeijffer's changing appearance has already been mentioned. In his case, it is also possible to include visual material in a posture analysis. The picture printed on the back cover of Pfeijffer's second collection of poems, *Het glimpen van de welkweek* (*The glimpses of the welkweek*), shows the young poet in his 'Leiden period': windswept long hair, health insurance glasses, hand-rolled cigarette in his mouth and the pack of DRUM rolling tobacco just visible (Figure 4). This is not the image of a Poet with a capital P, or the slick portrait of a hip young poet.

In Pfeijffer's case, there is good photographic material available that illustrates at a glance the changed explicit work-external posture. In 2008, on the back of his anthology *De man van vele manieren* (*The Man of Many Ways*), he had himself portrayed in a nude photograph. The collection marked the beginning of a period of years of silence as a poet, an interim balance, a closure or a poetic statement. The portrait could also be seen as a reference to perhaps the most famous stanzas by the primal father of the Dutch-language avant-garde, Paul van Oostaijen, in 'Vers 6' ('Poem 6') of his famous *De feesten van angst en pijn* (*The Feasts of Fear and Pain*):

Ik wil beproeven
 naakt te zijn
 [...]
 Ik wil bloot zijn
 en beginnen⁷

Unfortunately, Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer has not given permission to print this photo to illustrate this text. Those who cannot resist their curiosity can come up with their own search terms to view the picture on the internet. (But Pfeijffer's ban does offer a good example of an attempt to orchestrate posture in practice.)

The contrast between the nude photograph from 2008 and photographs from his current period in Genoa is enormous, with the posture of the successful novelist, translated into dozens of languages, "one of the self-proclaimed exponents of contemporary European literature" (Pfeijffer 2022, 87), a tastefully dressed writer in a chic-looking classical/Italian setting (Figure 5).

Even with this kind of imagery, where the posture naturally reveals itself, the question of its creation arises. For the photo on the back of *De man van vele manieren*, the same applies as for the blurb: it was used with Pfeijffer's consent. But the newspaper photo of Pfeijffer formally dressed in a stylish-looking setting is even more interesting: is this the result of an hour-long photography session in various location around Genoa? Or was the photo taken on the spur of the moment? When making enquiries, one should also take into account the aesthetics of the photographer, as well as the final choices made by the editorial staff of a daily or weekly newspaper. That is an important link, because such an editor will naturally choose images that fit the setting and scope of the article. It may well be that Pfeijffer was constantly walking around in sweatpants that day and



Figure 5: Portrait from Pfeijffer's current Genoa period.
© Lucia Buricelli

that the selected photo was the only one featuring the outfit of the 'bumper car director'. If so, it is still obvious that this photo was the one chosen. Again, the final published photos are the starting point for the posture analysis, but knowledge of the genesis of a publication (which is by no means always available) can be very illustrative of the *process*.

As with the poetic model, in the posture model, the *implicit work-external posture* is the most difficult category. After all, this category too involves things that are *not* said or shown. Here one can think of media the author does not wish to cooperate with, because of their political signature or social image. Or there may be other indicators, for instance that the author never partici-

parted in popular TV shows. When making such a determination, it is of course necessary to first check whether there are similar authors who did take part in such shows, and even then the question remains whether the author was not asked to participate or whether he in fact refused. Another example might be to see whether an author who manifests himself as an international ('European') writer like Pfeijffer might be missing from lists and articles in foreign media about similar authors successful outside our language area (e.g. Gerbrand Bakker, Stefan Hertmans, Lucas Rijneveld). But, as already mentioned, this is the most tentative and speculative category.

The ‘failed’ posture

A legitimate question that may arise in posture research is whether a posture can actually fail. It is one of those issues about which Meizoz provides an introduction in an interview, but does not come to a conclusive conclusion:

So what do we do about situations where the posture doesn’t “work”, isn’t accepted or recognised by the public or peers, etc.? Here again, I can’t speak in generalities. I’d have to study new cases where this happens, and I have no doubt that they exist. They may even be the rule, the successful or functional posture being perhaps only a kind of ideal-type or textbook case. Or even a simplifying projection of the analyst onto his documents. But it was necessary for me to go through this to clarify my ideas on authorial postures. (Mertens 2011, 206)

Perhaps this issue is fundamentally simpler to resolve than Meizoz supposes. Posture is a mirror game; after all, it exists by the grace of a reflective audience. Simply put: no response means no posture. An author can propagate a posture of *rebel*, *outsider* or *loner* for years, but that only ‘works’ the moment that posture is signalled and he or she is recognized and acknowledged as such. The *Einzelgänger*, paradoxically, gets recognition only when his solitude is *perceived*. In its extreme form, then, the answer to Meizoz’ question is unambiguous. But what about the grey area? What, for instance, about an author who has an intended audience of adults, but mainly reaches readers of *young adult* literature, despite presenting himself entirely as an author for adults (Ackermans 2022, 30, 49)?

Pfeijffer received immediate reactions to his public behaviour. At the time of his attacks on Dutch poetry, there were indeed opposing voices that also went against his posture. As early as 2002, *De Groene Amsterdammer* critically reflected on Pfeijffer’s public presentation:

He elicited fierce reactions in daily and weekly newspapers with it. Piet Gerbrandy, critic of *De Groene Amsterdammer*, and a poet and classicist himself, explained in *de Volkskrant* that Pfeijffer overplayed his hand. Others were more explicit: “That Pfeijffer is just a hypocritical jerk”, wrote the reviewer of the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* and in *NRC Handelsblad* Pieter Steinz claimed that Pfeijffer piled “lie upon lie” in order to “invent two opposite literary movements”. In the end, Pfeijffer ended up in brown socks in a boxing ring, in which,

in front of the television camera of *Nova*, he fought with Serge van Duijnhoven, a fellow poet for whom intelligibility and “performance” are important ingredients of good poetry. (Puthaar 2002)

It is interesting here, as an aside, that the quotes from Pieter Steinz cannot be traced at all and those from the *Dagblad van het Noorden* are only partly traceable: in his article, journalist Bram Hulzebos ironically paraphrases some critical voices about Pfeijffer’s statement, and then ends with two rhetorical questions, the first of which reads: “Is Pfeijffer a hypocritical jerk without cultural awareness who would be better off in nursing?” (Hulzebos 2000). In the scathing article in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, poet René Puthaar sneered at Pfeijffer’s latest work, the then just-published collection of poems *Dolores*, but also (implicitly) dwelt on Pfeijffer’s posture:

There, the audience feasts on his verbal potpourris and ratatouilles. The crowd is dizzy at so much roaring, panting, rattling and babbling. What a bard! How authentic! And it is real, isn’t it? Because a poet, that’s someone with wild hair and the chest at battleship height? Someone who plays with words like a church organ? Someone who can inflate an ordinary, far too banal sentence into an overwhelming sentence through an excessive use of synonyms, inversions and adjectives, a primal sensual sentence that smells and breathes and supports and thunders? (Puthaar 2002)

Does this kind of criticism point to a ‘failed’ posture? It is difficult to pin down, of course, but the mere fact that a reputable magazine like *De Groene Amsterdammer* devotes several pages to a relatively young poet indicates success of the posture adopted, which is, after all, signalled.

The later Pfeijffer also encountered criticism. In his Italian years, he has increasingly cast himself as a guardian of the Great European Tradition and a critic of mass tourism in Italy, such as cruises to Venice. Some uproar did arise when it turns out that Pfeijffer himself, meanwhile, has appeared as a guest speaker on such cruises (Peppelenbos 2019). This potential blot on his image turns out to be of no consequence, however. And that leads to the next question. We talked here about ‘failed’ postures, but when does a posture actually succeed? Upon Jan Cremer’s death, on 19 June 2024, the obituaries almost without exception mentioned his debut *Ik Jan Cremer* and the ‘iconic’ cover photo with motorbike (which by then was sixty years old). This is undoubtedly a successful posture. But how to

quantify the less obvious cases? In Pfeijffer's case, there is an abundance of material, both work-internal and -external, so a posture study will be fruitful in the case of his authorship. But there are many writers who are also successful but make do with a much less striking public image. The challenge is that a 'successful' posture is often a combination of sufficient work-external research material in combination with work-internal elements. Posture research is thus primarily a medium-oriented exercise. And of course, much media attention also means much public attention. It would therefore be interesting to carry out a survey among interested readers (visitors of bookshops and libraries) on the (perceived) posture of a certain author.

4. Conclusion

There are further caveats to a *posture* constructed on the basis of research. First of all, of course, there is the possibility that an author may not identify with such a posture at all – where the denial of a particular posture may of course also be part of that posture. It is very important to acknowledge that a posture is not (or does not need to be) a *pose*. A posture analysis is in principle 'objective' – or rather value-free – and does not involve any judgement about the author in question.

A final note on complicating factors in establishing a posture. In Pfeijffer's case, it has been clear from the beginning of his career that exaggeration and shock are deliberate strategies. In the process, his utterances very often feature a large dose of irony. This makes it difficult to appreciate and interpret his statements. Sometimes there are even deliberately conflicting utterances. The already discussed passage about the 'director of bumper cars', where 'Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer' is described extensively by the librarian Carmen, concludes with: "Carmen does not find him attractive in any way" (Pfeijffer 2022, 19). Self-mockery and irony always leave the door open for authors to backpedal on their statements. The best solution then, as a researcher, is to take a meta position here too, and include such a figure of speech in one's analysis of the posture.

Posture research relies on very diverse sources, with very different statuses: from the author's own texts to everything said, written or shown around him or her – or even *not* said, written or shown. This variety of sources makes this kind of research a precarious activity, which

presupposes precise, critical source research, where researchers must always be alert to the provenance, uniqueness and unambiguity of their material. If carried out with due care, however, this kind of research can yield very illuminating insights regarding the struggle, conscious or not, for a relevant, desired position in the literary field of the writer under study.

Notes

¹ On *Le scribe de la tribu* see Joosten 2009, on the posture of Dutch poet H. H. ter Balkt.

² For the latter, see e.g. Dera 2012, an early posture analysis in the Dutch language.

³ A non-poetic, working translation of the poem:

Farewell dinner

you can clear the table

the white-rimmed amuse gueule from the nouvelle cuisine

of chrysanthemums standing in the vase on the table by the window

but not in the vase on the table by the window

vegetarian still life sketched with the silver marker

have the larded well-filled

game roast brought in zap at a busty banquet

from dancing flesh to shiny voluptuous flesh

as a clip in large screen colour

serve me images baked in butter

and verses with bulimia.

⁴ See Joosten 2014.

⁵ On Pfeijffer's movement in the Dutch literary field, see Joosten 2023, esp. 288–290.

⁶ In Dutch: 'Wie niet van bloedvergieten houdt, houde zich beter verre van de heilige oorlog die poëzie is.'

⁷ I want to try

to be naked

[...]

I want to be naked

and begin

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Material Analysis and Book History Methods

Alicia C. Montoya

1. Introduction

This chapter describes how material analysis and book history methods can help scholars understand the reception of individual works of literature, categories of authors or literary corpora. Book history is the study of how books, as physical objects, have historically functioned as carriers of text and ideas. By studying the processes involved in the production, publication and circulation of books, book history sheds light on how the texts and ideas they carried were received by their various readers. Although it has traditionally focused on books, this approach also pays attention to the various people involved in these processes, from author to reader. Material analysis, in turn, is one of the methodologies developed by book historians. Material analysis refers to the examination of the extant physical copies of books containing a specific work or works in the search for clues on how these authors and works were received by their readers.

Book history draws on insights and methods from both literary studies and history. On the one hand, book history was an outgrowth of bibliography, a well-established branch of literary studies that describes books using standardized formats for various ends. Often, the focus was on production and circulation. Analytic or historical bibliography, for example, studied extant physical copies of books to reconstruct how they had been printed, thus shedding light on the history of the publishing business. Enumerative bibliographers compiled statistics about specific titles or authors to better understand processes of circulation, while critical bibliographers identified textual variants between different publications of the same text in order to establish scholarly, critical editions. On the other hand, however, book history was inspired by newer approaches, especially the French *Annales* school of history that, starting in the 1950s, sought to move away from an event-based, ‘great men’-style historiography, toward a more inclusive study of historical trends, patterns and underlying structures.

Its methodologies were hence often quantitative and large-scale, and sought to understand complex processes of societal change, including the impact of books on readers. Among other questions, *Annales* historians asked how books and print culture, by enabling the circulation of ideas on a hitherto unprecedented scale, might have acted as ‘agents of change’, contributing to major movements such as the European Reformation or Enlightenment.

Book history can thus best be understood as an auxiliary science rather than a stand-alone discipline and has subsequently not developed an extensive body of theory. Nonetheless, it draws theoretical insights from the two disciplines out of which it developed, history and literary studies.

From literary studies, book historians take the idea of the so-called author function, a concept first introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault in an influential 1969 lecture, ‘What is an Author?’ According to Foucault, literary authorship is a societal construct, involving multiple agents who give value to a particular text or its author – in other words, who proclaim that it is a work of literature, worthy of collective esteem. This implies that the author function is the combination of legal and cultural practices that establish the authority of a given author, by recognizing the author’s intellectual ownership of the text through copyright laws, and recognizing their name as a ‘brand’ guaranteeing the coherence and cultural value of their oeuvre. In the case of an especially successful author function, this collective esteem can ultimately lead to the canonization of the author and their works, or their inclusion in a so-called ‘canon’ of texts (after the ‘canon’ of texts officially making up the Bible) held in particularly high esteem by official cultural authorities such as academies and universities, and typically considered to represent the ‘great works’ of a nation or linguistic group.

Although Foucault did not discuss the persons involved in these processes of cultural authorization at length, in fact these are the persons identified by the second important theoretical strand in book history, provided by the concept of the communications circuit (Figure 1) first introduced by historian Robert Darnton in a 1982 essay ‘What is the History of Books?’ By identifying all the people involved in the material production of a single book, other than the authors, Darnton drew attention to the fact that all of these people or ‘agents’ played a role, consciously or not, in assigning cultural value to that book, and hence also to the text that it carried.

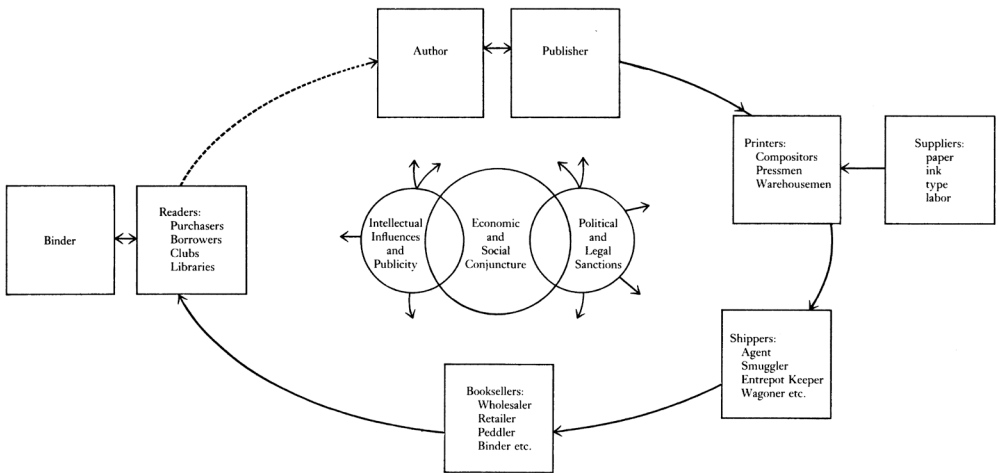


Figure 1: The communications circuit according to Robert Darnton (1982)

In the initial stages of literary production, these agents were the persons responsible for publishing the work, or for making it public (bearing in mind that in some literary cultures, publication does not necessarily involve print, but may take the form primarily of manuscript circulation, or oral transmission, for example through song). However, the publisher, as Darnton emphasized in his schema, was only one of multiple agents mediating the relation between the author and the reader (shown at the very end of the schema). In the intervening stages between author and publisher, the author's text could undergo several transformations that would eventually impact the way in which readers were able to receive it. In a later reflection on his schema, Darnton underlined the questions his model sought to address:

- How do books come into being?
- How do they reach readers?
- What do readers make of them?

2. The method

Studying the materiality of books is one way to start answering the questions Darnton asked: literary texts reach their readers in a variety of material formats, which reflect the value accorded them by publishers and other agents involved in the publication process, and which condition how subsequent readers will approach them. In the following, I consider only codex formats – the modern, printed book – as a discussion of newer formats, such as born-digital texts, requires substantially different approaches. As material objects, books function according to what Jerome McGann (1991) has described as “the bibliographic code”, or a set of signs that readers need to decipher just as they need to decipher “the linguistic code” or the words in a text to understand the meanings of a given book. Aspects such as format, quality of paper and binding, illustrations, typography, paratexts and other material aspects are all part of this bibliographic code. As such, they also all reflect the value that the agents in the communications circuit accord to a given text, and they all contribute to building, consolidating and modulating the author-function of the writer of the underlying text.

In order to understand the bibliographic code of a book, readers first need to become familiar with the conventions that publishers have developed over centuries in order to communicate messages about the contents of a given book. In the case of modern books, this is something most of us do without thinking. For example, when we see a row of Mills & Boon romances by the cash register at a large supermarket, we know just by looking at their materiality – the brightly coloured covers depicting lovers in a deep embrace, the pocket-size format indicating books easy to carry in a handbag, their location near the chocolate bars – that these books make no claim to lasting immaterial, ‘literary’ value. Indeed, their positioning near the candy bars suggests that they may be viewed as consumable commodities, or the object of impulse buys. In other words, before we have even opened the book or read a word of the author’s text, we have a good idea of what to expect as readers.

However, when the books we are studying are older, historians may need to first decipher the conventions and practices of the publishing business in that period. Attending to publishers often leads into the realm of economics. Publishing, after all, is a commercial enterprise, and the choices publishers made about format, paper size and quality, typography

and other material aspects of books were often related to expectations regarding the kind of profits a book might generate. For example, before the second half of the nineteenth century by far the largest proportion of publishers' costs went into paper. Because of this, the choice to print a book in a large format – hence using a lot of paper – needed to be reflected in the pricing, and made sense only if the intended audience of the book might be expected to have the financial means to pay for an expensive book. How much buyers were willing to spend on a book depended in turn on the contents of the book. While buyers might be unwilling to spend large amounts on an ephemeral publication (such as a magazine, a topical publication dealing with a current news item, or the umpteenth novel by a popular writer), books that might be expected to be kept for a long time (such as reference works or a handsome set of encyclopaedia volumes) could be priced higher, and therefore printed on better paper, in bigger formats. The popular novel, as it might be expected to sell many more copies than the encyclopaedia, could be produced in a smaller format, on lower-quality paper, but in larger quantities, hence maximizing publisher and bookseller profits.

As these examples show, choices about the material aspects of a book – primarily paper, format, typography and binding – find themselves at the intersection of considerations regarding the economic value of books and considerations pertaining to the cultural value of the texts they carry. In actual practice, these two kinds of value are often impossible to separate, hence paying attention to the materiality of books and to their 'bibliographic code' needs to be an essential element in assessing the reception of any text.

In addition to historical publishers' conventions, researchers need to understand how so-called paratexts may be at work creating meaning in books. No text reaches its readers completely unmediated by other (often medium-specific) elements. A book usually comes, at the very least, with two covers, a title page and a colophon providing information about the publisher, copyright and other edition-specific details. The title page may contain text, information or typography providing details about the main text. For example, the original title page of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* read "Pride and Prejudice: A Novel. In three volumes. By the author of 'Sense and Sensibility'", thus providing essential information about the genre of the text – a novel – and its likely content, which the title page suggests is similar to that of *Sense and Sensibility*. The front cover of a book

may in turn contain an illustration, while the back cover may bear a short summary of the contents of the book, or a 'blurb', sometimes accompanied by excerpts from reviews praising it. In addition, books may contain a frontispiece or other illustrations, a preface, introduction, notes and other textual material. All these extra materials are "paratexts", to use the term coined by French literary critic Gérard Genette (1997), i.e. textual and non-textual elements (e.g. in the case of illustrations) that cannot always be traced back to the author, but may be the work of publishers, editors and other agents intent on shaping readers' expectations, for example in order to increase sales or to ensure a positive reception of the book. Genette used the metaphor of the threshold to describe the function of such paratexts. They are indeed the threshold that readers must cross before they can gain access to the texts that books carry, and it is therefore essential, in studying any text's reception, to identify these paratexts and ask how they have shaped and continue to shape readers' reactions to the texts they frame.

3. Tools and techniques

How do historians actually go about cracking the 'bibliographic code'? A first step is to identify and source the physical books that they intend to work on. This entails searching in electronic library catalogues, starting close to home, with their own university library, other local libraries, perhaps a bookstore or two, and then gradually moving on to WorldCat and other larger, aggregate catalogues. It is important to get a general sense of 'what is out there' before homing in on one or more specific editions, and to establish a corpus of individual copies of books to inspect. Questions to ask at this stage are:

- How are the books described in library catalogues, i.e. what information is provided, and is there important information that appears to be missing?
- Are any indications provided as to the genre or content of the work, as reflected for example by keywords?
- Who is named as the author of the book?
- Who are named as secondary authors, for example authors of prefatory material, translators and others that may have been involved in granting authority to the text in question?

It is worth noting at this stage that cataloguing a book is itself a form of interpretation, which may involve several forms of classification and critical choices. It is up to the individual scholar to make these critical choices explicit, and to evaluate what these choices might say about the way cataloguers – and behind them, the institutions they represent – have evaluated the book in question. Behind these choices, ultimately, lies also the choice made by librarians and others to preserve certain books in the first place, thus enabling future researchers to study them: I say more about this so-called preservation bias below, when I touch on the material that is *not* in libraries and archives.

Moving on from these questions regarding authorship and the bibliographic description of a book in library catalogues, scholars can further ask a number of more quantitative questions, such as:

- How many copies can be found in libraries of works by the author under study?
- Is there a difference between kinds of library, for example between university libraries and local council libraries?
- If the works cannot be found in libraries, where else can they be sourced?
- What does the place where the books can be found say about the way they have been valued by readers (and what kinds of readers)?
- How many different editions exist of the works by the author in question, and which publishers and editors have been responsible for producing them?
- Is there a pattern in the date of publication of works by the author under study, which might for example point to fashions, spikes or tapering off of interest in their works?

In formulating answers to all these questions, a first sense will emerge of the publishing history of the author or works under study, and how this publishing history could have contributed to specific ways of ‘selling’ or ‘framing’ these works for potential readers. These questions will allow the scholar to formulate a series of working hypotheses about specific elements they expect to find in the physical copies of these books, and which books might be of most interest. Examining physical copies of a specific work, in other words, should not be the starting point of research, but a step taken only once the scholar has formulated a set of clear research

questions or working hypotheses and has an idea of what evidence might support or invalidate those hypotheses. This step is also a practical necessity, as the number of books that can be called up during a single library visit is often limited.

It is at this point that a visit to the library is indispensable. Leafing through individual copies of the books by the author under study, researchers can now test some of their working hypotheses, by looking at elements such as format, paper, typography, the presence or absence of illustrations, and paratexts (and changes in paratexts from edition to edition). When examining physical copies of books, it is also wise to be on the lookout for annotations, as these on occasion can provide essential information not available elsewhere. If working with early modern books, scholars might need to compare title pages and, if necessary, collate individual copies, i.e. go through the entire book, page by page, on the lookout for differences between copies that bear the same place, publisher and date of edition: copies that may at first sight look very similar may in fact be the result of different printings, also including pirated copies, or copies of the book printed without official permission from the book trade regulating authorities but made to look like official ones.

In addition to examining physical copies of the books they are studying, scholars can also make use of digital text corpora such as archive.org, Gallica, Gale Cengage's ECCO database (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online), the British Periodicals Archive, or Proquest's Early Modern Books. It is however worth stressing that the metadata of such collections may be incomplete or inaccurate. Additionally, scans fail to capture some valuable information, such as the quality of the paper (including watermarks, which may reveal the origin of the paper and hence reveal pirate editions), the binding and other material aspects of books that may provide clues concerning their valuation by previous generations of readers.

Finally, it is also good to bear in mind that serendipity, or the chance find, is often crucial in bibliographic research and scholarship focused on materiality. Not all books are easily findable and not all books have been catalogued, even in the best university libraries. Befriending one's librarian, and if possible one or two antiquarian booksellers, may be one of the smartest moves a researcher can make, as librarians and antiquarians have seen literally thousands of books pass through their hands, and often have a keen sense for the exceptional or the significant detail that others may overlook. Alerting other researchers to one's research questions can

also be beneficial to book history research. Looking for material evidence can sometimes feel like looking for a needle in a haystack, so making use of the collective brain of the larger scholarly community ‘out there’ may be a real necessity – besides resulting in sometimes lasting, lifelong friendships.

Thus far, I have been writing as if all books were more or less easily available in institutional libraries or through other commercial channels, such as bookstores. While this is so for most works and authors studied by literary scholars, sometimes accessing them may be more difficult. When books or texts were considered ‘minor’ or unimportant in their own day, ‘middlebrow’, or otherwise not worthy of serious literary consideration, they may not have been preserved in such repositories. This situation also holds for specific genres that were published in cheap, ephemeral formats, or left in manuscript form only, such as newspapers or play scripts printed only to be used for the duration of a performance, and at most kept as souvenirs for a while after. In fact, one of the truisms of book history is that the larger the number of copies originally printed of a work – think of almanacs, devotional works or telephone directories in the twentieth century – the fewer will have been preserved, as large print runs were typically produced on cheap paper, made to be used and discarded once the next update was published. It is crucial when adopting methods focused on materiality to be aware of preservation bias, or the accumulation of normative choices made in the past, by previous generations of readers, institutions and cultural gatekeepers, regarding what texts were deemed worthy, because of their literary quality or for other reasons, of being preserved in libraries, archives and in literary memory.

In these cases where preservation bias has worked against the authors or works under study, researchers need to turn to what Lucie Ryzova has felicitously termed “the Ezbekiyya methodology”, named after the Cairo Sur al-Ezbekiyya marketplace specializing in “used books, periodicals, and paper ephemera of all kinds and ages” (Ryzova 2014, 30). This is a form of no-method methodology, or sifting through old paper on the lookout precisely for what is absent from archives and libraries. As Ryzova explains:

Thus, the Ezbekiyya methodology ignores what one *should* look for after defining a research project. Instead, it gives one a fairly good idea of what there is: what generations of people left behind. Just like conventional archives, this method can easily destabilize or even disrupt research agendas, but it can reward by presenting a research agenda of its own, based on unforeseen sources. (Ryzova 2014, 30)

While this may sound disconcerting as a conclusion to an exposition of research methodology, Ryzova's words are a useful reminder that all good research potentially carries in it some element of chance finds, creative goings out on a limb, and being open to the unexpected.

4. Case study

A good illustration of how attending to materiality in reception studies can involve a mix of method and serendipity is the research underlying my own doctoral dissertation. It all started out with an MA course assignment, for which we had been asked to research the reception of an early-modern French woman writer of our own choosing. Not quite knowing where to start, I took a look at what was then one of the few, pioneering works on the topic, Joan DeJean's *Tender Geographies. Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (1991). DeJean had included at the back of the book an appendix listing dozens of early-modern French women writers who had hitherto not been the subject of any substantial modern critical work. One of the entries started out: "Barbier, Marie-Anne. 1670? – 1742?. Tragedies" and listed the titles of four tragedies published by this author: *Arrie et Pétus* (1702), *Cornélie, mère des Gracques* (1703), *Tomyris* (1707) and *La Mort de César* (1709).

Intrigued by these four titles and the female-centred perspective they seemed to imply – three out of four referenced a female protagonist, despite the fact that French classicist tragedy was known as a particularly male-gendered genre, with its focus on politics and matters of state – I decided to look further into this author I had never heard of. I consulted my professors, expecting them to be able to tell me more about her, but they, too, despite being specialists on eighteenth-century French women's writing, had never heard of this author. Some even suggested that, following a practice that was not unknown in the eighteenth century (in the nineteenth century, the reverse would be more common), 'Marie-Anne Barbier' might simply have been a pseudonym used by a male author eager to capitalize on the novelty effect of publishing tragedies supposedly authored by a woman. How then could I explain who or what this 'author' had been, and how could I explain the fact that she had been so completely forgotten by literary historiography?

As soon as I started searching for references to this mysterious author, I ran into statements by later critics to the effect that she was not, actually,

the author of her works. Instead, the real author was supposed to be the Marseilles-born, former priest Simon-Joseph Pellegrin. Often, the tone of such statements was strikingly misogynistic, even to the point of including various degrees of sexual innuendo. A fairly typical example were the words of Claude-Henri de Voisenon, an influential dramatist, friend of Voltaire and member of the French Academy, who wrote some forty years after Barbier's death:

MARIE-ANNE BARBIER lent her name and gave her heart to Abbé Pellegrin. She was from Orléans, but would never have been mistaken for the Maid [i.e. Joan of Arc, a famous virgin]. She was as ugly and as disgusting as the Abbé. Love never gained anything from their passions, nor did Apollo gain any glory from their works.¹ (Voisenon 1781)

As is obvious from Voisenon's words, one initial, possible explanation for Marie-Anne Barbier's disappearance from literary history might be the hostile manner in which later critics spoke of her. But where could I take my research from here? Had she simply been forgotten because, like scores of other authors (and as Voisenon's words suggested), she simply was not a very good writer, and had produced mediocre works that deserved to be forgotten – or was there more to the story? At this point, I decided to take a look in libraries, at the copies that had been preserved of her works. At the very least, I needed to form a judgement for myself: if after reading her works I decided that they were indeed not all that interesting after all, then the case would be closed.

But when I looked in my university library, a first surprise awaited me. An initial library search in Dutch libraries revealed that a surprising number of editions of her works were actually preserved there. Although Barbier had authored only four tragedies, Dutch university libraries held literally dozens of eighteenth-century copies of her works, including re-editions and translations – but no copies from after 1763, the date of publication of the Dutch translation of *Tomiris*. This did not appear consistent with a picture of an author who had enjoyed little recognition during her own lifetime. In order to get a clearer sense of what was going on, I started to leaf through the physical copies of her eighteenth-century works held in libraries. The materiality of these books, contrary to what I had expected, pointed to an oeuvre that had initially been held in high esteem, and a preservation bias that had initially worked in her favour.

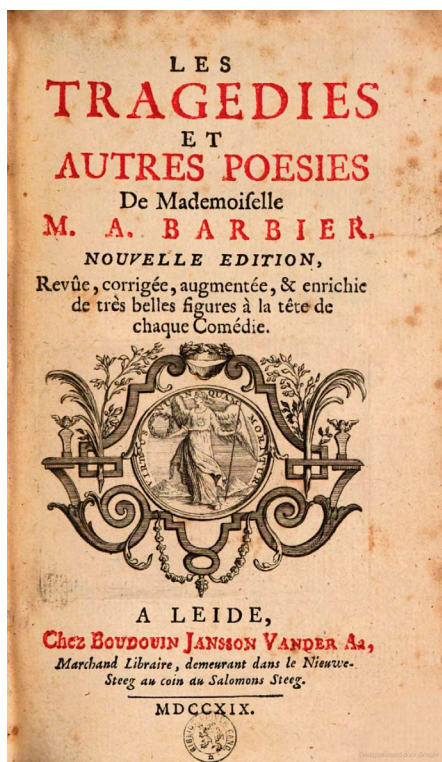


Figure 2: Title page of 1719 edition of Marie-Anne Barbier's works

First, the quality of the publications. Many of the books were richly bound, not in plain parchment (untanned, treated sheepskin), as was common for everyday books, but in more expensive kinds of leather, such as 'Morocco' (tanned, finely treated goatskin). The copies held in the French national library, as I discovered through the online catalogue, in several cases were stamped with the coats of arms of very illustrious owners, ranging from various prominent aristocrats to Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France, herself. Others bore the ex-libri of upper-class owners elsewhere in Europe. The quality of the paper used was very good. In some cases, Dutch translations had even been printed on extra-large paper, with wide margins, that cost twice as much as ordinary paper. In other words, the material aspects of these books suggested books meant to be treasured, as publishers

and owners had gone to some expense to produce durable copies. These material aspects of the books would make sense only if the author of the texts had enjoyed some degree of critical recognition.

This materiality can be illustrated by taking a closer look at the 1719 edition of Marie-Anne Barbier's complete works published in Leiden, by the young Boudewijn Janssen van der Aa, just as he was starting out on his own as a publisher (Figure 2).

This is a sumptuous edition, as reflected in various material details. The use of two colours on the same page was an expensive procedure, as it meant printers had to run the same sheet of paper twice through the printing press, with an extra delay caused by having to wait for the ink of the first printing to dry. The title page, in addition, advertises the inclusion of illustrations, which had been especially commissioned for this edition from an artist well known for his French-style engravings,

Frans van Bleyswyck. This meant an illustrator and engraver also had to be paid, adding to the publisher's costs. The vignette on the title page, of course, also had to be commissioned and paid for. And before the title page itself, the publisher had included for good measure a beautiful full-page illustration or frontispiece, depicting a young man or angel sitting on a cloud, lyre in hand, bearing the text "Le théâtre de Mademoiselle Barbier, à Leide, chez B.I. vander Aa, 1719".

The attractive title page is followed by several other paratexts that guide the reader toward an appreciation of the qualities of the texts by Barbier. The first is a four-page dedication from the publisher to a local aristocrat, himself also an occasional playwright, praising the literary work of Barbier. This is followed by a three-page "Avis de l'imprimeur au lecteur" (Notice from the printer to the reader) in which the publisher addresses his readers directly, again praising the tragedies by Barbier. While the author's name on the title page – "Mademoiselle M.A. BARBIER" – may not surprise modern readers, many plays were in fact published anonymously in the eighteenth century, so the typographic foregrounding of the author's name on the title page, in capitals and in red ink, should also be taken as significant. What is perhaps most surprising about this book is the fact that it presents itself as a kind of "Complete works". As Michel Foucault pointed out, the publication of an author's complete works was a decisive step in consolidating their authority as a 'literary' author worthy of critical consideration. Together with the copious paratexts, it is therefore clear that this edition was meant to convince readers of the literary value of this oeuvre.

In short, the materiality of the works authored by Marie-Anne Barbier suggested a very different reception by her initial readers than that represented by the misogynistic words of Voisenon several decades after her death. Study of the extant copies of her books in libraries in Holland and France turned up other evidence relating to this mysterious author's career. In the Paris Arsenal library, I discovered a copy of Barbier's last play, *La mort de César*, that bore handwritten annotations by the author herself, dedicating the book to a certain "M. de Brossoray". Illustrating the importance of reaching out to other scholars, a colleague from Princeton, Volker Schröder, discovered another copy signed by the author, in a library in the northern French city of Caen. This find was of course proof that "Marie-Anne Barbier" was not, as some of my professors had claimed, merely a male author's penname, but had actually existed. In the parish

registries in Orléans, I subsequently unearthed the baptismal record of one Marie-Anne Barbier, who I was able to trace to Paris and, through her signature on another archival document, was able to successfully match to the signatures in these two copies of her books.

Marie-Anne Barbier, more excitingly still, had not been alone. The picture that gradually emerged was that of a group of female dramatists who had enjoyed considerable success in their own day, in Paris and well beyond (Barbier's works were even translated into Russian, at the behest of Catherine the Great), during the last decades of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. This success, however, produced a backlash as a new generation of male dramatists, foremost among them Voltaire, began to make their way through the literary ranks. The women dramatists were actively persecuted, locked up in convents (Madame Ulrich), saw their works re-edited under the names of male authors (Catherine Bernard), had the authorship of their works contested (Barbier) or were plagiarized (Bernard, Barbier) by the same better-known male authors who had previously disparaged them. Despite some attempts at rehabilitation at the end of the eighteenth century, notably by the influential female author-pedagogue Félicité de Genlis, the smear campaign was successful, and this generation of female dramatists disappeared completely from literary historiography, only to start slowly re-emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As I have hoped to demonstrate, due attention to the materiality of their books provided a crucial first step in this process of rediscovery and critical re-evaluation.

5. Conclusion

Studying the material carriers of literary texts can yield many new insights into the ways in which contemporaries and later generations valued – or failed to value – the works of any given author, group of authors or literary genre. At the same time, locating, collecting and making the material speak can be a labour-intensive endeavour, and serendipity, or the chance find, often plays an important, but not easily regulated role in the process. In particular, preservation bias may mean that some kinds of material have been preserved only very poorly, and cannot be found in the archives and libraries on which scholars traditionally rely. In this last

case, departure from an overly systematized methodology may be necessary, calling for what has been described as ‘the Ezbekiyya methodology’.

These caveats notwithstanding, in general the following steps may be followed in cracking the ‘bibliographic code’:

- Identify and source the relevant books, by searching (electronic) library catalogues, and other repositories if necessary, to get a global feel of ‘what is out there’;
- Analyse the bibliographic descriptions in catalogues to assess who (authors) and what other elements are named, and what this reveals about how institutional libraries and cataloguers valued the works or authors under study;
- Quantify the extant copies that can be found in libraries and other places, and evaluate what these numbers say about how the author or work were valued;
- On the basis of this global survey, formulate a number of questions and working hypotheses to test against the extant physical copies of the books;
- Examine physical copies of the books in libraries, focusing on elements like format, paper, typography, the presence or absence of illustrations, annotations, and paratexts (and changes in paratexts from edition to edition).

Above all, however, the best advice is to enjoy following the paper trail of material evidence wherever it may go, feeling free to depart from the inherited narratives of literary historiography when the trail leads elsewhere, as attending to the materiality of books may well lead to unexpected discoveries and exciting new insights.

Notes

- ¹ My translation. French original: “MARIE-ANNE BARBIER prêta son nom & donna son cœur à l’Abbé Pellegrin ; elle étoit d’Orléans, & ne pouvoit pas passer pour en être la Pucelle. Elle étoit aussi laide, aussi dégoûtante que l’Abbé ; l’Amour ne tira aucun profit de leurs passions, ni Apollon aucune gloire de leurs Ouvrages.”

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PART III

DIGITAL METHODS

Literary Evaluation and Argumentation Analysis

Esther Op de Beek and Bea Ros

1. Introduction

Anyone can have an opinion about a book, but when that opinion is substantiated and articulated in a publicly consultable medium, we speak of a *book review*. It is a specific form of literary criticism. In scholarly research, ‘literary criticism’ is understood as the process of observing, analysing and interpreting literary objects, resulting in texts that contain verifiable statements (Winkler 2017, 16–17). The academic critic usually tries to be as objective as possible and refrains from making quality judgements. Of course, this objectivity is never fully attainable, for the very act of picking out texts to study presupposes judgement, and a scientific analysis may contain remarks that imply values (“this book presents a critical view of humanity’s selfish dealings with nature”). Nevertheless, an academic critic will not find it easy to add: “and I found it very boring”. Book reviews, on the other hand, contain the critic’s personal judgement. Reviews are meant to give readers an impression of new books. Even critics who claim to give an objective description of a book cannot avoid subjective judgements, for example in the titles and elements they choose to describe.

These public judgements about books are an important form of cultural production. Reviews, and the poetical beliefs therein, will legitimize certain ways to value or speak about literature. Therefore, book reviews are interesting (historical) documents to research and to supplement literary history with. They reveal how readers from different times and places thought about literary works, authors, genres and so on: which characteristics do they and do they not appreciate and consider to be important in literature?

One would be right to think that the ways books are judged vary greatly across different (book) cultures, time periods and media. If, for instance,

all Dutch book reviewers turn out to dislike novels that are sentimental in tone, these judgements would reflect a current trend in book reviewing. Nevertheless, precisely this sentimental tone might have been a valued trait in earlier times. By studying large amounts of book reviews from a wide-ranging period, from different media (for example newspapers versus online) or different kinds of critics (for example professional critics and lay readers), it would be possible to compare the ways of judging or substantiating by critics, looking for constants and changes over time or across media. It is the examination of such gross, dominant tendencies for which a research method is presented in what follows.

This chapter will present a methodology for categorizing and analysing evaluative judgements in book reviews, based on a model for the analysis of literary evaluation by Linders and Op de Beek (2009). They developed the model to carry out both quantitative and qualitative analyses of a large amount of book reviews from Dutch newspapers from 1955 to 2005, with the goal of uncovering evaluation patterns. Underlying that goal is the conviction that the systematic analysis of book reviews offers a nuance and complement to the picture we have of literary criticism based on repeatedly reproduced assumptions in literary historiography about the reception and appreciation of authors or trends in literature. These 'myths' often stem from active imaging by writers themselves.

Literary histories, for example, tend to retell how critics reacted fiercely to the novels of a celebrated Dutch writer like W. F. Hermans. Hermans himself gladly contributed to that image, which earned him a position of splendid isolation, placing himself outside what he considered to be a mediocre Dutch literary landscape. He complained firmly about the deplorable state of Dutch book reviewing:

Already it has reached the point where literary criticism seems all but extinct. More and more, unadulterated insult is taking the place of literary criticism. Anyone who cannot even construct a sentence with the aid of a word processor and who, moreover, has too little factual knowledge to successfully look up something he does not know in an encyclopaedia, still easily makes it to the literary editor of a newspaper.¹ (Hermans 1994, 28)

That some of his books would have been denounced on religious grounds was a particular thorn in his side. On the basis of such forms of self-fashioning, literary criticism in a given period, in this case around the 1950s,

is then generalized, in this case as predominantly ideologically oriented. Another example is the common view in the historiography of children's literature of the 1970s as being predominantly socio-critically oriented. Critics of children's books would have only been interested in the question if a children's book contains the desired amount of emancipation and (for children's books) taboo-breaking themes such as death, homosexuality or teen pregnancy.

The question arises whether these images hold up when we systematically look at a large number of randomly selected reviews. Were there indeed many religious judgements during the 1950s or only socio-critical judgements in the 1970s? Does what we presume about book reviewing – or what we know from case studies of individual critics or the reception of specific authors or literary works – hold true even when one considers a random sample from the vast amount of published reviews? Such systematic, quantitative corpus research is at the heart of this method.

To summarize, our model can be used for quantitative and qualitative research on reviews and evaluations within. Examples of research questions to be tackled with this model include: Which literary criteria are predominant in period X? What are the similarities and differences between the value judgements of critics in newspaper and online reviews? Are the books of male writers judged with different evaluation criteria from those of female writers? Which words are most commonly used by critics in value judgements specifically about the literary quality of the style of novels? Which criteria are associated with the jury of the Griffler Prize between the 1970s and 1990s?

After introducing the above-mentioned categorization model, we show how the model can be adapted for a special, well-defined literary field, namely children's literature, and how it can be used to test the specific hypothesis about ideological book reviewing with both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

2. The method

From prescription to description

Over the decades, the art of book reviewing has been the subject of highly charged debates. Such debates concerned questions not only about literary

quality, but also about the task of the critic, the validity of judgements, or the language and tone in which these judgements are to be formulated. In Dutch research on book reviewing, these ever-recurring debates led to scientific approaches that aimed to formulate answers to them, or to improve literary book reviewing, posing questions such as: How can criticism function *optimally*? What should the *ideal* review look like? Or what is a critic *allowed* to do or say (Joosten and Schellens 2007; Joosten 2007)? These kinds of questions can be called prescriptive, in the sense that they culminate in guidelines or norms. The Dutch critic Arjen Fortuin made fun of this tendency, formulating the Book Critics' Ten Commandments, which include "Thou shalt discern what is art and what is not" and "Thou shalt judge with language and with arguments, not with balls or stars" (NRC, 16 September 2011).

Apart from these prescriptive approaches, there were some Dutch researchers who developed more descriptive models for analysing book reviews. These models do not seek to prescribe what criticism should be, but rather what critics actually do. Mooij (1973; 1979) for example argued that evaluative statements in reviews are reducible to a limited number of arguments: realistic, emotive, moral, structural, intentional and innovative. A researcher could classify these statements to reconstruct the critics' poetics. Boonstra (1979) and later Praamstra (1984) elaborated on this and developed models for descriptive content analysis of book reviews by categorizing arguments. The disadvantage of these models is that they were too unwieldy and inflexible, and the researcher could get caught up in an increasingly sophisticated classification without really capturing the nuances in reviews (see, among others, Beekman 2004). When a critic argues, for example, that the structure of a novel is innovative, should it be called a structural argument or an innovation argument? And, once we have decided about that, can we conclude that the critic considers innovation or structure important? Or would the critic, in the case of another book, not consider it so important at all? Both the method and its purpose of reconstructing poetical beliefs have received criticism (Beekman 2004).

How can these drawbacks be overcome and how can one arrive at an analysis model that is both flexible and manageable and does justice to the practice of reviewing? Op de Beek and Linders (2009; see also Op de Beek 2014 and Linders 2014) found answers in the German discourse about aesthetics and evaluation. In Germany, more substantial attention was paid to the theoretical and methodological challenges of analysing

book reviews. In particular, the descriptive models for literary evaluation of Renate von Heydebrand and Simone Winko (1996) on the one hand, and Friederike Worthmann (2004) on the other, can be seen as attempts to gain theoretical insight into the complexity of this matter. They aim to dissect the process of literary evaluation and the nature of an evaluative judgement theoretically, which is an interplay between a critic's presuppositions, the specific qualities recognized in a book, and the value that is attributed to them. In doing so, these scholars provided a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the complexity of the reading, thinking and writing process that preceded a judgement that ended up in a review, and of what interests and context factors all influence it. Based on these theoretical concepts, Linders and Op de Beek (2009) designed a model to analyse evaluative statements in larger corpora of reviews.

A model for the analysis of evaluation domains

The method developed by Linders and Op de Beek (2009) is a code system for the categorization of the values that are *assigned* to books in reviews. Central is the concept of an *evaluative domain* (Linders and Op de Beek 2009). An evaluative domain is basically the subject of evaluation; it can be identified for each evaluative statement in a review. That subject of evaluation always consists of two components: the 'aspect' of a book that is being evaluated, and the 'quality' assigned to it.

Aspects and qualities

Let us dive a bit deeper into these two components of an evaluative domain. 'Aspects' are properties of the reviewed source, in this case literary novels for adults. In selecting the 'aspects' for their model, Op de Beek and Linders ask themselves this question: what are well-known, common features of literary novels about which a critic could say something? Their lists of aspect and quality categories in the model are based on earlier models and on what was found in a sample of book reviews (Linders and Op de Beek 2009).

Most aspects are inherent to what a novel (in most cases) is, for example: plot, composition, characters or style. Because every novel is a linguistic expression, style is an unmistakable aspect. It is important to realize that an aspect is always an objective property of a novel. A critic

can describe these aspects in the review, for example by explaining what the plot is about or which characters are involved. Only at the point when a critic assigns value to an aspect of the novel do we speak of 'qualities'. So qualities, for instance 'funny', are always subjective and evaluative. In selecting the qualities for their model, Linders and Op de Beek ask themselves this question: what are well-known, common grounds on which critics evaluate novels?

If a critic states that 'the style of a novel is funny', then the evaluated aspect of the book is the 'style', and the attribute assigned to it is 'funny'. The feature 'funny' would have been placed in the category 'humour', along with features such as 'hilarious', 'laugh-inducing' and 'not funny'. Equally, a critic may call a certain fictional character funny; then the same quality is combined with another aspect of the book: 'characters' and 'humour'.

An evaluation domain always consists of at least one aspect and at least one quality, for example 'style-humour'. If we look at the following statement,

The lifelike nature of the characters and the successful portrayal of everyday life in the lower social strata raised *Dubbelspel* far above the level of the average trend novel. (De Roo, *Trouw*, 7 April 1995)

both the 'characters' and the 'setting' are judged using the evaluation criterion of 'reality/credibility'. An evaluation of the literary quality of the novel (as a whole, not just one aspect of it) is also given. The analysis therefore assigns three evaluation domain codes to the three evaluations.

In this way, only a limited number of twelve aspect categories and fifteen quality categories are needed (see Table 1 below) to code evaluative statements, but a lot of combinations of aspects and qualities can be made. As a result, the model is both flexible and manageable – which is a difference from the earlier classification models of Mooij (1973), Boonstra (1979) and Praamstra (1984). The idea is that it is possible to map how often certain aspects and certain qualities are evaluated by critics, and in what combinations.

When quantifying evaluations, it is assumed that the extent to which certain aspects or qualities appear in evaluations is an indication of the importance attached to those aspects and qualities. 'Importance', then, does not really mean that critics rank the particular aspect or property in question as being hierarchically higher in their poetical views – after

all, our model is not suited to investigate what critics *think* but what they *write*. Hence, ‘importance’ refers to those aspects or qualities that play an important part in the professional, public and written, or legitimized evaluative discourse in daily newspapers.

Table 1: The model of Op de Beek (2014) and Linders (2014)

Aspects	Qualities
A. Style/tone	1. Efficiency
B. Structure	2. Coherence
C. Setting	3. Continuity
D. Plot	4. Intensity/vividness
E. Dialogues	5. Literary/intellectual qualities
F. Characters	6. Humour
G. Theme/ideas	7. Clarity
H. Symbolism/imagery	8. Realism/truthfulness
I. Material presentation	9. Emotionality
J. Author/intention	10. Didactic qualities
K. Parts/whole	11. Religious qualities
L. Other	12. Socio-political qualities
	13. Moral qualities
	14. Originality
	15. Other

3. Tools and techniques

Most book reviews consist of information (for example about the story or the author) and evaluative judgements. The model is used only for the *evaluative* part of a review. So the first thing to do is to identify which lines are informative and which contain judgements: every evaluative sentence is coded with one or more evaluative domains. Especially when used for a large corpus of book reviews – and that is what the model is designed for – you can use digital coding tools for qualitative data analysis. The best-known and most widely used tool in the academic context is MAXQDA, but also on the rise are applications that use AI, such as ATLAS.ti. It is important to always check whether you are allowed by your institute to use AI-driven tools, as they often require you to upload data that must remain protected.

The research starts with an inventory of all published reviews in a certain period or from a specified number of sources (such as magazines,

newspapers or websites). Then you take a sample of all the book reviews you have found. Op de Beek's research (2014), for example, covered book reviewing between 1955 and 2005 by selecting 734 book reviews from the total number of reviews (1,254) of newly published Dutch fictional prose in six reference years from five different newspapers. In this case, it was a stratified sample: not an at-random percentage of all the reviews found, but a percentage per reference year and per source (newspaper). This approach is recommended in order to get a good and reliable picture. To determine the sample, you can use a sample calculator, for example Qualtrics.

Of course, you should always consider the size of the sample that is attainable within your scope of research. It is obvious that a PhD student, who has four years to carry out their research, can handle more analyses than a Master's student. For any Master's thesis, a sample of approximately thirty to fifty reviews is manageable. Keep that in mind when formulating your research hypothesis and goals. Do not choose too long a period or too many sources if your time is limited. The risk then is that your sample is either not manageable or too small to draw reliable conclusions.

Another methodological issue to mention is the model's reliability. The coding process cannot be completely objective. Sometimes evaluative utterances are ambiguous or can be classified in different evaluation domains. When two or more researchers are involved in the same project, inter-rater reliability enhances the quality of the coding.² In that case, two or more researchers code evaluative judgements (in the same reviews) separately from each other, and then compare the codings. When only one researcher is involved, then intra-rater reliability is the solution. The researcher will code a sample of the reviews twice, with an interval of several weeks, say two months.

The coding procedure creates a rough categorization in evaluation domains, after which a more detailed inquiry can follow. Once all evaluative statements in a large set of reviews have been coded, it is possible to quantify the data: to see how often statements of certain categories appear in the book reviews, for instance in comparison to other evaluation domains. In a subsequent qualitative research phase, it is then possible to select from all the reviews only those statements with a particular code for further comparison. In these analyses there is more room for the contextualization of the evaluations – which critic said what, in what newspaper and section, in response to what genre of novel? – than in the quantitative research. For instance, what exactly is called 'funny' by whom

and what interesting word choices do critics make? What constants and developments can be seen in this category 'humour' over time or between critics? Thus, those constants and developments can be analysed both in a quantitative sense – the numbers of statements in the evaluation domain and their relationship to other aspects and qualities – and in a qualitative sense – the wording of the statements, the criteria made explicit and the common concepts. In the case study we will give an example of this, but let us first take a look at an adaptation of the model.

Adaptation for another domain: children's literature criticism

As stated, the above model was developed with literary novels for adults in mind. But the systematics and format can be easily adopted for other domains within the literary system or even other cultural disciplines, such as music reviews. Here we will give an example of an adaptation of the model for reviews of children's literature, as it is being developed in current PhD research of Bea Ros.

To be suitable for analysing this domain of book reviewing, the model of Linders and Op de Beek is adapted to the specific characteristics of children's literature and of reviews of this genre. We will not discuss the adapted model in detail, but highlight a few examples of adaptations.

Let us first look at the aspects. This is the easy part, because children's books share many properties with novels for adults. In both cases they involve a story conceived and constructed by a writer in language about certain characters and with a certain theme. However, there is one aspect that is characteristic of children's books but rarely found in novels for adults: illustrations. So this aspect must be added. An associated quality category is 'artistry', which is added as an extension to 'Literary/intellectual qualities'.

Not surprisingly, the qualities require further changes or additions. An important difference in book reviewing for adult and children's literature is that in the latter case the critic does not coincide with the book's intended reader (see e.g. O'Sullivan 2005; Ghesquiere 2009). After all, an adult critic discusses and evaluates books for young readers (0–16 years old) and does so on the basis of assumptions of what readers of a certain age can handle or like, or from the perspective of what adults deem appropriate, permissible or useful for young readers. This asymmetrical communication is characteristic of both children's literature and criticism of it (see, among others, Lypp 1977; Hulsens 1980; Joosen and Vloeberghs 2008; Ghesquiere 2009).

That child, the intended reader, always plays a role between writer and book and therefore between book and critic. Therefore, characteristic of and common in children's literature criticism are evaluative statements that concern the (young) reader. The Linders–Op de Beek model already partly provides for this, but for children's literature criticism, refinement of the categories is needed, for example breaking down the 'didactic quality' (10) into the qualities of formation and patronage. Formation is a more common term than didacticism in reflections on children's literature, in part to avoid confusion with school and textbooks. This property includes anything that children can learn from their reading, be it words, facts or life lessons. This is visible, for instance, in an evaluative judgement like: "The unexpected discoveries Marcella makes make her more mature, and with her the reader" (*De Telegraaf*, 19 October 1984).

That children's books should be formative often comes up in discussions of children's literature. Indeed, children's books are often referred to as an educator. But the formation must be subtle, with the right balance between teaching and amusement, between '*wormcruyt en suycker*' ('wormwood and sugar') (Daalder 1950), between telling and preaching, and between childlike and childish – in other words, between formation and patronage. Therefore, 'patronizing' has been added as a separate quality category. An example can be found in this judgement: "Without being preachy or sentimental, she writes about those issues which interest every girl" (*De Telegraaf*, 10 December 1955).

This balance also relates to another important concept within children's literature: adaptation (see, among others, Klingberg 1973; Shavit 1986; Nodelman 2008). In this context, this refers to the adaptation of style, tone, theme, structure and form to match with the age and understanding of the young reader. The way and extent to which an author does this is a common evaluation criterion in children's literature criticism and a reason to include 'adaptation' as a quality in the model. This category includes expressions such as: clearly explained, going 'over the head' of children, (not) well adapted to the understanding of young children, etc. An example is this judgement in *Trouw* (26 March 2005): "*Verdriet* is a beautiful, but intense, sad book; you might wonder whether it's okay to offer it to young children. I think so."

A further relevant reader-related quality is 'identification': the degree to which the reader can identify with the story and the characters and situations described in it. Initially this quality category was also part of

Linders and Op de Beek's model. It was eventually dropped because they rarely encountered it in their corpus. In children's literature criticism, on the other hand, it is a common evaluation criterion. The possibility of recognition, or identification, is considered an important attribute for helping children and adolescents to engage with the text. An example is: "Krik is a pleasantly naïve little animal who wonders about people's habits in a way that is recognizable for young readers" (*Trouw*, 23 April 2005).

The analysis model for children's literature criticism thus developed has thirteen aspects and eighteen properties (see Table 2). It retains the systematic methodology of the original model and can also be used for a large sample of reviews of children's books, in both a quantitative and a qualitative way.

Table 2: The Ros model (forthcoming)

Aspects	Attributed qualities
A. Style	1. Efficiency
B. Composition	2. Coherence
C. Setting	3. Continuity (author/event)
D. Dialogues	4. Intensity/liveliness
E. Plot	5. Literary/artistic/intellectual qualities
F. Characters	6. Tension
G. Theme/ideas	7. Humour
H. Symbolism	8. Reality/credibility
I. Illustrations	9. Emotionality
J. Author/intention	10. Formative qualities
K. Appearance (including price)	11. Patronizing
L. Parts/whole	12. Adaptation
M. Other	13. Identification
	14. Religious qualities
	15. Socio-political qualities
	16. Moral qualities
	17. Originality
	18. Other

4. Case study

We already described how certain assumptions about how critics operate can come into being. On this basis, hypotheses can be formulated regarding the value judgements of critics, and more precisely, regarding certain

categories in the model. A specific hypothesis regarding Dutch book reviewing that can serve as a case study is the expectation concerning evaluation of ideological qualities of books in the 1950s.

The period 1955–1975 is often marked as a turning point in Dutch literary criticism: the years in which a work-immanent approach to literature became the norm. This expected development must be seen in context of the heyday of pillarization in Dutch society, the time when – thinking from pillar-bound thinking styles – religious, political and moral standards would have been dominant in virtually all institutional and professional affiliations and behaviours. In his literary history *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945–2005*, Hugo Brems discerns an ideologically compartmentalized (‘pillarized’) and rather moralistically patronizing criticism in the 1950s, which by 1965 had come to be considerably more ideologically tolerant as well as more work-oriented. It may then be expected that the validity of ideological criteria, such as socio-political, religious and moral values, came under pressure in the evaluation of literature (Ruiter and Smulders 1996; Brems 2006). In the following decades, literary book reviewing in daily newspapers has repeatedly been characterized as *aesthetically* oriented, with scholars claiming that there were hardly any moral or emotional judgements and mainly critical attention to the formalistic aspects of literary works. The question that arises, then, is whether we see a decline in evaluation of didactic, religious, socio-political and moral qualities when we take a closer look at the codes that were attributed by Linders and Op de Beek.

The corpus used for this analysis was compiled by listing all book reviews of original Dutch literary prose that appeared in the newspapers *Algemeen Dagblad*, *Algemeen/NRC Handelsblad*, *Het Parool*, *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant*. A representative sample was selected randomly, which resulted in a corpus consisting of thirty samples of reviews (five newspapers multiplied by six reference years: 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2005).

The selected texts were copied into MAXQDA; sometimes they were available digitally, otherwise they had to be retyped. In MAXQDA, texts can be assigned codes, which form the basis of calculations. In this study, codes were allocated using the analytical instrument described above, which means one code for each evaluation domain, i.e. in each case a combination of an aspect and an attributed quality. Two coders analysed the data. Each coder coded the evaluations in half the total amount of reviews

(evenly divided across the samples). Fifteen percent of all reviews were coded by both coders so that inter-coder reliability could also be assessed. In addition, the word counts as well as the percentage of words that were part of evaluative statements were registered for all reviews. Statistical analyses were performed for all aspects and attributed qualities.

A first conclusion concerning our specific hypothesis about ideological evaluations that could be drawn from the corpus was that the proportion of political, religious, moral or didactic evaluations per review was low in all newspapers and in all six reference years. Relatively speaking, the proportion of these judgements taken together was still highest in 1955 – in this respect the findings match the expectations – but even in that year such judgements still made up a very small percentage of all evaluations. The expectation of a compartmentalized literary criticism in the 1950s could also be recognized to a certain extent on the basis of the religious evaluations: religious values played a modest role in the evaluation of literature in the Protestant newspaper *Trouw* and the Catholic *de Volkskrant* in 1955, but no or only a negligible role in the other newspapers.

Now, let us take a step further and subject the same material to a qualitative analysis. In MAXQDA it is possible to examine only those statements that have been given a certain code. This enabled us to take a closer look at the content of the sentences that were dealing with ideological (didactic, moral, socio-political and religious) qualities. Dutch book reviewers in the newspapers hardly ever directly or *explicitly* comment on literary texts from the perspective of their own ideological convictions. However, they do evaluate the ideological commitment of writers, the way they give shape to it in their novels and stories, and the ability to also involve the reader in current issues and universal themes.

The subsequent qualitative analysis showed that critics who evaluate novels by religious standards neither rejected nor praised authors or texts *on the basis of* the religious views they articulated. They did pay attention to how religion is addressed in the book, but it was not decisive in their overall judgement about a book. The sample corpus did not include reviews of W. F. Hermans, but it did include reviews of some other famous authors, often described as controversial, for example Jan Wolkers and Ferdinand Bordewijk. The following quote is from the Protestant critic J. van Doorne in a review of *The Golbertons*, a novel by Bordewijk. It shows how religious qualities did play a role, and moral ones too, but that Van Doorne gives more weight to the literary qualities of the book:

I never escape the impression of a certain sickness when I read Bordewijk. [...] I believe that the cause of this sickness in Bordewijk's work is to be found in his vague, strange religiosity. He also deals with God and death in *The Golbertons*. He does this by having a kind of preacher appear in his book, who has the impossible first name "Ece". [...] A sad book, *The Golbertons*. Yet still a book by Bordewijk. And that means an excellent, surprising treatment of language, a subtle unravelling of feelings, an unmerciful probing of secret voids in man. Like so many other times when reading Bordewijk, I was captivated by this book, as I am captivated by a large insect: that insect belongs to my world, but what a distance there is between that animal and me. It frightens me a little. (Van Doorne, *Trouw*, 14 May 1965)

To look further into evaluations on moral grounds, the evaluations were analysed that were given the 'moral qualities' code in the coding process. Broadly speaking, quantitatively, they showed a downward trend from 1955 to 2005. One explanation for this lies in the increasingly less frequently assigned characterizations of a specific aspect, namely the author's intentions. In 1955, these intentions were often evaluated with qualifications like 'sincere', 'pure' and 'sympathetic' that have a moral connotation.

In the downward trend in moral characterizations, we saw no quantitative differences between newspapers, but some differences between different sections in the same newspaper. Some newspapers had separate sections for, for instance, books from religious publishers (see Op de Beek 2014, 78–95), or for a particular genre of novels, such as thrillers, whereas on the literature page in the same newspaper 'high literature' was reviewed by renowned critics – and the latter may have been more likely to judge the compositional and stylistic properties of texts.

Furthermore, in the qualitative analysis of the *moral* judgements, a distinction could be made between evaluations on moral grounds in the strict sense – 'I disapprove or approve of this based on my own moral beliefs' – and evaluations of the moral qualities of the texts, in which the critic does not engage personally – 'it is admirable that the author never makes moral judgements'. We could never have found such a general trend if we had not been able to retrieve the judgements with the codes for 'moral qualities' to compare them in a substudy.

We will not discuss all the details of the case study here, but even on the basis of the findings we have discussed here, we were able to draw some conclusions. The hypothesis that there would be a significant decrease

in ideological judgements could not be confirmed: based on the sample, ideological qualities played a small role in book reviewing in these Dutch newspapers and even if they were present, literary qualities continued to play a dominant role. At the same time, the qualitative analysis also provided a nuanced picture of what ideological book reviewing actually looked like in Dutch newspapers.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, a method was presented for systematically analysing value judgements in book reviews. Central to the method is a model that can be used to attribute aspect and quality codes to these judgements, which in combination form evaluation domain codes. As stated, the model was developed with literary fiction for adults in mind, but the systematics and format can easily be adapted for other domains within the literary system, or even more broadly for other cultural disciplines, such as music reviews.

Applying the model then works in two ways: we can code a large corpus of reviews and look for unexpected patterns that are interesting to dive further into. Another possibility is to test specific expectations by formulating hypotheses in the occurrence of certain aspects or qualities in a corpus. The latter is also possible with smaller corpora that you can put together yourself. This is how students used the model in their theses to study, for instance, the developments within evaluations in reviews of Remco Campert's prose, or to make a quantitative and qualitative comparison of newspaper reviews of twenty-first-century novels with online reviews on *bol.com* and *Goodreads*.

Notes

¹ "Nu al is het zo ver gekomen dat de literaire kritiek zo goed als uitgestorven lijkt. Meer en meer neemt de onversneden belediging de plaats in van literaire kritiek. Wie met behulp van een tekstverwerker nog geen volzin construeren kan en bovendien te weinig feitenkennis bezit om met succes iets wat hij niet weet, op te zoeken in een encyclopedie, brengt het toch gemakkelijk tot letterkundig redacteur van een krant."

² Inter-rater reliability is the degree to which two or more assessors agree with each other (see e.g. Van Ark and Van den Hove 2019). This is expressed as a coefficient; the most well known and common is Cohen's kappa, where a coefficient of 0.20 counts as insufficient (slight), of 0.60 as acceptable and of 1.0 as excellent (Landis and Koch 1977). The same is necessary for intra-rater reliability

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Computer-Assisted Qualitative Analysis

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1. Introduction

This chapter will highlight how computer-assisted qualitative analysis can be used to examine a vast corpus of texts and to analyse how certain ideas or interpretations are constructed in literary book reviews. We will apply this method to an investigation of the referencing of Modernism, specifically the mentioning of modernist authors James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in the reception of two metamodern novels.

Metamodernism is one of various labels – among them, New Sincerity, Altermodernism, Digimodernism, etc. – coined to describe the post-post-modern cultural condition. Around the turn of the millennium, scholars like Linda Hutcheon (2002) announced the demise of Postmodernism, the previously dominant cultural paradigm, and suggested ways forward for art and fiction in particular. In 2010, a groundbreaking, exploratory essay by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, entitled ‘Notes on metamodernism’, kick-started a lively academic debate by inviting scholars to chart and consider the cultural manifestation of what they identified as Metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). Since then, Metamodernism research has become a productive strand within literary studies as well, with numerous studies charting the presence of the increasingly dominant ‘structure of feeling’ in twenty-first-century literary writing. Introduced by Raymond Williams, a structure of feeling denotes an emerging sensibility among, for instance, a younger generation, that develops alongside a cultural dominant before it takes over as the main interpretation of people’s place in history. The debate among scholars about the early-twentieth-century structure’s exact nature, as well as its relation to Modernism and Postmodernism, is ongoing and has spawned numerous publications. ‘Metamodernism’ is increasingly accepted as the preferred term for this structure of feeling. The impact of this emerging dominant can be traced in different art disciplines, including

literature. British fiction, the object of quite a number of academic literary Metamodernism publications, has responded to the present historical phase in diverse ways, but specific trends are clearly visible. For example, authors rework modernist stylistic practice and attempt to move beyond the excesses of postmodern fatalism and irony to carefully reintroduce and foreground authenticity, sincerity and empathy in their works.

Our research starts from the assumption that the effects and influence of any emerging structure of feeling will be felt, recognized and responded to across the entire field of literary production, not just in literature itself. Although academic research on metamodern art has, indeed, seen a significant surge since 2010, the majority of studies consist of close readings of case studies: novels that display characteristics of the metamodern cultural sensibility. We believe that the investigation of how readers interpret and describe the aspects of literary Metamodernism should focus much more on all participants in the field of cultural production, including those who, traditionally, have less authority or symbolic capital, like non-professional or so-called 'lay' reviewers.

In the case study presented in this chapter, we will specifically zoom in on the role that Modernism plays in the reception of contemporary British metamodern fiction. Although interpretations of Metamodernism have varied since Vermeulen and Van den Akker's seminal essay 'Notes on metamodernism' fuelled the debate, a key element in its conceptualization is the way the structure of feeling seems to 'upcycle' previous literary traditions, specifically Modernism and Postmodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). It can be argued that the emergence of Metamodernism runs parallel to the resurfacing of Modernism in early-twenty-first-century fiction. This chapter will centre on the question of how two British novels which have been categorized as 'metamodern' by literary scholars are reviewed in reference to (the work of) their twentieth-century, 'High' modernist predecessors. We will demonstrate how computer-assisted qualitative analysis may be employed to compare the reception of multiple literary texts by mapping a vast corpus of book reviews in print form. Although the case study presented below focuses on the reception of metamodern novels as referencing Modernism, the method illustrated in this chapter could also be applied to similar projects about other cultural dominants and their afterlives.

2. The method

In the following two sections, we will list the steps to be taken as well as the questions we ask when applying the method of computer-assisted qualitative analysis to our case study of the reception of two metamodern novels. The novels concerned are Will Self's *Umbrella* (2012) and Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012). As the illustration of our methodology in section 4 will show, both novels are interpreted and evaluated as having been influenced by, in particular, the modernist writing of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The two novels and their authors earn symbolic capital in the process of being recognized as continuing, innovating or metafictionally reflecting on the type of modernist writing that reviewers in the present apparently almost exclusively associate with Joyce and Woolf.

Theoretically, our research has a close affinity with the sociology of culture as developed and conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu (1983) and others. As we see it, the legacies of Modernism and Postmodernism are continuously interpreted and redefined in an ever-evolving subdivided field with social agents, such as authors, literary scholars, professional critics and lay reviewers, vying for positions of power. Our broader study, beyond this specific chapter, of the reception of contemporary British novels seen as 'neo-' or 'retro-'modernist, will give insight into the ways in which agents with different and sometimes competing interests attribute meaning and, thus, symbolic capital to terms like 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' while assessing literature. Of course, the questions we investigate are also firmly embedded in Metamodernism studies. Following Vermeulen and Van den Akker among others, we build on explorative and descriptive analyses of traces in the arts of what has been theorized as a structure of feeling.

Our combined Bourdieusian and metamodern project is set to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of a new structure of feeling like Metamodernism by examining how readers with different positions in the field of cultural production connect contemporary British fiction to the literary legacies of earlier cultural dominants.

The methodology presented in this chapter calls for the analysis of a wealth of reception material, coming from a multitude of actors – in this case professional and lay reviewers – in the literary field. This requires a tool which enables us to scan a large corpus of research material and yield results for a qualitative reading, which we will explain in the section below.

3. Tools and techniques

When preparing for a computer-assisted qualitative analysis of a large body of reception material the first step is to select the reviews that will constitute the corpus under investigation. A number of important decisions need to be made when selecting these book reviews, and it goes without saying that the research question(s) of any project should be the key deciding factor. Reviews may be included in the corpus on the basis of the nationality of their authors or the location from which the media and platforms for which they write operate; you could also make the language in which these reviewers write a selection criterion. Depending on your research question(s), both ‘professional’ reviews published in the established media as well as texts by (online) lay reviewers may be selected and copy-pasted to individual Word files. This is important because some of the URL links to the reviews may become defunct in the future. A separate spreadsheet could function as an archive of all the details of the corpus texts, each referred to with a unique name like ‘Uoor’ (for a review of Will Self’s *Umbrella*). The resulting overview of details could then include: author name, publication date and medium or platform, the review’s status (‘professional’ or ‘lay’), and its word count.

Platforms like Goodreads or Amazon are treasure troves of lay reviews, but those can also be found on personal blogs through, for instance, search engines like Google. Most (national) newspapers also publish their book reviews on their websites, even if paywalls may be an obstacle while gathering corpus texts.¹ We advise only choosing reviews that were published within a clearly defined period after the publication of the first edition of a novel – certainly when it comes to the category of online lay reviews, which will be added to long after a novel was first published. Our reasoning here is that reviews published after that cut-off point will most likely reflect on the broader interpretation of the novel and build on the previous reception of the text, a process also known as orchestration. Lay reviews can also be quite short, so to avoid the creation of an unmanageably large corpus with a relatively high number of texts that do not contain enough words to be able to sustain a proper argument, a minimum length (of 100 or 150 words, for example) could also be one of the selection criteria.

An important issue to address is the identity of the lay reviewers and whether their names, be it their real one or a pseudonym, should be disclosed (see the introduction of this handbook for a general statement

about ethical questions such as these). You could argue that the lay reviews need not be anonymized since they were published on online platforms and are, thus, freely accessible in the public domain and easily traceable.

After the composition of the corpus, all reviews need to be scanned manually with the aim of bringing into view the concepts that are particularly relevant for our research questions, in this case author names. These will be included in a list of labels to be entered into a software program like MAXQDA as tags, which can be used to code a vast number of segments of material – text, audio or video files – including survey data, SPSS files (see chapter 5.3) and social media content (MAXQDA requires the purchasing of a licence, with lower rates for students and PhD candidates, but free and open-source programs such as QualCoder and Taguette can be used as alternatives). Tags may be concepts (like ‘Modernism’ or ‘avant-garde’), titles of artworks (*Ulysses*; ‘The Waste Land’) or names of authors (‘James Joyce’; ‘Virginia Woolf’).

Both the Word files containing the actual reviews and the list of tags are then fed into the coding program, which will trace and code the occurrence of tags throughout the corpus. For instance, the 111th review of Self’s *Umbrella* (named ‘U111’), contains twenty concepts, titles or names from the list of tags. This overview already points to passages that need to be read in detail (see below, where the qualitative part of this method is further explained), but MAXQDA can generate a variety of (visualized representations of) results and, for example, calculate the distance between tags like ‘Woolf’ and ‘stream-of-consciousness’ or, indeed, between ‘Woolf’ and ‘Joyce’. Tables and graphs from the coding program will instantly show which tags appear most frequently and where in particular: for example, in the established press or in the lay reception.

After MAXQDA has directed us via its coding of tags towards significant passages in the corpus, we read all the relevant reviews in detail to examine the contexts in which the concepts, names and titles are used. This qualitative analysis is essential to our research, as the results generated by MAXQDA alone do not yield significant results – at least, not in light of our research question. Thus, the qualitative part of our method involves a detailed reading of the passages in the reviews that include mentions of the tags MAXQDA has traced and coded for us.

When analysing the use of labels in reviews, we ask ourselves the following questions: Are they attributed to the novel under review and, if so, to which of its aspects (for instance, genre, style, themes, characterization,

narrative techniques)? How are they defined or interpreted by the reviewer, and what role do they play in a reviewer's evaluation of a novel and/or its author?

However, there are a number of issues to take into account when interpreting the results produced by the MAXQDA coding in a research project like the one outlined here. Firstly, when mentions of the tags you are interested in are traced and coded by the MAXQDA program, are they actually referenced in relation to the novel under review? Secondly, can mentions be attributed to the author of the review in question, or are we dealing with quotations from other reviews or sources? Thirdly, does a reviewer perhaps use a label to claim that it does *not*, in fact, apply to a novel or author? And lastly, do passages in reviews without any tags nevertheless contribute to the suggestion that they are relevant to the novel the reception of which you are studying? These are the questions we ask ourselves when close reading the corpus texts – questions that can only be answered with the help of qualitative analysis.

4. Case study

In this section, we will apply the method described above to analyse the comparisons made, in both professional and lay criticism, between twenty-first-century authors Will Self and Zadie Smith and two icons of literary Modernism: James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The novels that we selected for our case study have both been interpreted by scholars as metamodern and actively respond to, or reimagine, the legacies of Modernism and Postmodernism. Academic studies of Smith's novel by, for instance, Nick Bentley and Lee Konstantinou, highlight the formal structure of the novel and its post-ironic stance as markers of the metamodern structure of feeling (Bentley 2018; Konstantinou 2017). Professional and lay reviewers also recognize the modernist influence in *NW*, for instance referring to the novel's "Joycean play" (Mars-Jones 2012). In his analysis of *Umbrella*, Nick Lavery focuses on Self's depiction of consciousness from a metamodernist approach (Lavery 2018), while lay reviewer Winstonsdad argues that Self is "tinkering with Modernism", concluding that the author "has updated the Modernist style" (Winstonsdad 2012).

Zadie Smith herself has actively reflected on the inspiration she draws from the modernist tradition. In a 2013 piece for the *Guardian Book Club* she observed:

When I was writing this novel what I really wanted to do was create people in language. To do that you must try to do justice simultaneously to the unruly, subjective qualities of language, and to what I want to call the concrete “thingyness” of people. Which was Virginia Woolf’s way of being a modernist – she loved language and people simultaneously – and her model is important to me. I admire Beckett and respect Joyce. I love Woolf. Whenever the going gets tough I reread her journals and it helps me through. (Smith 2013)

Similarly, Will Self openly reflects on the impact of Modernism on his work, for instance in his 2012 *Guardian* piece entitled ‘Will Self: Modernism and me’ (Self 2012). In an article for *Literary Hub* (2018), Self celebrates the experimentalism of modernist writing and underlines its relevance for the contemporary novel:

I write in praise of difficulty in writing – specifically difficulty in the novel form. Why? Well, not least because of the Modernist direction my own fiction has taken since I began my *Umbrella* Trilogy seven years ago – but also because I believe that in the contemporary era, with the novel under assault from digital text and other more compelling narrative forms, only soi-disant “difficulty” can preserve the form’s unique capability to both describe the contours of our brave new world, and enfold the reader in them. (Self 2018)

The reviews and articles cited above reveal that for Self and Smith, literary Modernism represents an artistic ideal to aspire to, and readers recognize its influence in *NW* and *Umbrella*. By focusing on the associations drawn between the two twenty-first-century authors and their renowned predecessors, we can analyse in greater detail how the legacy of Modernism takes shape in contemporary fiction and its reception.

For this project we decided to focus on the names of Joyce and Woolf, as they were coded the most in our MAXQDA corpus in comparison to other modernist and postmodernist authors such as Samuel Beckett and E. M. Forster. To analyse the presence of Joyce and Woolf in the reception of the novels by Self and Smith, we compiled a corpus consisting of professional and lay reviews of *Umbrella* and *NW*, which we copied to text files and for which we created a spreadsheet including details about, for

example, the source and publication date. The professional reviews were drawn from established media such as *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, while for the lay reviews, we consulted Amazon, Goodreads and personal blogs. The lay reviewers are listed according to the names or pseudonyms which they themselves provided in their publication. We selected reviews that were published no later than two years after the novels' publication date (2012 to 2014). We also set a limit for the minimum number of words that each review should contain – 150 – as reviews of fewer words will most likely not be able to build a sustained line of argumentation. Before we ran the tags through MAXQDA, we performed a thorough check of the material, which, for instance, comprised re-examining the publication dates and eliminating 'doublings' (reviews that copy another verbatim).

After 'cleaning' the material and removing doublings, the corpus of *Umbrella* consisted of 111 reviews that met our criteria; the corpus of *NW* comprised 170 reviews. We then ran a search through MAXQDA, scanning the combined corpus for the tags "Joyce" and "Woolf". The resulting overview revealed that the name Virginia Woolf, and tags associated with it (e.g. "Woolfian"), appeared 19 times in the corpus of *NW* reviews, as opposed to 16 times in the corpus of reviews of *Umbrella*. References to James Joyce surfaced 23 times in the reviews of *NW*, whereas MAXQDA generated 87 hits for the corpus of *Umbrella* reviews. This overview, limited as it is, already generates various insights: Woolf and Joyce both feature in the reception of the two novels, but whereas the appearance of the modernist authors in the corpus of *NW* is fairly even in numbers, the dominance of Joyce in the reception of *Umbrella* compared to in the reception of *NW* stands out. Other quantitative results could be drawn from MAXQDA's coding of the tags: percentages revealing the presence of Joyce and Woolf in the overall corpus, for instance, or calculations based on the number of hits in light of the number of reviews. This will be especially efficient in research projects with large corpora, in which distant reading will play a more important role.²

However, quantitative results like these are not of direct interest to us: we use the results generated by MAXQDA as signposts, which alert us to possibly relevant passages in reviews that we can then analyse in a qualitative manner. In other words, we are especially interested in *how* Joyce and Woolf feature in the reception of Self's and Smith's novels *when* they do, not exclusively in the number of appearances in the entire corpus, for example. A qualitative analysis is needed to examine the content and

nature of the associations and comparisons drawn between these four authors. In an analysis of the use of tags like 'modernist' or 'avant-garde' it is necessary to perform a detailed reading of the corpus to understand how readers interpret and define those terms when they use them. On the surface, this definition question may seem less complex when investigating the occurrence of author names like 'Joyce' and 'Woolf'. But even in the case of 'Joyce' and 'Woolf', only a detailed reading of the corpus texts will reveal what 'Woolf' means to contemporary readers of fiction. If Zadie Smith is compared to Virginia Woolf (or Smith's *NW* to Woolf's work), then what exactly does Woolf's name signify: is it shorthand for a 'stream-of-consciousness' technique of narration, or is the name predominantly used in reference to a novel like *NW* in discussion of its themes? Or both?

Our research certainly suggests that when Joyce is mentioned – either in reviews of *NW* or *Umbrella* – it is almost always in reference to *Ulysses*, hardly ever to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Dubliners*. While the MAXQDA analysis of our corpus instantly shows that Will Self is more often compared to Joyce than Zadie Smith is (possibly as a result of a gender bias), only a detailed reading of reviews of *Umbrella* will uncover which Joyce and which aspects of his work reviewers have in mind when interpreting the novel as processing the legacy of twentieth-century Modernism. In addition, Joyce and Woolf tend to be mentioned as a pair, both in the reviews of *NW* and the reception of *Umbrella*. In comparison to those of their contemporaries, Joyce's and Woolf's names appear so frequently (and, thus, as a fixed combination) that they become synonymous with (British) modernist writing. Both the analysis by MAXQDA and the qualitative reading of the corpus of reviews create the impression that the legacy of their works dominates the early-twenty-first-century interpretation and appreciation of British literary Modernism. A qualitative analysis will answer the question of how that legacy is defined approximately one hundred years later, in our own post-postmodern, or metamodern, moment.

Thus, a detailed reading of all reviews will contribute to the qualification of the results generated by MAXQDA when coding corpus texts. Mindful of our research questions, we are especially interested in those passages in reviews that explicitly reference James Joyce and Virginia Woolf as having influenced the writing of *NW* and *Umbrella*. But, even in those instances, caution is warranted. For example, as anticipated in

section 3, a reviewer might mention Woolf in relation to *NW* but only to suggest that Zadie Smith's fiction is *not* like Woolf's. In his review for the website *The Millions*, K. Thomas Khan interprets *NW* as an update of *Mrs Dalloway*, but also feels that Smith's complicated handling of her main themes is "unlike Woolf's more direct approach" (Thomas Khan 2012). Similarly, one Goodreads reviewer drops Woolf's name only to make the point that *NW* may at first create a Woolfian impression but that it is actually about a different class of characters and does not continue the "stream-of-consciousness impersonation" of its opening chapters (Rose 2012). In reviews of *Umbrella*, too, Joyce and Woolf are sometimes mentioned to make clear that Self's novel deviates from their modernist writing: "Whereas the likes of Joyce and Woolf were inspired by the speculative interpretations of psychoanalysis, Self frames his action in the mechanistic language of psychiatry" (Hunter-Tilney 2012). On rare occasions, Joyce and/or Woolf appear in discussions of twentieth-century Modernism that are not connected to the formal qualities or themes of *NW* or *Umbrella* at all (Daniel 2012).

MAXQDA may also report mentions of Joyce and Woolf in corpus texts that refer to *other* reviewers' linking of *NW* and *Umbrella* to Joyce and Woolf. K. Thomas Kahn writes that "[s]everal critics have already pointed out *NW*'s debt to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" (Thomas Kahn 2012), while Zoe says of *Umbrella* that "[m]any reviewers (some bemoaning it) have noted [its] homage to the Modernist novel", before namechecking Joyce (Zoe 2013). A review of *NW* in *The Washington Post* even mentions Woolf in a quote from Smith herself (Charles 2012). Éireann Lorsung emphatically *rejects* other readers' conclusions that *NW* is a Joyce- and Woolf-inspired modernist novel: "I wonder if that is in part or in the main because they have read about Zadie Smith, or read her essays, and know she is interested in Modernist writers [...] But the novel is not a Modernist novel" (Lorsung 2013). In a similar vein, one Amazon reviewer warns against "lazy comparisons with *Ulysses*", because "yes, Joyce mentioned umbrellas, but was there anything he didn't mention in that tedious word salad?" (de Ferrars 2012).

Moreover, a number of 'hits' in MAXQDA concern implicit, ambiguous or contradictory comparisons between Self and Smith on the one hand and Joyce and Woolf on the other. Quite a number of *Umbrella* reviews highlight the fact that it opens with an epigraph from Joyce without automatically wanting to suggest a connection between Self's writing and that

of Joyce (Lawson 2012; Nolen 2012; Anonymous 2012). Also, Daniel Green of *The Reading Experience* discusses critic James Woods' appreciation of Smith's novel, which is explained by the way in which "the realism of *NW* has gone inward, validating the triumph of the 'free indirect style' pioneered by Joyce and Woolf (and earlier Henry James)" (Green 2013). Joyce and Woolf are named here, but only indirectly in relation to *NW* via its use of free indirect speech. Even more complicated is a review of *NW* by lay reviewer New Red Indian: "Smith [sic] most recent novel, *NW*, while retracing steps taken by the postmodernists attempts to steer clear of both the easy course of modernist heroism – the legacy of Woolf and Joyce that hang heavily over this work – and the detritus of Postmodernism by shifting the focus of the novel from the self in crisis to the anxieties of place" (New Red Indian 2012). Joyce and Woolf are mentioned here to suggest that *NW* has undergone their influence, but New Red Indian simultaneously implies that Smith tries to stay away from their very legacy. Lastly, there are reviews that do not mention Joyce or Woolf at all but still make the comparison – most obviously by evaluating *NW* and *Umbrella* as novels that recall *Mrs Dalloway* or *Ulysses* without naming their authors. So, even in a research project with tags like 'Joyce' and 'Woolf' that do not require definition – unlike 'modernist' and 'avant-garde' – it is important to systematically complement the coding of reviews with a detailed reading of the corpus to bring into view the questions above.

5. Conclusion

With the case study presented in this chapter we have demonstrated how computer-assisted qualitative research enabled us to first produce an overview of the instances when James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are referenced in a large corpus of reviews of Will Self's *Umbrella* and Zadie Smith's *NW*. After that, we could analyse, in great detail, which comparisons are made between the two modernist authors and their contemporary successors. One benefit of this method is that the generated results are not only relevant for the research question that we posed but that the process inevitably reveals other avenues to explore, in this case a possible gender bias, the pairing of Joyce and Woolf in the reviews, and the fact that certain titles of the authors' work appear to be more dominant than others. Indeed, conducting research through

computer-assisted qualitative analysis yields insights which provide a response to the initial question while simultaneously creating a broader context for the issue under review. Although for a research project with a smaller scope the search function in text files could be efficiently used to trace tags, MAXQDA allows us to explore considerably larger corpora, which, for this case study, could be easily extended by adding more novels and author names, for instance. Despite a few disadvantages inherent to our approach – the existence of paywalls, the complexities involved in using public sources, and possible doublings in the corpus – overall, the benefits outweigh any practical obstacles.

For our broader research on literary Metamodernism, the value of the method also seems clear: whereas the current studies of metamodern novels centre mainly on close readings of those texts, our focus on the *reception* of metamodern fiction by both professional and lay reviewers enables us to trace the metamodern structure of feeling in a wider context than just the artworks themselves. The initial results of the case study presented in this chapter suggest that, to readers, Modernism is, indeed, as theorists and literary scholars have suggested, an integral part of these metamodern novels and that the manifestation of this literary legacy in contemporary British fiction warrants further investigation.

There are multiple options for future research and other avenues to explore: we could run the tags ‘Postmodernism’ or ‘postmodernist’ through the corpus, as, in light of Metamodernism, these are equally relevant terms compared to ‘Modernism’. We could also focus on questions related to authorship or apply the same method to a selection of American novels, to draw conclusions about the manifestation of Anglo-American Metamodernism. Computer-assisted qualitative analysis provides the opportunity to combine and compare large-scale and detailed analyses, which may include a wide variety of texts by different actors from the field of cultural production, and seems, therefore, especially suited for reception studies.

Notes

¹ There are ways to bypass this problem, for instance by searching for material on university platforms such as UniNexus and Delpher.

² For an extensive explanation of the possibilities of the distant reading method, see Chapter 12.

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Computational Analysis: Fanfiction as Literary Reception

Julia Neugarten

1. Introduction

This chapter presents a guide to applying collocation analysis – a method used in computational literary studies – to study literary reception in fanfiction using AntConc (Anthony 2023a). The chapter has five sections. Section 1 offers an introduction to computational literary studies. I also define fanfiction and provide a framework for understanding it as literary reception. Section 2 reflects on the methodological considerations underpinning collocation analysis: how do you create a corpus? And what are the ethics of collecting and using fanfiction, and web data more generally, for academic study? Section 3 describes the process of collecting a dataset through webscraping and illustrates how to use AntConc to study collocational patterns. Section 4 introduces a case study: fanfiction about Hades and Persephone from Greek mythology. Finally, section 5 reflects on the method of computationally analysing the collocational patterns in a fanfiction corpus and provides how-to bullet points that recap that method. Each section includes suggestions for further study.

Computational literary studies for literary reception

The field of computational literary studies (CLS) is vast and growing quickly. Within CLS, methods using novel technologies like machine learning are currently gaining traction, but other methods – including the method of collocation analysis central to this chapter – have been around for longer. Through collocation analysis, patterns in a textual corpus are quantified by counting how often words co-occur. This method relies on the assumption that “you shall know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth 1957, 11). Put differently, the analysis of words depends on the context they are used in, or the other words used around that word. This principle

has been extended in CLS to analyse literary concepts like characters and themes, which can also be investigated by examining their collocational contexts – often including adjectives, adverbs and verbs – on a large scale in literary corpora. For example, Smeets (2023) uses the ‘character-text’, or words used around the occurrence of fictional characters, to understand large-scale patterns in gendered characterization in Dutch literature. In previous work, I analysed the collocations of community-created genre labels to discover the discursive norms surrounding fanfiction genres (Neugarten 2023).

Such research, in which words or other small-scale textual features provide a proxy for concepts from literary theory that have traditionally been detected by human readers at the text level, is typical of CLS. In a survey of the field, Katherine Bode points out that “computation is a technological and material process, distinct from readers, texts, and reading. CLS proceeds, in these terms, by representing – in simplified, discrete, and manipulable forms – what occurs elsewhere in complex and continuous ways” (2023, 507). In other words, using proxies to model literary phenomena is often a simplification of the complex workings of texts. However, this simplification, in which some information may be lost, also offers significant gains in insight: the opportunity to study and understand textual phenomena at a scale undetectable to the human eye. It is important to keep in mind those limitations and affordances of computational methods: the larger scale made possible by computation offers other types of insight and knowledge production than the small-scale, detailed analysis most literary scholars are accustomed to.

To learn more about the proxy-selection that underlies much of CLS, I recommend ‘Think Small: On Literary Modeling’ (Piper 2017). If you want to learn more methods of computational text analysis, I recommend the tutorials by the Data-Sitters Club.

Fanfiction as literary reception

I define fanfiction as stories written by and for fans, inspired by existing stories, and published online for free. If you are unfamiliar with fanfiction, I recommend *The Fanfiction Reader* (Coppa 2017), which bundles short, accessible fanfiction stories (commonly called ‘fics’) from various fan communities (commonly called ‘fandoms’). Coppa situates these fics in the context of their fandoms, bridging the gap between readers who are

intimately familiar with fandom's traditions and community norms and those new to fanfiction.

Fanfiction is an incredibly large-scale and diverse phenomenon. As of May 2025, there are more than fifteen million stories on the largest English-language fanfiction website, Archive of Our Own (AO3). Another popular fanfiction website, Fanfiction.net, contains more than fourteen million stories. Fanfiction is predominantly written and read by young people: a 2023 survey ($n = 4,874$) showed that 36% of participants in fanfiction communities were between 18 and 24 years old, and 44% between 25 and 34. Only 14% of respondents identified as heterosexual, and 60% as cisgender women. For an overview of the demographic makeup of fanfiction communities, see Rouse and Stanfill (2025).

Perhaps because the demographics of fanfiction communities skew young, non-male and non-heterosexual, fanfiction is often characterized by a tendency to challenge culturally dominant identity categories like gender (Wills 2013), sexuality (Floegel 2020) and race (Fowler 2019). Fanfiction lets fans explore narratives and identities often ignored in mainstream culture (Tosenberger 2014). All the same, “the social biases and exclusions that characterize our world and popular culture manifest in fanfiction too” (Kidd 2023, 4). These opposing tendencies of both challenging and confirming the cultural status quo make fanfiction relevant to literary reception scholars: fanfiction can show us how stories are received by their fans and audiences. Which elements – values, representations, perspectives, narratives – from those stories do fans celebrate and repeat? Which elements do they critique and transform?

2. The method

This chapter teaches you to analyse collocational patterns in narrative text. Although I focus on fanfiction, AntConc can analyse any type of textual material, provided it is in .txt format and UTF-8 encoding (see section 3 for more on this). For example, you could use AntConc to analyse literary texts available in Project Gutenberg (<https://www.gutenberg.org/>) or elsewhere online, or texts you have collected or digitized yourself.¹

The case study in section 4 focuses on stories from popular fanfiction website AO3 (<https://archiveofourown.org/>), because this website has a relatively accessible and well-organized structure, making it easier to select

and gather data from this platform than from other fanfiction websites like Fanfiction.net or Wattpad. AO3 uses tags (labels attached to fics for selection and filtering) to organize its content. Fanfiction authors can attach tags to their works in numerous categories, including information about fandoms, characters and their relationships, relevant tropes or themes, and any content warnings, if applicable. Users of AO3, including researchers, can then use tags to find works that meet their specific tastes or interests.²

Considerations for corpus creation

First, carefully consider the types of text you want to analyse. If you are following the case study in section 4, this will be English-language fanfiction tagged with the Hades/Persephone relationship. The criteria for story inclusion in the case study are detailed in section 4. If you are not interested in the case study described below, or if you have your own research question(s), you can use the method I describe to satisfy your curiosity. Maybe you are interested in a particular (sub)genre of fanfiction, the fan representations of a particular fictional character, or the ways a specific trope is employed and subverted by fan writers. Think about the tags that will help you find this content and operationalize your research question. It is also advisable to read some fanfiction with those tags to make sure they are referring to the content you are looking for: tag labels can be niche, surprising and highly specific to individual sub-communities.

Also consider the size of your corpus. If your search query on AO3 is very specific, it may only yield a few results. For example, a search for English-language fanfiction in the fandom Ancient Greek Religion and Lore, tagged with the Hades/Persephone relationship and hurt/comfort – a popular fanfiction genre – yields eight-nine stories as of December 2025, but a search for all English-language fanfiction in that fandom yields over 15,000 stories on the same date. A smaller corpus allows you to zoom in on specific stories; a corpus of eighty-nine stories may even be small enough to read in its entirety. A corpus of 15,000 stories, on the other hand, is difficult if not impossible to read in detail, but likely to generate insight into patterns, and perhaps even into the discursive or textual norms of the fandom. The Stanford Literary Lab, a CLS-focused research group, observes that “in literature, different scales activate different structural features” (Algee-Hewitt et al. 2015, 21). In other words: different corpus sizes or scales of analysis yield different kinds

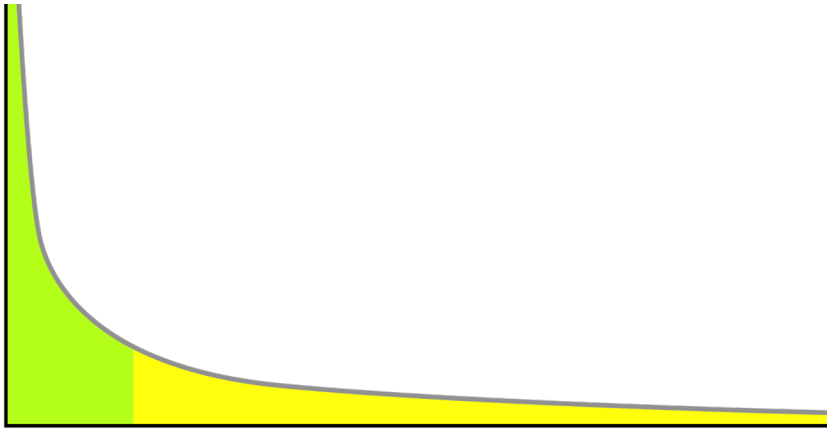


Figure 1: Example of a long-tail distribution by Hay Kranen, from Wikipedia (2006)

of insight. This means that you should consider the kinds of insight you want to obtain from your corpus before deciding on its size and content.

One important principle when conducting an analysis of collocations in a corpus is the long-tail distribution. This is also an example of the way computational approaches can reveal patterns in literary text that are not obvious to human readers. In general, word frequencies in textual corpora tend to follow a long-tail distribution (Figure 1), which is characterized by a high peak at the beginning – in this case, of very few very frequent words – and a long tail, in this case of very many relatively infrequent words. In the example below, the differently shaded parts of the graph are equal in size.

In English, the initial peak of very high-frequency words often includes terms like ‘is’, ‘and’ and ‘the’, followed by a long tail of words that occur infrequently. This long-tail distribution sometimes presents a problem for computational literary scholars. The high-frequency words often have very little explanatory value; they do not really convey a lot of meaning. The low-frequency words tend to be more intuitively meaningful, but their low frequency means that they sometimes cannot be considered representative of what is going on in a corpus. A larger corpus mitigates this problem somewhat.

The ethics of studying online fan communities

Online fan communities and fanfiction can be studied using various methodological and disciplinary frameworks. They are of interest to

literary and cultural studies – including the analysis of literary and cultural reception and rewriting as exemplified in this chapter, but also the analysis of creative writing, cultural representation of several identity categories, cultural networks and economies, and sociology. For those interested in a survey of methods for studying fandom, I recommend a special issue of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, titled *Fan Studies Methodologies* (Largent et al. 2020), and the book *A Fan Studies Primer: Method, Research, Ethics* (Booth and Williams 2021).

The ethics of studying online fan communities are worth discussing at some length in this chapter, because ethical considerations are involved in every methodological decision we make with online data. If you are following along with the case study below, you will collect a corpus of fanfiction. This means that the stories you find online will be copied into your personal storage. This section assesses the ethical implications of collecting a fanfiction corpus for academic study.

On the one hand, your corpus collection may seem perfectly innocent: you download something that is freely available online. Presumably, the author who published it understands that the internet is accessible to anyone. The difference between reading fanfiction on AO3 and downloading it to read it elsewhere may seem negligible. The website's interface even encourages downloading by including a specific button. On the other hand, fanfiction communities often feel intensely private to their participants. As noted by Anne Kustritz, “the gap between some fans’ feeling that online slash spaces remain private even when publicly available marks an important contradiction of modern digital life”³ (2024, 37). Those who publish on AO3 may assume that only fellow community members will view and download their work, and in most cases that is probably accurate. Additionally, although fanfiction falls under the Fair Use clause of copyright law in the US, this legal framework does not apply globally. Historically, fanfiction communities have been threatened with lawsuits, making some fans hesitant to have copies of their works shared outside the community. Furthermore, individual anonymity is highly valued in fanfiction communities. For those reasons, some fans disapprove of those who are perceived as outsiders downloading their stories for non-fannish purposes like academic study.

How to deal with these issues? As pointed out by Busse and Hellekson in their analysis of the ethics of researching fans, “much depends on the nature of the research” (2012, 52). If you are working with a relatively small

fanfiction corpus and are planning to refer to stories in a recognizable way in your work, it could be worthwhile contacting individual authors and requesting permission. Although AO3 does not facilitate direct messaging, some authors list contact details or usernames for other platforms on their profiles. Alternatively, you can leave a comment on the story you want to use and wait for the author to reply. If your corpus is very large, contacting each individual author for permission may be a daunting or even impossible task. However, the larger your corpus is, the less likely you are to refer to individual stories and authors in a recognizable way. A study shows that fans are often more comfortable with researchers using their data for quantitative approaches than qualitative ones (Dym and Fiesler 2020, section 4.6), although the same study advocates for getting to know the context of any fan community you take data from to inform ethical decision-making. In any case, I recommend *not* sharing any dataset of fanfiction you have collected in open access. This ensures that if fanfiction authors ever decide to take their work offline, you are not responsible for keeping unauthorized copies of that work in circulation.

3. Tools and techniques

This section covers two techniques for collecting a corpus of fanfiction from AO3 for analysis: through manual downloading or through webscraping. I also introduce the AntConc software needed to conduct collocation analysis of the resulting corpus.

I recommend the manual approach to corpus collection if:

- You have little to no experience working with Python code, or computer programming more generally, and no desire to learn; or:
- You want to analyse a relatively small corpus of fanfiction: fewer than twenty works.

I recommend webscraping if:

- You know how to run some Python code, or you are eager to learn;⁴ and:
- You want to analyse a larger corpus of fanfiction.

Manually collecting a corpus

First, go to AO3 and click on the work you want to download. In the upper right corner of your screen, you should see a button that says ‘Download’. If you click on this button, several possible formats will appear (Figure 2). Select the format of your choice and your download will begin. You need to repeat this download process for every story you want to include in your corpus. This is repetitive and time-consuming, which is why I do not recommend this approach for larger corpora.



Figure 2: Screenshot of the upper-right corner of your screen on AO3

AntConc, the software used for collocation analysis in the case study, only takes files in the .txt format as input. This means that you need to convert the format of your data. The easiest way to do this is by downloading your selected stories in HTML. Although there are many ways of converting HTML files to .txt, and converters are available online, my preferred method is using Calibre software for eBook conversion (Goyal 2006). You can download and install Calibre here: <https://calibre-ebook.com/download>. Once Calibre is installed, click on the green ‘Add books’ icon in the top left corner and add the HTML files you downloaded (Figure 3). Select them and go to ‘Bulk convert’ (Figure 3). This will open the screen you see in Figure 4. Now you need to do three things:

1. First, set the ‘Output format’ to ‘TXT’ using the dropdown menu at the top right of the screen. This should make the option ‘TXT output’ appear in the left-hand column. Click on it.
2. Second, make sure the ‘Output encoding’ is set to ‘utf-8’.
3. Finally, click ‘OK’ to carry out the conversion. Once this is complete, right-click on your files and click on ‘Open book folder’ (also in Figure 3) to locate your converted files.

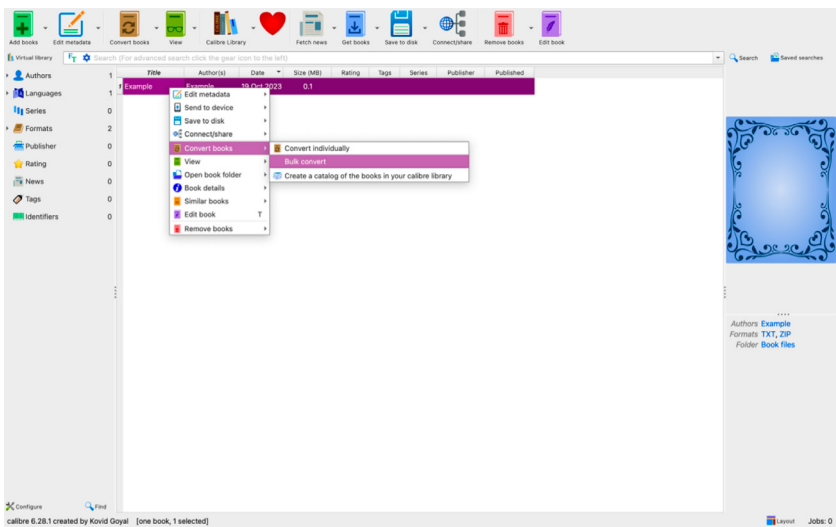


Figure 3: Screenshot of how to find Calibre’s ‘Bulk convert’ option

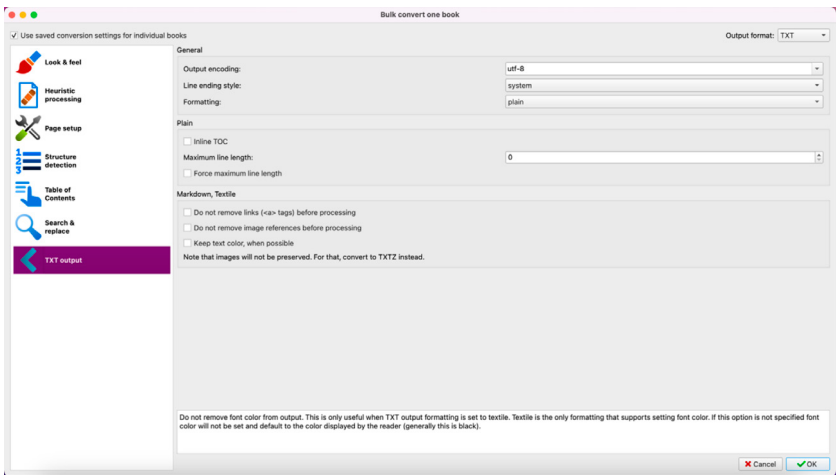


Figure 4: Screenshot of how to configure your conversion

Collecting a corpus by webscraping with Python

Webscraping is the process of extracting data from websites. Copy-pasting text from a web page into a Word document or using the ‘download’ button on a website are essentially small-scale forms of webscraping, although

the latter process typically involves some type of automation. You can use an API (application programming interface) to send download requests to a website. Here, I will use the AO3Scraper created by Radiolorian (2022) to gather a dataset.

Radiolorian's AO3Scraper is available on GitHub, an online platform for software development. Go to <https://github.com/radiolorian/AO3Scraper>, click on the green 'Code' button, then select 'Download ZIP' and unzip the folder on your local computer to access the code. Alternatively, you can search GitHub for other AO3 scrapers that offer functionalities that are better suited to your goals. In addition to some extras, the AO3Scraper folder you have now downloaded contains two Python files: `ao3_work_ids.py` and `ao3_get_fanfics.py`. Running the first of these will result in a list of `fic_ids`, or fanfiction identifiers, from AO3 for a particular search. You need the list of `fic_ids` to collect the desired fics: the output for `ao3_work_ids.py` will be the input for `ao3_get_fanfics.py`.

Once you have obtained the code repository from GitHub, open the document labelled `README.md`. The `.md` extension indicates that this is a markdown file. You can open markdown files in any text editor. A README file is part of most code repositories and gives you the information needed to work with the code. In this case, the file lists the features offered by the scraper and some other information, including the licence. Crucially, it also lists some dependencies – relationships between software components – required to run the code. These dependencies are bits of code required for the scraper to function. Open your terminal, navigate to the folder where you unzipped the AO3Scraper, and install the modules using the `pip install` command. If you have no previous experience with this, I recommend the Programming Historian tutorial 'Installing Python Modules with `pip`' (Gibbs 2013).

As described in the README under 'Example Usage', you need a search URL from AO3 as input for the scraper. To obtain this, visit AO3 in your web browser.

Use the search function, the fandom menu, the tags or the search bar (Figure 5) to filter your results, then copy the resulting URL. For this tutorial, I set 'Sort by' to 'Kudos', excluded crossovers, set the 'Completion Status' to 'Complete works only', the 'Word Count' to 'To 10,001' and the 'Language' to 'English'. I recommend you write down the date you gathered your corpus and the criteria you used. This information can be important later if you want to analyse and understand your corpus or compare corpora.

Sort and Filter

Sort by

Date Updated

Include ?

▸ Ratings

▸ Warnings

▸ Categories

▸ Fandoms

▸ Characters

▸ Relationships

▸ Additional Tags

Other tags to include

Exclude ?

▸ Ratings

▸ Warnings

▸ Categories

▸ Fandoms

▸ Characters

▸ Relationships

▸ Additional Tags

Other tags to exclude

More Options

▸ Crossovers

▸ Completion Status

▸ Word Count

▸ Date Updated

Search within results ?

Language

Sort and Filter

[Clear Filters](#)

Figure 5: Screenshot of AO3’s search bar, which appears on the right of your screen when looking for fics. Use this to specify your search.

Once you have your URL, you run the code `ao3_work_ids.py` to get a list of `work_ids` for all the stories you want to collect. As outlined in the README, you can set ‘flags’ or parameters for running the code. For example, you can limit your collection to only the first twenty works, collect a list of tags for the collected `work_ids`, limit your collection to multi-chapter works only or determine a name for the `.csv` file that will contain the `work_ids`. If you just want to collect the works for the URL you have copied, run the following code in the repository containing the `AO3Scraper` folder. Make sure to put quotation marks around the URL:

```
python ao3_work_ids.py "YOUR URL GOES HERE"
```

Your terminal should now say ‘no existing file; creating new file...’, then ‘processing...’, and then a series of dots will appear slowly in the terminal, to indicate that the code is running. Once the process is complete, your terminal will say ‘That’s all, folks.’ Your `AO3Scraper` folder should now contain a new document titled ‘`work_ids.csv`’, containing `work_ids` and URLs for all works in your `AO3` search.

Now run the second Python file, `ao3_get_fanfics.py`. Your code should look like this:

```
python ao3_get_fanfics.py work_ids.csv
```

Your terminal will now say ‘Scraping [fic id]’, then ‘Done’; then it will move on to ‘Scraping [next fic id]’, until the process is completed. The `AO3Scraper` folder should then contain a new `.csv` file titled ‘`fanfics`’, containing both the collected metadata and the full text for all stories. For larger corpora, the process of scraping the data can take some time.

The final step to get your corpus ready for analysis in `AntConc` is to convert the story texts from cells in a `.csv` file to individual `.txt` files. To do this, Radiolorian added a Python script in the folder ‘Extras’, which is part of the repository. To run this script, use the following code:

```
python extras/csv_to_txts.py fanfics.csv
```

This will result in a new folder in your repository, containing individual text files for each story in your corpus. The folder will be named ‘`fanfics.csv_text_files`’ and each file will be named after the story’s `fic id`. Congratulations, your corpus is now ready for analysis.

Working with AntConc

AntConc (Anthony 2023a) is software for corpus analysis. It allows users to search for words and phrases in corpora, view these words in their textual context (keyword-in-context, or KWIC, functionality) at both the sentence and text level, plot the occurrence of words and phrases over the course of a text, detect patterns in the co-occurrence of words and visualize these collocations in word clouds. Additionally, AntConc offers a measure of ‘keyness’ that identifies words that occur unusually frequently in one corpus compared to another. This section demonstrates some of these functionalities, while section 4 explores their usefulness for analysing fanfiction as literary reception. AntConc is free, easy to install and straightforward to use. Depending on your research questions and budget, you may want to explore other tools for corpus analysis, such as Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) or Voyant Tools (Sinclair and Rockwell 2024).

You can download AntConc 4.2.4 from the software’s website: <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>. To start analysing your data, upload a corpus by clicking on ‘File’ in the top left corner of the screen – note that this may look different for Windows users – then selecting ‘Open File(s) as ‘Quick Corpus’’. Once you have done this, AntConc should show a list of your files on the left. If you want to save the corpus for later use, you can do so by going to ‘Files’ > ‘Open Corpus Manager...’, selecting the corpus you have created, which has been saved under the name ‘temp.db’, and then clicking on ‘Save (to file)’ (Figure 6). In the corpus manager, you can also see the number of tokens (total number of words in your corpus) and types (total number of different words in your corpus). You can use this to calculate the type/token ratio of your corpus – a measure of a corpus’ lexical diversity – although this measure is contested because it is impacted by text length (Kettunen 2014).

AntConc enables various types of analysis. A description of each AntConc tool is listed in Table 1. To keep the content of my fanfiction corpus private, ‘Fileview’ is not discussed in this chapter. Because I have no corpus to compare to my corpus, I also do not cover the ‘Keyword’ functionality.

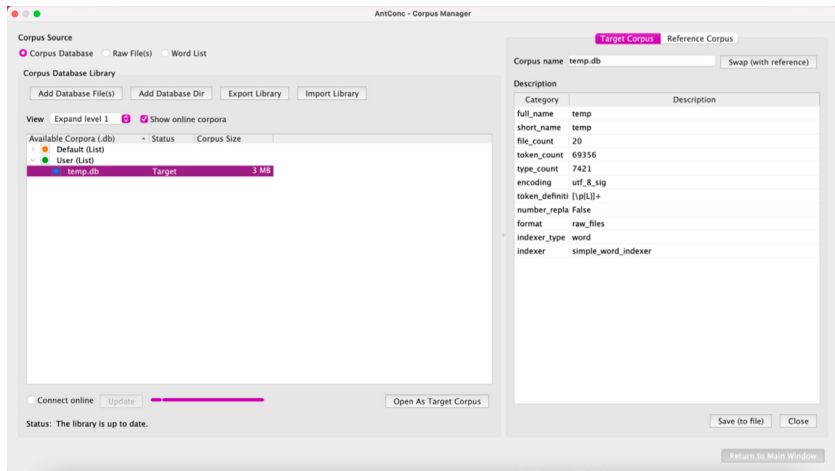


Figure 6: Corpus manager options in AntConc 4.2.4

Table 1: Overview of AntConc Functionalities

Tool	Description	Included in the case study
KWIC	Displays search words in their sentence context	Yes
Plot	Plots search words in barcode format, visualizing where a term occurs in the texts	Yes
Fileview	Shows the content of a full text, highlighting search words	No
Cluster	Shows sequential word patterns with your search word	Yes
N-Gram	Scans the corpus for N-sized clusters to detect common expressions and phrases	Yes
Collocate	Shows words that occur frequently within a set distance of your search word	Yes
Word	Counts the frequency of words in the corpus	Yes
Keyword	Identifies words that occur unusually frequently in one corpus compared to another	No
Word cloud	Visualizes results from some of the other tools	Yes

As discussed in section 1, the aggregate view offered by distant reading comes at the cost of the detail-oriented analysis made possible by close reading. In this vein, AntConc results have one important limitation: not all mentions of a character or concept will be found by simply searching for a name or term; for example, mentions of ‘he’, ‘him’ or ‘the God of the Underworld’ will not automatically be associated with the same entity as ‘Hades’. Results should therefore be critically evaluated. Automatically detecting an entity in a text is called named entity recognition (NER) and linking together the associations between an entity and its other mentions, including nicknames and pronouns, is called coreference resolution. If you want to refine the analysis of your corpus after exploring it with AntConc or similar corpus analysis tools, tools for NER and coreference resolution include spaCy (Montani et al. 2023), BookNLP (Bamman 2021) for literary text and FanfictionNLP (Yoder et al. 2021) for fanfiction text. These require some code literacy.

Additionally, AntConc cannot detect synonyms: it cannot recognize that words like ‘big’ and ‘large’ refer to the same concept. This means that you need to think carefully about your search terms and consider searching for possible alternative terms to capture specific meanings. Synonyms can also be context-specific, especially in texts originating from online sub-cultures like fanfiction communities. Similarly, AntConc cannot recognize polysemy. A search for the word ‘like’ will yield results for the terms meaning both ‘similar to’ and ‘enjoy’. When evaluating search results, scholars should therefore consider that there may be results they were not looking for. One other limitation is especially relevant when analysing internet data like fanfiction: AntConc cannot recognize typos or non-standard spellings as referring to the search term, if the search term is correctly spelled. You could therefore consider searching for common misspellings as well, when dealing with data where spelling may be diverse.

4. Case study

The case study centres on fanfiction about Hades and Persephone, two characters from Greek mythology that are frequently the focus of retellings, both in popular culture and fanfiction. The case study contributes to the field of classical reception studies, which examines the “different ways in which antiquity, a specific aspect of it or a view on it has intersected

with later contexts” (De Pourcq et al. 2020, 1). It is interesting because the reception of Greek mythology has ties both to a more traditional, prestige-laden literary canon and to contemporary popular culture. Additionally, the contemporary significance of Graeco-Roman Antiquity has become a political battleground recently, as “conservative politicians, pundits and activists like to refer to the Greek and Roman inheritance” (Naerebout 2022, 22), and “conservatives fetishize a particular stereotype of the Greeks” (Zuckerberg 2018, 25). These conservative discourses are particularly present online. The rise of rhetoric referring to Antiquity in right-wing online communities raises interesting questions for fandom studies: how do fans’ stories portray and value Graeco-Roman Antiquity? The study of fanfiction portrayals of Hades and Persephone ties in with these political concerns, as the characters are often rewritten to explore tensions between a patriarchal worldview and retellings’ capacity to explore female empowerment (Neugarten 2025a, b).

Previous research shows that Hades and Persephone are two of the most popular characters to write fanfiction about in the *Ancient Greek Religion and Lore* fandom (Neugarten 2024). In a corpus of over 5,000 fics, Hades occurred in 488 stories, and Persephone in 442. These characters can thus be taken as representative of the tastes and preferences of a large subset of fans reading and writing fanfiction about Greek myth. With that context in mind, the research question addressed in this case study is:

- How are Hades and Persephone characterized in these stories?

To answer this question, I use as a corpus the twenty most popular stories available on AO3 in English about the Hades/Persephone relationship in January 2024, of under 10,000 words each. As explained in section 3, I rank the stories by ‘Kudos’ to operationalize their level of popularity, and I select only stories in English, marked ‘Completed’ and not marked as crossovers. I select the most popular stories because I assume that popularity is an indirect measure of the types of characterizations that most closely align with the community’s discursive norms, which I am aiming to investigate.

The quickest way to get a sense of how a certain concept – such as the character ‘Hades’ or ‘Persephone’ – is represented in this corpus is by using AntConc’s KWIC functionality. To do so, click on the ‘KWIC’ button at the top of the screen. Here, you can search your corpus for occurrences of particular words and phrases. AntConc visualizes all sentences containing

your search term sorted by the words occurring before and after that term. Figure 7 shows several random hits for the search term ‘Hades’. Already, these results give us a sense of how Hades is described. He is “actually quite the sweetheart”, he is “on his pale throne”, he has an “aquiline nose and powerful, overcast brows”, and he is drinking lots of nectar.

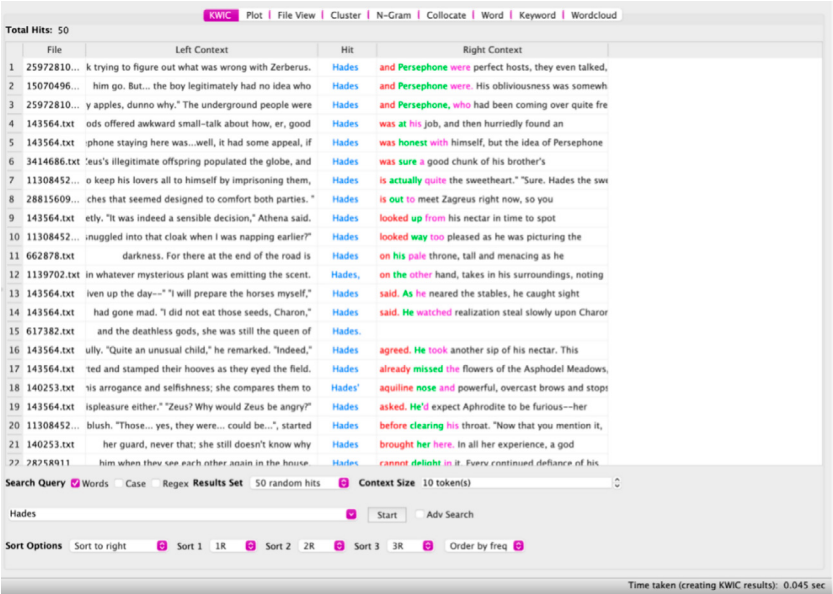


Figure 7: Random KWIC hits for the term ‘Hades’

Consider your search queries carefully. Search terms are *not* case sensitive by default: you can make them case sensitive by checking the box next to ‘Case’. You can also determine the set of results: all, or a specified number of random hits. Additionally, you can use wildcards – a way to describe a search pattern – to specify your search. For example, type a question mark to add a single arbitrary character to your search query, an asterisk to add zero or more characters, or a plus sign to add one or more characters. Thus, a search for ‘walk*’ will yield results for the terms ‘walk’, ‘walked’, ‘walking’ and any other string that starts with ‘walk’ and ends in zero or more other characters. You can find out more about wildcards in the IMS Open Corpus Workbench (Evert 2023). Regular expressions – enabled by checking the Regex box in AntConc – are a more advanced way of specifying a search pattern. You can learn more about them online, including

at Regular-Expressions.info (Goyvaerts 2023). Finally, checking the ‘Adv Search’ box lets you conduct advanced searches, including searches for lists of words and searches within context windows. To ensure that your research is reproducible, it is always advisable to keep track of all the search terms you have tried out.

Try ‘Plot’ to see how search terms are distributed over the documents in your dataset. This tool visualizes the occurrence of your search term per document in a barcode format. You can check the ‘Overlay’ box and select a different colour to visualize the distribution of multiple terms at once. Figure 8 shows the occurrences of the terms ‘Hades’ (darker grey) and ‘Persephone’ (lighter grey) for fifteen stories. You can use these barcode plots to select stories for close reading where one or more characters are prominent or where characters interact. You can also use them to get a sense of which stories are more Hades-oriented, and which are more Persephone-oriented.

AntConc offers several functionalities for analysing word patterns more closely. The cluster tool shows clusters of words adjacent to your search term. By default, these are sorted by frequency. In a sense, the cluster tool summarizes the outputs of the KWIC tool, counting and sorting by the frequencies of co-occurrences. You can set parameters for cluster size (number of words), frequency of occurrence and cluster range (number of files a cluster occurs in). You can also determine whether the tool examines words to the right or left of the search term, or both. Similarly, you can use the N-gram tool to search your corpus for N-sized clusters of words. The collocate tool shows words that appear frequently within a set distance of the search term. You can set this distance under ‘Window Span’. Finally, the ‘Word’ tool counts the frequency of occurrence for each word in the corpus.

The long-tail distribution pattern discussed in section 2, which is often key to interpreting the results of a corpus analysis, is also visible in the top 10 most frequent words in the Hades/Persephone corpus (Table 2). The words are very general, and their frequencies already decline rapidly between ranks 1 and 10. Meanwhile, of the 6,865 unique words in this corpus, 3,301 occur only once.

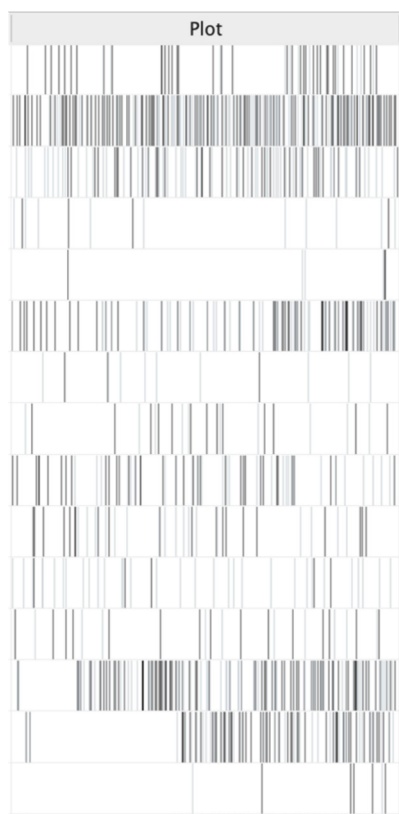


Figure 8: Plotted occurrences of ‘Hades’ (dark) and ‘Persephone’ (light) in fifteen fics

Table 2: Top 10 most frequent words, counted using AntConc’s ‘Word’ functionality

Word	Frequency
the	2870
to	1897
and	1864
he	1481
a	1350
of	1312
his	1165
her	1124
she	919
You	916

What does this long-tail distribution mean for our analysis of Hades and Persephone? Searching for frequent 2-grams that contain the words ‘Hades’ or ‘Persephone’ may not be helpful, because it yields many hits for phrases like ‘Hades and’ and ‘Persephone is’ which reveal little about the character’s portrayal. By contrast, extending the window to a wider range reveals that Persephone is more often portrayed smiling (nine times) than Hades (four times) (Figures 9 and 10). The context of these occurrences is also interesting: while Persephone smiling “sweetly” may point to stereotypical portrayals of her as girlish and demure, her smiling “in triumph” or smiling “wickedly” indicates that she is also portrayed as powerful. Such portrayals may give us an indication of diverging, perhaps even transformative or subversive uses of the Persephone character.

KWIC				Plot	File View	Cluster	N-Gram	Collocate	Word	Keyword
Total Hits: 9										
	ik	Left Context	Hit	Right Context						
1		o be honest, she craved female companionship.	Persephone smiled	in a way that she hoped was reassuring,						
2		wer made still paler by the darkness of her hair.	Persephone smiled	in delight. "Shall we have the judges to						
3		g stones broke the surface of the burning river.	Persephone smiled	in triumph and jumped out of the chariot,						
4		r as he opened the door and lead them outside.	Persephone smiled	at the sight of the horses. "I was						
5		t by the river Cocytus every time she passed by.	Persephone smiled	fondly at him and Hades, sheepish, frowned inst						
6		ched his nose, pacing in front of the bed while	Persephone smiled	sweetly and sat down next to Percy. She						
7		e omega was tugging helplessly on his bounds.	Persephone smiled	wickedly, kissing his cheek. "Phone, come on, pl						
8		auty amongst ugliness is transcendent." Finally,	Persephone smiled,	slow and inviting, and the earth shuddered clos						
9		Only for him to die in my arms once more,"	Persephone smiles	sadly. She touches Thanatos's cheek, a mere						

Figure 9: KWIC for the search query ‘Persephone smile*’

KWIC				Plot	File View	Cluster	N-Gram	Collocate	Word	Keyword
Total Hits: 4										
	ik	Left Context	Hit	Right Context						
1		ies in the Asphodel Meadows? They are beautiful."	Hades smiled	back. He made a mental note to bring						
2		vas just too nosy and he also really loved cooking.	Hades smiled	pleased, the alpha deep inside utterly satisfied by						
3		miles that preceded them. Everyone in the halls of	Hades smiled	so rarely, since. The godling's smile turned						
4		1 away enthusiastically, chasing after Mrs. O'Leary.	Hades smiled,	pleased. He is back to his old self,						

Figure 10: KWIC for the search query ‘Hades smile*’

Finally, AntConc can also visualize results from various tools in word clouds. Figures 11 and 12 show word clouds for the KWIC results for ‘Hades’ and ‘Persephone’. More emotion-words (‘cries, cried, anger, weep, laugh, delight’) are associated with Persephone, as well as the word ‘weak’. This

5. Conclusion

This chapter introduced the method of collocation analysis, taking fanfiction about Hades and Persephone as a case study. I hope this text will also prove useful to those using other types of textual material and other tools for collocation analysis. While the exploration of the case study shows that computer-driven collocation analysis can lead to large-scale insights into textual patterns, it also shows that these insights need to be contextualized through close examination of individual texts, or through awareness of the context in which texts are produced and received, to generate a nuanced understanding of the data. Tools for collocation analysis, such as AntConc, can help scholars navigate different scales of analysis – close and distant reading – by moving between frequency counts and keywords in context, then zooming in on usage in individual texts.

Notes

- ¹ You can digitize texts or manuscript through technologies like OCR (optical character recognition). However, digitization techniques are outside the scope of this chapter. To learn more about them, I recommend the Data-Sitters Club entry ‘Katia and the Phantom Corpus’ (Bowers and Dombrowski 2019).
- ² You can find all sorts of content on AO3, including stories on topics you may find offensive or triggering. Be mindful of this when browsing the archive, and use archive warnings to filter out content you want to avoid.
- ³ Slash is fanfiction that focuses mainly on homosexual romance and erotica, most often between men. If you want to know more about slash, I recommend Anne Kustritz’s book *Identity, Community, and Sexuality in Slash Fan Fiction: Pocket Publics* (2024).
- ⁴ If you have no experience with Python but want to learn, I recommend starting with the tutorial ‘Python Introduction and Installation’ (Tukel and Crymble 2012) offered by the Programming Historian. I also recommend the online course ‘Python Programming for the Humanities’ (Karsdorp 2021) (<http://www.karsdorp.io/python-course/>).

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Corpus Analysis: Distant Reading Digitized Periodicals

Maaïke Koffeman

1. Introduction

“Outrage against public and religious morals and against decency”: thus read the appreciation of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* by the French authorities. Shortly after the first six instalments of his debut novel about the adulterous wife of a country doctor appeared in the *Revue de Paris* in October–December 1856, the author was put on trial. This scandal resonated throughout Europe and made Flaubert into an instant celebrity. The name of his tragic heroine Emma Bovary came to exemplify the alleged immorality of the French realist novel.

A telling example of this phenomenon is an 1868 brochure by Taco de Beer that I stumbled upon while browsing a library catalogue for Dutch translations of the novel. Intrigued by the title *Madame Bovary in Holland*, I looked it up and found, much to my surprise, that it hardly mentions Flaubert or his novel. In fact, it is an attack against *Lidewyde* (1868), a novel of adultery by Conrad Busken Huet. The title of the pamphlet signals that this work is perceived as a Dutch equivalent of the infamous novel by Flaubert, and therefore tainted with a ‘typically French’ type of obscenity. It also proves that, by the end of the 1860s, ‘Madame Bovary’ was a household name in the Netherlands, even though the first Dutch translation of the book would appear only in 1904 (Koffeman 2018).

This sparked my interest in the early journalistic reception of Gustave Flaubert in the Netherlands. Earlier research by Toos Streng (2020, 78–105) has shown that his work, and French realism in general, was met with moral disapproval in the Dutch literary field. However, the breakthrough of naturalism in Dutch letters around 1880 indicates that the horizon of expectations, as theorized by Hans Robert Jauss (1970), must have shifted over time. Knowing that Flaubert would eventually become one of the most admired and translated French authors within the world of Dutch

letters, I was wondering if his changing reputation could be charted by systematically exploring the nineteenth-century press.

There was hardly any previous research on Flaubert's reception in the Netherlands, except for a modest booklet titled *Flaubert in Nederland 1870/2005* (Driest and Jansen 2006). According to the authors, the first mention of Flaubert in the Dutch press occurred in 1868 and their overview lists only a few scattered articles. Since then, this type of research has been revolutionized by the expansion of digitized archives. Currently, a quick search through the available online resources generates thousands of occurrences of Flaubert's name in newspapers, books and magazines. In what follows, I will show how literary studies can benefit from the use of digitized periodicals and distant reading methods. I present a case study organized around the question of how Flaubert's work was received in the nineteenth-century Dutch periodical press. How does the attention paid to the author of *Madame Bovary* evolve between 1857 and 1899? Which journalists are most active in presenting his work to a Dutch audience? Which names or notions occur most frequently in articles dedicated to his work?

2. The method

This research project is situated within the domain of periodical studies, a relatively young, interdisciplinary field that not only uses newspapers and magazines as primary historical source materials but also looks at the periodical press as "a key site for cultural production, public debate and the dissemination of knowledge" (Van Remoortel et al. 2016, 1). This is particularly relevant for the nineteenth century, when magazines and newspapers held a central role in the public discourse. Over the last few decades, research practices in periodical studies have been heavily impacted by the mass digitization of periodical archives, and by the adoption of quantitative research methods.

The transformation of printed newspapers and magazines into processable data has two major advantages: it offers a form of bibliographical control over a complex archive, and it makes the texts widely available (Mussell 2016, 17). Since the start of this century, an impressive number of mass digitization projects have been put into place, often by national libraries. Well-known examples are the British Newspaper Archive, Gallica

(France), Das Deutsche Zeitungsportal (Germany) and Trove (Australia). It has become so common to consult newspapers and magazines through online portals that we tend to forget that digitized periodicals differ from their originals in many ways. In the process of remediation, material aspects of the periodical get lost and new layers of information are added. Users are presented with visual simulations of printed pages, but in reality they navigate an underlying text layer generated through Optical Character Recognition (OCR), an efficient but far from perfect technology for converting images to text. Another important issue is the quality and the granularity of the metadata; in many cases, individual articles are not marked up, thus limiting the possibilities for faceted browsing. Consulting a digitized periodical is a fundamentally different activity than browsing through the contents of a carefully composed magazine issue: we tend to jump from one ‘hit’ to another instead of working our way through the whole magazine. This type of decontextualized research can lead to overgeneralization or misinterpretation of the search results, because it overlooks the context of the articles and periodicals at hand (Putnam 2016). Therefore, periodical scholars have stated that “keyword searches should be used in conjunction with, rather than replacing, the careful study of whole newspapers” (Bingham 2010, 230).

Another pitfall is the tendency to take the representativity of the digitized resources for granted. However impressive it may seem that millions of pages are now available, most of the printed archive is still left unscanned. Firstly, due to copyright restrictions, many periodical databases end their coverage in 1900 (Nicholson 2013, 60). Second, digitized collections are often incomplete due to the ‘hole in the archive’: issues may be missing from the original library collections, and significant elements such as advertising pages have often been discarded when the periodicals were bound into book form (Latham and Scholes 2006, 520). Besides, the digital archive is continuously expanding; today’s findings may be overruled in a year or so due to the inclusion of new periodicals in the collection.

However, James Mussell has pointed out that it is not very productive to see digitized periodicals as an inferior surrogate for the printed originals. Instead, we should focus on what this remediated form makes possible in terms of research methods (2016, 28). Many periodical scholars acknowledge that working with these new types of resources calls for the development of new methodologies. Bob Nicholson states that, “[f]aced with this mountain of print, we have two choices: to continue subjecting

tiny fragments of Victorian culture to close reading, or to supplement this approach by exploring a much larger proportion of the archive through ‘distant reading’” (2012, 238).

The term distant reading was coined by the literary scholar Franco Moretti. In a groundbreaking essay from 2000, he recommends the use of quantitative approaches to tackle ‘the great unread’. Moretti states that, once you decide to look beyond the canon, close reading is no longer a viable option:

[W]e know how to read texts, now let’s learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. (Moretti 2000, 57)

Although this attack against close reading as a preferred method of analysis sparked controversy among literary scholars, the concept of distant reading has been embraced by researchers working in the burgeoning field of periodical studies. They are typically working with textual archives that are way too large and complex to read from cover to cover. To retrieve meaningful information from those (digitized) archives, approaches from the Digital Humanities, such as distant reading periodicals through text-mining software, open up a wealth of new possibilities.

3. Tools and techniques

In what follows, I will demonstrate how digital resources can be made productive for studying literary reception. First, I would like to stress that quantification is not a goal but a means to tackle the immensity and the complexity of the press archive. Digital tools can read large text corpora systematically and open your eyes to aspects that would go unnoticed when reading them in the traditional way. In many cases, this will be followed up with a second phase, where a selection of the corpus is submitted to a qualitative analysis. Ideally, the two approaches should complement each other.

Bob Nicholson (2012) proposes a three-step methodology for working with digital periodical archives. First, you need to choose which titles you want to include in your search, based on information about the contents of the digitized collection. Always try to be aware of omissions or fluctuations in the archive, especially if you want to draw any statistical conclusions. Second, you will have to carefully design your prompts so that they generate a reasonable amount of useful results. It is often advisable to experiment with different varieties of the search string or to use wildcards to include several versions or derivatives of a word. If the number of hits is very large, use filtering options to narrow down the results. The third step consists of saving the metadata of selected search results, for instance in a spreadsheet, and possibly also the full text of the articles.

Once the primary data have been gathered, several distant reading techniques can be applied. You may want to look for quantitative patterns in the list of periodical articles, such as the number of items per year, per author or per magazine. These are quite easy to chart through the functionalities of a spreadsheet editor such as Excel, which also provides multiple options for visualizing them as tables and graphs. If you wish to move a step further and explore the contents of the articles themselves, it is advised to use text-mining software. This is a digital tool for performing automated tasks such as measuring word frequencies or collocations (clusters of words that often occur together). A helpful overview of the different possibilities can be found in the handbook *Quantitative Methods in the Humanities. An Introduction* (Lemercier and Zalc 2019, 142–154). I have chosen to work with AntConc, a corpus analysis toolkit that is freely available on the internet, but there are many options, varying from online word-cloud generators to high-end software suites.

4. Case study

In order to investigate the journalistic reception of Flaubert's work in the Netherlands, I decided to work with the two main digital archives of the Netherlands: the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (dbnl.org) and Delpher (www.delpher.nl). The DBNL dates to 1999, when several organizations joined forces to make a selection of important books available through transcriptions of their contents. In those early days of the internet, data limitations made it impossible to provide images of each

page. The DBNL has remained a text-focused resource ever since. Today, it contains more than 15,000 books and periodicals. Parallel to this ongoing, carefully curated transcription effort, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library of the Netherlands) has initiated several mass digitization projects, which resulted in the launch of Delpher in 2013. This portal allows visitors to browse through millions of scanned pages from books and periodicals. Keyword searches are possible thanks to the addition of an OCR-generated text layer. For pragmatic reasons, I decided to limit my research corpus to articles available in these two databases; with both being managed by the Royal Library of the Netherlands, I trust that they offer the largest, most carefully selected and representative archive of nineteenth-century Dutch journalism.¹ Besides, working with these two resources allows me to compare and discuss their functionalities.

My next step was to search both search engines for references to Flaubert. I experimented with a few different options to see what results would come up. First, on the home page of the DBNL, a simple search for 'Flaubert' generated the impressive (and slightly discouraging) number of 5,595 results. Fortunately, the DBNL has a refined metadata structure, which allows different types of filters to be applied. In this case, I selected the boxes for *year of publication: 19th century* and *type of material: periodicals*. This narrowed my results down to a much more manageable 210 hits. Unfortunately, it is not possible to mark the results as favourites, to download the list of results or to export their metadata or full text.

Looking at these results (see Figure 1), a few things caught my attention. First, the two results dated 1844 are clearly erroneous, because Flaubert was not yet active as a writer at that time. Secondly, the list gives very little information about the texts in question: it shows no author's names or article titles, but only the name and volume number of the periodical and its year of publication. This is because the DBNL fails to consider the specific nature of periodical publications. In the case of *De Gids*, one of the most relevant titles for my research, three monthly issues were originally designed to be bound together, thus forming one quarterly volume with continuous pagination. In the DBNL, all four volumes that have appeared in one year are merged as one 'book', whose table of contents treats articles as chapters.

The main feature of the results list is a snippet of the keyword in its immediate context. Clicking on a fragment opens a page with the article text which allows you to evaluate its relevance. This way I found out that the earliest mention of Flaubert in the DBNL collection occurs in the 1863

The screenshot shows the DBNL (Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren) search results for the keyword 'Flaubert'. The search was performed on 19th-century periodicals, yielding 210 results. The left sidebar contains filters for century (19th century), title, year of publication (1841-1850, 1851-1870, 1871-1890, 1891-1900), land of publication (Netherlands, Flanders, Other lands), material type (journal, book), publication type (work), and direct collection. The main results table lists several entries, including 'Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant' (1844) and 'De Gids, Jaargang 27' (1863), both mentioning Flaubert in the context of literary criticism or translations.

TITEL	JAAR	AUTEUR
Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant Uit: Verzameld werk. Deel 6, 1955	1844	[tijdschrift] Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant
• „haalt Flaubert naar beneden, vindt <i>Ilsen</i> een overschat heer, noemt een reeks beroemde boeken als typen		
• van Alphonse Daudet. Als we net over een Flaubert gelezen hebben 'qui assemble si bien les vocables à		
Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant Uit: Verzameld werk. Deel 6, 1955	1844	[tijdschrift] Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant
• doet de <i>sleer</i> mischien nog het meest denken aan het vermaarde <i>Un coeur simple</i> van Flaubert Maar		
De Gids. Jaargang 27	1863	[tijdschrift] Gids, De
• een Ernest Feydeau, een Emile Augier, of een Gustave Flaubert . Is dus voor de zedelijke belangen van		
De Gids. Jaargang 27	1863	[tijdschrift] Gids, De
• realistische school, aan wier hoofd Gustave Flaubert staat. De schrijver van 'Madame Bovary', op dit ogenblik		
De Gids. Jaargang 28	1864	[tijdschrift] Gids, De
• van Gustave Flaubert jongsten vrouwentype gezegd hebben: 'Salammô n'a d'autre caractere que d'être		
De Gids. Jaargang 28	1864	[tijdschrift] Gids, De
• realit doet de heer Koetsvold zoo min onder voor Feydeau als voor Flaubert . De vermetelste tooneelen in		

Figure 1: Screenshot of the first page of results for a keyword search on 'Flaubert' in nineteenth-century periodicals in the DBNL. Retrieved on 7 April 2024

The screenshot shows the full article page for 'De Gids, Jaargang 27 (1863)' in the DBNL collection. The article is titled 'Letterkunde' and is a critique by D.R. Koetsvold. The text discusses the work of Gustave Flaubert, specifically his novel 'Madame Bovary', and compares it to the works of other authors like Alphonse Daudet and Ernest Feydeau. The article is part of a collection of 81 pages, and the current page is 81. The right sidebar contains links to the full work, titles, and authors.

De Gids. Jaargang 27 (1863) - [tijdschrift] Gids, De - Auteursrechtvrij

Letterkunde.

Kronijk en kritiek.

Het Oordeel gaat wijder dan de Konst.
D.R. KOETSVOLD.

'Foci' zegt het jaar 1862, terwijl het al blazend in de halfgesloten hand op het tooneel verschijnt, 'wat is het schrikkelijk koud! Welk onuitstaanbaar weder! In mijn goeden tijd was het lekker warm. Alle dagen scheen toen de zon, van den morgen tot den avond. Aan de boomen prijken bladeren; bloemen geen gebrek, er zongen vogeltjes; de natuur hield zondag. En nu? Ik zie wel, de wereld wordt oud. Het plezier is er af. Die na mij komen, zullen er slecht aan toe zijn. Wie klopt daar?' ...

Met deze alleenspraak ongeveer begint het eerste tooneel van 'Tannée Nouvelle'; een aardig kinder-komedietje, waarmede Jean Macé, de schrijver van 'Histoire d'une bouchée de pain', den kleinen bundel opent van zijn 'Théâtre du Petit Château'. Het gaande en het komende jaar, de vier seizoenen, de twaalf maanden, alle personen die in dit tooneelstukje optreden en het woord voeren, de deftige Saturnus niet uitgezonderd, zijn kinderen. Geen knakkerende wijggetjes of touwtje springende vrijdenkstertjes, waar meisjes en knapen van vleesch en been,

Over het gehele werk

TITELS
De Gids

Over dit hoofdstuk/artikel

TITELS
over Al de kinderliederen

AUTEURS
C.J. Boeken Huet
over Louis Ratisbonne
over Anonim Sprookjes van Perrault,
De
over Jan Pieter Heije
over J.J.A. Gouverneur
over A.L.H. Ising

Figure 2: Screenshot of the earliest article in the DBNL collection that mentions Flaubert

issue of *De Gids* in an article on French theatre plays for children. It is written by Conrad Busken Huet, the very author who will be attacked five years later for his 'immoral' novel in the vein of *Madame Bovary*. That seems promising at first sight, but it turns out that Flaubert is only mentioned in a footnote. Such a peripheral mention would probably have passed unnoticed if the research had been based on combing through the printed versions of periodicals.

As shown in Figure 2, the DBNL gives a near-perfect transcription of the original text, with indications of page breaks and relevant information in the sidebar. The original visual aspect of the periodical pages is completely lost in the process. Also, this page does not indicate any specific date or issue number, details which are essential for a periodical publication. To identify the publication date of the first article, I clicked on 'Inhoudsopgave' (Table of contents), which gave only a list of (abbreviated) article titles; no authors' names, page numbers or delimitation of the individual issues were included (Figure 3). Knowing that Busken Huet had an influential monthly column titled 'Letterkunde. Kronijk en kritiek', and identifying the fourth item in the list as the article in question, I could deduce that it was published in January. This was confirmed by consulting the 'Verantwoording' (Justification), which contains the original table of contents as published in *De Gids*. All in all, this is a cumbersome procedure for retrieving a simple piece of information.

After this exploration of the DBNL collection, I turned to Delpher. There, my first keyword search on the home page generated 10,108 hits in newspapers and 2,448 hits in other types of periodicals. To keep the results within reasonable limits and because I expected them to contain less relevant content in terms of literary criticism, I decided to exclude the newspapers, which left me with 235 hits for my selected period (1856–1899). While perusing the list of results, I marked all items which seemed relevant, thus excluding all advertisements, publication announcements and articles about unrelated topics. For instance, the first listed result is from a medical journal and concerns Gustave Flaubert's father, who was a famous surgeon, and I also found many reports of shooting contests with the so-called 'Flaubert gun'. This selection process led to a list of 166 favourites which I could download and save as a text file.

As shown in Figure 4, the information on the Delpher results page is limited to the magazine title and year of publication, and a snippet of the keyword in context. Clicking on the link directs you to a scan of the page

dbnl Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren

Zoek alles Zoek naar auteur, titels en in tekst

Literatuur & taal Selecties Periode

De Gids. Jaargang 27 (1863) – [tijdschrift] Gids, De – Auteursrechtvrij

Inhoudsopgave

Gymnasiaal onderwijs paedagogiek.
Het partikulier landbezit op Java.
Mylady Carlisle.
Letterkunde.
Politiek overzicht.
Bibliographisch album.
Een antwoord aan den Minister van Oorlog.
Kerk en Staat.
Ten handelsroman.
Koloniale kamerkout.
Mylady Carlisle.
Letterkunde.
De doorgraving van Holland op zijn smalst.
Aan het Kabinet des Konings.
Bibliographisch album.
Ostia, Rome's havenstad.
Kritiek der practische staathuishoudkunde.
In 't Gooi.
Mylady Carlisle.
Een ander visioen.
1 onverschillen

Over het gehele werk

TITELS
De Gids

Verantwoording
Inhoudsopgave
Downloads
PDF van tekst (11.34 MB)
XML (6.68 MB)
Inhoudsopgave
Overzicht de tekst

Figure 3: Screenshot of the table of contents of the 1863 volume of *De Gids* in the DBNL

Delpher Tijdschriften flaubert Uitgebreid zoeken

Terug naar tijdschriften

Periode
☒ 19e eeuw
☐ 1860-1869 (10)
☐ 1870-1879 (26)
☐ 1880-1889 (63)
☐ 1890-1899 (195)
Kies periode...

Tijdschriftonderdeel
☒ Aflevering (294)
☐ Bijlage (8)
☐ Index (5)
☐ Inhoudsopgave (3)

Titel tijdschrift
Kies titel tijdschrift...

Herkomst
Kies herkomst...

Onderwerp beta
Kies onderwerp...

235 tijdschriften gevonden

Zoekterm: Flaubert X

Periode: 19e eeuw X

Tijdschriftonderdeel: Aflevering X

Filters wissen

Sorteer op: datum [0-9]

Weergave:

Nederlandsch tijdschrift voor heel- en verloskunde, ziekten der vrouwen en d... ☆
insteekt en eenvoudig den abceswand zoo ver open legt als men noodig oordeelt. Sommigen, zooals Flaubert

Deel: Nieuwe Serie- Vijfde Deel
Jaar van uitgave: 1860
Publicatiedatum: 1860
Meer details

Wetenschappelijke bladen, 1862 (2e deel) [volgno 1] ★
heeren Champfleury en Courbet tot hare hoofden heeft en aan welke Gustave Flaubert, de schrijver van

Deel: 2e deel
Jaar van uitgave: 1862
Publicatiedatum: 01-01-1862 (schatting)
Meer details

Figure 4: Screenshot of the first search results for 'flaubert' in Delpher periodicals. Retrieved on 7 April 2024

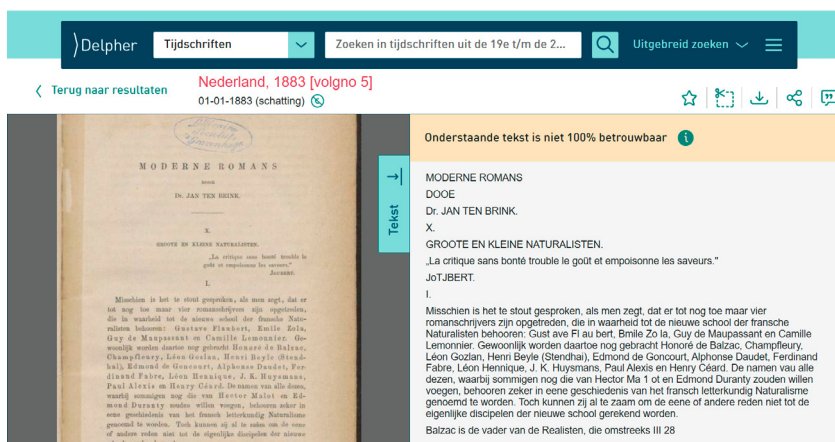


Figure 5: Screenshot of a digitized article in Delpher and its OCR-generated text layer

with the first occurrence of the keyword. The metadata in this collection function on the level of periodical issues or volumes; individual articles have not been marked up, which often obliges you to browse through many pages to find the article title and author. On the right-hand side of the screen, you can open a window with the OCR-generated text layer, which means you are immediately confronted with the imperfection of this technology. Errors are frequent and will inevitably affect your search results. See for instance the example from the magazine *Nederland* (Figure 5), where the search engine missed the first mention of Flaubert because the OCR reads ‘Fl au bert’ (see also: ‘Bmile Zo la’ and ‘Hector Ma 1 ot’).

Once I had compiled my two lists of preliminary search results, I noted all relevant metadata in an Excel file (see Figure 6). At this point in the process, it is important to make a distinction between ‘input’ and ‘categorization’ (Lemerrier and Zalc 2019, 52). Input means copying the basic metadata as provided by the resource: name, article title, periodical, issue, year, page numbers. To make my results more quantifiable, I manually categorized all articles according to their genre, the type of reference to Flaubert and very global indication of the topics discussed. Finally, I chose to copy excerpts from the text to my spreadsheet: generally, a few lines surrounding each mention of Flaubert or, for articles entirely dedicated to his work, their full text. Unfortunately, neither of the databases offers the possibility to do this automatically. The result was a spreadsheet with individual 276 records which forms the basis for my quantitative corpus analysis.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
	first name	author	article title	periodical title	issue	date	year	from	to	genre	type	URL	excerpts
1	William	Raymond	De letterkunde van het Tweede Franseche Keizerrijk. V de roman	Wetenschappelijke bladen	32	1862	160	170	article	discussion	https://www.scribd.com/doc/103484444/De-letterkunde-van-het-tweede-franseche-keizerrijk-v-de-roman-van-raymond-raymond-1862-1863-1864-1865-1866-1867-1868-1869-1870-1871-1872-1873-1874-1875-1876-1877-1878-1879-1880-1881-1882-1883-1884-1885-1886-1887-1888-1889-1890-1891-1892-1893-1894-1895-1896-1897-1898-1899-1900-1901-1902-1903-1904-1905-1906-1907-1908-1909-1910-1911-1912-1913-1914-1915-1916-1917-1918-1919-1920-1921-1922-1923-1924-1925-1926-1927-1928-1929-1930-1931-1932-1933-1934-1935-1936-1937-1938-1939-1940-1941-1942-1943-1944-1945-1946-1947-1948-1949-1950-1951-1952-1953-1954-1955-1956-1957-1958-1959-1960-1961-1962-1963-1964-1965-1966-1967-1968-1969-1970-1971-1972-1973-1974-1975-1976-1977-1978-1979-1980-1981-1982-1983-1984-1985-1986-1987-1988-1989-1990-1991-1992-1993-1994-1995-1996-1997-1998-1999-2000-2001-2002-2003-2004-2005-2006-2007-2008-2009-2010-2011-2012-2013-2014-2015-2016-2017-2018-2019-2020-2021-2022-2023-2024-2025-2026-2027-2028-2029-2030-2031-2032-2033-2034-2035-2036-2037-2038-2039-2040-2041-2042-2043-2044-2045-2046-2047-2048-2049-2050-2051-2052-2053-2054-2055-2056-2057-2058-2059-2060-2061-2062-2063-2064-2065-2066-2067-2068-2069-2070-2071-2072-2073-2074-2075-2076-2077-2078-2079-2080-2081-2082-2083-2084-2085-2086-2087-2088-2089-2090-2091-2092-2093-2094-2095-2096-2097-2098-2099-2100-2101-2102-2103-2104-2105-2106-2107-2108-2109-2110-2111-2112-2113-2114-2115-2116-2117-2118-2119-2120-2121-2122-2123-2124-2125-2126-2127-2128-2129-2130-2131-2132-2133-2134-2135-2136-2137-2138-2139-2140-2141-2142-2143-2144-2145-2146-2147-2148-2149-2150-2151-2152-2153-2154-2155-2156-2157-2158-2159-2160-2161-2162-2163-2164-2165-2166-2167-2168-2169-2170-2171-2172-2173-2174-2175-2176-2177-2178-2179-2180-2181-2182-2183-2184-2185-2186-2187-2188-2189-2190-2191-2192-2193-2194-2195-2196-2197-2198-2199-2200-2201-2202-2203-2204-2205-2206-2207-2208-2209-2210-2211-2212-2213-2214-2215-2216-2217-2218-2219-2220-2221-2222-2223-2224-2225-2226-2227-2228-2229-2230-2231-2232-2233-2234-2235-2236-2237-2238-2239-2240-2241-2242-2243-2244-2245-2246-2247-2248-2249-2250-2251-2252-2253-2254-2255-2256-2257-2258-2259-2260-2261-2262-2263-2264-2265-2266-2267-2268-2269-2270-2271-2272-2273-2274-2275-2276-2277-2278-2279-2280-2281-2282-2283-2284-2285-2286-2287-2288-2289-2290-2291-2292-2293-2294-2295-2296-2297-2298-2299-2300-2301-2302-2303-2304-2305-2306-2307-2308-2309-2310-2311-2312-2313-2314-2315-2316-2317-2318-2319-2320-2321-2322-2323-2324-2325-2326-2327-2328-2329-2330-2331-2332-2333-2334-2335-2336-2337-2338-2339-2340-2341-2342-2343-2344-2345-2346-2347-2348-2349-2350-2351-2352-2353-2354-2355-2356-2357-2358-2359-2360-2361-2362-2363-2364-2365-2366-2367-2368-2369-2370-2371-2372-2373-2374-2375-2376-2377-2378-2379-2380-2381-2382-2383-2384-2385-2386-2387-2388-2389-2390-2391-2392-2393-2394-2395-2396-2397-2398-2399-2400-2401-2402-2403-2404-2405-2406-2407-2408-2409-2410-2411-2412-2413-2414-2415-2416-2417-2418-2419-2420-2421-2422-2423-2424-2425-2426-2427-2428-2429-2430-2431-2432-2433-2434-2435-2436-2437-2438-2439-2440-2441-2442-2443-2444-2445-2446-2447-2448-2449-2450-2451-2452-2453-2454-2455-2456-2457-2458-2459-2460-2461-2462-2463-2464-2465-2466-2467-2468-2469-2470-2471-2472-2473-2474-2475-2476-2477-2478-2479-2480-2481-2482-2483-2484-2485-2486-2487-2488-2489-2490-2491-2492-2493-2494-2495-2496-2497-2498-2499-2500-2501-2502-2503-2504-2505-2506-2507-2508-2509-2510-2511-2512-2513-2514-2515-2516-2517-2518-2519-2520-2521-2522-2523-2524-2525-2526-2527-2528-2529-2530-2531-2532-2533-2534-2535-2536-2537-2538-2539-2540-2541-2542-2543-2544-2545-2546-2547-2548-2549-2550-2551-2552-2553-2554-2555-2556-2557-2558-2559-2560-2561-2562-2563-2564-2565-2566-2567-2568-2569-2570-2571-2572-2573-2574-2575-2576-2577-2578-2579-2580-2581-2582-2583-2584-2585-2586-2587-2588-2589-2590-2591-2592-2593-2594-2595-2596-2597-2598-2599-2600-2601-2602-2603-2604-2605-2606-2607-2608-2609-2610-2611-2612-2613-2614-2615-2616-2617-2618-2619-2620-2621-2622-2623-2624-2625-2626-2627-2628-2629-2630-2631-2632-2633-2634-2635-2636-2637-2638-2639-2640-2641-2642-2643-2644-2645-2646-2647-2648-2649-2650-2651-2652-2653-2654-2655-2656-2657-2658-2659-2660-2661-2662-2663-2664-2665-2666-2667-2668-2669-2670-2671-2672-2673-2674-2675-2676-2677-2678-2679-2680-2681-2682-2683-2684-2685-2686-2687-2688-2689-2690-2691-2692-2693-2694-2695-2696-2697-2698-2699-2700-2701-2702-2703-2704-2705-2706-2707-2708-2709-2710-2711-2712-2713-2714-2715-2716-2717-2718-2719-2720-2721-2722-2723-2724-2725-2726-2727-2728-2729-2730-2731-2732-2733-2734-2735-2736-2737-2738-2739-2740-2741-2742-2743-2744-2745-2746-2747-2748-2749-2750-2751-2752-2753-2754-2755-2756-2757-2758-2759-2760-2761-2762-2763-2764-2765-2766-2767-2768-2769-2770-2771-2772-2773-2774-2775-2776-2777-2778-2779-2780-2781-2782-2783-2784-2785-2786-2787-2788-2789-2790-2791-2792-2793-2794-2795-2796-2797-2798-2799-2800-2801-2802-2803-2804-2805-2806-2807-2808-2809-2810-2811-2812-2813-2814-2815-2816-2817-2818-2819-2820-2821-2822-2823-2824-2825-2826-2827-2828-2829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Figure 6: Screenshot of the spreadsheet containing metadata and excerpts from the selected articles

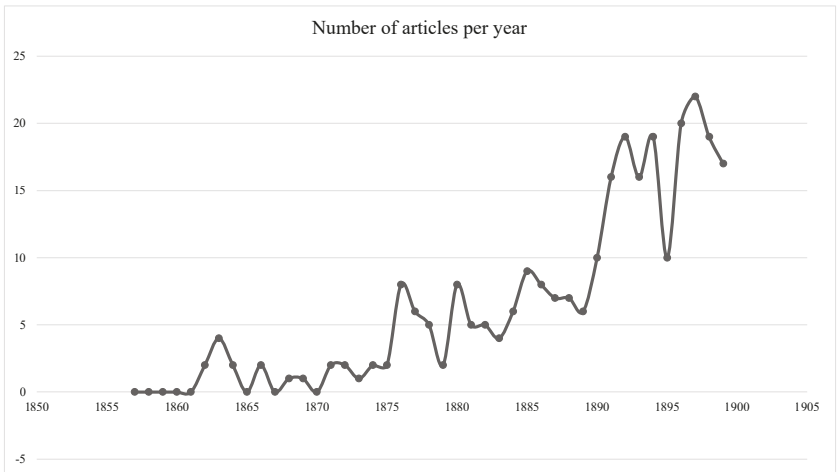


Figure 7: Evolution of the yearly number of periodical articles in the DBNL and Delpher which mention Flaubert

Thanks to Excel's graph function, I could now proceed to visualize structuring patterns in my data. Firstly: how does Flaubert's presence in the Dutch periodical press evolve over time? Are there any peaks in the attention paid to him, and how might they be explained? Secondly, I

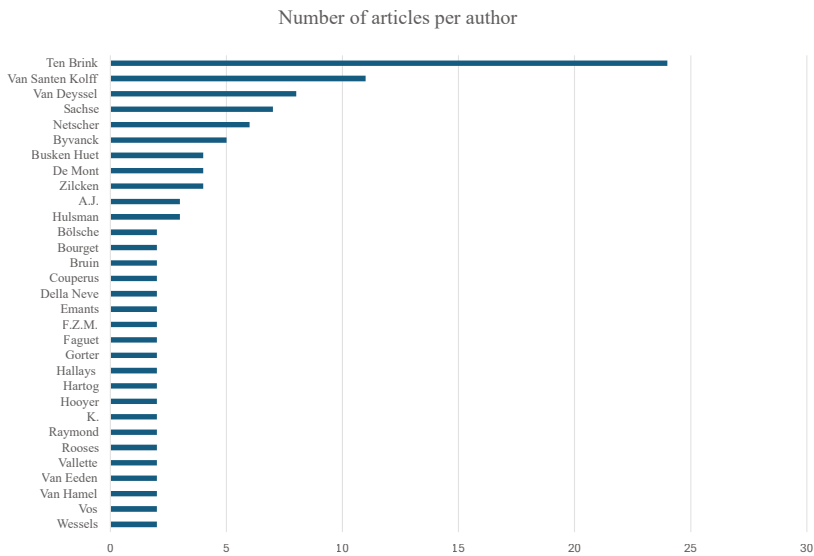


Figure 8: Authors contributing two or more articles to our corpus

am interested in finding out which are the central nodes in the reception network: which journalists are the most active intermediaries between Flaubert and the Dutch reading public?

The first thing we can conclude from Figure 7 is that the reception of Flaubert in the Dutch periodical press had a slow start, despite the notoriety caused by the 1857 trial. After 1875, the number of articles gradually increases, reaching a peak in the 1890s. What we witness here is a literary reputation slowly but surely establishing itself until Flaubert becomes a frequent reference in the literary debate. Some of the peaks in the graph are easy to explain: 1863 marks the publication of Flaubert's second novel *Salammbô*, which received some critical attention, and in 1880 his death formed an incentive for journalists to take stock of his literary career. Based on my knowledge of Dutch literary history I suppose that the increase in mentions around 1890 has to do with the breakthrough of realism and naturalism in Dutch literature under the influence of French authors, in particular Émile Zola (Anbeek and Kloek 1981, 9–13). These examples show that it is advisable to acquire basic knowledge on the topic at hand before engaging in digital periodical research; it makes it much easier to interpret the results and to select items for further inquiry.

	In-depth study	Discussion	Mention	Quote	Total
Article	8	29	144	11	192
Book review		10	50		60
Fiction			4		4
Miscellaneous		2	17	1	20
Total	8	41	215	12	276

Figure 9: Articles in the corpus categorized according to article genre and type of reference to Flaubert

Let us now look at the persons who are most actively engaged in bringing Flaubert's work to the attention of a Dutch audience (Figure 8). The name that stands out is Jan ten Brink, a well-known critic and literature professor with a keen interest in the French novel (he published a book on Émile Zola in 1879 and another one on Flaubert in 1901). This is obviously an author whose articles are worth looking at. The same goes for Jacques van Santen Kolff, a staunch defender of realism and naturalism who corresponded with Zola, and J. E. Sachse, author of a long in-depth article on Flaubert in *De Gids* in 1890. The list further contains the names of several novelists who are linked to the Dutch naturalist current that emerged in the late 1880s: Lodewijk van Deyssel, Louis Couperus, Frans Netscher, Frederik van Eeden and Marcellus Emants. Then there are two critics who are known for having lived in Paris and being active cultural mediators between French and Dutch culture: Conrad Busken Huet and Willem Byvanck. Thus, looking at the quantitative patterns in the data makes certain figures stand out and gives a global indication of the context in which Flaubert's work is discussed: that of discussions on realism and naturalism.

Finally, I have plotted my categorization of the articles in a pivot table (Figure 9). As you can see, I made a distinction between simple quotes or mentions and more substantial types of engagement with his writing: the label 'discussion' was attributed to contributions that dedicate at least several lines to his work, and 'in-depth study' means that the article has Flaubert as its central focus, or one of its main topics (at least several pages must be devoted to his work). It goes without saying that the last two categories would be most interesting for potential follow-up research. They represent only a minority of the items; most of the time, Flaubert is mentioned in passing in the context of an article devoted to a different topic.

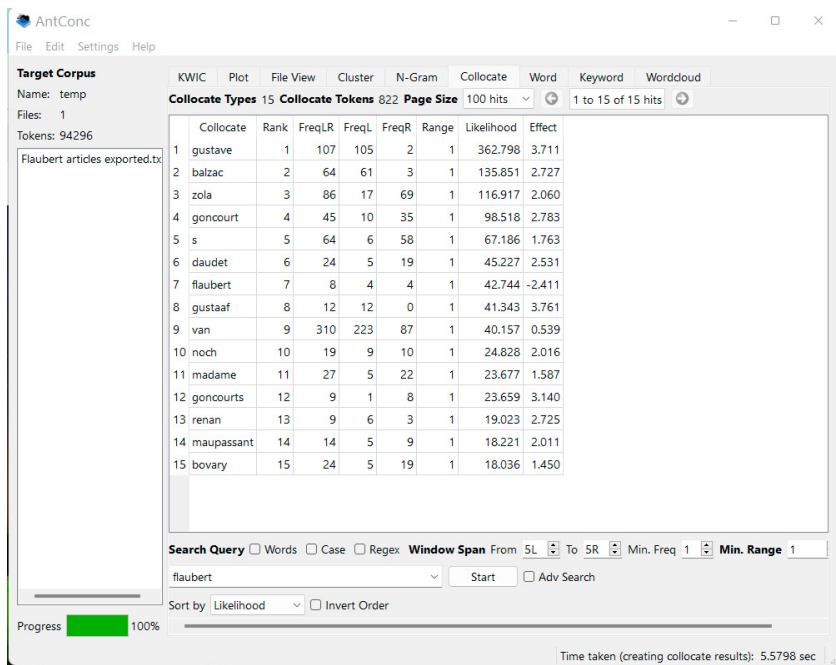


Figure 10: Screenshot of collocation results for 'flaubert' in AntConc

After looking at the article metadata from different angles, I turned to distant reading techniques to explore the Flaubert mentions in their context. In order to work with the AntConc text-mining software, I copied the spreadsheet column with article excerpts to a .txt file, resulting in a document comprising 94,296 words. I then let the software make a concordance of my corpus, showing the most frequently used words in decreasing order of prominence. As expected, the top of the list consisted of so-called function words ('the', 'from', 'and', etc.). To find interesting patterns in the concordance data, I would have to filter them in order to focus on proper names or on words related to literary norms and conventions. This would require a number of manipulations which lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

However, AntConc offers additional functionalities which provide a more refined insight into the data by charting the relations between the name Flaubert and other words in the corpus. The collocation tool shows which words occur more frequently within close range of a search word than could statistically be expected. The results are telling, but also rather

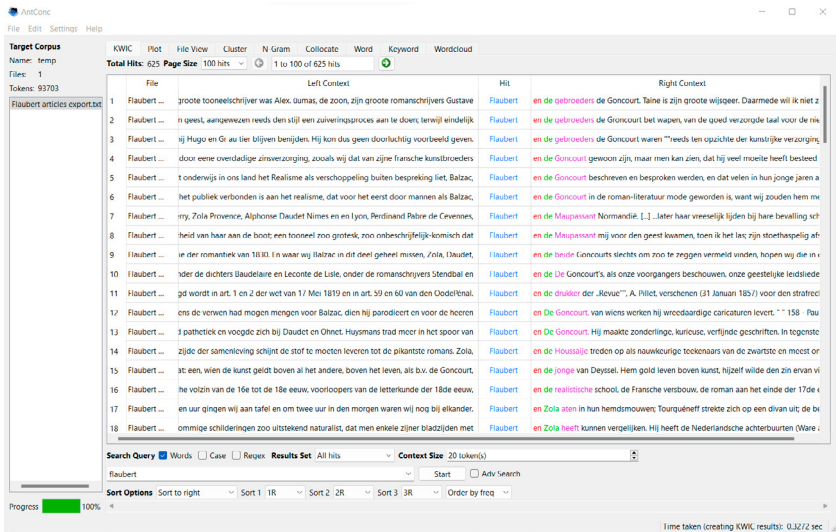


Figure 11: Screenshot of KWIC results for ‘flaubert’ in AntConc

limited, with only fifteen items (Figure 10). These are mainly names of other French authors, but also the title words of Flaubert’s most famous novel. This confirms that Flaubert was, unsurprisingly, most often mentioned in the context of discussions on French realism and naturalism.

For a closer look at the way Flaubert is being discussed in the corpus, I applied the tool called KWIC (keyword in context). This shows each mention of the keyword in its immediate context, as shown in Figure 11. This gives much more detailed information than the concordance and collocation tools, but the advantages of distant reading risk getting lost in the process due to the large amount of items to peruse. This can be countered by using the KWIC results as the input for a word cloud, which visualizes the frequency of words found in the immediate context of the keyword (twenty-five words on either side). Besides the inevitable function words, the word cloud presents title words from books by Flaubert, the names of other French authors, and relevant notions such as realism, romanticism, irony, school, art, novel, book, etc. (see Figure 12).

Besides these different ways of looking at word frequencies, I wanted to see how certain tendencies evolved over time. This is where the concordance plot function of AntConc comes in handy. It visualizes where in the corpus a certain word occurs, and since my texts are arranged in chronological order I used this method to see if Flaubert criticism became



Figure 12: Word cloud based on the KWIC search for ‘flaubert’

less moralistic over time, and more sensitive to his status as a great artist and master of style. I entered the search string ‘mor*!’ (using the wildcard * to include all words derived from both the noun ‘moraal’ and the adjective ‘moreel’). But, knowing that ‘zeden’ (manners) was a much-used synonym for ‘moraal’ in the nineteenth century, I also repeated the same procedure for ‘zede’ so as to include words like ‘zedelijk’ (morally correct), or ‘zedeloos’ (immoral). Similarly, I plotted the occurrences of ‘stijl’ (style) and ‘arti*st’, which includes words derived from both ‘artiest’ (artist) and ‘artistiek’ (artistic). Figures 13 and 14 suggest that my hypothesis was confirmed by this distant reading of the article excerpts: it shows a higher prominence of morally related words in the left-hand side of the bar and more references to style and artistry on the right. But there is an important nuance to be added, since the articles are not evenly distributed over time (see Figure 7: the first half of the period represents about 15% of the articles). This makes only the results in Figure 14 convincing.

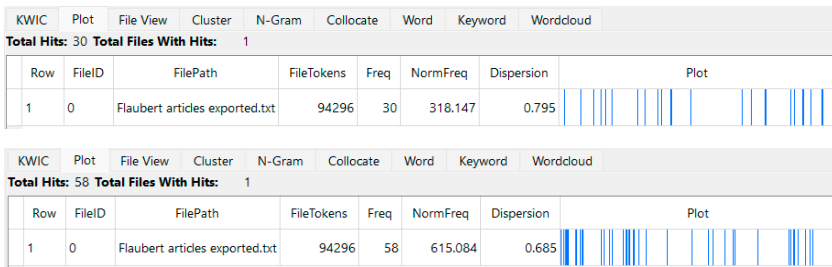


Figure 13: Screenshots of AntConc concordance plots of the search strings 'mor*I' and 'zede'

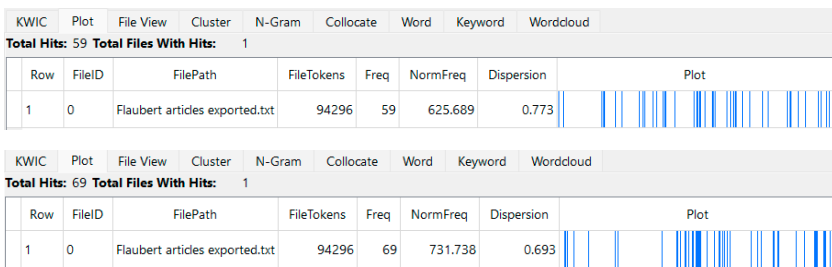


Figure 14: Screenshots of AntConc concordance plots of the search strings 'stijl' and 'arti*st'

An alternative way to chart the global evolution of Flaubert criticism is to plot my own categorization of the article topics. While I browsed through the online periodical collections looking for mentions of Flaubert to copy to my spreadsheet, I got a good grasp of what they were about. Based on my research interests, I noted which articles were explicitly discussing Flaubert in the context of realism or naturalism, which ones contained remarks on the moral value of his work or his stylistic craftsmanship, and which ones discussed his private life. These additional metadata were grouped by decade and visualized in a graph (Figure 15). The results concur with the concordance plots insofar as attention paid to style grows in the later decades (but, again, the total number of articles also increases). As one might expect, the notion of realism is present from the start, whereas naturalism becomes dominant from 1880 onwards. The growing interest in the author's biography can be linked to the publication of his correspondence and of the *Goncourt Journal* in the 1880s.

It is important to be aware of the differences between these two methods. Analysing the entire corpus with the help of AntConc means that you do not engage with the texts themselves; the most important thing is to

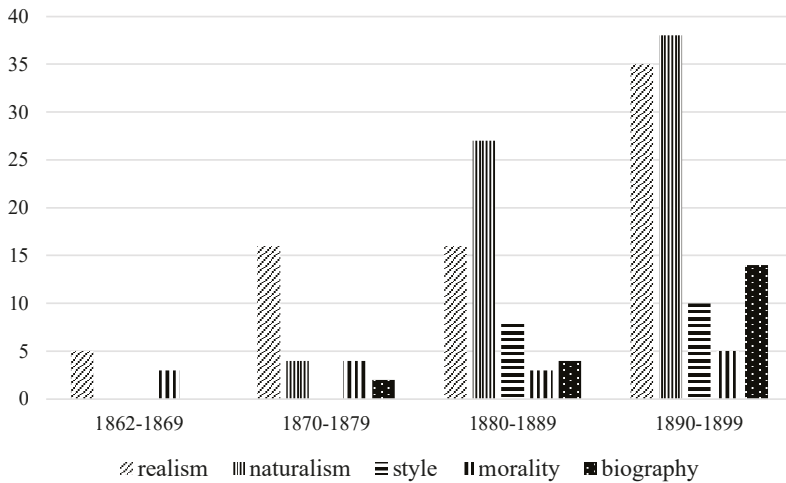


Figure 15: The cumulative number of articles per decade categorized with the label 'realism', 'naturalism', 'style', 'morality' and 'biography'

formulate the right prompts so that the software can tease out answers to your research questions. It does this efficiently, but without any contextual knowledge. It will be able to tell you how often a particular notion occurs in the corpus, but not who or what this notion applies. Considering that most of the search results were single mentions of Flaubert, we know that the majority of the surrounding text fragments are likely to deal with other authors and topics. However, thanks to the large scale of the corpus, I trust that the patterns found in the data give a global indication of the way Flaubert was received in the Dutch periodical press. The second approach may seem more trustworthy because it is based on an informed categorization of the articles. It has two disadvantages, however. Firstly, it is much more labour intensive than distant reading with digital tools. Secondly, it involves interpretation of the corpus, which entails a certain amount of subjectivity; the reading may be biased because the researcher departs from predefined notions or ideas.

5. Conclusion

My corpus analysis based on a selection of digitized periodical articles from the second half of the nineteenth century has charted the gradual increase in the renown of French novelist Gustave Flaubert in the Dutch literary field, well before the first translations of his work were published. Besides the legendary critic Conrad Busken Huet, forgotten figures such as Jan ten Brink and J. E. Sachse seem to have played an important role in the introduction of Flaubert's oeuvre in the Netherlands. Analysis of the reception data with the help of text-mining tools shows that his name is most often mentioned in the context of discussions on French realism and naturalism, especially after these currents are embraced by the Dutch literary avant-garde around 1880, and that he is increasingly recognized as a master of literary craftsmanship.

I am aware that the results presented in this chapter may be skewed for several reasons. In the first place, the digital resources provided by the Royal Library do not cover all that has been published in the Netherlands. Some periodicals are available on other digital platforms, but many are still waiting to be scanned, or have been lost altogether. Secondly, I have explored only the magazine sections in DBNL and Delpher, excluding books and newspapers, which may also contain relevant information for my case study. Lastly, the mass digitized periodicals in Delpher are fraught with OCR errors, which probably means that the results are incomplete. In comparison, the DBNL has the advantage of being much more accurate. However, the lack of scanned images and of a periodical-specific metadata structure also has major inconveniences. When working with digitized periodical archives, it is essential to critically assess their digitization method, selection criteria, metadata structure and user interface, and to nuance your findings accordingly. Moreover, the importance of prior contextual knowledge on your topic should not be underestimated. Ideally, your research process should start from reading a selection of secondary sources, which then generate a few research questions that are tailored to the digitized periodical archive. Once you have assembled your data, you can then interpret them in the light of the broader cultural context and possibly even challenge accepted views on the case study at hand.

In conclusion, studying reception patterns with the help of digital resources and distant reading tools is an efficient way of tackling the complexity of periodical archives, but the results of such an approach tend to

remain superficial. I recommend using it to get a grip on a large quantity of primary source materials, a selection of which may then be studied in greater detail. For my case study, this would entail close reading the evaluative passages in the longer articles on Flaubert – especially those by central figures in the reception history – to get a better understanding of the evolution of the Dutch literary discourse under the influence of French realism.

Notes

- ¹ On the selection criteria for Delpher, see Hauswedell et al. 2020; for the DBNL, see Van Stipriaan 2003.

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PART IV

TEXT-FOCUSED METHODS

Literary Discourse Analysis

Aukje van Hout

1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on literary discourse analysis (LDA), as proposed by one of its major theorists, the French linguist Dominique Maingueneau. According to Maingueneau, LDA must be viewed as a new way of constructing the object 'literature', because it aims to "consider the reciprocal envelopment of text and context" (Maingueneau 2010, 153). Contextualization is key in this approach. That implies shifting the focus of the analysis to the conditions that make literary discourse possible.

While the structuralist approach in the 1960s and 1970s preserved the division between text and context, considering them as separate areas of study, LDA denies this strict distinction, and by doing so, unites different areas of research. This allows scholars to study literary texts in conjunction with phenomena that were previously out of scope, such as the status of the writer, their place and their positioning in the literary field, genres and reading contracts, the text itself (as a material object), and the reader. LDA can focus on normativity in the text, and examine how value judgments relate to the social, political and/or historical context. Meanwhile, LDA also accounts for various textual voices and the grounds on which authority is attributed to texts. The research concerned is extremely diverse, and the texts themselves dictate the exact approach used.

Literary discourse is understood as a network of diverse text types and genres, encompassing not only literary forms but also those that engage with literature, such as newspapers, journals, handbooks, television programmes, interviews and biographies. Consequently, LDA can include a broad spectrum of literary and non-literary texts, including novels, poetry, drama, short stories, essays, memoirs, letters, diaries, reader reviews, and journalistic and expository writings.

LDA can be particularly valuable to scholars who are interested in the mutual dependence between literature and social and institutional

practices and interactions, relations of power, and normativity in literary texts. LDA considers the author to be someone who does not operate in a vacuum and claims that no form of communication, including literature, is ever universal or free of ideology.

A literary discourse analysis may inquire how we speak about literature, whose voices are represented and with what authority they speak. In addition, it questions the role of concepts we use to analyse literature, such as ‘author’, ‘oeuvre’ or ‘originality’. A major point of interest is how ideology and value judgements in a work of art relate to other discourses, and the resulting social and ideological effects. LDA proposes to investigate how the reader engages with a specific text and how their responses are shaped by its cultural and historical contexts. The ideology of a text is closely intertwined with the reader’s perception of the author’s persona, as this manifests itself in and outside of a text. All these research avenues essentially concern the relationship between what M. H. Abrams has called the four coordinates of literary theory: the work itself, reality, the writer and the reader (Abrams 1953).

The field of LDA is closely related to that of reception studies (Willis 2018). Although these disciplines have their own theoretical frameworks, both focus on understanding how texts are produced, interpreted and received by audiences over time, by studying structures, functions and cultural, historical and discursive contexts. Both approaches are also related to intertextuality as they consider how texts interact with each other, and how the reader’s knowledge of other texts influences their interpretation (Van Dijk et al. 2013; Genette 1997). Both acknowledge the fact that interpretation is dynamic: the meaning of a text is not fixed but evolves over time.

In this chapter, I will illustrate how LDA can be operationalized by applying it to the novella *Het klare gif* (1890) by Dutch writer Frits Lapidoth (1861–1932).

2. The method

As touched upon earlier, LDA studies the various relations a literary work can maintain with – according to the classical model of Abrams – reality, the author and the reader. Abrams did not neglect the relations that exist between various narrative aspects of the literary work itself. LDA-inspired research may investigate each of these relations.

Those who seek to examine the relationship between a literary work and reality – whether the reality of the author or that of the reader – should look for tensions within the fictional world, such as conflicts or clashing worldviews. These conflicts may represent actual frictions in the real world. Maingueneau uses the concept of paratopy to describe all kinds of ambiguities. These always provoke moral judgements, in both the fictional and the real world. They may be found in characters with double loyalties, with illicit relations, which become unavoidable processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Where there are moral statements in a text, whether implicit or explicit, the reader tends to seek a ‘normative centre’: a character, the narrator or the author who can be held responsible for his judgements. Researching normativity can be facilitated by the classical concept of ethos, the definition of which deconstructs the moral judgement as part of the mindset of the reader or the author – be it the author who is a textual construction or the author as a real person. Maingueneau distinguishes three manifestations of the ‘author’: the *personne*, the author of flesh and blood; the *écrivain*, who plays his role within the literary field; and the *inscripteur*, the writer-within-the-text, formerly known as the implicit author.

Reality – be it the objective world as most of us agree upon, or the subjective inner world of the writer – is investigated with the concept of scenography. This is the way the fictional world is constructed and presented to the reader. A scenography can typify a literary genre, such as horror stories, invariably situated in mediaeval castles or decaying old houses, or naturalist novels, which are situated in the slums of large cities, where poverty and amorality are indigenous. But every poem or novel has its own specific scenography, with characters who behave and speak in their own peculiar way, thus defining the characters’ inner world, set in a particular space and introduced by an invisible or present narrator.

The structure of the literary work itself, all relations that hold the fictional world together and give meaning to it, is essential for each investigation briefly dealt with in this section. A thorough narratological analysis is essential for any discourse analysis.

Instead of clearly defining the concepts LDA deals with, Maingueneau chooses to circumscribe them by narrowing down their meaning and by excluding what they do *not* refer to nor pretend to investigate. This way of thinking leaves the researcher with enough freedom to interpret Maingueneau’s concepts, always remaining within the boundaries he

draws, according to the specific demands the study of a novel or a poem (or a corpus of literary texts) poses. In the next section, the main concepts Maingueneau introduces are discussed.

3. Tools and techniques

Maingueneau's theory revolves around a few core concepts: *enunciation scene*, *scenography*, *paratopy* and *ethos*. Maingueneau views literature as one of the so-called 'self-constituting discourses' (*discours constitutants*) of humanity, including, for example, religious, political or philosophical discourse. These discourses are characterized by the fact that they do not have a defined place and obvious function within the society to which they belong: unlike, for example, a conversation or a speech, literature is not anchored in a specific communicative situation. Therefore, these discourses – as well as their authors – must constantly legitimize themselves through their enunciation scene (*scene d'énonciation*), or the speech act, that 'stages' reality in a certain way. Maingueneau breaks the enunciation scene down into three components: the *enclosing scene*, the *generic scene* and the *scenography*.

The enclosing scene can be understood as a 'type of discourse', such as a religious, political or administrative discourse. The enclosing scene covers a variety of generic scenes, for instance a conversation, a letter or an electoral campaign leaflet. Generic scenes assign roles to the actors and prescribe the right time and place, the medium, the organization of the text, its mode of circulation and reception, etc. (Maingueneau 2023, 237). Texts within the same generic scene can stage different scenographies. An historical novel, for example, can be prophetic, apologising or political.

Scenography

Every enunciation scene communicates through a certain scenography. A scenography can be understood as a certain 'staging' of reality, the shaping of a particular (fictional) world, through a narrator and a narratee, a place and moment and the characters' specific use of language and behaviour. It is simultaneously a frame and a process: it forms a connection between the autonomous literary work and the conditions from which it emerged, namely the status of the author and the place and time when it was written (Maingueneau 2004, 9). So, in a way, the text constructs its own context.

Some generic scenes are stricter than others: a weather forecast, for example, is very limited, and its speaker can easily be replaced. More complicated are genres like a song or a type of literary text, where the author's singularity – their individual literary persona – plays a major role, because they must invent a personal scenography that cannot be dissociated from the meaning they intend to confer upon their utterance. This scenography must present itself as original within the literary field the author operates in, it must appeal to the audience and it has to correspond with the message that is being conveyed. As Maingueneau states: “[The scenography] legitimises a text that, in return, must show that this scenography from which speech is proceeding is the relevant scene for speaking of what is spoken of” (Maingueneau 2010, 155). This is especially important in literature because it is a self-constituting discourse: the aim of this type of discourse is an open one, and it therefore must legitimize itself.

Paratopy

Maingueneau refers to this process of self-legitimation with the concept of paratopy (*paratopie*), a composition of *para* (next to) and *topos* (place). The concept designates a paradoxical space, “un impossible lieu”. Maingueneau actually regards such a place as a process, an ongoing negotiation, rather than as a place in the regular sense. He speaks of “une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu”, “un jeu d'équilibre”: a balancing game between an existing, already acquired place and a non-existent, desired place (Maingueneau 2016, 26 and 2014, 71). According to Maingueneau, such an ambiguous position forms the basis of every creative process and is at the same time also its product:

Condition de l'énonciation, la paratopie de l'écrivain en est aussi le produit ; c'est à travers elle que l'oeuvre peut advenir, mais c'est aussi elle que cette oeuvre doit construire dans son développement même. (Maingueneau 2014, 94)

Paratopy is, therefore, always reciprocal: the paratopy is the basis of such ambiguity or negotiation but perpetuates itself at the same time.

In Maingueneau's view, which is based on the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, an author is in a continuous dialogue with the literary field. The relationship between the author and their text is complex because, according to Maingueneau, an author's position is

always paratopic: their position is nothing less than a negotiation. After all, an author simultaneously participates and does not participate in the literary field: he moves within that field and is, therefore, part of it, but he also opposes it, seeking his own particular position, and does not fully conform to the rules that apply in order to be unique.

Not only is the author of a literary work considered paratopic by Maingueneau, but all kinds of relation within a literary work, such as characters, places of action and communities, can have a paratopic position, if they maintain an ambiguous relationship with established society, both within the literary text as well as beyond that.¹

Ethos: person, writer, inscriptor

In LDA, the strict distinction between author and text, as proposed by structuralism, does not exist. Maingueneau introduces a threefold concept of authorship consisting of what he calls the *personne*, the *écrivain* and the *inscripteur*.² The *personne* is the biographical person, the author of flesh and blood. The *écrivain* is the actor in the literary field. The *inscripteur*, who is responsible for publishing the text, somewhat aligns with what we would call the narrator but bears greater responsibility (also on a moral level) as they also direct the scenography. For example, a foreword is usually signed by the author, who in this role is neither the story's narrator nor a physical person outside the text. Situated at the boundary between the real world and the literary work, the author may be held accountable for the text in legal contexts, such as charges of plagiarism, immorality or incitement to hatred.

According to Maingueneau (2014, 108), the author's three incarnations are inextricably linked (he speaks of a "Borromean knot"). This would mean that paratopias in an author's life (both the writer and the person) would reflect their literary work. This idea should be regarded with caution since it would be a mistake to rashly make one-on-one connections between a text and the life of the author. Nevertheless, Maingueneau's threefold authorial concept allows the author to be examined in three dimensions: in relation to the text (the inscriptor), in relation to the literary field (the writer) and in relation to his biographical and social self (the person). This is where the discursive and the institutional meet; many recent studies on authorship demonstrate the fruitfulness of this premise (see for example Dorleijn et al. 2010; Sergier 2015; Gilbert 2022; Lang 2022).

To study this authorial concept, Maingueneau introduces the concept of *ethos*.³ He uses the Aristotelian concept of *ethos* and defines it as the image a speaker or writer builds of himself through his text. In this view, *ethos* is created discursively (albeit in consultation with the reader): it concerns matters such as word choice, style, argumentation, displayed knowledge and tone (*ethos montré*) and self-describing passages (*ethos dit*) (Maingueneau 2014, 205). Moreover, he addresses the fact that the authorial image a reader has in mind *prior* to reading (what he calls the *ethos prédiscursif*) can also contribute to the *ethos* of a text. That is why Maingueneau distinguishes a discursive and a pre-discursive *ethos*, together forming the *ethos effectif* (Maingueneau 2002, 55). In what follows, I will use ‘author’ for Maingueneau’s threefold concept of the author and ‘inscriptor’, ‘writer’ and ‘person’ respectively for the individual institutions.

4. Case study

LDA encompasses a range of perspectives and typically engages with text corpora or networks of interconnected texts rather than focusing on a single literary work. Nevertheless, it can also be applied to an individual text, as I will demonstrate by applying LDA to the novella *Het klare gif* (*The Clear Poison*, 1890).

Its central theme is morphinism – the only Dutch contribution to the long list of (mainly French) *fin-de-siècle* literature about this often controversial theme. For various reasons, this story is an interesting case study for LDA. Its theme, drug (ab)use, is still relevant today. Given that it was written over a century ago, there is a wealth of historical context to consider, which can aid significantly in interpreting the narrative. Additionally, its controversial nature makes it a compelling subject for an approach that focuses, among other things, on examining normativity in literature. The controversial aspects of historical literature often reflect the norms and values of their time, which can be quite different from today’s perspectives. This makes them fascinating subjects for examining how literature can challenge or reinforce societal norms.

The setting of the story is Paris, where we meet the artist Armand Seyssel and his young wife, Emilie. The latter starts a friendship with the parvenue Cléopâtre de Vescovato, a wealthy countess with a very dubious

reputation. De Vescovato takes a devilish pleasure in addicting young women to morphine and watching their demise in order to continue the work of 'destruction' that her former lover, an anti-Tsarist anarchist, once started with bombs through quieter, slower means. Emilie turns out to be ideal prey due to her longing for hedonism.

Seyssel, portrayed as an artist ill-suited for marriage, neglects to 'guide' his wife and allows her to act as she pleases, although he intends to "keep a close eye on things" (Lapidoth, 1890). His concern grows when Emilie's physical condition deteriorates dramatically, prompting him to take her to the countryside, where she realizes how far she has strayed from the right path. Seyssel, ignorant of the true cause, only discovers his wife's addiction after a suicide attempt. Finally, he takes decisive action and admits her to a sanatorium for treatment. While he immerses himself in the international morphine problem, Emilie recovers, and the couple relocates to Montmartre, far from the depraved centre of Paris.

From the perspective of LDA, several aspects of this story merit attention, including its relation to the author or extra-literary reality, its institutional context, and its thematic concerns. A complete analysis would examine these dimensions in conjunction; however, not all angles can be addressed within the scope of this brief contribution. In what follows, I focus on two salient aspects: the emphatic relationship with extra-literary discourse on morphinism and its connection to scenography, which concerns how the author stages a particular reality. This is also closely linked to ethos and paratopy, since the inscriptor is responsible for constructing the scenography. Accordingly, I will analyse the relationship between the author and the narrative as manifested in the scenography.

My first step is to examine the scenography in detail, considering elements such as theme, characters, setting, narrator, paratext, linguistic choices and normativity. Given the limitations of space, I will highlight those aspects most relevant to the central issue: the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality and the role of the inscriptor.

Although fictional, *Het klare gif* is replete with detailed information on specific morphine dosages, injection techniques, symptoms and medical perspectives on withdrawal methods – to such an extent that one contemporary reviewer even questioned Lapidoth's motives, regarding the story as a highly detailed manual for morphine use. Other reviewers observed that Lapidoth transcends the realm of art and wondered whether the text is a narrative or a scientific report (Langerock 1891, 323; Antonio 1890). The

inscriptor demonstrates extensive knowledge and explicitly engages with extra-literary discourse on morphinism through numerous references to newspaper articles and scientific studies on morphine use, thereby blurring the boundaries of fiction.

To illustrate this, I will provide a few examples. When Cléopâtre instructs Emilie in detail on how and where to obtain morphine, she claims that any pharmacist will readily supply it; a forged prescription in a foreign language suffices. A footnote signed “writer” – which Maingueneau would identify as the inscriptor – confirms that “all details provided by C. de V. are absolutely correct, unfortunately, and verified by the writer himself” (Lapidoth 1890, 311). Similarly, the precise information Cléopâtre gives Emilie regarding morphine dosage is commented on by the inscriptor, who notes that “real morphinomaniacs” swear by this ratio (312). When Seyssel consults a doctor, the narrative presents differing medical views on morphinism (319). The inscriptor even reproduces in full a genuine cry for help from a morphine-addicted physician originally published in a newspaper – a passage that, within the story, prompts Seyssel to recognize his wife’s addiction not as a moral weakness but as a disease resulting from the “power of morphine” (327).

Because the text repeatedly directs readers to contemporary newspapers, these sources constitute an obvious starting point for researchers seeking to understand the extra-literary discourse on morphinism with which the story interacts. For this purpose, I will consult the Delpher database. Another relevant discourse that sheds light on circulating ideas about morphinism around 1890 can be found in secondary literature on drugs in the *fin de siècle*.

Many news articles from around 1890 report on the ‘morphinism epidemic’, apparently caused by doctors who prescribe and pharmacists who hand out morphine too easily; there are many calls for stricter legislation. Dutch newspapers show that morphinism was mainly considered a ‘French problem’, since France had a widespread morphine culture, but the Dutch feared that the hype would spread to the Netherlands. Numerous newspapers testify to strong opposition. According to secondary literature, morphine use was relatively common, particularly among the upper classes, as it was an expensive drug often associated with a hedonistic lifestyle. *Het klare gif* explicitly situates morphine use within the context of decadence, making it one of the few nineteenth-century literary texts to address recreational drug use.

It is no coincidence that Paris serves as the novel's setting. As in much *fin-de-siècle* literature, the city is depicted as the epicentre of sin: lesbianism, satanism, nihilism, prostitution, occultism and so on. Psychiatrists of the time regarded morphinists as victims of the modern metropolitan lifestyle. In Paris, morphine use among the elite was considered chic and fashionable (Blok 2011, 17). Hypodermic needles and other drug-related paraphernalia – often costly, such as heraldically painted and numbered silver cases with gold needles and enamelled flasks adorned with emblems and engravings – became a form of applied art flaunted by idle, wealthy women (Ten Berge 2007, 111). In an almost lesbian-erotic boudoir scene, where Cléopatre introduces an undressed Emilie to morphine by injecting it into her inner thigh, we learn that Cléopatre owns an expensive needle case of this kind.

Het klare gif was first published in the Dutch magazine *Nederland*, but Lapidoth later included it in his collection of novellas *Moderne problemen* (1890). As the title suggests, this collection addresses the 'vraagstukken van den dag' ('questions of the day'), such as socialism, hypnotism, positivist psychology and morphinism, thereby establishing an explicit link with extra-literary reality. Both titles function as paratexts, integral to the scenography, and leave little ambiguity regarding how readers should interpret morphinism – as a problematic phenomenon of modernity. The narrator conveys his abhorrence of morphinism implicitly, for instance by emphasizing the damage caused by addiction, such as the loss of sexual desire. He elaborates on this explicitly through Emilie's thoughts, stating that "the terrible poison had [...] deprived her of the ability to love" and had "dulled her senses" (Lapidoth 1890, 314). Another example is his overt pity for Emilie, whom he considers so naïve that he laments the absence of any warning about the dangers of morphinism (307).

Literary discourse analysis seeks, among other things, to examine how a specific scenography takes shape – in this case, one that blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction while conveying a particular normativity regarding morphinism. The inscriptor, whom Maingueneau regards as indistinguishable from the writer (and, ultimately, the person, though I will set that aside here), constructs the scenography. This entails responsibility for the decisions involved in 'staging' reality through the enunciation scene, including narratological, paratextual and genre-related choices.

In this story, the inscriptor is highly present – not only by blurring the boundaries of fiction, but also through the narrator's explicit commentary

on morphinism and other normative remarks, for instance on journalism. This is noteworthy given that Lapidoth was not only a writer but also a journalist. To explore the relationship between scenography and the writer further, I draw on the concepts of paratopy and ethos. I begin by analysing paratopic elements within the scenography, which contribute to the author's ethos – a point I will elaborate on later.

Seyssel is a paratopic character for various reasons. As a Dutchman living in Paris, he is neither completely French nor Dutch. As an artist, he is not fit to be fully part of society since “those whose lives are a permanent search for the ideal of beauty, searching and creating, are powerless against the hostile influences of the great world, outside the studio”⁴ (Lapidoth 1890, 294). Seyssel is not quite fit to be married, as is shown through his actions, but is also pointed out by the inscriptor several times. He lacks the courage to protect his wife from what he fears to (and turns out to) be dangerous for her and his duties as a husband weigh too heavily on him. Seyssel also struggles with his artistry. In his view, an artist has to be a *homme du monde*, someone who puts himself out there and visits salons. On the other hand, he believes that he is corrupting his artistic ideals by engaging in this conventional life. While he moves in Parisian upper-class circles, he critically comments on it in satirical cartoons, thereby finding rapprochement with the “mondain chroniclers”, a type of journalists despised by the inscriptor. Without being able to really influence this scene, he carries out his profession in a world that thrives on gossip and backbiting.

The inscriptor's position in this story is also a paratopy. He distances himself explicitly from the seemingly Parisian scene of the *demi-monde*, yet uses language that is riddled with Parisianisms to do so. And while he comments sharply on many matters, he shows himself to be an expert on these topics, at the same time proving himself to be an insider. Both choice of words and exhibited knowledge are part of what Maingueneau calls the *ethos montré* and contribute to the *ethos discursif*, the discursively built image of a writer.

Lapidoth, the writer of the story, resembles his character, Seyssel, in significant ways. Just like Seyssel, he was a Dutchman living in Paris, where he worked as a journalist for the Dutch newspaper *Het nieuws van den dag* between 1884 and 1894, putting him in a similar cultural in-between position. An *in memoriam* characterizes him as “old-fashioned Dutch and modern French at the same time” (Brouwers 1986, 55).

Moreover, like Seyssel, he struggled with his artistic ambitions: although he is considered mainly a journalist by others, he himself had literary aspirations. Journalists did not enjoy a good reputation at that time; the profession was looked down upon (Van Hout 2022, 169), so Lapidoth's literary work was regarded with scepticism at first: "as soon as he actively engages in literary art, [he becomes] a person of that unbearable kind [...] who now nauseatingly put on airs by flaunting their 'interestingness' among genuine artists and intellectuals",⁵ one critic writes (Van Deyssel 1897, 89). In 1894, Lapidoth published *Fransche teekenaars*, a compilation of journalistic essays on contemporary French caricaturists and illustrators, artists who published, like Armand Seyssel from *Het klare gif*, mostly in daily newspapers, thereby "wasting their talent on mundane scenes", according to critics (*Elsevier's Geillustreerd Maandschrift* 1895).

5. Conclusion

Following Maingueneau, we can tentatively argue that the author manifests in the text on multiple levels: as inscriptor – through comments on Paris, artistry and morphinism – and as the character Seyssel, who seeks to reconcile his artistic ideals with his marriage and lifestyle. These levels are connected by paratopias: tensions present in the author's life find a place, albeit in encrypted form, within the narrated reality. Paratopy operates bidirectionally: not only do we identify these paratopias in the text (forming the *ethos discursif*), but they also contribute to shaping reality. They inform the writer's ethos (*ethos effectif*) by presenting a scenography that blurs fiction and non-fiction, narrative and scientific or journalistic discourse, and the position of outsider with that of insider.

As noted, literary discourse analysis aims to explain how a specific discourse takes shape – in this case, a discourse on morphinism. This scenography appears to be the form required to address a topic such as addiction, where the text comes to function as a warning against French-like situations. To analyse this, I have connected different types of texts: fiction (the central story and other works by the author), reviews, secondary literature, and articles from newspapers and magazines. Given the constraints of this chapter, I have only been able to touch briefly on a few points. With more space, the corpus could be expanded and questions explored further, including topics not yet addressed, such as the

connection between *Het klare gif* and other works by Lapidoth, intertextual links with French literature – such as Catulle Mendès's *Mephistophela* (1889), mentioned in reviews from *Moderne problemen* – the portrayal of lesbianism (which, in the context of decadentism, differs from later representations; see Van Hout 2022), or recurring images of artists and artistry within the narrative.

As I have sought to demonstrate, LDA and reception studies intersect and complement each other, producing a flexible and dynamic interpretation of literature. LDA explores how different discourses within a text generate multiple interpretations, while reception studies traces how interpretations evolve across time and cultural contexts. Integrating insights from these two disciplines enables analysis of both text production and reception, offering rich opportunities to understand the dynamic relationship between texts and their audiences.

Notes

- ¹ Compare Maingueneau 2014, 95–96.
- ² Maingueneau translates these terms as ‘person’, ‘actor’ and ‘author’ (see Maingueneau 2023a). I find these terms confusing because ‘author’ is commonly understood as the writer of a literary work, who is, in Maingueneau’s view, the actor. To avoid this confusion, I will adhere more closely to the French meanings and translate these entities as ‘person’, ‘writer’ and ‘inscripitor’.
- ³ Maingueneau’s ‘ethos’ closely relates to Jérôme Meizoz’s concept of ethos (see also Chapter 5 of this book). For a more extensive elaboration on this, and the pros and cons of the concept of ethos in the context of LDA, see Van Hout 2022, 25–28.
- ⁴ “[Z]ij, wier leven één zoeken is naar het schoonheids-ideaal, één zoeken en één scheppen, machteloos zijn tegenover de vijandelijke invloeden van de groote wereld, buiten het atelier.” All translations in this chapter are my own. Although I have sought to remain as faithful as possible to the original quotation, minor adjustments were occasionally necessary due to issues of untranslatability or nuance.
- ⁵ “[Z]oodra hij aan, aktief, aan literaire kunst gaat doen, [wordt hij] een mensch van die onuitstaanbare soort, [...] die zich nu misselijk aanstellen door met hun interessantheid te gaan ópzitten tusschen wézenlijke artiesten en intellektueelen.”

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Suggestions for further reading

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Close Reading and Reception Studies

Frederik Van Dam

1. Introduction

In close reading, small samples of text (particular words, sentences or passages) are singled out for scrutiny. The researcher then proceeds to investigate how this small sample either fits into or differs from its context, be it that of the larger text or a set of surrounding discourses. As Barbara Herrnstein puts it in an influential overview (2016), it can be understood as “an exercise in reverse engineering: the examination of an artifact to see how it was made and how it worked” (60). In contrast to the methods of distant reading (Moretti 2013; Jockers 2013) or surface reading (Best and Marcus 2009), it is a method that is more suited to one text or a small corpus of texts. It has developed in tandem with equivalent methods in legal research, art history, media studies and medical research. While in the field of literary studies close reading has traditionally been applied to poetry and fiction, it need not be restricted to these genres, nor to the discipline of literary studies: it can be applied to all sorts of texts, from constitutional declarations and illness narratives to diaries and reviews (for a reader with important theoretical texts, see Lentricchia and DuBois 2003; for a consideration of its antecedents in the nineteenth century, see Selbin 2016; for a methodological exploration of a close reading strategy in cultural history, see Ohrvik 2024).

At first sight, this microscopic method does not seem to lend itself to research into literary reception. Scholars in reception studies are interested in what happens to a text *after* it has been written: the goal is to understand a dynamic, continuously changing process. Close reading, however, focuses on the text itself, and on two aspects in particular. One is the text’s language: close reading aims to identify and analyse the formal patterns that a text is marked by. The other aspect is that of meaning: close reading aims to help us make sense of a text and to reveal an underlying message – in short, to interpret it. Because of this focus on the text itself,

as the theoretical excursion in the next section will show, close reading is often associated with research that privileges an understanding of texts as static entities, the kind of research that isolates a text in the way that a biologist isolates a cell in a Petri dish. If, however, one adopts a view of language and meaning that sees both as defined by social and cultural creations – in other words, if one posits that form and content come into being only in the mind of the reader – then close reading does emerge as a helpful tool to address questions in reception studies. One can identify at least two sets of interlocking questions where close reading has played a valuable role, often in connection with adjacent research domains (mentioned in between brackets after each question in the list below). The first set of questions has to do with readerly involvement or readerly ‘conscription’ (a term that I borrow from Stewart 1996):

- 1.1. How do readers arrive at an aesthetic appreciation of a text (practical criticism, post-critique)?
- 1.2. How does a text create the conditions of possibility for the reader’s interpretation (hermeneutics)?
- 1.3. How does a text make readers feel (affect studies)?

The second set of questions pertains to research into textual relationships:

- 2.1. How does the text itself respond to earlier texts (intertextuality)?
- 2.2. How does a change in the text’s transmission alter its meaning (transmission studies, genetic criticism)?
- 2.3. How did a text effect a change in the historical context in which it was created (New Historicism)?

Reading a text intensely and attentively may provide potent and distinctive answers to these questions. Because of the method’s association with textual analysis, however, there are few works in the field of reception studies that explicitly consider close reading as a part of their toolset: the role of close reading in reception studies still awaits a full theorization. This chapter will briefly sketch the possible contours of such a theorization, before moving on to discussion of techniques and tools, which it will then deploy in an examination of readerly involvement and textual relationships in Eleanor Catton’s *The Luminaries* (2013). Readers interested in this method may want to consult the three recent books at the very end

of this essay, as well as Scott Newstok's impressive database of scholarly references to close reading.

2. The method

Close reading originated in the first half of the twentieth century. At this moment in time, scholarship in literary studies tended to focus on the conditions under which literary texts were produced. Instead of reading texts, scholars were working at the coalface of authors' lives (biographical studies), historical contexts ('old' historicism) or texts' transmission (philology). To put it bluntly, facts about texts mattered more than the texts themselves. Rejecting such approaches, the Cambridge professor I. A. Richards developed a method that sought to show the value of texts for ordinary readers. In the book in which 'close reading' first appeared, *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards gives an account of an experiment in which he asked students to comment on poems without being told anything about them in advance: no titles, dates, names or notes. The underlying goal was not to see texts as autonomous, aesthetic objects, as in the tradition of aestheticism ('art for art's sake'), but to "put works of literature into a productive relation with their contexts of reception" (North 2017, 32). By asking students to reflect on works that had been stripped of their context, Richards aimed to raise their awareness of the cultural importance of language and communication (question 1.1). Following in Richards' footsteps, William Empson (1930) developed a mode of criticism that privileged the notion of textual ambiguity. According to Joseph North, this programme had a diagnostic and a therapeutic dimension: close reading texts was meant to make students think about the value of literature in light of their own historical moment.

In the two decades following Richards' work, close reading was marshalled into the service of projects that had a very different aim. In the United States, a curious mixture of conservative Southern poets and left-wing New York intellectuals (including John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley) picked up on Richards' and Empson's methods but rejected their focus on psychological and moral engagement, instead "stress[ing] literature as art" (Smith 2016, 69). For the New Critics, the reader was "strictly irrelevant to the pure aesthetic text" (North 2017, 40): close reading was

reimagined as an ‘objective’ method that would allow each reader to fully unpack the text’s status as a ‘verbal icon’. According to the New Critics, to understand a text readers have to ignore and bracket their feelings (the ‘affective fallacy’); similarly, they must not try to guess or find out what the author may have meant (the ‘intentional fallacy’). In a similar way but in a different part of the world, scholars grouped under the label of Russian Formalism (including Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson), too, looked at the text as an autonomous object, whose mechanics could be dismantled by means of close attention to linguistic and structural aspects. Questions about reception did not play a role of much substance in these formalist paradigms, although they did much to develop a vocabulary for textual analysis.

Language cannot exist without speakers and readers: even the most dogmatic scholars within the formalist paradigm were unavoidably compelled to address historical and social issues. In the ‘deconstructive’ backlash that identified this blind spot in formalism, close reading was once more put in service of reader-oriented questions. As the French critic Roland Barthes famously put it in 1967, “the death of the Author” – the axiom on which autonomist theories were founded – had to be “requited” by “the birth of the reader” (Barthes 1986, 55). Taken out of context, as it often is, this axiom seems to suggest that readers may freely impose their interpretation on a text. The semiotician Umberto Eco, for instance, sarcastically comments how for deconstructive critics “the glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything, except what their author wanted them to mean” (Eco 1990, 39). A sound deconstructive reading, however, does not presume that readers have such freedom: rather, it aims to account for those moments when the text’s meaning is nebulous, and the reader is forced to peer through the fog. When the reader encounters a word or phrase that seems to contradict what the text is saying elsewhere (a so-called ‘aporia’), for instance, the reader must consider an alternative interpretation. Close reading is indispensable in locating such textual shifts, conflicts and absences: without close reading, these moments of ‘undecidability’ would be glossed over.

Deconstruction was not the only reader-oriented theory that responded to the text-oriented paradigms, but emerged in tandem with a variety of theories that are often grouped under the heading of reader-response criticism. While certain scholars in this field favoured empirical or psychological methods, some also used close reading. In the 1970s, for instance,

Wolfgang Iser became intrigued by the fact that literary texts withhold the information that is necessary to understand them, and argued that these ‘textual gaps’ (*Leerstelle*) and other manipulations resulted in the profile of an ‘implied reader’. Other scholars have suggested that this implied reader is a social construct: according to the notion of ‘interpretive communities’, which was popularized by Stanley Fish in 1976, readers are conditioned by the conventions of the social group that they belong to.

Be it in deconstruction or in reader-response theory, close reading may help scholars address the way in which readers encounter conditions that generate multiple and possibly contradictory meanings (question 1.2). Such moments are especially pronounced when readers notice that a text is either overtly or covertly engaging with a previous text. At such points, readers cannot but try and make sense of the connection. As such, close reading also helps identify and untangle the more specific ways in which a text contains echoes of other texts (question 2.1), or the ways in which it differs from its earlier guises, such as the author’s manuscripts, an earlier edition or a later translation (question 2.2).

This attention to intertextuality was revamped in the 1970s and 1980s. In further exploring moments of textual contradiction or omission, scholars in a variety of paradigms (New Historicism, postcolonialism, feminism, etc.) became increasingly attuned to ways in which literary and non-literary texts intersect in a shared discourse. Literary texts, after all, often allude to non-literary texts, and vice versa; as the reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss posited, they share a ‘horizon of expectation’ (Jauss 1982; Jauss and Benzinger 1970). To study this intersection was not meant as a return to old-school historicism, in which literary texts were reduced to their context. Rather, as Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher (2001) argued, the aim is to blur the distinction between literary and non-literary texts, regarding both as performative utterances in a textual web by which the assumptions and values of a society at large were sustained (question 2.3). Scholars in these paradigms are often suspicious about the texts they read (the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur 1970)): in their works, close reading is used to shed light upon words or phrases that show how texts are unknowingly implicated in real-life power struggles.

Not all critics would agree that this kind of exploration of the echoes between literary and non-literary texts can be accomplished by close reading; in actual practice, moreover, many scholars in the contextualist paradigm have traded the ambiguities of close reading for the certainties

of reducing a text to its hidden ideological proclivities, if not to its context. Joseph North, for instance, argues that the contextualist approaches of the 1970s were at odds with close reading, and that these approaches found a proper method only belatedly, with the rise of ‘distant’ reading after the turn of the century (North 2017, 10, 109). Because a reading of a text that fastens on its politics cannot explain why it is that we still return to them, the past two decades have witnessed the rise of new, post-critical paradigms, in which the affective dimension of reading has been revalued. Isobel Armstrong, for instance, has issued a call to “rethink the power of affect, feeling and emotion in a cognitive space” (2000, 87). Drawing on the surrealist thinking of Michel Leiris, as mediated by Emmanuel Levinas, she identifies infinite interplay between two principles (bifurcation and erasure) that together form a cognitive space in which thought begins. The “intense analytic process” of close reading, she suggests, allows us to grasp “the cathecting or build-up and release of energies” (93) that we term affect. In a related way, Charles Altieri (2001) has argued that we should let students “know what is involved in feeling one’s body so intensely and so complexly that one has to reach out beyond it to imaginary extensions of those states, for the sake simply of who they make us become during the moments that we can make them last” (278). Put more prosaically, close reading may thus help readers understand how a text makes them feel (question 2.3).

3. Tools and techniques

Close reading refers to a specific mode of attention rather than to a step-by-step protocol, since its aim – when used in the context of reception studies – is to bring the reader closer to the text’s multiple meanings. That said, this kind of disposition may be fostered or cultivated by means of certain precautionary measures, searchlight beams and techniques.

One such precautionary measure relates to the intentional fallacy: almost all the theoreticians in the overview above held that the reader should resist the urge (at least initially) to find out more about the author. Instead, it is the text itself that must be central; the aim is to form a relationship with the words on the page. In the same vein, readers are to reject their inclination to adopt a spatial perspective and to skim through the text in order to get a sense of the whole. In this regard, close

reading can be contrasted with reading comprehension methods such as 'SQ3R' (which is an acronym for five different stages in the reading process: survey, questions, read, recall, review), which was developed by the educational psychologist Francis P. Robinson in *Effective Study* (1946). While the SQ3R method works well for understanding the content of a complicated text, it is not helpful in providing answers to the questions about readerly conscription or textual relationships that scholars in reception studies are concerned with. One precautionary measure that is traditionally associated with close reading and that scholars in this field should *not* try to avoid is the affective fallacy: in reception studies, the reader's emotional response and associations are part and parcel of the inquiry.

What, then, should the reader do to observe and study those responses and associations? The first principle is to take a linear approach and to proceed through the text, moving from word to word and from sentence to sentence. As you do so, pause to consider content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and see if you can pin down their meaning and if you can detect instances of ambiguity. An essential tool in this kind of investigation is a good standard dictionary of the language of your text: even when a word's meaning is clear, it will be worth your time to verify what it means, so that you can reflect on the decision that you are making in assigning it a meaning, a decision that may open up an alternative line of interpretation (bifurcation). Especially in dealing with older texts, you might want to look at differences between a word's historical meaning and its contemporary one (which will help you see how your own horizon of expectation meets with that of the text). One variation on this technique, which is especially favoured in more deconstructive forms of close reading, is to consider words' etymology: by looking at a word's roots, the reader will be led to confront language on a deeper, more fundamental level (erasure). This kind of focus will also help you in locating instances of wordplay, in which two or more meanings are activated at the same time. If you are lacking a dictionary, there is another, easy technique one can fall back upon, which is that of the 'cloze' procedure: by omitting a word in a sentence and replacing it with one that is close to it in meaning, one's appreciation of the nuances and contours of the original will be heightened.

Given that meaning is the primary focus of close reading, instances of figurative language are particularly important. By figurative language, I

am referring to instances where two words and concepts are compared and mapped onto one another. The most important form of this device is the metaphor, in which this comparison is left implicit, as when John Keats writes that “tender is the night”: in this instance, the night is given a quality that belongs to a different kind of entity, though it remains up to the reader to decide whether ‘tender’ here turns the night into a (soft, delicate) object (concretization), or whether it personifies the night into a (loving, gentle) being (personification). This particular metaphor might also be seen as a case of synaesthesia, as different sense domains are combined: the quality of tenderness relates to touching (or, indeed, tasting), whereas the night is perceived through sight (and, to some extent, sound). An attention to this kind of figurative language may make readers become aware of the many ‘dead’ metaphors with which ordinary language is saturated (here you may think of the legs of a chair or the foot of a mountain). An equally important case of figurative language – though less noticeable, because the second image is left implicit – is that of metonymy, in which two images stand in a relationship of contiguity. The most well-known example here is the synecdoche, in which a part (e.g. ‘the roof’) comes to stand for the whole (‘the house’). Finally, the close reader will want to pay attention to collocations in which words are combined that contradict one another, either directly (the oxymoron) or seemingly (the paradox), as well as to collocations that seem to repeat the same meaning, either because one is implied in the other (the pleonasm) or through the use of synonymous words (the tautology).

The attention to content words and their myriad meanings should not preclude a concern with their counterparts, the so-called ‘function words’ (determiners, qualifiers, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns). As scholars in linguistics have shown, the use of such words is quite idiosyncratic, and not strongly affected by a text’s topic or genre, as a result of which an author’s use of function words leaves an easily recognizable footprint. At first sight, then, they might seem to leave little room for play in terms of ambiguity: “statisticians join in the assumption that the words chosen are unambiguous enough in meaning and stable enough in incidence to admit direct contrasts between the habits of one writer and another or between the large slow phases of a development of style” (Burrows 1987, 1–2). Even so, a close consideration of function words will reveal important shades of meaning. In a story, qualifiers such as ‘almost’ or ‘perhaps’ may, for instance, shed doubt on the narrator’s reliability. Or take the word ‘of’,

which usually designates possession, but which may also create obfuscation, particularly in the case of nouns that designate a verbal action and that may take a direct object. When we speak of ‘the theft of the president’ or ‘the president’s theft’, it is unclear whether the theft is something that happened to the president, or whether the president is the thief. Usually context will favour one line of interpretation, but in close reading a consideration of an alternative line is seen as revealing.

The use of function words often yields a stylistic effect, which makes them also an example of the performative dimension of a text. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), the language philosopher J. L. Austin made a distinction between an utterance’s ‘constative’ and ‘performative’ aspects. The former refers to the fact that language can be descriptive: words are used to depict something that exists or that happens. The latter refers to the fact that words may also make something happen: the act of naming something, of expressing how one feels, of promising to do something or of apologizing, for instance, are instances where the act in question (the name, the feeling, the promise, the apology) comes into being. The performative aspect of language may be explicit in the case of certain speech acts, such as the examples I have just given, but it is also implicit in supposedly ‘constative’ utterances insofar as such utterances rely on sound and insofar as the quality of sounds, especially in repetitive patterns, may elicit feelings or simulate effects that may either contradict or tie in with the meaning.

So far, we have looked at certain precautions (the intentional fallacy) and particular kinds of focus (content words, function words, performativity), as well as at one tool, the dictionary, and one technique (the cloze procedure). I would like to conclude this section by highlighting three other techniques that may help in fastening the reader’s attention on the way in which a text moves: translating, paraphrasing, and memorizing. In the case of the first, translation (cf. Chapter 15), by turning the text into a different language, the reader is automatically forced to consider various lines of interpretation. Obviously, this technique will only work for shorter texts, for reasons of feasibility. The second technique is not beset by this limitation: the paraphrase, too, may be a helpful way of getting closer to the text. A paraphrase can be defined as a free rendering of something written or spoken, expressing the same thought in different words. That this technique may help in close reading may come as a surprise, since in New Criticism the paraphrase was famously condemned as a heresy

because it supposedly violates the literary work's intent to "return to us the unity of the experience itself as man knows it in his own experience" (Brooks 1947, 212–213). In actual practice, however, the interpretation of a text, even by New Critics, requires the critic to comment or describe the object in question. In recent years, various scholars have therefore argued for a rehabilitation of the paraphrase. "If meaning, in poetry, is dispersed across the differentials of its phrasing in time", so Angela Leighton writes, "then surely paraphrase becomes not only possible, but in fact in [sic] the very nature of reading" (Leighton 2009, 172; for a philosophical elaboration, see Currie and Frascaroli 2021). By repackaging what texts say in their own words, readers are naturally prompted to think alongside a text and to attend to the limits of meaning. A common practice in this technique is to identify the most salient features – hinge points or pulse points – which together provide a skeleton for the paraphrase. In dealing with a narrative, such a paraphrase will contain crucial elements such as the key events, protagonists, time, space and voice. While translation and paraphrase become more effective by being written down on paper, there is a related technique of close reading that has a more oral aspect, which is the technique of learning a text (or a passage) by heart. While this technique used to be a central part of teaching languages and literature for centuries, since the Second World War it has witnessed a steady decline because of changes in educational practice, in beliefs about children's needs and abilities, and in the function of poetry in society (Robson 2012, 9). Even so, it is a valuable exercise: memorizing a poem and reciting it out loud may help us feel "the endlessly repeated *minutiae* of common experience" (Robson 2012, 27). The most common (and most contested) technique is that of rote-learning, or sheer, endless repetition. Memorization need not be that tedious: Ted Hughes (1997), for instance, lists a number of ancient techniques that draw upon the powers of the mind. To memorize a poem, readers may want to separate the different images, visualize these in their mind's eye, and then connect them. They might also attend to more musical qualities, those having to do with sound and rhythm, and fasten on the patterns they hear in order to remember.

The above overview, which is not exhaustive, has focused on a number of searchlight concepts and techniques that may be used in close reading, but these do not constitute a fixed recipe: it is up to the scholar to choose the ingredients and to find the right combination – in other words, to decide which techniques are used and in which order. In creating this recipe, the

researcher must be guided by a particular research question, and in this chapter I have focused on aspects that fall within the remit of reception studies. In spite of this variety, it is worth stressing that close reading is “a set of attentional practices”: it helps us question preconceptions, to attend to things we take for granted, and to thus think differently (Thain 2024, 546). As Marion Thain has recently argued, this way of attending to the world may yield insights that are strikingly original and wholly new; the criterion for good close reading is not replicability but innovation. Unlike certain types of quantitative analysis, this kind of attentional practice cannot be easily outsourced to machines.

4. Case study

In this section, I will illustrate what such a recipe may look like by close reading *The Luminaries* (2013) by Eleanor Catton. At 832 pages long, this novel may not seem the most obvious object for close reading; memorizing the entire text, for instance, will not be attainable. As such, this case study will also show how one can still close read a longer text by making certain adjustments and accommodations. This analysis is a variation on a more contextualist kind of close reading that readers may find in a different article (Van Dam and Louttit 2023).

The first step in our examination is to consider the research questions that a scholar in literary reception studies may ask. We could investigate how actual readers read the text, or how people have responded to the novel in reviews, but these questions require different methods. Close reading may provide useful answers if we ask ourselves how we, as readers, are involved in the text and how the text is situated in a broader tapestry of texts. On the one hand, we want to find out why *The Luminaries* speaks to us, what the text is trying to tell us, and how we form an emotional attachment to it; on the other hand, we also want to see if and how *The Luminaries* draws our attention to other texts and how it responds to the world in which it was created. One question that is more difficult to ask has to do with transmission history, since we do not have access to original manuscripts or drafts. The novel has seen several different releases, however, and by looking and interpreting differences between the texts, close reading might have part to play. The most significant difference is the cover, the original of which was designed by Jenny Grigg.

A comparative close reading of the covers might be revealing, but because a cover is a peritext and thus in itself already a form of reception, I will leave it out of my purview here.

Since this novel is extraordinarily long, it is not feasible to do a close reading by lingering on each word. The reader will thus have to select certain passages. A novel's opening sentence or opening paragraph usually warrants closer inspection:

MERCURY IN SAGITTARIUS

In which a stranger arrives in Hokitika; a secret council is disturbed; Walter Moody conceals his most recent memory; and Thomas Balfour begins to tell a story.

The twelve men congregated in the smoking room of the Crown Hotel gave the impression of a party accidentally met. From the variety of their comportment and dress – frock coats, tailcoats, Norfolk jackets with buttons of horn, yellow moleskin, cambric, and twill – they might have been twelve strangers on a railway car, each bound for a separate quarter of a city that possessed fog and tides enough to divide them; indeed, the studied isolation of each man as he pored over his paper, or leaned forward to tap his ashes into the grate, or placed the splay of his hand upon the baize to take his shot at billiards, conspired to form the very type of bodily silence that occurs, late in the evening, on a public railway – deadened here not by the slur and clunk of the coaches, but by the fat clatter of the rain.

Such was the perception of Mr. Walter Moody, from where he stood in the doorway with his hand upon the frame.

We begin our analysis of this passage by focusing on content words. Translating the context words into another language would be a helpful exercise, as doing so makes the reader think about words that are quite rare in ordinary speech: frock coats, tailcoats, Norfolk jackets, moleskin, cambric, twill. What are we to make of these unusual items? All of them have to do with fabrics. This sartorial aspect is significant: later in the novel, we will discover that the story revolves around a particular set of dresses that are found to have gold hidden in their seams.

In our examination of content words, we might also apply a cloze procedure. As readers, we are given a picture of a room with people, which is specified as a 'smoking room' (and which, when we move to the second paragraph, is shown to be focalized through the eyes of a character,

Walter Moody). How does our impression change if we were to substitute 'smoking room' with near cognates of public rooms in a hotel, such as the 'lobby', the 'dining room', the 'corridor'? By trying to find such near-synonyms, it becomes clear that all these spaces share the main characteristic of a hotel, which is that of being a transitory space, or a space in between spaces (which may also remind us of the nature of fabrics and clothing). The smoking room is also different: as a room designated for smoking, we might see it as filled with fumes, thus heralding the reference to 'fog' later in the passage. If we go down the road of bifurcation, we might also begin to think about the practice of smoking, and the relationship between smoking, tobacco and colonization. Given that *The Luminaries* is set in a settler colony, New Zealand, this detour is perhaps not as arbitrary as it seems.

As the paragraph proceeds, it imposes a number of figurative images on this room. The first is that of the railway car. Here ambiguity begins to intrude: a railway car is like a hotel in that it is a place for people on the move, but it is different insofar as the hotel is stationary, while the railway car moves through time and space. The image is further complicated in that the people in this room or on the railway car are supposed to live in a city "that possessed fog and tides enough to divide them": if we paraphrase, the hotel is thought of as a ship within a larger sea or an ocean, rocked by tides and obscured by mist. Given that Moody has just disembarked from the *Godspeed*, the barque on which he arrived, the littoral metaphor is quite fitting. All these images serve as a stage for the characters' behaviour, which is that of a 'bodily silence'. Within this curious phrase, there is an element of contiguity in the substitution of bodies for people. The resulting phrase is quite striking, however: while we often say that people are silent, we rarely say that bodies are – except, perhaps, in the sinister manifestation of the body as a corpse. Since the people in this room are alive and well, we are therefore dealing with a paradox. As the novel develops, moreover, the reader encounters a mystery in which two characters' bodies are mysteriously entangled. If anything, the collocation 'bodily silence' highlights the ghostly atmosphere that the room is suffused with.

If we shift our attention from content words to function words, the most ambiguous element is the use of the conjunction 'or' in the second sentence: the text offers three different images of three different men, but does not specify what the others are doing, or whether some of these

actions are shared. We might say that this use of ‘or’ in the syntax adds to, or ‘performs’, the nebulous impression that the passage is conveying by means of its content words.

To conclude, we could try to assess the performative dimension of sound by committing the paragraph to memory. In doing so, we could try to find arbitrary connections between the various images, as Ted Hughes suggests; in the case of this text, however, we could also focus on the consonant that is most markedly present. One useful sound would be the ‘velar plosive’ k-sound in words such as congregate, smoking, accidentally, comportment, coats, tailcoats, jackets, moleskin, cambric, etc. The resulting soundscape, we might say, is one of creaking, crackling, squeaking and crunching. At this point in our close reading, we can begin to wonder if there is anything that we have encountered with which these sounds can be associated; perhaps we are hearing a railway car that is moving on the tracks?

This close reading of the novel’s opening passage contains most of the ingredients that were mentioned in the overview above. The next step would be to connect passages that resonate with one another, in order to further deepen our aesthetic appreciation of the text, and to discover what the text might be thinking; for reasons of space, I have already included aspects of such a proleptic elaboration above. To flesh out our close reading, we would also need to study the chapter’s title, ‘Mercury in Sagittarius’, which has to be interpreted in light of the fact that the novel’s tangled plot is shaped by astrological patterns. The seven characters central to the plot each represent a planet and a related trait (Walter Moody, the main focalizer, represents Mercury; his dominant characteristic is that of reason), while the surrounding characters correspond to the different constellations of the zodiac. These different characters combine and interact in different arrangements, to which the chapter’s title provides a clue. Each chapter offers us a new constellation, with the planetary characters in the centre and the stellar ones on the periphery.

In most novels, we would need an encyclopaedia or dictionary to unravel these elements, but *The Luminaries* helps its readers: two pages before our chapter begins, the reader encounters a character chart that specifies the astrological traits of each character and, at the beginning of each part, an astrological chart that specifies the constellation of the next set of pages. As such, the novel gives instructions on how it should be read. To embark upon such a course and to trace these patterns, however

interesting and pleasurable it is, provides an instructive contrast with close reading, as it would be an example of surface reading.

So far, we have seen how close reading will allow us to answer questions that deal with readerly conscription, but not those of textual relationships. There are no overt allusions or quotations in the opening paragraph, as a result of which we will have to do a bit of detective work. One way of finding intertextual relations is a comparison of works in the same genre or by the same author. Catton's third novel, *Birnam Wood* (2023), provides some clues. Although the story of *Birnam Wood* is set in twenty-first-century New Zealand, it shares a similar theme with *The Luminaries*, insofar as different characters are competing for valuable mineral resources. The novel's plot centres around the scheme of an American tech billionaire, Robert Lemoine, who wants to extract valuable rare-earth elements from a national park. In this attempt he is thwarted by a collective of guerrilla gardeners that calls itself Birnam Wood. This point of overlap might lead us to think more deeply about the relationship between *The Luminaries* and our contemporary world: the references to various natural resources in the opening paragraph, in particular tobacco (the smoking room) and cotton (the various fabrics), could lead us to think about the longer history of human-caused environmental destruction.

If we shift our attention from historical to literary contexts, we might want to look up 'Birnam Wood' in an encyclopaedia or dictionary. Doing so, the reader will find that it is an allusion to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In this tragedy, three witches tell the usurper Macbeth that he "shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him" (Shakespeare 2006, 112–113). Macbeth is, of course, fooled by this prophecy: as his enemies march against him, they cut down Birnam Wood and use the branches to disguise their true numbers. Catton's *Birnam Wood* alludes to Shakespeare's work in its title and in its story, but the supernatural dimension of the play is absent in the novel. Since *The Luminaries* does revolve around a supernatural occasion, however, we might wonder if it, too, albeit in a different way, relates to the Scottish play. A comparison of the first paragraph of *The Luminaries* with the first scene of Shakespeare's play might suggest as much. In this scene, the three witches famously vanish with an eerie rhyme: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair; / Hover through the fog and filthy air" (4). Shakespeare's references to fog and, earlier in the scene, thunder and rain, also inform Catton's depiction of the smoking room in *The Luminaries*. This initial

point of overlap might lead us to consider other intersections: the fate of the character Emery Staines, who is trapped in a ship crate for thirteen days yet miraculously survives, is similar to that of a sailor whom the witches intend to torment: “Weary seven nights, nine times nine, / Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine. / Though his bark cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed” (13–14). As with all research into intertextuality, once one has found a particular thread, the possibility of a near-endless unravelling begins to dawn upon the reader. For the purpose of our exercise, I hope that this example shows how close reading may contribute to both the identification and the understanding of textual relations.

5. Conclusion

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, close reading is not the most obvious method for scholars in reception studies, but I hope to have shown its relevance for questions that pertain to readerly involvement and textual relationships. Close reading has been an important method for various related fields in which such questions have played a part, including but not limited to practical criticism, deconstruction and reader-response theory, and affect studies. It is a method with a low degree of systematicity (the steps one takes are flexible) and a high degree of serendipity (insights seem to be sudden and unexpected). Even so, serendipity is not the same as luck: by proceeding in a meticulous and rigorous way, though guided by their own intuition and training, scholars engaged in close reading use practical judgement and creativity in an attempt to deduce matching pairs (see de Rond 2014). In a similar vein, replication will always result in different outcomes, but this does not mean that the facticity of one’s findings are baseless: as long as one is able to adduce samples from the text that illustrate one’s claims, there is an element of corroboration and evidential support. These rebuttals of possible points of critique should not obscure the strong merits of close reading. In addition to its diagnostic and therapeutic value (see Charon et al. 2016), one such merit is that of speculation: just as the scientist Johannes Keppler was able to discover the laws of planetary motion without an understanding of gravity as a force but through speculative comparisons with a wide variety of phenomena in the natural world, so the scholar who engages in close reading is able to creatively transform the texts that we think we know.

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Translation as Reception

Elke Brems and Jan Ceuppens

1. Introduction

Hans Robert Jauss, a founding father of European reception studies, described reception as a process in which the reader gives the potential of a text concrete form with a specific attribution of meaning (Jauss 1969). His definition also aptly describes what translators do: they make concrete the possibilities of a source text by attributing them with a specific meaning – their translation. Translators are often seen as meticulous and perceptive readers. Spivak for instance called translating “the most intimate act of reading” (Spivak 2012, 316), while Rigney says translating can be seen as “paradigmatic for reading as such” (Rigney 2011, 104).

It would therefore appear to be an obvious choice to also look at translations when studying a particular text’s reception. A widely studied form of reception in literary studies is reviewing. Although both genres – translations and literary criticism – combine reception and production, literary criticism is often still seen as *productive reception*, with translations considered *receptive production*. Or, alternatively, the reception aspect is especially emphasized with literary criticism, while the production dimension is underlined with translations. In reality, of course, literary criticism also involves production – after all, a new text is created. Translations similarly also involve reception – another text is received. Ika Willis calls both types of reception “text-to-text approaches to reception” as opposed to “text-to-reader approaches”. One does not, then, examine audience responses, but rather “texts which have been created in response to earlier texts. These responding texts are then seen as the place where the process of reception happens” (Willis 2018, 35).

From the very beginning of translation studies, literary translation has been conceptualized, among other things, as an interpretation of the source text. James Holmes, one of the founding fathers of translation studies, called a translated poem a ‘metapoem’ and the translator a ‘metapoet’.

He situated a translated poem alongside other forms of ‘commentary’ on the source text, such as ‘literary criticism’. “The relation of metapoem to poem is [...] similar to that of an analysis or explication of a poem to that poem” (Holmes 1988, 10). The common ground between translation and other forms of metatext has been noted on a more fundamental level by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe:

Metaphrasis, in ancient Greek [...], means: translation. [...] But other meanings are associated with the word, thanks to the polysemy of the preposition meta: for example what we, for our part, refer to with another term borrowed from Greek, “paraphrase”; or, on the basis of Latin, with “explication”. Metaphrazein means “to express in new terms” or, generally, “to speak afterwards, following”. And the same verb [...] means “to reflect afterwards, to deliberate, to examine after mature reflection”. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1998b, 7–8; quoted from McKean 2019, 72–73)

Important early translation scholars added their own concepts. Very influential was André Lefevere’s 1992 book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* in which he sets translation as a form of rewriting alongside anthologies, literary criticism and editing, among others. The Göttingen Sonderforschungsbereich “Die Literarische Übersetzung” (1985–1996) around Armin Paul Frank also saw literary translation as reception: a translation is an “Interpretation (auch Umdeutung), die sich den Anschein eines Originalwerks gibt” (an interpretation or reinterpretation that gives the appearance of an original) (Frank and Hulpke 1987, 105–106). In 2000, Cees Koster brought together the key concepts and frameworks up to that point in his book *From World to World* in which he sets out to examine “the way in which one can describe a target text in its status as an interpretation of a corresponding source text” (Koster 2000, 17).

In addition to interpretation, translation is also seen as evaluation of a source text. Translation is part of the evaluation history of a text. In Pascale Casanova’s words: “Translation, like criticism, is a process of establishing value” (Casanova 2005, 23). Thus, value is attributed to the source text simply by selecting it for translation, and by acknowledging or disregarding certain characteristics, whether in terms of form or content. This attribution of value happens according to the norms and conventions of the target culture, which are in turn revealed in the translation. Casanova used the phrase ‘establishing value’; Mona Baker uses the term

‘assessment’, arguing that our relation to every story, every narrative that comes our way, is determined by the other stories and narratives that we are involved in (Baker 2006), and these influence how we assess new stories.

For our purposes we regard translation as a form of reception that interprets and evaluates a source text.¹ It is important to note that the difference between interpretation and evaluation is not always clear. To put it simply: in interpretation you assign a meaning and in evaluation you assign a value, but often the two are inseparable. Nevertheless, we make the distinction here because not every interpretation is also an evaluation and not every evaluation is an interpretation.

In this kind of research, you use a translation of a literary text as the primary source. You can also take different translations of the same text, either retranslations in the same language or translations in different languages of the same source text. Often, using different translations makes the analysis richer, because you can see more clearly the choices the translators made (after all, you can see how another translator made different choices). In addition, the fact that there are translations in other languages, or retranslations in the same language, might say something about the evaluation of the source text: it could be a form of appreciation if it is deemed worthy of (re)translation (as opposed to the vast majority of published books, which go untranslated). If you stretch the term translation broadly, you can also include adaptations (e.g. screen adaptation and novel-to-comics adaptation) in your analysis, but for that you need an analytical toolkit that can also interpret other semiotic codes (image, sound, etc.), which we cannot provide here.² The main question you ask in this approach is: how does this translation (target text) interpret and evaluate the source text on which it is based?

2. The method

When studying a translation as a form of critical reception, you need to consider the different steps in the translation process where evaluation and interpretation can occur. In our view, three steps can be studied here: (1) selection, (2) translation, and (3) presentation. These steps can only be distinguished from a methodological perspective, because in practice they sometimes overlap; there is no clear sequence, and they are not always

easily distinguishable. In addition, as a fourth step one can examine the reception of the translated text. This will briefly be discussed, too.

Step 1: Analysis of the selection of authors and texts translated

As a first step, you can investigate why certain works, authors, genres (or even languages) were or were not selected for translation. It is more obvious to start investigating why something was translated than to investigate why something was not translated. With the latter, there must be a striking gap: something is not translated that you would have expected to have been translated (e.g. a canonical text, or a text by an author whose other texts were translated), or, as in quite a few cases, a translation was started but never finalized.

To start investigating the selection practice, you can proceed either contextually or textually. In the contextual approach, we can distinguish three levels. At the macro level, you can look at the relationship between cultures, which generates or prevents translation flows. For example, it is known that more translation occurs from dominant cultures to peripheral cultures than vice versa, or that Western cultures mainly translate each other's works and authors. Existing research on the world literary system can help you understand the translation flow your case study is involved in.³ You can also consult existing databases of translated works, although many databases are partial and/or incomplete. Much used is the UNESCO database Index Translationum, but it is only rich for central languages (in casu English) and lacks a lot of data for more peripheral languages. To set up your own research on translation flows, you need big data, so you probably need to work with a team and with data managers (Roig-Sanz & Fólca 2021).

At the meso level, it is useful to look at factors that cause a text to be translated. A helpful framework in this regard has been proposed by Gisèle Sapiro. She distinguishes political, economic, cultural and social factors (Sapiro 2016a, b), which often act in combination to grant or deny a work access to a target culture. To investigate this, you need knowledge of the target culture in a given period. You can often start from existing research, supplemented by archival work (publishers' archives, policy documents, etc.), interviews, information from the press, and so on.

We consider the micro level to be the human factor. In the selection phase, the role of cultural mediators is crucial. Meylaerts et al. (2017, 67) see cultural mediators as key figures in literary and cultural history. They

define cultural mediators as actors “active across linguistic, cultural and geographical borders, occupying strategic positions within large networks and acting as a carrier of cultural transfer” (Meylaerts et al. 2017, 67). They suggest analysing mediators’ socio-biographies to reconstruct their social and biographical trajectories and their intercultural habitus as well as mapping mediators’ networks. Again, archival work (correspondence, for example) and interviews are key methods to do so.

Finally, there may also be textual elements that cause something to be translated or not. There may be elements in the source text that are unacceptable in the target culture or perceived as untranslatable, which is why a text is not translated. This can be found out through correspondence, or interviews, for example. If a text does get translated, there may also be textual reasons for this: a mediator thinks it is a very good text, for example, or it is a text that offers something (in terms of form or content) that the target culture does not yet have or is not familiar with. It may be a text in a genre that is not (yet) really developed in the target culture, such as Young Adult in Dutch, for example, so that a culture relies on import. Ultimately, however, it is usually not possible to discuss these textual factors without taking the context into account (the profile of a mediator, the cultural production of the target culture, etc.), so the distinction between textual and contextual factors is not real in practice. Nevertheless, we include the textual level because we believe it is important to incorporate the text itself in the analysis, as it is sometimes lost sight of due to too much focus on context.

In this first step, we have focused on contextual and textual reasons for selecting or not selecting a text for translation. The underlying question remains what, by examining this, you can learn about the reception of the source text. That means you write down your analysis in such a way that you identify the reasons for selecting or not selecting a text for translation as expressions of interpretation and/or evaluation of the source text.

Step 2: Textual analysis of the actual translation

In this step, you compare source text and target text to examine how the translation choices made by the translator demonstrate the attribution of an interpretation and evaluation to the source text. Ika Willis states that “in studying text-to-text reception we observe how a text has selected and reorganised aspects of an earlier text: which elements it has activated, and which it has disregarded” (Willis 2018, 39). The focus at this stage is on

finding out how translators have read and subsequently reinscribed the text in the target language: what changes in form and content have they made, and what kind of interpretation and evaluation does this reveal?

You can compare both texts side by side in their entirety and go through the text from cover to cover, or you can limit yourself to certain passages or aspects of the texts. To make that selection, you can start from the critical framework: which aspects of this text (either the source text or the translation) have already been noted by the critics (e.g. the vivid dialogues or the plain vocabulary)? You can also start from your own analysis of the source text, from which you identify elements that lend themselves well to a translation comparison (e.g. irony or dialect). A specific research question can help you to decide which elements you want to focus on. You can ask, for instance, how a contemporary translation of *Pippi Långstrump* evaluates the colonialist elements in the stories and then isolate those textual elements for a comparison.

To structure your findings, you can divide them into categories you come up with yourself or use existing models. Commonly used models include that of Chesterman, who distinguishes three broad categories: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic changes (Chesterman 2016). Vinay and Darbelnet, in turn, have two broad categories: ‘traduction littérale’ and ‘traduction oblique’, meaning literal translation and divergent translation (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958). Pym (2018) has three broad categories: ‘copying’, ‘expression change’ and ‘material change’. In each case, those categories again have many subcategories. Hewson (2011), Koster (2000), Baker (2006) and many others have also designed useful models. Very straightforward is the model from the field of rhetoric in which only five types of changes are used: omission, addition, substitution, relocation and repetition. Not only are there many categorizations designed for translation in general, but there are also a lot of categorizations for specific genres or specific problems: changes are listed for translating operas, song lyrics and picture books, among others, or for translating humour, dialogue, dialect, etc. Most commonly used are categorizations that deal with translating culture-specific elements, such as Aixelà’s (1996) or Grit’s (2010) models.

When listing and grouping the changes, you try to identify the underlying translation strategies. In this process, there is always the danger of overinterpreting the effects the changes have on the text. There is also the danger of attributing everything to a particular translator’s intention or

strategy. In short, you easily overestimate both sides of a detected change: the translator's intention and the impact on the reader. In this step, due to the interpretive nature of the analysis, there is always a subjective aspect. Yet empirical research is also possible here, through corpus research, where you trace differences and patterns in texts based on quantitative analyses. This enhances objectivity during the data collection phase, although interpretation will also have to follow to make sense of the data.

It is important in step 2 that you make the connection with the results from step 1 and that the underlying question remains the focus: what, by examining this, can you learn about the reception of the source text? Do the changes and strategies that you found reveal something about how the translation interprets and/or evaluates the source text?

Step 3: Analysis of the presentation of the translation

In this phase, you examine how the way a translation is presented is a form of reception. We refer mainly to what has, since Genette, been called paratext. The most elaborate conceptualization of this for translation studies can be found in Kathryn Batchelor's book *Translation and Paratexts* (2018). There she provides a definition of what she means by paratext: "A paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received" (Batchelor 2018, 142). Thus, she defines paratexts as elements that precede reception, but they are themselves elements that can express a particular interpretation and evaluation. Batchelor argues that, for translations, the most studied paratext is the translator's preface. A translator's preface, which is not at all common, can be studied as a reception document that explains how the translator has read the source text and what his or her interpretation and evaluation of it is. The textual analysis of step 2 may admittedly provide other information, as there may be a difference between what a translator says and what a translator does.

Other paratextual elements of a translated text can also provide insight into its reception: the cover chosen, for example, which often differs from that of the original, the translation of the title (or even of the author's name), or the choice to publish in a particular series, in a particular layout, etc. Think, for example, of the Dutch translation of the Koran by Kader Abdollah, with tulips on the cover, thus presenting it as a typically Dutch book (an interpretive intervention). Another example could be the austere way Mario Molegraaf's translation of Hitler's *Mein*

Kampf was published, as a token of its evaluation as an unspectacular, purely scholarly publication. Studying paratextual elements is accessible because they are so conspicuous, but there is certainly a risk of simply describing them. It is necessary to contextualize and critically analyse your findings. This can be done by including the results from the previous steps in the analysis. One could also conduct additional research, for example on publishing practices, through archival research or interviews.

Other elements of the presentation of a translated book may also be relevant to study from a reception perspective. The way a book is presented in a library (for what age, what genre, etc.) or in a bookshop or book fair can also be studied, as can the way a book is presented on websites (that of the publisher, for example) or on social media (of the translator, the publisher, bookshops, etc.). Some books are even accompanied by a trailer that can reveal something about their interpretation.

All these elements can serve to answer the question of how a book is received by being translated. The way it is presented can reveal aspects of how it is interpreted and/or evaluated.

Step 4: Reception of the translation

When we mention the steps in a translation process, we cannot ignore the stage in which the translated text is received by the target culture. We seem to be in a loop here in our methodology, because we are then looking at how reception is a reception. So far, we have always asked how the different phases revealed an interpretation and evaluation of the source text. Here we add an extra layer because the reception of a translated text is a (not always explicit) interpretation and evaluation of both the source and target text. Hewson argues that:

even if we take the translation as embodying the translator's interpretation of the source text, it simultaneously stands as a text in its own right, awaiting its own interpretations on its own grounds. The critic's task is particularly arduous, as s/he is faced with a text – the translation – which takes on a life of its own in the target culture, while simultaneously representing the source text, and its interpretative potential. (Hewson 2011, 23)

So in this phase, you investigate the critical reception of the translation. There are, of course, many similarities to investigating the critical

reception of a non-translated text, but a number of additional research questions are possible.

For instance, you can compare the critical reception of the untranslated text with that of the translated text, or with the critical reception of the same text in other translations. And you can examine how in the criticism the translation is implicitly or explicitly commented on. Is something said about the translation or do translation and translator remain invisible? Are the book and author compared with examples from the critic's 'own' target culture, from the source culture or from world literature ('mentions')? Are statements made about the foreignness or, on the contrary, recognizability of the import? Are examples given of translation choices and how are they commented on? What criteria are used to assess the translation as a translation?

It is well known that reviews of translated books often do not even mention that a book has been translated, or only mention in passing at the end whether they thought it was a good translation.⁴ Or they may only mention some glaring 'mistakes'. Venuti already wrote in his seminal 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility* that: "On those rare occasions when reviewers address the translation at all, their brief comments usually focus on its style, neglecting such other possible questions as its accuracy, its intended audience, its economic value in the current book market, its relation to literary trends in English, its place in the translator's career" (Venuti 1995, 2). Vanderschelden confirms for France that in the critical reception of translated literature "the style or the language of the work are discussed, without any credit being given to the translator's role in creating this style or language in the target version" (Vanderschelden 2000, 284).

This fourth step is less essential in our methodology, because here we are closely aligned with other types of reception research. The focus on our research question, namely how translation is a reception of a literary text, is less directly addressed here.

A fifth step would of course be to bring together all the results of the previous steps in a coherent narrative about your case, albeit without ignoring the inconsistent, the arbitrary or the inexplicable.

3. Tools and techniques

In the steps of methodology we propose here, you can use various concepts and frameworks proposed by a range of researchers to structure, categorize, substantiate and generalize your findings. We have mentioned some of them, but you can also use other scholarship to help lift your findings above the purely descriptive and the individual level. Of course, a literature review is also needed to embed your own research in existing scholarship on the same or similar topics.

The research techniques you can use in these steps are manifold. A review of primary sources (newspapers, internet sources, etc.) is necessary for contextualization and tracing background information. Archival research and interviews with stakeholders also provide a lot of information to analyse. Text analysis is also important in the different steps (and especially in step 2); for this, you may want to use a text-mining tool like NVivo that allows you to structure your qualitative text analysis. More extensive comparative text research in step 2 can also make use of corpus research, where you compile a corpus of, for instance, an author's entire oeuvre and its translations to then detect patterns. In step 1, you can use existing databases, or you can build your own, but that is complex and specialized work that is beyond the scope of our methodology. For mapping networks of mediators, you can also use visualization tools, such as Tableau.

4. Case study

Step 1: Analysis of the selection of authors and texts translated

The texts under scrutiny here are two long prose poems by German author W. G. Sebald (1944–2001) and two Dutch translations. As stated above, such retranslations are especially relevant when studying the reception of a given text. In this case, they are of particular interest because they were made at very different points within the reception of Sebald's work. The source texts concerned are *Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen* and *Die lange Nacht fährt aus*, which were initially published in two different issues of the Austrian journal *manuskripte* (Sebald 1986a, 1987a). This was and is a well-respected journal, known for including more adventurous, even experimental texts. At the time of publication, Sebald was mainly active

as a literary scholar, teaching European literature at the University of East Anglia, and had published some shorter poems in various journals starting in the 1970s.

As a brief e-mail exchange with the translator has revealed, it was almost by coincidence that Huub Beurskens – himself also a poet – came across Sebald's poems and decided to translate them for the newly founded (and short-lived) journal *Het Moment*, which he himself edited with poet Peter Nijmeijer and Laurens Vancrevel, then head of the publishing company Meulenhoff. With the backing of that publisher, *Het Moment* was able to publish innovative work by somewhat lesser-known authors, both originally in Dutch and translated. The translations are mostly from the big European languages, in line with the translators' expertise, and mirroring general translation practice (and foreign language mastery) in the Dutch-speaking community.⁵ Among the German authors presented in translation were Bodo Kirchhoff, Anne Duden and Uwe Kolbe, who were all well respected and quite successful in Germany at the time, as well as future Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller, but also authors who were virtually unknown even in Germany, like Sebald. In view of the profile of *Het Moment* it is not surprising that Beurskens would browse kindred German journals such as *manuskripte*. A reason for the selection of Sebald's texts may have been their association with the 'postmodern long poem', a subgenre that enjoyed some attention in the 1980s and 1990s (this would imply both an interpretation and an evaluation). Even so, the inclusion of then unknown authors and of genres considered 'difficult' was somewhat of an economic risk for the publisher. It is hardly surprising that this translation remained restricted to a journal – aimed at a smaller audience – rather than yielding a book-length publication.

When Ria van Hengel translated the same texts some twenty years later, the situation had changed completely. W. G. Sebald had become a cult author, his books had been translated into most large languages, and his untimely death in 2001 added to a certain aura. Carole Angier, the author of the first book-length Sebald biography, has somewhat hyperbolically claimed that "[t]oday W.G. Sebald is the most revered twentieth-century German writer in the world" (Angier 2021, 427). By 2006, all of Sebald's prose had been translated into Dutch by Ria van Hengel. It was only logical, then, that she would also be commissioned to create a translation of Sebald's poetry. However, the source texts she relied on were not entirely identical to the ones Beurskens had used. In

1988, Sebald had combined the two texts mentioned above with a third poem, *Und stand ich am äußersten Meer*, to constitute a three-part epic poem entitled *Nach der Natur* (Sebald 1995 [1988]); in fact, this was his first book-length literary publication.⁶ It was this version that van Hengel used. Her translation was partly funded by the Goethe-Institut, which has been instrumental in the worldwide circulation of German literature. For publisher De Bezige Bij, this translation involved minimal risk in view of Sebald's international reputation, which had even prompted them to have two other retranslations done.⁷

Step 2: Textual analysis of the actual translation

Analysis of the source texts shows that the two Sebald poems are characterized by a number of stylistic features that present any reader, but especially a translator, with some very specific challenges, such as the use of archaic language, of certain forms of vernacular and of foreign languages. These are features that have been at the centre of Sebald scholarship ever since Sebald became a household name in comparative literature departments (for a general survey of research on Sebald, see Öhlschläger and Niehaus 2017, as well as Schütte 2023). Another is the reference to painting, which is quite logical in the case of the first poem – a poetic biography of sixteenth-century German painter Matthias Grünewald – but which also shapes a large part of the second, a seemingly autobiographical account drawing parallels to paintings by Albrecht Altdorfer. Both texts contain extensive ekphrastic descriptions. In contrast with Sebald's later prose work, the poems do not contain visual material, neither in the *manuskripte* version nor in the later book version.⁸ Finally, it should be noted that these poems contain neither rhyme nor clearly discernible meter; in fact, had they been arranged without line breaks, they could just as well be considered prose. These line breaks, however, do not correspond to syntactic units, occasioning a large number of enjambments.

Even at first glimpse, the two target texts show significant differences concerning these features. This is already evident in the title of *Die dunkle Nacht fährt aus*, where the source deviates from modern standard German in spelling and verb conjugation. While Beurskens chooses a somewhat unusual verb but normalizes the orthography (*De donkere nacht zet in*), van Hengel translates almost literally and uses not only an uncommon verb, but also a syncopated form of the adjective, which

has an archaising effect (*De duist're nacht vaart uit*). Very generally, van Hengel's translation remains much closer to the source text where line breaks, the use of archaic German and quotes are concerned. It seems that Beurskens includes literal quotes much less systematically, as can be seen when comparing both translations of a passage using quotes from Joachim Sandrarts *Teutsche Academie* (the italics indicating the quotes are van Hengel's):

Met licht in grijs en zwart had Matthaeus de buitenste vleugels van het door Dürer vervaardigde altaar met de Hemelvaart van Maria in het Prediger Closter te Frankfurt geschilderd en also ungefehr anno 1505 gelebet. Buitengewoon opmerkelijk was de door hem met waterverf uitgevoerde verheerlijking van Christus op de berg Tabor, vooral een wonderlijk mooie wolk, waarin, boven de helemaal in vreze vervoerde apostelen Moyzes en Elias verschijnen, in haar buitengewoonheid door niets overtroffen.	<i>Mit liecht in grau und schwarz</i> heeft Matthaeus, zo schrijft hij, de buitenvleugels van het door Dürer vervaardigde Maria- Hemelvaart-altaar in het Predikherenklooster van Frankfurt geschilderd en dus <i>ungefehr 1505 gelebet</i> . Bijzonder opmerkelijk noemt Sandrart De in waterverf uitgevoerde Verheerlijking van Christus op de berg Tabor, met name <i>eine verwunderlich schöne Wolcke</i> waarin, boven de van ontzag verstijfde apostelen, Mozes en Elia verschijnen, in <i>selzamkeit</i> door niets overtroffen. ⁹
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In Vinay and Darbelnet's terms, Beurskens' translation is somewhat more *oblique*, while van Hengel's is more *littérale*. These differences may confirm the so-called retranslation hypothesis, which states that later translations will mostly tend to be much more faithful or 'foreignizing', for example because the source text or its author has gained a certain authority since the first translation. Readers were bound to be more familiar with Sebaldian stylistics by the time van Hengel made her translation. Perhaps Beurskens being a poet may have played a role too.

The most striking difference between the two translations, however, is that Beurskens included reproductions of the Grünewald and Altdorfer paintings described in the poems – images that are absent both in the German source text(s) and in van Hengel's version. This unusual addition, of course, can also be considered part of the paratext; in fact, Sebald's own use of visuals challenges this distinction between text and paratext. This will be analysed in the next section.

Step 3: Analysis of the presentation of the translation

As explained above, the Beurskens versions were published in two different issues of the journal *Het Moment*, which he co-edited. *Als de sneeuw op de Alpen* appeared in the winter 1986 issue among texts by such authors as South African writer Breyten Breytenbach, Italian poet Antonio Tabucchi and Dutch poet Kees Ouwers, all of whom were already well known at that point. *De donkere nacht zet in* was published in the autumn 1987 issue, which also included work by German author Hans Joachim Schädlich, who had recently published his first novel to great acclaim, German poet Michael Krüger, award-winning American poet Charles Wright and unconventional Dutch poet H. H. ter Balkt. Most surprising in both Sebald translations is the inclusion of images: they are interspersed with reproductions of paintings mentioned or described in the text. This montage foreshadows Sebald's own later practice and was probably instigated by him; indeed, the reproductions may well have been made by Michael Brandon Jones, the photographer at Sebald's home university at Norwich (see Warr 2023). In a way, then, it seems Sebald wanted to test the technique in translation before he started applying it in his original texts. By contrast, van Hengel's translation does not contain any such illustrations, and the cover image is a reproduction of a Hans Holbein painting bearing no direct relation to Sebald's texts. Beurskens' translations are presented without further context, with the translator's name figuring in the table of contents as well as at the end of the text, and a short biographical note at the end of the journal issues; *Naar de natuur* has a very short biography and a photograph of the author on the dust jacket as well as some quotes from international reviews; the translator's name is mentioned on the title page, and all other Sebald translations are advertised, too. This again points to the fame Sebald acquired in the nineteen years between the two translations.

Step 4: Reception of the translation

As mentioned above, Sebald was still virtually unknown when Beurskens published his translations, which may explain why they went by largely unnoticed. It was not until Sebald's first prose book, *Schwindel.Gefühle*. (1990), was published that he garnered some attention in his native Germany, and when it was translated into Dutch in 1992, his name also started circulating amongst literature enthusiasts in the Low Countries. In fact, Dutch and Flemish reception of his work set in a few years before

it was picked up in other countries and languages.¹⁰ Notable propagators were author Stefan Hertmans, radio journalist Jean-Pierre Rondas and TV presenter and critic Michael Zeeman. Sebald's international career skyrocketed after the English translation of *Die Ausgewanderten* (originally published in 1992) came out in 1996. From there on out, his books also became commercial successes worldwide, as they did in Belgium and the Netherlands. His last prose book, *Austerlitz*, yielded a host of reviews and articles, in which he was regularly named as a potential Nobel Prize candidate. The translation of *Nach der Natur* was the first encounter with his poetry for the Dutch-speaking readers (as was the case for other languages), and it most probably benefited from his earlier fame as a prose author. It is no wonder, then, that all of his other poetry (some of it only just published posthumously in German) was also translated into all European languages, including Dutch, quite soon after. However, there are few reviews specifically of *Naar de natuur*; the book is mentioned in more general appraisals of Sebald's work, which reiterate the various topics and stylistic devices but mention the translation work only marginally (see e.g. Mulder 2011).

5. Conclusion

The case study outlined above seemed a logical choice: the two translations concerned were made at very different points in time, and the source text author became a literary celebrity in the meantime. It was plausible, then, that the two target texts would demonstrate very different approaches. They are indicative of the change in the author's standing, and they show how the amount of information available to the translators can steer that approach. The case also shows how a translator can gain a certain authority on the grounds of earlier translations of the same author (see Denissen 2017). Both translations, however, can be considered reports of individual reading experiences, in much more detail than a review or reader's blog could ever be.

The Sebald case further shows that the various methodological steps proposed in the initial sections are mere heuristic tools and tend to get conflated as the work on a particular case advances. Furthermore, the study of retranslations, highlighting contrasts between different translators' approaches, also opens new fields of research, especially concerning

translator biographies and backgrounds. However, one should be careful not to interpret certain translatorial decisions exclusively in view of contextual (biographical or historical) coordinates. In addition, when comparing translations, one should avoid the pitfall of quantifying ‘departures’ from the original; the available models (Vinay/Darbelnet, Chesterman) should not be applied mechanically to each new case. And finally, one should factor in possible divergences in the source text itself, which may not always be clearly identifiable in the target texts (as when a text was reworked for a later edition), as well as possible interventions by the source text author (as seems to be the case in the use of images in the Beurskens translations).

On a more material level, quantitative data about the translation’s impact and readership are often hard to collect. There are few databases specifically for reviews of translations. An attempt at such a database is included in the Digital Library and Bibliography of Literature in Translation and Adaptation (DLBT), which also features references to secondary literature, mainly on works by Dutch (and some German) authors. When it comes to translations, online platforms such as Goodreads only review English versions in most cases. One avenue of research we have not pursued above is the collection of library data on the numbers of loans for a specific book, which would be a good indication of that book’s reputation. Yet if and how reviewers or non-professional readers also acknowledge the translation and the translator remains hard to determine.

Notes

- ¹ It is also important to note that the relation between the source text and the target text only represents one dimension of the target text’s potential critical dimension. The target text can also show critical relations to other texts (from the target culture for instance). The target text is part of a discursive continuum; its relationship with the source text is not exclusive. The target text is moreover not only *critical* vis-à-vis the source text, and it is certainly not the only angle the relation between both can be looked at.
- ² A good book that can get you started researching adaptation is Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006).
- ³ Important theorists who have written about the world language system and the translation flows associated with it include Diana Roig-Sanz, Pascale Casanova, Johan Heilbron and Abram De Swaan.
- ⁴ Indeed, in some cases, critics may even not review the translation at all and rather just comment on the source text, for example because they are well acquainted with the source language and culture.

- ⁵ Although Index Translationum is often not up to date and somewhat unreliable, its statistics confirm what one can see from a visit to any bookstore in the Low Countries: the most translated source language by far is English, followed by German and French. English, French and German are also the foreign languages most usually offered in Dutch and Flemish high schools.
- ⁶ *Und stand ich am äußersten Meer* had previously been published in *manuskripte*; indeed, Sebald had inquired with Beurskens if he would not also translate it, but that translation never materialized (personal communication by the translator). Sebald partially reworked the three poems for the book publication (see Öhlschläger and Niehaus 2017, 12).
- ⁷ Sebald's first prose book, *Schwindel.Gefühle*. (1990), was first translated in 1992 by Jos Valckengoed as *Melancholische dwaalwegen*. Ria van Hengel retranslated it under the title *Duizelingen* for De Bezige Bij when the Sebald hype had kicked in. Moreover, she slightly reworked her own translation of *The Emigrants*, originally published in 1993, for a second edition in 2006.
- ⁸ It should be noted that the first edition of *Nach der Natur* at Eichborn Verlag was bookended by six photographs by Thomas Becker. These were omitted from all later editions, and although they would seem to illustrate a barren earth 'after nature', they do not interact with Sebald's texts in the same way the visual elements in his later prose books do.
- ⁹ The German original reads: "Mit liecht in grau und schwarz/habe Matthaeus die äußeren Flügel/des von Dürer gefertigten Altars/von der Himmelfahrt Mariae/in dem Predigerkloster zu Frankfurt gemahlt/und also ungefähr 1505 gelebet./Absonderlich merkwürdig sei die von ihm/mit Wasserfarben gebildete Verklärung/Christi auf dem Berg Thabor, insonders/eine verwunderlich schöne Wolcke,/darinnen, über die in Furcht ganz verzuckte/Apostel, Moyses und Elias erscheinen,/selzamkeit halver von nicht übertroffen" (Sebald 1988, 10). English translation by Michael Hamburger: "Lightly in grey and black,/he writes, Matthaeus had painted the outer/wings of an altarpiece made by Dürer/of Mary's ascension in the/Preachers' convent in Frankfurt and/thus had lived at around 1505./Exceedingly strange was the trans-/figuration of Christ on Mount Tabor/limned by him in watercolours, especially/one cloud of wondrous beauty, wherein/above the apostles convulsed/with awe, Moses and Elijah appear,/a marvel surpassed" (Sebald 2002).
- ¹⁰ The *W.G. Sebald Handbuch* (Öhlschläger and Niehaus 2017) dedicates a chapter to the reception of Sebald, but oddly limits itself to reception in the English-speaking world and France.

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Suggestions for further reading

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Glossary

A	
Active listening attitude	A communicative posture in interviews showing attention, interest and empathy, encouraging participants to share openly.
Actor	An entity, human, non-human or organization of entities, which is capable of action.
Affect	The way in which a text provokes certain emotional responses or imaginative involvement because of its content and stylistic elements, often without the reader's conscious awareness.
Ambiguity	The quality attributed to a text when it opens itself up to different lines of interpretation and reception.
Aporia	A moment of textual or interpretive uncertainty in literature, often revealing contradictions or ambiguities that resist resolution.
Authentic data	see: non-elicited data.
Author function	A concept developed by Michel Foucault, the author function is the result of a combination of legal and cultural practices that establish the authority of a given author, by turning their name into a recognizable 'brand' guaranteeing the coherence and cultural value of their oeuvre.
Author recognition test	A tool measuring reading exposure by asking participants to identify real authors from a list of names.
Axial coding	A stage in qualitative data analysis in which categories are linked to subcategories to identify relationships.
B	
Bibliographic code	A term coined by Jerome McGann to describe the material aspects of books such as format, quality of paper and binding, illustrations, typography, and paratexts, which reflect the values that publishers and other mediators have accorded to a given text.
Bifurcation	The association between different meanings or lines of interpretation within a single word or sentence.

C	
Canonization	The inclusion of authors and their works in a so-called 'canon' of texts held in particularly high esteem by official cultural authorities such as academies and universities, and often considered to represent the 'great works' of a nation or linguistic group.
Capital	A person or group's accumulated status within a stratified society or field.
Categorical level	see: nominal level.
Category	A grouping of related codes that reflects a meaningful concept in the data.
Classical reception studies	The academic study of how cultural elements or materials from Graeco-Roman Antiquity have been or are received in later historical and cultural contexts.
Closed-ended questions	Questionnaire or interview questions that offer a fixed set of responses.
Cloze procedure	The interpretative process whereby a reader gains a deeper awareness of a text's nuances by replacing a word in a sentence with one that closely relates to the meaning of the original term.
Cluster sample	A sampling method where groups (clusters) are randomly selected, and all or some members within them are studied.
Coding	The process of labelling and organizing qualitative data into categories to identify themes or patterns.
Coding phase	The research phase in which researchers assign textual codes to certain units of analysis, for instance to fragments of interview transcripts.
Coding schema	A structured system of categories and codes used to classify qualitative data.
Collocation	A cluster of words that occur together more often than might statistically be expected.
Communication circuit	A schema developed by book historian Robert Darnton, encompassing all the people involved in the material production of a single book, other than the author, such as printers, publishers and booksellers, all of whom also play a role in assigning cultural value to that book and to the text that it carries.
Compound questions	see: double-barrelled questions.
Computational literary studies (CLS)	The academic study of literature and literary culture using computational methods and approaches.

Concordance	A list of all the words present in a text or group of texts, with information about how often they occur.
Consecration	The process by which a writer or work gains symbolic recognition and legitimacy through endorsement by cultural authorities such as critics, publishers or literary institutions.
Constructed vignette	A stimulus in the form of a text, image or video, specifically constructed for research purposes by the researcher, to which participants are invited to respond during focus group meetings.
Content words	A category of words in a text that carry meaningful information, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.
Convenience sample	A non-random sample based on availability and ease of access, not representativeness.
Corpus	A cluster of texts.
Cultural capital	A person's social background and education, which can be used as a means of power and exchange within the field.
Cultural dominant	The primary mode of cultural expression in society at any given point in time.
Cultural mediator	Cultural actors active across linguistic, cultural and geographical borders, occupying strategic positions within networks and acting as carriers of cultural transfer.
D	
Data analysis	The process of interpreting collected data to identify patterns, relationships or findings.
Data management	The process of storing, organizing and maintaining the data created and collected by researchers.
Deductive work	Analysing data guided by existing theories or hypotheses.
Demographic data	Information about participants' characteristics such as age, gender or education.
Discourse	A structured set of spoken or written statements that create and reflect social norms, values and power relations within a particular context.
Discourse analysis	The study of language use in texts and contexts, focusing on how language constructs and is constructed by social realities.
Distant reading	Using digital tools in order to explore the contents of large text corpora.
Double-barrelled questions	Questions that address two topics but allow only one answer, risking unclear responses.

Dropout rate	The proportion of participants who begin but do not complete a study.
E	
Economic capital	A form of capital that equals money or can be directly converted into money and therefore represents a monetary value.
Elicitation	A research technique for drawing out data through prompts, questions or tasks.
Elicited data	Data generated in response to a specific research prompt or stimulus.
Emic	An emic approach to the analysis of cultural phenomena aims to understand cultural phenomena from within respondents' social group context, considering the meanings, beliefs and practices that are significant to the people being studied.
Enclosing scene	The broad social and institutional context that frames the discourse, such as religious, political or educational settings, influencing how the discourse is interpreted and understood.
Enunciation scene	The context and conditions in which discourse is produced, including physical, social and institutional settings and the roles and identities of the speaker and audience.
Erasure	The cancellation of different meanings in light of the chosen interpretation of a single word or sentence.
Ethics of research	Ethical standards in research that help promote the values that are essential to collaborative research work, such as trust, accountability, fairness, data sharing policies and confidentiality.
Ethos	The image of the speaker or writer as constructed through the discourse, contributing to the narrative voice.
Etic	An etic approach to the analysis of cultural phenomena aims to understand cultural phenomena from an outsider's viewpoint (for instance that of the researcher), applying universal or academic categories and concepts to study phenomena.
Etymology	The study of the historical roots and development across time and place of a word's spelling and meaning.
Evaluation domain	The subjects that a critic considers when evaluating a literary work. Within the domains of evaluation a distinction can be made between aspects and characteristics of books that are addressed in the value judgements.

F	
Faceted browsing	Selecting and filtering search results on the basis of metadata.
Fanfiction	Stories written by and for fans, inspired by existing stories, and published online for free.
Field	A setting in which agents and their social positions are located.
Field of cultural production	The broader social and economic context within which culture and individual works of art are produced.
Field theory	Bourdieu's field theory conceptualizes social life as a network of relatively autonomous arenas – called fields – each with its own rules, power relations and forms of capital, in which agents struggle to maintain or improve their positions.
Focus group	A form of group interview on a fairly tightly defined topic, with several participants, led by a moderator. The emphasis is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning.
Footings	The stance or role a person adopts in social interaction, reflecting their social position or perspective
Frequency table	A table showing how often each response or category occurs in the data.
Function words	A category of words that have a grammatical purpose, such as determiners, qualifiers and conjunctions, and that establish the relationship between the different content words in a sentence.
G	
Generic scene	The conventional and genre-specific expectations that shape the production and reception of a discourse, assigning specific roles, settings and structures to participants within a specific discourse, defining the appropriate context and manner of communication.
H	
Habitus	The traditionally existing norms, values and traditions within a certain field.
Heterogeneous sample	A diverse participant group with varying characteristics relevant to the study.
High Modernism	A phase within literary Modernism starting in the 1920s, in which its most famous authors, such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, published their most innovative and pivotal works.

Homogeneous sample	A participant group with similar characteristics to control variability.
Horizon of expectation	The shared framework through which readers understand, interpret and deconstruct a text based on implied conventions within a genre or historical context.
I	
Implied reader	The image of the kind of reader to whom a literary text is directed.
Inductive work	Developing theories or concepts from the patterns found in the data itself.
Interpretive communities	Social groups within which similar readers are conditioned by implied conventions with regard to their shared interpretation of a text.
Inter-rater reliability analysis	The degree of agreement between coders or raters analysing the same data.
Intertextuality	The web of meanings that results from the implicit or explicit references and allusions to different cultural works within an individual text.
Interval level	A measurement scale with equal intervals but no true zero point (e.g. temperature in Celsius).
Interview matrix	A structured table organizing interview data or comparing responses across themes.
Interview protocol	A standardized set of procedures and questions used in conducting interviews.
Introductory questions	Initial, easy questions that help participants feel comfortable in interviews.
J	
Journalistic capital	Accumulated media visibility, celebrity and notoriety.
K	
Key questions	Central questions in interviews that directly address the research aims or hypotheses.
L	
Level of confidence	The probability that a statistical estimate reflects the true population value.
Level of measurement	The type of data scale (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio) determining analysis options.
Likert statements	Statements rated on a scale (e.g. strongly agree to strongly disagree) to measure attitudes.

Literary field	A relatively autonomous arena with its own rules, power relations and forms of capital, in which literary works are produced and agents struggle to maintain or improve their positions.
Lived experience	Personal, first-hand accounts of participants' thoughts, feelings or actions.
M	
Margin of error	A statistical range indicating the possible deviation of a sample result from the population value.
Member check	A validation method where participants review and comment on the researcher's interpretations.
Memorizing	The act of learning a text or passage by heart through the method of visualization, rote-learning and oral repetition.
Metadata	Information describing the characteristics of data; in the case of periodical articles, it may include information on magazine sections, issue numbers, authors' names, etc.
Metamodernism	An emergent cultural dominant which is believed to have overtaken Postmodernism as a leading mode of artistic expression in Western art. It is characterized by its oscillation/fusion between the emotional sincerity of Modernism and the playful irony of Postmodernism.
Metaphor	A form of figurative language in which a particular entity is represented through the implicit or explicit comparison to a different entity.
Metonymy	A form of figurative language in which a particular entity is represented by an entity to which is related or with which it is associated.
Modernism	A cultural dominant associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in literature characterized primarily by its intentional and self-conscious break from traditional modes of poetry and prose writing. Its most famous attributes include fragmentation, the use of numerous points of views and stream-of-consciousness-style storytelling.
N	
Natural groups	Groups of respondents that are already connected in some way before the research starts, without interference from the researcher.
Nominal level	A categorical measurement scale with no inherent order (e.g. language, genre).

Non-elicited data	Data not prompted by a specific research question, often naturally occurring.
NVivo	Software used for organizing, coding and analysing qualitative data.
O	
Open coding	Carefully segmenting relevant information from the data and assigning each segment a label of the researcher's own choice to begin identifying concepts.
Open-ended questions	Questions that allow unrestricted, detailed responses in the participant's own words.
Open interview	A flexible interview style guided by broad themes rather than fixed questions.
Optical Character Recognition (OCR)	Automated text recognition on the basis of visual images of text pages.
Optimizing	The effort to give the best possible answer in a questionnaire, using careful reasoning and full attention.
Orchestration	The process by which critics gradually reach agreement about the ranking of works of art.
Ordinal level	A measurement scale with ordered categories but unequal intervals (e.g. ranking preferences).
P	
Parametric tests	Statistical tests that assume specific data distributions, usually normal distribution.
Paraphrase	A free rendering of a written or spoken text in different words.
Paratext	A term introduced by literary critic Gérard Genette to designate all textual and non-textual elements in a book, such as frontispieces, illustrations, prefaces, introductions, notes and other textual material, which may help shape readers' expectations of the main text.
Paratopy	Distinct paradoxical literary space, formed by the unique and ambiguous position of a literary author, who exists both within and outside the established norms.
Participants	Also called respondents; persons on whom the researcher has conducted research.
Patronage studies	A means of understanding the dynamics of 'private funding of the arts' by understanding how artists and patrons interact, how their interaction affects the artworks created through their exchange, and how their relationship is then evaluated by audiences.

Patterns	Recurring themes or concepts identified across data.
Performative	The capacity of a text or speech act to elicit certain feelings or making something happen through its use of language.
Periodical studies	An interdisciplinary research field that uses newspapers and magazines as source materials and/or studies the role of the periodical press in cultural history.
Population	The entire group of individuals or items that a study aims to describe or draw conclusions about.
Postmodernism	A cultural dominant associated with the mid to late twentieth century, in literature characterized primarily by metafiction, self-reflexivity, intertextuality and the merging of high and popular culture.
Posture	A constructed authorial (self-)image shaped in relation to literary, social and institutional contexts.
Preservation bias	The accumulation of normative choices made in the past, by previous generations of readers, institutions and cultural gatekeepers, regarding what texts were deemed worthy, because of their literary quality or for other reasons, of being preserved in libraries, archives and literary memory.
Prestige	see: symbolic capital.
Prompting	Fostering group interaction in focus groups by offering hints or reminders to participants to help the discussion along.
Q	
Qualitative analysis	Interpreting non-numerical data to understand meanings, experiences or themes.
Quantify codes	Counting the frequency of qualitative codes to identify trends or patterns.
Quantitative analysis	Statistical analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses or describe variables.
R	
Random sample	A sample in which each member of the population has an equal chance of selection.
Ratio level	A measurement scale with equal intervals and a true zero point (e.g. number of books read).
Ready-made vignette	A stimulus in the form of a real-life, pre-existing text, image or video to which respondents are invited to respond during focus group meetings.

Re-assembling	Combining coded data into categories or narratives during qualitative analysis.
Reception studies	A means of understanding literary and media texts by understanding how these texts are read by audiences. Theorists who analyse texts through reception studies are concerned with the experience of reading or viewing for readers or spectators, and how meaning is created through that experience.
Remediation	The incorporation or representation of one medium in another medium.
Representativity	A concern with the extent to which the research sample of respondents reflects the population accurately.
Research interview	Typically a two-person meeting conducted to collect data on a certain topic, providing researchers with an opportunity to delve deep into the thoughts, experiences and perspectives of a respondent, thus enabling a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena.
Respondents	Individuals who provide data by participating in questionnaire research.
Response rate	The percentage of people who completed a survey or interview out of those invited.
Retranslation	A new translation of a text that has previously been translated into the same language
S	
Sample	The subset of a population selected for a study.
Sample size	The number of participants included in a study.
Satisficing	Responding with minimal effort, often giving superficial or inconsistent answers.
Scenography	The overall arrangement and presentation of a discourse: a specific and unique way in which a generic scene is staged, through a speaker and an addressee, a place and moment and a specific use of language.
Script	A detailed scenario designed by focus group moderators to help structure the meeting.
Selection bias	Distortion in results caused by non-random participant selection.
Selective sample	The segment of the population that is selected for research.
Self-administered questionnaires	see: self-completion questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires	Surveys filled out by participants at their own pace, without interference of a researcher, often in written form.
Self-presentation	The ways in which people (or respondents) attempt to present themselves to control or shape how others (the researcher) view them.
Self-selecting sample	Sample consisting of participants who volunteer for a study, possibly introducing bias.
Semi-structured interview	An interview with set questions but room for probing and follow-up.
Snowball sample	A sampling method where participants recruit others from their network.
Social capital	Consists of a network of connections that can be used to increase economic or symbolic capital in the long term.
Social desirability	The tendency to give answers that are viewed favourably by others.
Social research	Systematic investigation of social phenomena, behaviours or structures.
Sociology of culture	A systematic approach to cultural analysis which takes into account the era and society in which the culture it analyses was produced.
Source text	An original text in the original language. The term is used in the context of translation, as the counterpart to target text.
Stereotype threat	The risk that awareness of a stereotype about one's group could influence responses.
Stimulated-recall interview	An interview in which participants reflect on their actions using a recorded stimulus.
Stratified sample	A sample in which participants are sampled from a population that has been divided into categories (strata).
Structured interview	A rigidly formatted interview using the same questions and order for all participants.
Structure of feeling	A way of thinking and expressing oneself within society that is in competition with other modes of thinking for dominance within the social hegemony.
Survey research	A method using questionnaires to gather data from a large group of people.

Symbolic capital	A term used by Bourdieu to indicate an intangible resource which represents the elevated status someone, such as a lauded author or a beloved public figure, holds in society. This capital may be used to pursue certain aims, such as authors using the positive reception of their oeuvre to launch a lecture series.
Synaesthesia	The combination of images that are related to different senses, be it in the form of a metaphor or mental processing.
T	
Target text	A text that is a translation of a source text: text in a different language than the original text.
Text mining	Using digital tools in order to retrieve structural information about a big text corpus, such as word frequencies or collocations.
Theoretical saturation	The point in qualitative research when no new insights are found in additional data.
Topic list	A written interview guide, constructed in advance, either very specifically, with carefully worded questions, or in the form of a list of topics to be covered.
Translation	The interpretative process through which the written words of a text are transmitted to a different language or linguistic context.
Translation flows	The number of books translated into and out of a language, as indicators of the direction and the size of cultural exchange.
Translation strategy	The most fundamental choices made by a translator when changing a source text into a target text, for example the choice of the target language (standard or non-standard), the decision to adapt a text to its readers' expectations or not, etc.
Triangulation	The use of more than one method or source of data to enable cross-checking findings.
V	
Vague quantifiers	Indefinite expressions (e.g. 'often', 'a lot') that can be interpreted differently by readers.
Validity	A concern with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research, or the degree to which a measure of a concept truly reflects that concept.
Verbal icon	The conception of a literary text as an aesthetic art object.

Verbatim transcription	A word-for-word written record of spoken interview or discussion data.
Verbum transcription	A simplified transcription focusing only on the essential verbal content.
Vignette	A short scenario or story used to elicit responses or judgements in research.
W	
Webscraping	The act of extracting data, such as texts, from the web, usually at a larger or automated scale.
Word cloud	A visual representation of word frequency in a text, in which more frequent words are given greater prominence.

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(2023, *Hurrah! A book about Dutch and contemporary Dutch literature*) and *Och eeuwig is zo lang: Zeshonderd jaar Nederlandstalige literatuur in het licht van de eeuwigheid* (2025, *Oh, eternity lasts so long: Six hundred years of Dutch literature in the light of eternity*).

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