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REVIEWS

Claassen, E. (2012). *Author representations in literary reading*, (Linguistic Approaches to Literature 11), Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 329 pages.

Reviewed by Gerhard Lauer (Universität Göttingen)

Nothing is more boring than the conventional critic on authorship and nothing is more interesting than research on authorship. That is simply because serious research on literary authorship is hardly undertaken, and besides many speculations obvious questions haven't yet been answered. Do readers have any kind of mental representation of the author during or after reading? Is the conventional distinction between author and narrator a distinction without a difference? The list of unanswered questions is long, but they attract considerable sentiments and speculations, but little research.

Eefje Claassen has written a book that cares who is speaking in literature. To name her book a milestone in authorship research is an understatement, because she combines unusual intelligent theoretical considerations with sophisticated experiments and thus opens the door to systematic empirical research on authorship. What she presents is the first ever evidence for the hypothesis that there is no literary reading without assumptions about an author's intentions and (moral) attitudes. In four experiments framed by an opening and closing chapter Eefje Claassen's book explores why reading is much more than only something between text and reader. There is always the author in between.

The starting point in her first, theoretical chapter is the gap between the liveliness of the author in all literary fields and the theoretical verdict against the author. She hypothesises that readers infer who is telling the story with which intention. With the model by van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) she suggests that readers not only take care of the surface code and the propositions within a text and that readers do more than building a situation model. On a fourth level, Claassen suggests, reading implies a communicative context model, a model of the underlying intentions and all sorts of information about who is talking to the reader with which attitude. In this contextual model the distinction between the empirical author, the implied authors and the narrator is heuristically important but readers might merge these roles. As always for Claassen it is an empirical question whether readers maintain independent representations of the author, of the narrator and the implied author or if they have more or less overlapping images of these figures. Her hypothesis is close to Bortolussi and Dixon's (2003) assumption about a reader's mental representation of the narrator as if he were a communicative partner for

whom all Gricean maxims of cooperative conversation are in place. In that sense the reader's mental construction of an implied author includes more or less explicit assumptions about author's communicative intentions and identity, sometimes even about his morality.

Claassen designed her experiments according to conditions with morally negative vs. positive cues for author inferences and is focused. In four chapters Claassen describes two off-line and two online experiments on the kind of comprehension that happens in the mind during and after reading. The first experiment uses the think aloud method to better understand what type of inferences readers generate during reading due to a narrator's visibility. It is hypothesized that readers have some sort of mental conversation with the author while integrating information in a bottom up fashion from the text. Extensive tagged verbal protocols and a short questionnaire about post-reading text evaluation and reading behaviour give insight in the way readers verbalize thoughts at points of interruption of their silent reading of four short narrative texts comparable in size but different in genres. Results show that expert readers generated more author inferences than non-expert readers, but rarely did they generate explicit author inferences. Expert readers also tend to read more point driven than story driven. Claassen is very careful not to overestimate her data and stresses more than once how difficult it is to decide whether a reader's verbal report is about an author's intention or about text inferences. The reported author inferences differ strongly in degree but not substantially in correlation with the conditions of visible vs. non-visible narrator or intentional vs. neutral instructions. Claassen interprets her findings by arguing that as soon as readers have a vague idea of what an author's intention could be they look for support in the text and switch then from a bottom-up strategy to a more top-down reading. Therefore the recognizable author's intention seems to diminish. As Claassen states, however, these findings are not sufficient to distinguish between readers' verbal accounts of the implied author, narrator or text as intentional agent.

In her second experiment Claassen, in line with Clark (1996), emphasises the joint pretence or game-of-make-believe between author and reader: readers usually accept the author's invitation of joint pretence and presume that the author is sincere, trustworthy, and has morals and values that are not questionable. This is the basic layer. On a subsequent layer the author makes an assertion of the role of a narrator, and this is an action the reader recognizes. Claassen call this assumption in the author's trustworthiness and sincerity the 'default assumption of good behaviour'. Readers must assume on a regular basis that the author will not attempt to convince them of beliefs that oppose their norms and values. Claassen has taken this as a testable hypothesis for her second off-line experiment. She tries to measure by questionnaires how differently readers generate author inferences out of

texts with an immoral narrator and an immoral character vs. texts with a relatively neutral narrator and a neutral character. Based on a highly disputable fragment of Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires* Claassen constructed four textoids with positive/negative characters and a first-person narrator, to force readers to wonder about the opinions expressed in the text. The results show that a text with a morally questionable view formulated by both narrator and character evoked more frequent questions about the (implied) author's intentions, his or her identity and moral position than in the other text versions. The interpretation of the findings is that these morally disputable texts question the default assumption of good behaviour between author and readers because readers start to worry about the implied author's moral position when both narrator and character seems to force readers to look at their world with the immoral eyes of the narrator and the author. The closer the disputable moral positions of the author came to the basic layer the more readers tend to reject him because it denounced the joint pretence.

The two following experiments are on-line measurements of author inferences generated by readers while reading. To do so Claassen chose the affect priming paradigm to examine whether biographical information about an author affects the generation of author inferences during reading. Again text fragments displaying morally reprehensible views or acts are used as prime and adjectives are used here as target words. The prediction is that author information generates an affective response during reading and therefore alters response and reading times, or more precisely: the congruence of the primes (author prime and text prime) and the target words would facilitate the judgement of the targets, showing in shorter reaction times. And again in both experiments a series of pre-tests and careful consideration of the method in general as of details has been done in advance (t-test, ANOVA, Chi-square, etc.), and recalibration of the results are carried out. In the end the data of both on-line experiments belong more or less to a journal of negative results. Claassen deviates in her interpretation from so many scholars to stay strictly to the data whatever they show. Her interpretation is that the results suggest the lost priming effect somewhere during the reading due to text content. No statistical significant congruence of the valences of author prime, text prime, and target adjective could be measured by response times. The marginal level of significance is interpreted by Claassen in the way that the author prime declines, the bottom up text overrides the prime the longer participants read.

Claassen's findings demonstrate that the implied author is the literary term for the psychological phenomenon, a cognitive construction, no reader of literature could completely avoid. Claassen makes a strong argument why more than once the notion of an implied author also affects the mental representation of an empirical author and the other way round. At a minimum it is claimed that we as readers could not read without thinking who is inviting us to jointly pretend about

the fictional world we are engaged in. Of course inferences about the author are not constantly activated during reading. Furthermore, Claassen also endorses the notion that readers of narrative fiction distinguish the empirical author, the implied author, and the narrator, even when they often conflate these notions, while readers also have a representation of the author's identity, intentions and attitude.

Claassen more than once modestly states that the conclusions from her results should not be overstressed. From her examples of a moral story, though, Claassen sometimes tends to overestimate the intensity of author inferences generated by readers. The more so by the use of first person text samples: Claassen's experiments trigger more author inferences than most narratives would do, because they are simply written as third person narratives. And due to those side effects Claassen emphasises point-driven reading. But what readers are engaged in most of the time is story-driven reading — and presumably the level of author inferences generated here is lower than in point-driven reading. Maybe we not always even need the assumption of an internal narrator, as Wilson (2007) and recently Currie (2010) argue.

We are still far away to say where the situation model ends and the context model starts during reading, still farther away from how we have to understand the interconnections of reader generated author inferences. The distinction between empirical author, implied author, and narrator is still largely a working assumption and might not really reflect the psychology of reading. These are all questions literary studies should take care to disentangle. Claassen's book is a stimulating invitation to get such research off the ground. Claassen casually compares her research with Don Quichote fighting a somehow hopeless battle without being aware of it. Well, I believe that to be wrong. She has not only fought the real battle of excellent research, she also wins the battle.

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