Here Hochman argues that a character's unity is *lacking* since as a reader I will never perceive more of them than glimpses with large gaps in between, whereas I can assume that my neighbour next door did continue to exist and lead a life between the two times I greeted them.

Indeed, the teleology of living people lies within their uninterrupted history of being. They exist for the sole purpose of existing and by doing so create their own determination. As a reader, I may not know whether a character was invented to fit the plot or vice versa, but I can say for sure that the history of a living being always presupposes their existence. Thus, characters are simultaneously lesser than life in that they lack unity, but also larger than life for they are teleologically embedded in a narrative that justifies their purpose.

Diagnosing Characters?

The limited data in combination with their heightened teleological determination leads to the phenomenon that we tend to remember a character "long after we have forgotten everything else about the texts that generate them" (Hochman 35). In other words, one retains an image or a concept of a character (35). Ironically, characters may thus become representative of ideas, emotions, or concepts, or what Chatman calls the paradigm of traits.

> … Chatman makes an elaborate case for the affinity between characters in literature and people in life, and for the similarity between the way we retrieve them, conceptualize them, and respond to them. He goes further in this direction, in fact, than I have so far indicated. Chatman holds that retrieval and imaginative reconstruction of character permit and even mandate speculation on the past, present, and future of each character. His grounds for doing so are the "openness," as he terms it, that is made possible by the extrapolation of a paradigm of traits for the character – a paradigm that exists in the spatial dimension that we abstract from the temporal sequence of the action. (Hochman 35–36)

Hochman disagrees, taking a stance toward dynamic characters:

> Such a view not only defines character in life as an emergent structure arising from a complex play of conflict in the individual; it also conceives of character in literature as part of a highly dynamic, if also stabilized, structure. That structure presents us with the process of coming into being at two levels. First there is the text itself, which generates images of characters by unfolding the materials of which we constitute them. Second there is the character, which as an imagined entity comes into being and falls out of being as it responds to the circumstances – to events and to other characters – delineated in the text. (Hochman 141)

In other words, living beings are too complex to be reduced to a single image or concept, especially since one tends to encounter them in different situations. However, literary characters consist of both, a textual level which provides the skeleton of a character, so to speak, and the outline a reader constructs for this character based on their imagination, or what Chatman calls the paradigm of traits.

Generally speaking, during reading the "incoming discourse is automatically mapped onto general world knowledge" (Ferguson et al. 103). Since such 'world knowledge' differs from individual to individual, I do not believe that a reader necessarily attributes the same meaning or force to a character as the author did – or any other reader, for that matter. Consequently, readers create meanings to a character, i.e., more than one, but each within the reader's respective imagination. Thus, even though the textual 'skeleton' does not change, the character's outline does. Through discursive practices, readers may agree upon one or more 'general' meanings, and sometimes the meaning of a character becomes detached from the original text. However, what if the character were modelled after an actual human being? On a physical level, it is easy enough to distinguish them. After all, a character's storyline is created while a human being creates its own history by living. Borrowing from biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Valera, I will call this process autopoiesis, the ability to *self-create*. However, once we enter

the metaphysical level, the lines are blurred once again. For example, how should one categorise characters in novels that feature historical figures, or, indeed, autobiographies? E.M. Forster argued:

> If a character in a novel is exactly like Queen Victoria—not rather like but exactly like—then it actually is Queen Victoria, and the novel, or all of it that the character touches, becomes a memoir. A memoir is history, it is based on evidence. A novel is based on evidence + or – x, the unknown quantity being the temperament of the novelist, and the unknown quantity always modifies the effect of the evidence, and sometimes transforms it entirely. (Forster 34)

Here, I disagree with Forster. There is no difference between characters in novels, memoirs, or autobiographies, for the simple reason that the acting figures were created by someone else, albeit after the model of a living being. The fact that somebody decided on what information to keep and what to leave out, how to put this information into words, and when to write it down (e.g. in the case of a memoir), makes these portrayals artificial. Even in the case of memoirs the author's unity and self-understanding cater to the unity of the character formed after them. The retrospective construction of events will always introduce an element of storytelling, thus the author of a memoir simultaneously writes themselves and about themselves. As for the 'evidence' in history on which Forster bases his argument – in the 1970s, Hayden White caused an upheaval amongst historians when he suggested they, too, write stories. Although Forster could not have anticipated the linguistic turn, I must discard his argument; while history might be based on evidence, it is not free of narrative, or 'the author's temperament'. However, I will keep the example of Queen Victoria for a little longer.

Assuming that a character always presupposes its creator for every word that is written about it, no character can ever be *exactly* like its human model. Even if the author could create the highest possible congruency, the character would lack the autopoietic abilities of the original. One could, arguably, treat it as a doppelganger, but this would kill the original:

> the double has come to be a portent of death once the second self is no longer protected by primary narcissism: duplication, the multiplication of selves, becomes the splitting of the self, no longer overcoming but rather confirming its non-identity and mortality. (Weber 1114)

The memoir, as Forster defines it, is both an attempt to make Queen Victoria immortal and the reason for the loss of her (unique) identity. Of course, if she were still alive, this would not affect her autopoietic abilities. However, upon dying, living beings lose this distinguishing mark. Consequently, with their death, humans pass on into the same realm as literary characters, i.e. they become agents in narratives. Hochman approaches the same thought from the opposite direction:

> Indeed, if the characters in literature are like people at all, in the ordinary sense, they are like dead people. The characters in literature, once they are "written," are finished like the dead. We can manipulate them only to the extent that we respond to the signs that generate them in our imaginations and, beyond this, only to the extent that we "liberate" them utterly from the texts that generate them and allow them to inhabit our thoughts, our fantasies, and our dreams. (Hochman 60)

Any memories of Queen Victoria, if we were to have any, would thus have the same status as the information a reader gathered from her memoir. '*But,*' someone might argue, '*memories of Queen Victoria would be memories of the original*.' Yes and no. The Queen Victoria that is featured in my memory and the Queen Victoria featured in the memoir have the same doppelganger-status. One could go as far as to say that any memory features a doppelganger of somebody if one defined memory as a disconnected narrative.[1]

1 Memories in general pose a curious case, since one might remember a person as a child even though they are an adult by now. Technically, the child featured in the memory would be a doppelganger, too, but is arguably too far removed from the original.

> Repetition, duplication, recurrence are inherently ambiguous, even ambivalent processes: they seem to confirm, even to increase the "original" identity, and yet even more they crease it as its problematical and paradoxical precondition. (Weber 1114)

Copying the original, however exact, will not destroy the original but it will warp it by pluralising ('creasing') the information that circulates. An original, then, might die in two ways: either a living being ceases to exist, in which case its death occurs at the point where its autopoiesis stops, or it might die while its autopoietic abilities are still functioning, while it is still very much alive, by passing on into the collective memory as a symbol.[2] Symbolic heightening requires 'creasing', by which a living being becomes artificial, or, as Gilbert and Gubar expressed it, it is "killed into art" (17). The difference between these two cases is the 'ideal unification'. In the first case, "[t]he fragmented materiality remains ideally unified" (Woodward 44) by the original, and in the second case by the symbol. Yet, the ideal unification of Queen Victoria is arguably represented in the symbolic heightening of her name when a whole era was designated Victorian.

I do not wish to proceed on the topic of ideal unification, nor am I able to pinpoint the exact moment when the scale tips from 'original' to 'symbol' (possibly the transition from individual to collective memory). However, all this taken together, one should consider literary doppelgangers – assuming they could actually be created – as unreal or artificial as any other character. Consequently, characters featured in autism autobiographies may be treated similarly to those featured in novels. For example, in *Odd Girl Out* (2017) Laura James explores her own story in light of her autism diagnosis in adulthood. Surely, the fact that an autistic individual wrote about their own experiences is sufficient ground to base a 'diagnosis' on. Unfortunately, the protagonist is still only a teleologically repurposed embodiment of her life story. Thus, although I know that this character is 'as similar as possible' to how a

2 To give an example: Many people curiously believed that Nelson Mandela had died in prison when he actually lived another 23 years after his release.

living being with autism views themselves, I cannot diagnose it. And thus, I believe we should finally bid farewell to the idea of 'diagnosing' characters, in the sense that we could potentially gather information and use it as evidence for new findings on them, especially if such 'diagnoses' are made by laypeople.

Casting terminology aside, characters are still interpreted in light of certain concepts. I am here referring to concepts as "the building blocks of thoughts[, which are] crucial to such psychological processes as categorization, inference, memory, learning, and decision-making" (Margolis and Laurence). There has been much debate over the exact nature of these entities, but for my study I will assume that concepts are representative of the knowledge an individual holds in relation to an object or word. I am therefore also assuming that concepts differ from individual to individual, based on their ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Thus, they should be understood as signifiers rather than signified. Consequently, individuals hold different understandings of autism, too.

If the diagnosis of autism is explicitly mentioned in the text, it directly alludes to the concept and turns the story into an *autism narrative*. Here, the character might be considered the symbolic heightening of a diagnosis, i.e. its fictionalised version. As long as such a portrayal coincides with the reader's understanding of autism, it will be considered reliable. Otherwise, it will turn into an unreliable or 'unrealistic' portrayal. On the other hand, one could argue that a character's story can also be retold in terms of a concept. Similar to White's historical storytelling, which creates one of many narratives, such retellings are one of many interpretations. Such reinterpretations are closely linked to the reader's concept and will thus remain fleeting.

Taken together, characters can be created to intentionally embody a concept, or they could be reinterpreted in light of a (new) concept. Both instances are representative of a particular understanding of a concept at a certain point in time, but one must not consider them irrefutable or defining, since they are mere snapshots of a discourse. To the point these concepts overlap, they can be understood as 'public knowledge'. Nevertheless, concepts will evolve and change over time, thus ultimately also changing what the character embodies. Some sig-

nifiers persist longer than others, such as fundamental ideas of love, war, power, etc. Contrary to that, medical diagnoses are much more fleeting and may even be overturned within the course of a generation. Here, the change is much more obvious because it usually coincides with the change or abandoning of a label. For example, when autism was first diagnosed, it was defined as a symptom of schizophrenia. The term itself was coined by Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 and became interchangeable with Freud's *Narzissmus* (Narcissism), the opposite of being social towards others (Sinzig 2). The label has since undergone several changes (and still does), such as the introduction of a spectrum in 2013 (see Chapter 6.1). When comparing retrospective interpretations and intentional embodiments, one should find the most congruence in contemporary portrayals. Yet even a century later, a fictional embodiment can tell readers much about society, although they will not be able to apprehend it as fully as a contemporary reader would. Retrospectively applied, new concepts can help readers understand a character in an equally new way. However, they carry with them the fallacy of truth, i.e. a reader might believe their interpretation to hold more truth than others before because they fail to take into account that their understanding of reality is equally as fleeting. Again, even if I interpret a character as being representative of autism, it ultimately only throws light on my current understanding of this concept, not on the character itself. Reinterpretations of existing characters can go as far as narratives being 'rewritten' when the collective memory assumes a disposition towards a certain interpretation, such as Sherlock Holmes being autistic. Such interpretations are not 'diagnoses', nor should those characters be considered 'autistic', but readers might still consider them the best, i.e. most comprehensive, explanation possible. However, what appears to be a mere conflict of interpretation can actually become harmful if it perpetuates misconceptions, an issue I return to in Chapter 3.3.

How Readers Recognise Concepts in Literature

In 1972 structuralist Propp (*Morphologie des Märchens*) identified different kinds of agents in the folktale, many of which are interchangeable.

> What matters, for example, is that the hero vanquish his enemy, not who the enemy is, or who – a bear, and old woman, a princess – gives him the winged horse, the magic ring, or the enchanted spear. (Hochman 20)

Here, the essence of a character (hero and enemy), as well as their course of action (fight or die) are so clearly identifiable and repetitive that they become interchangeable; they become the embodiment of a concept. Portrayals of single concepts are very limited compared to portrayals in modern novels, which usually feature more complex and individual characters (Hochman 29). While contemporary narratives still engage heroes and villains, they are less interchangeable. Nevertheless, I suggest that humans are prone to simplifying and categorising their reality (see also Chapter 3.1). Based on their real-life experience and knowledge, readers tend to recognise patterns in characters and draw parallels to their own realities, thus even complex portrayals are simplified. Moreover, characters are categorised in relation to other characters or even human beings. For example, a reader who encounters several autism portrayals will compare them to each other. Additionally, these characters likely share aspects that allow readers to recognise patterns based on the concept they have of this diagnosis. Thus, with every portrayal, a reader updates their concept of autism. This can be likened to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Familienähnlichkeit* (family resemblance)[3], which suggests that at times we do not have a fixed definition of something but rather a working concept that is consistently modified and extended. Wittgenstein famously used 'games' as his example to denote a group of things with overlapping essences.

3 Whose flaws Maurice Mandelbaum (1965) precisely pointed out.