INTRODUCTION
Researchers are seldom asked whether they have a vision and never whether they would like to provide a scientific contribution about this. A vision is generally associated with an attractive or charming content while at the same time they are usually characterized as improbable and unattainable. However, visions are of great importance for developing and renewing research disciplines and for this reason they should not be kept secret. I am, therefore, pleased to accept the invitation to put forward my ideas, perspectives and visions about onomastics. In doing so I will restrict myself to the area of literary onomastics. Within this field I will concentrate on that part of the discipline that concerns the analysis of names as used in literary works. For the present I will therefore ignore other forms of reception research based on systematically collected reactions from readers and research on the intentions of authors founded on interviews held with them. Naturally, these approaches do play a role in the analysis of names used in literature, as is apparent from the work of Friedhelm Debus\(^1\) and of Andrea Brendler and Francesco Iodice\(^2\), for instance, from the point of view of the authors, and e.g. Catherine Emmott\(^3\) from that of the readers.
In the most recent phase of scientific research into the use of names in literature arguments have been put forward very strongly that these names should not be studied in isolation. A name is only striking or expressive if it is considered within the landscape of names used in the text or a group of texts that is being studied – that is, in the ‘onymic landscape’. A large reference framework is, therefore, necessary for a responsible analysis. But how large must this framework be if we want to analyse the use and function of names in literary works? And what elements do we want to distinguish in that landscape? We can only determine the singularity of an author, oeuvre, genre, time or cultural area when we know what is really to be regarded as normal.

**LANDSCAPE WITH A FEW FAMILY NAMES**

I will illustrate this by using two specific examples from Dutch literature. Parallels in literary works in other languages can no doubt be found. However, any choices I would make from the international secondary literature would be very arbitrary because of the limited availability of these publications. I prefer, therefore, not to make such a choice and present two examples from an area in which literary onomastics is still in the initial stages.

Karel Glastra van Loon, who died recently at the age of 42, published his novel *Lisa’s adem* (*Lisa’s breath*) in 2001. The novel tells an intimate story of a boy and a girl, Talm and Lisa, who cautiously begin a relationship, but one in which earlier experiences of the girl with her stepfather, Sebastiaan, are a complicating factor. The girl disappears, and the novel reflects the search that her boyfriend undertakes seven years later to find out what really could have happened. The names of the four main characters in this novel (in addition to the three already mentioned, there is also Lisa’s mother, Sophie) have an important function in the story; they have been analysed elsewhere. Here, I only want to discuss one of the onomastic characteristics of the work, namely the fact that family names are used only very sparingly. The main characters are referred to exclusively by their first names
– or in the case of Talm by his nickname – and this emphasizes the intimacy of the story. Only Johan, a boy who appears in the boyhood memories of the stepfather and who had an important exemplary function for him, is mentioned by his full family name, Timmer, which is a standard Dutch surname. The stepfather himself, who Talm suspects of having murdered Lisa, is only given the first letter of his surname. The fact that merely an initial is used suggests criminality or the suspicion of this, given the circumstance that the story is set in a Dutch context. In the Netherlands, the media, until recently, were forbidden to refer to suspects or convicted criminals by anything other than their initials. On top of this, Sebastiaan has been given the guilt-ridden letter M, that recalls association with the very apposite film by Fritz Lang from 1931, *M – Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (or *The Murderers Are Among Us*), that concerns a child murderer. (With thanks to Frank Peeters for this reference.) The function of family names in this novel is more than just one of identification, and that becomes clear if we look at the names in the context of the other names used. In Lisa’s adem use of just the M., instead of using Sebastiaan’s family name in full, in fact accuses him. The reader is manipulated into believing the suspicions expressed by Talm. The association with Fritz Lang’s classic film does precisely the same. The only full surname used, that of Johan Timmer, underlines the fact that this boy is a concrete reference point or example for Sebastiaan.

The second Dutch novel that I wish to pay attention to here is *Nooit meer slapen* (*Never sleep again*) by Willem Frederik Hermans (1921-1995), first published in Amsterdam in 1966. The first German translation, by Rosemarie Still, appeared in Tübingen in 1982 with the title *Nie mehr schlafen*; a second translation with the same title by the translator Waltraud Hüsmert was published in Leipzig in 2002. (Nothing is known about a possible English translation.) The main character in this novel is the young geologist Alfred Issendorf, who makes a start with the research for his thesis about meteorite hits in Finnmark, Norway. He goes on an expedition there with three young Norwegian colleagues and immediately becomes friendly with one of them, Arne Jordal. The two others inspire great hatred and revulsion in him. The way in which the names of these three
Norwegians are used in the novel reflects Alfred’s emotions. Apart from a few exceptions the engaging Arne is only ever referred to by his first name, while the family names are used exclusively for the other two. In addition, their names almost always appear as one phrase – Mikkelsen and Qvigstad. Each time these family names are used it is in fact an expression of Alfred’s contempt, and fear, of them. Their family names are Alfred’s weapons of defence. Here family names are used in a manner completely different from that in Lisa’s adem. How are other family names used in the same novel by Hermans or in other works by him? And is this method of separating characters into those ‘for and against’ the main character by using first names or the family name tied to a particular period? Is such a function typical of the 1960s and 70s, for example? It is clear to everybody in the Netherlands, and doubtless elsewhere also, that the way in which people are addressed has changed radically in the last decades. This means that we cannot simply apply our present criteria to situations in a literary past.

In order to put the analyses of the use of family names in these two novels as sketched above into perspective and to ascribe a greater value to them, we must compare the onymic landscape in the texts with those in as many other texts as possible. In order to do that we would need to have the following concrete details from the work: how many first names are used in the work, how many family names and what is the ratio of these to each other? All occurrences of the names would also have to be coded with the functions of the name at the particular place in the work, such as identifying, illustrating, etc., so that it might be possible to discover tendencies per work, oeuvre, genre, time or area. The situation in an individual work could then be compared against this. We could then establish what is average or normal in a wide group of texts, but could also compare the usage with that in specific other texts – in the case of Lisa’s adem for example, with other novels from the same period that also use incest as a motive. Naturally, we also
want to be able to cross language borders when doing all this. Only then will it
gradually become clear how the use of names functions in their particular landscape,
what the constant factors are and how specific authors vary or may even be unique.
Constructing such a reference framework requires an enormous effort but I do think
that we could make a start in this direction by making optimum use of modern
information and communication technology.

DIGITAL VISION
The wish to be able to compare analyses of names and to be able to share these
analyses with colleagues everywhere in the world was the incentive for starting the
project ‘Autonom’ at the Dutch Linguistics and Literature Department in the NIWI-
KNAW (the Netherlands Institute for Scientific Information Services of the Royal
Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) in 2003. The department has now been
transferred to the Huygens Institute that also forms part of the KNAW. It was a small,
internal project in which a researcher and a scientific programmer worked together.
The aim was to develop a web application from which literary onomasticians,
anywhere in the world, could upload digital texts and then extract the names semi-
automatically from the text for further analysis by using special tools. It should then
be possible to make these analyses available to other researchers, by employing
technical methods to display the annotation schemes used and in this way compare
analyses carried out by different researchers with each other.

The foundation of this digital and collaborative work environment was laid in 2003
and 2004. It is now possible to place texts in a personal repository. Operating one of
the buttons generates an alphabetical list of all those words that might possibly be a
name. The algorithm can only be used for languages in which capital letters are used
mainly for proper names and for the start of a sentence, such as Dutch and English. It
cannot, therefore, be used for German where all nouns are written with a capital letter.
It is the intention that other language-specific algorithms can be added to the web
application. The list that the name-searching algorithm produces can
then be further processed by the researcher, whereby words that are not names can be rejected and any desired categorization label can be applied to names that have been found. All forms of a name can be labelled with the same label in one action, but labels can also be assigned per occurrence. The illustration shows a list of occurrences of one name with the annotation block in which the labels can be added displayed alongside one of the occurrences.

After the first round of name recognition, the researcher can zoom in on each name or a group of names as desired. The system makes it possible to refine the labelling still further by proceeding through the material in a criss-cross manner. Work is still being carried out on a filter to make the systematic labelling of the selected names even easier.

The functionalities sketched here are now almost complete, but this, however, encompasses only the basis; the final aim has by no means been achieved. The next step that we would like to take is to display the use of the assigned labels visually. It should be very simple for the user to access an overview of all or part
of the labels. If the user has used the labels ‘first name’ and ‘family name’ and has assigned these systematically then – in my vision – it should be possible to generate a bar chart showing the occurrences of both types compared with each other, or a graph showing the use of particular types of names throughout the text, by just a few mouse clicks. To go even further, it should be possible to set a statistical warning system in operation that would show when statistically relevant deviations from a particular trend have occurred. Furthermore, to complete my vision, the researcher should be able to display the results of his own analyses without difficulty alongside those of another researcher, who could have occupied him or herself with any possible other literary text, in whatever language. Naturally, this digital vision of the future would also have a reference system containing information about the works that have been analysed. The system should be able to make suggestions itself about possible other works that a novel such as *Nooit meer slapen* or *Lisa’s adem* could best be compared with.

More about the technical side of the application and its development can be found in the paper by Karina van Dalen-Oskams and Joris van Zundert ‘Modelling Features of Characters: Some Digital Ways to Look at Names in Literary Texts’ (2004). All that needs to be said here is that all that has been sketched out above can actually be achieved technically. Most of the programmer’s time is required in deciding how the web application should be displayed and how the user can find his way through the application as easily as possible. While working with the web application it is naturally very tempting for the project group to quickly write a new algorithm for their own research. This then provides interesting internal material for a paper or an article, but it then takes weeks to build this functionality into a web environment in such a way that others will also be able to make use of it without problems. But we are not satisfied ourselves until this is the case. This is our aim also from a research perspective since it will then be possible to check our analyses within such a web application and to repeat the measurements that we have made. These are two very important conditions for scientific research.

However, it is at the present time uncertain whether or how fast this project will continue. It is expected that new functionalities can only be developed with the help of external subsidy. One option
is to strive for international cooperation of literary onomastics with the aim of developing the web application further by the efforts of all, so that the costs are shared among the expected primary users of the system. We hope to be able to release a new version at the latest by the beginning of 2006. On the basis of this we hope to be able to search specifically for partners to whom we would like to propose a draft project plan intended for further cooperative development. Naturally, the intentions and vision as summarized here briefly will be further developed and modified to the concrete research needs of the target group in international discussions. This target group is expressly invited to experiment with us and to put forward its views in the hope that it will also come to believe in the desirability of actually implementing this vision.

Summary
The answer to the question of what is normal in the use and function of names in literary works – that is, comparative literary onomastics – would represent an important step forward in the development of theory. But this progress can only be made if we first overcome the practical problems. I hope that it is clear that my vision in this direction is both possible and probable thanks to the rapid developments in the discipline of Humanities Computing. I see using these new possibilities both in practice and theory as the most important task for literary onomastics of the future.
1 Friedhelm DEBUS, *Namen in literarischen Werken: (Er-)Findung - Form - Funktion*, Mainz 2002.