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Contemporary History, Literature and Literary Studies

von Katja Stopka

In this text, I argue for closer cooperation between historical and literary studies, both of which are text-based disciplines that work in ways oriented towards source materials and yet remain critical of the textual foundations on which they stand. History and literary researchers take writing and reading as their subject of inquiry; they collect and organize archives of written records, use these archives as repositories of knowledge, and in turn draw on these holdings, for example in critical examinations of cultural patterns of reflection, or historical perceptions in need of correction. Furthermore, both are based simultaneously on the practices of writing and reading, and thus on the cultural technologies of communication and archiving that also constitute their subject matter. As participants in a scholarly **discourse** that is predominantly recorded in writing and appropriated through reading, these two disciplines also make a decisive contribution to the analysis of narrative patterns of interpretation as applied to written texts, as well as to the constitution – and interrogation – of these texts' collective and cultural significance.

When reflecting on the possibilities of interdisciplinary cooperation between historical and literary studies, we cannot help but take a closer look at the object of common interest, namely literature, or, more precisely, literary historical narratives. In this regard it is clear that both disciplines stand in a loose relationship to one another, at least if we take as a criterion the references that historians make to literary studies. Although the relationship of history and literature now belongs to the humanities curriculum, historians (particularly in the Germanophone world) tends to treat literature – a medium that plays a key role in the production of and critical reflection on historical narratives and images – as a marginal subject. Consequently, opportunities to network with literary studies are seldom taken advantage of. The broad neglect of literary historical narratives in **contemporary historical** research is particularly striking, given that such research could benefit from including literary prose that deals with the same time periods and the same events in the past. However, in recent years we have seen an increase in studies focusing on the **history of media**, such as the participation of cinema and television narratives on the perpetuation, or infiltration, of dominant political and cultural semantics or narratives.[1] Comparable systematic examinations of literary historical **narratives** are not found in the field of history (with a few exceptions[2]); such work is being done in literary studies, which is more open to **cultural** and **social history**.[3]

As is well known, contemporary historical research refers to a past that at least some of our contemporaries consciously experienced. Following Hans Rothfels, we also understand

contemporary history as an era in which we have lived together, one which, more than any other period of time, shapes the thoughts and actions of the present. The historical events of the “catastrophic” twentieth century, and how we deal with them, do not fall solely within the remit of contemporary historical research, painful as this concession may be to contemporary historians; however, this is obvious in terms of contemporary history’s relevance to the present and the associated debates about who holds the prerogative to interpret contemporary history in its political, social and cultural dimensions. The historicization of the recent past is a fiercely contested field, one that does not lie exclusively in the hands of contemporary historians and in which a broad array of actors are actively involved, and this means that the question of which historical images should be valid for the present and future, and in what way, remains extremely relevant for contemporary historical reflection and self-positioning. And it is precisely in this field of historical communication that literature, similar to the medium of film, acts as a social multiplier that should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to dealing with the recent German past. Literature plays a decisive role in the construction and deconstruction of collective patterns of interpretation and stereotypes of memory.[4]

Given this background, there are abundant points of contact for interdisciplinary work between contemporary history and literature studies. The essential interfaces arise from the circumstance that both disciplines are dedicated to researching historical narratives in social- and cultural-historical contexts. As early as 1980, Rolf Grimminger postulated that “literary works of art or philosophical literature can only be understood inadequately, or even incorrectly, without knowledge of the social reality that such works have always processed into contexts of meaning in their linguistic forms”.[5] Around the turn of the millennium, the literary scholar Paul Michael Lützeler pointed out that the culturalist turn in the humanities in particular gave rise to “increased activity at the interfaces between subjects and disciplines”. According to Lützeler, this is reflected not only in the paradigm shifts of the **cultural turns**[6] and the differentiation of methods and approaches; at least in German studies, there has been an increased reception of the methods and results of historical studies and, in particular, contemporary history research, which we can understand not least as a reaction to the boom in contemporary historical prose.[7]

In this respect, a productive relationship between contemporary historical research and literary studies can unfold in the field of tension that brings the disciplines into relation and that intertwines the textuality of history and the historicity of literary texts. By “historicity of texts,” we mean that texts are always embedded in a socio-cultural, historical environment to which they owe their existence and in which they intervene. They can only be understood from this environment. [8] “Textuality of history” refers to the idea that history is not “directly” accessible, i.e., that there is no “history in itself,” only narratives of it. When history is written, whether in scientific treatises, newspaper articles or chronicles, it is always based on narrative and textual selection patterns that

In this context, cooperation between historical and literary studies can generate synergy effects which, on the one hand, provide information about the historicity of literary patterns of interpretation, cultural and social inscriptions and coding. On the other hand, the influence of contemporary historical narratives on the “text” of history can become visible, as can the influence of **contemporary history** or contemporary historical research on literary historical texts. In this way, contemporary history can take advantage of the unique tools offered by literary texts and literary discourses involved in the construction of historical knowledge and images of history. Moreover, scholars of history can examine whether the specific aesthetic qualities of literary historical texts also present additional value for contemporary historical discoveries and insights, insofar as aesthetic procedures – for example in the visualisation of the non-obvious, the polyvalent, the multi-perspectival and the paradoxical – open up a complexity that must often remain hidden from the narratives of historical scholarship, which are primarily aimed at explication. The consideration of linguistic processes of aestheticisation and fictionalisation for processes related to the (re-)construction of the recent past cannot only provide information on how literary language and literary texts shape images of contemporary history, but can also set in motion reflections that inquire into the function of aestheticisation and fictionalisation for contemporary historical, i.e. academic, construction principles and processes.

1. The Textuality of History – The Historicity of Literary Texts

In order to make the various aspects of cooperation between contemporary history and literary studies research more transparent, I would like to introduce an example that illustrates how strong the points of convergence between contemporary history and literary studies are, and how little the public discourse obeys the experts’ desire to leave the reconstruction and research of contemporary history to contemporary historians.

In 2002, Günter Grass initiated a debate with his novel *Crabwalk (Im Krebsgang)*, and we can read this episode as an appeal for a more in-depth examination of contemporary history by means of literature, and for a closer integration between the two fields. In the course of this debate, Grass, holder of the Nobel Prize for Literature, admonished the German public for their supposed failure to deal with a part of German history – and he did so not only at the literary level of the novel, but also via numerous media channels. According to Grass, the disaster of the refugee ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*, which was sunk by a Soviet submarine in 1945, and the related fate of the Germans affected by flight and expulsion from Eastern and Central Europe during the Second World War, had never been seriously discussed in public discourse, literature, or German historiography. Although this accusation against historians and writers was certainly unjustified, Grass had managed to

create the opposite impression in the public eye with his book and his media presence, which is²⁰ why literary scholars and contemporary historians joined the debate and called for a somewhat more differentiated view of the state of literary and historical reappraisal and public perception. [10]

This controversy exposed the problematic status that academic contemporary historiography has in the public eye. Contemporary history finds itself in a dilemma, as on the one hand it operates at the academic level of specialised expert communication, which obeys academic criteria and therefore remains rather inaccessible to a broader public. On the other hand, however, it claims to contribute to the fiercely contested contemporary historical images of the present and to the constitution of collective and cultural memory, whereby it always sees itself as a critical voice and corrective in public discourse due to its expert position.

1.1 Literature as Contemporary History – Contemporary History as Literature

The provocative statement by the writer and Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprún – who predicted in 2008 that in a few decades the collective memory of the Shoah would draw its material less from historiographical than from literary works[11] – once again confirms the dilemma facing historical processing of the past: namely that historiographical representations do not have even remotely the same range of public perception as, for example, literary representations.[12] The growing popularity of literary historical narratives in both parts of Germany, from the 1960s to the present day,[13] therefore also seems to be due to the demands of a public interested in history, to whom specialised academic discourse remains rather alien.

The literary treatments of the recent past, undertaken as they are from the perspective of the present, are in no way inferior to contemporary historical studies in their degree of reflection,[14] although literary depictions are far less abstract and therefore more accessible due to the “deepening of the observational standpoint”[15] in the sense that such literature focusses on individual experiences. However, literature’s capacity for articulating contemporary historical **narratives** makes a decisive contribution to increasing public interest in history and broadening the reception of historical narratives. In this respect, an appeal structure is implicit in the literature, inviting readers to engage with historical events and historical discourses. At the same time, however, literature also invokes historiography, because the allusive horizon of fictional historical narratives can ultimately only be recognised by engaging with the historical contexts to which literary texts refer.[16] In our attempt to determine this historiographical potential of literature, we must ask the important question of which historical contexts are evoked in which style and with which narrative means in literature.

In addition for some years now, literary fictions have not just taken up history as their subject^{6 of 20} matter; literature has also begun negotiating specialised discourses of historiography and historical theory, as Ansgar Nünning, among others, has worked out.[17] The literature also sheds light on historiographical problems with which modern historical theory and historiography are grappling.[18] Cees Nooteboom's novel *Allerseelen*, for example, deals lucidly with the relationship between historiography and fiction. And in his novel *Jahrestage*, Uwe Johnson reveals the unbridgeable gap between historical reality and the models of historiography, as well as **memory** and **biography** research.[19] In this context, diachronic investigations into developments and changes in historical images, historical **discourses** and theoretical structures, as well as semantics and patterns of interpretation in literature, are a worthwhile field of study for contemporary historical research, as well as for social and cultural studies-oriented literary history.

Furthermore, Semprún's question of whether literature as imaginary history-writing will *replace* academic historiography could be posed in a modified form for the sake of a productive exchange between contemporary history and literature: Can fiction *complement* fact? If we examine history as "the result of a discursive practice,"[20] then academic contemporary history can only improve its "material status" by dealing with fictional accounts of history, meaning that it would take literature seriously as a source. Instead, dealing with fictional drafts that take contemporary history itself as their subject leads to discussions and critiques of the possibilities, limits, and reliability of *one's own* methods and results. Faced with literature that uses focalisations of "unreliable narratives" to raise questions about the reliability of historical **events** and images of history, for example, academic contemporary history research can put its own narrative techniques and its ideas of truth and claims to objectivity to the test. Keeping in mind the literarising level of reflection, and entering into exchange with literary studies research, contemporary history can also arrive at an improved assessment of its own potential and its own impact. This concerns (1) the relationship between – and how to deal with the relationship between – fictionality and factuality, truth and probability; and (2) the question of the significance of the **subject** or actors of history (or histories) in terms of their connection to social practices and discourses.[21]

Literary concepts of contemporary history, despite their fictionalising procedures, are by no means in pure opposition to reality. Literary texts, through their complex interactions and interconnectedness, are based on sediments of real elements, discourses, and practices. Conversely, reality does not remain unsusceptible to the imaginarily produced "realities" of literature.[22] Consequently, literary studies – even if its practitioners assess literary treatments of history first and foremost in their aesthetic aspects of literariness – cannot ignore the conditions, prerequisites and modalities of the social and cultural potentials for meaning and offers of meaning contained and synthesized in these literary products. It is precisely in those branches of literary studies oriented towards social and cultural history that scholars recognise the relevance

of sociocultural and historical references to literary texts, as well as the significance of intertextual imbrications of literature and historiography. It is therefore incorrect to assume at a fundamental level that literature produces, delivers and reflects upon images of history that are less true than those considered in academic historiography. Literature only does this, of course, by other means, for example by focussing its attention on the experience of the individual rather than on the history of a group or a collective, as historiography often does. The fact that literature concentrates less on facts than on probabilities is ultimately due to its interest in filling in the gaps and grey areas of the micro-historical perspective, which historiography must inevitably leave behind if it wants to grasp and conceptually sharpen larger contexts of understanding. This is because, to paraphrase Georg Simmel, individual experience is generally below the threshold of historical interest, even though its influence on historical events is by no means insignificant.[23]

On the other hand, my initial assertion that contemporary history assumes no responsibility for individual experience may only be valid to a limited extent. After all, **historical biographical research** and *oral history* are increasingly striving to historicise personal experiences by investigating concepts of the **subject** and identity, and by interviewing **contemporary witnesses**. However, we must recall that this is ultimately done in order to be able to make statements about collective experiences, such as in **generational** research. While the historical interest in individual experience is guided by an interest in collective experience, the opposite is true in literature. Here – in the context of historical knowledge of collective experience – individual experiences are constructed which, when integrated into a specific historical context, appear more or less probable and realistic without, however, being verifiable. In this literary context, fictionality ultimately stands less for a freely invented situation than for a (typical or atypical) example of human behaviour, for a pointed depiction in which psychological and physical constitutions take shape. [24] Such literature is also in a position – freed from the obligation to empirical demonstrability – to experimentally discuss and open up for debate the questions left open by historical research, which are by no means insignificant.

These unanswered questions are, at one extreme, those relating to the incomprehensibility and monstrosity of historical events in the twentieth century. History lacks an appropriate instrument for a scholarly approach to the phenomenon of traumatisation resulting from the devastation caused by National Socialism, which, as a consequence of the experience of the erasure of identity and **subjectivity**, often manifests itself in the inability to cope with these monstrous experiences in language, since history's field of competence lies primarily in the research of existing documentary material, i.e. what is visible, and not what is missing.[25] However, since neither the historical nor the psychological dimensions of the Holocaust, for example, can be grasped without the knowledge of traumatisation and its unresolved aspects, i.e. the speechless and the concealed, history remains dependent on texts that are capable of modelling and conveying the unspeakable

as well as the unsaid and the concealed elements of such experiences. This is ultimately the ^{8 of 20} responsibility of literature, which has developed aestheticising processes that are not available to historians. Working out these literary narrative techniques and placing them within the horizon of their social and cultural context, which also means taking their historicity into account, is in turn the research task of literary studies.

Thus, beyond its original subjects of investigation and lines of questioning, historiography remains dependent on those types of texts that it must exclude from its own field of research because they do not have a documentary character. Because contemporary historiography must ultimately claim to also include such factors and influences that constitute part of historical processes and constellations that remain beyond verifiability,[26] the field has to approach and come to grips with this sphere of influence, even if it is not animated by documentary concerns. This requires, however, gaining insight into the aesthetic possibilities and variations of representation. The historian Wolfgang Hardtwig, for example, has been calling for years for more intensive co-operation between historical and literary studies. It is high time, he writes, “that the relevant disciplines, history and literary studies, now also address the question of how the literary historical narrative presents the past, what characterises its specificity compared to historiographical representation, and what its current boom means for historical consciousness.”[27]

Saul Friedländer – in the second volume of his complete account “The Third Reich and the Jews”, entitled “The Years of Extermination 1939-1945” – demonstrated that aesthetic modes of representation and the application of literary methods can also be highly productive in the historiographical context. By combining traditional modes of historical representation and reflection with the means of literary writing, Friedländer explored an historiography that was extremely well received by the historical profession, as it was precisely through this combination that he succeeded in circumventing the abstractions that usually result when writing about the millions of murders that took place.[28]

1.2 Contemporary History as Literary History

When we ask how and in what way images of history are socially and culturally constituted and sedimented, we begin to examine – at multiple levels and by means of different questions – the nature and conjuncture of literary “contemporary histories”. Ansgar Nünning suggests devoting more attention to a narratology orientated towards cultural history, which he believes can offer opportunities for interdisciplinary research into the correlations between literary textual processes, their functions and their images of history. Forms of literary appropriation of history and its narrative staging should be discussed on both a diachronic and a synchronic level. Aspects

of interest for the contemporary historical context include, for example:

- the semantization of spaces, objects and events to illustrate the significance that places and spaces of memory can have for historical consciousness and the transformations of cultural memory;
- the semantization of memory processes, time structures and experiences of time to represent subjectivised, fragmented and de-teleologised history;
- the multi-perspectival fanning out of narrated events and the associated pluralisation of history into stories;
- the meta-reflexive elements of fictional negotiations of history, which are characterised, for example, by the fact that discourses about the conditions of historical knowledge or methods and procedures of historiography are reflected at the literary level of plot.[29]

In addition to the current narratives of contemporary history, contemporary narratives from past decades can also provide illuminating information about this contouring of literary images of history and spaces of memory, including their **historicisation**. For, as already stated elsewhere, every fictional text incorporates historical experiences and perceptions of a distinctive social, cultural and political situation.[30] Or, to put it differently, literary art is always the art of the society in which it is created. The fact that these artistic objectifications of specific experiences sometimes reflect the colour of the times and patterns of interpretation to a greater extent than the remains of everyday, non-literary speech acts and narratives, for example, can ultimately also provide important insights into the atmosphere, form and contemporary patterns of interpretation of a particular historical period.[31] This provides contemporary historical research with the opportunity to discuss a historiographical approach initiated by literature and made accessible by academic literary history, and at the same time to develop new questions and problems from it.

The decisive importance of historical processes and caesuras and their historiographical construction in Germany since 1945 can also be seen in the orientation of literary studies, which is responsible for the systematisation of literature. Literary-historical epochal categorisations – such as “literature under National Socialism”, “literature of the new beginning after 1945”, “literature of the early Federal Republic” and “GDR literature” – make this clear.[32]

Another important argument in favour of interdisciplinary cooperation between (contemporary) history and literary studies under the banner of “contemporary history as literary history” can be derived from the controversy surrounding Hayden White’s poetological concept of historiography in the 1970s.[33] This debate has heightened awareness within the historical sciences of the symbolic structure of historical cognitive processes. According to White, the relationship to

language is established not only at the representational level of historiography, but already at the level of factual observation; this sets in motion the process of generating meaning, which is meant to make the past plausible. This is why historical cognitive processes are genuinely linguistic in nature, i.e. symbolically structured, and historical works emerge from the meaning-creating perspective of “narrating” historians. However – since White’s model of historiography posits that historiography revolves around different interpretations of facts, and not around the facts themselves – the boundary between historical science and literature appears extremely permeable according to White.[34] Even if White’s approach to historical work and literary work has been the subject of extremely controversial debate and can ultimately hardly be generalised, we can still state that the long-held prejudice that facts could be conveyed purely and objectively in a first step of cognition, and then presented in a second, fundamentally separable process, has been largely dispelled within historical scholarship. The greater emphasis on the meaning given by the linguistic form and the constructed character of even fact-saturated historical narratives has heightened awareness of the modes of representation and presentation in historiography.

The fact that academic history can neither escape culturally sedimented semantics nor the omnipresence of interpretations has relativised the claim to objectivity that historiography had asserted up to that point. This development set critical self-reflection in motion, which ultimately led to the establishment of more differentiated methods of historical research and enabled new narrative forms of historiography, which appear, for example, in the works of Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Robert Darnton or even Saul Friedländer.[35] Especially within cultural history, narrative as a cultural technique is increasingly being taken into account.[36] Narratives are not understood solely as the communicative mediation of real or fictional events; narrative is researched as a cultural pattern of order that is fundamental to the structuring of experience and knowledge. Narratives, or their written form in the sense of texts, link events and actors and can thus, for example, capture the temporality of **generations** and their connection to protagonists.[37] Historical narratives can also be historicised in terms of the changes in their narrative techniques, their narrative modelling and the use of rhetorical figures, and this also makes them a field of investigation for a literary history interested in the development of aesthetic modes of representation and intertextual references.[38]

1.3 Literary History as Contemporary History

Understanding literary history as contemporary history means making an important concession to literary studies: namely, that the moment of contemporary historical observation and discussion is already inherent in literary history’s analysis of contemporary historical literature. On the one hand, this applies to the subject level, at which literary studies seeks to distill the contemporary

historical content of the literary and to scrutinise and question it. On the other hand, this takes place at a meta-reflexive level, in which literary studies attempts to place categories of the historical – which are either obviously brought into play or merely evoked by literary contemporary histories – in the context of historical and contemporary discourses.

In this context, however, there is a further reason for historians to draw on literary expertise and to include literary contemporary histories in their own reflections on what lays claim to historical validity as a reference to the real. This has to do with the sometimes problematic mixing and blurring of fiction and fact. For as meaningful as literary texts of the past and present may be for the constitution of historical images and consciousness, they sometimes leave behind ambiguous traces for public discourse, the culture of remembrance and literary history. This is ambivalent insofar as the fictional stories, which do not claim **authenticity** per se, become referents of real events because they often remain in the **memory** of the individual and certainly also in cultural memory as a representation of real history, not as fictitious or invented. It is not uncommon for contemporary historians to come across (supposed) contemporary witnesses whose memories, as it turns out, are not based on what they have seen and experienced themselves, but on fictional material such as literature.[39]

The history of remembrance and cultural memory research has for several years proposed discussing this relationship of fictions and facts in the context of “false memory”, thereby opening up a new field of research.[40] However, literary studies have been dealing with this topic for a much longer time, often on the basis of specific cases from literary history.[41] The case of Binjamin Wilkomirski makes the necessity and opportunities of such an exploration clear, and illustrates the interdisciplinary relevance of “false memory” and the synergy effects of an interdisciplinary exchange between contemporary history and literary studies. Wilkomirski published the book “Fragments. From a Childhood 1939–1948” (“Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948”). The publication, written in the style of an autobiography, describes experiences from the life of the first-person narrator during the Nazi era in Latvia and other countries in fragmentary form and mainly from the perspective of a child. “Fragments” was translated into nine languages and was highly praised by critics. The author himself has repeatedly appeared before an interested public and specialist audience as a contemporary witness and expert. In 1998, Binjamin Wilkomirski was unmasked as Bruno Doessekker; his supposed life story turned out to be a forgery and was thus relegated to the realm of fiction.

This case did more than just give cause to scrutinise literary and cultural industry practices. In the context of dealing with National Socialist history and the Holocaust, this case triggered debates surrounding the relevance of traumatisations and the meaning of cultural patterns of reception, as well as questions revolving around the imbrications between historiographical and literary

competence.[42] *Fragments* is therefore extremely interesting from the vantage point of both^{12 of 20} literary studies and historiography.[43] For although this fabricated life story cannot claim validity as a document of contemporary historical experience of the Holocaust, its genesis can only be understood under the historical conditions and premises of the twentieth century. Furthermore, *Fragments* is interesting from both disciplinary perspectives for the sole reason that it belongs to the corpus of texts related to the history of remembrance which make the problematisation of fictitious and “true” memory almost unavoidable.[44]

Last but not least, the book’s initially emphatic reception among historians also illustrates the desire to archive the immediacy of authentic experience, which, however, seems conceivable only outside of the sobriety of historical analyses, either in poeticised or fictitious form. Important questions both for literary studies oriented towards contemporary history and for contemporary history research interested in literary history therefore would be: Which narratives, including fictional narratives, characterise the representation of historical events? Which narrative styles have which reception at which points in time? Or, to put it more precisely, what impact or influence do such narratives have?

Studies of literary and historiographically ambiguous narrative patterns and overlapping narrative styles illustrate just how unreliable the supposedly stable genres of historiography and literature have become. It is difficult to distinguish between a historical and a literary work when historians use literary methods and authors use historicising methods. In addition to Wilkomirski, authors such as Alexander Kluge (*Chronicle of Feelings*) and Walter Kempowski (*Echolot*), whose works raise the question of the genre to which their texts belong, stand for such borderline histories, whether fabulism or falsification of memory is intended or not. The deliberate blurring and mixing of the historical and the artistic, of the authentic and the fictional – which can be seen in the aesthetically alienating arrangements and compositions of archive material by these two authors – poses fundamental challenges to the clear demarcation of historiographical and literary writing styles and methods. This is because the blending of genres and the dissolution of their boundaries creates an additional reflexive benefit from both a historical and an aesthetic perspective. We can therefore only nod in agreement when Wolfgang Hardtwig writes: “For the method-conscious historian, the clear distinction between literary and historical questions and methods in the context of modern cultural history is no longer self-evident.”[45]

The realisation that history and stories about history are always based on certain narratives and discursive patterns, both from a historiographical and literary studies perspective, does not necessarily lead to a relativisation or even levelling of the respective individual disciplines; instead, this recognition allows and encourages the further differentiation of research perspectives and the intensification of interdisciplinary networks. However, the investigation of the

(re)construction and textuality of (contemporary) history cannot take place solely in the field of contemporary history. For, as we have seen, both historiographical and literary textual procedures and literary reflections constitute the thought pattern of “contemporary history”, whereby historical patterns and concepts are presented and reflected upon quite differently in contemporary historical research than in literature. The fact that academic historiography remains committed to the argument-based and rationally comprehensible substantiation of its statements on reality, and is rather difficult to confuse with fictional literature due to this specific mode of statement and its submission to the “veto right of sources“, is now largely beyond question.[46]

Literary studies has recognised the interdisciplinary potential of its investigations of literarised history on the one hand and its analyses of the interferences between literary and historical procedures and methods on the other. This has inspired discussion and methodological pluralisation within the historical sciences. For the project of (post-)modern historiography – which is aware of the “end of the grand narratives” and therefore also of the problems of historical “master narratives” and should deal with the historicisation of polyphonic and multi-perspective views and descriptions of reality – historiography can consult with its neighbouring discipline: literary studies is very familiar with the reflection on narrative patterns and modes of writing, including their historical genesis, from its work with avant-garde and advanced literary narrative forms in twentieth-century literary history. This involves nothing less than the fundamental question of how a contemporary history characterised by the diversity of its perspectives and voices can be adequately communicated, both as a subject and as a field of research.[47]

1.4 Conclusion

In contrast to the traditional model of a holistic and teleological history, contemporary historical research recognises that history has fragmented into a multitude of stories, which is why objects, events and discourses can no longer necessarily be reconstructed historically in a hierarchical structure or sequence.[48] This pluralisation of history is the hallmark and result of a process of insight in which the differentiation and diversification of the collective singular of history can no longer be ignored. What is circulating under the rubric of the “end of the grand narratives” is therefore the realisation that uniform perspectives are no longer available in history either; instead, how history is told, presented and thus interpreted always depends on the point of view of individual historians, who in turn always take up a position within a social discourse. Since both historical studies and literature (re-)construct history(ies) in and from pluralised perspectives, albeit not with the same means, the possibility and necessity of keeping a comparative eye on their intersections, convergences and divergences is obvious.[49]

Clearly, literary and scientific images of contemporary history cannot ultimately be understood independently of each other. The intersection of fact and fiction in literary and historiographical texts can also generate problematic consequences. Research in contemporary history and literary studies must take up the challenge, together, of approaching the opportunities associated with this disciplinary crossover in a constructive manner. This challenge is also a responsibility, given how influential contemporary histories are for the politics and culture of our societies today.

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[1] As for example in the context of the research field of **Cold War culture**, see in particular the studies by **Thomas Lindenberger**, “Looking West: The Cold War and the Making of Two German Cinemas,” in: Karl. C. Führer/Corey Ross (eds.), *Screening the Media: Mass Media and Society in 20th Century Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), (pp.) 113–128; Thomas Lindenberger, “Zeitgeschichte am Schneidetisch. Zur Historisierung der DDR in deutschen Spielfilmen,” in: **Gerhard Paul** (ed.), *Visual History. Die Historiker und die Bilder. Ein Studienbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), (pp.) 353–372; Thomas Lindenberger, “Home Sweet Home: Desperately Seeking Heimat in Early DEFA Films,” in: *Film History. An International Journal* 18 (2006), vol. 1, (pp.) 46–58.

[2] **Wolfgang Hardtwig** is one of the few German-speaking historians who has continuously addressed the question of the relationship between literature and history, or rather the influence of literature on historical science. See for example Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Fiktive Zeitgeschichte? Literarische Erzählung, Geschichtswissenschaft und Erinnerungskultur in Deutschland,” in: id., *Hochkultur des bürgerlichen Zeitalters* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), (pp.) 114–135.

[3] See also *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*. Begründet von Rolf Grimminger, München 1980ff., sowie Daniel Fulda/Silvia Serena Tschopp (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte. Ein Kompendium zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (De Gruyter, Berlin 2002); Hartmut Eggert/Ulrich Profitlich/Klaus R. Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur. Formen und Grenzen der Repräsentation von Vergangenheit*

(Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990); Paul Michael Lützeler, *Klio oder Kalliope? Literatur und Geschichte*:^{15 of 20} *Sondierung, Analyse, Interpretation* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1997).

[4] See Eggert/Profitlich/Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur*; Lützeler, *Klio oder Kalliope?*, (pp.) 11–20.

[5] Rolf Grimminger, “Vorbemerkung,” in: *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Bd. 3: Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution. 1680–1789, 1. Teilband, edited by Rolf Grimminger (Munich: Hanser 1980), (pp.) 7–12, here (p.) 7.

[6] See Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural turns. Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006).

[7] Paul Michael Lützeler, *Bürgerkrieg global. Menschenrechtsethos und deutschsprachiger Gegenwartroman* (Munich: Fink, 2009), (p.) 23. On the cultural-historical orientation of literary studies, see also Eberhard Lämmert, “Das Ende der Germanistik und ihre Zukunft,” in: Jürgen Kolbe (ed.), *Ansichten einer künftigen Germanistik* (Munich: Hanser, 1969), (pp.) 79–104, here (p.) 92.

[8] See Moritz Baßler (ed.), *New Historicism. Literaturgeschichte als Poetik der Kultur* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001).

[9] See Klaus Weimar, “Der Text, den (Literatur)Historiker schreiben,” in: Eggert/Profitlich/Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur*, (pp.) 29–39, here (p.) 29, as well as Katja Stopka, “Geschichte und Geschichten. Erzählen in der Historie,” in: Alf Mentzer/Ulrich Sonnenschein (eds.), *22 Arten, eine Welt zu schaffen. Erzählen als Universalkompetenz* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2008), (pp.) 207–224.

[10] On this debate see also Katja Stopka, “Vertriebene Erinnerung. Transgenerationale Nachwirkungen von Flucht und Vertreibung im literarischen Gedächtnis,” in: Wolfgang Hardtwig/ Erhard Schütz (eds.), *Keiner kommt davon. Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), (pp.) 166–184.

[11] See also Jorge Semprún, “Littell prägt unsere Erinnerung,” in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 07.02.2008.

[12] See also Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945–2005. Eine Einleitung,” in: id./ Schütz (eds.), *Keiner kommt davon*, (pp.) 7–25, here (p.) 8, and on the wealth of contemporary historical literature, see: Ralf Schnell, *Geschichte in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003).

[13] On this situation see also Ansgar Nünning, *Von der fiktionalisierten Geschichte zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion*, (p.) 545f., and Hardtwig, *Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945–2005*, (p.) 8.

[14] See also Ansgar Nünning, “Die Rückkehr des sinnstiftenden Subjekts. Selbstreflexive Inszenierungen von historisierten Subjekten und subjektivierten Geschichten in britischen und postkolonialen historischen Romanen der Gegenwart,” in: Stefan Deines/Stephan Jaeger/Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Historisierende Subjekte – Subjektivierte Historie. Zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), (p.) 240ff.

[15] Dieter Wellershoff, “Das Geschichtliche und Private,” in: Marcel Reich-Ranicki (ed.), *Der Kanon. Die deutsche Literatur. Essays* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 2006), (pp.) 393–416, here (p.) 396.

[16] See Lützeler, *Bürgerkrieg global*, p. 22.

[17] See Ansgar Nünning, “Von der fiktionalisierten Geschichte zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion. Bausteine für eine narratologische und funktionsgeschichtliche Theorie, Typologie und Geschichte des postmodernen historischen Romans,” in: Fulda/Tschopp (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte*, pp. 541–569; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988); Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984). Some authors in the literary field make explicit reference to historical studies, as for example in the controversial novel “The Well-Behaved” by Jonathan Littell, in which, according to the author, the studies of Raul Hilberg in particular have been incorporated. See for example the interview between Jonathan Littell and Pierre Nora, 29.01.2010. Hans-Ulrich Treichel's novel “Menschenflug” (Human Flight), which is about coming to terms with flight and expulsion in the broadest sense, also refers to a historical study.

[18] See Nünning, *Von der fiktionalisierten Geschichte zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion*, (p.) 548.

[19] See *ibid.* p. 560, and Günter Butzer, “Narration, Erinnerung, Geschichte. Zum Verhältnis von historischer Urteilskraft und literarischer Darstellung,” in: Fulda/Tschopp (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte*, pp. 147–169.

[20] Ulrich Kittstein, *Mit Geschichte will man etwas. Historisches Erzählen in der Weimarer Republik und im Exil (1918–1945)*, Würzburg 2006, p. 23.

[21] See also Marian Füssel, “Die Rückkehr des „Subjekts“ in der Kulturgeschichte. Beobachtungen aus praxeologischer Perspektive,” in: Deines/Jaeger/Nünning (eds.), *Historisierende Subjekte*, pp. 141–159.

[22] For more on this, see the section “Literary History as Contemporary History” of this article.

- [23] See Georg Simmel, "Das Problem der historischen Zeit (1916)," in: id., *Goethe. Deutschlands innere Wandlung. Das Problem der historischen Zeit. Rembrandt*, edited by Uta Kösser, Hans-Martin Kruckis und Otthein Rammstedt [GSG 15] (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), (pp.) 305–515; sowie Wellershoff, *Das Geschichtliche und Private*, (p.) 394ff.
- [24] See Ruth Klüger, "Was ist wahr? Kann man „schöne Literatur“ über den Holocaust schreiben? Welchen Anspruch erheben die jüngst erschienenen Romane und Erzählungen über KZ und Verfolgung?," in: *Die Zeit* 38/1997, p. 64.
- [25] See Deines/Jaeger/Ansgar (eds.), *Historisierende Subjekte*.
- [26] See Daniel Fulda/Silvia Serena Tschopp, "Einleitung, in: id. (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte*," Berlin 2002, (pp.) 1–10, here (p.) 3.
- [27] Hardtwig, *Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur*, (pp.) 7– 25, here (p.) 9. On the different literary and historiographic narrative possibilities and forms of the same historical material and their functions, see for example Jurij Striedter, "Erzählformen als Antwort auf den Schrecken in der Geschichte. Or: Wie Dracula überlebte," in: Eggert/Profitlich/Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur*, (pp.) 104–127.
- [28] See for example Ulrich Herbert, "Die Stimmen der Opfer. Saul Friedländers meisterhafte Gesamtdarstellung des Holocaust zeigt: Die Vernichtung war geplant und gewollt," in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29.09.2006; Klaus-Dietmar Henke, "Die Stimmen der Opfer. Saul Friedländers historiographisches Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 04.10.2006.
- [29] Nünning, *Von der fiktionalisierten Geschichte zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion*, (p.) 552ff.
- [30] See Baßler (ed.), *New Historicism*; Hardtwig, *Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945–2005*, (p.) 22; Lützeler, *Bürgerkrieg global*, (p.) 16ff.
- [31] See Micha Brumlik, *Wer Sturm sät. Die Vertreibung der Deutschen* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2005), (p.) 137f.
- [32] See Hardtwig, *Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945–2005*, (p.) 9.
- [33] Hayden White, *Auch Klio dichtet oder die Fiktion des Faktischen. Studien zur Tropologie des historischen Diskurses* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991; original 1978); id., *Metahistory. Die historische Einbildungskraft im 19. Jahrhundert in Europa* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1991; original 1973).
- [34] See also Hayden White, *Die Bedeutung der Form. Erzählstrukturen in der Geschichtsschreibung* (Fischer: Frankfurt a.M., 1990; original 1987), (p.) 64 ff.

- [35] For example Natalie Zemon Davis, *Die wahrhaftige Geschichte von der Wiederkehr des Martin* *Guerre* (München: Piper, 1984; original 1983); Carlo Ginzburg, *Der Käse und die Würmer. Die Welt eines Müllers um 1600* (Wagenbach: Berlin, 2007; original 1976); Robert Darnton, *Das große Katzenmassaker. Streifzüge durch die französische Kultur vor der Revolution* (München: Hanser, 1989; original 1984).
- [36] See for example Jan Eckel/Thomas Etzemüller (eds.), *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007).
- [37] See Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte. Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), (p.) 440ff.; Alexander von Plato/Almut Leh, *Ein unglaublicher Frühling. Erfahrene Geschichte im Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945-1948* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997); Moritz Baßler, "Zwischen den Texten der Geschichte. Vorschläge zur methodischen Beerbung des New Historicism," in: Fulda/Tschopp (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte*, (pp.) 87–100.
- [38] On the various theoretical aspects of narratology with regard to the convergences and divergences of historical and literary narration, see Dorrit Cohn, "Signposts of Fictionality. A Narratological Perspective," in: *Poetics today II* (Winter 1990), vol. 4, (pp.) 775–804.
- [39] See Hans J. Markowitsch/Harald Welzer, *Das autobiographische Gedächtnis. Hirnorganische Grundlagen und biosoziale Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), (p.) 27ff.; and Johannes Fried, *Der Schleier der Erinnerung. Grundzüge einer historischen Memorik* (Munich: C.H. Beck: 2004). See also the novel "Menschenflug" by Hans Ulrich Treichel, in which the blending of personal experience and fiction is thematized in a literary way.
- [40] See Fried, *Der Schleier der Erinnerung*; Günter Oesterle (ed.), *Erinnerung, Gedächtnis, Wissen. Studien zur kulturwissenschaftlichen Gedächtnisforschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Irene Diekmann/Julius H. Schoeps (ed.), *Das Wilkomirski-Syndrom. Eingebildete Erinnerungen oder Von der Sehnsucht, Opfer zu sein* (Zürich: Pendo, 2002).
- [41] See for example Karl Corino, *Außen Marmor, innen Gips. Die Legenden des Stephan Hermlin*, Düsseldorf 1996; id. (ed.), *Gefälscht! Betrug in Literatur, Kunst, Musik, Wissenschaft und Politik*, Nördlingen 1988.
- [42] See Alexandra Bauer, *My private holocaust – Der Fall Wilkomirski(s)*, (Januar 2006), http://www.sicetnon.org/content/literatur/My_private_holocaust.pdf [27.01.2010]; see also on the phenomenon of distorted memory, source confusion and source amnesia Markowitsch/Welzer, *Das autobiographische Gedächtnis*, (p.) 35.
- [43] David Oels, "A Real-Life Grimm's Fairy Tale. Korrekturen, Nachträge, Ergänzungen zum Fall Wilkomirski," in: *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, N.F. Band 14 (2004), vol. 2, (pp.) 373–390.

[44] See Barbara Breysach, “Stellvertretung oder Verdrängung? Jakob Littners Erinnerungen und Wolfgang Koeppens „Roman“” in: Diekmann/Schoeps (eds.), *Das Wilkomirski-Syndrom*, (pp.) 236–261, here (p.) 240ff.

[45] Hardtwig, *Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945–2005*, (p.) 21.

[46] See for example Reinhart Koselleck, “Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit. Ein Beitrag zur historiographischen Erschließung der geschichtlichen Welt,” in: id., *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1989), (pp.) 176–207, here (p.) 206, as well as Nünning, *Von der fiktionalisierten Geschichte zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion*, (p.) 544, and Kittstein, *Mit Geschichte will man etwas*, (p. 50).

[47] See Birgit Aschmann, “Moderne versus Postmoderne. Gedanken zur Debatte über vergangene, gegenwärtige und künftige Forschungsansätze,” in: Jürgen Elvert/Susanne Krauß (eds.), *Historische Debatten und Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003), (pp.) 256–276, as well as Fulda/Tschopp (eds.), *Literatur und Geschichte*; Konrad Jarausch/Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past. Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003).

[48] See Stefan Deines/Stephan Jaeger/Ansgar Nünning, “Subjektivierung von Geschichte(n) – Historisierung von Subjekten. Ein Spannungsfeld im gegenwärtigen Theoriediskurs,” in: id. (eds.), *Historisierende Subjekte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), (pp.) 1-22, here (p.) 2.

[49] Ibid, (pp.) 1-22; Lützel, *Klio oder Kalliope?*, (p.) 170ff.

Empfohlene Literatur zum Thema

Recommended Reading

Stefan Deines/Stephan Jaeger/Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Historisierende Subjekte – Subjektivierte Historie. Zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2003

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Daniel Fulda/Silvia Serena Tschopp, *Literatur und Geschichte. Ein Kompendium zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2002

Wolfgang Hardtwig/Erhard Schütz (eds.), *Keiner kommt davon. Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2008

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Paul Ricoeur, *Zeit und Erzählung*, Bd. 1-3, München, Fink 2007

Hayden White, *Auch Klio dichtet oder die Fiktion des Faktischen. Studien zur Tropologie des historischen Diskurses*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1991

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