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1. Introduction

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Memory and Literature in the Present

This volume has been built over several years, its conception pre-dating the COVID-19 pandemic that ended many lives and irrevocably changed others. During the pandemic and in its aftermath, many people's relationships with both "memory" and "literature", the two central concerns of this book, have shifted and evolved. As far as memory is concerned, the global but differentiated and uneven reach and impact of the pandemic, the way in which it disrupted modes of communal and individual mourning and commemoration, and the temporal disorientation experienced by many during periods of extensive "lockdown" or extended hospitalization, have created huge disparities in the stories groups and individuals tell of their experiences. Together, these factors point to COVID-19 as constituting a potentially significant historical transformation in memory culture.

In thinking about the impact of the pandemic on literature (in the broadest sense), we can see similarly profound shifts—its effects on practices of reading and writing, and on literature in general, have likewise been differentiated but widespread. The role of reading and writing—producing, distributing, and consuming—literature and books more generally changed during the pandemic. Sales in digital texts and audiobooks increased, and online vendors (particularly Amazon) saw profits soar. The importance of reading or writing as an escape mechanism, therapeutic channel, or source of solace was highlighted during this time. But the pandemic also affected our very ability to read and write; for

example, in the UK, for children, approximately two months of learning in reading and writing skills were lost by autumn 2020 (National Literary Trust n.d.). These statistics notably worsened, as did many of the negative impacts of the pandemic, for those from disadvantaged or minoritized backgrounds. While for some the pandemic may have been a chance to fulfil a long-term goal to finally sit down and write a novel, for others its aftermath prompted the writing of memoirs of struggle and trauma—there is already a subgenre of new fiction writing telling COVID-19-related stories.[1] For many academic authors, the pandemic was a time marked by the absence of writing, as universities around the world struggled to recreate themselves as online education providers.

Public responses to the pandemic also foregrounded the key roles that storytelling practices play in social processes of remembering. Narratives of memory framed the way the COVID-19 was managed, communicated in the media, and has been recalled since. In the United Kingdom, for example, politicians, the creative industries, and the media all made use of the Second World War to engage the public. Whether in direct propaganda designed to control behaviour or in the production of nostalgic entertainment, memories of wartime Britain were revisited and re-framed for public consumption (Pettitt 2021). This played upon an existing nostalgia industry—cultivated during the debates around Brexit—that saw a notable increase in public appetite for wartime stories and productions, such as *Downton Abbey*, written by British novelist, Julian Fellowes. An example such as this is a reminder that despite the increasingly transnational politics of memory of global events and phenomena, national contexts still inflect memory and often determine its forms, even as we witness the passage of stories across the borders and boundaries that were physically closed to human travel during the pandemic. Indeed, Astrid Erll cites the British COVID-19/Second World War discourse as an example of the re-nationalization of memory that characterized global dynamics during the pandemic (2020, 866).

As such, we find ourselves at a time when memory and literature, and the intersections between them, make compelling areas to explore. And yet, this is also a moment when the contingency of these very terms—their historical, cultural, and social relativity—is brought clearly to the fore. For this reason, we choose to situate our discussions as we began this introduction—in the present moment. This handbook focuses mainly on critical intersections between contemporary memory and literary studies, while exploring the provocative idea that critical attempts to elucidate these overlaps may constitute something like a field of *literary memory studies* (a proposal that deservedly receives some interrogation in the roundtable that follows this introduction). We do not revisit at length earlier discussions about, say, the possibilities of representing trauma, the challenges of writing or rewriting the Holocaust (to use James Young's (1988) evocative phrase), or cultural practices of witnessing and testimony. These conversations have been had elsewhere. Rather, we position this volume as the product of a particular

historical moment—an era shaped by increasingly divided global politics, where the legacies of colonialism and slavery continue to produce violent and unjust presents, and in which the looming threat of global heating and climate catastrophe impel urgent reconsideration of human and more-than-human relationships. In light of this framing, the chapters in this handbook explore how discourses in literary and memory studies address fraught and complex relationships between and across a variety of areas and contexts: acts of reading and writing; textual mediation and remediation; local, national, and transnational experience; postcolonial, de-colonial and environmental turns; and spheres of law and justice. We elaborate on each of these areas and the contribution made by each of the chapters in this volume in outlines at the start of each section of this book.

Memory and Literature in Theory and Practice

As the example of COVID-19 attests above, memory and literature are mutually constitutive. Literary texts present particular interpretations of the past, which shape the contents of cultural memory. The models of memory depicted within literature are both informed by and inform cultural practices of remembrance. Literature is a powerful mnemotechnic that is itself subject to processes of remembering and forgetting as regards the changing conventions of genres, the popularity of certain texts and forms, and the ongoing construction and contestation of the canon.[2] Memory and literature, then, are both critical *and* creative domains. As Brett Kaplan recently said of fiction, "it is also theory, it theorizes memory […] and makes its readers grasp in profound ways how sticky memory can be" (2023, 3). The art of memory-making can likewise be described as an inherently imaginative process, and different media of memory force us to consider the myriad forms in which the past can be narrativized and performed.

As cultural practices both memory and literature are inherently selective, reliant on processes of condensation and forgetting through which particular aspects of the past are given prominence while others are deprioritized. They are each narrative forms, in which "chosen elements […] become meaningful through the process of combination, which constructs temporal and causal orders" where the "individual elements are assigned a place in the course of events, and thereby also assume a specific meaning" (Erll 2011, 146). Each is shaped by and shape in turn generic conventions, be that through literary and historical emplotment or through the construction of genre memories and memory genres. In so doing, they blur (even as they claim to elucidate) the fine line between historiography and fiction,

facticity and fantasy, reality and myth. Memory and literature are also fundamentally intertextual and intermedial, premediated by existing cultural and historical discourses, and remediated by new forms and technologies of cultural and mnemonic production.[3]

There is a wealth of existing material that considers such interconnections, including the value of approaches and concepts from literary studies for memory scholarship, the productivity of contextualizing literature within broader circulations of memory texts, the role of literature in shaping collective and cultural memory, and the plurality of ways in which literature itself can function to advance theories of memory. Stef Craps illuminates this complicated looping between memory and literature in his contributions to the roundtable at the start of this volume. He variously argues: "memory is at the heart of literature, both formally and thematically"; "literature is a mnemonic practice; […] literature represents memory; […] [literature is] a medium of cultural memory [and] an object of remembrance" and thus a "form of heritage". "To a large extent", he concludes, "literary studies effectively is memory studies".

This handbook takes up this contention. As we embark on this discussion, and as the chapters in this collection evidence, we want to be clear that this is not an attempt to delineate the boundaries of literature (or literary studies) or memory (or memory studies). Rather, we see it as an opportunity to explore the shifting creative and critical conjunctions that arise *between* literature and memory as areas of cultural and academic interest. Within these conjunctions, we tentatively suggest, might lie the seeds of something like a field, or sub-field, of literary memory studies. In advancing this idea, this volume offers a starting place from which the ever-evolving tensions and overlaps between literary and mnemonic imaginaries, cultures, forms, theories, and practices might be explored.

To frame the chapters that follow, the remainder of this introduction seeks to elucidate the complex relationship between memory and literature (and their related and overlapping fields of academic study) through five interrelated categories. We will begin with the *literature of memory*, highlighting the thematization of memory in literature from antiquity onwards (in other words, exploring how literature reflects and shapes cultural constructions of memory). Next, we turn to *literature as memory*, interrogating how literature functions as a commemorative medium (put slightly differently, how literature informs what is remembered—or not—in cultural memory). We will then examine *memory as literature*, focusing on how memories are encoded in and mediated by literary form, before looking at the *memory of literature*—foregrounding the ways that literature remembers itself through intertextual and intermedial references and canonical construction. We will end by exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of delineating *literary memory studies* as a discrete disciplinary area.

The Literature of Memory

Perhaps the most obvious and straightforward connection between memory and literature is the literary preoccupation with acts of individual and collective remembrance. Through its imagination (and theorization) of mnemonic processes, literature informs how memory is understood, culturally and critically.

Since antiquity, writing in all forms has influenced cultural conceptions of memory (it is not coincidental that Mnemosyne was one of the ancient muses).[4] From Homer's *Odyssey* to the Athenian tragedies, ancient Greek literature explored the relationship between memory and justice, the politics of remembrance, and cultural practices of mourning.[5] Poetic epics and epic tragedy gave voice to the distant past, even as they forged new cultures of memory in the present. In time, the images and forms imprinted in these texts have become the basis for new literary traditions, as ancient myths and stories have been remediated by new cultural productions.

Renaissance playwrights were also fascinated by the art of memory. One only has to look at one of the most famous plays of the age, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to see how memory permeates every aspect of the plot. Act I Scene V stages an encounter between the eponymous Danish prince and the ghost of his father, who enjoins his son to avenge his murder and, crucially, to "remember me" (I.V.91); the rest of the drama might be seen as an extended commentary on Hamlet's often faltering attempt to work out how best to do this. As Katherine Blake argues, "*Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most sustained engagement with the place of remembering in English culture. It is not just Hamlet's memories, but specifically the way he describes the process and experience of remembering, that make his remarks especially notable to early modern memory studies" (2018, 1). Indeed, the play testifies to the increased philosophical and artistic attention that was attributed to memory in the Renaissance period.[6] As Lina Perkins Wilder writes (2010), "[t]he materials of theatre are, for Shakespeare, the materials of memory. On one level, this simply means that Shakespeare's theatre is a 'remembrance environment': a place whose physical and social properties shape remembering, a place of mnemonic instruction and of remembrance" (1). However, the "space itself, the players and the many stage properties used and reused from play to play" (1) also became "the materials for a mnemonic dramaturgy that shapes language, character and plot" (1–2).

Renaissance drama brought a new fascination with individual psychology to the European stage. This interest in the workings of human consciousness was later reformulated in the themes and structures of Romantic poetry. As Erll contends, with the Romantic period, "a literary concept of memory emerges which […] accentuates forgetting and the construction of individual identity through the selective and

constructive reference to the past" (2011, 78). Aleida Assmann (1999) demonstrates how William Wordsworth's poem, "Memory", identifies different conceptions of memory as variously "a pen", "a key / to secret wards", that which "smooths foregone distress", "a tool of fancy", a "pencil" that would distort "an image of the past".

Memory was likewise an important theme in the nineteenth-century realist fiction of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, where it functioned as the root of both social and individual identity. In Dickens' (1843) *A Christmas Carol*, the act of remembering is charged with moral purpose: in order to become a better human being, Ebenezer Scrooge must revisit his younger days to learn from the cruelties he has committed in the past. As Melissa Dickson (2020) notes, the idea that the mind "might be haunted by its own distressing memories or deep-seated anxieties was one that became increasingly prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, as writers and scientists sought to explore the complex relations between consciousness and unconsciousness, and the shaping force of memory on the construction of identity". We see such notions play out, too, in Hardy's poetry—specifically in the volume *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1919). In the poem "Memory and I", the speaker appears unable to find a secure sense of self without recourse to their (personified) Memory, opining "O Memory, where now is my youth?", "O Memory, where now is my joy?", "O Memory, where now is my hope?", "O Memory, where now is my faith?".

European literary interest in the structure of consciousness reached its apogee in the early-to-mid-twentieth-century modernist works of writers such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. While these authors precede the emergence of memory studies as an area of distinct scholarly concern, their work is marked by the philosophical and psychoanalytical writings of thinkers such as Henri Bergson, William James, and Sigmund Freud who explore, in different ways, the relationships between time and consciousness, experience and history, trauma and belatedness. Proust's (1913–1927) epic *The Remembrance of Times Past* is, of course, the quintessential memory text, setting the tone for later self-reflexive musings on the workings of the mind in its theorization of processes such as "voluntary" and "involuntary" memory. Modernist authors also pioneered new forms of stream-of-consciousness writing, a notion taken from James's psychological work, which argued that "Consciousness […] does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life*" (1892). Such ideas found their way into

literary works such as Woolf's (1927) *To The Lighthouse* and Beckett's (1953) *The Unnamable*, which portrays a disembodied consciousness restlessly trying to assimilate a coherent sense of self by ceaselessly inventing memories and remembering inventions.

The post-Second World War period and the Holocaust in particular gave rise to a new genre of testimonial literature (Eaglestone 2004), incorporating memoir and autobiography, as survivors tried to make sense of the atrocities they had lived through. Texts such as *Anne Frank's Diary* (1947), Primo Levi's *If This is A Man* (1947), Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956), and Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* (1965) sought to give voice to the horrors of the Holocaust. More recent reflections on the legacies of mid-twentieth-century violence can be found in the work of what Marianne Hirsch (2008) describes as *The Generation of Postmemory*—those authors who did not directly experience the Second World War, but who, through familial or generational proximity, grew up in and were fundamentally shaped by its shadow. Writers in this category might include W.G. Sebald, Art Spiegelman, Ian McEwan, and Kazuo Ishiguro.

The late twentieth century saw the publication of texts that reckoned with the ineffability of memory and the impossibility of articulating traumatic experiences. Novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991), Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces* 1996, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1997), and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) deliberately trouble the relationship between memory and referentiality, portraying, in Cathy Caruth's (1996) famous term, "unclaimed experiences" that escape the capacities of narrative memory. Such texts constitute the body of work that Anne Whitehead (2004) defines as *Trauma Fiction*, a corpus that explores the contention that "the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection" (3).[7] As Roger Luckhurst contends, trauma fiction reveals the essential paradox of traumatic experience, embodying "the tension between interruption and flow, blockage and movement" (2013, 79). While trauma "issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge", "it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (79). It is this capacity to represent both the silencing and generative effects of traumatic experience that have led trauma theorists such as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman to suggest that literature (and art more broadly) might provide a privileged mode of witnessing when other forms of cognition fail. As Laub asserts, in giving voice to "a history that nonetheless remains […] at once unspeakable and inarticulable" (Laub 1992, 80), literature offers an oblique mode of access to traumatic experience that is denied by other forms of narrative address.

Postcolonial texts have also critiqued the idea of untroubled referentiality between history and narrative. As former European empires crumbled under the pressure of sustained resistance from anticolonial movements, postcolonial authors began to write back against imperial histories, challenging hegemonic narratives, establishing traditions of counter-memory, and opening the past up to revision and reassessment. Such writing often depicts memory as contradictory and contingent, fluid and fragile. Works such as Salman Rushdie's (1981) *Midnight's Children* reckon with contested and entangled pasts, revealing the hybridity of the present, and the fragility of a historical imagination constituted by manifold "memory cracks" (Rushdie 1981, 536). As Rushdie commented in a BBC interview after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, "Memory […] selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and mollifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (1988).

Foreshortened and Eurocentric as it is, the above genealogy underscores how literature can illuminate the workings of memory and its relationship to historical experience—as evidenced by writing in different forms, genres, periods, and cultures. Indeed, one of the reasons that literature has been—and remains—a privileged commemorative medium is that "narrative texts in particular […] exhibit forms that show a special affinity to memory" (Erll 2011, 78). As Monika Fludernik (cited in Erll) contends, "narrative is the one and only form of discourse that can portray consciousness, particularly *another's* consciousness, from the inside" (1996, 27). It may be for this reason that recent memory texts have begun to explore less familiar psychological territory, reckoning with the idea of perpetrator trauma (e.g., Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* (1995) and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (2009)), and the challenges of imagining with non-human and more-than-human memory (see Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (2018) and Dan Pendell's *The Great Bay: Chronicles of the Collapse* (2019)).

Literature as Memory

This section focuses on the divergent ways literature might be understood as a medium of cultural memory, negotiating the blurred lines between individual and collective experience and their complex relationship to history.[8] Jan Assmann famously defines cultural memory as "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms"; "constructed by artefacts (monuments, museums, texts, films, photographs) and events (rituals, ceremonies, festivals)" that attempt to become "carriers of tradition" (1995, 2). Literature has long been regarded as a seminal carrier of tradition. As Erll elaborates, "literature exerts great influence as a media framework of remembering. Literary stories and their

patterns are represented in our semantic and episodic memory systems. They shape knowledge, life experience, and autobiographical remembering" (2011, 161). The manner and extent to which they do so is strongly informed by the context of their creation, circulation, and reception.

As elaborated by Frances Yates, from the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, literature was used to underpin the art of memory or *ars memoirae* (Yates 1966). In *De Oratore*, Cicero records the story of the Greek poet, Simonides of Ceos (ca. 557–467 BCE), the sole survivor of a banquet who was able to retrospectively identify the other guests because he remembered the order in which they were sitting. The ancient mnemonic traditions identified by Cicero rely on a spatial organization of memory whereby a series of real or imagined places are overlaid in the mind by vivid images that refer to objects or ideas to be remembered. Yates's seminal work, *The Art of Memory*, explores how the *ars memoriae* of antiquity were revisited in the mediaeval period. As she contends, mediaeval "memory treatises" linked revived Classical traditions to contemporary modes of thought, increasingly inflected by the emergence of European humanist traditions. The subsequent Renaissance was the era of the "memory theatre" (Yates 2014 [1966]), which was rooted in the work of Giulio Camillo, an Italian theatre architect who produced a model of a theatre, "based on the principles of the classical art of memory" (142). This "memory building is to represent the order of eternal truth; in it the universe will be remembered through organic association of all its parts with their underlying eternal order" (142).

As with the literary meditations upon memory explored in the first section, cultural mnemotechnics were repeatedly remediated by changing historical, religious, and intellectual contexts from antiquity to the Renaissance. As mnemonic and artistic practices evolved, so did the cultural media of memory. Mary Carruthers (1990) has demonstrated how mediaeval mnemotechnics transformed the printed page itself into a mnemonic space, marking the transition "from a spatially oriented memory moulded by images in the ancient and medieval world to a memory moulded by writing in the early modern period" (Erll 2011, 69). The emergence of print culture intensified these changes. During the Enlightenment "artificial memory in the spread of print" led to "mediated communication with the past" (Irmia 2017, 4) and "the assertion of the book and of its literate society as an essential aid to memory" (4). These changes charted a "sea change" from individual to collectively- and communally-engaged modes of relating to the past.

Literature's function as a forum for collective memory and collective identity finds detailed articulation in Benedict Anderson's exploration of the origins of the modern nation-state. In *Imagined Communities* (2006 [1983]), Anderson argues the invention and popularization of the printing press revolutionized mnemotechnics in Europe—the distribution of books marked a move away from memory traditions rooted in ancient rhetorics towards a collective memory stored in, and formulated by, print

capitalism. He suggests that, in order for any lasting sense of national identity to take hold, citizens must be able to imagine themselves as part of a community that shares "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7) across time and space. Regardless of the fact that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, […] in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Literature—and in particular, the novel— is, for Anderson, responsible for constructing the tissue of shared memories, fantasies, and beliefs from which the fabric of national identity is fashioned. It does so by facilitating the idea of the nation "as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (26). Within this context, the novel (with its ability to present a microcosm of the nation in its portrayal of multiple characters and settings) creates for Anderson "a sociological landscape of fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30). In so doing "print-capitalism […] made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (36).[9]

For Anderson, then, early novels functioned as what Erll (following Assmann 1995) describes as "collective texts" (2011, 164), which "create, circulate, and shape contents of cultural memory" (164). However, in Anderson's reading, novels also function as "cultural texts" (Erll 2011, 162), which "embody – and are used to transmit – cultural, national or religious identity as well as shared values or norms" (162). While Erll acknowledges that literary works can be both collective and cultural texts, she is keen to differentiate between the two on the grounds that, while collective texts provide "*vehicles* for envisioning the past", cultural texts are often regarded as "precious *objects* to be remembered themselves" (164). In other words, through the (cultural, political, educational, religious) capital they wield, cultural texts acquire a hegemonic power through which the "polyvalence of the literary text dissipates and gives way to a uniform message; and its original historical situatedness is lost" (163). Here we come to an important distinction between Anderson's reading of early print culture (in which the act of reading was historically situated) and the subsequent establishment of a literary canon through which particular works of literature (Erll cites Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan as key examples) "became a core component of enculturation" (163). This enculturation has historically functioned both intra-nationally, to reinforce a sense of national values and class distinction, and inter-nationally to buttress, particularly under colonial regimes, the perceived (cultural and ethnic) superiority of certain nations above others.

The process of canon-formation has received much attention in literary studies over the past fifty years and it is inherently bound up with questions of memory. From the early 1970s, feminist scholars (and others) argued that the predominantly white, male, Western, elitist canon must be opened up to previously marginalized voices—in particular those of women, queer writers, writers of colour, and

those from what we would now call the Global South.[10] At stake in these debates was the contention that restricting the diversity of the canon was essentially constricting who or what could be remembered, determining which subject positions and experiences were valued and visible, and which histories were preserved for posterity. As Herbert Grabes (2010) argues, "canons are objectifications of values, either individual or shared. For this reason they possess a considerable amount of prestige within the larger framework of culture" (311); the "collective canon widely determines […] what remains in a society's cultural memory, and this again influences the view of the present and the future" (312). Essentially, "the canon serves the most basic and indispensable function of turning the overwhelming plenitude of what has served into a 'usable past', a corpus of texts that can be surveyed and retained in collective memory" (314). However, just as literature contributes to the formation of canonical cultural memory, so it can challenge monumentalizing or exclusionary representations of the past. As Ann Rigney argues, "literature and the other arts often appear specifically as a privileged medium of *oppositional memory*, as a 'counter-memorial' and critical force that undermines hegemonic views of the past" (2010, 348).

Memory as Literature

As we have seen in the discussion of canon-formation above, not all literary representations of the past are created equal—or rather, not all literary representations of the past are disseminated and received equally. However, it is not merely external forces that determine what, where, when, who, and how a text remembers—"within their narrative structure, literary stories shape our understanding of the sequence and meaning of events, and of the relation between past, present and future" (Erll 2011, 155). Such observations demand closer attention to the relation between narratology and cultural memory. As Birgit Neumann remarks, narratological approaches to memory work to "draw attention to formal-aesthetic characteristics of literature and thereby bring into view the fictional possibilities of world- or memory- creation" (2010, 334). She goes on to expand, the "time structure, the narrative mediation, and the perspective structure of narrative texts are the central literary forms which permit the staging and reflection of memory-creation" (430).

Building on the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984 and 2004), Erll contends that "[d]ifferent modes of remembering are closely linked to different modes of (narrative) representation. Changes in the form of representation may affect changes in the kind of memory we retain of the past" (2011, 158). Enumerating an "assemblage of narrative forms" (157), Erll explores how different "mnemonic modes are constituted in the medium of literary narrative" (158). She distinguishes in particular between three types of narrative: an "experiential" mode, an "antagonist" mode, and a "reflexive mode". The

experiential mode of writing is "constituted by literary forms which represent the past as lived-through experience" (158). These tend to be texts that foreground autobiographical memories, often written in first person-narration and directly addressing the reader as witness. Primary examples of this mode of narrative include war novels, Holocaust fiction and memoir, and travel literature. In contrast, texts written in an antagonistic mode "help to promote one version of the past and reject another" (159). This mode of remembering, she argues, is often characterized by address in the first person plural (a narrative "we") and is representative of particular "identity-groups", such as feminist or postcolonial writing. Antagonist writing actively intervenes in canon-contestation, as minoritized individuals and groups seek to "write back" against dominant cultural texts and the ideologies they are used to uphold. The reflexive mode foregrounds literature's ability to afford readers both "a first- and a second-order observation"—in other words, its capacity to simultaneously participate in and comment on the mediation and remediation of memory. As Erll notes, "reflexive modes are constituted by narrative forms which draw attention to processes and problems of remembering, for instance by explicit narratorial comments on the workings of memory, metaphors of memory, juxtaposition of different versions of the past […], and also by highly experimental narrative forms" (159). As examples of the latter, Erll suggests the novelistic work of Kurt Vonnegut and Martin Amis—texts that might be described, following Linda Hutcheon, as "historiographic metafictions".

First published in 1988, Hutcheon's seminal work, *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, drew attention to a literary style that Hutcheon identified as paradigmatic of postmodernity. In historiographic metafiction (exemplified by works such as John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988)), Hutcheon foregrounds a strand of "well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (2000 [1988], 5). In this writing, she contends, the "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction), is made the grounds for […] rethinking and reworking […] the forms and contents of the past" (5).

Historiographic metafiction is a useful example of the way that generic conventions shape the representation of the past. Literary memory work occurs in a vast variety of different forms and styles—each of which will inflect, in particular ways, the events and experiences portrayed therein. Genre thus serves as a key mediator of literary memory, shaping the image of the past in line with established conventions. Genres are culturally and historically specific (and themselves key instruments of socialization and enculturation). They can operate as vehicles for nostalgia and belonging—particular genres may be called upon at times of historical uncertainty "to provide familiar and meaningful patterns

of representation for experiences that would otherwise be hard to interpret" (Erll 2011, 148–149). There is thus often a normative dimension to the memory work performed by genre selection.

This is particularly the case in relation to trauma literature, the conventions of which have been strongly informed by the interests of poststructuralist trauma theorists, such as Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth. The view that traumatic texts must challenge readers has been influential (Eaglestone 2020 , 291). As Joshua Pederson (2021) has shown, poststructuralist trauma theorists have prioritized certain literary tropes to buttress their view of trauma as an unclaimed experience. This has created a tacit paradigm for the representation of traumatic experience, premised upon narrative structures of absence, indirection, and repetition (101ff.)—privileging, in Stef Craps's (2013) terms, broadly modernist tropes. Luckhurst (2013) argues that the valorization of rupture, difficulty, and impossibility has resulted in the critical dismissal of stories that successfully cast trauma into conventional and accessible narratives. Highlighting "a wide diversity of high, middle and low cultural forms [that] have provided a repertoire of compelling ways to articulate that apparently paradoxical thing, the trauma narrative" (83), he calls for wider recognition of alternative representations of trauma in popular culture. Anne Rothe's (2011) study of popular trauma culture also foregrounds (and problematizes) the representation of trauma in mass media genres. While alert to the dangers of commodifying or commercializing traumatic experience, she argues that in occluding these forms of representation, literary trauma theory disregards how trauma operates, culturally and politically, in contemporary "wound culture" (Seltzer 1997).

Critiquing the same problem from a different angle, Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (2003) suggest that the narrow parameters of Western "trauma fiction", as defined by Whitehead,[11] entrench a particular cultural and ethnic delimitation of victimhood—prioritizing, in Laura Brown's terms, the suffering of "white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men" (1995, 101). As they contend, "there is a danger that the field is becoming limited to a selection of texts that represent a relatively narrow range of traumatic events, histories and cultural forms, rather than engaging the global scope of traumatic events and the myriad forms that bear witness to them" (Bennett and Kennedy 2003, 10). As Robert Eaglestone has argued, examples "that deal with a much wider range of historical traumas " can be found outside the parameters of "high", Western literature (2020, 291), yet there has been a continued devaluation of realist and indigenous writings on trauma which "often depart from the unspeakability paradigm, featuring witnesses who claim narrative and political agency rather than being passive, inarticulate victims" (Bond and Craps 2020, 113).

Genre selection, then, is not a neutral process, but can encode key political and ideological dynamics that shape the representation of the past. It is not merely in literary writings that generic conventions come into play. As Hadyn White (1973) has famously noted, historiography, too, is shaped by processes

of “emplotment” as chronicles of events are transformed into stories. Identifying four principal modes of historical narrative (Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire) White contends that “every history […] will be emplotted in some way” (1973, 8). He attributes each of his forms of emplotment to a particular political tradition (Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism, and Liberalism, respectively), whose ideological underpinnings shape the image of the past described therein.

Literary genres, therefore, are powerful instruments for poesis—potent “frames of memory” (Bond 2015), “that shade and, to some extent, determine the shape of the memory articulated therein” (11). However, for all their ability to premediate the form of past, genres themselves are also continually evolving in response to changing historical contexts, new technologies of production and consumption, and emerging literary and cultural discourses. As Jeffrey Olick concludes, “images of the past depend not only on the relationship between past and present but also on the accumulation of previous such relationships and their ongoing constitution and reconstitution” (1999, 382). By foregrounding the fluid relationship between “genre memories” (articulations of the past that assume particular forms) and “memory genres” (the narratological and tropological structures through which genre memories are mediated and produced), Olick argues that to “understand commemoration ‘generically’ is to appreciate the organization of language and action without reifying or making it permanent, to see it as a fundamentally historical accomplishment” (1999, 384). In this reading, genre exists in a dialogic relationship with both literature and memory—shaping and being shaped by each in turn. In this sense, genre informs both our exploration of “memory as literature” (as explored in this section) and our discussion of the “memory of literature” (as it unfolds below).

Memory of Literature

Olick’s analysis of memory genres draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to explore how “genre contact” can create a “common way of ‘seeing’ between texts” (Olick 1999, 383) as earlier commemorations create patterns of representation that shape later articulations of the past. This reading helps to elucidate how literature functions as one of the “cultural mechanisms of commemoration’s path-dependency” (382). However, Olick also suggests that examining memory generically allows for an alternative way of interpreting the relationship between memory and literature, which reverses the dynamics explored above. Rather than extending the primary agency to literature as a force for shaping memory (through its generic encoding of past events and experiences), this formulation foregrounds the powerful role that memory plays in literary production—shaping how later texts remember or relate to antecedent forms of writing.

As Bakhtin contends, "[a] genre lives in the present but always remembers its past, its beginning. Genre is representative of creative memory in the process of literary development" (1963, 121). In order to write generically—to invoke established tropes and forms—one must reference literary history (although, as Bakhtin and Olick both elaborate, an author may not necessarily be consciously influenced by pre-existing templates and traditions in order to be informed by them). Furthermore, as genres are subject to continual internal and external revision (challenged and developed from within by literary interventions and remediated from without by other forms of cultural and technological production, and by changing historical circumstances) they are also involved in broader processes of remembering and forgetting.

Renate Lachmann suggests that the question of "[w]hich literature is (and has been) remembered, why, by whom" is "usually framed using concepts such as canonizaton, intertextuality, adaptation, rewriting, literary tradition, influence and reception" (1997, 5). For Grabes, practices of canon-formation and contestation are strongly influential in shaping the changing memory of literature. In contrast to the dominant reading of literary canons as hegemonic (and exclusionary) forces, Grabes applauds their ability to evolve in response to critical and creative interventions. As he contends in a dynamic culture which is constantly changing, the contest over which of the

> cultural achievements of the more distant or more recent past will be able to secure a position in cultural memory finds its most prominent expression in the competing canons that serve as its archives. To abandon the canon would mean to jettison cultural memory. (2010, 318)

Such comments are indicative of a tension within literary criticism between understanding canonization as an, alternatively, reifying or fluid process. Rigney suggests that this dichotomy emerges from the "double picture" of literary texts and "their role in cultural remembrance" (2010, 349). On the one hand, she argues, "literary works resemble monuments in that they provide fixed points of reference. They are 'textual monuments' which can be reprinted time and again in new editions even as the environment around them changes" (349). On the other hand, "at the same time as they may enjoy this monumentality […], literary works continuously morph into the many other cultural products that recall, adapt, and revise them in both overt and indirect ways" (349).

The "combination of monumentality and morphing" (349) that shapes the memory of literature is perhaps most explicit when it comes to practices of intertextual and intermedial cross-referencing. These ongoing processes of mediation and remediation represent forms of cultural dialogue, constituting, as Erll might put it, an "inner-literary memory" (2011, 70) as "earlier texts are 'remembered' through intertextual references" (7). As Lachmann (1997) argues, "[t]he memory of a text is its intertextuality"

(15); literature "supplies the memory for a culture and records such a memory. It is itself an act of memory. Literature inscribes itself in a memory space made up of texts, and it sketches out a memory space into which earlier texts are gradually absorbed and transformed" (15).

Intertextuality has an interesting temporality, simultaneously anterior and retrospective; it describes both the process through which literary works are shaped by existing forms, and the means by which these pre-texts (their meanings and cultural significance) are reshaped by later works. As Lachmann contends:

> Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation by which every new text is etched into memory space. Involvement with the extant texts of a culture, which every new text reflects (whether as convergence or divergence, assimilation or repulsion), stands in a reciprocal relation to the conception of memory that this culture implies. The authors of texts draw on other texts, both ancient and modern, belonging to their own or another culture and refer to them in various ways. they allude to them, they quote and paraphrase them, they incorporate them. (2010, 301)

In so doing, literary works may pay homage to, align themselves with or against, appropriate or supersede their antecedents.

Within both memory and literary studies, the examination of such processes has often come to focus on mediality (particularly since Erll and Rigney's (2006) integration of the work of Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin into their discussion of how memory travels through texts (1999, 3–5)). As this work makes clear, literature is not merely interpolated by other textual forms, but by cultural media more broadly. Urina Milevski and Lena Wetenkamp stress that "only a historical and cultural contextualization can provide information about how the staging of memory functions" (2022, 208) in literary texts. Thus, we see projects which include discussions of literature as a co-ordinate in memory-making alongside film, visual arts, and landscapes (Hoesterey 2001; Kaplan 2011; Kilbourne and Ty 2013; Löschnigg and Sokolowska-Paryz 2014; Rapson 2015). Taking account of the mediating and remediating work of memory texts, not least the circulation of literature as a co-ordinate among other media, has enabled increased understanding of the construction of particular cultural and collective memories and the events and experiences they represent.

Rigney's (2012) monograph on *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* exemplifies the productivity of turning to the "social lives" of literary texts across different media and generations in this way. For Rigney, this focus on the social life of texts draws attention to an important "specificity of the arts as media of collective remembrance" (Rigney 2010, 17). As Erll expands, in reconstructing the "cultural biography" of a literary text, we may ask "how—across long periods of time—it was received, discussed, used,

canonized, forgotten censored, and re-used" (2011, 167). Tracing the "literary afterlives" of a text has the potential to expose "the intermedial networks, which maintain and sustain the continuing impact of certain stories: intertextual and intermedial references, writing and adaptation, forms of commentary and cross-reference" (167). These multifaceted processes are part of memory's "unboundedness" (Bond et al. 2016). They reveal the transcultural, transmedial, transgenerational, and transdisciplinary nature of literary memory, which stretches across other forms of cultural production, traversing diverse histories and cultures, and transforming discourses on the way.

Towards a Literary Memory Studies?

In light of the many rich intersections between literature and memory outlined in this volume, one might assume a promising future for a field of literary memory studies that takes the analysis of this relationality as its primary focus. This is by no means the first time such a notion has been proposed. The idea of "literary memory studies" has been used to date by scholars to describe quite a general field of study (Bøndergaard 2017; Becker 2018; Jünke 2021; Jünke and Schyns 2022), the precise scope of which is assumed rather than closely delineated. In her seminal work, *Memory in Culture* (2011), Erll references the "varying theoretical and methodological approaches" that "constitute a highly heterogeneous field that may loosely be called 'literary memory studies'" (67). She contends that these might include "concepts that span the spectrum from more narrowly philological analyses to approaches that are strongly influenced by cultural studies and interdisciplinary work" (67).

While the publication of this handbook was not motivated by an attempt to call a field of literary memory studies "into being" (Craps, roundtable), the volume makes "explicit what was previously implicit"—namely the existence of an extensive and rich body of scholarship across memory studies and literary studies, making use of tools, concepts, and methods from both areas. As Milevski and Wetenkamp's introduction to the recent significant special issue of the *Journal of Literary Studies* on Memory and Literature (2022) implies "literary memory studies" is potentially a useful umbrella term covering work that examines intersections of literature and memory along the four axes we have explored in this introduction: the thematicization of memory in literary texts (the literature of memory); the ways that literature informs what is remembered in cultural memory (literature as memory); how memories are encoded in, and mediated by literary form (memory as literature); and the ways that literature remembers (and forgets) itself through intertextual and intermedial references and canon construction and contestation (the memory of literature). However, Milevski and Wetenkamp also argue that "the potential of literary theory for a more systematic approach to memory studies has not yet been fully realized" (2022, 198). Expanding on this contention, they stress the importance of taking "the

literary text seriously as an object of *transdisciplinary* research" (2022, 198, our emphasis). Thus, while highlighting the methodological value of literary theory for memory studies, they simultaneously acknowledge the likelihood that other disciplinary factors will be at play in mnemonic exploration of literary texts.

The requirement to approach both memory and literature from a transdisciplinary perspective is coupled to the necessity of understanding both as shaped by intermedial forces. In the roundtable that constitutes the following chapter, our participants expressed significant concerns about the ability of "literary memory studies" to acknowledge these transdisciplinary and transmedial trajectories. Craps and Rigney, in particular, highlight what they perceive to be an inherent limitation in this concept:

> **Craps**: there is a risk that promoting literary memory studies could make literary scholars who are interested in issues of memory feel as if they're supposed to limit their enquiry to literary texts instead of taking into account the larger cultural constellation of which literature is a part, which would be unfortunate. Literature is not an isolated phenomenon and should not be approached as such.
>
> **Rigney:** I wonder if we should even want to invent a new specialism given the fact that everything in memory studies suggests that literature operates within a constellation of different media and different carriers of memory. Exciting things are happening, precisely because we have extended the scope of our research beyond the textual into performance, into materiality, into aesthetics in all its forms.
>
> So I'm actually quite uncomfortable with the very idea of literary memory studies. It seems to contradict the sense of memory studies as an interdisciplinary endeavour that looks at the interplay between different forms of storytelling. I'm concerned that we might end up fencing off literature and literary studies from this broader environment.

Such comments reflect a clear unease about the reifying potential of academic disciplines. While one might see a field of literary memory studies as a generative way of bringing together and catalysing work that examines the broad intersection of memory and literature and memory and literary studies, it could also be viewed as a way of closing down other avenues of research (particularly those that foreground interdisciplinary or intermedial conjunctions).

Other critics have raised different concerns about the delimiting effects of institutionalizing particular fields of study. As Susannah Radstone noted at the launching of the journal of *Memory Studies* in 2008, "incorporation into academic subject areas of emerging and new areas of research– particularly those that have their roots and hearts as much in extra-academic political and cultural movements as they

do in scholarly activities – has been met with ambivalence in the past" (2008, 31–32). Radstone's critique of memory studies comes from the opposite direction to the unease expressed by Craps and Rigney. While the latter are concerned that the consolidation of literary memory studies might close down the transdisciplinary and transmedial potential of research on memory and literature, Radstone suggests that the privileging of transdisciplinary perspectives has led to the attenuation of specific and grounded methodologies, allowing work in memory studies to "foreclose on the further analysis of its objects of study" (35). As she expands:

> Advocates of transdisciplinarity celebrate its irreverence, its unpredictability and its quest for connections amongst areas within which common ground has previously remained invisible, unexplored or unrecognized. But transdisciplinarity carries risks, too. Transdisciplinarity produces 'travelling concepts' (Bal, 2002) – concepts that may become attached quite rapidly to diverse phenomena including texts, practices and cultures. […T]he travelling concepts of memory studies offer much to researchers who come to the field urgently in quest of deeper understanding of questions that may be as personal as they are scholarly. But without careful disciplinary embedding and testing, [they] may appear to explain more than they actually can. (35)

Radstone turns to a literary case study to exemplify her point. She argues that the privileging of trauma as a framework for analysis within memory research has limited the perspectives from which texts such as Sebald's (2001) novel, *Austerlitz*, might be interpreted. Such approaches, she contends, tend to read Sebald's "complex narrative literally as the fictionalized testimony of a child survivor of the Kindertransport. This is a reading that substitutes literalism for the text's complex relationship with realism and reading positions" (34). By contrast, approaches embedded within German literature and critical theory that "treated the text as text, rather than as fictionalized reflection of historical actuality might be better placed to analyse the politics of the complex reading positions proffered by this enormously rich work". (35) Expressing a concern that "memory research" lacks "adequate attention to the literary as literary – to the complex play of tenses and tropes, narration, point of view and address that together constitute the complexity of texts and the reading experiences that they offer" (34), Radstone calls for methodologies grounded "not in the theories and concepts currently espoused by memory studies", "but in one or several of the longer-established and diverse theories and methods of literary analysis" (35).

The above critiques provide at least two important, if apparently oppositional, objections to the consolidation of a field of literary memory studies. Craps and Rigney suggest that the "very idea of

literary memory studies […] seems to contradict the sense of memory studies as an interdisciplinary endeavour that looks at the interplay between different forms of storytelling" (Rigney, Roundtable). Meanwhile, Radstone suggests that memory research might "be most productively practiced within the disciplines from which media and cultural studies borrow, rather than within the transdisciplinary space of 'memory studies'" (35). In attending to both perspectives, it seems crucial that work within literary and memory studies is able, on the one hand to remain fluid and evolving (open to influence from other media and disciplines) and, on the other, to retain attention to the rigorous methodological underpinnings of particular critical traditions. Whether or not one accepts the idea of literary memory studies (and this handbook is certainly not an intervention aimed at institutionalizing this field), both the diversity and the specificity of the concepts and theories that have undergirded research in memory and literary studies need to be attended to.

Ultimately, we conclude, with Marianne Hirsch that, "if there is such a thing as literary memory studies, then I'd hope that the literary and the memory and the studies will each remain open and capacious" (Hirsch, roundtable)—and that contemporary work in these areas is able to attend to their disciplinary pasts as well as their interdisciplinary futures. To these ends, this handbook aims to hold a mirror to the theory and practice of memory and literature at a particular historical moment and, in so doing, to explore how these vital discourses are shaped by, and in turn shape, the world around them. This is necessarily a book of its time: as we have seen throughout this introduction, the traditions, forms, ideas, and function of memory and literature are continually evolving. The different sections of the volume seek to explore and critique the most pressing concerns within memory and literary studies as they appear to us in the early years of the third decade of the twenty-first century. If literary memory studies provide a generative umbrella for this work, we are happy to embrace it—provided it remains flexible as a field of enquiry, and mindful of its own entanglement with cultural and critical trajectories of remembering and forgetting.

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Footnotes

1 See, for example, Ali Smith’s *Summer* (2020), Roddy Doyle’s *Life Without Children* (2021), Sarah Hall’s *Burncoat* (2021), Gary Shteyngart’s *Our Country Friends* (2021), Hanya Yanagihara’s *To Paradise* (2022), and Sequoia Nagamatsu’s *How High We Go in the Dark* (2022).

2 Ann Rigney (2010, 350–351) outlines five central roles that literature plays in constituting cultural memory. She contends that texts may act variously as:

1. *Relay Stations*: as fictional narrative build on or recycle earlier forms of remembrance;
2. *Stabilizers*: as fictional narratives anchor the memory of particular events or experience, providing a framework for later reflections;
3. *Catalysts*: as fictional works draw attention to topics or pasts previously marginalized in cultural remembrance;
4. *Objects of Recollection*: as literary works themselves become carriers of memory in other cultural media;
5. *Calibrators*: as canonical literary works become “benchmarks” for reflecting on dominant memorial practices.

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3 While noting these similarities, it is, of course, important to attend to the specificity of literature as a medium of memory. As Erll rightly asserts, “literary works should not be considered as being simply equivalent to media of other symbolic forms that play a role in the making of cultural memory—such as chronicles, historiography, legal texts, religious writings, and mythic tales. In the construction of memory, the symbolic form of literature displays distinctive characteristics” (2011, 149). Of these, Erll identifies among the most important: literature’s awareness of,

and meditation on, its own fictional status; its heteroglossic perspective (cf. Bakhtin 1981), its ability to incorporate multiple perspectives and voices; and its metacritical relation to memory—its ability to both produce memory and reflect upon the process of memory-formation.

4 What follows is an explicitly Eurocentric (and canonical) account of the literary treatment of memory. It is not intended to be in any way representative of the exploration of memory within world literature as a whole—it is merely one historical trajectory (selective and simplified) that demonstrates the enduring pull of memory as a subject of literary interest.

5 See Erll's chapter in this volume for a discussion of the *Odyssey*'s relationship with memory and literature.

6 To cite just a few examples of this increasing preoccupation with memory: the *Confessions of St Augustine* famously contain lengthy meditations on the (moral) power of memory; the poetry of John Donne considers the essential role of memory in "the art of salvation" (Guibbory 1980); and two of Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists, Robert Fludd and John Willis set out to design mnemonic spaces that departed from the model of the Classical amphitheatre that was the paradigm for Giuilo Camillo's original "memory theatre" (Wilder 2010).

7 For more on the possibilities and limitations of trauma fiction, see Rothberg (2000), Luckhurst (2008), Rothe (2011), Craps (2013), and Bond and Craps (2020).

8 For more on the complex entanglement of personal memory, collective memory, and history, see Sturken (1997).

9 Anderson argues that, from the eighteenth century, the newspaper similarly served to bind individuals to the nation by showing the calendrical simultaneity of events that were geographically dispersed and thus presenting the illusion of a shared mode of national experience.

10 For more on the construction and contestation of literary canons, see Alteri (1990), Gorak (1991), and Bloom (1994).

11 Anne Whitehead's ground-breaking study explores the key characteristics of trauma fiction—a mode of writing which suggests that "the impact of trauma can only be adequately represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection" (3). Quintessential examples of trauma fiction include Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces* (1997), and the work of W. G. Sebald, most notably perhaps, *Austerlitz* (2001).