

NEW DIRECTIONS IN GERMAN STUDIES



FROM KAFKA TO SEBALD

Modernism and Narrative Form

Edited by
SABINE WILKE

NEW DIRECTIONS IN GERMAN STUDIES

Vol. 5

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For Rick and Cora

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and the Place of Nostalgia in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Franza* Fragment" (*The German Quarterly* 79.1 (2006): 71–89); and "Melodrama's Other: Entrapment and Escape in the Films of Tom Tykwer" (*Camera Obscura* 62 (2006): 108–43).

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Walter Sokel is among the most important interpreters of the work of Kafka. He is part of the emigrant generation of Jewish scholars who built the field of German Studies after the war. His *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature* (Stanford UP, 1957) has become a classical study of German expressionism, followed by *Franz Kafka* (Columbia UP, 1966), a seminal study of the works of this author. Sokel's *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie. Zur Struktur seiner Kunst* (Fischer, 1983) has influenced an entire generation of Kafka scholars.

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1. Introduction: Kafka, Modernism, and Beyond

Sabine Wilke

The question of narrative form is crucial to the meaning of cultural artifacts. Unless we carefully analyze the position from which a tale is told and how that perspective evolves in complex ways, we have but a hazy grip on how the narrative unfolds, whose point of view we fully or partially share, which perspectives on the narrated events are presented as truths, and how trustworthy the narrator really is, if at all. Scholars who work on narrative theory and analysis concern themselves with this issue: Wayne Booth in his attempt to understand the rhetoric of irony, Robert Scholes who coined the phrase of the “fabulator” to designate modernist writers of fiction who shy away from direct representation of the surface of reality, Hayden White in his many studies on the narrative discourse of historical reality, to name just a few milestones in the history of narrative among many others.¹ *From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form* explores how this larger discussion of narrative form relates to German literary modernism. It also brings German scholarship on narrative into this discussion in the wake of the important work by Franz Karl Stanzel and Käthe Hamburger in the seventies.² Dorrit Cohn’s research on narrative tense and narrative modes for presenting consciousness in fiction built the necessary bridge between narrative theory and German literary modernism and it is by no means an accident that the focus of her analyses is the work of Franz Kafka.³

In terms of historical coverage, *From Kafka to Sebald* ties together original scholarship on one of the most important German-language writers from the beginning of the twentieth century, Franz Kafka, with scholarship on his contemporaries and on postwar German-language

fiction leading up to W. G. Sebald, Christa Wolf, Robert Menasse and others in an attempt to reflect on the specific trajectory German-language fiction has taken over the last century. The aim is not to be comprehensive and map all the possible avenues writers have traveled in expressing narrative modes of consciousness, but to highlight some crucial and recurring themes and formal problems that have preoccupied German-language modernism and continue to preoccupy self-conscious fiction to this day. Patricia Waugh, in her work on metafiction, characterizes the concerns and characteristics of self-conscious fiction as “a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naïve style of writing.”⁴ In the German context, self-conscious fiction often relates to the narration of trauma. Dominick LaCapra has reminded us that “there is an important sense in which the after effects—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone” and that, as a historian, he prefers to “distinguish between victims of traumatizing events and commentators (or those born later).”⁵ Cathy Caruth’s work on the double wound of trauma locates trauma not “in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.”⁶ The notion of writing trauma is crucial to an understanding of postwar German-language fiction in the wake of the Holocaust and will be addressed in several of the essays in this volume.

While there are many individual books and articles written specifically on Franz Kafka and his fiction, this collection of essays brings Kafka’s work into conversation not only with his contemporaries, fellow Hapsburg intellectuals such as Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler and other writers and artists of the period such as Yvan Goll, but also with contemporary authors that position themselves vis-à-vis the legacy left by Kafka’s writings and in particular his articulations of narrative consciousness. The emphasis in *From Kafka to Sebald* is on the advancement of narrative form in German-language modernist fiction, not understood as a universal structure, but as the location of an aesthetic and formal struggle with the main issues of the period, with alienation, urban existence, deception, disjointed life experiences, the collapse of the belief in the possibility of an objective articulation of meaning, the role of language, the fictionality of modes of documentation and the presentation of historical material, the fictionality of life and the performance of

cultures, and other issues that emphasize the cultural construction of life experiences in modernism. The book approaches the question of narrative via a set of important questions including gender, performance, trauma theory, exile, autobiography and memory in an attempt to establish relevance to ongoing debates. Narrative form in German-language modernist fiction is analyzed from a variety of perspectives that have comparative, deconstructive and historical dimensions. The relevance of the topic of modernism and narrative form rests on the idea that most twentieth-century modernist avant-gardes defined themselves through the critique of narrative as the quintessential form of modern identity and as a category in both aesthetic practice and theory. Narrative theory has experienced a major revival in the course of the last decade, transforming the heritage of structuralist literary narratology into a truly interdisciplinary, transmedial study of narrative practice. The papers collected in this volume investigate how these narrative practices in German-language fiction shape our perception of reality through these lenses.

The essays in this book are dedicated to Richard T. Gray, who turned sixty in July 2012. *From Kafka to Sebald* is a tribute to the work of this scholar of German literature who has devoted much of his intellectual and critical life to the interpretation of the works of Franz Kafka and, more recently, W. G. Sebald and other contemporary authors of fiction. The essays collected in this volume engage in a conversation with the topics that form the center of Gray's intellectual life as a teacher, mentor and scholar. Gray wrote a dissertation on Kafka's aphorisms under the direction of Walter H. Sokel at the University of Virginia. The work was later published as volume 91 in the "Studien zur deutschen Literatur" with Niemeyer, under the title *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation*. It constituted the first systematic attempt at articulating Kafka's contribution to this genre.⁷ *Constructive Destruction* charts the significance of the aphoristic form to the overall development of Kafka's fiction, leading up to the insight that Kafka's turn to aphoristic expression resolves dissatisfaction with his previous narrative practices and helps him evolve his parabolic style. Lessing's play *Emilia Galotti*, Schiller's *Die Räuber*, Heine's *Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand*, Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Hofmannsthal's "Reitergeschichte" and Kafka's "Das Urteil" constitute the *Stations of the Divided Subject* in Richard Gray's second book, which deals with questions of literary form in the context of displacement and subjugation of the political subconscious. In *Stations of the Divided Subject* Gray shows how aesthetic innovation in German bourgeois literature was shaped by the simultaneous accommodation with and rebellion against bourgeois reason on the part of the literary intelligentsia. Returning to Kafka, Richard Gray, together with Ruth Gross,

Rolf Goebel and Clayton Koelb, composed the entries in *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia*, an extremely useful and practical tool for students of Kafka's works at all levels.

After a critical study of the "science" of physiognomics⁸ and a study of the relationship between aesthetics and economic thought,⁹ Gray's scholarly interests returned to the subject of narrative in the example of W. G. Sebald and autobiographic fiction. In his work on W. G. Sebald, Gray explores questions of memory and narrative, relations of exiles to the idea of "homeland" and "adoptive nation", the relationship between image and text, trauma, memorial, and the possibilities of post-Holocaust literature, narratives of physical and imaginative travel, and questions of the relationship between architecture, image and narrative structure, always keeping Sebald's literary precursors in mind. In a contribution to a collection of essays on literature in the century of totalitarianism, Gray discusses the idea of exile as displacement using the example of one of Sebald's figures, Dr Henry Selwyn.¹⁰ A narratological examination of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Gray's essay begins with "the observation that this text exhibits a structure of laminated layers reminiscent of an omnipresent narrative consciousness in negotiating the transitions between themes, episodes, historical events and intertextual allusions that constitute the text's compositional makeup."¹¹ These points of transition become Sebald's segues that function as points of cohesion in an otherwise disjointed text. The impression of continuity that this strategy evokes, however, depends on the narrator's art of transition; he makes them look as if they are not merely staged when in fact they are the product of conscious intervention on the part of Sebald's narrator whose "narrative consciousness is characterized above all by its capacity to choreograph subtle transitions and cross-references among disparate elements", thus making him into the quintessential bricoleur.¹²

This volume addresses narratological questions in a variety of formats. The first section on "Kafka's Slippages" includes two essays that deal with the logic of ministerial action and narrating allegory. In his essay on "Ritardando in *Das Schloß*", Stanley Corngold analyzes the narrative logic of Kafka's novel and shows the complexity faced by any project that tries to map a unified narrative field theory. Corngold sees very little progression in the episodic structure of the work. Particles of Kafka's earlier work are redistributed throughout the novel among various characters and contribute to the failure of assuming a totalizing view of Kafka's narrative that always slips away from itself. In a similar vein, Imke Meyer takes a critical look at "Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist' as Allegory of Bourgeois Subject Construction". The outlines of her allegorical reading capture for a moment, in the face of allegory's insistence that the "breach between sign and referent" cannot be

healed, the shifting outlines of one of the text's possible meanings. Meyer contends that Kafka shows us a subject that must consume itself in the very process of its constitution.

The second section deals with "Kafka Effects". In his essay on "Hofmannsthal after 1918: The Present as Exile", Jens Rieckmann discusses exile in the context of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's understanding of the loss of the k.u.k ("kaiserlich und königlich"—imperial and regal) monarchy and his alienated existence in the Austrian Republic. Rieckmann reads Hofmannsthal's artistic crisis as a mode of exile compared to the creative output of his youth. In "Yvan Goll's *Die Eurokokke*: A Reading Through Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*", Rolf Goebel shows that although neither work influenced the composition of the other, Benjamin's monumental compilation of citations and reflections on Paris as the capital of European modernity in the age of high capitalism can serve as an interpretive framework for a new reading of Goll's rather neglected novel. The comparison of Benjamin's and Goll's texts helps elucidate the complex range of intellectual responses to the cultural crisis of interwar Europe.

The third section addresses questions of "Narrative Theory". In "Else Meets Dora: Narratology as a Tool for Illuminating Literary Trauma", Gail Finney discusses the correspondences between two distinct modes of analysis: narrative theory and trauma theory, elucidating the ways in which they borrow from and complement one another. Finney examines instances of literary trauma through the lens of narrative theory to suggest ways in which narratology might be useful in elucidating traumatic experience as depicted in literature, using the example of Sigmund Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905) and Arthur Schnitzler's *Fräulein Else* (1924). Heidi Schlipphacke takes a critical look at "'Das kleine Ich': Robert Menasse and Masculinity in Real Time", reflecting on the links between narrating masculinity and national identity. For Menasse, Austria stands for the retreat from a dialectical mode of history, and the metaphor of transvestism that he likes to employ embodies the mechanisms of borrowing, appropriating and harmonizing that characterize the various "clothing changes" of Austrian political identity in the twentieth century. Menasse's musings on Austrian identity call into question the future of gender in a post-dialectical world and, in particular, the previously hallowed relationship between the male body and the national body. In "Sebald's Encounters with French Narrative", Judith Ryan explores Sebald's work via important materials discovered at the Sebald archive in Marbach. Her essay begins with the question of the author-narrator relation, and moves from there through a series of French authors that Sebald read (Flaubert, Proust, Butor) to show the trajectory of his understanding of narrative theory. She concludes by considering the ways in which Sebald's learning about narrative strategies play into the effect his texts have on the reader.

The final section investigates modes of “Autobiography”. In “Gender, Psychoanalysis and Childhood Autobiography: Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster*”, Lorna Martens shows that Christa Wolf draws on details from her own childhood in the presentation of memory within the novel. What the narrator then “discovers” about memory largely corresponds to previously known psychoanalytic theory about memory. Walter H. Sokel shares an autobiographical reflection about his life in Vienna as a new student at the University shortly before the *Anschluss* (the annexation of Austria by the Nazis). “Provisional Existence” is based on a lecture Sokel gave at the University of Vienna in 2008, where it was received enthusiastically. This personal essay, which is included in this volume in an English translation by Japhet Johnstone, serves as a case in point for autobiographical narration and as a reminder to the reader of the lived nature of narrative.

I wish to thank all contributors for their enthusiastic response to the idea behind this project and their tireless work on the book’s execution and completion. The series editor, Imke Meyer, who supported the idea of a volume on German-language modernist fiction, provided great critical feedback on the planning and direction of the book. The humanities acquisitions editor for Continuum Press, Haaris Naqvi, guided us through the publishing process with ease and professional advice. The two of them deserve great credit for envisioning a book series on German literature and culture at a time when the discipline—and the institution of academic publishing—is under severe scrutiny in the context of serious budgetary constraints faced by institutions of higher education. Last but not least, my editorial assistant, Gloria Lucia Man, was a wonderful collaborator, a talented and hard-working editor, and a conscientious reader of academic prose. Japhet Johnstone finished copyediting the manuscript when Gloria Man had to return to her studies full-time and concentrate on her exams. He applied his talent as an editor and the publishing experience gained at the University of Washington Press very generously to this project and I am immensely grateful for his help. To all of them I wish to express my heartfelt thanks.

Seattle and Winthrop, August 2011

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Notes

- 1 See Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*; Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*; White, *The Content of the Form*.
- 2 Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens*; Hamburger, *Die Logik der Dichtung*.
- 3 Cohn, *Transparent Minds*.
- 4 Waugh, *Metafiction*, 2.
- 5 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xi.
- 6 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.
- 7 Gray, *Constructive Destruction*.
- 8 *About Face* (2004) tells the story of how physiognomics became popular during the Enlightenment as an empirically grounded discipline. Originally claimed to promote understanding and love, physiognomics evolved into a system aimed at valorizing a specific set of physical, moral and emotional traits and stamping everything else as “deviant”. This development not only reinforced racial, national and characterological prejudices, but lent such beliefs a presumably scientific grounding.
- 9 In *Money Matters* (2008), Richard Gray investigates the discourses of aesthetics and philosophy alongside economic thought, arguing that their domains are not mutually exclusive.
- 10 See Gray, “Exile as Dis-Placement in W. G. Sebald’s *Dr. Henry Selwyn*”.
- 11 Gray, “Sebald’s Segues”.
- 12 Gray, “Sebald’s Segues”, 54.

I Kafka's Slippages

2. Ritardando in *Das Schloß*

Stanley Corngold

This essay is dedicated to Richard Gray, with special appreciation and admiration of his critical writings on the work of Franz Kafka.

“One is alone, a total stranger and only an object of curiosity. And so long as you say “one” instead of “I”, there’s nothing in it and one can easily tell the story; but as soon as you admit to yourself that it is you yourself, you feel as though transfixed and are horrified.”

Kafka

I had originally set out to map the narrative of “ministerial action” in *Das Schloß*, that is to say, the story of the behavior of the Castle officials. But before doing so, I had to come to terms with the narrative logic of *Das Schloß*, and here I encountered difficulty. It is reported that Albert Einstein, on being lent *Das Schloß* to read by Thomas Mann, returned it soon after, declaring that the human mind was not constituted to grasp such perversity. Of course, it would be craven—inadmissible—to shelter in Einstein’s shadow, but I want to stress the difficulty of *Das Schloß* and the many obstacles it puts in the way of mapping a unified narrative field theory.¹

Individual episodes of *Das Schloß* have only a loose relevance to one another; they are less chapters in a progression with a detectable *telos* than a succession of novellas with a recurring cast of characters, not all of whom are easy to keep apart: we have the two “landladies”, K.’s admittedly indistinguishable apprentices, the two Friedas, the officials Sordini/Sortini. This loose structure allows Kafka to improvise continually: I refer to the scattering of Kafka-“memes” throughout the

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