

Reading Literature as Collective Texts

German and English War Novels of the 1920s as Media of Cultural and Communicative Memory¹

Astrid Erll

Literature is a medium which exerts considerable influence in cultures of memory. As 'collective texts' literary works can shape individual and collective memory. The forms and social functions of such 'memoryfical' narratives are studied from a historico-cultural and comparative perspective, by drawing on the paradigmatic case of the so-called War Fiction Boom: towards the end of the 1920s, English and German cultures of memory witnessed an almost singular literary phenomenon. A host of narrative texts about the First World War appeared on the literary market and became important media of collective memory. This article focuses on war narratives by Erich Maria Remarque, Frederic Manning, Josef Magnus Wehner and Edmund Blunden. An analysis of their specific 'rhetoric of collective memory' provides insight into different configurations and challenges of English and German cultures of memory in the 1920s as well as into possible effects of literature on collective remembering.

Generation of 1914 – close your eyes and a host of images leap to your mind: of students packing off to war with flowers in their rifles and patriotic songs on their lips, too young, too innocent to suspect what bloody rites of passage awaited them; of trench fighters whose twisted smiles and evasive glances revealed their close companionship with death [...]; of pacifists campaigning belligerently against war; of veterans unable to forget the grandeur of the trenches; of wasted women who had become widows before becoming wives; of a generation missing, sacrificed, decimated, destroyed "for an old bitch in the teeth, for a botched civilization" (Wohl 1979, 1).

These are the first sentences of Robert Wohl's *The Generation of 1914* – a classical study on generational identity. Wohl's book is devoted to one of the most notorious generations in the twentieth century, to young men and women who lived through the 'Great War'. Reading the text above you might have thought of the cinema, of photographic pictures, and of paintings as being the source of the 'host of mental images' which people all over Europe somehow seem able to produce (surely some to a greater, others to a lesser extent).² By the last words of the paragraph – a quotation from Ezra Pound's *Maudslayi* poems – we are, however, reminded how much *literature* (and especially the literature that emerged from the First World War and from the cultures of memory it was and still is recalled in) is involved in the formation of collective ideas and images of the past.³

No matter if we look at the impact which Remarque's German bestseller *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) had (and still has) on international cultures of memory or if we consider the contribution of Pat Barker's recent *Regeneration* Trilogy (1991-1995) to our contemporary ways of remembering the First World War – literary texts are obviously an important factor in processes of collective memory.⁴ But *how exactly* and *in what ways* can a fictional text shape collective remembering? What role does the reader, what role do cultural contexts of literary production and reception, what role, finally, does the text itself and its formal arrangement play in the process? These are some of the questions this article will address. It seeks to provide insight into the 'memoryfical' power of literature – i.e. its power to shape individual and collective memories actively.

In order to present a concept which may further our understanding of literature as a medium of collective memory, the essay will proceed in three steps. First, it will show that the question of whether or not a literary text becomes a medium of collective memory is first and foremost decided by the reader, who may or may not functionalise it as a 'collective text'. Second, it is concerned with the textual devices by which a literary work is staged as a medium of collective memory, with what I will call its 'rhetoric of collective memory'. The aim of the third step of this article is putting theory into practice: a sample comparison of war novels published in the 1920s will show the power and possibilities of literature as a medium of cultural and communicative memory – and thus

provide some answers to the questions arising from Robert Wohl's description of the 'host of images' we retain of a certain generation and their experience.

'Collective Texts': Literature as a Medium of Collective Memory

If asked in what respect literature can be understood as a medium of collective memory, a literary scholar will most probably explain that fictional texts are media which represent and critically reflect upon memory. Literature makes processes and problems of remembering observable. Good examples of literary texts which quite obviously fulfil these kinds of functions are Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and the host of contemporary novels belonging to the genre of 'historiographic metafiction'.⁵ What does not come into sight within this traditional literary studies approach, however, is literature as a medium which actively shapes and (re-)organises collective memory.

It is rather the interdisciplinary research into processes and functions of collective remembering one should turn to when seeking answers to the question of what literary texts actually do in cultures of memory. The German theory of 'cultural memory' – developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann – has, right from its conception, turned its attention not only to the role of ritual, historiography, monuments or paintings as media which constitute and continue a cultural memory but has always taken literary texts into account as well: Aleida Assmann (1995) has introduced the term 'kulturelle Texte' ('cultural texts'), which describes literary works that serve as **canonical media of cultural memory**.⁶ According to Assmann the cultural text is the effect of a certain way of reading literature, of a certain 'frame of reception'. Literature as a medium of cultural memory is thus a contextual phenomenon. It should be located on what Paul Ricœur (1984 [1983]) calls the level of *mimesis*₃. It is the 'refiguration', the actualisation of a literary text by readers which turns it into a medium of cultural memory.⁷

If you consider the variety and complexity of intersections between literature and collective memory, however, Assmann's theory and the concept of the 'cultural text' seem to have a rather restricted range: first, the majority of literary works (especially non-canonical and popular literature) are delegated to the so-called 'Speichergedächtnis' ('storage memory'; cf. J. and A. Assmann 1994: 123). The second restriction concerns the variety of modes of collective remembering: cultural texts are media of *cultural* memory (i.e. 'kulturelles Gedächtnis', in Assmann's sense). But we should bear in mind that there are other systems of collective memory, such as 'communicative memory' and non-intentional or implicit forms of collective remembering, for example.⁸ There is a way of using literature as a medium of collective memory which neither literary studies nor the theory of cultural memory have taken into account: I call this second mode of reception, which turns the literary work into a medium of collective memory (i.e. a medium which actively shapes a host of possible ways of contextual remembering, from 'cultural' and 'communicative' uses of the past to implicit forms of collective remembering), the 'collective text'. Whenever a literary text prefigures, forms, structures and organises, even retrospectively alters, our ideas and images of the past, we have functionalised it as a collective text.

Collective texts tend to belong – quite unlike the 'high-culture cultural texts' – to the realm of popular literature. Many readers draw their mental images and ideas about historical epochs not from historiography, and not from canonical literature, but from a multitude of historical novels, romances and detective stories – from fictional texts they probably cannot remember in detail any more. Yet, generally speaking, every literary text can be functionalised as a collective text: Homer's epics just as well as pulp fiction.

How does the phenomenon 'collective text' work? Collective texts are often non-intentionally functionalised as a medium of collective memory. They take effect without the reader noticing. In the act of reading, the literary text is used as a framework of collective memory. Collective texts thus are a *cadre medial*, a medial framework for remembering – as one might call them following Halbwachs' terminology.⁹ As such they shape collective memory considerably, and often without the community being aware of their workings.

What comes into view with the concept of the collective text is not only the role which epics, historical novels, romances and many more genres play in the creation and the continuity of a

cultural memory. It can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the important functions literature fulfils as a medium of *communicative* memory. It is the social psychologist Harald Welzer (2002) who has recently shown that soldiers remembering their experiences in the Second World War use narrative patterns and images derived from movies and novels and integrate them into their own life stories. Obviously, literary texts can function as medial frames for the construction of autobiographic memory. In this case, the reader understands the text as a means of communication about a shared reality – just as he or she would take part in the kind of conversational remembering in social contexts which Halbwachs has written about.

An important prerequisite for literature to function as a medium of collective memory is a form of reception in the process of which at least certain parts of the text are referred to reality. But what kind of reference are we dealing with whenever a literary text is read as a collective text? Halbwachs remarks with regard to the 'truth' of collective memory that it has got less to do with remembering dates and facts than with making sense of the past and with creating 'l'idées étoffées' (cf. Halbwachs 1968 [1950]: 59) – condensed images and ideas. Because of this, versions of the past can – for the sake of succinctness – contain fictive elements. It is here that we find an important intersection between literature and collective memory. Both create 'condensed images and ideas'. They make sense of an otherwise chaotic reality by applying forms, inherited paradigms, and patterns of narration. Thus, reading a literary text as a collective text does not mean referring the narrated events and existents to the extra-textual level of exact facts and data; it rather implies a referential reading with regard to a level of cultural signification – to shared narratives and horizons of meaning in a culture of memory.

To sum up, the concept of 'collective texts' draws attention to the fact that in cultures of memory literary texts can figure as a framework which shapes processes of remembering. Collective texts provide the mental pictures, the patterns of narration, and the structures of meaning vital for the construction of collective memory.

The 'Rhetoric of Collective Memory': Staging Literature as a Medium of Collective Memory

Literature as a medium of collective memory is first and foremost a phenomenon which has to be attributed to the level of reception. Having said this it is worth considering whether there are certain textual factors which can contribute to the activation of the frame 'collective text' during the reading process. This is what in the following will be called the 'rhetoric of collective memory': the totality of literary devices by which a given fictional text is staged as a medium of collective memory.

The rhetoric of collective memory finds expression in different modes. Two of them – the 'cultural mode' and the 'communicative mode' – will be presented here in some detail.¹⁰ In the context of cultures of memory the formal presentation of the narrated events can lead to different effects. Presented in the *cultural* mode, the story and its meaning seem to be an element of cultural memory, apparently belonging to the broad temporal horizon of a cultural formation. They seem connected with the normative and formative myths of a community and are felt to be of great relevance for future generations. Staged in the *communicative* mode, the story appears as specific experience. Its significance or message seems to belong to the realm of spatially and temporally limited social contexts – to the framework of communicative memory. If narrative texts show a rhetoric of collective memory and are read as collective texts, they can serve – according to the arrangement of their modes – as a medium of communicative memory and/or as a medium of cultural memory.

	Cultural Mode	Communicative Mode	(...)
some typical devices	○ intertextuality ○ 'high mimetic modes' (Frye) ○ 'authorial voice' (Lanser)	○ interdiscursivity ○ 'low mimetic modes' (Frye) ○ 'personal voice' (Lanser)	
possible effects: the story and its meaning seem to ...	... belong to the broad horizon of a cultural formation	... be the expression of specific experience gained in limited social contexts	
if read as a 'collective text', the literary texts turns into ...	... a medium of cultural memory	... a medium of communicative memory	

Figure 1: Cultural and communicative mode of the rhetoric of collective memory

Both modes – cultural and communicative – are constituted by variable combinations of textual features. Intertextuality, for example, is an important sign of a cultural mode. Especially by calling upon canonical works the literary text is linked to a cultural tradition, placed within this tradition, and given a monumental aspect. By interdiscursive references the literary work represents current ways of speaking – and thus properties of communicative memory.

An important kind of literary reference to the formal resources of a given culture is the choice of genre. Using Northrop Frye's (1957) terms, and very generally speaking, high mimetic modes have helped encode contents of cultural memory over the last couple of thousand years. It is through epic and tragedy that central myths were maintained. The use of such forms hints at the fact that the respective literary text is staged as a medium of cultural memory and that its story should be understood in the framework of cultural memory. Low mimetic modes – like letters, travel writing, and the novel – are forms which have been of great importance for the presentation of specific experience gained in social contexts and can thus be an indication of a dominant communicative mode.

By the choice of narrative voice (cf. Lanser 1992), to give one last example, different ways of communication and different social structures of the two frames of remembering can be staged in the literary medium. Cultural memory is generated and passed on in an asymmetrical way: the authorised elite instruct the

majority of the community (cf. J. Assmann 1992: 48-56). Thus, 'authorial voice' imitates the way in which cultural memory is transmitted. 'Personal voice', on the other hand, is a means of staging the interactional framework of communicative memory. Here, each witness of the past has the right to communicate his or her memories and to make sense of a collective experience.¹¹

The mapping of literary devices to different modes is, of course, not fixed. The rhetoric of collective memory is not a trans-historical phenomenon and it does not remain the same over a range of co-existing cultures of memory. Rather, its categories must be contextualised. They should be based on the knowledge of specific cultures of memory: with regard to cultural and communicative modes it must be taken into consideration how these cultures tend to express their mythic versions of important past events, on the one hand, and how people experienced life in their own times, how they usually expressed that experience, on the other. This is why the following figure can only show *tendencies* of the literary constitution of cultural and communicative modes, and why the last step of this article will be a sample comparison of both modes in the literature of two actual, co-existing cultures of memory at a specific historical time.

	Cultural Mode	Communicative Mode
selection	references to cultural memory (intertextuality)	references to communicative memory (interdiscursivity)
language	stylised language	milieu-specific language / language of everyday life
narrative mediation	'authorial voice'	'personal voice'
main characters and their perspectives	members of an elite, authorities / views 'from above'	ordinary characters / views 'from below'
plot structure and genre	closed structures / 'high mimetic modes'	open structures / 'low mimetic modes'
presentation of time and space	mythic times and spaces	everyday experiential times and spaces (e.g. l'effèt de réel)

Figure 2: *Tendencies* of the literary constitution of cultural and communicative modes

Cultural and Communicative Modes of the Rhetoric of Collective Memory in German and English War Novels of the 1920s

In Germany and in Great Britain (as probably in most parts of Europe and the U.S.) the 1920s were a decade which was suffused with the recent and still powerful experience of the First World War. It was a time of 'memory and mourning' (cf. Winter 1995).¹² The *inter bellum* can moreover be described as an epoch in which different systems of collective memory interacted powerfully: one decade after its end, the Great War was an historical fact with far-reaching effects on the entire cultural formation. The war had already assumed the mythical qualities which are typical of cultural memory. But at the same time it could be remembered by every grown-up as a recent everyday experience gained in limited social contexts, i.e. as part of communicative memory. Instead of a 'floating gap' (Jan Vansina; cf. J. Assmann 1992, 48-51) we find a superposition and intersection of the two systems of collective remembering.¹³

To many people in the 1920s it seemed that the Great War had destroyed traditional values and beliefs. German and British cultures of memory were confronted with a lack of mental constructions which could attach meaning to the Great War and locate it in the process of a national history. But not only cultural memory seemed to be at stake. The war as a traumatic experience for soldiers and civilians alike had turned the articulation of memory in the framework of communicative remembering into a difficult and often awkward enterprise as well. Thus, cultures of memory of the 1920s faced a double challenge: they had to create meaningful configurations of cultural memory *and* come to terms with the everyday experience of the recent past.

Towards the end of the decade literature became a powerful medium of collective memory. The novels of the so-called 'War Fiction Boom' or *Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur* created cultural *and* communicative versions of the war. They were widely read, discussed in a highly controversial way and measured according to the 'truth' they conveyed. These are some indications that the war novels were received as 'collective texts'. And as such, they had the power to shape both ways of remembering a shared past. Many of the texts show a marked rhetoric of collective memory, with cultural and communicative modes dominating and interacting in various ways. This memory shaping potential of the rhetoric of collective memory can be shown by a sample comparison of German and English war novels of the 1920s.¹⁴

German Alternatives: Experientiality or Monumentality

Probably the best-known war novel of the 1920s – not only in Germany but all over Europe – is Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen Nicht Neues* (1929).¹⁵ The first sentences of the book provide a good example of the literary constitution of a rhetoric of collective memory in the communicative mode:

Wir liegen neun Kilometer hinter der Front. Gestern wurden wir abgelöst; jetzt haben wir den Magen voll weißer Bohnen mit Rindfleisch und sind satt und zufrieden. Sogar für abends hat jeder noch ein Kochgeschirr voll fassen können; dazu gibt's außerdem doppelte Wurst- und Broportionen – das schafft. So ein Fall ist schon lange nicht mehr dagewesen: der Küchenbulle mit seinem roten Tomatenkopf bietet das Essen direkt an (*Im Westen Nichts Neues*, 11).¹⁶

Right from the beginning, by stating 'we are at rest five miles behind the front', the first-person narrator Bäumer assumes a 'communal voice' and speaks for a small group of front soldiers.¹⁷

Moreover, this rhetoric of collective memory is accompanied by typical strategies of the communicative mode: The personal voice (from which the communal voice emerges) indicates that the narrator is a witness of war; he is a 'social medium' of communicative memory. The fact that all the main characters are simple soldiers contributes to this literary evocation of the social structure of communicative memory. The historical present tense and the reference to details (like the soldiers' menu: 'weiße Bohnen mit Rindfleisch') create the illusion of having direct access to the past and contribute to a rich picture of a recent reality. And finally, like many other war novels in Germany and Great Britain, *Im Westen Nicht Neues* has an episodic structure. This is a typical device of staging the open, floating, uncompleted versions of the past as they are remembered within the system of communicative memory.¹⁸

'Küchenbulle' is obviously a literary representation of soldiers' slang. As a milieu-specific way of speaking, a sociolect, this slang is an important element of communicative memory in the 1920s. In the literary text it is a means of staging the specific atmosphere of a recent past. Because of its use of slang and its depiction of a hardly heroic but instead frightening, absurd, and sometimes disgusting war experience, Remarque's novel received the attribution 'latrine school' by British critics (cf. Halkin 1995). It is, however, an English war novel, Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929/30), which makes the most abundant use of soldiers' slang – and thus did not escape British censorship in the 1920s.¹⁹ In order to show what a communicative mode on the level of language (here: figural) can sound like and how a typical refiguration as a collective text works, a passage from *The Middle Parts* and a reaction by a critic shall be quoted:

"You shut your blasted mouth, see!" said the exasperated Corporal Hamley [...] "An' you let me 'ear you talkin' on parade again with an officer present and you'll be on the bloody mat, quick. See? You miserable bugger, you! A bloody cunt like you's sufficient to demoralise a whole fuckin' Army Corps. Got it? Get those buzzers out and do some bloody work, for a change" (*The Middle Parts*, quoted in Boyd 1999, ixf.).

William Boyd, who has written the introduction to a recent edition of the text, comments on the scene in a way which shows that he has read the literary text as a collective text and actualised the potential of the communicative mode: "Suddenly, a veil is stripped away. These are real men, real soldiers – and all soldiers swear, vilely, constantly. This is a world where corporals call their men 'cunts'." (Boyd 1999, x)

Internal focalization is one more important literary device for the constitution of a communicative mode. It is a means of staging what psychologists call 'field memory' and 'event-specific knowledge': forms of re-experiencing the past from something like the original perspective. Field memory is accompanied by emotional intensity and the recall of specific details, of sense perception, thoughts and feelings.²⁰ By means of internal focalization literature may reach beyond the possibilities of a communicative memory which is formed in everyday interaction and represent what is difficult to express in other forms of discourse. In Remarque's book it is the ubiquitous yet more often than not incommunicable experience of fear and agony in war which is shown by collective focalization in an episode before an attack:

Wir sind jetzt stumpf vor Spannung. Es ist eine tödliche Spannung, die wie ein scharftiges Messer unser Rückenmark entlang kratzt. Die Beine wollen nicht mehr, die Hände zittern, der Körper ist eine dünne Haut über mühsam unterdrücktem Wahnsinn [...] So pressen wir die Lippen aufeinander – es wird vorübergehen – es wird vorübergehen – vielleicht kommen wir durch (*Im Westen Nichts Neues* 82).²¹

In *Im Westen Nichts Neues* the war is depicted in a highly experiential fashion. The novel seems to convey an idea of 'what it felt like' to fight at the Western Front. But like many other German novels of the time which are critical of war it does not open up a 'cultural' perspective. The war is presented as an element of communicative memory alone. Remarque's book is an example of the total lack of a cultural mode.²²

Josef Magnus Wehner's *Sieben vor Verdun* (1930) may serve as a second German example in order to show what an excessive use of the cultural mode means: already the title of the novel constitutes a cultural mode. 'Seven against Verdun' is an obvious intertextual reference to the ancient tragedy *Seven against Thebes*. And as the title already suggests the novel closely follows the structure and the motifs of Aeschylus' tragedy. The text is thus associated with a high mimetic mode on different levels. One important function of such intertextual references to monuments of cultural memory is self-monumentalisation. *Sieben vor Verdun* is presented as an authoritative medium of cultural memory.

Military history and the adventures of seven German soldiers fighting in the Verdun sector on the Western Front are mediated by a marked authorial voice. A heterodiegetic, explicit narrator does not only tell the story but comments on it all the while. He makes excessive use of stylised language and thus employs what Aleida Assmann (1991) calls the 'language of the monument'. Typical of this mythicising language are descriptions of battle: "Es waren Riesen und Jäger, die da stürmten, und sie waren entbunden. Die befohlene Linie machte ihnen keinen Gewissensbiß, sie sprangen an den Feind, wo sie ihn erblickten, und wo er floh, da rauschten sie ihm nach." (*Sieben vor Verdun*, 196)²³ What is more, by comparing the German soldiers to figures of Germanic mythology, the broad temporal horizon of cultural memory is intertextually opened up and the First World War can be understood and located in a mythical framework.

Not only heroic and mythical contents are actualised to describe a modern technicised warfare but also the ancient forms connected with them: "Leib an Leib drangen die Deutschen durch Dickicht und Draht, ein einiges Volk." (*Sieben vor Verdun*, 57)²⁴ The intertextual actualisation of the epic device of alliteration (*Stabreim*, as used, for example, in the *Nibelungenlied*) gives the narrator's comment on the willpower and unity of the German soldiers a further semantic dimension: it constructs continuity between past deeds of Germanic heroes and Germany in the modern world war. Literary features like these contribute to the main effect of *Sieben vor Verdun*: The war is located not in an historical but in a mythical horizon.²⁵

To sum up, those who read Remarque's novel and actualise it as a 'collective text' will very likely remember the war in the framework of communicative memory as a recent experience with its specific atmosphere, language and sense perceptions. Those who read Wehner's text as a collective text are led to understand the war as a mythical event of cultural memory. While the first fails to attach meaning to the war which goes beyond the lifetime of a generation, the second makes it difficult to naturalise its characters as human beings which were actually part of a recent reality. Paradigmatically, Remarque's and Wehner's novels show tendencies of German war literature in the late 1920s. German novels offered their readership only two alternatives: a rejection of cultural memory and a purely communicative mode conveying the experientiality of war in the texts which were critical of the war; or a mythical cultural mode in proto-fascist literature.

For English authors of the War Fiction Boom – Sassoon, Graves, and Manning, for example – it seemed much easier to synthesise the two *modi memorandi*. Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928) is probably the best example of an integration of communicative and cultural modes in a war novel. *Undertones of War* provides the reader with a true synthesis of experientiality and cultural signification in its depiction of the Western Front. An explicit rhetoric of collective memory is established not by a communal voice, as in Remarque's novel, but by a narrator addressing his readership and inviting them to become part of a community of memory.

I would have you see that little reconnaissance in its natural or unnatural evolution. Date yourself 1916, and come [...] We cross the Nab [...] here the wood-path comes out [...] There are signposts [...] but we turn along the road [...] and then we have on our left hand a downland cliff or quarry, on our right hand a valley rich in trees. [...] But here we leave the road, and file along the railway track [...]; surely the 2.30 for Albert will come round the bend puffing and clanking in a moment? (*Undertones*, 113)

Typical features of a communicative mode are the personal voice, the immediacy of the historical present, deictic expressions (especially place and time deixis) and the display of event-specific knowledge. With literary devices like these Blunden's novel fulfils important functions for its contemporary readership: It helps in remembering the war as part of communicative memory.

However, in *Undertones of War* the detailed representation of the war as a recent everyday-experience is pervaded by what Paul Fussell (1980) calls 'cultural paradigms': Cultural paradigms are references to patterns of signification derived from cultural memory which are used to make sense of an otherwise chaotic reality. The close intertwining of the cultural and the communicative mode becomes obvious in those passages where canonical literary works and their authors – Milton, Chatterton and George Herbert, for example – are called upon:

Chatterton might have refused to leave the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliff whether five-nines were occasionally whooping past or not. (*Undertones*, 158)

[...] the luggage of war, as Milton calls it [...] (*Undertones*, 117)

Hamel Church attracted me, and though stripped and tottering still had that spirit clinging to it which would have been the richest poetry to George Herbert (*Undertones*, 117).

Blunden's text draws heavily on the pastoral genre. As Fussell (cf. 1978) has shown, at the beginning of the 20th century the pastoral tradition was felt to be specifically English. Thus, *Undertones of War* establishes cultural continuity, asserts certain parts of functional memory and promotes a version of *Englishness*. The literary actualisation of the pastoral tradition enables

Blunden to criticise war. But at the same time it asserts the simplicity and innocence of the British soldier. Passages like the following are, of course, powerful ideas and images for English cultures of memory:

Could any countryside be more sweetly at rest, more alluring to naiad and hamadryad, more incapable of dreaming a field-gun? Fortunate it was that at the moment I was filled with this simple joy. I might have known the war by this time, but I was still too young to know its depth of ironic cruelty. [...] No destined anguish lifted its snaky head to poison a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat (*Undertones*, 242).

In Blunden's *Undertones* the Great War is severely criticised. In terms of the received pastoral tradition it is understood as a kind of perversion. Yet at the same time, pastoral paradigms help to understand peacefulness and even pacifism as part of a specific English tradition. Thus, *Undertones* neither advertises a wholesale rejection of cultural memory, like its German counterparts which are critical of war, nor does it functionalise the resources of cultural memory in order to assert war and heroic front soldiers, like Wehner, Ernst Jünger, Werner Beumelburg and other writers of the so-called *Soldatischer Nationalismus* do.

Interestingly enough, Blunden's text employs more or less the same literary devices as can be found in both proto-fascist *and* pacifist German war novels of the time. But due to the selection of cultural paradigms and the combination of communicative and cultural modes, its effects are totally different: war can be remembered and located in both the frameworks of cultural and communicative memory – and all the while be understood as a "travesty of nature" (Fussell 1978, 261).²⁶

The 'Rhetoric of Collective Memory', (Collective) Text and (Memorial) Context

The rhetoric of collective memory is a form of expression used in specific cultures of memory. As a textual feature located between what might be called (drawing on Ricœur's model) a '*cultural* prefiguration' and a '*collective* refiguration' it points to exactly those two intersections between text and context: firstly, the rhetoric of collective memory is an answer to historical challenges, a literary attempt to solve specific problems prevailing in the cultural context. This is why it can provide insight into these challenges and into the contemporary mentalities connected with them. As far as the war novels show, the problem of configuring a collective memory after the First World War appears insurmountable in Germany. I have not come across a novel which integrates cultural and communicative modes the way the English novels almost naturally do.

The analysis of the two modes may moreover help to understand the German affinity to the strange combination of forgetfulness and mythical visions that the National Socialists offered. And perhaps it can also hint at some reasons for the relative stability of the English society during the difficult inter-war period. If we take into

account that towards the end of the 1920s war books could be found in almost every household, then it is interesting to consider how much their versions of collective memory were part of and shaped exactly these developments. And this is the second kind of result we may gain by using the categories I have proposed: the rhetoric of collective memory can – to some extent – indicate the possible cultural effects of a literary text. But we have to bear in mind that these effects can only take place under the condition that people read the literary text and refigure its as a medium of collective memory – as a collective text.

Bibliografie

Assmann, Aleida, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München: Beck, 1999.

Assmann, Aleida, Jan Assmann, 'Das Gestern im Heute. Medien und soziales Gedächtnis', in: Merten, Klaus, Siegfried J. Schmidt, Siegfried Weischenberg (eds.): *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien. Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994, 114-140.

Assmann, Aleida, 'Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument', in: Assmann, Aleida, Dietrich Harth (eds.), *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991, 11-25.

Assmann, Aleida, Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1999.

Assmann, Aleida, 'Vier Formen des Gedächtnisses', in: *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 13 (2002) 2, 183-190.

Assmann, Aleida, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte?' in: Poltermann, Andreas (ed.), *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*, Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1995, 232-24.

Assmann, Jan, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Beck, 1992.

Bal, Mieke, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover/London: UP of New England 1999.

Blunden, Edmund, *Undertones of War*, London: Penguin, 1982 [1928].

Boyd, William: 'Introduction', in: Frederic Manning: *Her Privates We*. London: Serpent's Tail 1999, ix-xvi.

D'haen, Theo (gen. ed.), *Literature as Cultural Memory*. 8 vols. Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA:

Rodopi, 2000.

Erll, Astrid, *Gedächtnisromane. Literatur über den Ersten Weltkrieg als Medium englischer und deutscher Erinnerungskulturen in den 1920er Jahren*. Trier: WVT, 2003.

Erll, Astrid, Marion Gymnich, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Literatur – Erinnerung – Identität. Theoriekonzeptionen und Fallstudien*. Trier: WVT, 2003.

Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957.

Fussell, Paul, 'Der Einfluß kultureller Paradigmen auf die literarische Wiedergabe traumatischer Erfahrung', in: *Vondung* 1980, 175-187.

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, London/Oxford/New York: Oxford UP, 1975.

Gollbach, Michael, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur. Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre*, Kronberg, Ts.: Scriptor, 1978.

Halbwachs, Maurice, *La mémoire collective*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968 [1950].

Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, ed., transl., and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 (contains extracts from *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris: Alcan).

Halkin, Ariela, *The Enemy Reviewed. German Popular Literature through British Eyes between the Two World Wars*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.

Hirschfeld, Gerhard, Gerd Krumeich, Irina Renz (eds.), *'Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch ...' Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1993.

Hynes, Samuel, *A War Imagined. The First World War and English Culture*, London: The Bodley Head, 1990.

Lanser, Susan Sniader, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1992.

Löschnigg, Martin, "'The Prismatic Hues of Memory.'" Autobiographische Modellierung und die Rhetorik der Erinnerung in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, in: *Poetica* 31 (1999) 1-2, 175-200.

Manning, Frederic [Private 19022], *Her Privates We*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1999 [1930] (orig.

limited. ed.: *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme & Ancre, 1916*. London: Piazza Press, 1929).

Nalbantian, Suzanne, *Memory in Literature. From Rousseau to Neuroscience*, Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Nünning, Ansgar (ed.), *Fictions of Memory. Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 10 (2003) 1.

Remarque, Erich Maria, *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998 [1929] (engl.: *All Quiet on the Western Front*, transl. by Arthur Wellesley Wheen, Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1975 [1929]).

Ricœur, Paul, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1984 [orig.: *Temps et récit*, Paris: Seuil, 1983]

Schacter, Daniel, *Searching for Memory. The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*, New York: Basic Books, 1996.

Schneider, Thomas F. (ed.), *Erich Maria Remarque. Leben, Werk und weltweite Wirkung*, Osnabrück: Rasch 1998.

Stanzel, Franz K., Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Intimate Enemies. English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1993.

Tate, Trudi, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.

Vondung, Klaus (ed.), *Kriegserlebnis. Der Erste Weltkrieg in der literarischen Gestaltung und symbolischen Deutung der Nationen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980.

Wägenbaur, Thomas (ed.), *The Poetics of Memory*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1998.

Wehner, Josef Magnus, *Sieben vor Verdun. Ein Kriegerroman*, München: Müller, 1930.

Welzer, Harald, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*, München: Beck 2002.

Winter, Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Wohl, Robert, *The Generation of 1914*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979.

Wolf, Philipp, *Modernization and the Crisis of Memory. John Donne to Don DeLillo*, Amsterdam/New York, NY: Rodopi, 2002.

Astrid Erll studied English and German at the Justus-Liebig-University Gießen. In 2002 she finished her dissertation, a study on the memory of the First World War in German and English literatures and cultures of the 1920s. Since 2003 she has been working at the Gießen Collaborative Research Centre Cultures of Memory (Sonderforschungsbereich 434 Erinnerungskulturen), where she is involved in a project on Britain's imperial memory. Her recent publications have been on the literary and cultural history of the First World War, cultural theory and concepts of memory, and narratology (e.g. Gedächtnisromane, 2003).

1 This article is a shortened and slightly reworked version of an essay which will appear in the volume Anglistentag 2003, München, Trier: WVT, 2004 (Christoph Bode and Hans Sauer, eds.). I am very grateful to Sara Young, who did the proof-reading.

- 2 In Great Britain, the First World War is commemorated in a much more coherent and intensive way than in Germany. For a comparison of British and German cultures of memory see Erll (2003).
- 3 'Cultures of memory' is my translation of 'Erinnerungskulturen', the title and focus of interest of a Giessen Collaborative Research Centre (Sonderforschungsbereich 434 Erinnerungskulturen).
- 4 'Collective memory' is used in the following as a general term, describing all possible relations between memory on the one hand and social and cultural contexts on the other.

5 For studies which focus on this aspect of a 'literary mimesis of collective memory' cf. for example Wägenbaur (1998), Löschnigg (1999), the series Literature as Cultural Memory (D'haen 2000), Wolf (2002), Nalbantian (2003), the essays in Nünning (2003) and in Erll/Gymnich/Nünning (2003).

6 Please note that Jan and Aleida Assmann use the term 'cultural memory' in a narrower sense than Anglo-American researchers (e.g. Bal/Crewe/Spitzer 1999) do. Jan and Aleida Assmann have introduced the distinction between 'cultural memory' and 'communicative memory', which they hold to be subcategories of 'collective memory', as Maurice Halbwachs (1968 [1950]) has studied and theorised it (cf. J. Assmann 1992). Although A. Assmann (2002) has further developed the distinction between different memory systems, for the purpose of this article I will stick to the original terminology. Furthermore, I understand cultural and communicative memory as different modes of collective remembering, different 'uses of the past'. Both serve to constitute 'social autobiographies'. But the first locates historical events in the wide temporal horizon of nations, religious or ethnic communities and tends to create myths, while the second is concerned with making sense in the more limited horizon of social communities (like family, friends or colleagues). Thus, an historical event like German reunification or 9/11 can be remembered according to both frames: it can be understood as a significant part of national history, but it can also be remembered as an event which was experienced in and had effects on small social groups, was woven into the autobiographies of their members.

7 Ricœur conceives of Aristotelian mimesis as a circle in which narrative text and cultural context intersect. He distinguishes three stages of a dynamic mimetic process: mimesis₁ (prefiguration), mimesis₂ (configuration) and mimesis₃ (refiguration). A narrative text is (1) prefigured by its cultural context with its specific symbolic order. It (2) configures (or: emplots) extra-literary elements into an exemplary temporal and causal order. In the act of reading, finally, the narrative composition is actualised. It becomes part of the symbolic order of a cultural formation, which is thereby (3) refigured and – here the circle closes – functions in turn as the source of narrative preunderstanding on the level of mimesis₁. Ricœur's first and third levels are intersections between narrative text and cultural context; mimesis₂, the configuration of textual elements, is the traditional focus of interest in literary studies.

8 For different systems of collective remembering cf. Erll (2003: 35-53). Cultural and communicative memory are 'explicit' and 'autobiographical' forms of collective remembering: They allow a community to establish 'social autobiographies', to negotiate identities and norms. But there are also non-intentional, 'implicit' forms of remembering in cultures of memory (e.g. stereotypes).

- 9 Cf. Halbwachs' (1992 [1925]: 38) definition of the social frameworks of collective memory: "[T]here exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection."
- 10 There are other modes of the rhetoric of collective memory: the 'antagonistic mode', which stages the literary text as a

medium of contested memories, and the 'reflexive mode', which turns literature into a medium of reflection and critique in cultures of memory (cf. Erll 2003).

11 Cf. Lanser (1992: 15) for the definition of 'authorial voice': "I use the term authorial voice to identify narrative situations that are heterodiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential." – and of 'personal voice' (Ibidem: 18f.): I use the term personal voice to refer to narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories." Both concepts were developed in the framework of a 'feminist narratology', but can easily be transferred to a 'narratology of cultural memory', an approach equally concerned with contextualising literary texts, with investigating cultural strategies of making sense of collective experience, and with the power-relations connected with these processes.

- 12 For cultural and comparative histories of the First World War and its impact cf. Vondung (1980), Hynes (1990), Hirschfeld/Krumeich/Renz (1993), and Tate (1998).
- 13 This seems to be a constellation of collective memory characteristic of societies that have recently experienced major disruptions. (cf. A. Assmann/Frevert 1999)

14 Central studies on English and German war literature are Fussell (1975) and Gollbach (1978). For comparative views on the literature of the Great War cf. the essays in Stanzel/Löschnigg (1993). Until today, most of the research into war literature of the 1920s focuses (1) on literary production and (2) on the intersections between literature and individual memory. The question posed over and over again is how ex-soldiers have come to terms with their traumatic experience and how they transformed it into autobiographical and (semi-)fictional texts. Understanding literature as a medium of collective memory, however, implies a change of perspective in both respects: My focus is therefore (1) on the reception of literary texts in specific cultural contexts and (2) on the intersections between literature and collective memory.

15 Translated by Arthur Wellesley Wheen in 1929, *All Quiet on the Western Front* quickly became a best seller in Great Britain. On the reception of Remarque's novel all over the world cf. Schneider (1998).

16 "We are at rest five miles behind the front. Yesterday we were relieved, and now our bellies are full of beef and haricot beans. We are satisfied and at peace. Each man has another mess-tin full for the evening; and, what is more, there is a double ration of sausage and bread. That puts a man in fine trim. We have not had such luck as this for a long time. The cook with his carrot head is begging us to eat." (*All Quiet*, 7)

17 Lanser (1992, 21) defines 'communal voice' as "a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community." My understanding of communal voice goes a little further: All literary texts with a rhetoric of collective memory have 'communal implications' (even if the personal or authorial narrator never explicitly says 'we'). Explicit communal voice – as defined above by Lanser and as used over long passages in *Im Westen Nichts Neues* – not only marks this rhetoric very distinctly, but moreover tends to have antagonistic effects: In novels with a rhetoric of collective memory the literary staging of a 'we' is usually accompanied by the distancing from a 'they'. In Remarque's text it is the young generation which is set apart from a negatively stereotyped old generation. *Im Westen Nichts Neues* is a book which advertises the antagonistic idea of a lost generation. This is its main contribution to – not only German, but international – cultures of memory. Thus, it combines the communicative with the antagonistic mode. But for the purposes of this article it suffices to concentrate on the analysis of the former.

18 In *Im Westen Nichts Neues* prevails a literary evocation of what psychologists (cf. Schacter 1996, 89f.) call 'general events' of episodic memory (like 'eating', 'going to the front', 'fighting in No Man's Land', 'experiencing moments of friendship' etc.). Cf. for a similar structure Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That* (1929). The sheer absurdity of Graves' anecdotes, however, effects a suffusion of the communicative with the reflexive mode.

19 Manning's text was censored and his war novel had to be published privately under the title *The Middle Parts of Fortune*. *Somme & Ancre*, 1916 in 1928. A censored version appeared in 1929 under the title *Her Privates' We*. (Both titles are quotations from *Hamlet*.)

20 The psychologist Daniel Schacter (1996, 21) differentiates between 'field memories' and 'observer memories' as possible forms of episodic memory: "Do you see yourself in the scene? [observer memory] Or do you see the scene through your eyes, as if you were there and looking outward, so that you yourself are not an object in the scene? [field memory]." Field memory is, according to Schacter (1996, 22), connected with "emotional intensity" (22). Moreover, all episodic field memories display "event-specific knowledge" (90): The memory is contextualised in time and space, and particulars are remembered, like details of a past experience or sense perceptions.

21 "We are deadened by the strain – a deadly tension that scrapes along one's spine like a gapped knife. Our legs refuse to move, our hands tremble, our bodies are thin skin stretched painfully over repressed madness [...]. So we shut our teeth – it will end – it will end – perhaps we will come through." (*All Quiet*, 98)

22 Other examples of this tendency in pacifistic and critical German literature are Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) (dominant communicative mode) and Edlef Köppen's *Heeresbericht* (1930) (communicative and dominant reflexive mode).

23 "[The German soldiers] stormed as giants and hunters, and they were let loose. They paid no attention to the line of attack that had been ordered, they jumped at the enemy where they saw him, and when he fled, they swept after him." (my translation)

24 "Body against body, the Germans penetrated thicket and wire, a united people." (my translation)

25 Cf. J. Assmann (1992, 77f.) on the different implications of remembering historical or mythical events in the framework of cultural memory. Such a tendency to mythicize war is typical of the war novels of the so-called Soldatischer Nationalismus. Other examples are Werner Beumelburg's *Gruppe Bosemüller* (1930) or Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920; *The Storm of Steel*, 1929).

26 This combination of cultural and communicative mode seems to be typical of English war novels of the 1920s: Manning, Sassoon (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, 1930), and Graves (*Good-bye to All That*, 1929), for example, have written highly experiential war narratives. And at the same time they draw on cultural memory (Manning's intertextual references to Shakespeare's works are an attempt to call upon tradition in order to understand war as a *conditio humana*; Sassoon and Graves actualise affirmatively the discursive formation of the English gentleman-ideal) and functionalise it – in a 'contra-presentic' (cf. J. Assmann 1992) way – as a bitter critique of war.