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Dorothee Birke

Memory's Fragile Power

Crises of Memory, Identity and Narrative
in Contemporary British Novels

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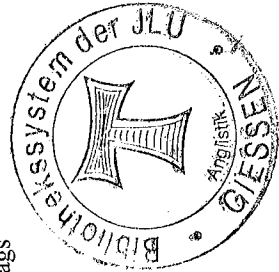
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realization that memory is always socially conditioned, through schemata. Crises of memory connected with the question of its social conditioning are either triggered by the question of how far one's memories are really one's own, and how far they are influenced by one's environment. Or, conversely, they arise if the versions of the past prompted by (and in turn sustaining) our self concepts cease to be intersubjectively communicable, because they are too idiosyncratic: such memory constructions are likely to break down at some point. These crises of memory are closely linked to problems connected specifically with the narrative structuring of autobiographical memory: if those structures prove to be inadequate and have to be altered, if they break down (dynarrativa), or get out of control (hypemarrativa), the individual may experience 'crises of narrative'.

The contemporary novels which are at the centre of this study raise the question of the limits of memory and highlight the conflicting demands and assumptions that characterize our stance towards our own memories. They present characters one could classify as 'memory junkies' – afflicted with an increasingly destructive addiction to their versions of the past –, and also characters who question or reject their own memories. In staging the plights of these characters as crises of form, these novels – as will be shown in the next chapter – engage with, imaginatively develop and take to extremes those notions of identity and memory which are also discussed in psychological research on autobiographical memory.

III. THE REPRESENTATION OF CRISES OF MEMORY IN THE NOVEL: A COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGICAL APPROACH

Precisely because the reader expects to be able to recognize a world, the novel he reads becomes a place in which models of intelligibility can be 'deconstructed', exposed and challenged. [...] Even when the novel is not explicitly engaged in undermining our notions of coherence and significance, by its creative use of these notions it participates in what Husserl would call the 'reactivation' of models of intelligibility: that which is taken as natural is brought to consciousness and revealed as process, as construct.

(Culler 2002 [1975]: 222)

Novels conjure up worlds. They both prompt their readers to apply knowledge and assumptions about their own lives in order to make sense of the universe evoked on the page, and they introduce characters, stories and concepts of their own. In some cases they even, as Culler describes it, provoke us to question "our notions of coherence and significance". The formation of human identity is one aspect of our own worldmaking often in the focus of attention in novels – in particular with regard to narrativization as a central process of autobiographical memory. In order to show how precisely this potential can be realized, it is useful to look at the specific characteristics of the novel as genre, and to identify the various building blocks which contribute to the formation of a literary universe.

There are three main reasons why the genre of the novel presents itself as an especially apt medium to represent and reflect on autobiographical memory and the process of narrativization. For one thing, the novelist has at her command a whole range of techniques for providing insights into the human mind. Dorrit Cohn, who has charted these techniques in her groundbreaking work *Transparent Minds* (1978), calls the novelist the "creator of beings whose inner lives he can reveal at will" (Cohn 1978: 4). The novel thus seems a much more obvious choice than, for example, the drama, if one wants to represent the cognitive activity of remembering – to grant a look, as it were, inside a character's head and show his or her memory at work. Secondly, the novel offers ample space to lay out both the present and the remembered past: it affords much more opportunity than a short story or a poem to shift back and forth between time levels, to lay out a history and to explore the complex relations between past and present.⁷⁵ Thirdly, the question of how narrative works, how causal relations

⁷⁵ This is not to say, of course, that processes of remembering can or are not represented in poetry or drama. Although the novel surely features more established techniques for

between events are forged, how a unity between seemingly disparate elements can be created, is the novel's very own territory. Because novels typically tell a story, they usually feature both a plot, i.e. the structure that is the sum total of the causal relations, and a level of narrative transmission, often a first- or third-person narrator who can be interpreted as the subject of the sense-making process we are confronted with on the page. Novels can thus create the illusion that we are witnesses to the process of remembering as sense-making as it unfolds inside the mind of a subject.

If the novel is thus a particularly well suited medium for exploring the process of remembering, it seems reasonable to assume that it may also be especially fit to represent crises of memory, in particular crises of memory that involve crises of narrative as means of making sense of one's life. An effective way of staging these crises is by breaking some of the conventions we usually associate with the representation of memory in the novel: we have seen that some literary scholars have even put forward the idea that the representation of real-world crises generally also involves crises of aesthetic form (cf. Hielscher 2001: 319). This need not necessarily be the case – it is not hard to imagine a perfectly conventionally written novel featuring, for example, an identity crisis, especially since crisis is such a pervasive motif in literature. However, one of the main theses put forward in this study is that crises of memory which are represented with the help of crises of aesthetic form have a special impact on the reader.⁷⁴ The contemporary novels analysed in part V were chosen because they give prominence to particularly striking 'crises of form', thus posing obstacles for the act of reading as a sense-making process. As the individual chapters will show, this draws the reader's attention to his or her own quests for story, coherence and sense, a quest which may mirror, complement or contradict the character's way of structuring his or her life story via memory.

Before embarking on an investigation of the 'crises of form' and their relations to crises of memory, I briefly want to point to another way in which crises of memory and identity materialize in novels: the 'rhetoric of memory'. Narrators or characters may directly discuss problems they experience with regard to remembering and making sense of their lives (e.g. "I have only a vague memory of the morning when...").

⁷⁴ 'looking inside someone's head' than drama, narrative elements in drama are also used to represent memory and its narrative structuring – for a study on plays dealing with the significance remembering assumes with regard to identity formation, cf. Glomb (1997). The twentieth-century plays that are the subjects of Glomb's study all depart from classical conventions which call for drama as representing present action between characters. Poetry, on the other hand, has been seen as the classical genre for representing subjectivity and emotions; however, because of their brevity, poems often tend to represent a present (or past) moment rather than a longer time span with switches between time levels. For a study of the genre of 'memory poetry' cf. Dietrich (2007).

⁷⁴ For an in-depth study of the potential novels have to provoke the reflection on and the revision of schemata, cf. Butter (2007).

Such utterances are part of a 'rhetoric of memory', a term introduced by Martin Löschmigg (1999) to describe explicit references to the act of remembering.⁷⁵ The rhetoric of memory is complemented by more abstract metamnemonic observations, i.e. observations about properties or characteristics of memory in general and metaphors of memory ("Is there some process of fixing I wonder, whereby time, rather than causing memories to decay [...] instead does the opposite – it sets them hard, like concrete, the very reverse of the sort of fluid mush I seem to get when I try to talk about yesterday?")⁷⁶ In this study, I am going to distinguish between 'rhetoric of memory', i.e. explicit comments on memory and remembering (including metaphors that are used for memory), and 'staging of memory', which includes all narrative techniques which show memory at work, such as shifts in time levels and focalization.⁷⁷ Rhetoric and staging of memory may be closely connected: in *David Copperfield*, for example, the 'rhetoric of memory' in the sentence "How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house!" (DC 69, emphasis added), together with the change in tense, signals a shift in focalisation from the remembering self of David as narrator to the remembered younger self and is thus also part of the staging of memory.

While the rhetoric of memory, as the examples above have shown, may be used to refer to and explain crises of memory, it usually does not entail a crisis of form. In contrast, if the act of remembering is *staged* instead of explicitly *commented* on, this often involves such crises – in particular, it shall be argued in this chapter, a complex play with conventions of the novel which can be called a 'crisis of narrativity', and is thus connected with the way in which literary works employ the human ability and desire to impose narrative structures onto a string of events.

Exploring the notion of a 'crisis of narrativity' and its significance for the staging of crises of memory and identity first of all requires an understanding of what is meant by the concept of 'narrative' in literature. Werner Wolf defines 'the narrative' as a cognitive schema which informs the production and the reception of novels, but also, at least potentially, of other works of art, such as films, paintings and even works of music, and allows us to read them as coherent stories which combine disparate features in a meaningful way (cf. Wolf 2002: 29). 'Narrativity' is thus the sum of aspects which constitute a text's (or other work's) potential to be read as narrative. Wolf conceptualizes narrativity as a gradable phenomenon: there are only few features which

⁷⁵ "[Die] charakteristische 'Rhetorik der Erinnerung' [...] in Form eingeschobener Verweise auf den Akt der Erinnerung ('I remember' usw.)" (Löschmigg 1999: 176).

⁷⁶ This metaphor – or rather complex of metaphors – is analysed in detail in chapter V.2.

⁷⁷ The term 'rhetoric of memory' has also been employed to describe the sum of narrative techniques for a representation of memory (cf. A. Nünning/V. Nünning 2002b: 29; Nünning 2005: 156). Nonetheless, I find the distinction between explicit comments and staging useful and will therefore return to Löschmigg's original usage.

are obligatory prerequisites of narrativity, but it is possible to describe prototypical aspects which increase it (cf. *ibid.*: 35). The minimal definition of narrativity calls for the representation of at least rudiments of a world which can be imagined in the act of reading, in which at least two different actions or states are centred on the same anthropomorphised characters. Moreover, it must be possible to link these actions in some potentially meaningful way; a merely chronological relation between them is not sufficient (cf. *ibid.*: 51).⁷⁸

Seen in the light of this minimal requirement, all novels are 'narrative' (with the possible exception of some postmodernist texts). However, a prototypical narrative would also feature the following five aspects, which enhance 'narrativity': texts are seen as more narrative (1) if they feature external and 'spectacular' action, (2) if they deal with specific characters instead of a collective body, (3) if the story they tell is set in the narrative 'past' and, from the point of view of the narrative 'present', has already been concluded, (4) if they are coherent and feature clear causal relations instead of ambiguities and blanks, and (5) if they allow the production and maintenance of illusion (cf. *ibid.*: 52).⁷⁹

Of these five aspects of narrativity, at least three are highly relevant to the representation of crises of memory. First of all, in novels which represent memory as problematic there is often a focus on the process of remembering as a mental activity and thus a tendency to concentrate on internal processes as well as (or even instead of) external action. What is more, external and internal action may become impossible to distinguish. Such features in the novel may be used to stage, for example, the impact the complex and potentially problematic relations between past and present may have on the individual (e.g. the idea that the past may be a fabrication of the present), or the crises that may arise out of a confusion of memories of 'real' experiences and memories of dreams or imagined events.

The second important aspect is the question of whether the story is already concluded in the 'narrative past': the more emphasis there is on the process of remembering and its problems, the more likely it is that the 'past' story is not presented as con-

⁷⁸ This is also already in itself a gradable aspect because the links can be made more or less explicit in the text, and thus it can be easier or harder for the reader to establish the connection, and some texts are more open to different possibilities of linking actions than others.

⁷⁹ In *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), Monika Fludernik proposes an alternative way of looking at the concept of 'narrativity': for her, the crucial criterion is what she calls "experientiality", the evocation of an anthropomorphic centre of consciousness (cf. Fludernik 1996: 13). While this new conceptualization promises new insights into issues like the differentiation between fictional and non-fictional literature, it seems too broad for the purposes of this study. Wolf's model retains the more traditional criterion of a coherent plot, which offers points of contact with the concepts of narrative identity as they were introduced in chapter II.5.

cluded, but as continuing into the present. Stories which stage crises of memory often lay emphasis on presenting remembering as a mental activity which relates to actions and conflicts in the present, rather than 'recounting' events that lie in the past. In order to show the destructive potential of memory, the negative impact the 'past' may have on the present is then brought into view by at least partly foregrounding present action. The 'story' in the past thus appears as a construct that is still worked upon, rather than a given entity.

Thirdly, novels staging crises of memory often feature ambiguities or blanks. One kind of ambiguity that is especially frequent in such novels is ambiguity concerning temporal relations between different events that are depicted: while in a prototypically 'narrative' text chronology is unambiguous, novels featuring 'crises of memory' often include passages whose temporal relation to the preceding passage is obscure.⁸⁰ Similarly, causal relations between passages may be unclear, or there may be gaps which represent blanks in memory. Such ambiguities can signal that remembering is not always a straightforward process which tells me how I have become who I am now ("because a) happened and then caused b), I am now c"), but can be very muddled and disorienting.

However, the flouting of these three prototypical aspects of narrativity is in itself not yet sufficient to speak of a 'crisis of narrativity' in the novels concerned: why should the deviation from a prototype in itself constitute a crisis? As was shown in the introduction, the concept only makes sense if we can argue that there is some kind of problematic *development* which is brought to a head. Such a development comes into focus if we, like Wolf (cf. 2002: 28-29), consider narrativity a cognitive schema. This schema is applied by the reader in order to make sense of the text. A 'crisis' may be diagnosed if the text on the one hand prompts the application of the schema with the help of elements that *evoke* prototypical narrativity (e.g. by introducing a suspenseful action), but on the other hand also contains elements which resist or question the application of the schema. The act of reading is then informed by the desire to make the text 'more narrative', especially by constructing coherence.

The view of reading not as passive reception, but as an active process of construction which underlies this notion of a 'crisis of narrativity' is a basic tenet of cognitive narratology and a crucial point for the analysis of all the novels presented in this study. In this view, meaning is not 'inherent' in a text, waiting to be 'discovered', but is the result of "specific cognitive operations" (Ibsch 1990: 412) performed by the reader. In the act of reading, we draw upon both real-world and literary schemata (or 'frames') in

⁸⁰ This does not mean that prototypically narrative texts are always strictly chronological; rather, switches forward or backward in time are signalled so the reader knows how each passage relates to the preceding one.

order to make sense of the information conveyed by the text.⁸¹ Jonathan Culler has called this process 'naturalization': "to naturalize a text is to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible." (Culler 2002 [1975]: 162) The reader's desire to 'naturalize' texts forms part of the "fundamental paradox of literature":

we are attracted to literature because it is obviously something other than ordinary communication; its formal and fictional qualities bespeak a strangeness, a power, an organization, a permanence which is foreign to ordinary speech. Yet the urge to assimilate that power and permanence or to let that formal organization work upon us requires us to make literature into a communication, to reduce its strangeness, and to draw upon supplementary conventions which enable it, as we say, to speak to us. (Culler 2002 [1975]: 156-57)

Although the rules of ordinary communication need not apply to literary texts, we try to make them fit anyway, while at the same time the most fascinating and interesting parts of a text are often those which are hard to assimilate.

'Crises of narrativity' involve a particular variety of this confrontation between the reader's desire for coherence and the applicability of models and a text's more or less fragmented and ambiguous dispensing of information.⁸² The scales are tipped to one side: novels that evoke these crises have passages which (at least initially) resist assimilation. As we will see, however, this resistance to assimilation can be of varying extent and degree, and its outcome is not determined from the beginning: assimilation may ultimately become possible. Texts featuring crises of narrativity thus to a particularly high degree require the reader's active participation: the reader desires to construct the text as a prototypical narrative, but is (temporarily or even ultimately) thwarted in this endeavour.

In order to analyse how this process works in specific novels, a second basic tenet of cognitive narratology is useful: the linear, but at the same time multidirectional

⁸¹ The terms 'schema' and 'frame' are commonly used interchangeably, cf. e.g. Riehl (2004 [1998]: 594), Fludernik (2003: 244). Whereas 'schema' appears to be the preferred term in psychological studies of memory (cf. e.g. Bartlett 1977 [1932], Neisser 1998), 'frame' is more frequently used in the context of cognitive narratology (cf. e.g. Jahn 1997). This preference in usage is reflected in the way the terms are used in this study, 'frame' appearing more often in the context of making sense of literary texts.

⁸² That all texts feature some gaps and ambiguities, as information is necessarily selective and never comprehensive, does not mean that these gaps and ambiguities always effect incoherences. Very often, a text's 'blanks', as Wolfgang Iser (1980 [1976]), another godfather of cognitive narratology, has called these indeterminate aspects, are easy to fill in with the help of frames – a process the reader is not even conscious of as long as it presents no problems. However, some texts contain blanks which are hard to fill, and which may even draw the reader's attention to the fact that there are different possible ways of filling them and that the coherence created by filling them is his or her own construction.

character of reading.⁸³ Reading is a linear process in that we take in the words sentence for sentence, in the order that is prescribed by the author. The order in which information is distributed has an important impact on the interpretation of the text.⁸⁴ Phenomena that have been introduced by psychologists concerned with human perception can also be applied to the reading of literary texts: on the basis of our first impressions, we select frames for interpretations: "The reader 'expects' the literary text to be as consistent and as coherent as possible. New material is assimilated as well as it can be into material read earlier." (Perry 1979: 49-50) As in the psychology of perception, the notion of a 'primacy effect' also applies: information that is presented first determines the schemata we first select and thus tend to persist (cf. *ibid.*: 53).

On the other hand, we also read 'backward' because we constantly re-assess information received earlier on in the light of new information. In extreme cases, we do not just modify initially selected frames but replace them altogether, thus also changing our interpretation of previous passages. This is the so-called 'recency effect' (cf. *ibid.*: 60). The act of reading thus involves the same basic processes of accommodation and assimilation as the construction of memory and identity (cf. chapter II.1). It weaves back and forth; it is characterized by recourse to previous information to understand the currently read passages as well as forming expectations about what is still to come. Conversely, current information may be used to reinterpret old information (cf. Iser 1980 [1976]: 111).⁸⁵ Iser emphasizes that the movement through the text and the dynamic relation between text and reader is a characteristic of all literary texts; however, I would argue that it can be more or less conspicuous and that one especially effective way of staging crises of memory in novels is to bring this dynamic relationship to the centre of attention. In these novels, the sense-making that is entailed by the act of reading is not an easy, almost unconscious by-product. Not only do they feature 'crises of narrativity' by both evoking and questioning or even rejecting prototypical coherent patterns, but they make the desire for a coherent pattern itself an issue.

Of what kind, then, are the schemata or frames that play the most important roles in novels staging crises of memory? As the number of relevant frames is potentially

⁸³ For a comprehensive theory of the act of reading, cf. Iser (1980 [1976]). For a concise introduction to the basics of cognitive narratology, cf. Zerweck (2002).

⁸⁴ Menckhem Perry (1979) gives a detailed account of the way in which "[t]he ordering and distribution of the elements in a text may exercise considerable influence on the nature, not only of the reading process, but of the resultant whole as well" (Perry 1079: 35). He also provides a practical example for the interpretive uses of this "theory of literary dynamics" (*ibid.*) by applying them in an analysis of William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily".

⁸⁵ Iser (1980 [1976]: 111) calls this the "reader's position [...] at the point of intersection between retention [moving back to connect the present moment of reading with a previous one] and protension [building expectations of what is to come]".

endless, concrete examples will be reserved for the analysis of the individual novels. However, there are a few general aspects that need to be considered. First of all, it is important to realize that both real-world and literary frames are involved. Real-world frames that are pertinent to the present purposes include, for example, the ideas we have about 'normal' identity formation and processes of remembering in the real world, which were discussed in the previous chapter. In assessing the representation of the characters' memories, we also, for example, apply notions of what should be seen as 'sane' or 'insane' behaviour, which emotional reactions should be expected in particular situations and so on.⁸⁶ Another real-world paradigm that is highly relevant to the novels analysed in this study involves the ideas we have about what constitutes a coherent and believable life story in the real world, i.e. the narrative schemata that were introduced in the last chapter.

While the importance of our ideas about memory and identity in the world outside of the literary text is probably immediately obvious to most people's minds, the significance of literary frames should by no means be underestimated. How we read the staging of memory in a novel is not just determined by our ideas of how remembering works in the 'real' world, but also by our expectations regarding the way in which novels represent this process. One case in point is the idea of 'realism' itself: what we consider 'life-like' in a novel depends just as much on a long literary tradition which has developed a whole catalogue of forms and conventions as on our real-world experience.⁸⁷ Novels staging the process of remembering do so in the context of a tradition which has developed a number of techniques and models we associate with a 'realistic' representation of memory. Moreover, genre conventions have a strong influence on the way we read a text: elements that would seem ludicrous in a historical novel, for example, are perfectly acceptable in a science fiction story. In turn, if a text exhibits features that we associate with detective stories, we automatically start looking for clues that fit into the final solution we assume will be offered.

It is not always easy or even possible to distinguish between frames that have been shaped by literary convention and those that determine expectations about the 'real world'. For example, should the expectation that a remembering subject has a good overview of his or her life and, while he or she may not remember every detail of the past, is able to give an accurate and coherent account of the important events, be considered to originate with real-world or with literary frames? The notion that a remem-

⁸⁶ For a groundbreaking article on the impact of real-world as well as literary frames on reading literary characters, cf. Grabes (1978).

⁸⁷ This point becomes immediately apparent if, to name but one example, we compare a 'realistic' dialogue involving 'oral' elements in a novel with a written record of an actual conversation, as linguists would use it: the discrepancies are striking. For a comprehensive survey of the definition and the attributes of realism, cf. Zerweck (2001, especially 19-47).

bering subject should be able to provide reliable information about all important aspects of his or her own life story is certainly a convention of autobiographical writing; but is it a convention in autobiographical writing because this is what we expect of people in real life, or have expectations in real life been shaped by the conventions of autobiographical writing? It would be far beyond the scope of the present study to provide answers to these questions. However, the idea that we not only use real-world schemata in order to make sense of literary texts, but that the process may also work the other way round, that we use schemata developed in fiction in order to make sense of the 'real world' and our lives, suggests that the representation of crises of memory may also have an impact on the way in which we see memory and identity outside of the novel: it may lead us to perceive phenomena in a different light, or to reflect on issues which we never before thought to question.

In order to investigate the ways in which the contemporary novels analysed in this study make use of both real-world and literary frames in their stagings of crises on the level of form as well as on the level of content, it is first of all important to take a close look at the foils with which these novels engage and against which they position themselves. In the following, the question will be pursued what means have been traditionally employed in the novel for the staging of memory processes. Some relations between the 'building blocks' of narrative and processes of perceiving and remembering appear almost as natural: the question of narrative perspective, for example, corresponds with questions about subjectivity, while narrative time structures relate to different modes of temporal experience. However, there is no direct correspondence of form and function; each segment of the narrative has a range of possible functions. The identification of such forms for the staging of memory is a prerequisite for identifying points at which narratives depart from established patterns and thus represent crises of memory with the help of crises of form. The following overview of the narrative building blocks involved in the representation and reading of memory processes will consider some of the most obvious points at which contemporary novels often depart from conventional patterns. The concrete functions of these deviations, and the interplay between convention and experiment in general, however, are different in each novel and will thus be the subject of chapters V.1 to V.4, which present detailed analyses of the individual works.

Another crucial objective of the following sections is to introduce a narratological terminology which will aid a detailed and precise analysis of textual features and their effects. Where necessary, new terms are introduced to refer to important phenomena. Moreover, some of the existing categories will be modified or rephrased if they appear inadequate in the light of this study's horizon of interest. In accordance with the cognitive narratological focus presented above, categories originally introduced in the context of 'classical' structuralist narratology are understood not as features 'inherent'

in the text, but as the results of a reading process.⁸⁸ How do we know, for example, that there has been a shift from one time level to another in the text, or that we all of a sudden see the action of the novel through a character's eyes instead of the narrator's? Instead of merely regarding these phenomena as objective features of the text, I am, in my readings of the novels, going to consider how textual features prompt readers to infer such shifts in temporal structure or focalization in order to make sense of an otherwise incoherent or puzzling passage. Special attention will be paid to cases in which ambiguities prevail, so that different readings suggest themselves.

Since most novels include some instance of remembering, it seems advisable to introduce a distinction between those novels which include memory as a theme and those which foreground the process of remembering itself. This study therefore proposes to distinguish between 'tales of memory', which present events as if they were told in retrospect by a narrator or character (i.e. virtually all first-person/homodiegetic narratives) and 'tales about memory', in which remembering is not only a main theme but also *staged as a process* throughout the text.⁸⁹ Tales about memory usually contain a large number of elements pertaining to memory and the act of remembering, which can be labelled 'mnestic' elements – for example, shifts from the level of the present to the level of the past and back, instances of focalization which can be linked to the act of remembering, connections between memory and the representation of space and so forth.⁹⁰

There are two aspects that constitute the 'basic pillars' for the staging of autobiographical memory: firstly, there are at least two different time levels (a 'past' that is remembered and a 'present' in which an act of remembering occurs)⁹¹, and secondly,

⁸⁸ For a condensed account of the development 'from structuralist narratology to postclassical narrative theory' cf. A.Nünning/V.Nünning (2002b).

⁸⁹ This distinction is a modification of a concept introduced by A.A. Mendilow (cf. 1952: 16), who differentiates between 'tales of time' and 'tales about time'. Paul Ricoeur also picks up Mendilow's concept: "All fictional narratives are 'tales of time' inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time. However only a few are 'tales about time' inasmuch as in them it is the very experience of time that is at stake in these structural transformations." (Ricoeur 1985 [1984]: 101) Michael Basseler and I (2005) have termed the quality which characterizes tales about memory 'Erinnerungshafgkeit' – however, the term does not translate well into English. Instead, I will refer to a novel's 'mnestic' elements, i.e. elements pertaining to memory and the act of remembering.

⁹⁰ The distinction between 'tales about memory' and 'tales of memory' does not aim at establishing a genre, as Neumann's 'fictions of memory' does, but instead is intended to emphasize the idea of gradable differences in the representation of memory in novels.

⁹¹ This time level of the 'present' does not necessarily have to be the present for the novel as a whole; it just has to be the present with regard to the act of remembering.

we are allowed an inside view of the remembering character's mind while the process is at work: we are allowed to share not only the content of the memories, but also the subjective experience of remembering. The two aspects are closely connected in that the 'past' is represented as mediated through the consciousness of a character on the time level of the 'present'. The following subchapters will introduce a range of the most important mnestic elements which can be produced by particular techniques for representing time, consciousness, space and action. They will also specify the range of functions these elements can fulfil in tales about memory – and in particular in those about crises of memory.⁹²

⁹² The findings in the following chapters are partly based on the article I wrote together with Michael Basseler (Basseler/Birke 2005).

1. The Complex Relations of Past and Present: Staging Crises of Memory by Means of the Representation of Time

The representation of time plays a key role in the narrative staging of memory and its crises. Above, it was explained that in order to show memory at work instead of merely commenting on it, a narrative structure with at least two time levels is needed as a basic building block. The systematic analysis of these levels and their interplay is facilitated by the categories Gérard Genette (1983 [1972]) developed for the description of temporal structure in narratives.⁹³ The three main categories Genette (1983 [1972]: 35) distinguishes with respect to temporal structures in narratives – order, duration and frequency – all involve issues that are pertinent to the purposes of this study.⁹⁴

'Order', the first and (for my purposes) most important category, refers to the relation between a 'natural' chronology of events that can be reconstructed ('story time') and the sequence in which they are narrated in the text ('discourse time'). The representation of memory processes usually involves 'analepses' (Genette 1983 [1972]: 40): 'jumps' backward in time, so that events which, according to their position in story time, already happened earlier are narrated later. This deviation from a strictly chronological representation produces two time levels, firstly the "temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined as such" (ibid.: 48), which Genette refers to as the 'first narrative', and secondly the level of the past formed by the analepsis. Analepsis is found in most narratives; what is typical of tales about memory, however, is that movements from one time level to the other are frequent, so that we are continually reminded of the mnemonic qualities of the events contained in the analepses. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50), for example, the level of the first narrative is constantly evoked with the help of explicit comments or rhetoric of memory: the autodiegetic narrator thus continually highlights the mnemonic qualities of his account. The act of remembering appears as a process which slowly unfolds, and the development of this process structures the narration itself: "Looking back [...] into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves

⁹³ Genette's system proceeded from the studies of Günther Müller (1968) and Eberhard Lämmert (1955). It was Müller who introduced the distinction between *Erzählzeit* (discourse time) and *erzählte Zeit* (story time), while Lämmert analysed anachronic structures in narrative and their functions. Genette, however, is generally credited with developing a systematic and comprehensive framework incorporating these ideas.

⁹⁴ It is interesting that Genette bases his work on the structural analysis of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), a novel which is famous for prominently featuring the depiction of memory processes. Although Genette does not say much about the relevance of his findings to the study of the thematic focus of memory, it seems that his choice is no coincidence, because the depiction of memory processes calls for an especially complex time structure.

from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see." (DC 61) It is the depiction of the act of remembering itself that is thus drawn into the centre of attention.

One central criterion Genette introduces to describe analepses more precisely is that of 'reach', which refers to the temporal distance between "the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony" and the moment in the story at which the anachrony is set (Genette 1983 [1972]: 48). Analepses which reach back to a time before the beginning of the first narrative are termed 'external', analepses which stay within the time frame of the first narrative are 'internal' (cf. ibid.: 49). Often, tales about memory include both internal and external analepses; however, unless the first narrative spans a period of at least a few years, the kind of analepsis that is the most interesting in the context of staging of memory is external analepsis, because the longer distance in time between the moment of narration and the moment that is remembered highlights the potential gap between present and past experience and thus poses the question of the relation between the two.

In classical 'tales about memory' like *David Copperfield*, which are modelled on non-fictional autobiographies, the analeptic passages among themselves mostly follow the chronological order of 'story time'. This adherence to chronology is especially suited to representing the successful retrospective construction of a life story, in which a remembering self's current position and character are seen as the outcome of a more or less coherent development.⁹⁵ In these cases, remembering appears as an effective tool that can be employed to explain the self to itself and others. Novels in the twentieth century, however, have often departed from this chronological pattern, featuring complex and sometimes confusing temporal structures. In some cases, these deviations from chronology mostly have the function of staging autobiographical memory not as voluntary and ordered reminiscence, but as involuntary recollection which is often shown to be triggered by external cues.⁹⁶ In contemporary novels like those analysed in this study, they can contribute to the staging of crises of memory in that remembering is represented more like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle than like recounting a well-structured story. The construction of the life story is thus shown to be in process

⁹⁵ For an excellent study of the development and the typical features of nineteenth-century fictional autobiographies, cf. Löschnigg (2006).

⁹⁶ One particularly prominent example for memory triggered by sensory experience is the already mentioned famous madeleine episode in the first book of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which the taste of cake that is dipped into tea transports the narrator back into his childhood. However, Proust mainly adheres to 'classical' chronology; in his analepses, the past is mainly told in linear sequence. In contrast, novels like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (cf. chapter IV.2) dispense with a chronological survey of the past and instead focus on the present state of the remembering self and the associations triggering his or her memories of the past.

(and often also in jeopardy) rather than already finished; moreover, causality may not always be represented as unidirectional, as the jumble of time levels can serve to show how the present may influence the past just as the past influences the present. Deviations from chronological order among the analepses can in some cases effect 'crises of narrativity': two of Wolf's criteria for prototypical narrativity, namely the impression that the story is already concluded on the level of the narrative present and the requirement of unambiguous coherences, are at stake.

Texts featuring instances of complex or ambiguous sequences make it easier than their 'well-ordered' counterparts to see how temporal structure is not a self-explanatory characteristic of a text, but needs to be established by the reader, who interprets textual signals (cf. also Herman 2002: 211). The assigning of chronological patterns, the distilling of a story time out of the jumble which the discourse time may present is part of the reader's attempt to naturalize a text. These attempts may run smoothly (as in the case of well-ordered texts), but they may also be rendered difficult or even impossible by complex time structures which make passages hard to place with regard to chronology, or by 'achronies', i.e. passages to which no place in the chronology of 'story time' can be assigned (cf. Genette 1983 [1972]: 84). Neither complex time structures nor achronies necessarily ultimately frustrate the endeavour to naturalize a text: they may present a challenge, but in many cases the texts allow a coherent and non-ambiguous reading of chronology, if only the reader goes through the trouble of trying to assemble it. In these cases, passages which are first read as achronies can be integrated into a chronology once the reader has accumulated more information.⁹⁷ However, when achronies are first introduced, they always have a potential for destabilization, as they (at least for a while) frustrate the reader's attempts to establish a coherent chronology.

The cognitive narratological notion of chronology as the result of naturalization draws attention to the textual signals the reader can fall back on. Temporal shifts can be signalled by explicit markers (i.e. "I remember when..." or even "it was the night before my 18th birthday when..."), changes in focalization (see chapter 3.2 below), and also by shifts in the narrative tense. In many texts, transitions from one time level to another are signalled by the switch from present to past tense (or the other way round). In texts where this pattern is mainly adhered to (especially in autodiegetic texts, the present tense is often used for the level of a narrative 'present', on which the

⁹⁷ There are also achronies which present no challenge to chronology as such because they deal with events that need not necessarily be assigned a specific point in time. David Herman distinguishes "modes of narration that inexactly code the temporal position of events through partial or multiple coding" and "modes of narration that code the temporal position of events as intrinsically inexact" (Herman 2002: 219). Instances of the latter are, for example, the 'iterative' passages introduced below, which present an event not as single, but as habitually returning.

act of remembering takes place, while the past tense refers to the remembered 'past'), deviations from the pattern can be especially effective and point to particularly close or complex relations between the time levels (as is the case, for example, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Guy Burt's *The Dandelion Clock*).

The fact that there are a number of contemporary novels which appear to resist the imposition of a clear chronological pattern altogether raises the question of whether Genette's system for analysing order in narrative is based on an outdated model of temporal experience and is thus rendered useless for the analysis of some contemporary works. Ursula Heise, whose study *Chronoschisms* (1997) deals with time and narrative in postmodern novels, proposes that

the narrative organization of postmodern novels reconceives temporality regardless of whether their subject matter involves explicit history or not, and [...] these formal strategies form part of a restructuration of time that goes far beyond literature and affects a broad range of cultural and social practices. (Heise 1997: 2-3)

A similar point is made by Elizabeth D. Ermarth (1992: 14), who argues that in the postmodern novel, chronological principles are abandoned in favour of 'rhythmic time', which she characterizes as synchronic, non-linear and tending towards the incoherent (cf. also A. Nünning 2002b: 255). Does this mean, then, that the Genetian categories of order should be discarded, because contemporary novels follow completely different patterns?

The analyses of the novels presented in this study will make a case against abandoning these categories altogether, even for those works that depart from conventional temporal patterns. Although admittedly Genette's categories are hard or even impossible to apply to some of those postmodern novels which appear to have abandoned chronology and coherence altogether, I find them highly relevant to most of those contemporary works which feature a mixture of 'realistic' and 'experimental' elements (cf. Zerweck 2001), and which far outnumber extreme examples such as the postmodernist texts by Christine Brooke-Rose or Alain Robbe-Grillet analysed by Heise. I would thus follow Nünning's view, who argues that contemporary novels do not simply replace the notion of linear, chronological 'historical' time favoured in the nineteenth century by a new model of time, but simultaneously present or allude to different models (cf. A. Nünning 2002b: 397). Deviations from conventional patterns of temporal order may in some novels signal the questioning or rejecting of traditional notions of chronology and causality; however, by prompting the reader to naturalize the text by trying to fit these passages into a chronology, they may also serve to show just how great our desire for chronological order and clear causalities really is. With the help of temporal structures contributing to a crisis of narrativity, these novels thus make the crisis of memory part of the reading experience: like the characters in the novels, the reader also tries to piece together disparate time levels in order to construct a coherent whole.

While the category of order is a very important concept for the staging of crises of memory, the other two categories yield less central, but also interesting aspects. Duration, the second category Genette proposes, is concerned with the quantitative relations between discourse time and story time, or the time span that is narrated and the number of pages needed to cover this time span. The basic types of duration (cf. Genette 1983 [1972]: 94), i.e. summary (story time > discourse time), stretch (story time < discourse time),⁹⁸ pause (discourse time continues, story time stands still, e.g. if the narrator comments on narrated events), ellipsis (events are left out completely) and scene (story time = discourse time, e.g. in quoted dialogue), can be employed for the staging of memory in a variety of different ways. First and foremost, duration can be used to signal the subjective relevance of memory: we expect that key events which are of special relevance to the individual are told in detail, whereas less important time spans may be summarized or even left out. This usage of the basic types of duration mirrors the real-world expectation that memories of events that are important to us are especially detailed and accurate, while memories of everyday events are more likely to be come hazy, blurred or be completely forgotten. Deviations from this pattern can signal crises of memory: for example, ellipses of important events may in some cases point to the fact that the character is suppressing a pain- or shameful memory. Obvious discrepancies between the apparent significance of an event and the duration of its narrative representation may serve to point to fissures in a character's attempt to assemble his or her memories into a coherent life story – they can be signals of dys- or hypermaritavia.

Like order and duration, the third category Genette suggests for an analysis of narrative time structure, frequency, also concerns the way in which a character's subjective experience of time is staged. Frequency pertains to the number of times a certain event is narrated. There are three basic types of relation (cf. Genette 1983 [1972]: 114–16): singulative narrative (telling once what happened once, or *n* times what happened *n* times), repeating narrative (telling *n* times what happened once) and iterative narrative (telling once what happened *n* times). As singulative narrative constitutes the narrative norm (cf. Toolan 1988: 61), we are bound to look for explanations if we encounter the repeating mode. In stagings of memory, repeated episodes can often be interpreted as pointing to the traumatic character of memories, which are reproduced time and again (cf. Neumann 2005: 201). Repeating narrative may also be used to stage the same memory twice or more often, but with changed details, thus pointing to

⁹⁸ Strictly speaking, the concept of 'stretch' does not originate with Genette, who argues that passages that may appear as if they involved stretches should usually be read as descriptive pauses (cf. Genette 1983 [1972]: 95). It is, however, included in some introductions to narrative theory (cf. for example V. Nünning/A. Nünning 2004b: 127), and as the idea of a genuine time stretch in narrative definitely appears possible, even if it is not used very often, it shall also be included here.

the unreliability and malleability of memories, i.e. the problem of accuracy that was discussed in the last chapter. While repeating narrative is mainly used for extraordinary events, the use of the iterative signals the opposite: it "narrates [...] not what happened but what used to happen [...], regularly, ritually, every day, or every Sunday, or every Saturday, etc." (Genette 1983 [1972]: 117–18). The iterative is thus the perfect mode for staging generic recollective memory. Iterative and singulative are not always clearly distinguishable, and what starts out as an iterative passage often turns into a singulative account. Moreover, singulative accounts may be "contaminated by the iterative", which "wipes out all demarcation" between similar events (ibid.: 121). The iterative can thus be used to show the borders where memory becomes less specific and more general, representing the status of generic recollective memory as situated on the border between episodic and semantic memory. This kind of usage can raise doubts about the unique and individual character of a particular memory that is recounted.

While in traditional 'tales about memory' such as Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and (arguably) also their modernist counterparts, the representation of temporal experience mainly conveys the impression that memory may at times be hard to get hold of but is on the whole reliable, the relations between past and present are frequently presented as much less stable in contemporary works. The notion of a 'crisis of memory', however, would be very hard to convey just on the basis of temporal structure. A second element that is crucial for the staging of memory as well as of its crises is the narrative representation of consciousness. Without it, there could be no turn from the narrative presentation of time as change and development into a presentation of the subjective experience of time, and of the self's capacity to project into the past and the future.