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Literature, Interlingual and Cultural Translation, and Mnemonic Migration: Introduction

Olga Grjasnowa's German-language novel *All Russians Love Birch Trees* (2012) tells the story of the interpreter Mascha from a Russian-Jewish migrant background, who loses her German boyfriend to a sports accident and travels to Israel, where she falls in love with a Palestinian woman. Mascha's Jewish background and her move to Israel evoke the difficult legacies of Nazism and the Holocaust in Germany, and the occupation of Palestinian territories in the post-war years. But this amalgamation of the past and present familiar in Germany, in the linguistic and cultural context of the novel, is unhinged by an additional history that is brought into the equation through Mascha's personal experience as a witness to ethnic cleansing in Baku in 1990 during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and her subsequent journey as a refugee to Germany. There she is expected to play the role of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, which contradicts her "explicitly non-Jewish and non-German experiences" (Braese 2014, 289) in Baku. The travel from the personal and collective memories of Azerbaijan, where her Jewish background and her grandmother's flight from the Nazis had been of minor significance, into a social framework of memory in which the Holocaust is central, alienates her from her new place of residence. Grjasnowa's novel is part of the rapidly growing body of literature in various languages across Europe, where translingual authors who write in their second or third language¹ stage encounters between the historical imaginaries prevalent in their host country and those that they bring with themselves from their country of origin. This is one of the phenomena in contemporary literature that we call *mnemonic migration*.

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1 On translingual authors as those who write in one of their additional languages, see Kellman 2003, Kellman and Lvovich 2022.

We understand *mnemonic migration* as the movement of memories across mnemonic borders through the medium of literature (Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčák 2022; Ortner 2022). Literature facilitates mnemonic migration when it enables memories and the cultural forms in which they are expressed to travel into new “social frameworks of memory” [*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*] (Halbwachs 1925) and “media cultures” (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 10), meaning into the patterns and templates of representation that prevail in a given mnemonic community. Next to the concept of mnemonic migration in this volume, we propose to look at both interlingual and cultural translation as a “new model for conceptualising the transnational travel of memories that operates through transcultural memorial forms” (Laanes 2021, 43). Interlingual translation has always played an important role in the travel of memories. Literature has always been a transnational phenomenon that has reached audiences in different parts of the world through translation and disseminated historical imaginaries that are born in one specific language or in one cultural framework into others. Through intertextual relations with other texts from other languages and cultures literature has made stories, narrative patterns and tropes and motifs from one context travel into another and be transformed there (Erll 2019; Lachmann 1997, 2022). Interlingual translation and remediation have thus enabled the travel of stories about local histories for centuries. In this volume we focus on modern literature and the ways in which it facilitates the migration of memories. The works of postcolonial authors have brought colonial histories told from the perspective of the formerly colonised into major European languages, but there are also new ways in which stories about local histories travel in literature today. New waves of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants have had an impact on literary fields, sometimes generations later, when the children of the migrants start to write their stories. Additionally, as Rebecca Walkowitz has noted, many contemporary authors are “children of globalisation rather than colonisation [...] [who] have travelled among metropolitan centres for education and work” (2020, 323–324). Most of the contributions in this volume address authors who have a migration or refugee background, or texts that thematise migration in both a literal and a metaphorical sense.

Mnemonic migration

In her programmatic call for transcultural memory studies, Erll (2011b, 11) argues that cultural memory has always been constituted through movement.² Transcultural memory studies therefore explore “the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual ‘travels’ and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders” (Erll 2011b, 11). In response to the earlier nation-centred conceptualisations of cultural memory in the 1990s, many scholars have emphasised the fundamentally deterritorial nature of cultural memory that becomes visible through a transnational lens (De Cesary and Rigney 2014; Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017). Michael Rothberg has argued that all acts of memory are actually “knotted” independently of their national framing, meaning “rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialisation (whether at the local or national level) and identitarian reduction” (2010, 7).

The concept of *mnemonic migration* develops further the idea of travelling memory, which Astrid Erll describes as an “ongoing exchange of information between individuals and the motion between minds and media” (Erll 2011b, 12). Of the different dimensions of travelling memory that Erll elaborates on, two are especially important for the development of the concept of mnemonic migration. The first is that memory travels through migration, displacement, flight and travel of people, turning them into “carriers of memory” that diffuse “mnemonic media, contents, forms and practices across the globe” (Erll 2011b, 12). The second is that memories travel through media as “books, movies and TV disseminates the past across space” (Erll 2011b, 13). This could potentially create “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg 2004) as a way of adopting the experiences of others.

2 For transcultural and transnational memory studies, see Crownshaw 2013; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Bond and Rapson 2014; Bond, Craps and Vermeulen 2017. While “transcultural” and “transnational” are often used interchangeably in memory studies, De Cesari and Rigney (2014, 3–4) establish a slight difference between the two. While ‘transcultural’ sets the perspective for the travel and flows of memory, ‘transnational’ firstly stresses the entanglement of cultural practices with social formations and institutions, and secondly makes a case for the continuing importance of national borders in the movement of memory, and “frictions” between different scales of public remembering, whether local, national or global. Rothberg, for his part, defines transcultural memory as the “hybridization produced by the *layering* of historical legacies that occurs in the traversal of *cultural* borders, while transnational memory refers to the *scales* of remembrance that intersect in the crossing of *geo-political* borders” (Rothberg 2014, 130). For a comprehensive overview of the concept of transcultural memory, see Ortner and Sindbæk Andersen 2025.

The reason we propose mnemonic migration as the key concept in this volume is that the travel of memories and historical imaginaries in contemporary literature is increasingly linked to physical migration of people. There is a growing number of authors who have experience of migration; who might write not in their first language, but rather in their second or perhaps in their third; and who deal in their work with experiences of migration. The underlying idea behind the concept of mnemonic migration is then both to focus on how physical migration impacts the transnational circulation of memory in literature, and to widen our understanding of what happens in the process of migration. When people migrate to a new place, they enter not only a new political and cultural structure, but also a new social, cultural and political framework of memory (Halbwachs 1925; Rothberg 2014), and so they need to adjust their historical imaginaries, thereby perhaps also contesting and expanding the framework that they enter. Consequently, we are especially interested in the interplay between the dimension of people who function as “carriers of memory”, and literature as a medium of memory that re-presents migration into another social framework of memory and media culture. By writing about this experience and by addressing readers that are socialised in the mnemonic framework of the host countries, these writers contribute to disseminating “the past across space” (Erl 2011b, 13) through the medium of literature. However, *mnemonic migration* denotes not only how literature represents the memories of migrants, but also how these deterritorialised memories arrive at their point of destination, and how readers react to those memories.

In this volume, we examine how contemporary literature addresses specific historical legacies, juxtaposes them multidirectionally and disseminates them in the original form or through translation in different parts of the world and in various social contexts. We address both the literary representation of the encounters between different memories and the frameworks of memory (Ortner 2022), and the different memorial forms, narrative templates and tropes that facilitate the cultural translation of memories (Laanes 2021). This volume contributes to the exploration of literature not only as a medium of powerful affective and engaging representations of the past, but also as an agent in the form of a stepping stone, a transitory station, or a vehicle in the dynamic processes of the reproduction, re-thinking, remediation, redistribution, and movement of memory.

Why literature?

Before exploring the different ways in which we approach mnemonic migration and cultural translation in literature, a look at how literature has been theorised as a medium of cultural memory is in order. Since the boom of both public remem-

bering and memory studies in the 1990s, literature has been theorised as an important site for working through painful memories of violent histories in trauma studies and as a powerful medium of cultural memory for consolidating communities. Fiction was initially distrusted in the last decades of twentieth century as a medium for coming to terms with the Holocaust, for learning about it and commemorating it (Adorno 1977 [1951]; Langer 1991), and the emergence of witness testimonies in both factual and fictional form provoked heated debates about the adequacy of aesthetic and cultural media, but literature, with its experimental, self-reflexive and often modernist modes, became an important medium for representing events that seemed unrepresentable and for offering consolation, healing or at least symbolic retribution for the victims (Eaglestone 2020; Erll 2011a, 79).³

More recently, literary memory studies has widened its focus from the narratives of victimhood to those of different forms of perpetration, collaboration and implication (Rothberg 2019) in historical violence. Here literature likewise has an important role in offering an opportunity to learn from history by trying to understand how ordinary people become perpetrators in wars and state terror. The perpetrator narratives have been studied from the perspective of the different modes of identification that they solicit from the reader to fulfil ethically the function of facilitating historical reflection (McGlothlin 2016; Knittel 2019). In a movement away from the traumatic paradigm altogether, literary memory studies has also followed the call for attention to be shifted to the memories of hope that could work as a catalyst for new scenarios for the future (Rigney 2018; Sindbæk Andersen and Ortnér 2019). Amir Eshel believes literature could expand our “vocabularies, by probing the human ability to act, and by promoting reflection and debate” (2013, 4; see also Adelson 2013).

Pioneering cultural memory studies by scholars like Pierre Nora, and Jan and Aleida Assmann initially viewed literature as one of the powerful cultural media for shaping and consolidating the collective identities of different communities,⁴ but the work by Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll, among others, has pushed the interest in the field from the texts as “sites” of cultural memory to their dynamics, and to “the way texts give rise to commentaries, counter-narratives, translations into other languages, adaptations to other media, adaptations to other discursive genres, and even to particular actions on the part of individuals and groups” (Rigney 2008, 348–9, 345). This has encouraged researchers to scrutinise different ways in

3 The research on literature and trauma is enormous. For classical texts, see Caruth 1995, 1996; Felman and Laub 1992; for recent overviews, see Davis and Meretoja 2020; Kurtz 2018.

4 Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as the “body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (1995, 132).

which literary texts sustain, solidify, and perpetuate cultural memories through constant renewal, and also reshape and change them through “remediation”⁵ and “morphing” (Rigney 2008).

Rigney differentiates between five different functions of literature as a medium of cultural memory. It can pick up and remediate stories, figures and images, and because of its nature as a cultural and aesthetic medium it can give them a wider relevance by acting as a relay station for different memories (Rigney 2008, 351; 2012a, 25). Works of literature sometimes do not only relay a historical event or figure, but also bring them into public memory for the first time, thereby becoming a catalyst for relevant cultural memories. Rigney suggests that the creative arts have the ability to function as a “catalyst in creating new memories, supplementing what has been documented with imaginative power and creatively using cultural forms to generate vibrant (if not always literally true) stories that may then be picked up and reworked in other disciplines” (2021, 12). By catalysing or relaying cultural memories, a literary text functions as a stabiliser. It turns the memorial material into a monument, a representative part of cultural memory. A literary text can also itself be an object of recollection that is kept up to date through various remediations in different media by new generations. Finally, it can work to calibrate cultural memory as it critically revises its ways of imagining the past, not only through new remediations, but also through revision of canonical literary texts.⁶

The role of literature and other aesthetic media in bringing into public remembering the experiences of individuals and groups that have been silenced by the hegemonic discourses of cultural memory, and in offering counter-memories and alternative interpretations to those discourses, has been highlighted by many scholars in both trauma studies and cultural memory studies. Geoffrey Hartman has argued: “When art remains accessible, it provides a counterforce to manufactured and monolithic memory” (1995, 80). Aleida Assmann has suggested that “artistic creation plays an important part in the renewal of memory, in that it challenges the firmly drawn border between what is remembered and what forgotten, continually shifting it by means of surprising compositions” (2000, 27). It is enough here to think of the testimonial literature by the Holocaust survivors in

5 Following media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Erlil and Rigney understand remediation in memory studies as the use of stories, images and metaphors of the past present in earlier media in a new media form: “memorial media borrow from, incorporate, absorb, critique and refashion earlier memorial media” (2009, 5).

6 See also Rigney and Erlil (2006), who define the role of literature as “medium of remembrance”, “object of remembrance”, and “medium for observing the production of cultural memory”; for Erlil’s extensive work on literature’s “rhetoric of cultural memory”, see 2003, 2009 and 2011a.

the immediate post-war years in Europe (Rothberg 2009) or the “antagonistic mode” (Erll, 2011b, 159) of literary representation that is often encountered in feminist and postcolonial texts.

In arguing for “the agency of the aesthetic” (Rigney 2021), Rigney and Erll explore the specific aesthetic capacities of literature that enable it to fulfil its various functions in cultural memory and turn it into one of the most powerful media of memory. Alongside the wide mode of circulation that makes literature a good relay station, catalyst and stabiliser of cultural memories, Rigney also stresses what she calls the “stickiness” of the stories, figures and images of the past in literature: “Stories ‘stick’. They help make particular events *memorable* by figuring the past in a structured way that engages the sympathies of the reader or viewer” (Rigney 2008, 347; see also 2012a, 17; 2021, 14). Erll (2011a, 154) for her part has elaborated on the role of emplotment in making events memorable. Through the narrative devices of characterisation and focalisation, literature can create vivid characters, give closure to events (Rigney 2001, 13–58) and design an experiential and immersive mode of narration that engages the reader (Erll 2011a, 158; Rigney 2021, 15). Rigney (2012a, 34, 38) also stresses that it is not only the power of the seamless image of the past offered in literature that makes it powerful as a form of cultural memory, but sometimes also the unreconciled contradictions in the complex aesthetic structure that make literary texts procreative in cultural memory by provoking revisioning remediation and thereby boosting the dynamics of cultural memory.⁷ While these theoretisations in both trauma studies and cultural memory studies highlight the role of literature in working through traumas or in mediating memory, the ability of literature to enable mnemonic migration firstly by disseminating memories through interlingual and cultural translation and secondly by entering new mnemonic frameworks and being received by readers in that new memorial context, has not yet been fully explored.

Mnemonic migration: translation

Questions of the interlingual and cultural translation of memories have only belatedly moved into the focus of transcultural memory studies. Little thought was initially given to the fact that the texts, both fiction and witness testimonies, that were part of the memory boom in the second half of the twentieth century and that have come to be considered as the canon of Holocaust literature were originally written

7 Rigney defines procreativity as the capacity “to generate new versions in the form of other texts and other media” (2012, 12).

in different languages and owe their status as canonical texts to translation (Boase-Beier et al. 2017; Davies 2018). Bella Brodzki (2007) was one of the first to point to the role of translation in mourning and in the intergenerational transmission of memory, building on Walter Benjamin's understanding of translation as the transformative afterlife of texts. Susan Brownlie (2016) has brought various concepts from memory studies to bear on translation studies and has offered a framework for exploring the relevance of interlingual translation for various forms of memory of human rights. Angela Kershaw (2019) has studied the movement of literary memories of the Second World War from France to Britain in 1940–1960 from the combined perspective of memory studies and translation studies. Recent handbooks and comparative volumes testify to the vibrancy of the nexus of interlingual translation and cultural memory (Deane-Cox and Spiessens 2022; Jünke and Schyns 2023).

As these studies make clear, mnemonic migration is not exclusively a modern phenomenon. Literary texts have never stopped at linguistic, national or cultural borders, but have travelled into other languages and cultures in the original or in translation (Damrosch 2014). In that sense, the cultural memory held in literary texts as “portable monuments” (Rigney 2004) has always been “unbound” (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen 2016). By circulating their stories across linguistic and cultural boundaries among people who do not identify linguistically or culturally with their protagonists, literary texts have contributed to “defining and shifting those boundaries by creating the imaginative conditions for new affiliations with strangers and hence virtual mnemo-regions that transcend traditional solidarities” (Rigney 2022, 166; see also Rigney 2021, 15).

However, there have also always been real material, symbolic and cultural obstacles that literature has had to overcome in order to travel, and the borders between languages are only the most obvious of them. Literature as a global cultural medium is written in different languages and has to be translated in order to travel across the borders of linguistic communities. When it is translated, however, complex processes of linguistic and cultural domestication and foreignisation occur (Venuti 1998, 2013). The travel of memory in literature should consequently not be imagined as a smooth flow, because there are borders that exist, not only those crossed by translation, but also others that are established by the power structures and the symbolic and economic hierarchies of the world republic of letters (Casanova 2014; Rigney 2022, 164). These hierarchies mean that not all the texts that are important for a linguistic or national community for how they mediate cultural memory get translated or travel internationally. Conversely, some literary texts are “born translated” (Walkowitz 2015), as they are consciously written with multiple reading communities in mind so that they can travel, be read, and be un-

derstood outside of their linguistic community and their place of writing or publication.

But the concept of translation has also been used metaphorically in memory studies, in the sense of cultural translation, to explore what happens in the process of transnational travel of memories. Susannah Radstone and Rita Wilson have recently called on scholars “to conceive of memory’s migratory journeys as translations across and between the intersecting domains of time, place, language, the senses, culture, media, institutions, ideology, and politics” (2021, 6).⁸ Laanes (2021) has argued in favour of translation as a new model for conceiving the transnational travel of memories as it works through the transculturally shared memorial forms of narrative templates and schemata, tropes, and icons that facilitate the articulation, travel, and dissemination of cultural memories. As they are transculturally familiar, these memorial forms help make peripheral memories understandable in a new context. Rigney has shown how Walter Scott’s fiction developed a memorial form that became available through the widespread transnational circulation of Scott’s oeuvre for other cultural contexts to articulate their historical experiences because it

offered a model of remembrance for dealing with other events in which a comparable struggle between modernizers and traditionalists, or between intruders and natives, was played out. In the absence of many precedents at the time, the *Waverley* model worked as a catalyst for writing the story of other groups by providing a template for shaping national histories. [...] Scott’s narrative matrix proved to be as portable as the novels themselves. (2012a, 108)

Laanes (2021) has shown how war rape as a transcultural memorial form has been employed not only to articulate the local past, but also to make that local past understood transnationally because it is a form that is intelligible and familiar in many other contexts. Erll (2011a; 2019, 147–149; 2019) has specifically focused on how literary genres and literary narrative devices can boost the travel of memories into new contexts.

While the metaphor of cultural translation premised on the common-sense understanding of interlingual translation retains the idea of the locatedness of texts, culture and memories that are unidirectionally transposed from one distinct “language” or memory culture to another, the translation historian Kristin Dickinson has shown that translation has an omnidirectional “disorienting” potential that displaces the configuration of target and source and changes both the original

⁸ Radstone and Wilson urge us “to encompass those complex and multi-layered processes of parsing by means of which the unfamiliar and the familiar, the old home and the new are brought into conversation and connection” (2021, 1).

and the translation (2021; see also Laanes 2024). Dickinson's idea of translation is extremely useful for the study of mnemonic migration and the processes of vernacularisation of cultural memories in a new place, because it urges us to explore how travelling memories configure national frameworks of memory in places where they are adopted, and also how those memories themselves are reconfigured by these new encounters at their point of destination.

Mnemonic migration: reception

Although the focus in the past decade has been on the transcultural encounters of memories and their transnational mobility, Susannah Radstone has reminded us that both memory and theories of memory are always located, since they are born in a specific place, in a cultural and political context, and they are also “instantiated” in different other specific places in the course of their travels. When a memory's potential to travel is activated in a “memory event”, this event is experienced by a particular person who is always localised in a culture, “however hybridised, complex, multiform” (Radstone 2011, 118). Transnational memory studies should consequently explore the “locatedness of engagements with memories on the move, rather than with their ‘non-location’” and “attend to these processes of encountering, negotiation, reading, viewing and spectatorship through which memories are, if you like, *brought down to earth*” (Radstone 2011, 110–111). Indeed, as Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Tea Sindbaek Andersen and Astrid Erll put it, “successful memory transmission entails reception [...] For Transcultural memory to actually come into existence, deterritorialised transmission must be followed by localised reception” (2017, 3). Rothberg stresses in relation to post-migratory societies that the local should not be imagined as an organic community, but as “a locatedness expressed in the interplay of both diverse historical layers and legacies, and disparate scales and temporalities” (2014, 133). He argues that the memories that are brought into a society by communities of migrants from their culture of origin encounter the pre-existing frames of memory of the titular nation *in that place* and “jostle each other in an unsettled present” bringing about a “thickening”⁹ (Rothberg 2014, 125–127) of that culture and its frames of memory. Rothberg points out that migration always also means “immigration into the past” (2014, 123–125) of the host country and problematises the expectation that migrants

9 On “thickening” as becoming a “setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealisations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other”, see Aydemir and Rotas 2008, 7.

should be concerned with, for example, German history, while at the same time are excluded from this very past “because they are not ‘ethnically German’” (2014, 137). This case exemplifies the inevitable frictions that arise from migration between social frameworks of memory and highlights the difficulties of dissemination and reception that the term mnemonic migration addresses. As Radstone and Rothberg agree, a meaningful study of travelling memories needs to focus not only on the modes and modalities of travel, but most importantly on the “instantiation” of the memory that has travelled and the “thickening” of memorial cultures that together lead us to the renewed interest in the reception of literary texts.

Little can be said about mnemonic migration in literature without consideration of how literary texts that travel are “brought down to earth” and are read in a certain cultural context. Many scholars have pointed to the desideratum of the study of the reception of memory media in transnational memory studies: “no mediation of memory can have an impact on memory culture if it is not ‘received’ – seen, heard, used, appropriated, made sense of, taken as an inspiration – by a group of people” (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 3; see also Kansteiner 2002). Rigney has located the reasons for this desideratum in the tradition of literary studies, where for a long time “the unit of analysis has been the discrete text seen as the *terminus ad quem* of everything that came before with claims being made about the role of literature on the basis of readings of single works independent of their afterlife” (2012a, 19). Hence the traditional approach of close reading of literary texts can only make assumptions about how the texts work as media of cultural memories, but in order to explore truly the ways in which memories travel, we need to return to the question of reader response.

A number of ideas in trauma and cultural memory studies about how literature and other cultural media supposedly impact their audiences assume that the memories that are transmitted through these media are fixed and that “memory consumers” are somehow passive receivers of that given fixed meaning. However, as both the responses of readers and the observations of poststructuralist critics have shown “reception is an active process, which can produce diverse ‘readings’ or appropriations of the same message” (Hall 1980).¹⁰ A text does not contain one singular image of memory, but several possibilities for actualisation that the reader can choose between. The actualisation of a text is influenced among other things by cultural schemata constituted by the social and collective frameworks of memory that the readers participate in (Kansteiner 2002; Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen

¹⁰ For the reception studies we draw on, see Gadamer 1960; Fish 1980; Barthes 1990; Iser 1976, 1991.

and Wierød Borčák 2022; Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčák 2022). The knowledge, prejudices and values of the readers, and the multiple group identities they adhere to inevitably steer their interaction with and their response to a literary text. To understand the impact of transnationally circulated memory carriers, it is necessary to look at the “social and cultural patterns of thought” that determine the interpretative strategies (Fish 1980) that guide the memory consumers in their interpretation of a given literary text.

Wulf Kansteiner warns though that “it would be a ‘receptional fallacy’ to study reactions and memory negotiations among individuals or aggregations of individuals (for example, a group of viewers’ reactions to a film) and to draw from there conclusions about collective memories” (2002, 9). However, focus group interviews with lay readers, such as those undertaken and discussed by Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčák (2022), may help to define the *potential* of how a certain memory media may affect cultural memory, by investigating for example how the memories expressed in distinct texts are received in the experimental framework of specific groups of people who are embedded in, and presumably influenced by, the distinct national, generational and other contexts in which they were socialised. No reading can actualise all the potential meanings of a text. Each empirical reader composes their reading by choosing from among the several possible ways of actualising the text and for filling in “the gaps of indeterminacy” (Iser 1976, 282–283), and so it is of the utmost interest to explore whether and how the frameworks of memory determine the reader’s interpretation and to analyse the extent to which the memory of distinct events travels, and what arrives at the point of destination. Furthermore, as Welzer points out, “reception is not the final destination of the memory process, but can lead to further (individual and collective) productions” (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 6 in reference to Welzer 2010).

The structure of the volume

This volume addresses the multiple questions that rise from the discussion above. How does literature function as a vehicle of mnemonic migration? How does it disseminate historical imaginaries produced in different local or transnational contexts? What role does interlingual and cultural translation play in this dissemination? Which factors facilitate the travel of memories in literature and why? What is gained and lost on the way? What are the obstacles to that travel? How do we study and estimate the effects of that travel? How are memories received and “instantiated” by specific individuals and in new cultural contexts? How do they “thick-

en” memory cultures both at the point of destination and also at the origin of the travel?

Our volume on mnemonic migration and cultural translation in contemporary literature is divided into three parts that explore different aspects of mnemonic travel: multidirectional remembering and remediation in literature; travelling through interlingual and cultural translation; and the role of reception in mnemonic migration. In exploring these aspects of mnemonic migration and interlingual or cultural translation, we draw on lessons from the established fields of world literature studies, translation studies and reception studies, but also from the fields of transnational literature, migrant literature and multilingual literature. These fields do not always focus specifically on the issues of the circulation of cultural memory in literature, but they can be drawn on to explore those questions. The literatures and authors explored in this volume are mostly European with a particular focus on authors with Eastern, Central and South-Eastern European backgrounds, which reflects the regional research interest of the editors and authors of the volume. What is explored in this volume is thus primarily mnemonic migration within modern European literature. However, memory processes across Europe are inevitably and increasingly concerned with global and transcontinental issues such as slavery, colonialism and climate change. The issues we explore – the capacity of literature to transmit and share memory across cultural and political boundaries – are as relevant in literatures outside Europe as within it, as Hanna Teichler’s contribution in this volume lucidly testifies. Hence we hope that despite its regional limitations, this volume offers broader theoretical insights that will be helpful in studying the circulation of historical imaginaries in and between other literatures of the world.

I Travelling memories, multidirectional remembering, and remediation

The contributions in the first part of the volume engage with some of the most fruitful ideas in transnational memory studies of the past decade, such as multidirectional memory and the remediation of stories and texts across linguistic, national and cultural borders. Rothberg’s idea that “memory emerges from unexpected, multidirectional encounters – encounters between diverse pasts and a conflictual present, to be sure, but also between different agents or catalysts of memory” (2014, 9; 2009) has inspired various studies of how different histories of violence emerge together or intersect in literary texts, or how culturally and politically more “visible” memories are drawn upon to help to articulate publicly a cultural memory that is peripheral in a culture or in a public sphere. In literature,

the multidirectional encounters of memories are often staged through the remediation of earlier literary texts and the intertextual reworking of them in a new context (Erl1 2019). The contributions in this part of the volume take these ideas further by exploring how histories of refuge, migration, and exile “thicken” and complicate further the sites where the multidirectional encounters of memories happen.

Both of these ideas are dealt with in **Colin Davis**’s reading of Jorge Semprun’s play *The Return of Carola Näher*. Davis highlights both Semprun’s transnational background as a Spanish-French survivor of a Nazi camp, and the transnational trajectories of the protagonists of the play and the remediated texts that are chosen as its focus. The play features the German actress Carola Näher, who fled Nazi Germany to be killed in the Soviet state terror. It remediates Goethe’s play *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which Carola Näher had played in, and the remediation of Goethe’s work by Jewish intellectual Leon Blum in the context of German antisemitism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The remediative intertextual web of the play is anchored in the specific geolocality of a Soviet military cemetery near Buchenwald, where Semprun was held during the Second World War, and near Weimar, the cultural capital of German classicism. The territorial anchor and the choice of characters and texts to be remediated bring together multidirectionally not only the cultural heritage of the Greek myth and of German classicism and the histories of perpetration in Germany through antisemitism and the Nazi camps, but also the Soviet state terror and the contemporary atrocities of the Bosnian war that was raging at the time the play was premiered. Davis is interested in how the transmission of these memories after the death of the survivors is explored in Semprun through the figure of the ghosts who come to speak to one another and meld their memories together. Even if the dense layering of seemingly unrelated memories may appear to send a message of ubiquity and of the unbreakability of the circle of violence, the ghost from the future, who appears in the figure of a Bosnian Muslim, shows us the way towards how that circle of violence can be broken. Davis’s chapter implicitly questions the limits of multidirectionality and the reterritorialisation of transnational memory.

Rafael Baquero’s contribution focuses on the ways in which Max Aub’s literary oeuvre has belatedly gained prominence as a catalyst for reframing Francoism as part of the transnational history of European state terror in mid-twentieth-century Europe. Baquero highlights how the French-born Spanish author of German and French-Jewish descent, who was interned in a French concentration camp for his resistance to Franco and later escaped to Mexico, has been rediscovered, partly through contemporary literary remediations following the excavation in the 1990s of the memories of Francoist state terror in Spain, after he had written and published his work in exile many decades earlier. Baquero shows how Aub’s Jewish

background and his experiences in the French concentration camp let him draw multidirectionally on Holocaust memory to reinterpret Franco's regime not as a phenomenon that was specific to Spanish national history, but as a part of the wave of state terror in mid-twentieth-century Europe.

In her chapter on the transnational travel of the memories of the Holocaust through Anne Frank's diary and its remediations, **Unni Langås** explores both the trajectory of the diary into the canonical "site" of the transnational memory of the Holocaust, and its remediations in different national contexts in the US and in Norway in Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer* and Kristian Klausen's novel *Anne F*. Langås argues that Roth parodically reflects on the travel of the Holocaust through cultural media when he thematises the famous 1955 sentimental remediation of the diary on Broadway in his novel to draw attention to the post-war commercialisation of the Holocaust in the US and the negotiation of Frank's story as the core of the American-Jewish identity. In Langås's second case study, the story of Anne Frank is transposed to Norway and "brought down to earth" by being literally mapped onto the townscape of the small town of Drammen. Next to the role of geographical space in the mnemonic migration in *Anne F*, Klausen is, like Langås, interested in the materiality of objects, as the novel thematises the material production, survival, and travel of Anne Frank's diary.

Hanna Meretoja's chapter on Herta Müller's novel *The Hunger Angel* focuses on the ability of fiction to open up the past as a space of possibilities. Meretoja argues that the primary aim of reading fiction is not to give the reader the factual knowledge to "know" about a past reality that is distant to us, but to let them imagine that past world as a space of possibilities and ways to act that contributes both to understanding of that world and how it felt to live and act in it, and to our perception of our own present world as one that is pregnant with different choices that we make on a daily basis without necessarily being aware of them. In terms of mnemonic migration, Meretoja shows how an author from a German minority background moving from Romania to Germany as a refugee brought the memories of the collaboration of that minority with the Nazis and its repression by the Soviets into the German public sphere in her new host country, where what was previously her minority writing language was now the majority one.

II Multilingualism, interlingual and cultural translation

Part II of the volume elaborates on the questions of multilingualism, and the interlingual and cultural translation of memories. The first three contributions in this part explore the multiple roles of interlingual translation in the migratory context and the thematisation of linguistic differences; various forms of translation such

as self-translation and pseudo-translation in the work of translingual authors; and the role of multilingualism in highlighting the multiethnic and multireligious histories of many regions. They also show how the figure of the interlingual translator in the texts and films explored becomes a metaphor for the cultural translation of memories.

The chapters in Part II examine examines the cultural translation of memories and the role of transcultural memorial forms in that process by looking at literary genres as a vehicle for the cultural translation of memories that can boost the travel of those memories into new contexts (Erll 2011a, 147–149; 2019). This idea is based on an understanding of literary genres as fluid virtual phenomena that emerge from the process of what Wai Chee Dimock, drawing on Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, has termed “regenreing”, a constant “cumulative reuse, an alluvial process, sedimentary as well as migratory” (2007, 1380). The last two chapters in this part of the volume focus specifically on the ways in which literary genres and other genre-specific literary devices facilitate mnemonic migration, and the movement and cultural translation of memories across linguistic, national and cultural borders. We are interested here in how the reader's memory in literary genres as travelling sedimented media in the world republic of letters facilitates their engagement with culturally distant memories that are represented in that genre.

In her contribution **Una Tanović** is critical of the metaphorical use of the concept of translation for referring to transnational remembering in literature, and insists on the need to explore the role of the interlingual translation that is ubiquitous in situations of migration and take seriously the hard language barrier as a power differential that is at work in cases of asylum, refugeedom, and migration. Her chapter on the novel *Ukulele Jam* by the Bosnian-Danish author Alen Mešković addresses the key issue of the link between literature and mnemonic migration that is grounded in the refugee experience and the question of how memories of violent histories are brought to the new host country and how they are articulated in a new language and culture. She is interested in the ways in which linguistic difference and translation is thematised in the work of translingual authors who, as first generation migrants or refugees, write in their second or third language. Translingual writing is “at home” in a national literature because it uses the majority language, but Tanović shows that Mešković signals the translated origin of the text through the different literary practices of self-translation and pseudo-translation. In a certain sense, he writes originals in the target language. Tanović explores how Mešković is able to produce prosthetic memories of the Bosnian war for his Danish and international readers by foreignising the Danish original by giving the impression of the story unfolding in a language that is different both to its original Danish and to its possible translations into other languages.

Furthermore, Tanović shows that when the Danish novel is translated into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, it functions as a prothesis for the community fractured by the Yugoslav wars, leavening its phantom pain. By using literary practices of pseudo-translation, the novel gives the impression of taking place in the pre-war Serbo-Croatian language, a language that became extinct after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and that is different from contemporary Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. As such the novel helps to remember and mourn the lost community and lost language. Tanović shows that neither translation nor mnemonic migration is a one-way process in mediating traumatic memories of the Bosnian war across linguistic and national borders and social frameworks of memory, but that literature in its travel and translation experiences encounters that transform both the target and the source, or both the point of departure and the point of destination.

The article by **Damjan Božinović** and **Stijn Vervaeke** views translation as a practice of mnemonic migration and a metaphor for it. They first discuss a contemporary bilingual collection of poems by Norwegian authors about the Bosnian war that was prompted by encounters with Bosnian refugees in Norway and largely premediated by global mass-media images of the war. Božinović and Vervaeke show that not only the events of the war in Bosnia and their mediated response in Norway are enmeshed in this project of transnational solidarity, which addresses the implication of Europe in the Bosnian war, but earlier layers of mutual history such as literary and cultural contacts between Norway and socialist Yugoslavia are also involved, as are the Nazi occupation of Norway and the memory of Yugoslavian forced labour in the Norwegian Nazi camps. Next to the poetry project, this chapter also considers the figure of the war translator in the film *Quo vadis, Aida* by transnational Bosnian-German director Jasmila Žbanić, and explores the links between translation, witnessing, memory and migration. The authors show how the way that this transnationally-produced film highlights the paradoxical position of the translator as a survivor at the cost of others thanks to the very task of translation, and also as a witness, implicates its Western audiences in the Bosnian war not only by providing prosthetic memories of that war, but also by asking about the responsibility of the communities they are part of for how that war played out.

Mónika Dánél's article on Adam Bodor's oeuvre explores the ways in which multilingual novels dealing with language histories encrypt in themselves various histories and cultural memories. Bodor's novels engage imaginatively with the history of the multiethnic and multilingual region at the border zone between Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, which hosted not only the histories of those peoples, but also Jewish history and an Austro-Hungarian imperial presence. Danel shows how Bodor's way of featuring the names of characters that cannot be pronounced without an awareness of the other languages that are present in the

region, turns his readers into accented readers who become aware of the complicated histories of multiethnicity, religion and multilingualism by reading the novel.

Anja Tippner's contribution explores the migratory power of the family novel as a literary genre that serves to shape the memories of an author about their family according to literary convention, while at the same time also making those memories more understandable to culturally diverse audiences through the shared literary convention that is embodied in the conventional genre. Tippner argues that family novels by post-Soviet Jewish-German authors writing in German such as Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Marina Frenk do not so much deal with memories of Soviet Russia, as negotiate the identity and cultural alterity of the authors in their new migratory context in Germany, and the generational differences between the authors and their parents in adapting to the migratory setting. She also shows how these novels innovate the genre because the families they write about are fragmented not only by the pressure from the Soviet state on familial structures in the past, but also by the experience of migration that creates physical distances between family members and alienates the generations from one another. The texts also reframe the German memory culture in which Jewish-German life-writing is linked to the Holocaust, since in these texts the Holocaust is not central and is multidirectionally entangled with the Soviet experience.

Aigi Heero's chapter on Bosnian-German author Saša Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* deals with the child's point of view as a transcultural narrative device that helps to translate the memories of pre-war Bosnia under late socialism into the Germanophone literary and cultural space. Heero reads Stanišić in the context of the Eastern turn in German literature (Haines 2015) and compares his representational choices to those of the Jewish-German authors Wladimir Kaminer and Vladimir Vertlib. Heero draws on Rothberg's distinction between transnational and transcultural memory, where transnational designates the crossing of geopolitical borders and transcultural is the process of hybridisation in the encounter between different cultures (Rothberg 2014, 130), to illuminate how experiences from Bosnia travel to a German-speaking readership through literature that is written from a child's perspective, and also how the German-language cultural space is hybridised and "thickened" by these memories.

III Circulation, reception, and the protocols of reading

Part III of the volume studies mnemonic migration in the reception of literary texts, this time in terms of how those texts impact memory cultures. Recognising

that literature contributes to cultural memory only to the extent it is engaged with, read, viewed, visited, and elaborated on by real people (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 3), the articles ask how literary texts are received as media of cultural memory and remediated, and how their reception can be studied. They explore the “social life” of texts and turn new attention to the question of how to study literary reception in such a way that it could tell us more about how literature impacts cultural memory. The contributors to this volume have previously applied different methods of studying the reception of memory media, investigating literary analysis in academic circles, public reception in professional reviews, and the reception by lay readers, who have been studied through focus group interviews (Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčák 2022). The focus group interviews can give fascinating insights into how social frameworks of memories and personal experience influence the interpretation of texts that circulate as distant events. However, the focus group interviews are unable to predict the long-term influence of these books on readers and how they might influence cultural memory. Three contributions to this section of the volume consequently engage in a debate about the limits of how the reception of literature can be understood as a medium of memory.

In this section **Jessica Ortner** explores the work of Bosnian-German author Saša Stanišić and its reception as a process of the mnemonic migration of memories of the Bosnian war, using the method of focus group interviews with lay readers in three different European countries, Germany, Denmark and the UK. She shows that the capacity of the readers to connect to this distant narrative of war and refuge, which is obscured in its historical context by the perspective of the child used in the novel, is dependent both on the reader’s personal frames of reference from personal experience of other wars or trips to the former Yugoslavia, and on their national, generational and familial frameworks of memory. Drawing on Astrid Erll’s (2014) concept of the rhetoric of collective memory, Alison Landsberg’s (2004) concept of prosthetic memory, and Iser’s concept of “the gaps of indeterminacy” (1991), the article shows that the mode of memory transmission has different outcomes and depends on the ability of the reader to fill in the narrative gaps that are left by the naïve child narrator. Whereas this proves difficult for Western readers, the experiential “rhetoric of collective memory” that Stanišić uses in the text speaks directly to the memory of Bosnian readers, who have their own or familial memories of the Bosnian war. The article discusses the limits of prosthetic memory and argues that the readers’ frameworks of memories are decisive for their ability or willingness to become emotionally engaged with the memories transmitted in literary texts.

Anita Pluwak’s chapter on the memoirs of the wives and daughters of important Polish politicians is interested in how popular reception of these memoirs me-

diates the memory of the political upheaval under late socialism, in particular the Solidarity movement and subsequent martial law in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s, which are a major source of political polarisation in contemporary Poland. By looking at the reception of the texts in a popular Polish online forum over the past ten years, Pluwak shows how the afterlife of the texts has turned them into dynamic sites of negotiation about political and social issues in the past and in the present. Pluwak also argues that, contrary to the widespread dismissive stance taken towards the female celebrity memoir as a genre in professional literary criticism circles, the genre proves to be an extremely fruitful one for mediating memories of the past and for negotiating contemporary politics, gender roles and female political participation. Polish female celebrity memoirs modelled on the global narrative template of memoirs of famous first ladies are symptomatic of post-socialist society, the resurgence in it of traditional values, and its negotiation of the role of women as political agents. Even if professional critics tend to disregard this popular genre because of its arguably predictable function as a medium of memory and political contestation, Pluwak's research findings show a variegated response and fruitful negotiation of the burning political issues of Polish society in the social life and afterlife of literature.

Hanna Teicher offers a thoughtful analysis and discussion of the canonical theories of reading and asks if those theories also apply to reading as a process of mnemonic migration, when the potential travel of memory would be conditioned on the reader's ability to uncover vague and symbolically sophisticated mnemonic references that are highly dependent on an understanding of the cultural context. She takes as her case study the novel *The Dragonfly Sea* by Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor to show that some novels use the mnemonic strategy of what Teichler calls "mnemonic mannerism" in order to describe the sheer overabundance of mnemonic cues that cannot be picked up in their entirety by any single reader. This leads her to ponder the paradoxical question of whether the extraordinary and rich literary quality of such novels may actually result in a mnemonic blockage of the text and in the end prevent the migration of memory.

In implicit conversation with Teichler **Kaisa Kaakinen's** chapter argues in reference to Bosnian-American writer Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* that a novel presenting its readers with an overabundance of mnemonic cues does not need to lead to the failure of each singular reading process, but rather constitutes the very poetic principle of transnational historical narration that, through the sense of failure, signals the presence of differently situated reading positions towards the text. Kaakinen's contribution shows that when memories cross borders through literature, they should be understood as a movement of the local not to the transnational defined in universal terms, but to different localised contexts that cannot together be conceived of as a unified community. Kaakinen de-

scribes such novels as “born migrated” because they reveal an awareness of their historically differently-situated readers and so of their transnational context of reading.

In the final chapter **John Greaney** questions the idea of mnemonic migration in relation to what Roland Barthes has termed radically symbolic texts, which are those that do not close in on a story or setting as a specific signified, but are interested in the deferment of that story by the play of the signifier. As poststructuralist critics have reminded us, literary realism is a code of representation that does not possess a more direct form of referentiality than other forms of literature, and the historicist understanding of literature that the idea of mnemonic migration is based on may be applicable only for certain types of literature. Greaney asks what happens to mnemonic migration in radically symbolic texts, and by discussing examples of such texts by Samuel Beckett and a more recent text by Anna Burns, he explores how we can think of this kind of literature without reducing it through historicist modes of reading.

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