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What Literature Knows: An Introduction

The nexus of literature and knowledge is an underdetermined and capacious one. Both popular and culturally distinguished forms of literary writing exhibit a whole range of relations to knowledge landscapes, be they scientific, political, or administrative. Karl Richter, Jörg Schonert, and Michael Titzmann have distinguished four general types of relation between literature and knowledge: *first*, literature may *integrate bodies of knowledge* in order to *confirm, modify, or criticize* them. *Second*, literature may entertain fields of knowledge that scientific discourses have not taken up (yet). *Third*, literature may produce knowledge that is taken up and authorized later by academic discourses (e.g. psychoanalysis). And *fourth*, specialized bodies of knowledge might remain difficult to mediate or even inaccessible for literary writing (30). In all four types of relation literature functions as an ‘interdiscourse’ (Link, “Interdiscourse”) which may participate in and selectively connect other more specialized discursive formations.¹ The contributions to this volume address all four types of interconnection, and they all insist that literature’s interdiscursive relation with specific areas of knowledge is fundamentally twofold, involving both the level of content and the level of discursive form, to selectively tap bodies of knowledge for representation and to produce knowledge in its own right. The essays collected here trace what the Münster research training group on “Literary Form: History and Culture of Aesthetic Modelling” conceives of as the characteristic cultural work literary writing performs in differentiated social contexts: literary writing explores debates

1 Interdiscourses build on general categories (like freedom, equality, or progress), collective symbols (like machine, organism, train, or computer), myths and elementary narratives (e.g. of rise and fall). They serve to accentuate, discuss, and subjectivize dominant knowledges from specialized discourses. The awareness created in interdiscursive communication and reception processes for the operative moment of various kinds of knowledge production feeds these processes’ “generative intelligence,” i.e. their drive for new interlinkings (Link, “Interdiscourse”).

and articulates concrete perspectives and positions within complex knowledge cultures (Graduiertenkolleg Literarische Form 10).

Since literature's guiding epistemic value is not scientific truth or plausibility but a notion of truth that is built around historically shifting semantics from beauty to coherence and attraction, Jochen Hörisch describes literature as a 'dissident archive' which, as he explains, deserves to be taken seriously for providing a range of alternative perspectives to everyday and to disciplinary bodies of knowledge. Hörisch compares the cultural work literature performs to the playful switch of viewpoint required for the children's game of "I spy," which in German is more tellingly called "Ich sehe was, was Du nicht siehst [I can see something that you can't see]," building on the notion that different points of view may have access to a different range of perceptions and positions e.g. on illness, economics, legal rationale, individual or collective identities, political rhetorics, religious belief or the sciences (Hörisch 1–14). To those who value critique and processes of deliberation and understanding as much as accumulated stocks of facts and a metrics of social evaluation and control (Mau 1–22; Mack 1–18), words that "have savor" (M. Wood 9) may put into new perspective what we believe we know and return us, senses refreshed, to the conflictive plurality of human imaginations and cultural shapes that co-produce our own worlds (Bercovitch). The worlds that imaginary texts project thus entertain possibilities and alternative perspectives to be reckoned with in the academic articulation and public discussion of pertinent social issues. As Sheila Jasanoff shows in all her work on the co-production of scientific knowledge and political thought, the regulatory objectivity at work in the implementation of scientific knowledge, in the US in particular, deprives political and administrative action of a much-needed sensitivity to criticism (Jasanoff).

As Aleksandra Boss and Martin Klepper elaborate in their contribution to this volume on US-American mass cultural products of the 1930s, not only high-brow canonical writing, but also popular formats, which tend to reproduce cultural predilections and mores, enable audiences to understand what Jasanoff insists on considering: that (and how) knowledge is always embedded in both material and social forms.

With literary studies growing into cultural studies and with rising political encouragement of interdisciplinary projects, much work has been done in the past two decades on both the epistemological powers of literary

textuality and on the poetics of knowledge production. Literature and science, literature and the law, and literature and economics have become important fields of research, dedicated to exploring the multifaceted ‘co-production of the social order’ (Jasanoff). Equally hybrid transdisciplinary projects like narrative medicine and investigations into the power of literary discourses to reveal the relevance of implicit and affective dimensions in knowledge production thrive.

Historically, literature has often presented itself as a unique ‘stage’ (Merten, *Text-Theater*) for knowledge of the human being and has therefore also seen itself in competition with academic fields such as medicine, biology, or philosophy. The relationship of literature and institutionalized, official forms of knowledge is therefore a shifting and historically contingent one (Foucault): what has been academic knowledge in one age becomes relegated to a less official realm in the next. The belief in a God-given, beautiful order of nature, e.g., became an important topos of Romantic poetry at a time when emergent scientific fields shifted towards a much more secular understanding of the human environment (Merten, “Poetic Genres”).

From a systematic perspective, literature cultivates a “provocatively relaxed” relation to notions of truth in an exact or scientific sense (Hörisch 15; see also M. Wood 56–59), while the “imagined yet referentially salient worlds” (Felski 104) which literary writing draws us into familiarize the unfamiliar and estrange what is too close to home to grasp. Literary writing stages plausible, interesting, and productive – rather than scientifically true – insights about the socially situated human being in all its paradoxical implications *in* (and anachronistic resistance *against*) the quietly pervasive powers of natural, material, and social environments (see Garber; Mack; Link “Flexible Normalism”).

Let me mention two recent debates around educational policy in Germany to exemplify occasions calling for an intervention of literary and cultural studies voices of the kind this volume provides. When the German high school student Naina tweeted on Saturday January 10, 2015 that she was almost 18 and had no clue about taxes, rental or insurance contracts, but could easily interpret a poem in four languages, she received so many reactions that even the federal secretary of education, Johanna Wanka, felt the need to respond to the publicity stunt. The student’s tweet hit a nerve of a culture unsure of its educational values. Wanka appreciated that

the student had started the debate and expressed her support for teaching more practical skills in the country's schools. She added that it remained important to learn to interpret poems. Secretary Wanka did not elaborate on why reading and interpreting poems remained important, but from the perspective of this collection, the connection is easily made. Practices of close reading train modes of inquiry into language and its products, modes of paying attention to textual structures and historical contexts, ways of making sense, and strategies of interpretation that allow us to understand our own place in cultural traditions. These modes of inquiry might not come in 'handy' when we are confronted with tax laws or insurance contracts. They are likely to complicate things. While that might not be what we want when we seek to solve practical tasks at hand, there are countless daily scenarios – from traveling and participating in international tourism to the confrontation with disease and the hospital system, from the encounter with educational institutions and the banking system to casual encounters with people from backgrounds different from our own – which profit from such complication, as it helps us to understand how cultural discourses shape our everyday lives. From a historical perspective, an analysis of lyrical writing's relation to accounting, taxation, and contract law is also of interest as it fosters the articulation of the specificity of both as well as an illumination of their shared cultural context.

The long negotiations leading up to the position paper by the German Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities) on "Grand Societal Challenges as a Topic for Science Policy" in April 2015 are another case in point for the fraught relation between socially generated expectations and academic modes of knowledge production in the sciences and in the humanities. In an attempt to avoid purely solutionist versions of innovation, transformative research, and usability, the paper calls on the heterogeneous plurality of all academic disciplines to contribute their specific forms of expertise to the long-term negotiations of "grand social challenges" in such areas as demographic change, energy supply and distribution, health, migration and security politics, mobility and communication. None of these problematics are purely natural phenomena; all of them have constitutive – rather than ornamental – social, cultural, historical, medial, semantic, and ethical dimensions (see Rheinberger; Hörisch 10; M. Wood 61). The same is true for the paradigm of 'life' which currently generates a lot of mileage: even

in the era of the life sciences, ‘life’ in all its social, historical, and semantic specificities is not least a humanist and a literary field of interest (Garber 15–43; Ette). This volume helps to map out how the humanities and literary studies in particular have illuminating things to say about grand social issues which do not yield trivial or optional solutions: e.g. about othering processes and how they structure intersectional cultural conflicts, about experiencing what seems strange and strange experiences, about the relation between religious belief and moral integrity, about the cultural relevance of remembering and forgetting, about how ideologies of victory and victimization interact, about how frequently diagnosed diseases like depression, anorexia, ADS, or Alzheimer might illuminate the pathologies of an era, and about many other questions the natural sciences or daily party politics raise but do not address themselves (Hörisch 10–14; Kley, “Literary Knowledge” 158–161).

This volume seeks to shed light on two interrelated dimensions of the nexus between knowledge and literature. Arranged historically, its contributions address various forms of literary production from the early modern period to the present and investigate how each period’s historically specific literary mediality engages with concepts of knowledge and with questions concerning the interrelation of epistemology (both individual and collective), materiality, and representation (Horatschek, “Erfahrung”; “Inhabiting”). At the same time, the volume discusses literature as dissident archive and culturally embedded form of knowledge production in its own right, which deploys *narrative*, *poetic*, and *discursive* methods of exploration and experimentation that are clearly distinct from the quantifiable or empirical logics in such fields as the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, and economics. While empirical forms of knowledge production seek to produce a “view from nowhere” (Nagel; Daston) in order to achieve the ideal of objective verifiability, literary writing provides a decidedly interested, socially situated “view from somewhere” (Kley, “Literary Knowledge”) in order to produce meaning and accrete credibility through imaginary acts of interrogation, claiming and confirmation (Mohanty).

The essays collected here address these questions in historically specific ways. They put particular emphasis on the Renaissance (Merten; Nate), the Enlightenment (Meier, Hartwig), the Romantic age in England (Harding; Gronau; Erchinger) and 19th-century US America (Kaspirek), Edwardian England (Casper) and early 20th-century US mass culture (Boss and Klepper)

as well as more recent configurations of a “knowledge society” since the mid-20th century (Bauer; Schäßler; Spangenberg; Zimmermann; Schwarck). An essay concerned with the interconnections between historiography and knowledge formation during the Mongol period in Iran (1216–1335) forms the volume’s coda (Pistor-Hatam).

What Literature Knows opens with two contributions concerned with traditional epistemological paradigms coming under strain in early modern England. Medieval cosmology and religious faith were still largely in place, but the onset of the Reformation, the impact of classical learning, and the dawn of the technology and culture of print begin to shift the contemporaneous worldview. The humanism of Montaigne and John Locke and the nascent practice of natural Philosophy in the wake of the Copernican Revolution, Baconian empiricism, Newtonian mechanics, as well as the founding of the Royal Society deeply unsettle time-honored notions of authority and the production of reliable knowledge (Cartwright and Baker 31–120; Kley, *Ethik* 71–111). Economic, political, and intellectual transitions of the modern age are intricately connected to these epistemological upheavals. In a cultural climate of merely nascent functional differentiation between social systems, writers both well known and unsung gained a strong voice in these transitions.

In his essay “‘His ignorance were wise’: Gendered knowledge in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*,” Kai Merten chooses William Shakespeare’s satirical romantic comedy (1594/95) as a characteristic dramatic staging of the contest between an institutionally stabilized factual or academic knowledge and social know-how (‘wit’). His reading traces how gender relations shift significantly when seemingly fixed bodies of knowledge become temporarily unreliable. Against the historical background of ‘mother nature’ being cast in increasingly scientific terms and a general gendering of a) the practice of scientific observation as male and b) of the object of scientific observation as female, Merten’s reading clarifies how “[w]omen in the play shake up the male, factual knowledge of a court academy, turning it into the procedural knowledge game of courtly love and thus turn themselves from objects into subjects of the knowledge discourse” (29). Merten reads the play’s choreography of discrepant awareness as a specific formal device deployed to involve both the play and its contemporary recipients in the knowledge debates of their time. While awareness implies sovereignty and power, the

play stages and finally suspends its inversion of a gendered episteme, postponing it, as Merten argues, to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

Focusing on the relation between not yet entirely secularized scientific inquiry and the human inquirer, between scientific knowledge and self-knowledge, **Richard Nate** takes us to the early 18th century in his "The pleasing visions I had formed': Natural Knowledge and Self-Awareness in Jonathan Swift's Satires." Reading Jonathan Swift's satire *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and his novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Nate explains how Swift's textual experiments chastise those scientific voices that do not only seek to improve the human lot, but do so with what seemed to Swift undue self-confidence and pride. "To study the outside world without taking into account human fallibility was," for a writer steeped in the humanist tradition and an adherent of the belief that literature had a moral agenda, "an indication that human pride was once again triumphant" (60). For Swift and his friend Pope, "[c]ritical self-inspection was regarded far more essential in developing a true personality than any attempt at discovering God's secrets through a scientific investigation of nature" (51). Swift's satirical portrayals of modern victims of their own curiosity bespeak this philosophical diagnosis.

Albert Meier's "Access Denied: English Experiences in Karl Philipp Moritz's Travel Report of 1782" provides an exemplary reading which argues that throughout the 17th and into the enlightened 18th century, national character as well as a people's social and cultural mores had to be derived first and foremost from fiction and travel narratives. Meier reminds us that both genres work with aesthetically and economically motivated stylizations – rather than naively 'realistic' or pedantically precise depictions – designed to catch and entertain readers' interest. As Moritz's German wanderer's experiences are prefigured by the unreliable, heavily mediated, and consciously crafted guidance of literary writing and thus depend on his choice of literary intake, Meier concludes that "the authenticity of Moritz's narrative of England proves to be an ultimately literary construction, which – regardless of its basic soundness of detail – makes his generalizing characterization of the country and people factually questionable" (75). While Meier, too, asserts the specific, or even singular quality of literary epistemologies, affirming that one only sees what one knows, he remains suspicious of literature's status as a medium for knowledge production.

Marcel Hartwig's "Fothergill's Web: Transnational Quaker Networks and the Pennsylvania Medical Library" is, next to Anja Pistor-Hatam's essay, one of two historiographic contributions which adopt a wide notion of the literary as written forms of mediation. Hartwig introduces the enlightenment scholar and London-based medical practitioner John Fothergill's efforts to negotiate the emergence and solidification of reliable medical knowledge in written exchanges with a host of pen pals. In our volume, Hartwig's essay constitutes the bridgehead for Kaspirek's and Schwarck's inquiries into the relations between medical and literary knowledge in the 19th century and today. Hartwig reads Fothergill's epistolary exchanges in interconnection with the institutional practices of transnational collection and dissemination of the first Medical Library in Philadelphia. His micro-study aims "to show the intellectual work and the practices of knowledge production that are involved in institutionalizing a knowledge network of 'professional' medicine that by the end of the 18th century paves the way for the success of rationalized pathological medicine in the Western hemispheres" (81). Reminding us of Albert Meier's similar observation about late 18th-century travel writing, Hartwig notes that the letters he investigates frequently borrow from established literary genres. 'Science' and the notion of the 'professional' remain, as Maria Kaspirek will confirm in her essay, anachronisms into the 19th century.

The following set of essays is concerned with the epistemological crisis of the Romantic period in England, "a crisis of knowledge which was simultaneously a crisis of religious faith and of political stability" as Anthony Harding puts it (94). In this context, Romantic writers attempted "to forge a new kind of epistemology, a theory of knowledge that rejected the passive and mechanical role assigned to the mind by eighteenth century thinkers and asserted instead the essential creativity of the human imagination" (Cartwright and Baker 121; see also Kley, *Ethik* 177–212). They did so, of course, in manifold ways and on the basis of very different attitudes toward current changes in culture, society, literature, and the arts (Cartwright and Baker 120–70).

In "Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, and the Crisis of Knowledge," Anthony Harding reads Wordsworth's understudied poem (1814) as a response to John Locke's, David Hume's, and Immanuel Kant's thought. Their ideas helped to dethrone Cartesian Metaphysics and to unsettle Western culture's

religiously based conception of what it means to know, while industrialization and profit-driven commercial values promoted profound social changes. In this context, the “poem is a response to a crisis of knowledge that is both personal to Wordsworth and part of a much broader 19th-century realignment of the relationship between philosophy and poetry” (95). From his close reading Harding concludes that *The Excursion* embraces as “a basis for a future ethics and politics” a limited kind of knowledge rooted not in religious belief but “in a secular, anthropological understanding of human experience” (110).

Picking up on Harding’s concerns, **Justus Conrad Gronau** uses examples from Keats’s and Shelley’s poetic work to address a paradox frequently encountered in Romantic thought between a turn to subjective, non-propositional, and sense-based ways of encountering the world on the one hand and the need to express these in linguistically based reasoning on the other. In “Romanticism and Anoetic Knowledge,” Gronau assumes that Romantic writing absorbs the epistemological uncertainty emerging from the simultaneous and frequently conflicting strengthening of adjacent epistemological fields like the literary, the scientific, and the economic. Poetry, Gronau asserts, transforms this uncertainty into a key component of its own aesthetics. His essay seeks to articulate the epistemic value of limits of knowledge, working toward a Romantic poetology of a particular form of non-propositional, not cognitively conceivable or ‘anoetic’ knowledge. A key characteristic of this poetology is a self-reflexive awareness of the paradoxical conditions and limitations of poetic mediality, an awareness nurtured by an explorative hovering between knowing and not knowing.

In “Curious to Know: John Clare’s ‘The Nightingale’s Nest,’” **Philipp Erchinger** programmatically explores the difference between a modern, strongly scientific notion of objective knowledge as ‘justified true belief’ and literary modes of knowledge production which deliberately replace systematic detachment *from* with involvement *in* the objects under consideration. In order to exemplify the difference between articulate and personal knowledge, between what Gilbert Ryle has distinguished as ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ (see also Ernst and Paul 12–22), Erchinger presents a contrastive case study of an 18th-century dictionary entry on the “Nightingale” and some of John Clare’s Romantic bird poems. In contrast to the by then established

textbook approach to natural history, Erchinger sees Clare's bird poems and natural history letters practicing poetic, process-based forms of investigation that "remain sensuously responsive to, and subject to be affected by, the matter they seek to know" (142). He shows how Clare's texts enable readers to read an observer's experience in the making and to entertain ecological modes of thinking that challenge the anthropocentric mind. Erchinger's essay is most explicit about heuristically differentiating modes of knowledge production tied to strict scientific protocols from those relying on more hermeneutic protocols of truth production.² All essays collected in this volume rely at least implicitly on some version of this differentiation. Erchinger also elaborates what all contributors affirm quite explicitly, namely that literature *knows* that the notion of reliable knowledge is a contested one.

In "Negotiating Authority: Literary and Medical Configurations of Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century America," **Maria Kaspirek** confirms Hartwig's claim that only in the 19th century do notions of 'science' and the 'professional' gain discursive currency. Presenting original evidence primarily from 19th-century medical journals, Kaspirek "reveals the hitherto neglected but substantial influence of literature on the consolidation of scientific knowledge on human nature" (156). Against the background of a gradual institutionalization of medical science – the nationwide American Medical Association was founded in 1847 –, Kaspirek studies literary engagements with medico-scientific discourse and its ethical concerns, medical professionals' reliance on literary observations in their diagnostics, the work of physician writers Oliver Wendell Holmes and Silas Weir Mitchell, and the medical case study as a literary genre. Subsequently she observes how the medical profession began to pathologize writers and their work to consolidate their own discursive authority in the field. Emphasizing that her observations are suggestive for the contemporary literature and science debates as well, she concludes that "[a]ll these examples paint the relationship between medicine and literature as a mutually beneficial one; two fields that were engaged in the struggle for epistemological authority, vitalized by

2 Since the turn of millennium, work in the field of New Materialism has picked up on this distinction between different modes of knowing, emphasizing its precariously unstable character (see Barad's onto-epistemology and Bennett's exploration of the lively powers of material formations).

the public's interest in health and human nature, sharing common subjects, negotiating a field of tension between democratization and professionalism, and united not only in a quest for knowledge but also for national identity and independence from European paragons" (166).

In his essay "The Fourth Dimension and Impossible Knowledge in Edwardian Speculative Fiction," **Cord-Christian Casper** follows the Romantic interest in the limitations of knowledge into the early 20th century. Casper investigates Early Modernist literary confrontations with the humanly unknowable. In Edwardian novels, short stories, or popular scientific tracts such limits of knowledge are associated with a realm of their own: the Fourth Dimension. Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* (1917), Charles Hinton's *Scientific Romances* (1886/1896) as well as Joseph Conrad's and Ford Madox Ford's 1901 novel *The Inheritors* each stage attempts to represent this space beyond the limits of familiar perceptual and cognitive faculties. These narratives of hyperspace, however, deprive their readers of immediate paths towards dimensional transcendence. The journey to the Fourth Dimension stalls: interrupting the pursuit of impossible knowledge, each text self-referentially marks the breakdown of its representational strategies. As a consequence, "analogies falter, the unlearning of conventions stagnates, and, ultimately, literature can only register impossible 4-D knowledge as a perpetual absence" (190). Far from elegiac, however, these marked impasses propel these speculative texts towards "a constant flight from generic constraint and cliché" (190). The article demonstrates that it is precisely by barring easy access to 'supra-sensible' knowledge that the texts inculcate ever-renewed narrative experiments and readerly speculation alike.

Based on the assumption that "mass literature matters" (193), **Aleksandra Boss** and **Martin Klepper** analyze – in connection with the then particularly popular culture of self-help – the American middle-class girl detective series *Nancy Drew* that appeared from the 1930s through the 1960s as well as the African American serial novel "Hell" that appeared in the *Chicago Defender* in 1929. Reviewing the series' content and formats, white and black literary mass markets of the time, and the tradition of American rituals of self-improvement, "What Nancy Knew, What Carol Knew: Mass Literature and Knowledge" suggests that "the discourse of self-improvement and mental mobility is so strong in the products of consumer culture and mass circulation because these products were on demand by virtue of this very

discourse” (208). Throughout the series, the protagonists’ knowledge proves to be ambivalent, “riddled [...] by the contradictions and silences of the discourses sustaining it,” and fundamentally constrained “by the violence and prejudices of its times” (211). The series themselves thus develop a very specific cultural knowledge of self-help in terms of socially permissible behaviors, practices, and aspirations, and have much to say to their contemporaneous readers as well as readers and critics today.

In “Scientific Knowledge and the Display Function of Literature: *The White Hotel* (1981) and *Freud’s Megalomania* (2000),” **Matthias Bauer** elaborates how literature may display, work through, and transfigure bodies of scientific knowledge, ideology, and rhetoric. In accordance with sociological accounts which distinguish between raw information and processed knowledge (Burke 1–17), Bauer argues that only the subjective mediation of bits and pieces of information may produce relevant meaning; modern literature as an instrument of subjective mediation therefore assumes significance in the production of the cultural achievements of subjectivity and responsiveness. He turns to psychoanalysis as a scientific discourse strongly influenced by literary writing and explores two exemplary literary displays of the psychoanalytic processes to show how explicitly literary writing redresses psychoanalytic theory’s weakness in terms of its disregard for self-reference. According to Bauer, self-referentiality makes “literature such a fascinating mode of experimental thinking” (228). This experimental thought reveals “contradictions in Freud’s theory or between his findings and the findings in other disciplines” in Rosenfield’s novel *Freud’s Megalomania*; and it “confronts knowledge and history, academic discourse and real events” in D. M. Thomas’ novel *The White Hotel* “both to stress the importance of psychoanalysis and to mark its boundaries” (233).

Daniel Schäbler addresses the formal textual realization of knowledge distribution and processes of deception, which he conceives of as a special case of discrepant awareness. His essay “The Art of Deception: Knowledge Distribution in English Literature” undertakes case studies of Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* and Ian McEwan’s novel *Sweet Tooth* (2012) to conceptualize deceptive relations “as a three-way intrafictional communicative act [...] between the deceiver, the deceived, and the audience,” (251) primarily designed to catch and entertain the reader’s interest. Beyond that, Schäbler finds *Hamlet* mobilizing the supposedly stable deceptive triangle, so that

the structural positions of deceiver and deceived displace each other, resulting in “a politically condemning and poetically just view of courtly tactics of the Elizabethan Age as well as of societal power-play on a larger scale” (246). *Sweet Tooth* is seen as employing modes of deception to show that – contrary to official political discourse during the Cold War era – the relation between the epistemological category of truth and the ontological category of reality is an unstable one, governed by the authority which guides the respective formations of knowledge. Schäbler’s analysis returns literary narrative quite literally to what Hörisch calls its staging of an epistemic version of “I spy.”

In her essay “‘We are only what we know’: Knowledge in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*,” **Ann Spangenberg** is concerned with a postmodern version of the literary critique of timeless truths. She reads the novel’s fictional presentation of six different socio-historical settings with different belief and media systems as an exploration of a cross-culturally pervasive human hunger for knowledge and domination. She traces the text’s attempts to pry apart the perilous conjunction between the desire for power and that for knowledge in order to sound out possibilities for “the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge and a higher level of civilization, in the sense of longer, more peaceful and comfortable lives and more justice and equality” (254).

In her contribution “Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* as Multi-Narrative: The Dialogic Relation of Indigenous and Western World Views,” **Jutta Zimmermann** addresses the need to decolonize regimes of knowledge which claim universal and timeless validity and to promote epistemic diversity. She reads the multinarrative structure of *Monkey Beach*, which interweaves Western trauma narrative and Indigenous survival narrative, as a “literary manifestation of an Indigenous worldview in which knowledge formation is seen as a dialogic process that puts in relation competing yet at the same time entangled views of the world” (278). The author argues that the text’s structure “challenges the predominance of Western knowledge production by presenting Indigenous knowledge as more localized, yet at the same time more encompassing than Western scientific approaches” (278). The novel thus questions the culturally restrictive force of dominant, normative, medically, and psychologically defined notions of individual and collective well-being and launches its demand for decolonization processes that might

help to ensure the survival of indigenous cultures and diverse humankind in general.

André Schwarck is interested in how literature may reveal and attend to the shortcomings of an advanced medical discourse and practice in his essay “Useless, off-beat information!': Knowledge and Successiveness in Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*.” Reading Friel's play, based on Oliver Sack's medical case history of a blind man whose sight is successfully restored through a series of operations, Schwarck traces how the play intercepts the associative assimilation between seeing and knowing by undermining the idea that medical knowledge produces a life-transforming restoration of sight. Schwarck shows how expert medical knowledge becomes a source for the male characters in the play to establish and sustain authoritative narrative patterns. By imposing these patterns on Molly Sweeney, the female protagonist of Friel's play, knowledge becomes not only an indicator of male identity and authority but a catalyst for an inscrutable gender struggle. Schwarck's reading sheds light on how the play reveals the violence implied in medically successful protocols where they (necessarily?) fail to take into account how their patients' situatedness may cancel their own definition of success.

Anja Pistor-Hatam's essay “Historiography and the Production of Knowledge: The Mongol Period in Iran as a Case Study” participates in the postcolonial critique of hegemonic knowledge formations, focusing on the textuality and the narrative quality of historical accounts on the Mongol period in Iran (1216–1335). The author selects modern historical narratives by well-known but non-professional Iranian historians, all of which are regarded as state of the art in Iranian school and university education. The essay argues that large parts of these texts' content can only be accepted as plausible if one reads them as adopting not only Mongol history, but Mongol historiography. As constructions of historical meaning, they retrospectively employ fictions of coherence to forge a usable past that fits and supports an overall nationalist political paradigm.

All essays presented in this volume explore literary writing – in its popular and its canonical forms, in a narrow and in a wider sense – as ways of thinking about and as ways of experiencing the production, reception, evaluation, and reformulation of knowledge. They explore literary writing as a formally, rhetorically, and generically rich archive of re-descriptions of the world. They trace the dissident archive's attempts to surprise, seduce,

enchant, or shock us into reading other people's minds, into accessing institutional environments, processes of knowledge formation, and social interactions in a different key, and into seeing individual self-understandings as socially mediated (see Felski). Interconnecting formalist and political protocols of reading, this volume thus articulates a more plastic sense of how philological expertise in imaginary and historiographical processes of meaning making, in conceptual clarification, in the negotiation of uncertainty, complexity, heterogeneity, and particularity (see Turner ix–xviii; Kelleter 167–173) may generate productively irritating forms of connectivity to other knowledge discourses.

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