

HISTORY OF THE MODERN PRACTICE OF FICTION

International Conference, October, 10–11, 2019, Göttingen (Germany)

--- Abstracts (as of: September, 24, 2019) ----

Stefan Descher (Göttingen)

Satirical novels and the practice of fiction in the 18th century

For the examination of the social practice of fiction in the 18th century, satirical novels make for a particularly interesting and telling field of study. On the one hand, satirical novels clearly are works of fiction: they have a fictional plot in which fictional characters, fictional events and other fictional entities occur, and usually they employ fictional narrators and/or publishers. In this respect, they are based on an established practice of fiction and simply 'play by the rules'. On the other hand, it is downright constitutive for satirical novels that they are not 'merely' fictional, but refer to the real world in one sense or another. It is typical of many of these novels to even break the rules that constitute the practice of fiction, for example by explicitly addressing their own fictional status, by repeatedly reminding the reader of this status, and even by trying to prevent the adoption of an immersive reading stance typical of the reception of fictional texts.

In my talk I start from the hypothesis that the different ways in which satirical novels refer to the real world, highlight their own fictional status and playfully handle the rules of fiction, can provide insight into the practice of fiction itself. First, I will present a series of examples of how satirical novels directly or indirectly refer to their own fictional status, comment on this status, try to manipulate the receptive attitude of readers, and so on. Mainly, I will deal with German satirical novels from the late Enlightenment period, such as Wezels 'Belphegor', Nicolais 'Sebaldu Nothanker', the novels of Wieland, and others. Secondly, I will ask to what extent these characteristics of satirical novels are revealing in terms of the practice of fiction in the 18th century.

Carsten Dutt (Notre Dame)

Distancing the Game from its Players: On Putative Changes in the Practice of Fiction between roughly 1730 and 1770

Literaturtheoretisch belangvolle Differenzierungen im Begriff der Fiktion sind im deutschen 18. Jahrhundert zunächst in Anknüpfung an Leibniz' Theorie möglicher Welten aufgekommen. So unterscheidet Baumgarten in seinen 1735 erschienenen *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* drei Klassen von Erdichtungen (*figmenta*): 1. Erfahrungswirklichkeitsanaloge *figmenta vera*, die das in der tatsächlich existierenden Welt Mögliche zur Darstellung bringen (*possibilis in mundo existente*); 2. *figmenta heterocosmica*, deren fiktionale Gehalte zwar in der existierenden Welt unmöglich, unter den Gesetzen denkmöglicher anderer Welten hingegen möglich und *ipso facto* konsistent darstellbar sind (*possibilis in omnibus mundis possibilibus*); 3. *figmenta utopica*, deren fabulatorische Widerstimmigkeiten weder in der wirklichen noch in allen möglichen Welten möglich und eben deswegen als Gegenstände fiktionaler Darstellung illegitim sind (*impossibilis in omnibus mundis possibilibus*). Notgedrungen umrisshaft geht mein Vortrag den geistesgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen, deskriptiven und normativen Implikationen, argumentativen Kontexten und spezifisch literarischen Resonanzen dieses dreifach aufgestuften Fiktionsbegriffs in der Poetik und epischen Dichtung des 18. Jahrhunderts nach. Neben weiteren Theorietexten, so von Gottsched, Breitinger, Johann Adolf Schlegel und Lessing, werden dabei

paratextuelle Rahmungen und metatextuelle Reflexionen literarischer Fiktion in Werken von Schnabel, Gessner und Wieland Aufmerksamkeit finden.

Im Durchgang durch die ins Auge gefasste Mini-Diachronie mag folgendes einsichtig werden:

A. Die Bildung und Verbreitung des in possibilitätstheoretischen Unterscheidungen verankerten Fiktionsbegriffs verändert die konzeptuelle Umgebung und mit ihr den Gehalt der seit alters zentralen Legitimationsbegriffe literarischer Fiktion: Nachahmung, Wahrscheinlichkeit und Wahrheit.

B. In Dichtungen, die paratextuell oder metatextuell possibilitätstheoretisch bezogen sind, bilden die Zwecke und Zugangsbedingungen, Regeln und Konventionen literarischer Fiktion keinen selbstverständlichen Hintergrund mehr, sie werden stattdessen ihrerseits reflexionsgegenständlich. Dergestalt kommt das variantenreiche Sprachspiel literarischer Fiktion im Spielvorgang selbst zur Abhebung – mit entsprechenden Entselbstverständlichungseffekten für die von ihm intendierten Spieler.

C. Eine an der Erhebung und Erklärung von Differenzbefunden interessierte Geschichte der modernen Fiktionalitätspraxis kann nicht umhin, einen dichten, über Minimalerfordernisse und Invarianten („make believe“, „Ausgestaltung von Vorstellungswelten“ etc.) hinausreichenden Begriff des in Rede stehenden Gegenstandes anzusetzen. Denn eine Fiktionalitätspraxis, die nicht auf diese oder jene Weise in die Lebensform Literatur eingebettet und kraft dieser Einbettung integraler Bestandteil der vielbezüglichen Praxis des Produzierens und Rezipierens generisch, thematisch und ästhetisch spezifizierter Fiktionen wäre, gibt es nur in historisch sterilen Träumen.

Helmut Galle (São Paulo)

Fictions of the Holocaust: what enables the orientation of the reader?

In the twentieth century, testimonies of Holocaust survivors became a particular genre which affected presumptions and conditions of fictional practice. In fictional narratives, the reader expects "fictitious" persons and actions (Zipfel) within a basic set of correspondences with common semantics of reality. Deviations from the generally shared assumptions about physics, psychology, and social behavior become apparent through corresponding specifications in the narrative. The world of Auschwitz, however, lies "outside reason as it lies outside speech" (G. Steiner), so that it remains incomprehensible to outsiders. If the real task of the witness is to portray this unimaginable reality, the reader faces the problem of being unable to distinguish between the unimaginable that occurred and the fictitious. Therefore, numerous survivors have presented their experiences in factual mode (Levi, Améry, Klüger), though many others, chose fiction instead (Semprun, Kertész, Apitz, Wander), i.e. a paradoxical union of testimony and invention. In view of this problem, I suggested (Galle 2018) a specific kind of „pact“ alternative to the autobiographical and fictional "pacts": the authors notify their status as survivors to the reader by means of paratextual signals, thus ensuring the truth with their subjective experiences. However, this does not solve the question of how the reader concretely processes the details in the fictional text, nor the problem of texts by authors without experience as survivors (Remarque, Becker, Weiss). Therefore, the thesis will be examined, whether the readers of Holocaust narratives are orientated by fiction markers (Hempfer) on the discourse level, in order to distinguish between fictitious and real elements of the diegesis. At the same time, this would support the conception of "compositionism" (Konrad), that in certain classes of fictions factual and fictional propositions can juxtapose each other in a relevant way.

Eva-Maria Konrad (Frankfurt a. Main)

On Being Sceptical about an Institutional History of Fictionality

The problems inherent to a history of the modern practice of fictionality are overwhelming. Serious methodological, conceptual, and semantic difficulties seem to amount to the following dilemma: Either we project the conventions of our modern practice of fictionality onto texts and practices of former times, i.e. we work with anachronistic concepts and conventions, or we try to figure out what historical concepts and practices of fictionality actually denoted and consisted of, but remain hopelessly speculative with regard to these reconstructions: When we go back in history (and we do not have to go back very far) the only way to find out about former practices of fictionality is to look at the (fictional?) texts themselves, because there are usually no sources that report on the writing and reading conventions of contemporary authors and readers. This seems to imply (at least in part) a substitution of the institutional theory of fictionality with a product-oriented theory that regards textimmanent features to be the main criteria of fictionality. But even if there are poetological treatises or other sources with regard to former practices, they can only shed light on the question of when certain issues were discussed among experts, but we can neither know if these discussions reflect the actual practice of fictionality (instead of trying to change it) nor if they reflect the common practice of fictionality at that time (and not only the experts') nor if they actually reflected a practice of fictionality (and not of e.g. poetry or literature). All in all, the question of whether we can ascribe (the practice of) fictionality to former texts and societies seems to be idle. Though I am convinced that we can trace back the origins of parts of our modern practice of fictionality in history, I propose that we should refrain from using the modern concept of fictionality in premodern contexts. At least in this sense, there is no history of the modern practice of fictionality.

Françoise Lavocat (Paris)

Dido meets Aeneas.

Anachronism, Alternative History, Counterfactual Thinking and the Idea of Fiction

My hypothesis is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries discussions about fiction and fictional works were divided between two conceptions. Fiction might be legitimated as a "possible" version of history, but this conception of fiction as "if . . . then" was challenged by an "as if" conception (as a possible world independent of history).

My purpose is to describe the logical form of this counterfactual conception in the late Renaissance, comparing it with features of modern counterfactuality in contemporary fiction. With examples borrowed from Saint Augustine, Castelvetro, Ronsard, Fontenelle and Ménage, I will mainly focus on various interpretations of the Virgilian anachronism (allowing the meeting of Dido and Aeneas despite the historical gap of three hundred years between them). This anachronism was soon understood as a landmark in the rights and privileges accruing to poets, entailing as it did a counterfactual conception of fiction. I will show that a critique or rejection of just such a privilege in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was akin to a new conception of fiction "as if."

Henrike Manuwald (Göttingen)

Traces of a practice of fiction in Middle High German short verse narratives?

Is it necessary and does it make sense to apply the notion of fictionality to medieval literature? Debates on this problem have come to a kind of impasse: the historical terminology has been largely clarified; difficulties in transferring modern concepts of fictionality have been outlined; any practices can only be reconstructed to a limited extent. Some scholars even deny that the subject of fictionality is relevant for medieval literature. Nevertheless, the issue of 'fictionality' in the Middle Ages is still important, for systematic reasons. For only a diachronic perspective, including the Middle Ages, can reveal whether fictionality may be regarded as a timeless phenomenon and, if this is the case, whether concepts of fictionality can be assumed to vary through the ages.

Rather than another description of the problems, this talk will look at rules for the production and reception of Middle High German short verse narratives (Mären), as they can be reconstructed from prologues. In a second step, it will consider the necessary premises for assigning the practices observed to a concept of 'fictionality'. The focus on a single literary genre starts from the assumption of conventions of reception specific to individual genres. At the same time this approach privileges a literary genre that has so far been neglected in discussions of medieval fictionality. The examples, which show the frequent use of insisting on the truth (as in Arthurian Romance), will also demonstrate, beyond the generic study, why the discussion of fictionality for the Middle Ages is closely linked to questions of literary autonomy.

Stein Haugom Olsen (Bilkent)

History, Literature, and the Practice of Fiction

When the history of the practice of fiction comes to be written, one of the most interesting and problematic areas are going to be what has been called 'literary' history. Until near the end of the nineteenth century, literature was held to mean not only plays, novels, and belles lettres, but all writing that was above a certain standard of excellence. This included major works of history: Thomas Arnold's *History of Rome* (1838-43), Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837), or James A. Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey* (1856-70). In the hands of a Macaulay, a Carlyle, or a Froude, historical figures assumed the proportions of full-scale heroes and villains, sometimes acting out their roles in the historical present tense, thinking out loud for the reader's benefit, or speaking dialogue fashioned from source documents.

'Literary' history is not the only genre that not only tolerates, but that actively involves what we are bound to call fictionalizing. In 1831 John Wilson Croker's new edition of *Boswell's Life of Johnson* sparked a debate about the nature of biography: is it a branch of history, recording the life of its subject, or is it a constructive and thus literary effort on the part of the biographer? This is a debate that is still going on and there is certainly a strong tendency in many biographies to 'construct' personalities and situations.

In this paper I shall discuss what are the implications of these kinds of work for a theory of fiction, and how, if at all, the notion of a practice of fiction can be adapted to deal with these and similar kinds of work. In this discussion, it will be important to distinguish between narrative, fiction, and literature to sort out the various problems that arise.

Nicholas Paige (Berkeley)

What is a Fictional Novel? Three Definitional Problems and One Possible Solution.

The novel is central to most recent histories of fictionality. (It need not be, however: to take only the most venerable example, it was with reference mainly to drama that Aristotle distinguished between history and poetry—and thus, many feel, between nonfiction and fiction.) The gist of the arguments is typically that the novel's history is synonymous with that of fiction, and that the story of the novel's rise is also the story of Europe's "discovery"—the word is Catherine Gallagher's—of fictionality. While accepting the basic premise that the novel's historically variable fictionality is indeed a legitimate object of inquiry, I first want to lay out a series of specific inadequacies with these accounts, all of which stem from an overinvestment on the part of critics in fiction qua mode of credence (i.e., "suspended disbelief"). One, they do not try to account for the prevalence of historical subject matter in many early novels. Two, they do not effectively assess the contours (historical and formal) of the early novel's frequent truth pretense (sometimes called pseudofactuality). Three, they do not distinguish between registers (e.g., comic, tragic, sentimental, marvelous). I will argue that taking these difficulties into account usefully sharpens both a historical definition of the fictional novel and our understanding of the literary-historical factors underpinning its consolidation in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Specifically, I will show that these decades mark the emergence of a novelistic artifact whose formal properties distinguish it from its forbears, giving it the best heuristic claim—but only heuristic—to being called "the fictional novel."

Dirk Werle & Uwe Korn (Heidelberg)

Fictionality in poetics of the 17th century – the example of the 'carmen heroicum'

Johann Karl Wezel introduces his novel *Herrmann und Ulrike* (1780) with a preface in which he announces it as a "bürgerliche Epöpee" and sets it apart from the genre "Heldengedicht", the epic poem or *carmen heroicum*. He describes the reader's expectations of a novel and defines it as a mixture of genres in which elements of narration, dialogue, and correspondence are incorporated. For Wezel the "Form und Manier" of the epic poem are shaped by ancient models, of which the novel is free: "[A]ber die wirklichen Regeln, die sich auf die Natur, das Wesen und den Endzweck einer poetischen Erzählung gründen, sind beiden gemein." Wezel's remarks are based on a concept of literature composed of readers' expectations, poetic rules, and models of other texts. Above all, it is important for him to connect his concept of novel to older reflections on the epic poem which represented the narrative leading genre of the time.

Poetics of the 17th century do not comment on the genre of the novel. It could be surmised that for contemporary authors and readers the 'modern' novel established a new set of rules for the social practice 'fictionality'. Is this assumption true? With our paper, we want to elucidate the expectations articulated in poetics of the 17th century directed to epic poems. We are going to examine a larger number of those texts with regard to statements concerning the *carmen heroicum*. In addition to Martin Opitz's epochal "Buch von der deutschen Poeterey" (1624), we will examine poetics by August Buchner, Philipp von Zesen, Justus Georg Schottelius, Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, Balthasar Kindermann, Nicolas Boileau, Sigmund von Birken, Daniel Georg Morhof, Kaspar Stieler, Albrecht Christian Rotth, and Magnus Daniel Omeis.

Frank Zipfel (Mainz)

Imagination and Verisimilitude: Reflections on Conceptions of Fiction in European Enlightenment

The concepts of fiction or fictionality do not play a significant role in either philosophical or poetological discourse about art and literature in the 18th century. This is different, however, with some of the basic elements of today's theories of fiction; for these elements do get discussed in Enlightenment aesthetics quite a lot, albeit under different names. Prominent among them is the concept of the imagination, in the German context discussed as *Vorstellungskraft*, *Einbildungskraft*, or *Dichtungskraft*. Many participants in the eighteenth century debate consider imagination the most important human faculty indeed, especially with regard to the acquisition of knowledge but also in the context of art and literature. This fascination for the imagination, however, is somewhat counterbalanced by highly sceptical attitudes towards an unbound play of the imagination, or fancy, and its purported dangers. Accordingly, discussions of the conditions of production and reception of fiction, including its content and representational dimensions, are typically located in between the power of the imagination to freely combine impressions and ideas on the one hand, and the urge to restrict the imagination by way of rules concerning verisimilitude on the other. In my talk I will take poetological sources from German, French and English Enlightenment as my starting point in order to shed some light on eighteenth century conceptions of fictionality; in a second step, I will compare the reconstructed account with institutional theories of fictionality which are most prominent in today's debate.