

CFP: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL LITERATURE AND THE AUTHOR'S RESPONSIBILITY

Contextualisation

Since the 1930s, a progressive intensity of engagement with politics and society can be observed in German-language literature: From the documented entry of reality into the diegetic fiction of the 'New Objectivity' to the increasingly politically engaged phases of realism and neo-realism to today's 'co-stenography' of the present, to use Juli Zeh's words, the participation of the writer in public life is becoming ever more visible and present. Irene Husser sees the reasons for this boom in the political in the social climate of the twenty-first century, which is characterised by increasing armed conflicts (think Russia/Ukraine, the Middle East), right-wing extremist movements in response to inadequate political solutions, environmental and health crises and much more. Since politics, according to Husser, repeatedly fails to provide answers to the challenges of the current century and does not offer any meaningful solutions that are effective for society as a whole, "literature is more in demand than ever as a medium for orientation and the communication of values and guiding principles of democratic coexistence in the age of globalisation, digitalisation, growing social inequality and ecological crises".¹

The presence of committed authors who are not afraid to publicly express their opinions is further intensified by the diversity and reach of the media, which makes the question of the writer's responsibility for their writings, statements and comments in public more topical. This increasing closeness to reality in political writing thins the boundary between fictionality and factuality and places greater demands on the author as the bearer of responsibility towards society. Particularly for the political writing of 'committed' contemporary authors such as Juli Zeh, Uwe Timm, Ulrich Peitzer, Robert Menasse, Maxime Biller, Bernhard Schlink, Daniel Kehlmann, Josej Winkler, Benjamin Stuckrad-Barre, Peter Handke, Dinçer Güçyeter, Nora Bossong, Navid Kermani, Karen Duve, Karine Tuil, Tanja Dückers, etc., the question arises as to whether the political writing of these authors is a matter of fact. The question arises as to whether a specific claim to responsibility is required in order not to compromise 'good coexistence' in society. According to Gisèle Sapiro, the freedom of the author cannot be total, insofar as the reading of a work that enters the public sphere is not able to free itself from the socio-historical context and functions as a vehicle for ideologies, world views, interpretations and convictions.²

I am happy to receive suggestions for contributions that be categorised in the following subject areas (and am of course also open to other suggestions):

Investigations into the definition of the term 'political literature' and responsibility: According to Michael Navratil, it has become clear that "an overarching [...] concept of 'political literature'"³ cannot be found. In this regard, Claas Morgenroth recommends "speaking of political literature with as much caution as open-endedness".⁴ According to Peter Handke, it is a matter of 'calling a spade a spade' in order to produce a "very simple, enumerable, datable, generalised reality".⁵ Other attempts to tame the concept of political writing refer to the notion of the writer's commitment to providing critical perspectives and active statements on socio-political events in order to point out contradictions, grievances or contradictions.⁶

¹ Husser, Irene. *Elfriede Jelinek's Theatre of the (Post-) Political. Agonistics of contemporary literature*. Berlin/Boston. De Gruyter, 2023, p. 2.

² Cf. Sapiro, Gisèle. *La responsabilité de l'écrivain. Littérature, droit et morale en France (XIXe - XXe siècle)*. Paris. Seuil, 2011, pp. 715-720.

³ Navratil, Michael. *Counterfactuals of the present*. Berlin/Boston. De Gruyter, 2021, p. 195.

⁴ Morgenroth, Claas. *Memory politics and contemporary literature: Das unbesetzte Gebiet-The Church of John F. Kennedy-Really ground zero-Der Vorleser*. Erich Schmidt Verlag. Berlin, 2014, p. 278.

⁵ Handke, Peter. *I am an inhabitant of the ivory tower*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, 1972, pp.

Investigations into authorship:

According to Willi Huntemann and Kai Hendrik Patri, political literature can only be "adequately grasped in the quadrangle of author, text, (literary) public and political status quo".⁷ As Christian Sieg emphasises, political literature cannot be separated from authorship, because it is ultimately the author who takes a position on social debates through literary fiction.⁸ The question of the 'translucency' of the author in the fictional text must be raised: To what extent can, must, may a text be attributed to the responsibility of the author? Text and author as a responsible duo?⁹

Investigations into the relationship between artistic freedom and the responsibility of the political author:

The free exercise of art can only tolerate restrictions whose justification must be reassessed on a case-by-case basis with regard to other fundamental rights (principle of proportionality), art-related laws or principles of 'good coexistence', morality or ethical reservations. "How can the principle of 'artistic freedom' be defined for literature?" could be the question. Examples, suggestions, comments on this complex question.

Thematic analyses of contemporary political literature in the light of the writer's responsibility:

In *Über Menschen* (2021), Juli Zeh deals with issues of right-wing radicalism, the coronavirus crisis and the climate crisis; in *Lichtspiel* (2023), Daniel Kehlmann focuses on the political pliability of the artist and his art; in *Die Erweiterung* (2022), Robert Menasse looks at the political background to EU enlargement; in *Die Möglichkeit von Glück* (2023), Anne Rabe denounces the 'omerta' of the last GDR generation, and so on.

The list is not exhaustive, other suggestions, topics and ideas are also possible and welcome.

I look forward to receiving suggestions for contributions (300 words), to the following e-mail address by 20 March 2025: Alexandra.juster@uibk.ac.at

The advertised contributions in **English** must reach me by **30 September 2025** at the latest. Publication is planned by Brill or De Gruyter, depending on the thematic focus of the contributions.

The contributions should consist of at least 45,000 characters, ideally 55,000 - 60,000 characters and a maximum of 80,000 characters including bibliography.

If you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail.

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⁶ Krstanović, Anđelka/Luka, Banja. "Literature vs. commitment. Some notes on Peter Handke's ivory tower". Jelena Knežević & al (eds.). "Macht und Politik in der deutschen Sprache, Literatur und Kultur, "in *Folia linguistica et litteraria: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* (18/1), 2017, pp. 83-98, here: S. 90.

⁷ Willi Huntemann and Kai Hendrik Patri. "Introduction: Engagierte Literatur in Wendezeiten". Willi Huntemann/ Malgorzata Klentak-Zablocka/ Fabian Lampart/Thomas Schmidt (eds.). *Engagierte Literatur in Wendezeiten*. Würzburg. Königshausen & Neumann, 2003, pp. 9-31, here p. 12.

⁸ Sieg, Christian. *The "committed literature" and religion. Political Authorship in the Literary Field 1945 and 1990*. Berlin/Boston. De Gruyter, 2017, p. 2.

⁹ See also Sapiro, Gisèle. *Peut-on dissocier l'œuvre de l'auteur?* Paris. Seuil, 2020.